AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE HISTORICAL, HERMENEUTICAL AND GOSPEL-CRITICAL PARAMETERS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SYMBOL OF RESURRECTION

by

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submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

NEW TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF P J J BOTHA

JUNE 2007

I declare that

'AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE HISTORICAL, HERMENEUTICAL AND GOSPEL-CRITICAL PARAMETERS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SYMBOL OF RESURRECTION' 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.

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SUMMARY

'Resurrection' can be approached from several angles. The most common angle is what this study avoids: pressing for a 'yes' or a 'no' answer as to whether 'Jesus really rose from the dead'. That is, demanding a definitive and final outcome from the discipline of historical-critical research. This study treats resurrection as a symbol. Symbols intrinsically generate multiple meanings. Historical, hermeneutical and gospel-critical parameters are the constraints within which reflection on the symbol of resurrection must take place, and the validity of perspectives be established.

John Dominic Crossan's view of the resurrection is the focal point of discussion in this thesis, for two reasons. (1) He has clearly mapped out his method. (2) He occupies a middle position, by interpreting resurrection metaphorically and theologically. This sets him apart from those who interpret the resurrection literally and historically and those who accept the negative or uncertain outcome from the side of historical-critical inquiry as the death sentence for Christian faith.

KEY TERMS

New Testament

Historical Jesus

resurrection

eschatology

resurrection traditions

historiography

method of hypothesis and verification

tradition-criticism

myth and transcendental claims

John Dominic Crossan

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"RESURRECTION"

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

3 He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.

6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.' "

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'

12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

13 And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.

14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.' "

Ezekiel 37:1–14

PROLOGUE

'Resurrection' has been a much debated issue throughout the history of Christianity. There are many aspects to it and it can be approached from various angles. Some argue that the truth of Christianity depends upon the historical factuality of the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth: if Jesus did not rise, historically and physically, Christianity is a fairy tale which no rational person should believe. Others argue that the nature of the evidence in the New Testament is such that historical inquiry cannot provide definite answers as to what happened on Easter day and that a suspension of historical judgment is the only adequate response. Both these cases approach resurrection as historical event. And whereas the first group bases its faith on what it perceives to have actually happened, the second group concludes that no definitive answers can be provided as to what actually happened, and that therefore history cannot provide faith with the certainty that it longs for.

Establishing historical facts about resurrection is, however, not the only way to approach the issue. In fact, it might well be the less appropriate way. Those who put history first imply that one can penetrate through the interpretive layers of the tradition to some original event or some original account of an event. This assumption is false. There never was a privileged moment when a favoured few saw 'face to face'. Everyone is an interpreter, whether one is part of the apostolic group in the first century CE or whether one is a reader of their testimonies centuries later. Resurrection functions as a *symbol*. Already in the New Testament it incorporated a variety of meanings and presented itself as the product of several stages of interpretation. And this interpretive process continues up to the present. But this is not a negative given. As generations of believers and strands of Christianity wrestle with what it means that 'Jesus rose from the dead' a richness of meaning is created.

A recent and stimulating perspective is that of John Dominic Crossan who investigates resurrection in a number of publications. Crossan interprets resurrection metaphorically and theologically. His purpose is to keep to an intellectual integrity and still associate with Christian faith—such is his claim. Reason and belief, history and faith, are often set in opposition to one another or are fused uncritically and unconvincingly. Anyone who claims to have found a way to

responsibly reconcile the two is worth investigating. Therefore, Crossan's view on resurrection is the focal point of discussion in this thesis. For Crossan there is a *dialectic* at work between faith and history in which the two are neither separated nor confused. Crossan views Jesus Christ as the combination of a fact (Jesus) and an interpretation (Christ) and each must be found anew in every generation. This study analyses and evaluates how Crossan finds Jesus Christ; how the dialectic between history and faith is at work in his thinking, especially with regard to the resurrection. Vital questions ensue: which fact and which interpretation make up the resurrection of Jesus? And: how does the historical Jesus become the risen Lord?

There are parameters within which reflection on the symbol of resurrection must take place. This study recognises three: historical, hermeneutical and gospel-critical parameters. This study investigates whether Crossan moves effectively within these constraints so that the validity of his perspective can be established.

This study is a contribution. It does not provide final answers. Its ultimate aim is best summed up by the apostle Paul:

> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own (Phlp. 3:10–12).

The Bible translation used in this study is the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE   **UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN INTERPRETING THE SYMBOL OF RESURRECTION**

1.1   INTRODUCTION

David Perman (1977:229) writes that it is only by returning to their roots that the churches today can be sure of a continuing future. The statement seems to presuppose a unified beginnings for the church. This chapter will have to test this cherished concept as, relating to the subject of resurrection, it aims to determine whether the Christian tradition in its earliest stages (at *its roots*) was indeed uniform and presented resurrection as a unanimous symbol[1] expressing a single meaning, a meaning that can have authority even for today. Modern church historians argue that a unified beginnings for the church does not conform to historical reality. They reject a monolithic formative period for Christianity, referring to it as the so-called Eusebian Scheme (Robinson 1988:9). This scheme named after bishop Eusebius (263–339 CE), author of *The Ecclesiastical History*, postulates that in the earliest period of the church there was no diversity of interpretations of the Christian message but there was simply one pure apostolic proclamation. Orthodoxy later on had credible apostolic roots, whereas heresy lacked these. 'Orthodoxy' in this scheme referred to the views promoted by Jesus and his apostles and subscribed to by a solid and pervasive core of the Christian church from the earliest of times; 'heresy' was of little historical significance and comprised marginal groups that had wilfully chosen to corrupt and depart from the true faith (Ehrman 1999:131). Walter Bauer, who published his ground-breaking study *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* in German in 1934, questions this traditional understanding and cautiously asks: 'Perhaps … certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as "heresies" originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only form of

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[1] Perkins (1984:28) defines a symbol as a double-meaning linguistic expression that requires an interpretation. For Küng (1974:350) a symbol is a pictorial-graphic expression for a reality that is intangible and unimaginable. Setzer (2004:4) emphasises that a symbol is not a static entity. It both expresses meaning (in the thought forms of a particular time) and gives humans the capacity to make meaning.

the new religion—that is, for those regions they were simply "Christianity"' (Bauer 1971:xxii). He furthermore describes how Rome, which had gradually become the centre of orthodoxy, developed a heresiological approach that can be summed up as follows: 'Where there is heresy, orthodoxy must have preceded it.' In this way even one who preserved the most ancient position could become a 'heretic' if the development of the 'great church' with Rome at the centre moved sufficiently far beyond him (Bauer 1971:236). In speaking about the first century, Dunn, an evangelical scholar, admits that Christianity knew no single normative form (1977:373). Ehrman (1999:132) writes that before the great church councils of the fourth century that ratified the beliefs, practices and ethics of the form of Christianity that by then had 'won out' (the dominant form), there was a diversity of belief and practice that makes the varieties of Christianity today look altogether tame in comparison! Bowden (1988:59–60) sums it up as follows: 'the mainstream was achieved by historical circumstance and a process of blocking off many other courses, not always on the basis of either good arguments or sound evidence.'

If applied to the teaching on resurrection, it leads to the following question: 'Why did a strong current in early Christianity ("the mainstream") persistently cling to a literal and physical notion of resurrection, even though there were repeated attempts by theologians and philosophers ("the other courses") to provide alternatives? Moreover, was this notion of resurrection achieved on the basis of good arguments and sound evidence, or by historical circumstance and theological, philosophical and socio-political bias?' In §1.2 aspects of the historical reality and process in operation in early Christianity with regard to the teaching on resurrection and the nature of the resurrection body, will be discussed. The aim is to gain insight into the forces that shaped the views of early Christianity on resurrection so that in the end one is able to evaluate the historical process by which the church reached consensus or remained divided. In §1.3 findings and conclusions on unity and diversity with regard to the early Christian belief in resurrection will be presented. The section will explain the plane(s) on which unity operated and present the problem of diversity as the research problem of this thesis. The ground will thus be cleared to present the aim and objectives in §1.4.

1.2   RESURRECTION TRAJECTORIES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Setzer (2004:1) argues that among Jews and Christians of the first few centuries of our era the symbol of resurrection was never an isolated belief. It was always part of a larger constellation of ideas and values; it functioned, so to speak, as a 'condensed worldview' (2004:83). Consequently, the way certain groups understood the resurrection hope sheds light on how these groups saw themselves, how they saw others, and how they coped with political and social realities. The following three sections will demonstrate that the symbol of resurrection 'worked' for early Christianity, but it worked in different ways for different individuals and communities (2004:6).

1.2.1   Paul's Interpretation of the Symbol of Resurrection

For the apostle Paul resurrection certainly condenses a worldview; in fact, it *is* his worldview. Resurrection is the final act of the apocalyptic drama—a drama that does not consist of one climactic moment, but of a process with a beginning, an intermediate period of time, and then the end. Jesus' resurrection as firstfruits marks the beginning of the eschatological general resurrection and God's new creation. In Jesus God's justified world has *already* become present, and the Christian community must engage itself in constructing an alternative society that reflects this new creation and reign of God. There is a dichotomy here. Over against the dominant Greco-Roman society that functions as a unified organism under the emperor, Paul places the alternative society of the 'body of Christ' (1 Cor 6:15). Setzer argues that First Corinthians presents an anti-imperial gospel in which the symbol of body or sw'ma is crucial (2004:56). The lowly and earthly sw'ma is the site of God's power and must therefore be protected from the invasion and pollution of a surrounding hostile culture. The resurrection of this sw'ma will be the ultimate proof of God's victory over the political and cosmic powers of the age. Mere survival of the soul or spirit is not sufficient to turn around the accepted hierarchy of power and values (2004:65). Therefore, the Christians in Corinth who deny the resurrection of the body disrupt the process of liberation that began at Jesus' death; they short-circuit the apocalyptic drama (2004:60).

Paul also appropriates resurrection symbolism to legitimise his authority within the Christian community. The risen Lord appeared to him and therefore his apostleship has validity (1 Cor 9:1). Moreover, his missionary lifestyle, fraught with perils and hardship, is meaningful and legitimate only in light of the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:14–15; 31–32). Thus, in appropriating the symbol of resurrection Paul expands it. It has become a tool to make meaning (Setzer 2004:4).

With regard to the nature of the resurrection body, Paul utilises the organic metaphor of the seed (1 Cor 15:37). This image conveys radical transformation. Whatever body is raised, it is not exactly the body that was buried. Paul calls it a 'spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44). However, Paul does not reject *bodily* resurrection and therefore, to read the words of 1 Cor 15:50 ('flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God') in terms of a body-soul dichotomy would be incorrect. The contrast here is between ordinary human life and pneumatic human life. Interpreting 1 Cor 15:50 in terms of substances or entities puts one in any case on a slippery road, because in the ancient world substances like matter, body, soul and spirit were not in opposition to one another, but on a continuum (Setzer 2004:64; see also §3.1.2).

Lastly, in a chapter like 1 Corinthians 15 in which the resurrection of Jesus and the concomitant resurrection of the believer are so central one would expect references to other New Testament resurrection traditions like the apparition and empty tomb traditions. In 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 Paul mentions a list of appearances of the risen Jesus to individuals and groups. The purpose of this list is to provide proof of Jesus' resurrection and defend apostolic authority. However, it is difficult to reconcile this list with apparition traditions elsewhere in the New Testament. Moreover, in building up his argument for bodily resurrection in the remainder of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul no longer makes use of this evidence to support his argument. The empty tomb tradition (see Mk 16:1–8) Paul does not mention at all. It might have been unknown to him. Carnley (1987:53) ventures to say that Paul's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus was incongruous with the way resurrection is depicted and/or implied in the different versions of the empty tomb story. Therefore, it could not be utilised for his argument in 1 Corinthians 15 even if he had known about it. Carnley's argument is conjecture. What can be concluded is that Paul indeed reduces the evidence in promoting his view of bodily resurrection, but whether this is done intentionally or unintentionally cannot be determined with any certainty.

1.2.2 Bodily Resurrection with the Apologists of the Second Century CE

With the second-century apologists the symbol of resurrection has moved from its originating context of the symbolic world of the apocalyptic to the heart of soteriology. Due to debates that arose around the question of resurrection as the fate of believers and of humanity as a whole, both orthodox and Gnostic teachers found themselves pressed to explain what resurrection means for the ultimate salvation of the believer. Justin Martyr and Athenagoras express resurrection as reconstitution of the bodies in which we now live and the subsequent reuniting of them to our souls. Their concern is for the structural and material continuity between the earthly body and the resurrected body. This particular understanding of resurrection gained ground during a time when persecution and martyrdom occurred, be it that opinions differ as to the intensity of both (Bynum 1995:44). The image of reassemblage of exactly the flesh that suffered was comforting because it promised those who were willing to die in God's service the victory (Bynum 1995:83). But there were additional corollaries of resurrection understood in this way: resurrection of the *flesh* (savrx) extolled the power of God and the essential goodness of creation in the face of pagan and Gnostic incredulity and disgust; it showed the uniqueness of the Christian faith in the Greco-Roman world and its superiority over philosophy; it came to be associated with the correct interpretation of scripture; it solved the problem of the decomposition of the body after death; and it constituted ultimate justice (Setzer 2004:85). Resurrection as a symbol had once more reached beyond itself and functioned as a tool to make meaning and as a problem solver. It also became a clear boundary marker to distinguish true Christians from heretics, Jews and pagans. Justin Martyr who composed *Dialogue with Trypho* between 155 and 165 CE reserves in *Dial.* 80.3–4 the name 'Christian' for those who share the belief in resurrection of the *physical* body (Setzer 2004:84).

The apologists Irenaeus and Tertullian share with Justin and Athenagoras a materialistic notion of the resurrection and emphatically apply this notion to the resurrection of both Jesus and the believer. The two resurrections have to be the same in kind so as to avoid any kind of subordination. The fact that especially Luke and John in their versions of the empty tomb story put much emphasis on the physical reality of the risen Lord supports the claim that Jesus' resurrection, like the anticipated resurrection of the believer, is one of material continuity. To stress the dual destiny of Jesus and the believer Irenaeus argues in *Adversus haereses* 5.7.1:

In the same manner, therefore, as Christ did rise in the substance of flesh, and pointed out to his disciples the mark of the nails and the opening in his side (now these are the tokens of that flesh which rose from the dead), so "shall he also", it is said, "raise us up by his own power" (Roberts & Donaldson 1869:70).

So far so good. But the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 turns out to be a hurdle for these apologists, especially as the verse 'flesh and blood (saVrx kaiV ai‰ma) cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor 15:50) is used by Gnostics to tie their position (resurrection is spiritual in nature) to that of Paul.[2] For Irenaeus and Tertullian the interpretation of the symbol of resurrection has to include physicality and therefore they restrict Paul's assertion that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' to the moral sphere and have it refer to those who live immoral lives and produce 'works of the flesh'—it is they who will not inherit the kingdom of God (*Haer.* 5.9.3–4; *Res.* 50; Olson 1990:138). Tertullian furthermore can agree with Paul that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God by adding the word *alone*. Alone, flesh and blood are too weak to attain the kingdom, but after being made alive by the Spirit, and swallowed up by immortality and incorruptibility, they will inherit the kingdom of God (*Res.* 50; Roberts & Donaldson 1870:306)! Irenaeus and Tertullian have to manipulate the text in order to promote their view of resurrection.

1.2.3 Origen's View on Bodily Resurrection

With Origen (185–253 CE) the antagonistic attitude to the surrounding culture and the subsequent use of the symbol of resurrection as a boundary marker is fading. Origen also parts decisively with the materialistic and overly literal interpretation of the symbol of resurrection. His great achievement is to reconcile traditional Christian eschatological beliefs with contemporary philosophical views. Origen modified a lot of elements in the traditional eschatological pattern. He rationalised the doctrines of God's wrath, punishment and judgment by representing them as aspects of God's education of mankind. He demythologised the apocalyptic tradition of the scriptures

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[2] Whether the Gnostics interpreted Paul correctly is not the point here. The point is that Irenaeus and Tertullian took their interpretation seriously and developed lengthy arguments to refute it, thereby presenting their own alternative interpretations of 1 Cor 15:50.

and popular Christian belief by applying the Church's traditional eschatological imagery in a symbolic way to the growth of the Christian toward salvation and union with God. By introducing these kinds of double-layered interpretations through the use of the allegorical method, Origen attempted to be both true to the sources and intellectually responsible in terms of the science and philosophy of his own day (Daley 1991:59). He sincerely aimed to reconcile Christian beliefs with intellectual concerns so as to strengthen religious conviction and to prevent Christians from going to look for answers in the great Gnostic sects (Crouzel 1989:46). Hanson notes that it is interesting that so drastic a remoulding of eschatology could be made within a little more than a century of the compilation of the New Testament (2002:367). But his conclusion is that Origen's eschatology can no longer be viewed as consistent with the eschatology of the New Testament (2002:356). Origen, however, did not perceive himself as departing from the church's 'rule of faith' as norm for belief. Yet he acknowledged that there was a broad field for free speculation outside its boundaries and that it was the responsibility of the intelligent believer to struggle for clearer understanding (Daley 1991:48). This recognition of the strong bond between knowledge and salvation emerged from the surrounding intellectual Hellenistic environment.

The key text in Origen's doctrine of the resurrection of the body is Matthew 22:29–33 that relates Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees and includes his statement that the risen 'will be like the angels in heaven.' Since, according to Origen, only God is utterly incorporeal, becoming like an angel does not mean that one ceases to have a body. Angels and demons have bodies, but of a more tenuous nature than humans: bodies that are suited to the environment in which their souls find themselves. The soul will always form for itself a body suited to its environment. At the resurrection the saints will discard the present body in favour of a more ethereal vehicle. But even though these resurrected bodies have undergone a quality change from earthly to heavenly, they preserve their unique, recognisable features or form. This 'form' or ei\do"[3] is a key-term that Origen employs and it can be described as an internal principle of growth and development; a force of individuation; a pattern that organises the flux of matter, guaranteeing that amidst the constant flux of material elements, the

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[3] Bauer (1979:221) lists the following meanings for the Greek word ei\do": 'outward appearance', 'form', 'kind', 'active seeing', 'sight'.

body, like a river in constant flow, remains identifiable, remains the same river (Crouzel 1989:255). Since it is corporeal, it must not be confused with the soul, yet it is imposed by the soul so as to shape and integrate the material body. This very *eidos* will again be produced by the soul at the resurrection when it will build for itself a new body, better in every way than the present one, yet recognisable as the same corporeal individual, freed from its labile character and having come to rest in a part of the universe beyond all motion (Daley 1991:54).

To Origen then, the body that survives and rises is not the reassembled statue of the earlier apologists but the Pauline seed. This is Origen's philosophical answer to the mystery of the identity of the earthly body with the risen one. In fact, it is firstly an answer to the mystery of the identity of the earthly body with itself, beneath the constant flux of its material elements. Origen's explication is thus an intellectually responsible attempt to account for our bodily survival from birth to old age and into the glory of the end of time, a survival that is not dependent on the reanimation of bits of flesh that happened to make up the body of an individual at the moment of death, but that features a sophisticated and plausible conception of the corporeal 'form' in the light of ancient philosophy and science (Dechow 1988:352). The true identity of each subject remains for Origen its spiritual core. The stage of one's journey to God in a particular kind of body is determined by the level of spiritual maturity. Each new level of spiritual maturity over the body is accompanied by a new material environment for the body to work in and grow through, but 'materiality' here does not stand for matter with which the present bodily senses are familiar. Yet the present material world is not evil nor a mistake, but the providential gift of a good and just God who has clothed fallen spirits with bodies, so that they may develop their spiritual capacities once more through the challenge of overcoming bodily instinct; so that, in other words, the body may function as a gymnasium for the spirit (Williams 2004:136). The pivot of salvation is not the flesh, as the apologists before Origen had asserted (Bynum 1995:43), but the intellect, set free from passion, as the supreme form of love united with the Logos in contemplation and praise of the Father. This is how Origen 'demythologises' resurrection. In a way, traditional eschatological imagery is again put to the service of the individual Christian's growth toward salvation and union with God. Origen's treatment of the doctrine of the resurrection is a good example of how he blends the Biblical material and the beliefs and practices of traditional Christianity with a series of presuppositions extraneous to these, so as to produce his own unique view of the

doctrine. Hanson (2002:371) concludes that these presuppositions were very little altered by contact with the material in the Bible, though Origen was perfectly willing to accept the ideas of the Bible where they did not conflict with his presuppositions. An example is his use of Matthew 22:29–32 as starting-point for the discussion on the resurrection of the body. Tertullian's radically different conclusion on the same text indicates, however, that the exegete's context is decisive in the interpretation of a text. In *De resurrectione carnis* 62 Tertullian comments:

> … nor would they [the saints] fail to remain in the flesh for the reason that they did not remain in the practices of the flesh, … He did not say: "They will be angels", lest He should be denying their humanity, but "as angels" (cf. Mt 22:30) in order to preserve their humanity. He did not take away the nature of him to whom He added a likeness (Souter 1922:158–9).

Like angels, but still flesh. This remained the dominant view. The Letter to Menas of the emperor Justinian in 543 CE and the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 CE pronounced anathema concepts attributed to Origen and labelled Origenist (Trigg 1998:66).

1.2.4 Conclusion

There is no doubt that Origen solved the problem of identity, the nature of corporeality and the nature of the resurrection body more successfully than any other thinker of Christian antiquity. He succeeded in professing traditional Pauline/New Testament resurrection doctrine in the contemporary terms of intellectual Alexandrian Christianity and against the wider background of late Hellenistic thought. His sketch was superior to the theological erudition of the apologists on how there can be eternal physical bodies. Yet the apologists' view won out. It is difficult to determine with any exactness why their view triumphed. It most likely developed under the influence of a combination of factors. An attempt must be made to list these factors so as to gain insight into the process by which 'the mainstream was achieved by historical circumstance' (Bowden 1988:59). The following can be mentioned: the model of Jesus' own resurrection (even though not just physicalist but also spiritualist interpretations on Jesus' risen body are expressed in the gospel accounts); the impact of millenarianism and its materialistic conception of the future hope; the conflict with

Gnosticism resulting in the acute need for boundary markers; the Christian adoption of the Hellenistic dualist anthropology of body and soul leading to questions about the nature of the body when it reunites with the soul; persecution and martyrdom and the need to formulate an adequate response to this; the emerging governmental structure of the third-century church that aimed to exploit the dogma of the resurrection of the physical body to defend the newly achieved ecclesiastical and ascetic hierarchy in the body of Christ; and last but not least, the deep and consuming fear of putrefaction, of extinction, and the need for a solution to this basic existential problem.

With such an impressive list of factors in its favour, it is not surprising that the interpretation of the symbol of resurrection as resurrection of the flesh gained and preserved dominance for many centuries. A few examples of this lasting influence will suffice. First, in 1215 CE the Fourth Lateran Council pronounced that 'all rise with their own individual bodies, that is, the bodies which they now wear' (Bynum 1995:155). Second, the influential Old Roman Creed that was given the title *Apostles' Creed* at the beginning of the fifth century (Swainson 1875:154) refers to resurrection as 'resurrection of the flesh' throughout its editorial history with only one exception: in 1539 CE 'flesh' was changed to 'body' in the English translation (Bray 1984:102). Third, during the time of the Reformation the reformer John Calvin (1509–64 CE) merely echoed the second-century apologists by presenting the resurrection of Jesus as the prototype, and God's omnipotence and justice as the foundation for the resurrection of the flesh (McNeill 1960:989–993). Fourth, despite modernism and the rise of science, even many Christians today are more connected to this long-standing tradition than they are aware of or willing to admit. Deep anxiety is often displayed in relation to the proper care of cadavers. And one of the reasons why Christians harbour inhibitions about donating organs to be used in organ transplants is the underlying fear that such an act will cause one to rise incomplete in the general resurrection. It seems that the idea that the physical body or 'the flesh' is crucial to self, that identity entails material continuity, remains a basic unspoken assumption and inconsistency at the heart of people's experience of the world and of oneself. The body, *this* body, must rise, for without it—it is viewed—we are not persons, we are not *our selves* (Bynum 1995:340).

The study on the resurrection trajectories in early Christianity has confirmed that the symbol of resurrection worked differently for different individuals and groups. From the apostle Paul to Origen resurrection had multiple meanings. The diversity in

interpretation was due to the fact that the symbol was so embedded in worldview and ideology. The study has also validated Bowden's claim that the mainstream was achieved by historical circumstance. It is time to determine the nature, extent and consequences of the unity and diversity displayed in the interpretation of the symbol of resurrection. In addition, the role of the resurrection traditions in the New Testament in establishing unity and/or causing diversity has to be examined.

1.3   UNITY AND DIVERSITY

1.3.1 The Elusiveness of Unity and the Inevitability of Diversity

Considering the fact that the resurrection trajectory from the gospels of Luke and John to the apologists of the second century CE and into later centuries represents the majority view on resurrection, it is tempting to accept the literal and material notion of resurrection as the correct and binding interpretation for the symbol of resurrection. To actually do so, would, however, be a fatal mistake. Majority does not mean validity. The criteria for validity are much more intricate (see §1.4). This may be hard to accept for those who are eagerly looking for evidence to support their position, but if one wants to do history the honest and scientific way, it is best to recognise faulty reasoning for what it is. 'Majority' is a relative and often biased concept. With regard to resurrection, it is only in hindsight that resurrection as 'resurrection of the flesh' can be considered the majority view. At the time of the New Testament the resurrection traditions in Luke and John that depict the risen Jesus in strongly physical terms represent only one way of experiencing and reflecting on the resurrection of Jesus. Likewise, the view of the apologists that resurrection must be physical and that there is structural and material continuity between the present body and the resurrected body did not stand out at the time. On the contrary, it was in fierce competition with other views, proposed by other schools and philosophies. With regard to the persistence of the belief in resurrection of the flesh, §1.2.4 has demonstrated that powerful forces were at work to keep this interpretation alive—forces that derived from and were fuelled by theological, socio-political and even psychological or existential bias. The interpretation as such was in no way superior to other interpretations. It

could not provide proof that it was based on clear-cut evidence of a historical event or a genuinely uniform tradition.

It is time to establish the parameters for unity. Is it possible to get to some objective historical event, to some original pre-symbolic account of 'what actually happened' and so arrive at a single and authoritative interpretation for the symbol of resurrection? The answer is no. The resurrection traditions in the New Testament present us with evidence that is ambiguous, diverse, and at times tendentious. These traditions can actually be referred to as 'sermons' because they are exegetical in nature; they are reflections on, rather than reports of the resurrection; they are proclamation in a concrete situation; hence the diversity. The same applies to the later tradition. It was reformulated again and again to fit new contexts (Steyn 1984:7; see also §1.2.2 and §1.2.3). The resurrection traditions thus arose in history and have a history of their own. Their historicality has to be recognised. And to historicise means to relativise. The New Testament traditions could not then and cannot now serve as the absolute norm for interpreting the symbol of resurrection—or any other potent religious symbol for that matter.

How does Luke's ascension story, for example, express its historicality? Firstly, it utilises the then-current literary genre that surrounded the birth and death of a significant person with extraordinary and often miraculous stories (Kriel 2003:322). Secondly and more importantly, it reflects the assumption of a three-storeyed universe. This kind of cosmological speculation understood images of transcendence literally, and allocated spirit (as a refined sort of matter) a place in the cosmos. By exploring into space, one would at a certain point come to the end of matter and at the beginning of spirit. And thus, the ascending Christ, after leaving the earth and passing a hierarchy of spiritual beings, would eventually reach the throne of God. Expressing divine transcendence in terms of spatial distance is a feature of mythological thinking.[4] Myths express unobservable, ultimate realities in terms of observable phenomena. Myths cannot be taken literally but must be interpreted. In this way one does not abandon the reality, although one may give up the image.[5] Hans Küng (1974:353–54) has this to say about Luke's ascension story:

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[4] 'Mythological thinking' here refers to the mythical view of the world that the New Testament presupposes which is the cosmology of a pre-scientific age (Bultmann 1961:3).

[5] It is, on the other hand, doubtful whether the human mind can ever dispense with myth. We can only speak of the invisible in terms of the visible. It would therefore be more accurate to use the term

Obviously Jesus did not go on a journey into space. In which direction would he have ascended, at what speed, and how long would it have taken? An ascension in these terms is inconceivable to modern man, but it was familiar enough to people at that time. We hear of an ascension, not only in connection with Elijah and Enoch in the Old Testament, but also with other great figures of antiquity like Hercules, Empedocles, Romulus, Alexander the Great and Apollonius of Tyana. It was a question of being carried up, not of a "journey to heaven," neither the way to heaven nor the arrival there being described, but only the disappearance from the earth. In this respect the cloud signifies both the closeness and the inapproachability of God. The taking up pattern was therefore at Luke's disposal as ideal type and narrative form.

Luke's ascension story could be accommodated comfortably within the ancient worldview. Within that particular view of reality the story had meaning and significance in a concrete sense. Within another worldview the story may only have meaning in a metaphorical sense. Crossan views the story of Jesus' ascension as a formidable parable about Jesus (Crossan 2003b:305). Craffert also departs firmly from the concrete and literal sense, but proposes instead the term *cultural event* for events or experiences that belong to one specific cultural system or register of reality (Botha & Craffert 2005:11). Such events are not 'out there' as objectively observable events; they are not real in a material and physical sense—after all, culture is not real as 'a thing out there' (Botha & Craffert 2005:15). Cultural events are real in the sense that they constitute reality for the participants within the parameters of their specific cultural system. In a comparative setting the same events may be viewed as ASC (alternate state of consciousness) experiences (Botha & Craffert 2005:18). The resurrection and ascension narratives in the New Testament might well describe cultural events in the sense that they express definite cultural experiences, such as visionary or ASC experiences, in which the participants became convinced that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. Cultural events and experiences are capable of profoundly impacting the lives of the participants.

There is validity in interpreting the events of Jesus' resurrection and ascension as either parabolic or cultural events (see also §3.2.2.4–5). The former interpretation views the events as instances of narration in which historical processes are symbolically incarnated in events; the latter places the events firmly within history,

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'remythologising': discovering a new mythical expression for ultimate realities which will take account of the change of one's view of the universe (Thielicke 1961:162).

albeit as observer-dependent, cultural events. Treating these events as observer-independent, objective historical events would, however, be a misinterpretation of the data; it would be an instance of what is called the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* (Botha & Craffert 2005:17). There is no objective historical event or uniform tradition that can serve as the absolute norm here. It follows that no once-and-for-all authoritative interpretations for the symbols of resurrection and ascension can be established from the New Testament traditions on Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

There is a second reason why single authoritative interpretations for religious symbols are not within reach. Symbols are intrinsically polyvalent and dynamic. Suppose that, for instance, the resurrection stories in the gospels could stand the historical challenge and one could establish from them facts about resurrection as a past historical event; these historical facts would not carry a once-and-for-all meaning of resurrection as symbol. The event of resurrection, to the extent that it is claimed to have occurred, is quite without effect except as it is subjectively appropriated by individuals.

In reply some might argue with Davis (1993:ix) that the resurrection of Jesus means little *unless it really happened*. This reasoning is understandable. However, the bottom-line is that we do not know what really happened. The meaning and content of the pronoun 'it' in the clause *unless **it** really happened* eludes us. The resurrection traditions in the New Testament present us with evidence that is slim and diverse. The various accounts of Jesus' appearances, for instance, are difficult to reconcile with one another and the apparition to Peter is referred to but not described. Moreover, the evidence is of an ambiguous nature. Even if the bare historicity of the appearances of Jesus could be established, multiple interpretations and explanations can be put forward to explain them, with the assertion of the resurrection of Jesus as only one possible interpretation of the available evidence. Similarly, if the historicity of the emptiness of the tomb could be established, the ambiguity of its meaning has still to be overcome. The story as it stands is merely a sign that alerts us to the possibility that Jesus was raised (Carnley 1987:61). Moreover, the more we decide that *what* we have (a buried Jesus first and an empty grave later) is a sequence of objectively observable historical events, the more we reduce what presumably happened to the body of Jesus to the dimensions of a bodily resuscitation. Is this a meaningful interpretation of the symbol of resurrection? Jesus' resurrection as an observer-independent historical event—if indeed it was such an event—will always remain

elusive, without analogy and thus unknowable. It has to be acknowledged that knowing that such an event *happened* contributes very little to the interpretation of the symbol of resurrection. Therefore, instead of aiming at reaching a final judgment on the observer-independent ontology of the *event* of Jesus' resurrection, one should explore the origins of the *belief* in Jesus' resurrection: what could possibly have happened to the original actors within the worldview and religious milieu of the first century that led to resurrection faith (Craffert 1989:343)? This is a shift in focus from objectively observable historical events to real, observer-dependent cultural events (Botha & Craffert 2005:16–17).

It has by now become clear that going the route of establishing a single interpretation for the symbol of resurrection based on an objective historical event or uniform tradition ends in a cul-de-sac. Christianity is a historical religion in the sense that it derives from certain past events—events that have been reported, narrated and interpreted in scripture—but Christian faith cannot be proven by these events nor is religious significance self-evident from them. It follows that Christian unity cannot be based on these events but must be achieved on a different plane, a plane that lays claim to subjective rather than objective truth. The resurrection hope of Christianity is centred on the risen Christ. He is the heart and goal of it and as such its source of unity. Unity, certainty and meaning are found solely through faith in the risen Lord. But this is a statement not at the level of historical fact or supra-historical truth but at the level of existential encounter and experiential truth guided by critical self-understanding.

All that is required at the historical level is that what evidence there is should not be *incompatible* with this faith in the risen Lord (Watson 1987:372).

1.3.2 The Problem of Diversity as Research Problem

So far the historicality, diversity and relativity of the early Christian tradition on resurrection has been established. It has been demonstrated that individuals and communities promoted *a* view of resurrection which contributed to their self-understanding and self-definition. Multiple meanings of resurrection ensued. Resurrection is a polyvalent symbol. Often it is also a contested symbol. In early Christianity it was contested both from within (as in Corinth) and from without (as with pagans). In proclaiming and defending resurrection, theologians and philosophers

used the evidence[6] selectively and/or reinterpreted it within the framework of a particular hermeneutic and worldview. It was the overall hypothesis that mattered. The evidence was in any case incapable of functioning as a unifying factor as it exhibited the same diversity as the later tradition. But, as was argued, all of this is not a negative given. In this way the symbolic nature of resurrection is retained. Symbols cannot be viewed as static. The moment only one interpretation is allowed for a symbol, it ceases to be a symbol and becomes a dogma. Symbols have multiple meanings and can function in a variety of contexts. The future of a symbol is in this sense open. Symbols are tools for making meaning.

Does it follow therefore that *any* interpretation for the symbol of resurrection will do? Does interpretation *x* have as much validity as interpretation *y,* due to the intrinsic openness of the symbol? Such a conclusion would be unscientific. There are parameters for understanding and interpreting the symbol of resurrection that cannot be ignored. There are, firstly, *historical* parameters. The historicality of the resurrection traditions in the New Testament and the later Christian tradition has already been established. But true historical thinking also takes into account its own historicality, and this includes the aspects of prejudice and finiteness (Gadamer 1979:246, 321). The historically-conscious interpreter does not view the tradition as an object that can be approached in a free and uninvolved way in order to arrive at an understanding of what it contains. Such an attitude of 'epistemological primitivism' (Barnhart 1980:503) will only lead to alienation both from oneself and from the tradition. Nothing said in the first or second century CE means the same in the twenty-first century CE, even if the same words are used. The historically-conscious interpreter knows that any statement has to fit in a total conceptual framework, horizon or worldview if it is to have meaning (Barton 1979:107). Therefore, in the process of understanding a historical horizon is projected that is different from the horizon of the present. Subsequently, a fusion between the present horizon and the projected historical horizon takes place (Gadamer 1979:273). When past and present fuse, understanding becomes real—an experience of reality. This is called effective historical consciousness (Gadamer 1979:325). Fortunately, even where one's own historicality is consciously or unconsciously concealed and the naiveté of historical positivism or objectivism is

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[6] Evidence here can refer to both the resurrection traditions in the New Testament and any preceding or contemporaneous extracanonical traditions.

preferred, the power of effective history can prevail (1979:268). Nevertheless, an interpretation of the symbol of resurrection that does not take into account the historicality of the Christian tradition and one's own historicality loses much of its validity and 'falls short of reaching that truth which, despite the finite nature of our understanding, could be reached' (1979:268).

Secondly, there are *hermeneutical* parameters for interpreting the symbol of resurrection. These parameters concern method and methodology, representing respectively the practical and the theoretical side of interpretation. A basic requirement for a valid method is its 'public-ness', its repeatability. The more public the method, the more valid the results. Methodology can be defined as the theory of method, and as such it includes methodological assumptions. An assumption that any valid methodology must adopt is the historicality of the entire interpretive process, and this includes the method used. Method is not immune from historicality. Therefore, any naïve faith in method and the objectivity that supposedly can be attained through it must be abandoned. It appears then that the terms historical and hermeneutical are two sides of one coin; they presuppose one another. A valid interpretation must be based on a valid hermeneutic, and a valid hermeneutic will recognise the historicality of all interpretation. Ultimately, hermeneutics aims to understand *understanding*. It cannot do so unless it takes into account the historicality and thus the finiteness of all knowledge and understanding. Gadamer (1979:266) writes that the hermeneutically trained mind will include historical consciousness.

Thirdly, there are *gospel-critical* parameters for interpreting the symbol of resurrection. In the Christian tradition Jesus' resurrection is paradigmatic. Therefore, any interpretation of the symbol of resurrection within this tradition has to come to terms with the resurrection of Jesus or rather with what the earliest accounts relate about the Easter event. In fact, the followers of Jesus do not witness the resurrection-event itself; they experience an encounter with Jesus which they then interpret as meaning that Jesus is risen. The ambiguity and sketchiness of the evidence was already commented on earlier. Understandably, a valid interpretation of the gospel stories can only be arrived at if the other parameters, the historical and hermeneutical, are properly in place.

§1.2.1–3 summarised how representatives of early Christian thought arrived at their own unique interpretations of the symbol of resurrection. Each group or individual responded to the available tradition from within then-current historical, hermeneutical

and gospel-critical parameters. It is not the task of this thesis to determine the validity of these interpretations. The task of this thesis is to focus on the present, and examine how a contemporary theologian interprets the symbol of resurrection within current historical, hermeneutical and gospel-critical parameters.

1.4   AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1   The thesis is aimed at the following:

To investigate how John Dominic Crossan, a contemporary theologian and Historical Jesus specialist, interprets the symbol of resurrection within current historical, hermeneutical and gospel-critical parameters, and to test the validity of this interpretation.

In order to achieve this aim, the thesis will study and evaluate the following:

From the perspective of hermeneutics and history:
- the emphasis on method in Crossan's project
- Crossan's *interdisciplinary* method
- Crossan's hermeneutic of interactivism
- Crossan's reliance on tradition-criticism for interpreting the literary Jesus tradition, including the atomistic treatment of the data referred to as scissors-and-paste historiography
- the opposing historiographical method of hypothesis and verification
- resurrection trajectories and appropriations of the symbol of resurrection outside early Christianity

From the perspective of gospel-criticism and hermeneutics:
- Crossan's non-historical and non-literal interpretation of transcendental claims in the gospel stories leading to a metaphorical and theological interpretation of Jesus' resurrection

- the main alternative position: a historical-literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection
- Crossan's treatment of the resurrection traditions of early Christianity
- Crossan's elevation of the historical Jesus to the status of risen Lord

1.4.2 Basic Claim and Method

Crossan's interpretation of the symbol of bodily resurrection with its single focus on the resurrection of Jesus has validity but also reveals three aspects or assumptions that are problematic yet pervasive:

- The optimistic assessment of the role of method as a means of minimising the historian's hermeneutical involvement, after method itself has been immunised from historicality on the practical level
- The (over)reliance on the classic model of tradition-criticism and transmissional analysis within the literary paradigm
- The (over)emphasis on a singular aspect of the Christian tradition, namely the historical Jesus

This thesis will follow the order of the list of proposed objectives. A main critic of both Crossan's methodology and view on the resurrection of Jesus is N. T. Wright. Wright's position will be outlined in some detail at different stages of this thesis so as to provide an alternative to Crossan's position and obtain an even sharper focus on what Crossan intends to convey. G. Lüdemann criticises Crossan's metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus. His position will be contrasted with that of Crossan in §3.2.2.4 and §3.2.2.5, sections that deal with the apparitions of Jesus and their role in the construction of the Easter faith. A main opponent to Crossan's virtually exclusive reliance on the method of tradition-criticism within the literary paradigm is J. D. G. Dunn. His proposals with regard to an oral living tradition as the first phase of the transmission of the Jesus tradition will be briefly mentioned in §2.4.2.6 but discussed in detail in §3.2.4.13.

1.5 CROSSAN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE SYMBOL OF BODILY RESURRECTION

The final and culminate task of this thesis will be to evaluate Crossan's elevation of the historical Jesus to the status of risen Lord (see chapter 4). At this point the main aspects of Crossan's interpretation of the symbol of resurrection, with its single focus on Jesus' resurrection, will be examined. Crossan interprets Jesus' resurrection metaphorically and theologically. This is his way of fusing past and present (see §1.3.2), of seeing Jesus-then as Christ-now. There is a dialectic at work here. It is the dialectic between history and faith. Crossan defines Christian belief as (1) an act of faith (2) in the historical Jesus (3) as the manifestation of God (1994a:200). He considers it the task of each generation to make its best historical judgment about who Jesus was then and, on that basis, decide what that historical reconstruction means as Christ now. It becomes, in other words, a matter of saying and living what the reconstruction of the historical Jesus means for present life in this world, after one has reconstructed the historical Jesus with fullest integrity.

Later on in this thesis reasons will be presented why according to Crossan the gospel stories do not provide evidence that what they portray about the resurrection of Jesus is historically true in a literal sense (Crossan 1996:209; 1998a:29). Consequently, when it comes to the Easter event and the decades succeeding it, Crossan accepts only the barest minimum as historical fact namely, there was a *movement*; there was an *execution*; and despite the execution there was *continuation* and *expansion* of the movement (1998a:9). For this four-point pattern Crossan relies on Tacitus and Josephus, first-century historians outside the circle of Christianity, who describe the origins and early growth of the Christian movement similarly (1998a:9–12). According to Crossan, the central historical fact underlying the New Testament resurrection texts is that people continued to experience the empowering presence of Jesus after his death. Without that presence and experience of Jesus, there is indeed no Christian faith. The same radicality is expressed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:14: '… if Christ has not been raised, our faith is in vain.' For Crossan an empty tomb may be a dramatic way of expressing this faith and risen apparitions may be dramatic ways of organising this faith, but they are not Christian faith itself. They point to something, and that something is the experience of Jesus' continued empowering presence (Crossan 1996:210); a presence that was there pre- and post-

Easter, not just during Jesus' life or during a restricted period of forty days after the Easter event, as Luke records.

Some might argue that, if we only have this experiential reality as historical fact, we have a minimal historical reconstruction on which to build the next level (i.e. the theological one) of articulating meaning for the present. But Crossan moves surprisingly smoothly from this historical level to the theological level:

> Bodily resurrection means that the embodied life and death of the historical Jesus continues to be experienced, by believers, as powerfully efficacious and salvifically present in this world. That life continues, as it always has, to form communities of like lives (1998a:xxxi).

For Crossan the emphasis must be on *the embodied life and death of the historical Jesus.* Resurrection is not simply a matter of the spirit of Jesus living on, or the followers of Jesus living on in the world while furthering his cause. Resurrection means that the historical Jesus of the early first century CE is the risen Jesus—absolutely the same and absolutely different, like the metaphor of the seed becoming grain. The very same historical Jesus continues to be present and powerful in the world in an absolutely different mode of existence. Crossan wants to hold on so strongly to the historical Jesus who lived a way of life in his Jewish homeland in a flesh-and-blood body that he prefers the term 'fleshly' resurrection of Jesus (1998a:xxxi). It is his way of insisting on the permanence of the history of Jesus. And the eye of faith recognises the historical Jesus as the incarnation of the Jewish God of justice and as the revelation of the Kingdom of God. A Christian finds God in Jesus (cf. Buckley, Crossan & Craig 1998:48)—this sums up the dialectic between history and faith. It is history seen by faith. With Crossan the historical Jesus (i.e. Crossan's reconstruction of the historical Jesus) is sufficient, adequate and conclusive for Christian faith. The historical Jesus has become the Christ of faith. First the 'Word' (i.e. the intelligibility of the world; the meaning of life) became 'flesh'. Now the 'flesh' of full and normal human existence becomes the incarnation of the divine meaning of life (Crossan 1998a:xxxi). And the believing community ('the community of like lives') is committed to continuing such incarnation ever afterward. Crossan considers himself an exponent of incarnational Christianity. He places this over against docetic Christianity. The former is committed to Jesus possessing a body that is fully and validly enfleshed while the latter believes that for a divine being like Jesus, an unreal

and apparitional body, a seemingly enfleshed body, will suffice. What we have here is the old dichotomy between monism and dualism, between the 'sarcophilic' tradition of necessarily enfleshed spirit and the 'sarcophobic' tradition of flesh against spirit (Crossan 1998a:xxiii). Crossan appeals to incarnational Christianity to legitimise his quest for the historical Jesus *as* risen Jesus. By so doing he redefines incarnational Christianity. He shows awareness of this when he writes: 'Its (i.e. incarnational Christianity's) insistence on the resurrection of Jesus' flesh is my insistence on the permanence of Jesus' history (1999:47).'

Crossan has thus *expanded* the symbol of resurrection by *restricting* it to the historical Jesus. For Crossan the 'body' that is raised is the metaphorical body of Jesus' earthly existence; the deposit of all the historical experiences of the corporeal living being called Jesus of Nazareth (Wedderburn 1999:132). Crossan's definition refrains from saying anything about what happened to Jesus on Easter Day. Instead, it focuses on his continued influence, on his empowering and transforming impact.

In reply Wedderburn (1999:133) warns that this interpretation of the symbol of resurrection goes far beyond the intentions of the New Testament writers. Wedderburn does not consider this invalid as long as one sees how far beyond the text one has gone. Craig, however, considers Crossan's interpretation of resurrection a denial of resurrection (cf. Buckley, Crossan & Craig 1998:58). Crossan replies by stating that with regard to faith in resurrection, then and now, a spectrum has always existed from the most literal to the most metaphorical. And even if resurrection is interpreted as entirely non-literal and fully metaphorical, it must point to something, to something concrete (cf. Ezk 37:1–14 where the metaphor resurrection points to national restoration). For Crossan this something concrete is God's justification of the world—God making the world divinely just (2003a:55). Crossan arrives at this interpretation by returning to the Jewish-Christian originating context for resurrection which viewed Jesus' resurrection as start of the general resurrection and the apocalyptic consummation (see §1.2.1). But it is clear that Crossan demythologises the apocalyptic framework. He argues that the phrase 'Christ has been raised' means that the justification of the world is gradually unfolding through the powerful and transforming presence of the historical Jesus among his followers. But the reverse is also true: if his followers fail to make the world more divinely just, both visibly and publicly, then 'Christ has not been raised' (cf. 1 Cor 15:12–16). Crossan, like Paul, correlates two things; the one cannot be true without the other (Crossan 2003a:55–6).

Earlier it was concluded that diversity is an inevitable feature of the interpretive process with respect to the symbol of resurrection. Unity is not absent, but it is experienced solely through faith in the risen Lord. Crossan's faith has been outlined in this section. It can be summed up in one sentence: there is, ever and always, only one Jesus, the historical Jesus *as* risen Jesus (Crossan 1999:47). Whether this is a valid interpretation of the symbol of resurrection depends on Crossan's ability to take into account the historical, hermeneutical and gospel-critical parameters for interpreting the symbol of resurrection. This will be the subject of investigation in chapters 2 and 3.

CHAPTER TWO   **ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF CROSSAN'S METHODOLOGY**

2.1   BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

John Dominic Crossan was born in Ireland and began his academic career as a Servite priest in the Roman Catholic Church. He earned a doctorate in divinity from Maynooth College in Kildare, Ireland, and was engaged in biblical research at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and in archaeological research at the École Biblique in Jerusalem. He left the priesthood and the order in 1969. Soon after leaving the priesthood he began teaching at DePaul University in Chicago. At this university he was a professor of religious studies for twenty-six years. He took early retirement in 1995. Crossan is married and resides with his second wife Sarah in Florida (Copan 1998:23).

Several shaping influences on Crossan's life and work must be mentioned.[7] These are not listed in order to prove that Crossan is nothing more than a product of historical, political and ecclesiastical circumstances—Crossan operates from a context, no doubt, but his creative and independent mind is able to fuse the divergent influences and in the end emerge as an original thinker, not an unbiased thinker, but still a scholar with unique emphases and insights as well as some brave stances on sensitive issues. With regard to his Roman-Catholic background, Crossan acknowledges that he sees the historical Jesus, the New Testament, and early Christianity with a Roman Catholic, not with a Protestant, sensibility. This sensibility springs from the fact that up to his early twenties Crossan knew the Bible only as quarry for liturgy. Crossan left the priesthood and monasticism later in life. Apart from the desire to get married, his main motive for leaving the priesthood and joining the university was to be able to think critically without getting into trouble for it. Crossan does, however, not consider himself scarred by fundamentalism or dogmatism. He never sensed in himself a hidden agenda of either excuse or revenge with regard to his past. And the sudden death of his first wife does not seem to have put him off-

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[7] These autobiographical details have been taken from a brief autobiography by Crossan called 'Almost the whole truth: an odyssey' (1993 – online).

track. The political turmoil between the British and the Irish, on the other hand, seems to have exercised an influence on Crossan's historiographical works. His conclusion on the British-Irish issue is that power *inevitably* corrupts. Crossan sees this same negative principle at work in the history of the Christian church. Crossan's language is inflammatory when he writes about the incipient anti-Semitism in the early Christian tradition: 'The last chapters of the gospels and the first chapters of Acts taken literally, factually, and historically trivialize Christianity and brutalize Judaism. That acceptation has created in Christianity a lethal deceit that sours its soul, hardens its heart, and savages its spirit.' As a Christian, Crossan accepts the responsibility to do something about it. It is the task of this thesis to find out what Crossan has done and whether it has made a positive impact on Christian faith and theology.

2.2 THE EARLY CROSSAN: FROM EXISTENTIALISM TO POST-STRUCTURALISM

In Crossan's work two distinct stages of Jesus studies can be detected which Denton (2004:18) has identified as 'the early Crossan', consisting of his work on Jesus' parables in the 1970s; and 'the later Crossan', beginning in 1991 with his best-selling work *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. The two stages reflect a gradual change of focus from an emphasis on Jesus' words only to a wider emphasis on both Jesus' words and life. Both stages testify, however, to Crossan's fundamental interest in recovery of the historical Jesus. This has remained a constant factor in his historical work, even though his expressed or assumed hermeneutic underwent various changes, some of them radical. The method of historiography of the early Crossan is founded upon the classical methodological model of tradition-criticism and application of criteria of authenticity—during this early stage the criterion of dissimilarity particularly.[8] The purpose of Crossan's historical work is establishing the corpus of authentic Jesus material. Literary interpretation follows upon and assumes the results of this historical work, in other words,

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[8] This criterion regards the earliest form of a saying as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases of both ancient Judaism and early Christianity. Crossan applies this criterion not just with respect to subject and content, but also with respect to form and style (Denton 2004:20).

synchronic assumes diachronic (Denton 2004:35). Crossan characterises his scholarship as a refusal to allow either of these two orientations—synchrony or diachrony—to dominate, and an attempt to place them in tensile juxtaposition (Crossan 1994b:146). Synchrony can be defined as the analysis of traditions as they function as a system or within a system, while diachrony analyses Jesus traditions chronologically, as they underwent change and development. For Crossan then, the reconstruction of authentic Jesus material (the diachronic) is preliminary to the literary appreciation of this historical corpus (the synchronic). And whereas the historical methods of form- and tradition-criticism and application of criteria of authenticity are the time-tested tools that are adequate to reconstruct authentic Jesus material, they are inadequate to grasp the message contained in those reconstructed traditions. In order to correctly interpret and understand the message of Jesus, theories and methods are needed that go beyond historical reconstruction.

In his first work on the historical Jesus, *In Parables*, Crossan's hermeneutic is firstly informed by existentialism. Jesus expresses his parables in the language of paradox. The parables overthrow all absolutes thereby shattering the listener's world and ethics. In the face of this utter uncertainty, the action mode of the Kingdom arises out of one's experience of God. The parables of Jesus are thus metaphorical in the sense that they can be expressed in no other way than by inviting participation in the referent (Denton 2004:21).

The beginning of a structuralist orientation becomes noticeable in *In Parables* when Crossan refers to the nature of all reality as parabolic (Denton 2004:25). In his work *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* he elaborates on this point and states that there is no reality outside the structures of language and story. Linguistic structure constitutes reality (Denton 2004:25), or to say it with the words of the Dutch theologian Kuitert (1998:102–3):

> We kennen onze wereld en onszelf niet anders dan als "ter sprake" gebrachte wereld. In die zin is de werkelijkheid waarin we ons bevinden altijd vertaalde werkelijkheid.…De spraak is de wereld, de wereld is de spraak, in de spraak komen we dus de geïnterpreteerde wereld tegen.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure analysed language as a system and asserted that language is radically interrelational: words only have meaning in relation to other words, in the total system of a given language

(Denton 2004:26). And this system is closed from the inside without reference to external categories of meaning. For biblical studies this implies that one brackets the historical or extra-textual referent when examining a text. The text has meaning only as a closed, self-referential system, and not by virtue of any historical events or persons to which the text purportedly refers (Denton 2004:26). Crossan shares the structuralist tendency to view reality as exhausted by language, but he goes further: he also sees the need to relativise reality. Reality is 'story' and story has a dimension which Crossan identifies as 'play'. Play is the human imaginative activity that creates world; the totality of *played world* is what we call reality (Denton 2004:31). In paradox language reveals itself best as play, because paradox is 'language laughing at itself' (Denton 2004:32). Jesus' parables are paradox in the form of a story. Crossan uses the term *paradox* here in the sense of 'limit-expression': an expression that goes to the limit of language, that even points beyond its immediate signification to the Wholly Other (Denton 2004:37). Crossan believes that with the parables aniconicity is turned, not just against a law, a wisdom or an ethic, but against language itself. After all, language is potentially an idol (Denton 2004:37). The parables as paradoxical stories relativise and subvert the hearers' reality so as to prepare for an experience of the transcendent that cannot be contained within that reality. Crossan defines the 'transcendent' as the Wholly Other that resists the specifications of anything nameable, including language (2004:40). One detects a negative theology here. In *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* Crossan declares that the absence of a fixed, literal, univocal, referential language leads to the inevitability of metaphor. All language is metaphorical since there is no language of the kind mentioned above against which metaphor may be identified (Denton 2004:37). Since language is metaphorical, it follows that no reality can ever be fully present to us. There is a void of meaning at the core of metaphor and this void allows for polyvalence in readings and multiplicity of interpretations. The metaphor of metaphors is play. Play is the ultimate paradigm of reality. All is relative play and the fundamental paradox is that the player himself is played (Denton 2004:38). By introducing the notions of play, polyvalence and paradox Crossan reveals his shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. Kuitert (1998:175) illustrates the notions of metaphor and play excellently when dealing with the topic of reconciliation in his book *Jezus: nalatenschap van het Christendom*:

> "Verzoening" is binnen de algemene metafoor van Gods mensvormigheid een speciale metafoor: God wordt verzoend zoals een mens wiens ontstemming of boosheid is opgewekt, verzoend wordt.

Kuitert proceeds to explain atonement on the level of ritual or play. Note how he stresses the human initiative and creative imagination in play (1998:170, 177, 179):

> Net als alle symboliek is verzoening een *ritueel spel* (my emphasis), een hoogst ernstig spel … rein worden de mensen niet van een ritueel. Maar ze gelden weer als rein; het ritueel is als het ware een afspraak tussen God en mensen. Door onszelf (wij mensen) bedacht natuurlijk, en God in de mond gelegd: wat de Allerhoogste ervan denkt moeten we afwachten.

Eventually, the player himself is played. God now participates in the ritual and actually begins to take the lead (1998:179):

> Waar alles om draait is dat mensen hun overtredingen beseffen en van de last daarvan bevrijd willen worden.... "We moeten er wat aan doen." De apostel Paulus tekent Jezus in het (joodse) ritueel van de verzoening in, als de zondebok die de overtredingen van de wereld wegdraagt. Met als bijzonderheid, dat het volgens hem God zelf is die "er wat aan doet", die dus niet alleen het ritueel *meespeelt*, maar ook als het ware onze rituele rol *overneemt*; Hij levert Jezus als "zoenmiddel" (my emphasis).

Play then constitutes world or story. In fact, play is storied world. And the ineffable transcendent, the Unspeakable that lies outside our words and signs is actually the ground of play (Denton 2004:39).

To sum up, the early Crossan clearly demonstrates development in the hermeneutic he employs. Surprisingly however, his historiography seems to be minimally affected by it. As a (post-)structuralist, the early Crossan must deny extra-linguistic referents onto language, but as a historiographer he continues to operate on the assumption that what is sought is a real historical, extra-linguistic referent, the authentic words of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Kuitert observes the following regarding extra-linguistic, historical referents and texts:

> Mattheüs [and also Mark and Luke] verwijst niet alleen naar andere (vorige) teksten, maar nodigt ook uit om door de tekst heen te kijken naar buitentekstuele, in dit geval historische gegevens. In tekst verpakt, dat wel, maar toch: gegevens die er al waren voordat de tekst van Mattheüs er was en juist via het verhaal aan anderen moeten worden verteld (1998:112).

Undoubtedly Crossan agrees with Kuitert. He confines reality to language when it comes to literary theory, but when it comes to the application of his historical method, he assumes historical referent and extra-linguistic reality for the purpose of historical reconstruction. It is clear, Crossan is not satisfied with a purely literary Christ, even at this early stage. He cannot limit himself to the 'Word made text'. And with the later Crossan, historiography will gain the ascendancy that previously belonged to hermeneutics (see §2.3). Kuitert likewise is a theologian who believes that Jesus is done a disservice when accepted as a literary product only, and he warns against the quicksands of creating an a-historical Jesus:

> De Jezus van vlees en bloed moet "van betekenis" worden, maar "betekenis" als *vevanging* van het "van vlees en bloed" opvatten, zie ik als kortsluiting. Zonder teksten over Jezus is er voor ons geen Jezus te ontwaren die voor ons "van betekenis" zou kunnen zijn, maar zonder een historische Jezus van vlees en bloed zouden we even ver zijn: er zouden geen teksten zijn waarin hij ons werd beschreven. Hij moet er, kortom, geweest zijn, om voor ons "van betekenis" te kunnen worden (1998:113).

Kuitert (1998:125) sums up the tension between synchrony and diachrony in the following way:

> We komen dus telkens bij dezelfde waterscheiding uit: literaire fictie of (ook) historische informatie; zinstichtende mythe of (ook) bericht over het leven van ene J. van N.

But his conclusion on the matter is clear: 'De historische Jezus is de tak waarop christenen zitten, en die zaag je zelf nooit af (Kuitert 1998:126).' The historical Jesus is indispensable for faith. Crossan is in good company, making the reconstruction of the historical Jesus his fundamental interest. But how does Crossan balance diachrony and synchrony? As was cited earlier, Crossan characterises his scholarship as a refusal to allow either of the two orientations— synchrony or diachrony—to dominate, and an attempt to place them in tensile juxtaposition (Crossan 1994b:146). Has Crossan thus far succeeded? It seems not. Crossan developed and applied his hermeneutic in isolation from his historiography. Throughout this early phase he typically moves from history to language and back to history without presenting a clear theoretical justification for the connection of historical method with literary theory

(Denton 2004:41). And when in the 1980s a shift occurs in his historiography to a wider emphasis not just on Jesus' words but also on his life, Crossan abandons the (post-)structuralist method (Denton 2004:42).

This, however, does not necessarily mean admission of failure. To Crossan the method has simply ceased to be helpful as method. It is clear from later works and debates, however, that the central ideas of structuralism and post-structuralism stuck with him. In 1998, while in debate with William Lane Craig, Crossan's reply to Craig's question why we should believe in metaphor is as follows: 'We never believe in anything else.… It is for metaphors that we live and die—for nothing else.… We die for a way of seeing a fact, and that is called a metaphor' (Crossan 1998b:47). A metaphor: a way of seeing a fact. Another interesting example of how Crossan recoins a term.[9] In the same vein, Crossan understands the Easter stories metaphorically. They are a way of seeing a fact—the fact of Jesus' abiding and empowering presence. It is clear that post-structuralist concepts like the metaphoricity of language and play as the paradigm of reality are not far from Crossan's mind as he argues his case here. And neither should they be from ours as we study the method and methodology, findings and conclusions, of the later Crossan.

2.3   THE LATER CROSSAN: THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

2.3.1 The Emphasis on Method

'Crossan is one of the few historical Jesus scholars today who stands out in the field for his rigorous attention to method, and whereas his Jesus portrait is often an easy target, his method is not.' This is Denton's judgement on Crossan's scholarly work and method (2004:11), and we allow these words to stand until proven otherwise. In the Prologue to his work *The Historical Jesus,* Crossan notes the stunning diversity in results and conclusions in historical Jesus research and calls it an academic embarrassment (1991a:xxviii). Crossan pleads for issues in method and methodology to be addressed if there is to be any real progress in our comparisons of competing

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[9] In §1.5 it was shown that Crossan uses the terms 'fleshly resurrection' and 'incarnational Christianity' in a way that they have not been used in the twenty centuries of the church's existence.

portraits of Jesus. After all, no matter how fascinating result and conclusion may be, they are only as good as the theory and method on which they are based (1994a:xi). Crossan defines 'method' as the way you do something, and 'methodology' as the theory or logic of your method (1998a:139). Differently phrased, it is all about tools and assumptions. And both of them Crossan has laid out plainly, making them accessible for scrutiny (Denton 2004:11). Crossan does not believe that any theory or method can stand the test of time. They are dated by definition due to the nature of historical reconstruction as interactive of present and past. Historical reconstruction does not yield answers once and for all, but must be done over and over again by every generation. In Crossan's own words: *History is the past reconstructed interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse* (1999:3). To keep this dialectic and creative interaction of past and present as honest and accurate as possible we need method, self-conscious and self-critical method (1999:5). Total objectivity is not attainable, but honesty is. And method is our best hope for honesty (1999:5). *Mere* reconstruction of the historical Jesus does not invalidate the project, because there is *only* reconstruction (1991a:426). Honest historical reconstruction keeps safe from the pitfalls of either narcissism or positivism. It leads away from just story-story to history-story (1999:5).

2.3.2   Introduction to the Three-Tiered Method

Crossan's method, most clearly outlined in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991), is called 'interdisciplinary' by virtue of its work in three equally important areas: literary analysis, historical context and social anthropology. The areas are referred to by Crossan as 'levels' or 'vectors' (Denton 2004:49). As levels they operate as concentric circles in the sense that data yielded on the lowest, textual level are subsequently interpreted within the other, broader levels of archaeology, history and anthropology in a way appropriate to the historical contextualization of data (Denton 2004:49). As vectors the areas operate independently, yet their triangulation serves as internal discipline and mutual corrective, since all must intersect at the same point (i.e. the historical Jesus) for any of them to be correct (Crossan 1994a:xi). In actual practice this means that the best reconstruction of the historical Jesus is arrived at when the sharpest possible image of the 20s in Lower Galilee—obtained with the help of data from anthropology, history

and archaeology—is linked most tightly to an earliest layer of text (1998a:149). The method thus moves from context to text via tight linkage.

2.3.3   Social Anthropology

The *macrocosmic* level of cross-cultural and cross-temporal social anthropology is the broadest level. Crossan explores this area with three focal points in mind: class, gender and resistance. An underlying premise is that peasant resistance tends to develop as agrarian empires become commercialised (Crossan 1998a:209). Crossan outlines two pan-Mediterranean anthropological models and he accounts for the historical data within the context of these models. What follows cannot possibly be a comprehensive overview. The models and what they mean for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus will be briefly summarised followed by an evaluation of Crossan's discussions and conclusion on Jesus' social class.

Crossan draws, firstly, on the anthropological model of honour and shame as basic and pivotal Mediterranean values. Ancient Mediterranean society was based on groupism rather than individualism with honour and shame as sanctions. In such a society, an individual would always see himself through the eyes of others, and if he disregarded society's honour-rating, he would lose his honour and no longer exist (Crossan 1991a:9). Malina (1981:84) describes an honour and shame society in broad terms as a closed, limited-good society with a contentment and status-maintenance orientation.

The second anthropological model that Crossan draws on is closely connected with the first. It is the model of patronage and clientage as the basis of Mediterranean political life. In a patronage society those without power are the clients to the patrons above them, while those very patrons might themselves be clients to more powerful patrons, and are therefore called brokers. The whole resembles a pyramid—a pyramid of power. Patrons provide clients with goods and services not normally available or just badly needed at a particular time. Clients in turn repay their patrons by intangibles like praise and loyalty (Malina 1981:86). The relationship between patron and client could be a brokered one, with a middleman distributing goods to the clients and in turn representing the clients to the patron. Crossan sees Jesus as someone who denies these processes of patronage, brokerage and clientage, not just socially and politically but also religiously and spiritually. Instead, Jesus propagates radical, unbrokered

equality in which individuals are in direct contact with one another and with God, unmediated by any established brokers (Crossan 1994a:101). It is the vision of the brokerless kingdom of God (Crossan 1991a:422). Crossan describes Jesus as a peasant Jewish Cynic whose lifestyle of itinerancy testifies to his reluctance to settle down and establish a brokered presence (Denton 2004:54). Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God is sapiential: a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future. This lifestyle is characterised by open commensality and performance of miracles—actions that could be considered just as subversive and world-negating as the actions of a millennial prophet who announces imminent apocalyptic intervention by God. Crossan understands 'world-negation' as just another term for eschatology and concludes that Jesus is an eschatological figure because he radically criticises this world's values and expectations (1994a:52). As a post-structuralist, the early Crossan spoke in the context of the parables of Jesus about subversion and radical negation or relativising of one's reality, including one's ethic. The later Crossan still uses these terms but they now become explicitly social in their implication and the element of relativising disappears. His book *The Birth of Christianity* includes a chapter called 'Affirming Ethical Eschatology'. In this chapter Crossan defines Jesus' eschatology as 'a divinely mandated non-violent resistance to the normalcy of discrimination, exploitation, oppression and persecution' (1998a:317). Clearly, Crossan's growing appreciation for and interest in the social dimension to Jesus' message and deeds causes him to put aside post-structuralism as hermeneutic.

Still, the question remains: exactly, how radical and subversive was Jesus? In a study on Mark 6:3 ('Is not this the *carpenter*?') Crossan elaborates on the social status of Jesus and defines it more precisely as 'peasant artisan'. About five percent of the population of the Roman Empire belonged to the class of artisans. It was a group below the social class of the landed peasants and just above the class of expendables (1994a:25). Matthew and Luke avoid calling Jesus a carpenter in their gospels, and from this Crossan concludes that the Greek word for carpenter, τεκτων, could well be a euphemism for a dispossessed peasant or landless labourer (1998a:350). Indeed, members of the artisan class were normally recruited from dispossessed members of the peasant class. As such the artisan class hovered just above the group of expendables: beggars, outlaws and the underemployed. The question could now be posed: if Jesus was such a peasant artisan as Crossan argues, what exactly is so strange about one peasant in another peasant's home (Strijdom 1995:314)? To

Crossan Jesus' open commensality clashed fundamentally with the values of honour and shame (1994a:70). However, one peasant in another peasant's home receiving food in exchange for healing is not in conflict with a peasant's sense of honour and shame. To peasants (and even to outside observers for that matter), Jesus' table fellowship with fellow peasants would not have been viewed as subversive. It just affirmed peasant practices and realities. And although the ancient and universal peasant dream is one of radical egalitarianism across class lines (Crossan 1994a:72), first-century Mediterranean society never made a claim about the legal equality of all men. On the contrary, it was a society in which the obvious inequality of persons and social classes was considered normal, useful and God-given (Malina 1981:86). Crossan calls open commensality the symbol and embodiment of radical egalitarianism (1994a:71). We have noted that the qualifier 'open' is doubtful when it comes to peasants having table fellowship with one another. Moreover, Malina's observation concerning first-century society may well mean that beyond the group of Jesus' companions and adherents the vision of the absolute equality of people—which Crossan says Jesus embraced (1994a:71)—would not have resonated.

But then, there is the parable that advocates open commensality (cf. Mt 22:9–10 and Lk 14:21–23): 'invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' And there is proof that Jesus lived out this parable by eating and drinking with 'tax collectors and sinners', people who were marginalised morally by sin (Mk 2:16). This is indeed daring open commensality and it must have struck fellow-peasants as a betrayal of their class. After all, tax collectors were despised for their practices and belonged to the retainer class.[10] There is, however, no evidence in the gospels that the lower classes actually attacked Jesus on this issue. There is all the more evidence that those from the priestly, retainer and merchant classes uttered their criticism. Two lessons can be drawn from this: first, Jesus' association with members of the retainer class (both friend and foe) weakens the image of Jesus as champion of the peasants whose movement was some kind of revolution against the rest of society; second, the line between the peasant or artisan class and the classes just above it may not have been as rigid as has often been supposed (Strijdom 1995:320–1). It follows that the social

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[10] This class averaged around 5% of the population and ranged from scribes and bureaucrats to soldiers and generals but all united in service to the political elite (Crossan 1991a:45). The class is further sub-divided by Crossan in 3 subgroups: military, religious and scribal retainers (1998a:172).

stratum from which Jesus came and in which he lived and moved may have been more fluid than what is implied in, for instance, Crossan's title *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. Two more examples will illustrate this: religious functionaries (members of the retainer class again) opposed Jesus when he challenged a number of official religious practices, such as the purity laws. The fierceness of that opposition raises some questions. If Jesus was just a 'peasant nobody' (Crossan 1991a:xii), his behaviour would have been tolerated, be it with scorn. Peasants belonged to the 'people of the land' who did not know the law (Jn 7:49). The strong reaction from the opponents, however, suggests that Jesus was more than just another peasant. There is indication that Jesus transgressed the purity laws intently and deliberately, and that he did so as a leader who set the example, hence the opposition. This is Strijdom's argument for assuming a power base for Jesus amongst the peasants—maybe even that of peasant leader (1995:318). Crossan (1998a:172) at one point also classifies Jesus as a leader when he writes about the priestly class:

> The Priestly Class means *religious* leadership, whether we are dealing with priest or prophet, visionary or teacher, institutional or charismatic individual, official or popular personage—*as long as the claimed authority is transcendental or divine*.… In the first-century Jewish homeland, then, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, John the Baptist **and Jesus** all belonged to Lenski's Priestly Class (my emphasis).

With this statement Crossan has effectively moved Jesus from the peasant class into the retainer class, more exactly, the subgroup of religious retainers. This is a surprising move. Furthermore, according to a hypothesis by Crossan, something happened after Jesus' death that also bears witness to Jesus' close association with and impact on the retainer class. Crossan has always maintained that Jesus must have been an illiterate person since peasants were usually illiterate (1994a:xii). The segment of the population of the Jewish homeland that was illiterate at the time of Jesus was between 95 and 97 percent (1994a:25). Despite this stark statistic, Crossan suggests that Jesus, as illiterate, must have had literate followers from the retainer class amongst his original audience. He concludes that there is evidence that there were such people among Jesus' followers, probably at Jerusalem and probably at a very early stage (1994a:145). What evidence is Crossan pointing to? According to his hypothesis, these learned scribal followers, probably under the leadership of

James the brother of Jesus, forever left their mark on history because they searched their scriptures and composed the passion traditions—unique detailed accounts of Jesus suffering, death and burial in which prophecy and history interweave in such a way that they mutually influence and even create each other (1994a:144). Such a brilliant accomplishment can only be attributed to persons with highly sophisticated scribal and exegetical capability. And by propagating Jesus, these religious retainers who by virtue of their membership in the retainer class were called to serve but the elite, turned on the governing class, be it the Jewish religious upper classes or the Roman occupational power, and chose to become 'dissident retainers' (Crossan 1998a:166).

This is not the place to weigh the pro's and con's of Crossan's hypothesis (see §3.2.3.2). What is important at this point is the fact that he proposed it. And a critical observation is in place here: when it comes to Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial, Crossan stresses the fact that Jesus was but a 'poor Galilean peasant' who was taken and executed in casual brutality (1994a:152). Such terminology certainly fits in well with Crossan's historical reconstruction of these particular events. But at the same time Crossan allows for this group of very learned and very loyal followers of Jesus from the retainer class. It is clear, the denotation 'peasant' for Jesus is an ambiguous one, particularly because of its connotations with insignificance, illiteracy, poverty, exploitation and dishonour. The social status of Jesus is not clear-cut, despite the great help from the area of social anthropology. And Crossan fails to be entirely consistent in the historical reconstruction of Jesus in this respect. Neither is he always nuanced enough in his assessment of Jesus' status amongst the different groups of society. These diverse audiences must have viewed Jesus' words and deeds from their own perspectives and what was considered subversive, undermining or shocking for the one group may have been life-affirming and inspiring for the other.

In conclusion, Crossan must be appreciated for the important use he makes of social anthropology in his three-tiered method. He is contributing to a significant trend that includes figures such as Richard Horsley, Gerd Theissen and Bruce Malina, among others (Denton 2004:58). Crossan attempts to apply the generalisations or models of social anthropology meaningfully to historical events and people. In this rather long section Crossan's work around the vision and social status of Jesus has been evaluated. Any difference of opinion on Crossan's findings does not mean rejection of his method. In his book *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N. T. Wright

criticises Crossan for stressing Jesus' *social* programme at the expense of the latter's *Jewish* programme. Still, Wright is appreciative of Crossan's application of social anthropology to the historical study of the New Testament (1996:53, 59). Crossan's 'interdisciplinary' method with social anthropology as one of its disciplines will continue to discipline all of us and act as a corrective against ethnocentrism and anachronism, or in the words of Crossan (1998a:149), 'the inevitable tendency to take one's own perfectly valid but particular experiences and erect them all too swiftly into human universals.'

2.3.4   History and Archaeology

The second level of Crossan's interdisciplinary method is the *mesocosmic* level of Judeo-Roman history and Galilean archaeology. Crossan has chosen the phrase 'Judeo-Roman history' because his focus is on Judeo-Roman relations in the Jewish homeland. These relations were not good. The Jewish homeland was a colony of the Roman Empire, an empire that could no longer be described as traditional agrarian. It was in the process of becoming more and more commercialised. Roman imperialism was interested in holding territory for the purpose of taking taxes (exploitation) and in developing territory for the purpose of increasing revenues (expansion). Central to it all was the possession of land. This process is therefore referred to as 'rural commercialization' (Crossan 1998a:178). The correlative to this is peasant rebellion. Throughout the century leading up to the First Roman-Jewish War in 66 CE there was consistent peasant unrest in response to the economic exploitation, social discrimination and military oppression that was being experienced. It was an age of unarmed protesters, bandits, messianic claimants and apocalyptic prophets. Crossan (1994a:40) distinguishes between an apocalypticism springing from the retainer class and the peasant apocalypticism of, for instance, John the Baptist. The former expresses itself by way of oracle, the latter by way of movement. Crossan moreover distinguishes between leaders who invoke the ancient model of Moses and Joshua (prophets) and those who re-enact the model of Saul and David (messiahs). One ideology, however, they all share from their sacred scriptures: Jahweh is the only true God because he is the God of righteousness, justice and purity. This is his character and nature. And he is involved in covenantal relationship with a people of justice and righteousness under a law of justice and righteousness in a land of justice and

righteousness (Crossan 1998a:176). The apocalyptic vision saw this God reenacting the inaugural deliverance from Egypt, restoring his people once more in the Promised Land under the rule of righteousness and justice. Roman imperialism that considered the land as entrepreneurial commodity had to clash with the Jewish tradition that considered land as divine gift (1998a:209).

For historical data on the kinds and levels of peasant unrest in the first century, Crossan pays great attention to what Josephus, the Jewish historiographer, writes about it (1994a:xii). Crossan admits that Josephan accuracy cannot always be taken for granted (1991a:92). He recognises Josephus' prejudice in favour of Roman rule as a heavenly mandate and the Flavian dynasty of Vespasian and successors as decreed by God. Josephus himself had prophesied in 67 CE that Vespasian would become emperor. And when Vespasian was declared emperor in 69 CE, while on Jewish soil, Josephus concluded that apocalyptic messianism should look no further: the hope that one from their country would become ruler of the world was now fulfilled (Crossan 1994a:32). Against this background, it is obvious that Josephus in his works underplays the existence of alternative messianic fulfilments. Crossan repeatedly comments on Josephus' pejorative language and terminology with regard to millennial prophets and messianic claimants (Crossan 1991a:160, 199). It should be noted that Josephus' bias against these rebels was not just from a religio-political but also from a socio-economic point of view. Josephus belonged to the priestly aristocracy. He was an antirevolutionary, but he was so particularly if the revolt involved the lower classes, the peasants. Josephus' socio-economic bias has until recently been underemphasised (Crossan 1991a:99). And what must, lastly, be taken into account when interpreting Josephus' works is his development from Roman apologist to religious nationalist. Although Josephus was always a man of divided loyalties, in broad terms it can be said that he began as apologist for Romans to Jews, and he ended as apologist for Jews to Romans (Crossan 1991a:94). This progression is also reflected in his two works *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* that both cover the period 175 BCE until 66 CE and thus overlap. In *The Historical Jesus* Crossan deals with this overlap by citing both texts wherever parallels are present. He then interprets any significant differences, and bases his conclusions on such analyses (1991a:96). Crossan thus steers away from conflation or preferring one version over the other. Instead he 'reads each one critically as one version of a basic source now arranged apologetically and thematically according to the basic Josephan

development' (1991a:96). All of this sounds like honest scholarship. Method stands or falls with how one handles the sources. Crossan says that he aims for a reading of Josephus that is coherently and consistently critical (1991a:97). The question is: has he succeeded? In the chapter 'The Dogs Beneath the Cross' (pp. 124–139) from *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994), there are no fewer than ten quotations from Josephus, either from *Jewish War* or *Jewish Antiquities*, some of them quite lengthy. A few observations: Crossan no longer cites both texts when there are parallels, but opts for one of the two. This is a minor flaw. What is more serious is the virtual lack of evidence of critical reading. The passages from Josephus are just inserted in the chapter, obviously supporting Crossan's argument (or else they would not have been included), and obviously taken at face value. This fact has not gone unnoticed in the scholarly world. Wright (1997:370) writes the following in, admittedly, a rather heated response to Crossan's evaluation of his book *Jesus and the Victory of God*:

> (I am interested to note that you take Josephus' accounts of these incidents [i.e. the resistance movements], which so obviously serve his overall agenda, as literal historical descriptions. Is it overcynical of me to suggest that, if Matthew or Luke contained stories that were similarly congenial to their polemical thrust, you would have cast doubt on their veracity?)

It is clear what Wright is hinting at. When it comes to handling the source Josephus, Crossan has become lenient with regard to applying the method that he spelled out so eloquently in *The Historical Jesus*. There might be some justification in the fact that *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* is called a more popular version of *The Historical Jesus* (1994a:xiv). However, the problem lies still deeper.

In §2.3.1 we cited Crossan's working definition of history: *history is the past reconstructed interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse*. Interactivism is the keyword here. It means that in 'doing history' you need to have an equal awareness of your own and your subject's historicity (Crossan 1998a:45). Crossan demonstrates a degree of awareness of Josephus' historicity. He is enough of a postmodernist to realise that there are no brute facts or 'raw data' out there. He therefore tries to point out Josephus' emphases, purposes and prejudices. Still, at a deeper level Crossan has failed to do justice to Josephus as a historiographer. Josephus wrote lengthy stories, inviting readers into narrative worlds that he created. History is just that: a story told by someone (the narrator) to someone

(the audience), with a view to persuading the audience (Botha 1997:16). It involves inevitable selection: history is not about 'what really happened,' but 'what shall be remembered' (1997:16). Unfortunately, many scholars, including it seems Crossan, consult Josephus to obtain some small historical authentic 'bits' and not the rest—the meaning of his stories. But the ethics of interpretation demands that we deal with context—we should endeavour to cite Josephus' 'meaning' (Botha 1997:12). This cannot be achieved if one simply pulls out remarks from Josephus, neglecting their narrative context and Josephus' particular use of language. Crossan purports that he reads Josephus 'between the extremes of either acritical paraphrase or corrosive agnosticism' (1991a:92, 100). Whatever Crossan means by this, on the practical level his historiography is 'scissors-and-paste' historiography (Denton 2004:65). This type of doing history has as starting-point the historian who decides what he or she wants to know about, and then collects statements about it from sources, forming a pool of potential data on the subject. The 'scissors-and-paste' historiographer then decides as to which statements are included in the historical reconstruction and which are omitted, based upon judgements of authenticity (Denton 2004:65). What matters is the final result: a conclusion about 'what really happened.' An alternative way is doing history from a 'history-as-rhetoric' perspective (Botha 1997:17). This perspective allows us to see Josephus' 'histories' as life-stories that can provide us with opportunities to understand ourselves. It is about a *style* of doing history that draws both readers and narrators into the process itself (1997:17). Knowledge of the extra-linguistic referent is not necessarily abandoned, but whether the referent is real or imaginary becomes, in a sense, a superfluous question.

As history emphasises textual remains, so archaeology emphasises material remains. Crossan includes archaeology on the *mesocosmic* level. Eventually, the data from anthropology, history and archaeology must provide that sharpest possible image of the 20s in Lower Galilee. The field of archaeology renders these important findings: life in Lower Galilee in the first century was as urbanised and urbane as anywhere else in the empire (Crossan 1991a:19). Herod Antipas fortified Sepphoris in 3 BCE and between 17 and 20 CE built an entirely new city twenty miles from it on the western shore of Lake Galilee which he called Tiberias. Urbanization often brings with it a measure of oppression. In agrarian empires cities 'live off' peasants (Crossan 1998a:216). Moreover, in Lower Galilee urbanization was the unmistakable result of Roman control. This combined fact led to sustained tension and even overt conflict

between cities and the Galilean peasantry. Within this context Crossan places Jesus' kingdom-of-God movement as movement of peasant resistance aided by members of the retainer class who in the sight of the increasing exploitation of the countryside by the urban wealthy responded by joining the ranks of the peasants as dissident retainers and scribal radicals (1998a:235).

2.3.5 The Literary Jesus Tradition

The third level of Crossan's interdisciplinary method is the *microcosmic* level of the literature concerning Jesus. This is the most significant and most controversial level where Crossan is most careful to outline his method and presuppositions. About the latter Crossan writes (1997:351):

> Methods for historical Jesus research depend on gospel presuppositions.…The validity of one's Jesus-conclusions stand or fall with that of one's gospel-presuppositions. If mine are wrong, then all is delusion.

To Crossan then, all historical Jesus research works within certain presuppositions about both the intra- and extracanonical gospels—their number, nature and relationships. Further defined these presuppositions are prior historical judgements, not a priori dogmatic or theological assumptions (Crossan 1997:347). Legitimate historical judgements are based on present evidence but require constant future testing against new theory, method, evidence, or experience (Crossan 1998a:109). Crossan insists that you must decide your presuppositions about gospel traditions before starting the reconstruction of the historical Jesus (1998a:103). Crossan does not make a normative distinction between intra- and extracanonical gospels: both kinds are historical evidence to be investigated fairly and accurately (1998a:108).

The fact that the literary or textual level of the Jesus tradition has its own unique problems and complications was well summarised by Koester (cf. Crossan 1991a:xxxi):

> In the first century and early second century, the number of gospels in circulation must have been much larger, at least a good dozen of which we at least have some pieces, and everybody could and did rewrite, edit, revise, and combine, however he saw fit.

The multiplicity of gospels forces one to look at relationships. Crossan presupposes the following concerning the intracanonical gospels (1998a:109–114):

- o Markan priority with Matthew and Luke independently copying from Mark;
- o the *Q Gospel*[11] as hypothetical document whose existence is persuasively postulated to explain the amount of non-Markan material found with similar order and content in Matthew and Luke;
- o Dependence of John on the synoptic gospels *at least and especially* for the passion and resurrection narratives.

The criteria for direct literary dependence (as here with John's gospel) are genetic relationship regarding style and content, and redactional confirmation: where, how, and why was the independent text changed by the dependent one. Indirect literary dependence is more difficult to determine and can only be argued from redactional confirmation.

Concerning the extracanonical gospels Crossan presupposes the following (1998a:119–120):

- o the independence of the *Gospel of Thomas* from the four intracanonical gospels;
- o the independence of the community rule *Didache* (not a gospel);
- o the existence and independence of the *Cross Gospel*, a passion-resurrection narrative different from that in Mark, reconstructed out of the *Gospel of Peter*.

It goes without saying that an independent text fails to show genetic relationship with another text and/or redactional confirmation.

As far as the nature of the gospels is concerned: they are neither histories nor biographies (Crossan 1991a:xxx). Gospels proclaim the 'good news'. They are the deliberate theological interpretations of the Jesus tradition by the early communities of faith. As such they contain three layers of data: original Jesus materials (*retention*), *development* of those retained materials, and *creation* of totally new materials (Crossan 1991a:xxxi). Crossan 'rejects any pejorative language for those latter processes. Jesus left behind him thinkers not memorizers' (1991a:xxxi). Besides, had it not been forced upon him by the evidence, Crossan would never have dared to postulate the conclusion that the evangelists were both transmitters and creators

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[11] In order to respect its textual and theological integrity, Crossan views Q not merely as a source but as a gospel in its own right, a sayings gospel that is, just like the *Gospel of Thomas*.

(1991a:xxx). Still, Crossan's purpose is to search back through the sedimented layers of development and creation to find what Jesus actually said and did.

In order to achieve this he firstly compiles an inventory of all relevant sources and texts. This inventory includes non-extant but recovered sources such as the *Q Gospel* and the *Cross Gospel*. The second step is stratification: each source is now positioned in one of the four chronological layers or strata: 30–60, 60–80, 80–120, or 120–150 CE. Thirdly, the traditions from the stratified sources are grouped according to complexes. A complex consists of material that is thematically related. Crossan defines a complex as a 'matrix or core structure' (1998a:87). Some examples are: *Ask, Seek, Knock* (saying complex); *Crucifixion of Jesus* (action complex); and *Bread and Fish* (symbolic event complex). Each complex is subsequently noted for the number of times it is attested in independent sources (e.g. Mark, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Didache*). An example (1991a:436):

> 17 *Resurrection of Jesus* [1/4]
> > (1) 1 Cor. 15:4b
> > (2) *Gos. Pet.* 9:35–10:40
> > (3) *Barn.* 15:9
> > (4a) Ign. *Mag.* 11:1c; (4b) Ign. *Trall.* 9:2a; (4c) Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:2b

What does this abstract description mean? The complex *Resurrection of Jesus* is item 17 in the section 'First Stratum, Multiple Independent Attestations'. Although it contains six units, these units come from four independent sources and therefore the independent attestation is fourfold. Finally, the sources originate from various strata, beginning with the first (cf. [1/4]).

In addition, Crossan recognises three principles according to which he handles this inventory. First, in formulating a working hypothesis on the historical Jesus, Crossan limits himself to complexes with attestation in the first chronological layer or stratum. To Crossan this first stratum (i.e. sources dating from 30–60 CE) has tremendous importance because it is chronologically closest to the time of the historical Jesus. Once the working hypothesis has been established from this first stratum, it can be tested against subsequent strata. The second principle is called hierarchy of attestation: this principle recognises the importance of those complexes that have the highest count of independent attestation. Closely related to this is the third principle of a bracketing of singularity: Crossan completely avoids any complex that is only singly

attested, even if that attestation is in the first stratum. In short then, the key indicators of authenticity for a complex are: date of earliest attestation and number of independent attestations. The lower the first number and the higher the second, the more likely the complex reflects material authentic to Jesus. This is Crossan's 'methodological rule of thumb' (Crossan 1991a:xxxiii). Crossan calls his method *formally* objective. It is a procedural method which can help to identify points of agreement and disagreement. And Crossan's inviting words are: 'By all means, if you think you have a better method, let's have a look' (1991b:1201).

Whether better methods have presented themselves remains to be seen, but that there is no shortage of points of disagreement has become obvious over the last decade or so: Crossan's method of handling the textual sources on Jesus has been severely criticised by fellow-scholars. This casts doubt on Denton's conclusion quoted earlier: 'and whereas his Jesus portrait [i.e. Crossan's] is often an easy target, his method is not' (see §2.3.1). At this stage only the aspects that have evoked most opposition and debate can be treated. The next chapter which deals with Crossan's view on and analysis of the resurrection narratives will allow for a more focussed study and critique. Crossan's method will then be assessed in terms of his handling of the sources and texts on resurrection.

2.4   CRITICAL RESPONSE

2.4.1 Crossan and Gospel Presuppositions

Within the broader picture of critical response to Crossan's methodology, the item of criticism that stands out is Crossan's use and dating of the extracanonical sources. The way Crossan goes about handling these sources is perceived by many scholars as uncritical. The criticism concerns aspects like: the early dating of the *Gospel of Thomas* (cf. Evans 1994:130; Meier 1991:124–39); the treatment of *Q* as a gospel and not a source (cf. Wright 1992:437; Venter 1995:374); the inclusion of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* in the second stratum (cf. Neusner 1994:116); and the *Cross Gospel* as the single source of the intracanonical passion accounts (cf. Brown 1987:333). The debate on each of these items has its value, no doubt, and will continue in the future. However, there is an underlying criticism that surfaces every time the debate on the

details is carried out and this demands our attention here: Crossan considers his presuppositions on the intra- and extracanonical gospels as *starting-points* as was explained above. He views them as scientifically established, prior, historical judgements. Naturally, once established, these judgements determine for a great deal the work of stratification. Crossan begins his working theory on the historical Jesus only after the work of stratification has been completed, limiting himself to complexes with attestation in the first stratum. Crossan does so with confidence because he considers his presuppositions—foundational to the whole exercise—to be adequate, legitimate and valid historical judgements, or else he would not have made them his starting-points. He is, however, open to have them tested and even rejected if more adequate historical conclusions are reached. The British scholar N. T. Wright is one of several who question the role and primacy that Crossan assigns to these gospel presuppositions and the consequent chronological stratification of the texts. Although Crossan calls these *starting-points*, Wright believes that in actual fact they are *conclusions* drawn from the basic thesis that Crossan holds about Jesus and early Christianity (1996:50). There is a Jesus portrait in the mind, right from the start and it interferes with the historical enquiry. The same holds true for the Jesus Seminar and its methodology:

> What is afoot, at least in the "results" available thus far, is not the detailed objective study of individual passages, leading up to a new view of Jesus and the early church. *It is a particular view of Jesus and the early church, working its way through a detailed list of sayings that fit with this view* (Wright 1996:33).

This sounds like severe criticism of the methodology of Crossan and the Jesus Seminar; in a way it discredits their work. Yet Wright goes on to say that he actually endorses a methodology that moves from the big picture to the smaller details, a methodology that starts out with a hypothesis that is subsequently tested against the material. He simply requests Crossan and the Jesus Seminar to admit that this is what they have been doing all along. Wright rejects the strict delimitation of the methodological steps in Crossan's historical Jesus research. One does not have to move in rigid sequence from gospel presuppositions to stratification and eventually to a working theory on the historical Jesus. In fact, from a broader epistemological

perspective the method that Crossan proposes is not even a feasible one. According to Wright (1997:363):

> theories about the gospels [i.e. presuppositions] have always interacted, and continue to interact, with theories about Jesus. I am not complaining about this. I am asking that we recognise as historians, that we cannot but have the broader picture in mind.

Thus, according to Wright, a Jesus-neutral analysis of gospel traditions is not possible. Evans (1994:130) concludes the same when he observes that the early dating of the *Gospel of Thomas* serves Crossan's aim of portraying Jesus as a Cynic. To repeat Evans' statement in more scientific terms: the tacit yet operative principle with Crossan appears to be the principle of reciprocity between data control and data interpretation. Phrased differently, it means that Crossan's decisions on the historicity of the individual data (data control) are not settled apart from his decisions on how to interpret the data within a larger frame of reference. Thus, according to Evans, the early dating of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Crossan's unacknowledged historical hypothesis regarding Jesus as a peasant Jewish Cynic were settled together in reciprocal relation. They were not settled sequentially, with decisions on the authenticity of the *Gospel of Thomas* preceding the working hypothesis on Jesus as a Cynic. Although Evans in his evaluation on Crossan seems motivated chiefly by an uneasiness with Crossan's gospel presuppositions, he does touch on the important principle of reciprocity: data are always seen within a context. To this principle we will soon return as we compare the historiographical approaches of Crossan and Wright.

2.4.2 'Renewed New Quest' versus 'Third Quest'

2.4.2.1 Introduction

Crossan and Wright represent two large trends in historical Jesus studies today. Crossan's approach has been characterised by opponents as 'atomistic', while Wright has been described as a prominent advocate of holism in historiography (Denton 2004:155–6). Differently categorised, Wright places himself and about twenty other contemporary scholars within the so-called 'Third Quest' (1996:84), while, much to Crossan's chagrin (Crossan 1997:346), Wright considers scholars like Crossan and

others in the Jesus Seminar, by virtue of both their methodology and results, 'a new wave of the New Quest' (1996:44). To this terminology we will return later.

2.4.2.2 Crossan's Atomistic Investigation into the Literary Jesus Material

Within the classic model of tradition-criticism, Crossan's focus is on transmissional analysis, assuming an original version of the tradition that was transmitted, revised and reinterpreted. At one point Crossan calls the gospels *absorptive tradition* in which earlier accounts are swallowed whole into later ones (1997:347). Therefore, 'the problem of the historical Jesus pushes you back and back along that absorptive path to the earliest stratum of the tradition' (Crossan 1998a:101). In true traditio-critical fashion Crossan presents a stratified conception of the gospels in which he views similar traditions as literary layers on an original, pure or authentic layer. The presence of these multiple versions or parallel traditions is a basic historiographic problem in the data on Jesus. The explanation that Crossan offers for this phenomenon is relations among the sources, particularly relations of literary dependence. As was discussed above, Crossan's historical judgements on gospel relationships and dating, the so-called gospel presuppositions, become Crossan's starting-point for all other work. After all, relations of possible dependence among the sources and their correlative dating establish which sources can be used as valid testimony. Crossan handles historical data strictly as *testimonies*: the data are either true or false witnesses to the words, deeds and events of the life of Jesus and are either used or discarded on that basis (Denton 2004:65–6). This means that in Crossan's method, *individual units* (later grouped thematically into complexes) become the building bricks of his historical investigation and are subjected to rigorous examination to determine if they qualify for consideration as historically authentic data on Jesus—hence the term 'atomistic' to describe his method. As we saw earlier, for Crossan the core of valid testimony or authentic Jesus material consists of complexes that are both attested in the first stratum and attested at least twice throughout the strata. Thus, the criterion of stratification together with the criterion of multiple attestation become the principle means of establishing a pool of usable data on the historical Jesus. This is the first and foundational phase of Crossan's historical method. It is the phase of data control. To Crossan, it is extremely important that the historian specifies beforehand exactly what his database consists of, because inventory must precede interpretation:

> We cannot act here as if we all had the same inventory of materials—the same "text" as it were—in our hands or on our desks. And of course our results and conclusions will be different when we start with different data-bases or inventories of first-stratum materials (1998a:141).

Interpretation must be consciously bracketed in the first phase, and can only come into deliberate use in the second phase when data verified as authentic are used in a reconstruction of the historical Jesus. This is the phase of data interpretation. The data are now organised into a meaningful whole. They are set into the wider contexts of social anthropology, history and archaeology. This is Crossan's interdisciplinary method and it is characterised by strict separation of data control from data interpretation. Crossan's concern is for a public handling of the data and a method that keeps at abeyance the historian's hermeneutical involvement, so as to prevent disfigurement of the historical object (1998a:44). Crossan does not altogether deny the self-involvement of the historian. He allows for what he calls *interactivism* of past and present. But the dialectic between the past and present is kept 'honest' by one's method. Method does not guarantee the validity of results, but it makes fully accessible the means by which one reaches those results. And everyone is welcome to participate in using the same method or to take up the methodological challenge by posing a different, but still public, method:

> My challenge to my colleagues is to accept those formal moves, or if they reject them, to replace them with better ones. They are, of course, only *formal* moves which then demand a *material* investment. Different scholars might invest those formal moves with widely different sources and texts, but historical Jesus research would at least have a common methodology instead of a rush to conclusion (1991a:xxxiv).

2.4.2.3 *Critical Response to Crossan's Hermeneutic*

There has certainly been response to Crossan's challenge, but a common methodology in historical Jesus research remains an out-of-reach goal. Wright, representative of the second main trend in historical Jesus studies, has taken up Crossan's challenge by proposing a methodology that is diametrically opposed to Crossan's. About Crossan's book *The Historical Jesus*, Wright concludes in blatant terms that it is almost entirely wrong (1996:44). This is not the place to give a detailed overview of Wright's critique. Wright himself admits, while dealing with isolated

aspects of Crossan's method such as the latter's treatment of the sources, that the real debate must take place elsewhere (1996:49–50). We must therefore attempt to go to the heart of Wright's offensive against Crossan and this is on the level of epistemology. According to Wright, *The Historical Jesus* implicitly appeals to the old objectivist values that it explicitly repudiates (1996:55):

> Despite the postmodern tone which predominates the book, the massive inventory of material is bound to look like a thoroughly modernist piece of work, appearing to lay firm, almost positivist, foundations for the main argument of the book (1996:50).

Wright notes a tension in Crossan's historical Jesus research—the tension between proclaimed post-modern sensibility over against actual modernist aims and practices. Crossan maintains, in reply, that his inventory and stratification do not aim to lay positivist foundations; on the contrary, as a historian Crossan claims to be fully aware of the interactive nature of historical enquiry. Precisely for this reason, self-conscious and self-critical method is needed to keep the interaction of past and present honest and public, and to apply a check on interactivism. The resulting picture, however, is of a scholar whose very *doing* of history seems little affected by his stated hermeneutic of interactivism. Denton (2004:77) observes that Crossan's method does not account for its own interactive nature; it is solely meant to curb it. Hence, Wright's criticism is on target: on the epistemological level Crossan's historiography suffers from ambiguity. As with the early Crossan, the Crossan of *The Historical Jesus* fails to genuinely integrate hermeneutic with historical method. For some reason Crossan allows the striking claim on the jacket of the book *The Historical Jesus*: 'The first comprehensive determination of who Jesus was, what he did, what he said.' Then on the other hand, he relativises overall historical results by insisting that he does not offer a timeless, definitive portrait of Jesus (Crossan 1998a:45). And in good post-modern style Crossan calls objectivity spurious and unattainable, 'because almost every step of his methodology demands a scholarly judgement and an informed decision' (1991a:xxxiv). Indeed, historical judgements are dynamic. Pivotal decisions are still made based on arguments not reducible to rules of thumb, even with Crossan. An example: Crossan's inventory of the Jesus tradition by chronological stratification and independent attestation certainly gives the appearance of scientific and methodological rigour (1991a:427–450). From this inventory Crossan

creates a usable database of authentic Jesus material, applying the criteria of multiple attestation and priority of first stratum complexes. Nevertheless, at a critical point in the reconstruction of the historical Jesus when Crossan attempts to reconstruct the occasion of Jesus' death, he relies on a singly attested tradition, located in the second stratum, that connects Jesus' symbolic Temple destruction with Jesus' execution (Mk 11:15–18; cf. Jn 2:14–16). Crossan does admit that this is an unmethodological move. But he justifies it by saying: 'Without it, however, we are reduced to even greater guesswork in answering why then, why there, why thus (1991a:360)?' It is clear, Crossan accounts here for data by explanation and argument, rather than by his stated method of stratification and multiple attestation. A datum is allowed, not because Crossan has first controlled it (decided on its historicity), but because he has controlled it in interaction with his interpretation of its significance for a coherent portrait of Jesus (Denton 2004:74). This leads once more to the principle of reciprocity between data control and data interpretation. It is a principle that fits within a 'holistic' approach to historiography as opposed to Crossan's 'atomistic' approach.

2.4.2.4 Holism in Historiography

The holistic approach recognises that the intelligibility of individual historical data depends ultimately on the contexts[12] or wholes in which they are perceived and in which they play a part (Denton 2004:155). Therefore, Wright, an exponent of holism in historiography, does not start his historical investigation with evaluation of the individual data like Crossan, but with a hypothesis, a paradigm, a big picture of how everything fits together. This hypothesis is in place at the outset of the enquiry and it functions as a means of ordering the data. Its claim to truth lies in its explanatory power as time goes on and as it is applied to ever enlarging arrays of data. A hypothesis must be open to alteration as it is in dialectical relation with the data. Wright lists three requirements for a good and valid hypothesis: first, it must include the data (Wright 1992:99). In Wright's methodology data are treated as evidence, not as testimony. This means that their usefulness is not decided beforehand in isolation from their use in the course of the historical investigation. Anything may be evidence if

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[12] Denton (2004:187) lists several important contexts, some of which will be introduced and explained later in this study: the narrative context of the sources; the context of the historical object; the narrative context of the object itself; and the context of the historian's horizons. For this last context Wright (1992:32) uses the term 'worldview'.

the right questions are asked of it (think of a detective on a crime scene). Collingwood has the following to say concerning data as testimony versus data as evidence:

> The important question to ask about a given statement in a source [a historical datum] is not whether it is true, but what it means. What light is thrown on the subject in which I am interested by the fact that this person made this statement, meaning by it what he did mean? … The historian's interest should be, not in statements-as-testimony, but in the very fact that the statements are made (cf. Denton 2004:65).

As a critical realist,[13] Wright believes that the nature of knowledge is such that individual data are known only in the context of sense-making hypotheses. Knowledge does not spring ready-made from data. The senses provide the data. This is the level of experience. But knowledge only comes when the data are acted upon by the operations of insight (understanding) and judgement. Knowledge takes place when people find things that fit with the particular story or stories to which they are accustomed to give allegiance, that is their worldview (Wright 1992:37). To operate consciously on the three levels of cognition: experience, insight and judgement is what Meyer[14] calls 'authentic subjectivity' (Denton 2004:143). As with knowledge in general, so it is with historical knowledge: historical data come to be known as the historian poses questions to them, formulates answers to those questions, and verifies the answers. This is referred to as the process of hypothesis and verification/falsification. Data have their sense only in such a context. Denton (2004:123–4) summarises it as follows: 'Data cannot be controlled until they are understood, and they cannot be understood before they assume some role in a historical investigation, or are seen in light of some historical question.' Data control and data interpretation interact spirally. They are interdependent dimensions of the one ongoing movement of historical investigation, the one process of historical knowing within ever-widening contexts.

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[13] See Wright (1992:35, 45): Critical Realism is an epistemology that recognises a reciprocal relation between the knower and the known in the process of knowing, resulting in the provisionality of all knowledge. Knowledge is about realities independent of the knower ('Realism'), but is never itself independent of the knower ('Critical'). This is because knowledge of realities external to oneself takes place within the framework of a worldview, of which stories form an essential part.

[14] Wright is indebted to Ben F. Meyer for his epistemology and historical method. Meyer in turn was deeply influenced by the epistemology and cognitional theory of Bernard Lonergan and the historiography of R. G. Collingwood (Denton 2004:12).

Ultimately, historical knowing is a dialogue between the historian's worldview and the worldview of the object (Denton 2004:188). Wright considers this first requirement, the criterion of inclusion of the data, as the most essential one for a good and valid hypothesis and proper historical enquiry. It is getting in the data that really counts (i.e. data as evidence), and all data must be treated seriously on their own terms (Wright 1992:105). The second requirement for a good hypothesis is that it must construct a basically simple and coherent overall picture. When the historical investigation concerns a person, a hypothesis that can display an overall consistency of thought will always be preferable to one which leaves the main character incoherent and changing his mind at every turn (1992:108). But simplicity may not be achieved at the expense of some of the data. Neither should explanations for all the data be suggested at the cost of producing a highly complex hypothesis. There is thus a tension between criterion one and two. In the end several possible hypotheses may present themselves. But then there is the third criterion: a good hypothesis must also make sense of other areas outside the immediate chosen field. It must explain or help to explain other problems. Like Crossan, Wright realises that the work cannot be done once and for all. None can meet the criteria for a historical hypothesis perfectly: evidence may be overlooked, the hypothesis may have unnecessary complexities, or the hypothesis may create new problems in other fields. Therefore, as Wright put it: 'In the best scientific tradition, we need each other' (1992:109).

How does all of this work itself out practically with regard to Wright's historical investigation into the life and message of Jesus?

2.4.2.5 Wright's Jesus Portrait

Wright positions himself within 'Third Quest' scholarship and calls this category 'the real leading edge of contemporary Jesus scholarship' (1996:84). The Third Quest follows Albert Schweitzer by placing Jesus firmly within his Jewish eschatological context (1996:81). Unlike the (renewed) New Quest with its emphasis on Cynicism, world-negation and sapiential kingdom (cf. §2.3.3), the Third Quest highlights Jewish eschatology, particularly apocalyptic, as an appropriate context for understanding Jesus (1996:123). By applying the criterion of double similarity and double dissimilarity—that is, similarity and dissimilarity to both Judaism and early

Christianity,[15] Wright and the majority of the Third Quest seek to understand Jesus as a comprehensible and yet, so to speak, crucifiable first-century Jew (Wright 1996:86). Wright's full-scale portrait of Jesus can be found in his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996). It builds on the earlier work *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992) which describes and defends Wright's methodology. Wright's portrayal of Jesus is that of a Jewish eschatological prophet. But it does not stop there. Wright argues that there are sufficient data in the canonical gospels that point toward Jesus' own belief in his messiahship, with the temple action (Mk 11:1–10) constituting the most obvious act of messianic praxis (1996:490). Wright sums it up as follows: Jesus, quite self-consciously, came not merely to announce the kingdom, but to enact and to embody the real return from exile, the defeat of evil, and the coming of Yahweh to Zion (1996:481). A lot more could be said about Wright's Jesus portrait. However, we must proceed to outline his methodology so as to be able to evaluate his reconstruction of the historical Jesus on valid and public grounds.

2.4.2.6 Wright's Method as Opposing Tradition-Criticism

The critical realist Wright summarises his method as follows:

> The task before the serious historian of Jesus is not in the first instance conceived as the reconstruction of traditions about Jesus according to their place within the history of the early church, but the advancement of serious historical hypotheses—that is, the telling of large-scale narratives—about Jesus himself, and the examination of the *prima facie* relevant data to see how they fit (1996:88).

Concerning the overuse of the adjective 'serious' Crossan remarks: 'your there-and-elsewhere use of the word 'serious' to dismiss alternative positions is noted' (1997:350). It is true, deliberate or not, by his frequent insertion of the word 'serious',

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[15] The 'criteria of authenticity' mostly employed by Crossan (stratification and multiple attestation) are considered suspect by Wright, since they are so difficult to assess (1996:79). Wright applies, among others, the double criterion of similarity and dissimilarity—that is, similarity and dissimilarity to both Judaism and early Christianity. In interpreting the gospels' story line, Wright seeks to grasp Jesus as a religious genius who consistently differed in striking ways from his environment and was not fully imitated by his followers, yet who was not a madman that differed too radically from his immediate contexts (Blomberg 1999:22).

Wright evokes the reader's question: 'But then, who are the a-serious or not so serious historians?' Reading Wright carefully, the answer to this question is not difficult to find: Wright is very suspicious of the (renewed) New Quest's classic methodological model of tradition-criticism and the application of various criteria of authenticity. Therefore, we begin with an overview of his major points of disagreement with this model and its associated category of scholarship: the (renewed) New Quest.

As was discussed above (see §2.4.1), Wright believes that New Questers *do* work with an overall picture, a hypothesis about Jesus and Christian origins in mind, even though they do not openly concede to it (1996:79).

Secondly, the exercise of tradition-criticism to discover what happened to synoptic material before it settled into fixed forms, written source, and final redaction (i.e. the whole area of source-, form- and redaction-criticism) is, according to Wright, in danger of degenerating into 'epicycles of hypothetical and unprovable *Traditionsgeschichte*' (1996:517). Too often tradition-criticism, esp. form-criticism, becomes a tool to find out about the life and faith of the early church rather than the life of Jesus (1992:421). Wright notes, on the one hand, an ultra-suspicion of the (canonical) texts, but on the other hand, an extremely thoroughgoing credulity regarding other matters (1996:60, 81). Elaborate hypotheses about the early church communities are proposed to account for isolated sayings of Jesus that presumably could not have come from Jesus (1997:362). By starting with sayings one tends in any case to lose sight of events and actions in the life of Jesus (1996:554). Wright encourages praxis, story and symbol[16] as starting-points in historical reconstruction ('the telling of large-scale narratives'), rather than ideas and sayings (1996:554).

Wright considers redaction-criticism a rival of form-criticism. If the evangelists are no longer seen as mere collectors, but as editors of the independent 'forms' of the pre-literary oral tradition, then to what extent can one still offer hypotheses about the original *Sitze im Leben* of the original forms whose final form in the gospels is in any case an edited form (1997:363)? On the whole Wright proposes caution and thinks that the only safe place to begin is with the documents that we have (1997:364). We will return to this later when we outline Wright's gospel presuppositions.

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[16] Wright defines a 'symbol' as something which brings the worldview into visibility (1996:369). Symbols often function as social and/or cultural *boundary-markers*: those who observe them are insiders, those who do not are outsiders (1992:124; see also §1.2.2).

Thirdly, a last and major point of disagreement that separates Wright from the methodology of the (renewed) New Quest is orality. Wright questions the almost exclusive emphasis of Crossan and others on literary relations among the sources to explain gospel parallels. Instead, Wright urges historians to take seriously the probability of a strong and formative oral history of the Jesus tradition that interacted with literary materials at every point. Jesus was an itinerant prophet within a peasant oral culture and must have said substantially the same things wherever he went. With this in mind, it is Wright's guess that we have two versions of the beatitudes and two versions of various parables (1996:170).

James D. G. Dunn is another advocate for the role of orality in the transmission of the Jesus material. He points to the shared memory of Jesus' shared impact on the community. This resulted, according to Dunn, in a living Jesus tradition, with liturgical patterns becoming conversed and adapted and stories retold. This traditioning process developed alongside written traditions, and began already during Jesus' lifetime and not only after Easter (Dunn 2001:89, 111). Dunn views each telling and each version, not as a new layer or edition, but as a performance of the tradition itself, having its starting-point at the same storehouse of communally remembered events and teaching (2001:93). Understandably, the consequences of such a viewpoint for one's method and results are far-reaching. The concept of literary layers implies remoteness from an 'original' and 'pure' layer, but oral performance allows a directness, an immediacy of interaction with a living theme and core even when variously embroidered in various retellings (2001:124). By assigning a formative role to orality, the first stratum of the Jesus tradition is considerably expanded! Dunn sums it up as follows:

> What we today are confronted with in the Gospels is not the top layer (last edition) of a series of increasingly impenetrable layers, but the living tradition of Christian celebration which takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus (2001:129).

Dunn has no intention of toppling the scholarly consensus regarding Markan priority or the existence of Q. But he wants more balance and have the focus shifted from the individualistic literary paradigm of standard tradition-criticism to the communal paradigm of oral performance. Dunn thinks that it is incorrect to assume that the authors of Matthew and Luke familiarised themselves with the stories and

sayings of Jesus as recorded by Mark and Q only when they came into contact with Mark and Q as documents. As a matter of fact, in a good number of cases, the more natural explanation for the evidence is *not* Matthew and Luke's literary dependence on Mark or Q, but rather their own oral retellings of the same stories, either from oral tradition or from Mark and Q themselves (Dunn 2001:105). Dunn supports his argument by pointing to the instances when Q material in Matthew and Luke lacks the characteristic similarity in wording. The episode of the centurion's servant as recorded in Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 is a good case in point. There is substantial divergence between Matthew and Luke in the first half of the story which makes sole literary dependence on a common written source (Q) improbable. Tradition-criticism will stay within the literary model and postulate that Matthew and/or Luke heavily edited Q or that Q contains earlier and later layers. To Dunn, the variation can more plausibly be attributed to knowledge and use of the story in oral mode, as part of the communal tradition familiar to the evangelist (2001:128). So, in the above case as in similar cases, Dunn considers oral retelling more plausible than dependence on a literary source and subsequent literary editing. In fact, even when Dunn allows for the use of Mark as a written source (i.e. literary dependence), he notes frequent inconsequential differences between the synoptic versions as in, for instance, the episode of the stilling of the storm, and since these differences are too inconsequential to be considered conscious, intelligent editorial moves on the side of Matthew and Luke, Dunn concludes that Matthew and Luke were not in a purely literary connection with the source Mark, but followed Mark in oral mode or alternatively, drew on their own oral version of the story as well (2001:101).

2.4.2.7 *Crossan's Case for Tradition-Criticism*

Crossan has realised how detrimental the above criticism of scholars like Wright and Dunn can be to his entire method. In his book *The Birth of Christianity* Crossan devotes more than forty pages to refuting the importance of oral traditioning in gospel-criticism and showing the fallacies of arguments based on 'reliable memory' (1998a:47–89). With general case studies and examples from the intra- and extracanonical gospels, Crossan makes a case for the unreliability of memory, and demonstrates why shared memory is simply not a sufficient explanation for gospel parallels. It is beyond the scope of this section to relate his discussion in full. Two important points must be noted. Firstly, Crossan invites those who resort to oral

tradition to reveal on what general theories or empirical studies of oral memory their resulting hypothesis about the role of oral performance within the Jesus tradition is based (1998a:55). Crossan's own conclusion about memory is that it is 'creatively reproductive rather than accurately recollective'. He characterises oral memory as 'structural rather than syntactical' (1998a:54). It is clear, Crossan is very wary when it comes to the role of shared memory in the formation of the written Jesus tradition. When faced with the problem of the minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark, Crossan does not postulate oral tradition for these instances, as does Brown in *The Death of the Messiah* (cf. Crossan 1998a:54). Crossan takes a closer look at two particular agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark in their passion narratives, and arrives at a conclusion very different from Brown's. About the agreements: Matthew and Luke add to their Markan source in exactly the same wording 'Who is it that struck you?' (Mt 26:67; Lk 22:63) and 'And he went out and wept bitterly' (Mt 26:75; Lk 22:61). Since Crossan does not know of a theory of oral tradition and human memory that works in such a way that oral versions of an event are so verbally precise and so syntactically fixed as in these two instances, he assumes that the text of Mark which the authors of Matthew and Luke had at their disposal in about 80 CE must, on those particular verses, have been different from ours—dated around 250 CE. Crossan considers this quite probable in the light of ample textual-critical evidence of copyist errors, omissions and changes (Crossan 1996:29). This example (and others could be provided[17]) demonstrates that Crossan wants to stay safe within the literary model, for fear of getting astray in the 'no-man's-land' of oral tradition. But this does not mean, secondly, that Crossan denies all interaction between orality and literacy. Crossan affirms that, whereas cultures with *only* orality may exist, there simply are no literate cultures *without* orality (1998a:88). For Crossan, orality implies that extant traditions, like aphorisms, should be seen as reflecting a common oral, historical core (Denton 2004:63). Crossan does not go as far as Dunn to view each version of a saying as an autonomous act, yet he acknowledges contexts of oral sensibility and the

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[17] Crossan refutes Brown's explanation of the origins and nature of the *Gospel of Peter* as memory of hearing or reading the New Testament gospels in the distant past (Crossan 1998a:68; Brown 1994:1334–36). Crossan considers the *Gospel of Peter* or rather the *Cross Gospel* in the *Gospel of Peter* the original passion-resurrection narrative used by the New Testament gospel writers (Crossan 1996:30–31). See also §3.2.3.

manifold interaction of the oral and scribal worlds (Crossan 1998a:88). Nothing, therefore, that anyone says about oral transmission is, to Crossan, *a priori* impossible.

Having said this, Crossan emphatically maintains that tradition-criticism, entailing the two processes of source- and redaction-criticism, is the best explanation of the data that we have (1997:350). Its conclusions are hard won by gospel scholarship over the last two hundred years and confirmed by Crossan's personal study. Similar materials are best explained, not by resorting to oral memory, but by affirming literary dependence among the sources and variation on a historical core. If unit A (the *source*) was used by unit B (the *redaction*), a continuing *tradition* was developing (Crossan 1998a:93). If his method is proven wrong, Crossan's historical reconstruction of Jesus and the early church will be invalidated. Naturally, this same principle applies to everybody else. Does this mean that methods and methodologies have to be perfect? Crossan does not think so. He writes the following about gospel presuppositions or gospel theories:

> A theory does not have to be perfect or even able to answer absolutely all objections against it. *A theory must simply be better than its alternatives; it must solve quantitatively and qualitatively more problems than it raises* (1996:29).

For Crossan, tradition-criticism as it proceeds from scientifically established gospel presuppositions that are open to scrutiny, solves more problems than it raises. On the *microcosmic* level of the literary Jesus tradition, it is the most persuasive general interpretation of the data that we have.

2.4.2.8 The Method of Hypothesis and Verification Applied to Historical Jesus Studies

For Wright and others within the Third Quest, tradition-criticism raises more problems than it solves. It definitely does not make the best sense of the data. On the contrary, the tools of tradition-criticism have often proved an obstacle in the search for Jesus. Particularly damaging is the attitude of scepticism that presupposes that certain data about Jesus, esp. synoptic data, cannot be historical, upon which a tradition-historical hypothesis is produced to explain the evidence (Wright 1996:87). Wright suspends or even bypasses tradition-criticism and its objective to reconstruct traditions about Jesus according to their place within the history of the early church (1996:87). He prefers to

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start from a different vantage point: the level of serious historical hypotheses about Jesus *himself*, and the examination of the *prima facie* relevant data to see how they fit (1996:88). Wright's historical enquiry proceeds by means of a method of hypothesis and verification. As we saw, within this method, historical data come to be known as the historian poses questions to them, formulates answers to those questions, and verifies the answers. Wright poses one overarching question that precedes all others:

> How do we account for the fact that, by AD 110, there was a large and vigorous international movement, already showing considerable diversity, whose founding myth (in a quite "neutral" sense) was a story about one Jesus of Nazareth, a figure of the recent past (1996:90)?

To answer this question properly, reference to Jesus has to be made. Therefore, Wright proceeds by posing five key questions about Jesus: How does Jesus fit within the Judaism of his day? What were his aims? Why did he die? How did the early church come into being, and why did it take the shape it did? Why are the gospels what they are (1996:90)? After having formulated the questions, the method of hypothesis and verification can run its course: data are collected and included 'without distortion' (1996:133); hypotheses are advanced and rigorously tested to see if they account for as many of the data as possible and maintain a sufficient level of simplicity; answers to the questions are verified or falsified; and eventually, an overarching hypothesis about the historical Jesus is formulated. Wright's portrait of Jesus was outlined in §2.4.2.5.

2.4.2.9 Wright's Method Assessed

There has been considerable positive response to the effort by Wright to reconstruct Jesus along the lines described above. Paul R. Eddy concludes that Wright has succeeded in making good historical sense of Jesus within the context of the Second-Temple period. Significantly, Wright's method of hypothesis and verification that includes tests or criteria such as comprehensiveness, simplicity, explanatory power, fit within historical constraints, and the 'double criterion of similarity and dissimilarity' has shifted a good amount of the burden of proof to those who approach the text with historical scepticism (Eddy 1999:42). Similarly, Craig Blomberg concludes that 'Wright has succeeded in staying relatively rigorously within the historical constraints of Jesus' lifetime and within the limits of what can plausibly be defended as historical or

authentic by reasonable critical criteria' (Blomberg 1999:38). L. T. Johnson agrees and considers Wright's final product 'a plausible construal' which, moreover, demonstrates that those pieces of the gospel tradition that are dismissed by the New Quest can be used as a basis for a portrait of Jesus that makes better sense of all the data (Johnson 1999a:208). In similar fashion, P. R. Eddy hails Wright's method as 'historically sane and refreshing' since it allows for a positive reassessment of the historical value of the canonical gospels (Eddy 1999:42).

Indeed, Wright's first line of appeal is to the canonical gospels, primarily the synoptics. But this aspect of Wright's method has not only evoked positive response. In what follows, it will be shown that most negative response to Wright's method and results centres around this same aspect: the evaluation, selection and use of gospels sources.

Wright describes the gospels as 'Jewish-style biographies, designed to show the quintessence of Israel's story played out in a single life' (Wright 1992:402). The gospel writers, in other words, told *Israel*-stories about Jesus, stories whose form and style, as well as whose detailed content, proclaimed that Jesus was the quintessence and, what is more, the climax of Israel's history (1992:401). Wright insists, however, that these stories represent events that actually happened. The gospels as stories are indeed 'works of literary art in their own right', but this does not take away the fact that the authors of at least the synoptic gospels intended to write about Jesus of Nazareth (1996:89). This historiographic objective was not diminished by their theological and pastoral programme (1992:403). Therefore, the synoptic gospels are historically credible and can be used as potential data for integration into an overarching hypothesis about the historical Jesus. In fact, they must be preferred to other material because it is best to begin with the known and then move towards the less known (Wright 1992:371). Not that Wright has much time for the 'less known'. As a historian, he does not think that the extracanonical sources have very much to offer, and beyond occasional references, he makes little use of them (Wright 1999:252). So then, Wright builds his reconstruction of the historical Jesus almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition, bypassing even the canonical gospel of John and the historical evidence concerning Jesus in Paul's epistles (Johnson 1999a:217). Concerning John's gospel, Wright admits that it plays little part in his portrayal of Jesus, yet he does not want to rule John out altogether a priori as a historical source (Wright 1999:251). It has disturbed scholars to see Wright in actual practice reducing the complexity of

witnesses to Jesus to a single synoptic strand. After all, if one follows the two-source hypothesis to account for synoptic origins, then Mark's story line is the basic source for both Luke and Matthew, and so we have basically only *one* synoptic witness to the portrayal of Jesus in Wright (Johnson 1999a:220–1). Can it still be said that Wright makes sense of all the data?

There is a second related aspect in Wright's methodology that has caused much uneasiness among scholars. Wright actually sets aside the difficult critical issues concerning literary relationships among the gospel sources. This leads us back once more to the much debated 'gospel presuppositions' (see §2.3.5 and §2.4.1). Gospel presuppositions are definitely not as high on Wright's priority list as they are on Crossan's. Wright explains:

> The only safe place to begin is with the documents that we have. When we have done our composition-critical analysis of these documents [i.e. the gospels] in their own terms, we *might* find that their main thrusts and emphases were consistent with a particular line of literary dependence. We might, in other words, move back from composition-criticism to redaction-criticism, and, as it were, meet traditional source-criticism tunnelling towards us in the other direction.… There is another particular reason for this postponement of a detailed account of gospel origins. There is actually no current consensus about gospel sources (1997:364).

Wright brackets the question of synoptic relationships and he justifies doing so by pointing to the lack of unanimity among scholars about gospel sources. He is convinced that we can know more about Jesus himself than we can about the origin and development of the gospels (1997:365). Wright proceeds to reconstruct from selected sources a portrayal of Jesus that looks like a merger: a synoptic Jesus (Denton 2004:180). This clearly tells one something about his gospel presuppositions! Yet, his gospel presuppositions are never openly and clearly expressed, only hinted at, according to Crossan (1997:347). Correct, because Wright has decided to postpone discussing them. Nevertheless, that he holds on to certain gospel presuppositions is clear throughout. Everybody does. Such being the case, the criticism of John P. Meier becomes relevant:

> We are all attracted by calls to a "holistic" approach (…). But until we have at least a vague idea of what parts might qualify as belonging to the historical whole, a "holistic" approach remains a distant ideal (1991:195).

Meier agrees with Crossan that we need gospel presuppositions, or at least, initial data control. Historical Jesus research cannot proceed without the 'swinehusks' (Wright 1996:662): the assured or not so assured results of modern criticism. Disagreeing with them here and there is fine; but disregarding them is setting yourself back. Wright, therefore, has to pay dearly for, what opponents would consider, this methodological blip. Newman (1999:286) predicts that 'some will look askance at Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God.* To them this book is a prime example of a historical study gone awry.' And Crossan warns that, provided the results of tradition-criticism are basically correct, then Wright has produced an elegant fundamentalism by taking a theology of the synoptic tradition and calling it a life of the historical Jesus (1997:351). It is true, Wright's rendering of Jesus, and his treatment of the data on Jesus is not convincingly historical, but rather theological (Johnson 1999a:224).

But the criticism goes further. Wright recommends 'composition-criticism' as a starting-point in understanding the gospels. What does he mean by this? In his book *The New Testament and the People of God*, Wright depicts the Christian worldview as a diamond with four corners: praxis, symbol, worldview questions, and lastly, stories (1992:370). We meet the larger stories as books in the New Testament. Wright takes a closer look at each *story-teller* in the New Testament and does a narrative analysis (another word for composition-critical analysis?) of the books. He starts with Luke, because 'it is the most obvious place to begin, in terms of early Christian literature' (1992:372). Obvious or not so obvious, it is obvious that Wright has a particular liking for Luke. The reason for this is twofold: Luke takes care to hook his story in to the long history of Israel (1992:373). This agrees well with Wright's carefully formulated thesis about the gospels, discussed earlier. Secondly, Luke, like Wright himself, portrays Jesus above all as a prophet. So, Wright proceeds and outlines first the stories of Luke (the gospel and Acts), followed by those of the other two synoptic gospels. Wright acknowledges wide divergences among them (hence the need for applying the tool of composition-criticism), yet he still detects a clear common pattern: each gospel tells the story of Jesus as the end of a much longer story, the story of Israel, which in turn is the focal point of the story of the creator and the world (1992:396). Furthermore, they all represent subversions of Israel's story and the Jewish worldview of their times. One overarching theme then binds the three gospels together.

It must be said that Wright's generalisations at this point are no longer helpful. Simplicity is achieved at the cost of a more adequate reading of the evidence. Denton describes this flaw in Wright's method (and in holism in general) as follows:

> the data are all dumped into one large pile, and themes and patterns are chosen from the whole lot with little regard for how the data may have functioned differently in different sources (2004:180).

This weakness is strangely surprising, as it was holism in historiography that reminded us that data have a sense only in contexts (see §2.4.2.4). And the context *of the sources* in which the data are found is the necessary context for an initial understanding of the data. Has Wright stressed the remoter context of sense-making hypotheses at the cost of the immediate context of the sources? It seems so. In his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* Wright follows now one gospel, and now another, selecting what fits his hypothesis as determined by the perceiving themes and patterns among the mass of data. Wright fails to reckon with differences among the gospels and their specific compositional tendencies (Newman 1999:218). As was shown earlier, the result is the merging of the plural Jesuses of Matthew, Mark and Luke into one synoptic Jesus. Out of the three gospels, Wright creates a single story, a master plot that is not found as such in any of them. In so doing he has distorted an essentially complex process by trying to make it simple. Wright's objective to produce 'serious historical hypotheses' has been achieved at the cost of the integrity of the narrativity of each source. At the heart of critical historiography is the work of comparison. In the end the historian wants to achieve a coherent explanation; he wants to formulate a good historical hypothesis. But this should never translate in harmonisation of historical sources! A valid method will have to take seriously the context, the narrative context of each source. And for this we have to move beyond Crossan and the atomistic approach, and beyond Wright and the method of serious historical hypotheses.

2.4.2.10 The 'Literarily Historical' Jesus

It has been shown that Wright, in his search to evaluate the data in the context of the role that the data play in historical hypotheses, shows a lack of appreciation for the narrative context of the sources as a necessary context for an initial understanding of

the data. Similarly, Crossan, in his search to understand and evaluate individual data of the Jesus tradition by way of textual stratigraphy, disregards the narrative context of the sources in which the data are found (Denton 2004:176). It has been the contribution of Bruce Chilton[18] to draw particular attention to the 'literarily historical' Jesus: the historical Jesus as he is understood and presented in the sources (Denton 2004:166). Chilton does not think that we have access to a historical or authentic Jesus apart from what the texts promulgate. Jesus is, in the first instance, only knowable as a literarily historical phenomenon. Therefore, Chilton's first step is to infer the literarily historical Jesus constituted in a particular source from that source. For instance, the literarily historical Jesus of Mark is Jesus as he is portrayed in the confines of Mark's gospel. Other gospel sources will yield their own literarily historical Jesus.[19] By applying this first step, Chilton cautiously allows the data to begin to have their sense in the narrative contexts in which they are found. It is, furthermore, important to note that this exercise views the data within a public context (the narrative context of a source is public), and it views the data as evidence and not simply as testimony.

But Chilton does not just remain in the sources. That would not be doing history. The next step is to reconstruct the historical Jesus that would have given rise to the Jesus as constituted in the sources. Now questions are asked such as: What must be presupposed of Jesus in order to explain what is in the sources? What was the historical reality that generated the data that we have? (Obviously, there are overlappings here with the critical tools of form- and redaction-criticism.) Next, the various literarily historical Jesuses are set in wider historical contexts, various scientific models are employed (cf. Crossan's macro- and mesocosmic levels of investigation) to shed further light on the significance of the data, and the literary portraits are compared with one another to see if they fit or fail to fit. Eventually, the historical Jesus is seen *through* the sources. Denton summarises Chilton's method as follows:

> The historical Jesus can only be seen *through* the understanding of Jesus … as presented in the sources.… The historian begins with the sources and reasons back to what the historical

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[18] Wright includes Chilton in the list of 'Third Quest' scholars (1996:84).

[19] Chilton identifies five gospel sources: the canonical gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas* (Denton 2004:166).

event would have been that gave rise to those sources as evidence, including but not limited to how the sources may function as testimony (2004:177).

2.5   CRITERIA FOR HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH

§2.4 has shown that there is definitely a gap among scholars today on how to go about doing historical Jesus studies, especially when it comes to handling the material on Jesus. This, however, should serve, not as discouragement but rather as impetus. The various angles from which historical Jesus research has recently been undertaken, by whatever 'quest', enriches the discipline as a whole and bodes well for the future. In this section the strong and weak points of both the atomistic and holistic approach have been presented. In the final analysis two things remain vitally important for any method: firstly, a method must be public, and secondly, it must account for its own interactive nature. The 'public-ness' of the method stands or falls with the 'public-ness' of the means by which the data are selected and evaluated, and the contexts in which the data are understood and interpreted. The higher the number of tacit contexts, the less public the method and the less valid the results. The opposite is equally true, of course. Secondly, method cannot be employed in isolation from hermeneutic (i.e. the understanding of understanding). The method that accounts for its own interactive nature is characterised by self-awareness and is therefore capable of self-criticism (Denton 2004:187). The 'serious' historian is aware of both the fluid nature of the historical object and the tentative nature of the historian's knowledge of the object. All knowledge and perception take place within the framework of worldview, which is characterised by stories; all individual facts and objects come with theories attached, which are stories (Wright 1992:43). The keyword here is story or narrative. We live in a story-laden world; we live by means of narrativity. Narrative is a constitutive part of our experiences and actions in which we may assume any of the three roles: storyteller (narrator), agent (subject) or audience (spectator) (Denton 2004:172). Communities exist by virtue of a shared experience articulated as a story. Historical events, with their inherently narrative quality, must also be understood in the context of narrative. But this 'narrative historiography' is not synonymous with 'narrative anti-realism'. Real historical, extra-textual referents are not denied (2004:170). What defines narrative historiography is contextualism. Narrative

historiography recognises various types and levels of contexts in which data are understood (2004:187). There is, firstly, the *narrative context of the sources*. This is the context in which we initially find the data. It is Chilton's context of the literarily historical Jesus. Secondly, there is the *context of the historical object or referent* in its many dimensions, such as the historical, the social, the economic and the political. This is the context that Crossan deals with on the macro- and mesocosmic levels. Thirdly, there is the *narrative context of the object*. This context slightly overlaps with the previous context, but can be defined more precisely as the context by which the historical agents performed intentional actions in the context of a sense-making story. It is the context that has been highlighted by scholars like Meyer and Wright with their focus on the aims and intentions of Jesus (Wright 1992:110). Last but not least, there is the broadest of contexts within which the historian lives and observes the world, call it *worldview* or *horizon*. Denton (2004:165) believes that this context is non-public in the sense that it cannot be argued for like the others, although it can be expressed.

In the next chapter Crossan's method will be assessed in terms of his handling of the sources and texts on resurrection. By means of the criteria just outlined, questions will be posed such as: Is Crossan's method public (enough) or are there (too many) tacit contexts? How does Crossan account for the interactivity between historian and history? Are the data understood in the necessary contexts? What are the means by which data are controlled? To answer this last question Crossan's reliance on tradition-criticism will have to be assessed. The renewed New Quest assigns a primary role to transmissional analysis, stratification, and other criteria of authenticity. The objective is to determine the usefulness of historical data in a historical investigation. In reply, Denton has these words of caution:

> Source relations and consequent stratification are not the absolute presuppositions that Crossan understands them to be, parallel materials are not the crux of the historical problem that Crossan takes them to be, and tradition-criticism is not the *sine qua non* of a historical handling of the data (2004:67).

Denton wants historiography in general, and historical Jesus research in particular to move beyond the dominant role that the renewed New Quest assigns to tradition-criticism and data-as-testimony, and embrace contextualism, narrativity and holism in historiography.

CHAPTER THREE   **ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF CROSSAN'S TREATMENT OF THE TRADITIONS ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS**

3.1   JESUS' RESURRECTION: CROSSROADS OF HISTORY AND MYTH

3.1.1   Introduction and Statement of the Problem

In §1.5 it was stated that, in Crossan's view, the gospel stories do not provide evidence that what they portray about the resurrection of Jesus is historically true in a literal sense. At this point in our study reasons will have to be provided for this stance taken by Crossan. Inevitably, this will lead to questions about data control and data interpretation and the possible reciprocity between the two. As was explained earlier (see §2.4.2.4), reciprocity in historiography means that decisions on the historicity or non-historicity of the individual data (i.e. data control) cannot be settled apart from decisions on how to interpret the data within a larger frame of reference. The crucial question to be posed now is whether a frame of reference or context can be identified that has convinced Crossan that the resurrection stories should be interpreted non-literally and non-historically. This study division will show that not just one such frame of reference or context can be identified, but three. In their triangulation these three contexts could well have reinforced one another. And for Crossan, at their intersection they yield the following regarding Jesus' resurrection: Resurrection as depicted in the gospel stories does not convey concrete, historical fact, but is a powerful metaphorical affirmation that Jesus is not to be found among the dead.

The first of the three contexts to be identified is the context of the *sources* in which we initially find the data on Jesus' resurrection. Crossan's methodological treatment of the sources (the resurrection stories in the gospels and other literature concerning the Easter event) will be dealt with in section §3.2. Attention will be paid to the role of tradition-criticism in his handling of the data. This first context is dealt with last, because—as Wright so aptly summarised it—'if one begins with them (the Easter stories) it is easy to get bogged down in a mass of detail and never emerge' (2003:587).

Secondly, there is the historical contextualisation of the concept of resurrection on the *macro- and mesocosmic levels of anthropology and history*. §3.1.2 and §3.1.3 will deal with this important frame of reference as they aim to place the meaning of Jesus' resurrection firmly within its contemporary context. Earlier on in our study (see §1.2 and §1.3.2) resurrection was described as a 'symbol'. It was concluded that symbols can never be viewed in a vacuum. They emerge from, and in turn shape the experiences of the community that uses them. This means that informed conclusions regarding the nature and content of the resurrection stories in the various gospels can only be arrived at when certain basic questions are answered such as: What did a first-century Jew mean by the term 'bodily resurrection'? What did early Christians mean when they claimed that God had raised Jesus from the dead? Crossan is convinced that unless one knows the content and meaning of Jesus' resurrection within its contemporary context, it will be impossible to either affirm or deny it (2003a:30). Hence, a cross-cultural journey through the first-century world in order to ascertain what was hoped for and believed or disbelieved with regard to life after death, and particularly with regard to resurrection.

The third context is the broadest of contexts, the context of *one's horizon or worldview*. Crossan accounts for this context under his stated hermeneutic of interactivism. He describes interactivism as the dialectic between historian and history. Indeed, ultimately, historical knowing is a dialogue between the historian's worldview and the worldview of the object. Crossan believes that this dialectic and creative interaction of past and present is kept as honest and accurate as possible by method: self-conscious and self-critical method which makes fully accessible the means by which one reaches one's results. Section §3.1.4 will investigate whether Crossan's method genuinely accounts for its own interactive nature or whether his method is, in the words of Denton (2004:77), 'solely meant to curb interactivism'. Crossan himself provides three reasons (i.e. historical, ethical and theological) why historical Jesus research, strictly guided by method, is essential. After all, the reconstructed past must serve as a basis for a pre-constructed future (1998a:31). And he suspects that shunning away from such research, or bracketing it at a certain point, is nothing but a masked attempt to assert a unique and transcendental status for the historical Jesus. Crossan brackets nothing from historical discussion. But then, how does Crossan *as historian* deal with transcendental claims made for Jesus or, for that matter, for anybody else in the first century? Crossan concludes that these are so far beyond the

publicly verifiable and empirically provable consistencies of our world that, whatever their value as myth or parable, they are not to be taken literally as historical event or fact (1998a:29). This, for Crossan, is the only ethical position the Christian *as historian* can take. Consequently, he opts for a non-literal, or symbolic, or parabolic interpretation of the resurrection stories. After all, the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead is a transcendental claim.

The widening hermeneutical divide observable in historical Jesus studies today, namely this gap between literal versus metaphorical, factual versus symbolical, and historical event versus myth or parable, is assessed in §3.1.5. In both §3.1.4 and §3.1.5 Crossan's position is contrasted with the viewpoint of the by now familiar British scholar N. T. Wright.

3.1.2 Resurrection in the Mediterranean World of the First Century CE

Crossan has described the Greco-Roman world as a world where divine and human, eternal and temporal, heaven, earth and Hades were marvellously porous and open to one another (1998a:29). It will not be difficult to corroborate this statement with a number of interesting data.

Outside of the philosophical schools, Greco-Roman popular religion upheld an elaborate cultus of the dead. The dead, particularly the heroes, were taken excellent care of. Offerings of food were common, and meals for the dead were held at the gravesite on the anniversary of death. These meals were even 'shared' with the deceased—a seemingly odd practice since there was no supporting belief that the body might survive (Riley 1995:47). Still, the dead were believed to retain their recognisable form and appearance in Hades, and this could even include previous wounds and marks of suffering (Riley 1995:51). This form or appearance was referred to as the εἴδωλον. The soul (ψυχή) was the bearer of this 'image' of the body. However, sometimes ψυχή was used interchangeably with εἴδωλον (Riley 1995:48). It was commonly held that εἴδωλα were impalpable; they could not be touched. In light of this, the invitation of the post-Easter Jesus to be touched by his disciples (Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27) could well be seen as an attempt by the evangelists to counter the idea that Jesus was an εἴδωλον, a phantom. Mistaking Jesus for an εἴδωλον could easily have occurred, as all the physical activities claimed for the post-Easter Jesus were common

religious inheritance for the post-mortem εἴδωλον. Riley considers this a major problem in the resurrection texts: they could be, and were interpreted by many, in non-physical terms (1995:63).[20] The dead were indeed believed to be involved in all kinds of activities and thus led a fairly normal existence: resting, waking, interacting with one another and with the living, and even engaging in sex, both among one another and with the living (Riley 1995:54).[21] At the heart of the cultus of the dead was the belief that the dead acted on behalf of the living as protectors and avengers of wrong. Their function was to bless and to curse. It follows that when the dead returned from Hades and appeared to the living, it was not simply to say hello. On the contrary, such interaction generated important processes and events (Crossan 1999:28).

In his time (around 500 BCE), the philosopher Plato had introduced a more elaborate and positive view of the ψυχή. He regarded the soul as the true self of the human being and the body, in a clever reversal of terminology, as the mere εἴδωλον of the soul (Riley 1995:49). The soul, according to Plato, was immaterial and immortal in nature. This made human souls, at least by implication, in some way divine, because for many Greeks 'the immortals' were the gods. Although not everyone in the ancient world read Plato, popular culture gradually became affected by his ideas. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, for instance, provided an important theoretical underpinning for the belief in the divinization or *apotheosis* of the Roman emperors. Apotheosis can be defined as the ascent of the immortal soul to the land of the immortal gods, the physical body being dissolved here on earth. In the earlier Greek world the separation between human and divine had been strict, but apotheosis opened up the possibility for a human being to become a god. By the time of the New Testament emperors were routinely worshipped as divine, not only after their death but even during their lifetime (Wright 2003:56). People who had cultivated virtuous souls, like philosophers, could also go to live with the gods. Their apotheosis, however, was often referred to as 'attaining to the stars'. Individual stars became their homes. Wright (2003:60) explains the belief in astral immortality as follows:

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[20] Wright does not believe that these practices imply that which the term 'resurrection' (*anastasis*) referred to: a dead person who is alive again in this present world (2003:62). More about Wright's definition in §3.1.5.

[21] Gods/deities are also known to have had sexual relations with humans. Emperor Octavius Augustus (died 14 CE) was believed to have come from a miraculous conception by divine and human conjunction of the god Apollo and Octavius' human mother Atia (Crossan 1998a:28).

> The basis of the theory, from Plato to Cicero, is obviously that stars and souls are made of the same kind of material. There was considerable philosophical debate down the years as to what exactly this material was (…), but there was no sense that souls and stars were quite different sort of things. They were, so to speak, made for each other.[22]

The less virtuous souls would return to some kind of this-worldly and bodily existence after their death, according to the theory of *metempsychosis*, the transmigration or reincarnation of souls.

Those who felt excluded from the preceding hopes for immortality, that benefited the aristocratic elite almost exclusively, found a good alternative in the mystery religions or the mysteries. On the basis of undergoing an initiation rite, these cults offered one a private spiritual experience in the present and held out the promise of an afterlife in the regions of the blessed. It is in connection with one of these mysteries, the cult of Isis or Demeter, that we come across a rare case of resurrection. Isis is said to have raised (a*nasthvsai) her son Horus from the dead (Porter 1999:76).

By now it has sufficiently been demonstrated that there was indeed an openness, an absence of boundaries, in the Greco-Roman world with regard to divine and human; heaven, Hades and earth. It is important to recognise this. And interest in the afterlife was certainly not lacking. A lot of things could happen to the dead. But, with a few exceptions, resurrection was not among the options. When 'resurrection' proper is mentioned in the relevant literature, it is most commonly in a statement of its impossibility: the dead are not raised (Bolt 1998:74). Given the accepted doctrines of soul and body, the logic of the idea of resurrection seemed all wrong. Plutarch puts it as follows: 'Mixing heaven with earth is foolish' and 'to send bodies to heaven is against nature' (cf. Bolt 1998:74–75). Indeed, bodily resurrection was considered a distasteful idea, at odds with everything that passed for wisdom among the educated (Wright 2003:34).[23] The Greco-Roman world, therefore, cannot be considered a direct cause for the belief in resurrection proper and the resurrection of Jesus, even though

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[22] The belief that the soul was a kind of finely particled material 'body' was also touched on in §1.3.1 in connection with the discussion on the pre-scientific cosmology of a three-storeyed universe.

[23] Porter (1999:68), however, claims that examples of bodily resurrection are available in Greek and Roman religion. Wright (2003:35) correctly points out that the evidence for this remains slim and that in his study Porter has merely shown that many in the ancient world believed in some kind of survival after death.

as a variegated culture and worldview containing both philosophical and popular religious traditions and rich mythological imagery about the afterlife, it most definitely influenced the way this belief was expressed and (re)interpreted.

3.1.3 Resurrection in Biblical and Post-Biblical Judaism

From the ancient non-Jewish world of the Greeks and the Romans the focus now turns to the Jewish people. Granted, this is a rather artificial division, if one bears in mind that in the first century CE all the many varieties of Judaism were to a lesser or greater extent Hellenistic. Nonetheless, it has to be noted and explained that, unlike their pagan neighbours whose majority view and sentiment it was to deny the body a role in the afterlife, a considerable portion of the Jews in the first century CE affirmed some form of resurrection as a future hope.

This had not always been the case. The Jewish scriptures are surprisingly reticent about life after death. The focus is on this life which is robustly believed to be God-given and therefore, adequate, good and all there is. Man's final destination *Sheol* (i.e. the pit or the grave) is the end of any meaningful existence for the individual. Those who have gone down to *Sheol*, good and bad alike, are 'asleep', they are 'shades'. Hope is not absent in ancient Israel, but it focuses on the fate of Israel as the people of God, and the promised land; individual Israelites lie down and sleep with their ancestors, but *Yahweh*, the creator, the life-giver and the covenant-keeping God, will carry out his purpose and fulfil his promises toward Israel, eventually including the whole world. The Jewish hope, even during these early days, clearly derives its ground and substance from a reflection on who *Yahweh* is for his chosen people.

The first glimmers of a death-transcending hope are in Psalms 49 and 73. Both psalms solve the problem of the prosperity of the wicked—and thus the failure of the deuteronomic theology of this-worldly reward and punishment—by radically putting their trust in God's justice and goodness that must triumph beyond death. Vindication *beyond* death is also the theme of Daniel 12:2–3. These verses are the one undisputed reference to resurrection from the dead in the Hebrew scriptures (Bauckham 1998b:86). The historical context of this passage is the martyrdom of faithful Israelites under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes during the 160s BCE. The two verses in Daniel 12 envisage specific and dual resurrection. 'Those who awake to everlasting life' are the just and the martyrs; 'those who awake to shame and

everlasting contempt' are their persecutors, and possibly, Jewish apostates. The context here resembles a law court, in which *Yahweh* as the righteous judge puts wrongs to right. The martyrs receive resurrection and some form of exaltation as verse 3 says: 'Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky.'

Earlier on in Israel's history, in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel (ch 37), resurrection had served as a metaphor to refer concretely to the restoration of the nation and the land after the return from exile. The metaphor invested socio-political events with the significance that they would be an act of covenant restoration, and in this sense a new creation. This same metaphor of resurrection, so fitting for *Yahweh* who is said 'to kill and to make alive' (Dt 32:39), has become metonymy in Daniel 12. In what way? The focus has shifted from the national hope for faithful Israel to the personal hope of the righteous individual; from national renewal to personal, bodily renewal. In other words, the metaphor of resurrection has become literal. It is not difficult to see why. Literal re-embodiment is the only fitting vindication of God's justice above the battered bodies of the martyrs. *2 Maccabees*, dated around 100 BCE, illustrates this even more clearly than Daniel 12 as it describes how martyrs are publicly brutalised and bodily murdered for fidelity to Israel's God (Crossan 2003a:42). This requires nothing less than *public* and *bodily* vindication arranged by the same God. As the life-giver and ultimate judge, surely, Israel's God would resolve the apparent contradiction of the injustices and sufferings of this life by undoing death and restoring the martyrs to some kind of bodily life. Resurrection as literal re-embodiment is the divine way of setting all wrongs to right and is, therefore, a revolutionary doctrine (Wright 2003:139). The theological rationale for resurrection is the reward of justice beyond death. It is not about a philosophical vision of human destiny, it is about a theological vision of divine character (Crossan 2003a:43). And the twin doctrines of creation and justice that so perfectly reveal who *Yahweh* is—powerful creator, sovereign life-giver and just judge—always kept the metaphor of resurrection alive. Reflection on suffering and martyrdom ensured the continuation of it in a unique way. The metaphor became literal. Yet never was the larger concrete referent of divine vindication and national restoration lost sight of. The grand finale would be God's public vindication of all the righteous and punishment of all the unjust after which a renewed Israel would be established on a transformed and justified earth. The general resurrection of the dead would inaugurate this 'age to come'. This is the apocalyptic

hope.[24] It raises, however, an important question. What about the Gentiles? Will they participate in Israel's final redemption? The Old Testament scriptures provide two opposing solutions. They will be exterminated by God or converted to God: final Divine War or final Divine Banquet (Crossan 2003a:45). For the apostle Paul the choice between these twin options is not difficult. To him Israel's spiritual prosperity and the rest of the world's are not antithetical, but complementary. Israel's rejection of God's Messiah brought benefit to the rest of humankind; Israel's acceptance will bring still more benefit to humankind: 'For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but *life from the dead* (Rm 11:15)?' Paul has reworked the Jewish apocalyptic hope in Christian terms. Within the apocalyptic hope the resurrection of the dead was a presupposition for the restoration of Israel, inaugurating the 'age to come'. In Paul's sequence the 'age to come' is still inaugurated by the resurrection of the dead, with one mutation: Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, has *already* inaugurated the 'age to come'.[25] And it is Paul's utmost desire to help bring about its final consummation, namely total universal redemption. Nothing less than this is his goal, the goal of his mission to the Gentiles, in order that Gentile 'riches' will result in Jewish 'fullness' will result in 'life from the dead' (cf. Rm 11:12–15). What a vision!

Did all Jews of the first century CE share the vision of a restored Israel (with or without the nations) on a renewed earth and the accompanying belief in a future general resurrection of the dead? The Sadducees did not, which is hardly surprising considering the fact that they were conservative aristocrats who had their compensations in this present life. They saw no need for a belief in resurrection, a doctrine which had such obvious revolutionary connotations. They even went further and denied any form of post-mortem existence. After all, nothing of the kind was taught in the Torah. In this the Sadducees were right, yet adherents to the doctrine of resurrection—especially the Pharisees, and after them the rabbis—began to occupy themselves with tracing resurrection texts right through the scriptures. Texts that

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[24] Vorster (1989:163) notes here the similarities between Judaism and Iranian Zoroastrianism which also maintains a doctrine of resurrection associated with judgment. Iranian influence on Judaism is not unlikely because the Jews lived for about two centuries under the *Pax Persica* during which they produced important religious literature.

[25] Compare §1.2.1 which also deals with resurrection as an *eschatological* event. Jesus' resurrection is linked to the general resurrection as firstfruits are linked to the harvest.

portrayed *Yahweh* as the one giving life and rescuing from death were seen as potentially teaching resurrection. The ground for the Jewish resurrection hope thus remained *Yahweh* as revealed in the scriptures. Talk of resurrection remained unspecific about details, however. The nature of the resurrection body was not widely discussed among adherents to the belief (Wright 2003:205). Continuity with the present body was considered important for the sake of identity, but transformation into incorruptible and immortal life was also stressed.[26] The element of light recurs in the image of the resurrected righteous, associating the latter with heavenly beings (Bauckham 1998b:92).

Belief in resurrection necessitated belief in an intermediate state. To express this belief, Hellenistic language about the soul lay ready to hand. No Jewish writing, however, depicts immortality as an inherent quality of the soul as in Platonic thinking. Souls of the dead are immortal by the creative power of *Yahweh*. They are 'in the hand of God' in *Sheol* that has now become a temporary resting-place (Wright 2003:203). *Sheol* is, furthermore, envisaged as having distinct compartments for the righteous and for the wicked. Although both groups must wait for the general resurrection and the final judgment, real bliss and real suffering are already experienced as both groups contemplate their respective destinies. The separation of soul and body will be done away with at the time of the general resurrection. This is the view of the Pharisees and others who shared the apocalyptic vision; belief in the immortality of the soul in no way renders the resurrection of the body superfluous.

There were, however, Jews in the first century CE who believed exactly the latter. In their thinking there was no place for the resurrection of the body, although they upheld the immortality of the soul. The best-known representatives of this view are the philosopher Philo of Alexandria and the writers of *4 Maccabees* and *Jubilees* (Wright 2003:143–45). Another writing of the time, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, also puts great stress on the immortality of the soul—an immortality attained through wisdom and not innate in a pre-existent soul as with Plato—yet the ultimate state is described as a renewed bodily life in which the righteous will 'judge nations, and rule over peoples, and the Lord will be their king for ever' (cf. Wright 2003:167). Bauckham (1998b:90)

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[26]*2 Baruch* combines the two aspects beautifully as it describes how the dead are first resurrected in their original form (including deformities) for the sake of recognition, after which comes the judgment, which in turn is followed by the transformation of the saints into an incorruptible state which enables them to enjoy the glory of paradise (Vorster 1989:169).

concludes that despite the variety of Jewish beliefs about resurrection, a distinctively Jewish shape of Jewish expectations can be detected with the following elements present: concern for God's justice and righteousness, priority of corporate eschatology over individual eschatology, and the holistic conception of resurrection life as fully embodied life. According to Bauckham (1998b:94), early Christians took over this view which had become dominant in the Judaism of their day. Riley (1995:22), on the other hand, pictures the Jewish belief in resurrection in the first century CE much more as a spectrum with conceptions and imagery still in a fluid state. He emphasises the diversity among early Christian groups (Paul's spiritual body versus the crudely physical body in Luke and John) which to him is proof that resurrection in Second-Temple Judaism could mean different things to different people, especially with regard to the nature of the resurrection body.[27] It would indeed be better to take the various and sometimes opposing trends in Second-Temple Judaism seriously and to realise that Christianity, as it slowly divested resurrection of its nationalistic robes, became caught up in the same conflict of opposing trends that characterised contemporary Judaism, and, like Judaism, appeared unable to resolve it.

3.1.4 Christianity and Uniqueness

After having surveyed the larger contemporary context for the concept of resurrection in his book *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N. T. Wright concludes that, when the early Christians spoke of Jesus being raised from the dead, the natural meaning of that claim throughout the ancient world was that something had happened to Jesus that had happened to nobody else (2003:83). There were partial analogies, but the event itself was significantly new (2003:17). And precisely because of its unique character, this event came to possess unrivalled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity (2003:718). At the end of the day the historian must ask why Christianity began and why it took the shape it did. The universal early Christian answer always involved Jesus and his being raised from the dead (2003:28). Wright does not agree with those who are of the opinion that a historical study of the resurrection cannot and/or should not be undertaken since acceptance or rejection of

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[27] For agreement with Riley on this matter, see Vorster (1989:167), Fisher (1999:64–66) and Lüdemann (2004:64–66).

it depends largely on one's philosophical and theological presuppositions. On the contrary, Wright recognises Jesus' resurrection as a historical problem that can and must be investigated with all the available tools of historical-critical research. And Wright's final conclusion *as historian* is that the empty tomb and the appearances of the living Jesus—these two things together—present both the sufficient and necessary condition for the rise of the early Christian belief. Alternative proposals do not have the power to explain the phenomena before us (2003:706). Moreover, what the early Christians claimed was not the outflow of some primitive world view, but emphatically this: it is true, ordinarily, dead people do not rise, but Jesus rose from the dead and this is, and remains, without analogy (2003:712). In the end, the early church—its origin and its expansion—can only be described as something for which there was no precedent and of which there remains no subsequent example (2003:18).

It is clear, Wright is playing the *Uniqueness* card here, but is he playing it right? In §3.1.2 it was indeed concluded that examples of 'resurrection' proper are rare in the relevant Greco-Roman literature, and in §3.1.3 it was pointed out that, although a strong strand of resurrection belief pervaded in Second-Temple Judaism, early Christianity introduced a mutation, so fresh and startling, that it could well be considered as something uniquely new: it declared Jesus the Messiah the beginning, the 'firstfruits', of the general resurrection.

So, is Wright correct by stating that there is nothing in history that is on a par with Jesus' resurrection and the impact it had on the contemporary Mediterranean world? At this point it is too early to provide the definitive answer to this question, because a lot depends on how one defines 'resurrection' (more about this in §3.1.5) and on how one reconstructs what happened on that Easter morning in the garden of Joseph. Two weaknesses in Wright's methodology are noted here: first, Wright gives both the resurrection of Jesus and the concomitant rise of the early church the stamp of uniqueness. In the building up of his argument he uses these two events as mutual re-inforcers: the resurrection of Jesus must be unique because the rise of the early church is so unprecedented in history—and the other way round. He believes that there are huge differences at the point of origin between Christianity and, say, Islam or Buddhism. Christianity cannot be classified as simply 'a religion' like the others (2003:17). Such an observation, however, evokes the question: who is speaking here, the historian or the apologist? Surely, a Muslim apologist would be able to point out how adverse the culture of seventh-century Arabia was to Islam's monotheism and

demanding morality, yet Islam spread so rapidly that by the time of Mohammed's death almost all of Arabia had embraced it (Miller 1998:80)—a clear sign that this religion's origin was divine and its transcendental claims were true! Wright would consider all of this partial analogy, but on what grounds? It seems that Wright's argument for the uniqueness of Christianity, however skilfully developed, is proof that apologies work for insiders, not for outsiders. They function to support what the audience already believes, in our case, the uniqueness of Christianity flowing from the resurrection of Jesus (Miller 1998:89). In fact, the resurrection stories in the gospels function in the same way: they address a friendly audience and they presuppose rather than give rise to faith in the risen Jesus (Miller 1998:96). It is a case of belief first, story second. If the belief is not there, it will be very hard for the naked story or the cleverly devised apology to persuade the outsider who is then branded as 'unbeliever'. There is a second weakness in Wright's methodology. Throughout his argument Wright affirms a historical reality that is unique, that is totally outside anyone's experience and without analogy. But this has its implications. The old historian's dictum says that whatever is absolutely unique is absolutely unknowable. Wright defends the validity of his argument by comparing Jesus' resurrection with Ceasar's crossing of the Rubicon which also took place only once, yet the two are not the same (MacDonald 2004:316).

Crossan, on the other hand, does not think that what he calls the apologetic *Uniqueness Option* (2003a:31) has a valid foot to stand on. From his survey of the larger contemporary context for the concept of resurrection, he concludes the following: risen visions or resurrectional apparitions—for this is all we can reconstruct from what the canonical texts relate about the events of Easter—cannot explain the birth, the continuation and the expansion of the movement of early Christianity, because in terms of first-century culture such events were not considered absolutely extraordinary let alone completely unique (1998a:xviii). Such events were perceived to happen, and to happen repeatedly.[28] It follows that in the ancient world the believer could not invoke the *Uniqueness Option* and the non-believer could not invoke the

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[28] Crossan adds that post-mortem apparitions are even recognised as common possibilities today, especially in cases of sudden, tragic or brutal death (2003a:46–47). Note, however, that Crossan does not regard the risen apparitions in the resurrection narratives of the gospels as historical events (more about this in §3.2.2.5). To Crossan, only the apostle Paul received—literally and historically—an entranced revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus (1996:209).

Impossibility Option (2003a:31). The only valid option was the *Relevance Option*—the so what (2003a:32)? Textual evidence to this extent is available. Justin Martyr, for instance, admits in *First Apology* 21–22 (Falls 1948:56–58) that Christians propound nothing different about Jesus Christ from what pagans believe regarding those whom they esteem sons of Jupiter. Jesus born of a virgin? So was Perseus. Jesus the miracle worker? Such deeds were also performed by Aesculapius. Jesus the crucified one? Reputed sons of Jupiter also suffered. Jesus who died, who appeared as the risen one and who ascended into heaven? Numerous sons of Jupiter ascended into heaven, among them Mercury, Bacchus and Hercules. Understandably, being part and parcel of such a cultural context, Justin Martyr cannot and does not argue for uniqueness. But then, why care about *this* son of God, called Jesus? Justin responds by arguing the superiority of Jesus above all others:

> To make this clear to you, we shall present the following arguments to prove: that whatever statements we make, because we learned them from Christ and the prophets who preceded him, are alone true, and are older than all writers, and that we should be believed, *not because we speak the same things as the writers* (my emphasis), but because we speak the truth; that Jesus Christ alone is *properly* the son of God … having become man by His will he taught us these doctrines for the conversion and restoration of mankind (*1 Apol.* 23; Falls 1948:58–59).

Uniqueness, no,[29] but superiority, yes, because the events of Jesus' life and death were foretold in the Hebrew scriptures and have universal salvific effect. Still, there are the striking and troubling similarities between this son of God and other sons of god, that is, the sons of Jupiter. How to explain them (away)? In his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin solves this difficulty by dismissing the entire pagan repertoire as works of the devil, the great imitator of truth (*Dial.* 69; Falls 1948:259):

> For, when they say that Bacchus was born of Jupiter's union with Semele, and narrate that he was a discoverer of the vine, and that, after he was torn to pieces and died, he rose again and

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[29] Wright in discussing *First Apolpgy* concludes that the similarities that Justin Martyr mentions between Christian belief in the son of God and pagan beliefs about the sons of Jupiter are mere 'stepping-stones towards the truth' and are in no way meant to identify Christian belief in resurrection with pagan beliefs on survival and glorification (2003:501). Wright preserves uniqueness, but it is at the expense of a more plausible reading of the data. Even if only stepping-stones, the fact that such stepping-stones would never work for us today shows how far removed we are from the worldview of the early Christians. Wright and Crossan clearly part ways when it comes to interpreting the data before them.

ascended into heaven, and when they use wine in his mysteries, is it not evident that the devil has imitated the previously quoted prophecy of the patriarch Jacob, as recorded by Moses[30] … And when the devil presents Aesculapius as raising the dead to life and curing all diseases, has he not, in this regard, also, emulated the prophecies about Christ?

Another apologist, Theophilus, does not hesitate to surrender his religion's uniqueness by using pagan mythology as a bridge across which to guide his audience (*Autol.* 1.13; Roberts & Donaldson 1868:62):

Then, as to your denying that the dead are raised—for you say, "Show me even who has been raised from the dead, that seeing I may believe,"—first, what great thing is it if you believe when you have seen the thing done? Then again, you believe that Herculus, who burned himself, lives; and that Aesculapius, who was struck with lightning, was raised; and do you disbelieve the things that are told you by God?[31]

With the non-believer Celsus we have moved from pro-Christian apologetics to anti-Christian polemics. But here also, relevance, meaning and superiority are the categories that count. Celsus discovers only inferiority, absurdity and lack of relevance in the events of Jesus' life and death, and therefore, he rejects him:

If Jesus really wanted to show forth divine power, he ought to have appeared to the very men who treated him despitefully, and to the man who condemned him and to everyone everywhere … If he really was so great he ought in order to display his divinity, to have disappeared suddenly from the cross … At the time when he was disbelieved while in the body, he preached without restraint to all; but when he would establish a strong faith after rising from the dead, he appeared secretly to just one woman and to those of his confraternity (*Cels.* 2.67, 68, 70; Chadwick 1953:117–120).

Strijdom (2003:275) has correctly pointed out, however, that Celsus knew the distinction between fact and fiction, like other sophisticated literates (2003:279), and

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[30] See Gn 49:11: 'he (i.e. Judah) will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.'

[31] In view of texts like these Crossan (2000:106) emphasises that the debate around uniqueness is not about different physical experiences then and now but about *divergent cultural acceptances* then and now. Vorster (1989:172) agrees and provides the example of Tertullian who found some similarity between the ascension of Jesus and that of Romulus. Such an example indicates the degree of *reception* these stories enjoyed in the ancient world.

that he did not hesitate to invoke the *Impossibility Option* when it suited him. In the passage below Celsus questions the historical veracity of the gospel stories:

> But we must examine this question whether anyone who really died ever rose again with the same body. Or do you think that the stories of these others really are the legends which they appear to be, and yet that the ending of your tragedy is to be regarded as noble and convincing (*Cels.* 2.55; Chadwick 1953:109)?

Celsus in the same passage goes on to describe the resurrection story as a 'fantastic tale' and a 'cock-and-bull story' invented by a hysterical female, Mary of Magdala (*Cels.* 2.55; Chadwick 1953:109). From this it is clear that with Celsus the *Impossibility Option* must still play second tune to the *Relevance Option*: it could not have happened, because it is so ridiculous. In this regard, the two adjectives that he uses at the end of the above quotation are telling: 'noble *and* convincing.' One is convinced of the truth of something when it is perceived as noble. In the final analysis then, believer and non-believer met on the level of relevance and meaning in, what Crossan calls, the pre-Enlightenment world (2003a:33).

But what are the implications of all of this for us who live in a post-Enlightenment world? Unfortunately, the similarities between the stories of Jesus' birth, miracles, death and ascension and those of other sons of god do not ring in our twenty-first-century ears as they did in those of the first century, simply because we are so unfamiliar with the latter. Nevertheless, ignoring this cultural common ground will come at a steep price. Crossan considers it unethical when Christians as historians bracket from critical discussion and historical reconstruction the specific events of Jesus' bodily resurrection and ascension, but not all other such claims, past and present (1998a:29); or when Christians admit that events such as a bodily resurrection and ascension usually do not occur, but then suddenly insist that for this one absolutely unique instance of Jesus they did. To Crossan such a position is not only unethical, it also constitutes a serious misreading of what the earliest Christians meant when they made transcendental claims for Jesus. They were not saying that events such as a divine conception and a bodily resurrection and ascension had occurred only once in the history of the whole world—to Jesus. They could not and they did not. But what they did do was singling out the events concerning Jesus, so as to invest them with a meaning and relevance far surpassing all the others. *As historians* they

accepted without distinction all such events as (possible) facts; *as believers* they saw God at work in Jesus only. Today's Christians face the same challenge. If, as historians, we accept the transcendental claims made for Jesus as literal fact and historical event, the only ethical option open for us is to treat all other such claims the same way. If, on the other hand, we discount the Hellenistic stories as a-historical myth or worse, evil superstition, and accept Jesus' divine conception, his miraculous deeds, his resurrection and ascension as literal fact and historical event, we must realise that we have made this distinction, not as historians, but as believers. Religious criteria were used to make a qualitative distinction between the two sets of stories, not the common tools of historical-critical research. A well-known religious criterion is 'revelation'. Believers of several of the world's religions use this criterion when they claim uniqueness, historicity and factuality for their particular story on the ground that God chose to reveal himself through it, thereby granting the story a divinely inspired status. There is nothing wrong with such a move, as long as everyone understands that here the standard or principle on which the judgment is based—because this is what the word 'criterion' means—is a religious belief and not a publicly argued historical conclusion. When one reasons: my story is unique and true, both in fact and in meaning, because it is God-breathed and God-enacted, one is using revelation as a religious criterion, while other criteria, like the tools of historical criticism, are bracketed. Granted, there are Christians who refuse to understand and use revelation in this way and who prefer to divest the concept of its absolute character. Kuitert is a good case in point and he has this to say about revelation:

> Ik zie geen heil in het gebruik maken van dat begrip [i.e. openbaring] voorzover het als aanduiding van een bovennatuurlijke bron van Godskennis moet dienen. De bedoeling daarvan is duidelijk: zo krijgt onze kennis van God een onaantastbare positie. Maar dat lijkt alleen maar zo. Ten eerste doen anderen (Islam bijvoorbeeld) dat ook, zich op openbaring beroepen en zijn we weer net zover. Openbaring is niet een onderscheidend begrip. Ten aanzien van het gesprek met de buitenstaanders—dit in de tweede plaats—prijs je jezelf bovendien de markt uit door niet alleen met je eigen gelijk te beginnen maar dat zelfs immuun te maken tegenover elke aantasting. Openbaring heeft immers per definitie gelijk (1992:29)*.

Crossan also strongly objects to declaring the Christian tradition 'immune' by using a religious criterion to overrule historical verification or falsification—and this religious criterion could be any philosophical or theological presupposition or ecclesiastical

consideration. Instead, he aims to keep the distinction between historical and religious criteria clear and sharp. As historian he does not accept any transcendental claim made for anyone as factual history, because there has never been adequate empirical proof for such claims. A miraculous event is too far removed from the publicly verifiable or objectively provable consistencies of our world and can, therefore, not be taken as fact or historical event (1998a:29). Divine conceptions, from Alexander the Great to Augustus to Jesus; heavenly ascensions, from Herculus to the Roman emperors to the Christ, must be accepted metaphorically and theologically, not literally and miraculously (1998a:28). In this way the symbolic meaning is affirmed, even though the literal fact is denied. *As historian* Crossan does not accept as factual history the transcendental claims made for Jesus or anybody else, but *as believer* he finds God in Jesus and in nobody else. This to him is Christianity: to find God, not in the military prowess of someone like Alexander the Great, nor in the imperial power of Rome, but in the Jewish peasant poverty of Jesus (1998a:29).

Crossan has been criticised for the dominant role that he assigns to historical-critical research, subjecting even the miraculous to its rigid grid, resulting in the exclusion of all miracles and/or transcendental claims from historical reconstruction. John P. Meier, a representative of the kind of historiography that consciously limits the role of historical criticism, says that Crossan attempts to resolve a philosophical question (whether miracles do take place) with the sources and tools of historical criticism (1994:220). To Meier, this is not possible. How one answers such a philosophical question is beyond the realm of history proper and depends largely on one's philosophical and theological presuppositions. Part of what Meier is conveying here, be it subtly, is that everyone, Crossan included, has presuppositions. And this strikes at the heart of the criticism against Crossan's hermeneutic: many perceive Crossan as someone who fails to account for his own philosophical and theological horizon.[32] Crossan makes it seem that there can be presupposition-free historical-critical research, that method is a check on everything. But his ruling out of the historicity of miracles is a philosophical presupposition. It shows that the method of historical criticism is never presupposition-free, but operates from a context, just like any other method of interpretation.

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[32] See Denton (2004:77) on Crossan's method, Wright (2003:714–717) on why there can be no neutral historiography, and Miller (2003:209) quoting Wright's rhetoric against post-Enlightenment metaphysics.

What is Crossan's context or, to use another word, worldview? Clearly, Crossan does not adhere to the Jewish worldview of the open universe ruled by the omnipotent creator God who can break into the world of space, time and matter at his will. Underlying all Crossan's doing of history is the post-Enlightenment worldview of a mechanical universe, with at its centre the late-modern and post-modern presupposition of the closed continuum of cause and effect.[33] Crossan nowhere explicitly mentions his worldview, but rather presents his own doing of history as honest, since it is kept honest by method. Method, after all, protects the historical object from violation and disfigurement (1998a:44).

Do the critics of Crossan have a point? Has Crossan failed to demonstrate how his own presuppositions have affected his very doing of history? Has he only paid lip service to what he himself calls 'a post-modern sensibility—that is, an equal awareness of your own and your subject's historicity (1998a:45)?' Crossan responds with a kind of rationale. He provides three reasons why historical research is necessary and how it should be done. Firstly, there is the *historical* reason: Jesus lived in history and therefore he can and must be historically reconstructed (1998a:26). Secondly, there is the *theological* reason: Christian faith is the interaction of the historical Jesus and the risen Jesus and this interaction cannot be done once and for all, but each Christian generation must reconstruct its historical Jesus anew and then say and live what that reconstruction means for present life in this world (1998a:40). It follows that historical reconstruction is indispensable for faith, that is, sarcophilic faith (see §1.5). Thirdly, there is the *ethical* reason. Since history is *the past reconstructed interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse,* a miracle cannot form part of that reconstructed past since it cannot be classified as public knowledge based on critical consideration of public evidence. Miracles or transcendental claims are phenomena that are outside the circle of the objectively provable consistencies of our world. They cannot be judged historically and tested empirically. This does not leave them immune to historical enquiry. On the

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[33] In the dialogue with William F. Buckley and Wiliiam Lane Craig, Crossan clarifies his position further. For him it is about what he finds God doing. Healing, for instance, God has built into the universe (cf. Buckley, Crossan & Craig 1998:50). Borg (1998:122) sums up Crossan's stance as follows, 'The supernatural is always present; it operates through the screen of the natural; it is like the beating heart of the natural.' So, the ultimate question in the debate supernaturalism versus naturalism is, 'How does God act in the universe?'

contrary, for the historian this leaves open the one morally acceptable position: do not take miracles, any miracle, as historical event but accept all miracles metaphorically and theologically.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Crossan on the matter of miracles, it has to be said that he has clearly and explicitly demarcated his position here. He does not present it as a presupposition though, but as a straightforward scientific given: miracles do not happen and we live by this fact every day, especially where others are involved (1998a:29). Do not those who claim to be open-minded about miracles suddenly change into, what Crossan calls, 'indirect rationalists' (1998a:29) when they are confronted with reports about miracles that, if true, would undermine their own religious beliefs? Such people will have to come to terms, ethically, with their ambivalent stance on miracles for it is unethical to reason away or deny reports of miracles from outside one's circle, but to allow them to abound, almost uncritically, when it comes to one's own faith system.[34] Ultimately, the question of miracles is a question about God. Crossan (1998a:29) puts it like this: 'Where do *you* find your God?' This is a challenging question. Do we find God in the orderliness of the cosmos, or rather in supernatural and omnipotent acts that suspend the normal regularities of the natural world? Do we acknowledge God's nature as primarily mysterious or do we rather picture God as one who conforms to our notion of what God should be like? Do we find God in the teaching and actions of Jesus, depicting his superhuman status, or is the clue to the nature of God to be found in the suffering of Jesus, with whom God co-suffers as with the rest of creation—a suffering so real that it should not be undermined by assuming that God could have dispensed with it all as sovereign and almighty 'Mr Fix-it' (Wedderburn 1999:219)? Where are we on these various spectra? Wedderburn has this to say about the changing views on the God of Jesus:

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[34] A test case: where are Protestants on the reported appearances of Mary and the accompanying miracles of healing at Lourdes in France? Lüdemann notes the apologetic value of these appearances at a time when the Roman Catholic church sought to ratify the dogma of 'Immaculate Conception' (2004:49). But then, what about the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus? Do they also serve a political agenda? Crossan answers in the affirmative: the resurrection narratives (and even Paul in 1 Cor 15:1–9) are primarily interested, not in apparition and trance, but in authority, power, leadership and priority (1996:203). See also §3.2.2.5.

> The cosy familiarity of the omnipotent God, who has at least once revealed that omnipotence unmistakably, in the raising of Jesus from the dead, has gone, as has the easy anthropomorphism of the acting and intervening God (1999:218).

Wright, on the other hand, strongly maintains the actuality of the activity of God in the world. He cannot but view those who resist the miraculous as people who have 'a sheer horror for the being and action of God himself in space and time' (2003:736). Wright views the miracle of Jesus' resurrection within the context of Jesus being the son of God, that is, the son of Israel's God, who by nature is the creator, the one who is both transcendent and acting. Furthermore, instrumental in God's raising of Jesus from the dead has been the divine Spirit who now lives in the believers and will raise them also (2003:734–5).

But then, if Wright accepts the resurrection of Jesus as actual event in space-time history, as something that we have access to in the public world, surely, the evidence for it will have to be assessed and the end result, as with all historical examinations, will be a choice between verdicts of 'more probable', 'less probable' and 'improbable' (Wedderburn 1999:5). Is Wright willing to await the result of historical enquiry and subsequently base his faith on it? Wright's answer is in the affirmative and this is why:

> The question which must be faced is whether the explanation of the data which the early Christians themselves gave, that Jesus really was risen from the dead, "explains the aggregate" of the evidence better than any sophisticated scepticism. My claim is that it does … Many will challenge this conclusion, for many different reasons. I do not claim that it constitutes a "proof" of the resurrection in terms of some neutral standpoint. It is, rather, a historical challenge to other explanations, other worldviews (2003:717).[35]

We have come full circle and are now where we were at the beginning of this section on 'Christianity and Uniqueness'. To Wright the event of the resurrection of Jesus—an event which the early Christians claimed to have taken place—has unrivalled power to explain the phenomena before us. The extraordinary origin and

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[35] Dunn is a holistic historiographer like Wright and presents a very similar argument: 'Despite the inconsistencies and tensions which the diversity of traditions evidences only too clearly, it is in the end of the day the tradition itself which pushes us to the conclusion that it was something perceived as having happened to *Jesus* (resurrection evidenced in empty tomb and resurrection appearances) and not just something which happened to the *disciples* (Easter faith) which provides the more plausible explanation for the origin and core content of the tradition itself'(Holmberg 2004:456).

rise of early Christianity, despite persecution,[36] warrants an initial supernatural and unique event, the more so as the early Christians themselves gave expression to it in no uncertain terms with the pithy statement: 'Jesus is risen'. Other language of ghosts, spirits and the like lay readily available, but these terms were considered inappropriate (2003:10; see also §3.1.5). And therefore, Wright concludes, the historical challenge is now with those who question the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Do they have alternative proposals as to why Christianity began and why it took the shape it did— and will these proposals stand up to scrutiny (2003:28)?

3.1.5 Literal versus Metaphorical

'He has risen![37] He is not here (Mk 16:6).' This claim, first uttered by the angel(s) and echoed by the early believers, is foundational to Christianity, yet what does it mean? Wright, in contrast to Crossan, does not interpret this transcendental claim metaphorically and theologically, but literally and miraculously. Therefore, before moving to the alternative proposal of Crossan as to how Christianity originated, first a closer look at Wright's literal treatment of this claim. We have now arrived at what was called in §3.1.1 'the hermeneutical divide'. The categories literal/metaphorical have indeed proven to be frequent stumbling blocks in recent scholarly discussions. One example from the debate 'Will the real Jesus please stand up?' will suffice at this point. William F. Buckley Jr., one of the participants in the debate, retorts at a certain point:

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[36] Wright argues that there is a clear line from Paul to the apologists of the 2nd century CE which focuses its hope for the future *on the unique and bodily resurrection of Jesus*, who was raised in advance of all the rest and in whom God's new creation and kingdom were established (with Jesus' claim to universal lordship ultimately coming into conflict with the empire of Caesar). It is this kind of eschatological hope that explains why early Christianity expanded and why the early Christians were persecuted (2003:552, 583). A general principle to be established from this is that religions (or ideologies) come under threat of persecutions when they are perceived to be politically subversive in teaching and/or in praxis, but this does not necessarily have to involve a unique and supernatural event, as Wright argues.

[37] Literally 'was raised' (ἠγέρθη): many grammarians and lexicographers argue that the passive voice should be taken here with an active sense, hence 'he has risen', but they argue this not on grammatical but on theological grounds (O'Donnell 1999:161).

Wright, in dealing with the issue, notes the regular confusion with regard to the use of the opposites literal/metaphorical and concrete/abstract (1997:367). He admits that in both the Old and New Testament there is evidence for the term 'resurrection' being used in a metaphorical sense. But the referent is always concrete, not abstract. In Ezekiel 37 the concrete referent is the restoration of Israel (2003:202), and with the apostle Paul the concrete referent is baptism or bodily obedience (2003:547). So, whereas 'metaphorical' means that the relationship between the word(s) used and the referent is non-literal, the referent in both the Old and New Testament is concrete. It follows that 'resurrection' as biblical metaphor does not stand for an abstraction in the sense that its referent is an idea, feeling or belief (1997:368); rather, it is metaphorical of something beyond itself, and that 'something' is literal, actual and historical. When confronted with the metaphorical use of the term 'resurrection' outside the canon in Christian Gnostic texts, Wright concludes that here the referent is no longer concrete, but abstract; 'abstract' in the Platonic sense of 'spiritual' (2003:548). It is outside the scope of this thesis to explore Gnosticism and Gnostic writings. One comment is in place though: bearing in mind that for the Gnostic there was nothing *non-concrete* about the referent that he was focussed on, one begins to wonder whether the distinction between concrete referent and abstract referent is still a helpful one. In Christian Gnostic texts resurrection is metaphorical of the elevation of the soul during the present life and after death. This kind of referent may not pass for concrete, but it is nonetheless *real*—very real to the Gnostic. In fact, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* 48 (cf. Ehrmann 1999:184) describes *this world* as 'an illusion'! Clearly, what counts for real and concrete depends on one's worldview. In light of this, it may be safest to recognise as valid any metaphorical usage of the term 'resurrection' as long as it is metaphorical of something beyond itself that is real, real in the eye of the beholder. Wright's primary objection, however, to the Gnostic use of the term 'resurrection' is not the kind of referent that is intended, but the fact that Gnosticism does away with the bodily aspect. Wright therefore considers the Gnostic use a denial or radical reinterpretation of the main sense of the word (2003:547).

What then is the main sense of the word 'resurrection' or 'rising' (a*navstasi")? Wright concludes that 'resurrection' when used in the first century CE (by pagan, Jew and Christian alike) was used by and large, not in a metaphorical, but in a literal sense, and meant new life after a period of being dead; fresh living embodiment following a period of death-as-a-state. It never simply meant 'life after death,' it always involved a two-step story: life *after* 'life after death' (2003:31). Moreover, it was always and unambiguously *bodily* resurrection. Wright admits that describing the mode of embodiment is hard. Nevertheless, he proposes a label for it: *'transphysical'*, that is, of transformed physicality. The term refers to a body that is incorruptible, yet not without physicality, but rather possessing enhanced physicality (2003:478). And this, according to Wright, is what the early Christians meant when they spoke about Jesus' resurrection and their own future resurrection. And their claim should in no way be diminished by proposing a different meaning; one that may fit our imagination but excludes physicality. For Wright, physicality must remain an intricate part of the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead, for without it, both as sufficient and necessary condition, the empty tomb and the meetings with the living Jesus—two events recorded in the resurrection narratives—do not make sense and the historical jigsaw puzzle of early Christianity and its origins cannot fall into place (2003:717). It is clear, Wright interprets the resurrection narratives literally and historically. With the help of these and other sources he aims to reach semantic clarity and uniformity on the literal use of the term 'resurrection' in the first century CE, after which he elevates the outcome of his study as norm, even for today. However, is such a move legitimate and within reach? In chapter 1 it was established that resurrection is a symbol and that symbols are embedded in worldviews. Moreover, like all symbols, 'resurrection' is intrinsically metaphoric. This means that, even if used in a literal sense, it still remains a figurative term, because it attempts to put into language something that we have no direct knowledge of, something that Küng describes as 'intangible and unimaginable' (1974:350). Post-structuralism goes even further and teaches that besides symbols all language is metaphorical and that no reality can ever be fully present to us (see §2.2)—there will always be a void of meaning at the core of language, and thus at the core of the symbol of resurrection, and this void allows for polyvalence in readings and multiplicity of interpretations. Ultimately then, the debate here is about the nature of language. Wright aims to reach exactness in semantics and uniformity in interpretation by coining the label 'transphysical' for the resurrected life, but in so doing he has not

filled up the post-structural 'void of meaning.' Sad to say, but his definition of resurrection as 'transphysical embodiment' is as elusive and open-ended as the symbol that it attempts to define. We have not come any closer to 'knowing what it is which offers itself for belief' with regard to Jesus' resurrection (Evans 1970:130). Moreover, it is not clear whether the early Christians unambiguously intended to convey 'transphysical embodiment' when talking about resurrection and rising. The resurrection narratives in the gospels are not coherent in this regard. It is in any case illegitimate to use them to prove anything definite for or against transphysicality since the gospel narrators make use of dramatic presentation to describe the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Theology cannot simply repeat the language of narrative if it seeks to adequately understand the symbol of resurrection.

Wright's desire as holistic historiographer is for a sense-making hypothesis. If Jesus was raised with a 'transphysical' body, the two key pieces of evidence, the empty tomb and the post-resurrection meetings, are explained (2003:711). In their turn these two events explain the rise of early Christianity with resurrection belief at its centre (2003:706). History thus proceeds by *inference to the best explanation* (2003:716). This method was explained earlier as the method of hypothesis and verification (see §2.4.2.8): historical data come to be known as the historian poses questions to them, formulates answers to those questions, and verifies the answers. In the end, the hypothesis' claim to truth lies in its explanatory power. There is, however, a risk involved in this kind of doing history: the end result can resemble a house of cards. This happens when the context of the sense-making hypothesis is stressed at the cost of properly understanding the contexts that need to be the supporting pillars of it, such as the context of the sources and the contemporary context. It has to be said that in Wright's historical study on the resurrection of Jesus there is an insistence on exactness and uniformity (all part of the sense-making hypothesis) that cannot be supported, firstly, from certain epistemological principles nor, secondly, from the available data in the form of first-century (Jewish) culture in general and the early Christians' appropriation of the symbol of resurrection in particular (see §3.1.3).

Crossan, on the other hand, does not think that the battle is to be fought on the level of semantics. He firstly argues that among the manifold meanings a claim like 'Jesus is risen' could have had in the first century CE, it is more useful to first establish a vision and a program because that alone clarifies the content of a claim (2000:105). Who was Jesus and what did he do that caused his followers to make certain claims

about him? Proceeding thus, one discovers that Christian faith often tends to be right on the *what* and *that* but wrong on the *how* and *when* of its content (Crossan 2003a:55). Secondly, resurrection could then for ancients and can now for moderns be interpreted across a spectrum from the most literal to the most metaphorical (2003a:55). Again, for Crossan it is not the bare claim 'Jesus is risen' that matters, but the reality that it points to and this will always be something concrete, something that is literal, actual and historical. Wright concluded the same earlier on in this section. What, according to Crossan, is the concrete referent for the statement that Jesus is risen from the dead—a statement that he takes metaphorically and theologically? In order to answer this question Crossan places the resurrection of Jesus firmly within first-century Jewish culture and concludes that a Jew who claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead was actually saying *that the general resurrection had begun* (2003a:48; cf. §1.5 and §3.1.3). This is the primary claim of early Christianity, stunningly original, but after two thousand years of Christianity often overlooked. Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus' resurrection and the general resurrection stand or fall together as start and end of a single process that is taking its course swiftly and without delay from the firstfruits (Jesus) to the harvest's completion (2003a:48). For Paul the Jew resurrection is the last act of the apocalyptic drama, the inauguration of the 'age to come' which is about nothing less than the final justification and ultimate divinisation of this earth (2003a:49). This is what it means to say that Jesus is risen: God's new creation has become present; God's justification of the world has begun; it is no longer imminent; it is already here. And there is evidence for this newness all around. What evidence? An empty tomb? Visions and apparitions? Maybe, but not primarily. Resurrection means that Jesus' claim that one could *already* enter the kingdom of God, could *already* have the kingdom of God come upon one by living a life like his own has become an experienced reality (2003a:49). And this actual and historical reality constitutes the concrete referent for the metaphor 'Christ has been raised':

> Something literal must have been there "as an actual event in space-time history" (…), or else all that symbolic and parabolic language would refer to nothing at all. Lives in imitation of the historical Jesus continued, communities in union with the God of the historical Jesus developed, the Kingdom of God on earth expanded, and *that was enough* (my emphasis) for more and more believers (Crossan 2000:105).

This is Crossan's proposal as to why and how Christianity originated. The key is to look at the life of Jesus and the empowering movement that he started. It is not sufficient to say that the vision of a dead man birthed Christianity. Such an event is not special enough, let alone unique, to explain anything. Even if this vision is interpreted as an eschatological event—the start of the general resurrection—we are still left with the question: why this man, why his resurrection as distinct from any others (Crossan 1998a:xxi)? Easter faith started as an empowering movement, a Kingdom movement, long before Jesus' death, and it was this faith *as empowerment* that survived, despite execution (and for that matter, despite ascension). The empowering presence of one and the same Jesus was there before and after Easter; what changed was his mode of existence (Crossan 1996:210). It is an insult to the first followers of Jesus to assert that Easter faith started on Easter Sunday as if Christianity would have been obliterated from the map of world religions had it not been for the events of an empty tomb and several apparitions. Could the life, vision and program of the historical Jesus have counted for so little? Josephus realises where the seeds of survival for Christianity are to be found and sums up post-crucifixion Christianity with the following words: 'those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him' (*Ant.* 18.63–64; Crossan 1998a:12). These words are a crystallization of the historical beginnings of Christianity: there was a *movement*; there was an *execution*; and despite the execution there was *continuation* and *expansion* of the movement (see §1.5).

Some may call this with Wright (2000:88) 'a resurrectionless explanation' for the origins of Christianity that is not convincing.[38] Others stress the fact that Christianity emerged, not just as a movement that continued and expanded gradually, but as a

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[38] Lüdemann (2004:173) sides with Wright here, be it for radically different reasons. His two severest points of criticism against Crossan's explanation as to how Christianity originated have to do, firstly, with the disciples: they claim exactly what Crossan negates, namely that Easter *was* decisive and not the historical Jesus. Secondly, there is the case of Paul: how does Crossan explain the fact that Paul who had never known the historical Jesus came to lead the movement? Lüdemann concludes that the origins of the resurrection faith must be sought in the visions of Peter and Paul who in turn were victims of self-deception (2004:154). It follows that Christianity is 'a worldwide historical hoax'. This is the inescapable conclusion of historical analysis (2004:190). More on Lüdemann and his extreme (but consistent?) position in §3.2.2.4–5.

movement which appeared to have come to a grinding halt when its leader died a shameful death, after which it made a dramatic recovery in the very name of the defeated leader. Surely, 'something' (something historical) must have happened to effect this change (Wedderburn 1999:47)?[39] The same question can be asked when one considers two other historical realities: firstly, the custom to celebrate the Lord's Day, no longer on the seventh, but on the first day of the week,[40] the day the *Epistle of Barnabas* 15.9 describes as 'the day on which Jesus rose from the dead' (cf. Wedderburn 1999:49); and secondly, the absence of any cult around Jesus' grave which contrasts sharply with the early interest in the site of Jesus' birth for purposes of worship and pilgrimage.[41]

What is Crossan's response to those who want to see this 'something' that must have happened defined more precisely and linked more closely to Jesus' personal destiny? Crossan maintains that this 'something' must have to do with the continued experience of Jesus' empowering presence and cannot be the miraculous resurrection of Jesus as actual event in space-time history. At one point Crossan even calls it 'lethal deceit' (1996:218) to accept the transcendental claim 'Jesus is risen' literally and historically, because such a move forces the Christian *as historian* to treat similarly other Hellenistic tales of heroes and gods: they could also be true, pending the outcome of historical investigation. Historical enquiry could, of course, pronounce the verdict 'improbable' on both. It is for this reason that many Christians want to avoid this painful exercise. Yet Christianity as historical religion excludes itself from any

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[39] This is sometimes referred to as the 'beaten men' argument: the disciples could not have made the dramatic recovery from despair and fear to valiance and hope were it not for the fact that they were convinced that Jesus was risen. Carnley (1987:170) argues in critical response that the presence of a fervent and intense belief does not necessarily secure the *validity* of what is believed. Whether an illusion or an accurate reproduction of facts any belief as intense as the faith of Easter is capable of yielding exactly the same results. Watson (1987:367) comments that a crisis in a religious movement (like the crucifixion of the leader in the Jesus movement) does not have to lead to wholesale apostasy and abandonment of previous beliefs, but can lead and often does lead to a reinterpretation of the beliefs in the light of the crisis and of the crisis in the light of the beliefs.

[40] See, however, §3.2.2.2 that explains the eschatological symbol of 'the third day'. The early church interpreted this symbol literally and thus believed Jesus to have been raised on the first day of the week.

[41] Alternative explanations for this lack of interest are provided in §3.2.4.10 that deals with the historicity of Jesus' burial and tomb.

meaningful theological dialogue as long as the following attitude prevails: we, Christians, have history, you, the others, live out of myth; we have facts, while you have interpretations; we are the custodians of truth, you propagate lies. This, according to Crossan, can no longer work. What, then, is the alternative?

> Christians, like all other human beings, live from out of the depths of myth and metaphor. But there still remains, now especially, the urgent challenge to accept our own foundational myth without shame or denial and that of others without hate or disparagement (1996:218).

Every faith builds on the inevitable foundations of myth and metaphor. Crossan does, of course, not use the word myth in the everyday meaning of 'a widely-held but false notion'. To him the resurrection narratives are 'myth' in another sense. Avis (1999:125) sheds light on Crossan's use of the word myth when he defines the term as: a constellation of sacred symbolism in *narrative* sequence. In other words, a myth is a *story*-metaphor. In story form, myths speak about the activity of another divine world and its impact on our world. This last aspect is also stressed by Hick (1973:175) who defines religious myth as 'a story which is not literally true, or an identifying concept or image which does not literally apply, but which may be 'true' in virtue of its power to evoke an appropriate attitude.' Myths have enormous emotional power; they are self-involving. This means that for a myth 'to work', it must work for you (Astley 2004:49). How true this is in the case of the 'story-metaphor' of the resurrection of Jesus!

As religions develop, myth symbolism is supported by concrete structures. This is referred to as the institutionalising tendency of a faith towards an institutionalised religion, and, like Crossan said, this becomes enough for more and more believers (2000:105). A good example of the 'coming of age' of the Christian faith is the way the church dealt with the delay of the *parousia*. The resurrection myth (including both the resurrection of Jesus and that of the believers) had an originating context, the symbolic world of the apocalyptic. When the apocalyptic consummation failed to happen (Jesus was raised, but not the saints), new forms of realised eschatology within the context of Christology and soteriology were gradually and creatively added. The foundational myth was not lost. It took on new meaning in new contexts.

How myths originate is a mystery. Vermes (2000:174) recognises the mysterious origin of the foundational myth of Christianity when he writes: 'No one can trace exactly the first stages of the spiritual conviction that led from despair (Mark) followed by a belief mixed with doubt (Matthew) to the established doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus (Luke and John).' It is to these writers and their texts, the resurrection narratives, that we turn in §3.2.

3.1.6 Summary

In §3.1.1 we asked the question: what frame of reference or context can be identified that has convinced Crossan that the resurrection stories should be interpreted non-literally and non-historically? Three such frames of reference or contexts were identified and it was put forward that in their triangulation they could well have reinforced one another. Two of the three contexts have now been dealt with: the contemporary context and the context of Crossan's horizon or worldview. One thing has become clear: in Crossan's case, these two contexts carry enormous weight when it comes to interpreting the data regarding Jesus' resurrection. To what extent and in what way the third context, the context of the sources, has contributed in shaping Crossan's view on the resurrection of Jesus will be discussed in §3.2.

3.2   THE LITERARY TRADITION ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

3.2.1 Complexes related to the Easter Event

In Crossan's 'atomistic'[42] investigation into the literary material on Jesus' resurrection, the first and foundational phase is the phase of data control, and the principle means of establishing a pool of usable data are the criteria of stratification and multiple attestation within the classic methodological model of tradition-criticism. Data control means that individual units (grouped thematically into complexes) that are attested in the first stratum and at least twice throughout the strata can (at least) be considered

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[42] This term is explained in §2.4.2.2 The *microcosmic* level of Crossan's method, i.e. his investigation into the literary material on Jesus, is also discussed in §2.3.5.

authentic Jesus material. In his inventory of all relevant sources and texts on Jesus, Crossan names complex 17 *Resurrection of Jesus*:

17± *Resurrection of Jesus* [1/4] : (1) 1 Cor. 15:4b; (2) *Gos. Pet.* 9:35–10:40; (3) *Barn.* 15:9; (4a) Ign. *Mag.* 11:1c; (4b) Ign. *Trall.* 9:2a; (4c) Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:2b (1991a:436).

Crossan marks the complex, not with a + which would logically follow from his method, but with a ± which means that this complex is not straightforwardly designated as either from the historical Jesus (+) or from the later Jesus tradition (-) but stands for a *process* symbolically incarnated in an *event*. The 'events' of the ± -type function as dramatic historicizations of something that took place, not at one moment in time or place (hence the -), but over a much longer period (hence the +). They are, in other words, metaphoric condensations. In Crossan's pithy words: 'Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens (1994a:197).' After the in-depth analysis of Crossan's horizon or worldview and his metaphorical understanding of the claim 'Jesus is risen' in §3.1.4 and §3.1.5, the marking of the complex *Resurrection of Jesus* as ± does not surprise us, but is only to be expected.

In Crossan's inventory there are several other complexes related to the Easter event that are based on sources that originate from various chronological layers or strata, beginning with the first. Crossan (1991a:435–43) marks them as either ± or -:

3± *Bread and Fish* [1/6] : (1?) 1 Cor 15:6; (2) John 6:1–15; (3a) Mark 6:33–44 = Matt. 9:36; 14:13b–21 = Luke 9:11–17; (3b) Mark 8:1–10 = Matt. 15:32–39; (4) Luke 24:13–33, 35; (5) Luke 24:41–43; (6) John 21:9, 12–13.

6± *Revealed to Peter* [1/5] : (1) 1 Cor 15:5a; (2) Luke 24:12 = John 20:2–10 (3) Luke 24:34; (4) Ign. *Smyrn.* 3.2a; (5) John 21:15–23.

18± *Revealed to Disciples* [1/4] : (1) 1 Cor 15:5b, 7b; (2) Matt. 28:16–20; (3a) Luke 24:36–39; (3b) John 20:19–21; (4) Ign. *Smyrn.* 3.2b–3.

29± *Descent into Hell* [1/4] : (1a) *Gos. Pet* 10:41–42; (1b) Matt. 27:52–53; (2) *Herm. Sim.* 9.16:5; (3) Ign. *Mag.* 9:2; (4a?) 1 Pet. 3:19–20; (4b?) 1 Pet. 4:6.

30± *Revealed to James* [1/3] : (1) 1 Cor 15:7a; (2) *Gos. Tom.* 12; (3) *Gos. Heb.* 7.

182- *Jesus' Tomb Guarded* [1/1] : (1a) *Gos. Pet.* 8:29–33; (1b) Matt. 27:62–66; (1c) *Gos. Naz.* 22.

183- *Crowds Visit Tomb* [1/1] : (1) *Gos. Pet.* 9:34.

185- *The Guards Report* [1/1] : (1a) *Gos. Pet.* 11:45–49; (1b) Matt. 28:11–15.

186± *Apostolic Grief* [1/1] : (1) *Gos. Pet.* 7:26–27; 14:58–59.

Complexes related to the Easter event of which the first source is positioned in the second stratum are (Crossan 1991a:444–6):

207- *Buried and Resurrected* [2/2] : (1) P. Oxy 654 5; (2) Oxyrhynchus shroud.

240- *Passion-Resurrection Prophecy* [2/1] : (1a) Mark 8:31–33 = Matt. 16:21–23 = Luke 9:22; (1b) Mark 9:9b = Matt. 17:9b; (1c) Mark 9:12b = Matt. 17:12b; (1d) Mark 9:30–32 = Matt. 17:22–23 = Luke 9:43b–45; (1e) Luke 17:25; (1f) Mark 10:32–34 = Matt. 20:17–19 = Luke 18:31–34; (1g) Matt. 261–2; (1h) Mark 14:21 = Matt. 26:24 = Luke 22:22; (1i) Mark 14:41 = Matt. 26:45b; (1j) Luke 24:7.

262- *On the Resurrection* [2/1] : (1) Mark 12:18–27 = Matt. 22: 23–33 = Luke 20:27–40.

275- *The Empty Tomb* [2/1] : (1a) Mark 16:1–8 = Matt. 28:1–10 = Luke 24:1–11; (1b) John 20:1, 11–18; (1c) *Gos. Pet.* 11:44; 12:50–13:57.

These last four complexes and the preceding complexes 182, 183 and 185 do not fulfil the criteria of first stratum and/or multiple attestation and are, therefore, marked with a minus (-) in accordance with Crossan's method. The minus indicates that Crossan views these complexes not as historical or symbolic events but rather as products of the Jesus tradition.

In Crossan's inventory there are four chronological layers or strata (1991a:427–34). Sources of relevance for our study in the first stratum (30–60 CE) are: *First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* and *Cross Gospel* (embedded in the *Gospel of Peter*). To Crossan this first stratum has tremendous importance because it is chronologically closest to the time of the historical Jesus. The second stratum (60–80 CE) yields the following source: *Gospel of Mark.* Sources in the third stratum (80–120 CE) are: *Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of Luke, Gospel of John I, Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas* and *Letters of Ignatius.* Lastly, sources relevant for our study in the fourth stratum (120–150 CE) are: *Gospel of John II, Gospel of the Nazoreans* and *Gospel of Peter.*

In the sections that follow Crossan's method will once more be tested as several important texts on the resurrection of Jesus, starting from Crossan's first stratum, are studied. Crossan will be assessed, firstly, in terms of data interpretation in the context of these sources, a context that was identified in §3.1.1 as the first frame of reference in data interpretation. Although the non-historicity of the key datum, the resurrection of Jesus, has already been established, Crossan must now demonstrate that the decision to interpret the claim 'Jesus is risen' metaphorically is reinforced and

corroborated from the context of the intra- and extracanonical sources on the resurrection of Jesus. Hence, in the sections that follow Crossan will offer historical explanations as to why the literary tradition on the resurrection of Jesus emerged and why virtually all its data are not testimony, but evidence: they do not reveal an authentic historical core, even though they throw light on the wider subject of research (see §2.4.2.4). It will be our task to evaluate these explanations.

Crossan's method will, secondly, be assessed in terms of his gospel presuppositions and the role he assigns to transmissional analysis.

3.2.2 First Stratum (1): First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

3.2.2.1 Introduction

There is general consensus that the summary statement of the 'gospel' in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15 is a transmitted, pre-Pauline tradition of a very early date. But despite this fact, Crossan identifies only two data mentioned in the verses 3–9 as historical events: Jesus' death (15:3b) and the appearance to Paul (15:8). This can partly be explained from the nature and structure of this formula. As a creed these verses are primarily theological in character and the added tags 'for our sins', 'on the third day' and 'according to the scriptures' (15:3–4) indicate that the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is informed, even, or maybe especially (!), at this early stage, by the language, motifs and stories of the scriptures of Israel. Aitken (2004:31) refers to this process as the *performance* of the scriptures. The scriptures perform, not by functioning as proofs or testimonies, but by providing the language and patterns for the new story about Jesus whom the early Christians now recognise as the embodiment of the true Israel. Crossan describes this process more concretely as the scribal activity of early learned followers of Jesus who continue to experience Jesus' presence after the crucifixion via the option of *exegesis*, one of several legitimate ways to experience the risen Lord (1994a:169). At the heart of it is the procedure of 'historicizing' prophecy, not in the sense that prophecy *confirms* current events (of this there are also examples in the gospels); rather, it *constitutes* these events (1991a:382). §3.2.3 that deals with the other first-stratum source, the *Cross Gospel,* will explain and evaluate the foundational and constitutive role that Crossan assigns to prophecy.

3.2.2.2 'Raised on the Third Day'

The statement 'that he was raised on the third day (in accordance with the scriptures)' in 1 Corinthians 15:4b is for Crossan an example of 'prophecy historicised'. It is frequently linked to Hosea 6:2[43] which later rabbinic sources understand in the context of the general resurrection (Evans 1970:49). Crossan points out that Hosea 6:2 conveys the promise that God will deliver and vindicate *soon*—this is what 'after two days…on the third day' means. It is a Hebrew poetic device. The background here is passion prophecy with the unmistakable dyad of persecution-vindication (1996:191).[44] According to Wright, several other Old Testament texts speak of 'the third day', understanding it too as the time when Israel's God will accomplish his work of salvation e.g. Gen 22:4; Gen 42:18; Ex 15:22; Ex 19:16; Jos 2:16; Jn 2:1 (2003:199). Aitken correctly concludes that 'raised on the third day' is a statement that betokens a network of associated passages and motifs (2004:31); it is, so to speak, dug from a rich scriptural quarry. When the gospel report of the guard at the tomb speaks about 'three days', there is still another dimension added: by Jewish reckoning a person can be declared dead, surely and irrevocably, only after three days. Hence the request for soldiers in the *Cross Gospel* and the *Gospel of Matthew* to guard the tomb for three days lest the disciples resuscitate Jesus and remove him. In light of this, it is not difficult to see why Hosea 6:2 became such a popular piece of passion prophecy for the early believers. Interpreted literally, like the gospel stories do, it speaks of deliverance that comes not *before* but *despite* death, despite having been dead for three days. It cannot be proven, however, that Paul in citing this traditional formula in about 53 CE knew about the empty tomb tradition and its particular use of the three-day motif. He makes no reference to any of the details of the empty tomb narrative. For Crossan this is proof that creedal statements precede creedal stories (1976:152); that passion prophecy precedes passion narrative (1996:123). The early formula of 1 Corinthians 15:4b expresses belief in the vindication of the persecuted and the divine

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[43] Hosea 6:1–2: [1]Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. [2]After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

[44] From the overall context of the prophecy of Hosea, Aitken (2004:33) concludes that the dyad can be defined more precisely as loosing and renewing the covenant, a pattern that is reenacted in Jesus' suffering, death and vindication.

acceptance of the crucified as the elect and holy one of God. Nothing more and nothing less.

3.2.2.3 Paul's Received Tradition and the Empty Tomb Tradition

There are others who maintain that a genetic connection between this early creedal statement and the later gospel stories can be established, since the creed also includes, 'that he was buried' (15:4a), an event recorded in the gospels.[45] In §3.2.4.10 the burial of Jesus as historical event will be investigated. At this point, suffice it to say that the phrase 'that he was buried' could simply be a way of insisting that Jesus was truly dead. In this case the phrase would not lead forward into the following statement of the resurrection, but point backwards, underlining the reality of Jesus' death. It would thus function as a presupposition or presumption, rather than a tradition (Crossan 1999:17). Admittedly, this is one of Crossan's weaker links, but there are others who share his view, among them Wedderburn (1999:87), Lindars (1993:125) and Lüdemann (2004:61). Wright (2003:321) also recognises that the phrase can carry this nuance of meaning.

Underlying the painstaking attempt to separate Paul's received tradition from the empty tomb tradition is the concern to rank proclamation over story, not just chronologically but also theologically. In this Crossan is not alone. Against Cranfield's assertion (1990:171) that 'it would seem that there never was in the early church a belief in the resurrection which did not involve belief that the tomb was empty', Lindars (1986:91) and Eddy (1990:327) emphasise that the story of the empty tomb arose as a *consequence* of the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus, and not the other way round. The theological implication is that the bodily resurrection of Jesus can be upheld without the need to refer to an empty tomb as proof or, for that matter, the production of a corpse as disproof. In this way, the crudely literal notion of the resurrection can finally be 'laid to rest.' §3.2.4.6 will summarise and evaluate Crossan's historical conclusions with regard to the empty tomb tradition.

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[45] Among those who propose a genetic connection are N. T. Wright (2003:321) and Martin Hengel whom Lüdemann (2004:71) quotes: 'this statement of time [in 1 Cor 15:4b: "on the third day"] is connected with the date of the discovery of the empty tomb.' Lüdemann, in agreement with Crossan, denies any genetic connection between 1 Cor 15:4 and the narrative about the discovery of the empty tomb (2004:72).

3.2.2.4 The List of Appearances

Leaving aside for a moment burial, tomb and raising, Paul's received tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 also speaks of two appearances of Jesus: the appearance to Peter or Cephas (which is referred to in Mark 16:7[46] and Luke 24:34 but not described) and the appearance to the Twelve (verse 5). The appearances that follow in the verses 6–7 are additions by Paul; they do not form part of the kernel tradition (Lüdemann 2004:41). Paul closes the list with the appearance of Christ to himself (verse 8). Many scholars agree that for the received tradition and for Paul these appearances functioned as primary testimony to the resurrection of Jesus and as basis for the original Easter faith. Lüdemann (2004:138) expresses the importance of the appearances as follows: 'at the beginning of early Christian faith stood visions of the "Risen One," visionary experiences that led to perceiving a formerly dead person as being alive.' Lindars (1993:127, 133) describes the appearances as experiences of the present reality of Jesus who is risen from the dead, exalted as Messiah to God's right hand and reserved in heaven to be God's agent in the imminent general resurrection and judgment. Lindars thus views the appearances as apparitions of the exalted Lord and he assumes that the majority of them took place in Galilee, not Jerusalem (1986:93). Most importantly, they triggered off the proclamation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus (1986:92).[47] Lüdemann (2004:35), Spong (1994:53) and Zwiep (1997:131, 143) agree with Lindars that the traditions which have Jesus appear *from heaven* where he has already assumed heavenly status are the older ones; reports that allow Jesus time on this earth, being somehow bodily present until the ascension, are of a later date. As far as the nature of these experiences is concerned, Lindars chooses not to dogmatise about it. He regards the appearances as profound religious experiences in view of the immediate results they produced, yet he leaves it open whether these appearances involved normal, subjective or objective vision

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[46] Crossan does not interpret Mark 16:7 as foreshadowing a post-resurrection appearance but rather the parousia appearance in line with Markan redactional theology (1999:16). See §3.2.4.3

[47] Lindars sees a clear relation between resurrection and exaltation: exaltation means that Jesus' soul has been raised to God's right hand, i.e. to a place of equality with God himself. But by virtue of Jesus' being the agent of the general resurrection, it is assumed that his body has risen too as the firstfruits. In the early Jewish-Christian milieu raising from the dead and ascending into heaven are often viewed as one act (1993:129–30). See also §3.2.3.4.

(1986:92).[48] Wright chooses to be much more exact and he emphasises that the witnesses saw, with their own physical eyes, the risen Jesus in his own transphysical body (2003:383, 398). The distinctions 'objective' and 'subjective' Wright does not find very helpful and he makes no use of them (2003:323). Spong describes the visions as real and non-delusional: Jesus really appeared, even though it was from the realm of God, a realm that is not within history (1994:256). Lüdemann's stance is clear but drastic: he interprets all apparitions or 'christophanies' as psychological phenomena (2004:81). It falls outside the scope of this thesis to analyse and evaluate Lüdemann's psychogenic explanation of the appearances. Suffice it to say that his 'subjective vision hypothesis' based on contemporary findings of depth psychology cannot be dismissed lightly, given the nature of the evidence we have (Carnley 1997:35). Relevant for our discussion right now, however, is Lüdemann's basic argument that the appearances—regardless of the fact that he views them as cases of self-deception and shared hallucinatory fantasy—played a decisive role in the rise and expansion of the Easter faith. Lüdemann's historical reconstruction of Peter's life 'after Easter' illustrates this: Peter, overcome by remorse, experienced a vision of Jesus not long after Good Friday and this event led to an extraordinary chain reaction. He reconstituted the circle of the Twelve in Galilee where his vision became the impulse for further appearances—and whereas he had experienced the apparition of Jesus as reacceptance by the one whom he had denied; the other disciples experienced it as forgiveness for their desertion (2004:174). Even the natural brothers of Jesus got caught up in the excitement and Jesus' brother, James, received an individual vision. Then, most likely as a result of his vision, Peter was appointed to a position of prominence in the early Christian community in Jerusalem. The appearance to more than five hundred brothers at one time was an occurrence of mass ecstasy in the early period of the Christian community. The event behind Acts 2:1–4 could well be combined with it (2004:73, 81). Lüdemann concludes that Peter's vision of Jesus was of paramount importance for the origin of the belief in Jesus' resurrection. In fact, the appearance to Peter could well have led to the confession that God raised Jesus from

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[48] Davis (1997:127) proposed these three categories of seeing. A subjective vision is usually called a hallucination, whereas an objective vision or 'graced seeing' refers to a situation where one person has been enabled by God to see the real and objective presence of a thing while others lack this ability.

the dead (2004:32). The only other person who had a similar immediate or *primary* experience of the 'Risen One' was Paul (2004:44).

3.2.2.5 Appearances and the Origins of Christianity

It is clear that Lüdemann, like Wright (see §3.1.4), parts ways with Crossan when it comes to explaining the origins of the Easter faith, which is tantamount to explaining the origins of Christianity. Over against Lüdemann's statement that 'the discovery of the faith in Jesus' resurrection is really the quest for the origin and nature of the two transformational experiences of Peter and Paul' (2004:154), stand the words of Crossan: 'It is not sufficient to say that the vision of a dead man birthed Christianity' (1998a:xxi). And, 'apparitions of Jesus do not constitute resurrection (2003a:47).' Crossan, in other words, does not accept a foundational role for the appearances of Jesus in the early Christian community nor does he see a logical development from these appearances to the proclamation of the resurrection. But then, how does Crossan interpret the data in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8? Crossan accepts the apparition of Jesus to Paul as historical event and calls it an 'entranced experience of the risen Jesus' (1994a:169), that is, a subjective vision.[49] But—Crossan hastens to add— trance does not furnish new information nor creates the raw materials of faith, but only confirms or enforces what was already there. At the time of the vision, Paul knew the Christian sect well enough to persecute it. The revelation of the risen Jesus caused Paul to undergo a 'dissociative' experience (1994a:168): what he had persecuted most vehemently in the Christian sect (the opening of Judaism to the pagans), he now accepted as his destiny (to become the apostle of the pagans). It is clear, Crossan downplays the formative significance of Paul's revelation even though he cannot deny its historicity due to the fact that there is multiple attestation for this event (see Ac 9:3– 4, 22:6–7, 26:13–14; Gl 1:16 and possibly 2 Cor 12:2–3). Moreover, how else could Paul's reversing stance from persecutor to advocate be explained? There was no life(- style) of Jesus for Paul to be radically changed by, because Paul never knew the historical Jesus.

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[49] Crossan does not equate subjective vision with hallucination (cf. Buckley, Crossan & Craig 1998:63). Borg (1998:122–3) who says that his position is quite similar to Crossan's says the following about visions: 'I think visions can be true; unlike Craig, I never put them in the same category as hallucinations.'

Does Crossan also consider the other appearances in the list as 'historical' events? (Appearances as understood by Crossan and Lüdemann are visionary events and they may to that degree be termed historical.) In verses 5–8 Paul uses the same expression, 'appeared to' or 'was seen by' for all instances, thereby equating his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. But for Crossan this does not mean that Paul equates the mode or manner of his experience with that of the others, only its validity and legitimacy (1994a:169). The point of this text is, there is *I* and there is *they,* but we are all alike apostles (1996:204). So, the interest here is not primarily in apparition and trance but in authority and power. When Crossan compares this passage with the apparition stories in the closing chapters of the gospels, he arrives at the following conclusion:

> What are often taken in the last chapters of the New Testament gospels, as entranced revelations, simply because of the analogy with Paul, are not such at all. They bear no marks of such phenomena (no blinding light, nobody knocked to the ground, no heavenly voices) but are rather quite deliberate political dramatizations of the priority of one *specific leader* over another, of this *leadership group* over that *general community.* Those stories, then, are primarily interested not in trance and apparition but in power and authority. They presume rather than create the Christian community; they are about how it will continue, not how it began. They detail the origins of Christian leadership, not the origins of Christian faith (1994a:169–70).

Other scholars, among them Lüdemann (2004:41) and Wedderburn (1999:116), readily agree that appearances of Jesus were used in the early Christian community to defend apostolic authority. This function can clearly be inferred from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:1: 'Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' But the question is whether this is the main emphasis in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. For one, the appearance of Jesus to more than five hundred at one time (verse 6) cannot be explained in the sense of leader authorization. There simply was no authoritative body of five hundred for whose status this collective experience was formative (Wedderburn 1999:117). Lüdemann concludes that when it comes to this appearance any a-historical, non-ecstatic interpretation comes to grief (2004:175). Moreover, the addition in the same verse, 'most of whom are still living' indicates that the thrust of verses 5–8 is about evidence, about witnesses that could be called and that could vouch for something that actually happened, which some in Corinth seemingly denied. (This is what the wider context of 1 Corinthians 15 is all about!) And

the addition 'at one time' in verse 6a attempts to intensify the objectivity: more than five hundred witnesses together could hardly all have been deluded. Therefore, the most important purpose for Paul in presenting the list of appearances seems to be providing historical proof of the resurrection. Wright (2003:325), Wedderburn (1999:117) and Lüdemann (2004:41) stress this fact, but Crossan makes no mention of it.

It follows that Crossan's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 is not altogether convincing because there is a disregard for the immediate context. Still, Crossan has his reasons for not granting apparitions a dominant place in his historical reconstruction of earliest Christianity, and we briefly list them here. Firstly, from the viewpoint of cultural context, post-mortem apparitions were common possibilities in the first century and they are still recognised as such today. Most probably, there were apparitions of Jesus to some of his companions after his death, but apparitions of Jesus do not constitute resurrection; they do not require a body. To single out these experiences, or a few of them, and to offer them as the primary explanation for the origin and rise of the Easter faith is attaching more weight to these phenomena than they actually merit.

Secondly, the apparition tradition is not as well attested as is generally assumed. This is what the sources yield: the 'Life Tradition' (1998a:xxxiv) with its emphasis on the sayings of Jesus and on living within the kingdom of God is silent on the matter of Jesus' death, resurrection and subsequent appearances. The *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Q Gospel* belong to this tradition. In Crossan's inventory they are both first-stratum sources for their original layers. The faith of Thomas and the Q community is all about imitating Jesus and Wisdom's truest life-style. If these believers were told that they had lost their faith on Good Friday and had it restored by apparitions on Easter Sunday, it would make no sense to them. In another first-stratum source, the *Cross Gospel*, Jesus' resurrection, (one) apparition and ascension are combined. But Jesus' appearance is not to his followers but to his enemies. The purpose is vindication. The *Gospel of Mark,* a second-stratum source, deliberately avoids risen apparitions. For this gospel writer and his community chapter 16:8 is the appropriate conclusion amidst trials and suffering. There are to be no appearances between Jesus' passion and imminent *parousia*, only an empty tomb.

It is not until we get to the *Gospel of Matthew*, the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Gospel of John,* all third-stratum sources, that apparitions feature prominently in the

resurrection narratives. Unfortunately, it turns out to be very difficult to reconcile Paul's list of people in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 with those of the evangelists and it is just as difficult to reconcile the gospel accounts among themselves. The appearance to Cephas, listed first in Paul's received tradition, is not reported in detail by any of the evangelists, unless one accepts certain stories in the gospels as Easter narratives that are reassigned to Jesus' lifetime, such as Luke 5:1–11 and Matthew 16:17–19 (Lüdemann 2004:154). Luke 5:1–11 is a nature miracle and it reoccurs as an apparition story in John 21:2–8. Crossan concludes that these two stories are separate versions of one narrative. How much of them is historical accuracy, redactional theology, or visualisation of hierarchy is difficult to decide. Crossan's verdict is: it is quite likely that these and other similar gospel accounts are not describing visions at all (1998a:xx); rather, they detail origins of Christian leadership (1994a:170).

There is a third reason why Crossan does not view literal and historical apparition as the dominant experience of earliest Christianity and it follows upon the previous one. The sources just mentioned reveal that the continued presence of Jesus was experienced differently in different strands of earliest Christianity. Crossan recognises three of them: trance (primary only for Paul), life-style and exegesis (1994a:169). Crossan views these as three separate but valid options for different groups within earliest Christianity and a historical reconstruction must give equal weight to each one of them. Apparition is but one experience of the risen Jesus. This is Crossan's conclusion after he has controlled and interpreted *all* data on the appearances as honestly as he could.

Lüdemann responds to the above as follows: firstly, Crossan underestimates the shock of Good Friday, and his undue emphasis on the life of Jesus together with a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection do not do justice to what the early Christians actually believed (2004:14). For them the confession that God raised Jesus from the dead had a reference point in history and yes, Easter *was* decisive (2004:173). To revert to the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Q Gospel* for 'life-style Christianity' is dubious because a considerable portion of the *Gospel of Thomas* reflects an earlier apocalyptic tradition (2004:180). Secondly, Peter's vision is better attested than Crossan is willing to admit which means that the case for this event's

decisive role in the rise of the Easter faith is given a boost.[50] Thirdly, granted that Paul's list in 1 Cor 15:5–8 carries political overtones, why must this *exclude* the historical and ecstatic character of the apparitions (2004:185)? Fourthly, trance and reflection (or 'exegesis') are not mutually exclusive. Apparition of Jesus can constitute resurrection. Peter's faith started as a vision and developed into faith in the 'Risen One'. After the revelation and upon reflection, Paul, a trained Pharisaic theologian, designed Christ as the 'first-fruits of the risen dead' (2004:174). Hengel's words (as cited by Lüdemann) are of relevance here: 'during these momentous months of beginning … many movements and discoveries alongside and with each other and sometimes confusingly "through each other" were possible (2004:180).' Therefore, Crossan's compartmentalization of earliest Christianity is too rigid.

It is not improbable, however, that Crossan's uneasiness with the apparitions mainly springs from fear: if the central role of Peter's vision in the rise of the Easter faith is acknowledged and if at the same time this vision is explained in terms of modern psychology as a self-deceptive, self-induced case of unsuccessful mourning (Lüdemann 2004:163), then one ends up, ontologically speaking, with a 'risen Jesus' in the memory of the disciples only, a mere fancy of the mind, and a Jesus of Nazareth who is dead and who remains dead somewhere in the close vicinity of Golgotha. No wonder, Crossan clings to the *life* of the historical Jesus for meaning and substance of faith. But Lüdemann, insisting that Christian faith depends totally on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection for its existence, accepts the radical and extreme consequence of his resurrection-less historical reconstruction:

> For two thousand years an abiding faith in Jesus' resurrection has displayed enormous power, but because of its utter groundlessness we must now acknowledge that it has all along been a worldwide historical hoax (2004:190).

Lüdemann has been labelled 'a historical fundamentalist' and 'a radical historical critic who recklessly destroys religion' (2004:205). Unlike Crossan, he has no time for

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[50]According to Lüdemann, apart from Paul's received tradition, the appearance of Jesus to Peter is referred to in both Mark 16:7 and Luke 24:34 (the so-called 'cry of Easter-jubilation') and possibly in Luke 5:1–11 and Matthew 16:17-19 (2004:87, 154). Moreover, pre-Easter reports about Peter, i.e. the tension between him and Jesus (see Mk 8:33b) and his denial of Jesus, can be related hypothetically to Peter's visionary experience after Easter (2004:35).

a metaphorical or theological interpretation of the transcendental claim 'God raised Jesus from the dead.' To him, such an interpretation is nothing but a pale counterfeit that stands in stark contrast, if not contradiction, with the earliest Christian belief that assumed an act of God upon the dead body of Jesus (2004:198). A serious flaw in Lüdemann's reasoning, however, is that he uses terms like 'early Christians,' 'first Christians' and 'early Christian belief' (2004:14) too generally, as if he is speaking for early Christianity as a homogenuous whole. Yet he is not, because at a later point he admits:

> It is clear that almost from the beginning members of many Christian communities did not understand the resurrection literally, that is, as the resuscitation and/or transformation of a dead body. Rather, they understood the proclamation as a symbolic statement. Certainly this is true of Paul's converted Gentiles and, I am tempted to say, all Christians from the first generation whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally (2004:178).

But then, if resurrection as metaphor has such early credentials, why be so hard on those who today choose to interpret the resurrection of Jesus metaphorically? Crossan, in line with what the data yield, accepts a spectrum from the most literal to the most metaphorical then as now (2003a:55). Crossan argues that a metaphorical understanding of the raising of Jesus is legitimate, provided it is metaphorical of something beyond itself (see §3.1.5).

3.2.2.6 Recapitulation

Crossan's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 as 'prophecy historicised' is credible because the double 'according to the scriptures' clearly recalls the biblical basis that furnished the creative matrix for these earliest passion and resurrection formulas. As far as 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 is concerned, Crossan's rejection of the historicity of all apparitions except Paul's is debatable, not only in light of the nature of the available data—it is simply impossible to interpret all data on the appearances as dramatisations of authority—but also from Crossan's two main criteria of authenticity: the criterion of first stratum attestation and the criterion of multiple attestation. One learns from this that, even with an 'atomistic' historiographer like Crossan, sometimes the individual data have to be sacrificed on the altar of the meaningful whole! Lüdemann has presented some valid objections to Crossan's historical treatment of

the apparitions, even though his own argument is, as we saw, based on some key generalisations that cannot be justified from all the available data. Unfortunately, it is outside the scope of this thesis to evaluate his method and conclusions more thoroughly.

3.2.3 First Stratum (2): Cross Gospel (embedded in Gospel of Peter)

3.2.3.1 Introduction

When N. T. Wright (2003:596) wrote that 'the *Gospel of Peter* remains an enigma, but an enigma which need not materially affect our assessment of the four major accounts of Jesus' resurrection,' he summed up the ambivalent attitude of a considerable group of New Testament specialists today. Some in this group argue that the *Gospel of Peter* (an extracanonical passion-resurrection narrative) is wholly dependent upon the intracanonical gospels in line with Zahn, Swete and Vaganay (McCant 1978:12); others, like Brown (1987:337), warn against a simple notion of literary dependence on the canonicals, as the *Gospel of Peter* may also have drawn from oral memory of these gospels and from non-canonical oral traditions. When it comes to dating these non-canonical oral traditions, several in the 'Brown' camp concede, surprisingly so, that some of these traditions may *antedate* the intracanonical gospels and thus contain primitive material.[51] Yet by no one is there an attempt to identify this primitive material and to discuss its impact on the historical-critical study of the passion-resurrection narratives in the New Testament gospels. It seems that within this group there is a silent, a priori consensus that the *Gospel of Peter* must not be allowed to influence final conclusions. At best the text is called 'a window into popular Christianity of the 1st half of the 2nd century' (Brown 1987:339); at worst it is called 'little more than a blend of details from the four intracanonical gospels, especially from Matthew, that has been embellished with pious imagination, apologetic concerns and a touch of anti-Semitism' (Charlesworth & Evans 1994:511).

Crossan is part of another group. This group includes scholars who explicitly state that the *Gospel of Peter*, though possibly influenced in its final stages by the

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[51] See Charlesworth & Evans (1994:514) who do not rule out this possibility. Brown (1987:337) concedes to the *Gospel of Peter* having drawn on non-canonical (oral) traditions also available to Matthew. McCant (1978:115) and Craig (1997:251) admit that the *Gospel of Peter* may contain some independent tradition but they refrain from dating it.

intracanonical gospels, preserves an older text or texts, independent of those gospels.[52] This group also attempts to identify this primitive material and assess the evidence it provides concerning the development of the tradition regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus. Crossan identifies it as one text, the *Cross Gospel*, now embedded and discernible in the *Gospel of Peter*, and used by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, with the last three also dependent on Mark (1996:10). Helmut Koester identifies the primitive material as two texts now lost but preserved in their oldest form in the *Gospel of Peter*: the passion narrative and the account of a resurrection-epiphany (1980:126, 129).

In the sections that follow Crossan's two basic and interconnected premises with regard to the *Cross Gospel* will be examined. The first premise concerns the nature and genre of the *Cross Gospel.* Crossan calls it a consecutive passion-resurrection narrative that is not history remembered but prophecy historicised. It is clear that this first premise renders non-historical most events described in the *Cross Gospel*. The fact that the actual event of the resurrection of Jesus is mythological in character adds force to this interpretation. After all, the transcendental claim that Jesus descended into *Sheol* after which he ascended into heaven with the liberated saints Crossan must interpret metaphorically and theologically, as he does with all other transcendental claims (see §3.1.4). Still, Crossan has to provide a historical explanation for the emergence of this text. He has, in other words, to decide what *Sitze im Leben* provided the context for the generation of this narrative. The second premise is actually a gospel presupposition: the passion-resurrection narratives of the New Testament gospels are dependent on the *Cross Gospel*. For Crossan, the *Cross Gospel* is the first and the only first-stratum passion-resurrection narrative available on which the others are based; a conclusion, no doubt, that impacts greatly on his ultimate reconstruction of the Easter events. After the study and critique of these two basic premises, the focus will shift to the actual resurrection scene in the *Cross Gospel.* Crossan's premises will be tested by means of this passage. Questions will

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[52] The first scholar to defend both the canonical dependence and independence of the *Gospel of Peter* was Adolf von Harnack in 1892. Helmut Koester went one step further and defended the independence of the *Gospel of Peter* from the canonical gospels. He was followed by two of his students, Johnson and Hutton (Crossan 1998a:484–5). Crossan's position is similar to that of Harnack and has been worked out in detail in his works *Four Other Gospels* (1985), *The Cross that Spoke* (1988) and *Who Killed Jesus?* (1995).

be asked such as: in what way can this resurrection scene be considered a text of passion prophecy? And: are we provided with clues that this resurrection narrative is the earliest one available on which the others are based? In order to answer this second question issues with regard to tradition-criticism and early Christian theology will be explored.

3.2.3.2 The Constitutive Role of Prophecy

For a historical reconstruction of the last hours of Jesus' life Crossan proposes that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of their leader's crucifixion, death and burial. They fled after the latter's arrest and the only eyewitnesses from within Jesus' inner circle on the hill of Golgotha were some women who 'looked on from a distance' (Mk 15:40). Therefore, what we have now in those detailed passion accounts is not *history remembered* but *prophecy historicised* (1994a:145). For Crossan 'prophecy historicised' means that Jesus is embedded within a biblical pattern of corporate persecution and communal vindication (1998a:521). It is the procedure of interpreting the meaning of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Chosen One, through the stories of Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon; through the songs of the suffering servant of Isaiah; through the psalms of lament; through the prophecies of, among others, Zechariah; and through the rituals of the festivals.[53] In the process, Old Testament scripture and the events of Jesus' life and death begin to interweave, and now the process is not just apologetic and illustrative, but constitutive and foundational (1991a:382): scripture must indeed validate Jesus' death as divine necessity, but beyond that, it is called upon to construct the very memory of Jesus' death (Aitken 2004:169). Finally, in order to assist this communal memory, historicised narratives are created out of these scriptural complexes and the development from historical passion to scriptural (or prophetic) passion to narrative passion is complete.

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[53] Bauckham (1983:41) explains that underneath this procedure is the presupposition that there is a consistency about God's acts in the history of his people, so that similar situations and events constantly recur. Spong (1994:20) puts it as follows, 'when one enters the scriptures, one must abandon linear time.' For Spong this is midrash, and the proper 'midrash question' is, 'What was there about Jesus of Nazareth that required the meaning of his life to be interpreted through the stories of the sacred past (1994:11)?'

Crossan's proposal that from a very early stage Old Testament texts had a creative influence on the formation of the passion-resurrection story was already put forward by Dibelius in the 1930s, even though Dibelius was not as sceptical about the possibility of historical information for the passion as Crossan is today (Green 1990:357). Jürgen Denker completed an important work on the *Gospel of Peter* in 1975 in which he demonstrated that almost every sentence of this gospel's passion narrative was composed on the basis of scriptural references. Helmut Koester (1980:127) supports Denker's findings and explains how one's views on the origins and nature of the passion narratives are challenged by them:

> If one assumes that there was once an older historical report which was later supplemented with materials drawn from scriptural prophecy, the *Gospel of Peter* with its rich references and allusions to such scriptural passages will appear as secondary and derivative. There are, however, serious objections to this hypothesis. Form, structure, and life situation of such a historical passion report and its transmission have never been clarified. The alternative is more convincing: … The very first narratives about Jesus' suffering and death would not have made the attempt to remember what actually happened. Rather, they would have found both the rationale and the content of Jesus' suffering and death in the memory of those passages in the Psalms and the Prophets which spoke about the suffering of the righteous.

Koester and Crossan agree on the constitutive role of prophecy in the formation of the passion narrative(s), since a constitutive role for history and memory cannot be clarified. However, there are scholars for whom the idea of prophecy historicised replacing historical recall is simply too radical and unsettling. In line with Dibelius, Marcus (1995:213) opts for what he calls 'a nuanced position': the original narrative was only *partially* created out of Old Testament texts. Marcus summarises his position in rather unclear wording:

> The early Christians remembered certain details about Jesus' death because they believed them to have been prophesied in the scriptures. Once having made the connection with the scriptures, however, they discovered, other, related OT passages that, in their view, *must* have been fulfilled in his death as well—and so they created narratives in which they *were* fulfilled (1995:213).

Fuller (1991:72) in a book review of Crossan's *The Cross that Spoke* (1988) expresses appreciation for Crossan's contribution in demonstrating the extent to which

Old Testament prophecy and typology have shaped all the passion and resurrection traditions, but asks:

> Need we therefore conclude that the post-Easter community knew nothing beyond the bare fact of Jesus' execution? Surely it was the scandalous nature of the facts which led the early community to explain them in the light of the OT scriptures? This is still the case even if we grant, as we must, that some of the details of the story were invented in the light of the scriptures.

Fuller, like Marcus, wants to maintain a notion of a core of historical reminiscence beyond the facts of arrest, crucifixion and death. Crossan, on the other hand, is convinced that not just 'some of the details of the story' but all the individual units, the general sequences and the overall frames of the passion-resurrection narrative were derived not from history remembered but from prophecy historicised (1996:4). Crossan observes that on all three of these narrative levels, biblical models and scriptural precedents have controlled the story to the point that without them nothing is left but the barest facts, almost as in Josephus and Tacitus. These 'barest facts' are the 20 percent history remembered (1996:11): arrest, execution and death by crucifixion.[54] Crossan describes the other 80 percent as a single sequential and coherent passion-resurrection narrative with prophecy once and for all historicised (1996:12). This story originated from among circles of very literate and exegetically skilled followers of Jesus who began an intense search in the scriptures similar to that at Qumran and in the *Epistle of Barnabas* in order to find meaning in Jesus' death and ultimately, to find faith and identity for the group (1996:12). Somebody, in an act of religious genius, took the prophetic texts that the searching of the scriptures had yielded and combined these into a coherent story to suit popular memory (1996:12).[55]

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[54] Aitken's conclusion is similar: 'most of the passion narrative can be demonstrated to be the product of scriptural reflection and interpretation. If all that remains of an "earliest account" after such an analysis is a marker of events—"Jesus was arrested, was executed and died"—we must ask whether this is actually a story and whether such a statement could of itself generate narrative. I maintain that it could not; rather we must inquire into the generating principles and building blocks available to speak of Jesus' suffering and death' (2004:12).

[55] In a later work (*The birth of Christianity*) Crossan changes his theory somewhat and proposes that 'in the Jerusalem community the female lament tradition turned the male exegetical tradition into a passion-resurrection story once and for all for ever' (1998a:573). See also §3.2.3.7.

Crossan identifies this single and independent source—with the prophetic texts as a now hidden substratum—as the *Cross Gospel*, because in this gospel prophecy historicised appears at its most original and primitive (cf. Koester 1980:126). The New Testament gospel writers used this source, all the while adapting and developing its units (1996:24). They too had access to ongoing passion prophecy (1996:128).

In his books *The Cross that Spoke* (1988) and *Who Killed Jesus?* (1995) Crossan provides many instructive test cases that illustrate the movement from prophetic text to 'historical' event e.g. the creation of the trial of Jesus from Psalm 2; the abuse of Jesus in the form of 'nudging with a reed' as derived from the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement; the gall and vinegar episode on the cross as derived from Psalm 69:21; and the burial, in the *Cross Gospel* by enemies before nightfall, in obedience to Deuteronomy 21:22–23. For Crossan each one of these instances corroborates the hypothesis that in the beginning there was biblical prophecy, not historical event. And closest to biblical passion prophecy is the *Cross Gospel* which can therefore be considered the earliest and most original version (1996:147). The other evangelists adapted and/or developed this version for their own specific purposes, be it theology, polemics or sheer narrative force (1996:100). What they added, in other words, was their own redactional modification; for narrative sequences and overall framework they relied heavily on the *Cross Gospel.* The result is a number of stories that are remarkably similar in general sequence and content but that vary considerably in detail, sometimes to the point of contradicting each another. It is a matter of other versions, other purposes (1996:112). These are stories made right for the past time of Jesus (prophecy historicised) and/or made right for the present time of one's own audience (prophecy actualised and popularised). Crossan views them as popular storytelling (1996:154) and at times Christian propaganda (1996:152).

But, one may ask, can nothing in this whole process be attributed to memory, even bad or selective memory? Crossan does not think so. If the passion-resurrection story had been there as history remembered, one would have seen versions of it all over the various strands of tradition, including the Q gospel and the *Gospel of Thomas.* However, independent versions of it can hardly be found. To Crossan this is proof that the passion-resurrection story does not stem from history remembered. And as was said earlier, if one takes away biblical models, prophetic fulfilment and redactional modification, one is left with the barest facts of crime, arrest, execution and death. This is the 20 percent that Crossan allows as historical fact. Whether *we* prefer

historical detail to 'prophetic fulfilment' or whether *we* disapprove of apologetic or polemical motives colouring the text is not what counts here. What matters is what interested those first Christians and what those first Christians did (1996:4).[56] Those who pronounce parts of the passion-resurrection story history while they admit to other parts being created from prophecy must argue from the criteria of authenticity that they employ which parts are history and which parts are creative tradition. Those who maintain that the gospel writers moved from history to text and not vice versa must prove from case studies in the gospels that this is what actually took place, similarly to what Crossan has done to prove his point.[57] Unfortunately, not enough progress has been made in this regard as one author in the 'history remembered' camp, R. T. France, readily admits in a work called *Studies in Midrash and Historiography*:

> If we want to know what the gospel writers thought they were doing, our primary line of approach must be what we actually find in the gospels. Perhaps this is too obvious to mention, but some recent scholarship has not obviously given the appropriate weight to this primary evidence. Indeed this volume too is perhaps at fault here … we have not dealt adequately with the actual data of the gospel text. It is surely here that future work must be focused (1983:295).

In her recent work *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory* (2004), Aitken writes that she is in fundamental agreement with Crossan that the story of Jesus' passion arose out of the scriptures of Israel. However, Aitken questions Crossan's dependence on scribal exegesis as the vehicle for the formation of this story

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[56] Consider for instance the exegetical technique of overexact fulfillment of Hebrew parallelism. Two examples of the use of this technique are Matthew 27:34, 48 (gall *and* vinegar) and John 19:23–4 (dividing garments *and* casting lots). This technique was employed to show the audience that God's guiding hand was behind every incident in Jesus' death. Marcus (1995:212) admits that this technique and other embellishments drawn from the OT raise questions about the historicity of the passion narratives.

[57] This is exactly where scholars like Green and Eddy are falling short. They do not build up their argument from case studies in the gospels. While admitting that more work needs to be done (cf. France 1983:295!), Green (1990:358) asserts that the study of the various genres of Second-Temple Judaism is already suggesting that the direction of influence was from event to biblical text, from history to prophecy. This is also the conclusion of Eddy (1997:282) who in a footnote of his essay lists several works that argue that post-biblical Jewish historiography and exegesis *generally* moved from history to text and not vice versa. But what about the gospels? See also §3.2.3.7.

(2004:22). This brings us to the issue of the *Sitze im Leben* for the original passion-resurrection narrative(s). Aitken does not think that scholarly exegesis of the scriptures combined with ritual lament, resulting in one single independent source, the *Cross Gospel,* best explains all the evidence. Her hypothesis is that the story of Jesus' suffering and death developed as part of the cultic practice of various early Christian communities. This context included not just liturgical actions such as baptism and eucharist, but all acts of veneration of Jesus: stories told, songs sung and rituals performed (2004:16). In the process the cult legend and practices of Israel were transformed in terms of the cultic life of various early Christian communities with Jesus and his death as the new focus. Aitken calls this the 're-enactment' of the cult legend of Israel which entailed identification between the 'there and then' of scripture and the 'here and now' of the present situation of the community (2004:26). Scripture was actualised to say something about Jesus and his sufferings, as well as about the situation of the community. This is an important point: the performance of the memory of Jesus' death was closely related to the self-definition and constitution of the community (2004:16). And as a result, a multiformity of traditions on Jesus' suffering and death arose, each offering a view of a particular re-enactment or set of re-enactments of the central story or cult legend of Israel (2004:168). This multiformity is reflected in texts such as *Hebrews* and *Barnabas* but also in three independent but similar passion narratives in the gospels of Mark, John and Peter (2004:169). Aitken clearly does not limit the process of actualisation and re-enactment of Israel's story to the person or community that produced the *Cross Gospel.* To Crossan's credit it must be said that he also recognises this fact:

> Even when passion narrative had developed out of passion prophecy, that latter process continued on its own momentum and remained present as a permanent substratum. All the evangelists knew of its existence so that, no matter how dependent they were on one another for their narrative sequences, they all potentially had independent access to ongoing passion prophecy (Crossan 1996:127–8).

For Crossan the striking similarities in sequences and framework of all five passion narratives point to a single stream of tradition which flowed from the *Cross Gospel* into the intracanonical gospels. Moreover, redactional peculiarities of one writer are present in another, thus proving genetic relationships between the passion-

resurrection stories (1998a:565). Aitken, proceeding from a context of cultic practice, mostly oral in character, concludes that the similarities do not necessarily lead to the explanation of a single stream of tradition; the fact that the cult legend of Israel served as the fundamental form or occasion of each passion narrative can serve as an adequate explanation for the similarities (2004:169). Trocmé, anticipating Aitken, argued that the *Sitze im Leben* for the original passion-resurrection narrative is in relation to cultic practice, but unlike Aitken he concluded that all passion narratives go back to one archetype (1983:67).[58] At this point therefore, we allow Crossan's theory to stand. Whether a single-source theory is indeed 'the most economical working hypothesis which solves more problems than it creates (Crossan 1996:25),' and whether this source or 'archetype' can best be identified as the *Cross Gospel* (Crossan 1996:10) will have to be further assessed in the next section as the focus moves to the scene of the actual resurrection of Jesus in the *Cross Gospel.* Is Crossan able to argue for the priority of the *Cross Gospel* from the angles of early Christian theology and transmissional analysis?

3.2.3.3   *The Resurrection Story in the Cross Gospel*

For Crossan, the passage in the *Cross Gospel* that describes the actual resurrection of Jesus is the third act in a consecutive and independent three-act drama of juridical execution, guarded burial and visible resurrection (2003a:54). Such an independent, consecutive source (within the *Gospel of Peter*) Brown also concedes to, although his contains only two acts: guarded tomb and visible resurrection (Brown 1994:1305–7; see also 1301). In reply to Brown, Crossan argues that the story of the resurrection of Jesus could never have existed without some prior account about the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The most probable proposition is that this prior account is right there in the *Cross Gospel* preceding the units of guarded burial and visible resurrection (1998a:490). It follows that the *Cross Gospel* is not a collection of random oral traditions or scattered written fragments; it is an independent, extracanonical, consecutive narrative source describing the events from Jesus' trial all the way to the report of the guards and elders to Pilate. Such being the case, it should even be possible to detect this text's own redactional purpose (1998a:486), a purpose that, no

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[58] Trocmé defines the *Sitze im Leben* for the original passion-resurrection narrative as 'the worshipping life of a Christian community still influenced by Jewish customs' (1983:80).

doubt, also reveals itself in the resurrection account. This account runs from verses 9:34 to 10:42 and we quote it here in full:

> [9:34] Early in the morning, when the Sabbath dawned, there came a crowd from Jerusalem and the country round about to see the sepulchre that had been sealed. [9:35] Now in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers, two by two in every watch, were keeping guard, there rang out a loud voice in heaven. [9:36] and they saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw nigh to the sepulchre. [9:37] That stone which had been laid against the entrance to the sepulchre started of itself to roll and give way to the side, and the sepulchre was opened, and both the young men entered in. [10:38] When now those soldiers saw this, they awakened the centurion and the elders—for they also were there to assist at the watch. [10:39] And whilst they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, [10:40] and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. [10:41] And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, "Hast thou preached to them that sleep?" [10:42] and from the cross there was heard the answer, "Yea." (see Appendix)

According to Crossan this scene in the *Cross Gospel*, just like the preceding account of trial and crucifixion, has passion prophecy as its hidden substratum. But, one may ask, in what way can this passage be considered *prophecy historicised*? No specific prophetic text seems to have informed the story. For Crossan the answer to this question is not difficult to find. The texts and types in passion prophecy always looked to both persecution and vindication; to both suffering and triumph (1996:190). And so, the author of the *Cross Gospel* converted various passion prophecies into a single tale of vindicated innocence which is the heart of passion prophecy (1996:191). The background here is Jewish Christian wisdom and the genre or story pattern is that of court conflict in which the unjustly condemned is vindicated before the very eyes of his unjust accusers in the presence of a neutral ruler who thereupon confesses him (1988:334). Nickelsburg was the first to argue for the story pattern of the suffering and vindication of the righteous behind the composition of the passion narrative in Mark (cf. Aitken 2004:17); Crossan argues for the same with regard to the *Cross Gospel* (1998a:504). Within this pattern, vindication could occur before or after death but *before-death* vindication is the older and more dominant specification. The *Cross Gospel* is an attempt to realise this older variation. The enemies of Jesus (Roman soldiers and Jewish authorities) do not have to wait to see Jesus triumph in heaven or

at the *parousia*; his vindication takes place right before their eyes. After Jesus has died and descended into *Sheol* to liberate 'them that sleep,' he exits at their head as a transcendental figure who is sustained by two angels who had come down from heaven earlier. The three now walk out of the sepulchre followed by the freed righteous ones. These saints form a giant cruciform procession[59] and answer in the affirmative when a voice from heaven asks, 'Hast thou preached to them that sleep?' From a later canonical stratum in the *Gospel of Peter* it becomes clear that after these events Jesus takes the redeemed with him to heaven: ascension follows immediately upon resurrection with no interim period of risen appearances (1996:197). A 'young man' (verse 13:55) tells the women:

> [13:56] He is risen and gone. But if you do not believe, stoop this way and see the place where he lay, for he is not here. For he is risen and is gone to the place from which he was sent. (see Appendix)

3.2.3.4 *The Theology of the Cross Gospel*

The most important theological decision that the author of the *Cross Gospel* could make was his generic choice. According to Crossan (1988:297) genre is already theology. The genre of the *Cross Gospel* is that of the persecution and vindication of the righteous and this genre requires that both suffering and glory are interpreted in a corporate and communal sense. Therefore, in the *Cross Gospel* Jesus does not die alone. The implicit allusions in the passion account to prophetic texts that describe the suffering of Israel's persecuted righteous emphasise this communal aspect (Crossan 1998a:503). Neither does Jesus rise alone. After his descent into *Sheol* to deliver those imprisoned by death, he takes them with him to glory. Thus the holy and righteous ones of Israel are always present in Jesus' suffering and vindication: he dies

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[59] Daniélou writes that the cross in Jewish-Christian theology is a reality in its own right. It is often made to play an active part like a living being. This is also the case here in the *Gospel of Peter* (1964:266). The cross follows Jesus out of the tomb and is able to speak. Wright (2003:595) thinks that Crossan has been overcreative in interpreting the cross here as a procession of freed saints. But Crossan considers this interpretation plausible, since the question from heaven is addressed to Jesus but answered by the cross (1988:386). Whatever the case, it is clear from the question 'Hast thou preached to them that sleep?' that the context here is Jesus' descent into *Sheol* to proclaim deliverance to the righteous and holy ones.

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in their pain, they rise in his glory (1998a:504). In very real terms all of this forms part of an early theological vision held by Jewish Christians who cared about the destiny of those who had suffered and died before Jesus. This concern found expression in the belief that from earliest Christianity is referred to as the Descent into Hell or the Harrowing of Hell—a belief barely visible in a few places in the New Testament, although still enshrined in the Apostles' Creed with the words 'he descended into Hell' (Crossan 1996:196). The *Cross Gospel* attempts to fit this belief into a sequence of historical events in the verses 10:41–42: 'And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, "Hast thou preached to them *that sleep* (italics mine)?" and from the cross there was heard the answer, "Yea."' The evangelist Matthew makes a similar attempt in his gospel, even though here the event is visualised as a single-act drama: communal resurrection without immediate communal ascension, as if anticipating the general resurrection. And this remarkable, apocalyptic and, of course, symbolic event has its inception at the very moment of Jesus' death:

> The earth shook, and the rocks split. The tombs also were opened, and many of the bodies of the saints who *had fallen asleep* were raised. After the resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many (Mt 27:51b–53).

Another Jewish Christian text that Daniélou (1964:235) dates as 'very ancient,' the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah*, refers to the Descent into Hell with the following words:

> And the Lord God remembered His dead which were of Israel, those that *had fallen asleep* in the earth of the tomb, and He went down unto them to preach to them the good news of His salvation (Daniélou 1964:102).

Here the dead are expressly called 'of Israel', a clear indication that this work belongs to Jewish Christianity, expressing a Jewish-Christian concern. Daniélou (1964:234–6) concludes that the *Gospel of Peter* 10:41–42, Matthew 27:51b–53 and the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah* aim to resolve one theological dilemma: how can the generations of righteous Jews that died before Jesus be included within the scope of salvation that Jesus has brought about by his victory over death? The answer is of course provided in mythological terms by way of the 'story metaphor' of Jesus' descent into Hell. The answer, in other words, comes from the world of symbol, not from the world of time and space, and it is meaning that counts: Jesus is the

culmination of Israel's hopes; his resurrection is the decisive moment in salvation history. Crossan also describes the scene in the verses 10:41–42 of the *Cross Gospel* as 'serenely mythological' (1998a:489). Crossan emphasises that the vision of Jesus' proclamation of deliverance to those shut up in *Sheol* was early and it was soon pushed to the periphery of Christian theology because of its lack of appeal and its inherent problems: who exactly were freed? Did they have to become Christians first and receive baptism? If resurrection and ascension coincide, as they must in the case of the *Cross Gospel's* portrayal of events, what about risen apparitions (authentications) and apostolic mandates (authorizations)? This last feature, resurrection-ascension as one event, doomed the *Cross Gospel* more than anything else (1996:197).

The resurrection scene in the *Cross Gospel* can indeed hardly be called a *resurrection* scene. Daniélou recognises that the *Cross Gospel* identifies Jesus' resurrection with his entry into heaven (as confirmed by this gospel in verse 13:56):

> the opening of the heavens, the elevation of the risen Christ on the angelic throne (the Jewish *merkabah*), the fact that his head reaches above the skies, all describe the resurrection in terms of a heavenly ascension (1964:249–50).

Eskola (2001:353) in his study on Jewish *merkabah* mysticism[60] agrees that early 'exaltation Christology' regarded resurrection as an act of enthronement in heaven. In fact, texts informed by this tradition often do not even mention resurrection. This does not mean that they regard the resurrection of Jesus as unimportant. By no means. However, this strand of Jewish-Christian theology prefers to express Jesus' exaltation from the point of view of ascension rather than that of resurrection, as its worldview is more cosmological than anthropomorphic (Daniélou 1964:249; cf. Zwiep 1997:143). The *Cross Gospel* is clearly an exponent of this early and Jewish Christology. Both spatially and temporally it does not distinguish between resurrection and ascension in its narrative. The descent into *Sheol* is immediately followed by the communal

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[60] The *merkabah* is the throne chariot of God. Eskola (2001:15) defines *merkabah* mysticism as 'throne mysticism.' By way of throne visions this tradition attempts to describe the heavenly palace (the Temple of God) and God sitting on his heavenly throne. Through ascent, privileged persons are escorted before God's throne of glory. Angelic intermediaries make services to God both in heaven and on earth (2001:6). Exaltation Christology turned the Jewish *merkabah* vision into a vision of the enthroned Christ (2001:289).

ascension with no intervening incident. Resurrection day is coronation day! Wright calls the idea that for the earliest Christians there was no difference between resurrection and exaltation/ascension a twentieth century fiction introduced by Bultmann (2003:625). What Wright may be overlooking here is this particular feature of exaltation Christology to identify resurrection with ascension, not so as to deny the resurrection, but in order to conceive of it in a unique way within the framework of Jewish-Christian sacred cosmology.

Another feature that stands out in the resurrection account of the *Cross Gospel* is its use of apocalyptic imagery to describe Jesus' resurrection (see verses 10:36–40): the heavens opened; the great noise in the sky; the immense size of Jesus to indicate his divinity; and the presence of the two heavenly beings in bright raiment whose function it is to escort Jesus. In view of this Johnson defines this story as an 'eschatological epiphany' (1965:82). The *Ascension of Isaiah,* an important early Christian work dated late first century, describes the resurrection of Jesus in very similar terms in chapter 3.16–20:

> And that (Gabriel) the angel of the Holy Spirit, and Michael, the chief of the holy angels, on the third day, will open the sepulchre; and the Beloved sitting on their shoulders will come forth and send out his twelve disciples; and they will teach all the nations and every tongue of the resurrection of the Beloved, and those who believe in his cross will be saved, and in his ascension into the seventh heaven whence he came (Johnson 1965:53).

Jesus is now *carried* by the two angels who are also named. He is clearly superior to them. Knight (1996:45) regards Jesus as already in the enthroned position here. Moreover, this text separates resurrection from ascension by placing the apostolic mandate in between those two events. This inevitably suppresses the communal aspect of the resurrection. In a later chapter of the *Ascension of Isaiah* (9.16–19) a distinction is made between Jesus' ascent from Hell on the third day and Jesus' ascension to the seventh heaven which will occur 545 days later! The sojourn of Jesus 'in this world' is conveniently prolonged to instruct and send forth the apostles as messengers of salvation.[61] It is clear, the *Ascension of Isaiah* intends to make up for

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[61] The theme of a fixed prolonged stay of the risen Christ on earth also appears in Luke's gospel in which the duration is 40 days. Gnosticism asserted that Jesus imparted the true *gnosis* to the disciples during the time between the resurrection and the ascension (Daniélou 1964:251–2).

the omission that doomed the *Cross Gospel*: it has prolonged Jesus' stay on this earth so as to give the apostles their official missionary mandate. We do not know whether the original *Gospel of Peter* included an apostolic mandate since it breaks off at verse 14:60. In any case, for the *Gospel of Peter* such renewed contact could only have been in the form of an appearance of the exalted Jesus from heaven whither he had already ascended. Crossan assumes that there is a common tradition behind the *Cross Gospel* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. He considers the theme of escorted and communal resurrection-ascension an antique one (1988:345).

Crossan's date for the *Cross Gospel* is early 40s and the provenance is the Jerusalem community.[62] We are now in a position to ask whether such an early date is justifiable from the perspective of the theology of the *Cross Gospel*. The inclusion of the descent into *Sheol* and the identification of resurrection with ascension both justify an early date (Daniélou 1964:21; Lindars 1993:129–30). The description of the risen Christ as sustained by two angels stems from *merkabah* imagery which, according to Daniélou, derives from the oldest stratum of Jewish Christianity, that of Palestine (1964:255). Therefore, in terms of theology, Crossan's date and place of origin for the *Cross Gospel* are plausible, although not absolutely necessary. The *Ascension of Isaiah* that shares a common matrix with the *Cross Gospel* dates from the late first century. And there is evidence for a (more developed) belief in the Descent into Hell in a work called the *Odes of Solomon* which is also generally dated late first century CE (Wright 2003:528). Why not accept a similar or slightly earlier date for the less elaborated *Cross Gospel* which clearly belongs within the same tradition as these two texts? Furthermore, Johnson (1965:7) and McCant (1978:120) argue for a date after 70 CE based on an apparent knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 7:25 of the *Cross Gospel*. Thus the evidence so far seems to point to a later date than proposed by Crossan. We therefore locate the *Cross Gospel* provisionally in the second or early third stratum (70–90 CE) of Crossan's inventory, rather than the first (30–60 CE). Does this cancel the priority of the *Cross Gospel* over the intracanonicals, especially Matthew? More about this in the next section.

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[62] Crossan dates the *Gospel of Peter*, the final composite document, around the middle of the second century CE with (western) Syria as place of origin (Crossan 1991a:433–4; cf. Daniélou 1964:21; Johnson 1965:124, 127).

3.2.3.5 The Priority of the Cross Gospel

Those who argue for intracanonical gospel priority call the *Gospel of Peter* 'a later conflated digest of the intracanonical tradition' (Crossan 1988:405). Brown thinks that the author of the *Gospel of Peter* had a knowledge of the intracanonical gospels, especially Matthew, even if that knowledge rested on having heard them, or once having read them (1987:339). We now want to test this theory and for this we turn to Matthew 28:1–6 (NASB). These verses read as follows:

> 1. Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; 4. and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. 5. And the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6. He is not here, for He is risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.'

This is an odd story. The time is the same as in the *Cross Gospel*: it is before sunrise and still dark. In verses 2 and 3 Matthew shows all the signs that an epiphany is going to take place, very similar to the one in the *Cross Gospel*: there are epiphanic features such as an earthquake and an angel who descends from heaven in bright raiment.[63] However, after having mentioned these features, Matthew suddenly breaks off the story line to make way for the account of the women at the tomb, following Mark. There is no Jesus egressing from the tomb; there is only the angel, sitting on the very stone that he has just rolled away. This angel tells the women that 'he (i.e. Jesus) is not here (verse 6).' And one is left with the confused realisation that Jesus must have arisen earlier through a still sealed tomb! There is also something notably strange about those guards 'who became like dead men (verse 4).' They reported 'all that had happened (Mt 28:11-NASB).' But what had they actually seen? In the *Cross*

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[63] The epiphanic feature of an earthquake is lacking in the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection account; it mentioned an earthquake earlier at the moment of Jesus' death (verse 6:21). Furthermore, while Matthew mentions only one angel, the *Cross Gospel* speaks of 'two men'. In Matthew the angel is very busy: he rolls away the stone and addresses the women; in the *Cross Gospel* the stone rolls away of its own accord. To Johnson these differences are further indication that the *Gospel of Peter* is not dependent on Matthew here (1965:76).

Gospel it says that they reported 'everything they had seen (verse 11:46).' In that story the guards had indeed witnessed something spectacular, namely the resurrection-ascension of Jesus. Johnson, who in his dissertation applied form-critical methods to the *Gospel of Peter*, aptly summarises what is going on here:

> While GP (*Gospel of Peter*) goes on in 10:39–42 to complete the description of the epiphany in a manner which has external support in AI (*Ascension of Isaiah*), in Mt 28:4 the special material is broken off suddenly. Just as one would expect the description of the critical situation to occur, the first evangelist returns fully to the account of the women at the tomb, following Mk … in Mt there is no description of the event suggested in the special material in both AI and GP. The epiphanic features—darkness, earthquake, light, descent of angel—all give promise of a resurrection account. But its subordination to the women at the tomb story has emasculated the epiphany and in its present state it functions simply as a handmaiden to the account of the women at the tomb (1965:84–5).

Crossan concludes that at this point Matthew is conflating the *Cross Gospel* and Mark (1988:352). Matthew knew the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection account, but as a redactor he omitted most of it here, leaving only the epiphanic features as residual traces. The resulting Matthean account is not smooth; it actually contains discrepancies. Matthew also left traces of the *Cross Gospel's* account in an earlier chapter (Mt 27:51b–53) to which he relocated the communal resurrection, as was shown earlier. And then there is the Transfiguration story in Mt 17:1–8 (cf. Mk 9:2–8). Arguing from the striking similarities between this story and the epiphanic resurrection account in the *Cross Gospel*, Crossan concludes that Mark transposed the latter into his transfiguration account with Matthew and Luke following him (1988:349). Since Matthew knew both stories, Crossan presumes that Matthew was aware of what Mark was doing here: retrojecting the epiphanic resurrection of the *Cross Gospel* back into the earlier life of Jesus (1988:349). Why Matthew decided to follow Mark in all of this is not clear. One could say that the Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20) was of crucial importance to him and for that he needed a prolonged stay of Jesus on this earth—a narrative detail that the resurrection-ascension account of the *Cross Gospel* lacks. Granted, but he could have solved that problem just like the *Ascension of Isaiah* did.

Those who argue for the priority of the intracanonical gospels realise that Mt 28:1–6 cannot be explained in terms of it. Matthew's account is truncated and awkward; it cannot have served as the prototype for the *Cross Gospel's* account. McCant, who

throughout his doctoral dissertation defends canonical gospel priority, has to allow for the possibility that here 'the two authors simply knew the same oral traditions and each shaped the data in his own way' (1978:57). While discussing Mt 27:51b–53 (a 'residual trace' from the *Cross Gospel*), even Wright admits that 'Matthew may perhaps know the tradition we find in the *Gospel of Peter*' (2003:634). And Brown after having noted that the resurrection account in the *Cross Gospel* is notably longer and more vivid concludes:

> Rather than explaining one account as directly dependent on the other, we may be dealing with another form of the same basic story.… GP may be presenting at a later period a more developed form of the story involving two angels that descend from heaven, Jesus preaching to the dead, and the ascent of Jesus with angels.… This story GP may have drawn not only from oral memories of Matt but also from other ongoing oral traditions similar to that received in Matt in an earlier stage (1987:337).

Brown and the others make a crucial concession here: Matthew and the *Cross Gospel* drew on common oral traditions. In other words, the *Cross Gospel* had access to and used primitive material that was also available to and 'good enough' for the intracanonical Matthew to include in his gospel (after the necessary editorial work, of course). Thus the same primitive material entered both an intra- and an extracanonical gospel. To McCant the more expanded version of the *Cross Gospel* indicates 'the abandonment of all restraint,' a clear sign that it is of a later date (1978:57). Still, the acknowledgement by Brown and McCant that common oral traditions were creatively used by both evangelists cancels *Cross Gospel* dependence, even though it is still a far cry from *Cross Gospel* priority! For Crossan, however, the evidence points to exactly the latter: Matthew 28:1–15 confirms his theory that the *Cross Gospel* is the single, independent passion-resurrection narrative that Matthew (and the other evangelists) used. Matthew, of course, also used Mark (1996:10). And wherever Matthew adapted a source, chose one source over the other, or departed altogether from his two sources, it was for redactional purposes, be it theology, apologetics, polemics or sheer narrative force. This is the heart of Crossan's work; it is the beating heart of a traditio-critical treatment of the gospels as dealt with in §2.4.2.7: similar materials are best explained, not by resorting to oral memory, but by affirming literary dependence among the sources and variation on a core. If unit A (the *source*) was used by unit B (the *redaction*), a continuing *tradition* was developing (1998a:93). As

early as 1976, Crossan wrote: 'One should not postulate divergent and independent traditions as methodological discipline, if textual differences can be *as easily* explained by redactional creativity on one and the same tradition' (1976:136). Therefore, with regard to Matthew 28, Crossan concludes that Matthew relied on the *Cross Gospel* and Mark for its composition. Any differences can be explained by Matthew's redactional modification on these two sources, not by Matthew having access to other (independent) traditions. Brown, on the other hand, prefers to explain the differences between the *Cross Gospel* and Matthew by postulating oral traditions that were used by both.

An important conclusion at this point is that even in Brown's hypothesis the *Cross Gospel* has become an independent witness *on a par* with Matthew. Crossan's theory that grants the *Cross Gospel priority* over Matthew will be further assessed in the next section which identifies the motifs that acted as impulses for change in the history of the tradition.

3.2.3.6 The Cross Gospel and the Developing Tradition

Crossan has been criticised for his heavy reliance on source- and redaction-criticism. To Dunn and others (see §2.4.2.6) in this way hardly any room is left for orality in the transmission of the Jesus material. And yet, oral traditions are able to take us with immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus. Wright talks about 'the strong probability that the Easter stories go back to genuinely early oral tradition (2003:612).' But he admits that these traditions (and literary dependence for that matter) are not easy to pin down:

> It is likely that the appearance of literary dependence is an illusion caused by a natural overlap in the swirling, incalculable world of oral tradition.… It is difficult to say very much about either literary sources or oral traditions. The latter certainly existed; Paul tells us as much in 1 Corinthians 15:3 (2003:591).

It is not difficult to see that by posing this kind of a theory one can always use oral tradition as a (last) resort to solve gospel-critical problems. What the advocates for oral traditioning ignore or play down, however, is the fact that we do not merely have a collection of traditions on the death and resurrection of Jesus, edited to a lesser or greater degree but essentially going back to the same originating events; instead we

have a *continuing* and *developing* tradition. And in order to expose and explain this phenomenon one needs the tools of tradition-criticism. The tradition on the death and resurrection of Jesus is not static. There are powerful forces at work within this tradition that materially alter the story. Crossan talks about the ability of the tradition to protest (1976:152); Johnson speaks of apologetic *motifs* that act as impulses for change (1965:106). It is the task of tradition-criticism to identify these motifs and their function in each text. Subsequently, tradition-criticism has to determine where each text is to be located in the stream of the tradition.

In the *Cross Gospel* Jesus' resurrection takes place within the dyadic framework of persecution and 'before-death' vindication (see §3.2.3.3) and therefore it takes place in front of the accusers: the Roman soldiers (neutral witnesses) and the Jewish authorities (hostile witnesses).[64] This *witness motif* alters considerably in the intracanonical gospels. In Matthew the guards are still there and they witness at least the beginning of an epiphany. But their nationality is not even mentioned. For Matthew the identity of the witnesses and the very fact that they witness something is not the point. The guards are only important when it comes to reporting the event, especially *to whom*. These guards, surprisingly, do not report to Pilate (cf. *Cross Gospel* verse 11:45) but to the chief priests who then consult with the elders and come up with a plan. This reveals the strong Matthean motif to break down the Jewish instigation-Roman implementation pattern and replace it with the Jewish instigation-Jewish implementation pattern in order to exonerate Pilate. The result is a historically implausible story: the Jewish leaders become fully responsible for suppressing the evidence of the guards. They do so by inventing the body-snatching story. That Matthew writes in the heat of Jewish polemic is clear from his one and only personal use of 'the Jews' in Mt 28:15. In the *Cross Gospel* it is Pilate who suppresses the evidence by commanding the guards to say nothing (verse 11:49). Clearly, the *Cross Gospel* reflects an earlier stage in the development of the tradition.

In Mark nobody witnesses the resurrection, but women are instructed by 'a young man (Mk 16:5)' to convey the message to the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus

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[64] Johnson argues that hostile witnesses are a later development in the tradition, pointing to a time when the world was divided into three groups: Christians, Jews and pagans (1965:118). Unfortunately Johnson's argument fails to convince because he has not taken into account the very important distinction that the *Cross Gospel* makes between the Jewish leaders (who are unrepentant) and the Jewish people (who are repentant).

there. Thereupon the developing tradition (i.e. the evangelists Matthew, Luke and John who each used Mark as a source) demonstrates a steady desire to replace the *women* of Mark with *apostles*, and the *messenger* of Mark with *Jesus himself* (Crossan 1976:138). Johnson wrote earlier: 'In the development of the tradition two powerful motifs impinged upon the women at the tomb story: (1) the attempt to connect the disciples with the story in some way and (2) the tendency to provide an appearance of the risen Lord at the tomb' (1965:133). The *Cross Gospel* does not include a women at the tomb account, but a later stratum in the *Gospel of Peter* that Crossan identifies as the canonical stratum does. Like Mark, it does not include the two motifs that were to become so predominant in the third-stratum gospels of Matthew, Luke and John: apostles' involvement and risen appearances of Jesus. It is quite remarkable that the later, canonical stratum in the *Gospel of Peter* preserved such a 'pure' version of the women at the tomb tradition. More about this in § 3.2.4.

3.2.3.7 Recapitulation and Evaluation

§3.2.3 set out to analyse Crossan's treatment of the *Cross Gospel,* and especially the resurrection scene in this gospel. Crossan's in-depth study of this extracanonical text deserves respect. We therefore start with a strong point. Crossan's hypothesis that the passion narratives[65] in the gospels are not history remembered but prophecy historicised is revolutionary but persuasive, as it is corroborated from the actual data in the gospel stories and from an outside source, the *Epistle of Barnabas* (1998a:569). For Crossan, these two data are the pillars on which his theory of prophecy historicised rests (see Eddy 1997:283). The *Epistle of Barnabas*, as it reflects on Jesus' passion by way of scriptural allegory, attests to the existence and sole sufficiency of prophetic exegesis, to the *uninevitability* of passion as biographical story (1998a:570). In the passion story as reflected in the *Cross Gospel*, prophetic exegesis has become a hardly-discernible substratum but the redactors of Mark bring it back to the surface, thereby showing that they too have access to ongoing passion prophecy and not, for that matter, to historical recall (1996:128–132).

Crossan's position is further strengthened from the fact that he stands in a line of scholars on whose work and insights he builds. Not surprisingly, there are other scholars who strongly disagree with Crossan. What these critics have so far failed to

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[65] The resurrection narratives are treated separately in this section for reasons provided below.

do, however, is present a systematic and convincing rebuttal. Some critics misrepresent Crossan's theory by ignoring the fact that Crossan still accepts 20 percent of the passion story as history. One repeatedly comes across caricatures of the concept of prophecy historicised like 'the OT as source for outright fiction', 'the imaginative creation of stories out of scripture' (France 1983:120, 125) etcetera. It must be emphasised that this is not what Crossan is proposing. He does not deny the historical core, the shocking raw material of crime, arrest, desertion by close friends and crucifixion by indifferent enemies. After the death of Jesus this raw material was there like a skeleton waiting to be covered with flesh and sinews. It could make for a profound story and it did: the 20 percent historical memory fused with the 80 percent scriptural memory in intense reflection and a search for answers to questions from both in- and outsiders. The process culminated in the passion-resurrection stories. Today no NT scholar when pushed to the limit maintains a schema of 100 percent history remembered with regard to the contents of the passion stories. However, many still want to hint at historicity without having to either affirm or deny it. This is unethical (Crossan 1996:36–7). *History is the past reconstructed interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse* (Crossan 1999:3). The onus is on each critic to defend his or her own schema for the passion stories whether 80 over 20 percent or 50 over 50 percent or any other combination, and to present it in a scientific manner as one's best reconstruction of history. The argument that there are no parallels for the practice of historicising prophecy in contemporary Jewish methods of exegesis and historiography has often been put forward but is not a very helpful one, as France (1983:123) admits:

> It cannot simply be assumed that a Christian writer, because he was also a Jew, will have approached the scriptures in the same way as the writer of Jubilees or of a Qumran *pesher* or of the *Life of Moses*; indeed the difference of orientation is such as to require that any such correspondence must be specifically demonstrated from the text of the gospels.

With these wise words we leave the delicate subject of prophecy historicised. It is clear that the meeting-point (or the battleground) for Crossan and his critics has to be the actual and unique text of the gospels.

The second point for discussion and evaluation concerns the origins of the passion narrative. Crossan postulates one archetype or independent source for all the other

passion narratives: the *Cross Gospel.* The *Sitze im Leben* that provided the context for the generation of this narrative Crossan defines as a uniform scribal tradition combined with religious genius (his earlier position) or female ritual lament (his later position). His later position is best summed up with these words: in the Jerusalem community the female lament tradition turned the male exegetical tradition into a passion-resurrection story once and for all forever (1998a:573). With the transition from religious genius (within what might be called 'the individualistic literary paradigm') to female lament (within a communal ritual context) Crossan has moved closer to the position of Aitken (see §3.2.3.2). The latter assumes an originating context of cultic practice for the passion stories. However, Aitken postulates that from this context not just one but three independent written sources were generated, the passion stories in the gospels of Mark, John and the *Gospel of Peter.* Koester's most recent position is similar to that of Aitken: Mark, John and the *Gospel of Peter* are later written versions of three independent oral performances of the passion story in the context of ritual celebration (cf. Crossan 1998a:563–64). In light of the above, must Crossan's hypothesis of one independent written source for the passion stories be rejected? Crossan provides three reasons why his theory is still the most plausible one: first, one prototype accounts best for the striking similarities in the passion stories with regard to units, sequences and overall frames (1996:11); second, one prototype explains why Mark, John and the *Gospel of Peter* share redactional peculiarities (1998a:565–8); and third, since the transition from passion prophecy to passion narrative was not at all inevitable, it is implausible that at least three communities made the transition from passion prophecy to passion narrative through the independent use of the narrative genre of the persecuted and vindicated righteous sufferer (1998a:568–70). If they did, would they be as closely similar as Mark, John, and the *Gospel of Peter*?

Before reaching a final conclusion on the matter of source(s), it is necessary to speak about the above-mentioned narrative genre in more detail here. So far this section (§3.2.3.7) has presumed as topic of discussion the *passion* narrative(s) only. However, for Crossan the archetype, the *Cross Gospel,* is not just a passion narrative; it comprises both passion *and* visible resurrection. Together these two stories reflect the persecution-vindication dyad of passion prophecy within the genre of the persecution and vindication of the righteous sufferer. Koester agrees with Crossan on the decisive role of passion prophecy in the generation of the passion narratives. However, he argues that the oldest passion account(s) ended with the empty tomb

story, not with the story of visible resurrection (1990:231). Jesus is the vindicated hero-martyr who escapes death, leaving behind an empty tomb. Without going into detail as to which ending—visible resurrection or empty tomb—reflects vindication better, it should be noted that there is a third possibility: Jesus' *death* can be viewed as the moment of vindication and function as a suitable ending to the passion story (Perkins 1992:35; Dewey 1990:111). A remarkable chain of events surrounds Jesus' death (in the *Cross Gospel*): he is taken up; the veil is torn; there is an earthquake; there is fear and acknowledgement of guilt on the side of the perpetrators (see verses 5:19–6:22; 7:25). The function of these events in the narrative is to depict Jesus as the vindicated hero-martyr. We conclude that Crossan's argument for the *Cross Gospel* as both passion *and* resurrection narrative based on generic identity is unconvincing. Vindication can be expressed in various ways. Visible resurrection is not the inevitable vindication and reward for the righteous sufferer.

Crossan's second argument for the *Cross Gospel* as a *consecutive* passion-resurrection narrative is based on textual integrity. Crossan perceives a logic and consecutive cohesion in the narrative entirety of the *Cross Gospel* that can hardly be broken up (1998a:498). The story is about the Jewish authorities who know the truth of Jesus' resurrection but lie to protect themselves from their own people. This narrative core sets Jewish people and Jewish authorities in opposition to one another. We agree with Crossan that the *Cross Gospel* more than any other gospel depicts a dramatic split between Jewish authorities and Jewish people. However, does the *Cross Gospel* maintain this split consistently throughout the narrative? In one portion the antagonism is strangely absent: in verses 2:5b up to 6:22 one group ('the people') is specified. They are in charge of Jesus' execution.[66] They exhibit a unity and singleness of purpose that is missing in other parts of the *Cross Gospel.* And the simple designation 'the people' in these verses contrasts with the (over)specification of the groups later on in the text (see verses 7:25 and 8:28). But most importantly, there is a discrepancy in the narrative: verses 2:5b–6:22 make 'the people' responsible for Jesus' execution whereas verse 7:25 makes 'the Jews and the elders and the priests'

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[66] The canonical gospels are more plausible in this regard. The *Roman soldiers* mock Jesus and are in charge of his execution (cf. Mk 15:16; Jn 19:2, 16). However, an active role for 'the people' does not necessarily point to a late date. Johnson (1965:107) asserts that from a very early date it was common for Christians to write as if the Jews alone were responsible for the death of Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:15 about '…Jews who killed the Lord Jesus.'

responsible, who now perceive what great evil they have done to themselves. And the group called 'the people' who was one in its concerted act to kill the messiah (2:5b–6:22) suddenly becomes united in an act of all-out repentance a short while later (8:28). Is this drastic reversal of roles credible? In §3.2.4.7 Jesus' burial will be discussed. That study will demonstrate the same lack of cohesion in the *Cross Gospel* at the same point in the narrative, namely the transition from verse 6:22 to 7:25.

Brown allows for an older consecutive independent account in the *Gospel of Peter* drawn from a body of popular material (1994:1304), but he emphasises that it could only have contained the stories of guarded tomb and visible resurrection, not the passion account (see §3.2.3.3). Koester doubts whether the *Cross Gospel* ever was as comprehensive and as fixed a literary document as Crossan assumes (1990:220). Clearly, Brown and Koester do not share Crossan's optimism with regard to the consecutive cohesion of the *Cross Gospel.* (The earlier) Koester proposes an alternative source theory for the *Gospel of Peter*:

> Studies of the passion narrative have shown that all gospels were dependent upon one and the same basic account of the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus. But this account ended with the discovery of the empty tomb. With respect to the stories of Jesus' appearances, each of the extant gospels of the canon used different traditions of epiphany stories which they appended to the one common passion account. **This also applies to the *Gospel of Peter*. There is no reason to believe that any of the epiphany stories at the end of this gospel derive from the same source on which the account of the passion is based** (1990:231—my emphasis).

Koester postulates one common passion account, a prototype, that ended with the empty tomb story, not an epiphany story. Crossan, on the other hand, assumes that the prototype, which is the *Cross Gospel* and not some unidentified older text, includes all three acts: juridical execution, guarded tomb and visible resurrection. But by so deciding Crossan has pushed his theory beyond its plausible limits. Several features in the *Cross Gospel* (and admittedly in the *Gospel of Peter*) point to an emphatic lack of consecutive cohesion: first, the connection between verses 2:5b–6:22 and verse 7:25ff is disjointed as was shown above; second, the procedure of *historicising prophecy* so evident in the passion account is completely absent in the resurrection narrative (Crossan 1985:180–81); and third, it is implausible that four gospels, which in Crossan's theory are dependent on the *Cross Gospel,* make full use

of it for their passion accounts but without exception reject it for their resurrection accounts (see §3.2.4.1 and §3.2.4.2). Therefore, we conclude that the passion account and the account of guarded tomb and visible resurrection were originally not a single, independent and early text. Our assumption is that these two accounts only became an artificial unity in the later and composite *Gospel of Peter* whose redactor was unable or not alert enough to remove the incoherence despite the enthusiastic employment of redactional devices elsewhere in the text (cf. Crossan 1988:21).

When a theory raises more problems than it solves, it must be dismissed. The *Cross Gospel* as an early, independent and written source comprising both passion and visible resurrection and functioning as the prototype for all other passion-resurrection narratives is such a theory. It had better be dismissed. Even Koester's presupposition that there was an older text now lost that functioned as the archetype for all other passion accounts is nothing more than conjecture and does not contribute to a better understanding of the data.

Thus, the study on the origins of the passion-resurrection narrative(s) in terms of prototype and source relations has so far yielded minimal results. In fact, it has merely confronted us with the inadequacy of the presented theories to solve problems. It has raised questions as to the efficiency of the categories that have been used to interpret the data. Is searching for the 'original' version of the passion-resurrection narrative the valid and only way to go? Aitken and the recent Koester have moved away from the idea(l) of an 'original' version. They argue that the written gospels are the outflow of multiple oral performances. Within a living oral tradition each oral performance functions in and of itself as an 'original' (Dunn 2003:153). But this recognition is not a concession to unbridled variability. Oral performance is characteristically a combination of fixity and flexibility, of stability and diversity (Dunn 2003:154); there are essential themes that stabilise the performance, thus ensuring 'variation within the same' (Dunn 2003:154). For Koester this stability is in the same basic structure of the story that is told in diverse oral performances (cf. Crossan 1998a:564). Aitken views the central story or cult legend of Israel as the stabilising factor and fundamental form of each passion story (see §3.2.3.2). For Crossan, however, the stability of the tradition is in the prototype, and diversity must be explained primarily in terms of editorial redaction. The oral tradition model, on the other hand, explains diversity primarily in terms of performance variation (Dunn 2003:169). Thus the oral tradition model presents a move away from the scribal uniform to the oral multiform; from the

hypothetical stability of the prototype to the characteristic diversity of the oral performances. Can this shift in focus become the way out of the impasse? Only at the end of the study on the *Gospel of Mark* will it be possible to conclude which interpretive model or combination of models is the best way forward in gospel-critical studies today (see §3.2.4.13).

The last point for discussion and evaluation concerns the resurrection account in the *Gospel of Peter* and its relationship to Matthew. Studying the relationship between these two gospels was rewarding because it provided a good case study in tradition-criticism: unit A (the *source*) was used by unit B (the *redaction*), and a continuing *tradition* was developing (see §3.2.3.5). The traditio-critical study of Matthew 28:1–15 refuted canonical gospel priority by demonstrating that the intracanonical text Matthew used and edited an extracanonical text, the account of the guard at the tomb and visible resurrection, which at that point was either part of the *Gospel of Peter,* or a version of an independent tradition (Johnson 1965:121), or part of floating popular traditions (Brown 1987:337). §3.2.3.6 argued that from a traditio-critical point of view the visible resurrection story in the *Gospel of Peter* is to be located earlier in the stream of developing tradition than the account in Matthew due to the presence of archaic Jewish-Christian theological features and the absence of later apologetic motifs like the exoneration of Pilate, the involvement of the apostles at the tomb or elsewhere, and risen apparitions of Jesus at the tomb or elsewhere. Koester assumes that the visible resurrection story is very old and best preserved in the *Gospel of Peter* (1980:129). The question now is whether it was already part of the *Gospel of Peter* when Matthew used it. Crossan's date for the *Gospel of Peter* (the final composite document) is around 150 CE with western Syria as place of origin (1991a:433–4). Earlier Johnson also postulated western Syria as provenance but he argued for a date of around 90 CE (1965:127). Such a relatively early date for the *Gospel of Peter* makes Matthean dependence on it a possibility. Alternatively, we conclude with Johnson and Brown that for their resurrection story Matthew and the *Gospel of Peter* shared the same traditions. This is also the view of the early Koester (see §3.2.4.2).

The next section is a study on the *Gospel of Mark.* It will include analyses of the relationship between Mark and the *Cross Gospel* (and the later strata in the *Gospel of Peter*). It will demonstrate that the conclusions reached on the *Cross Gospel* in this section are confirmed and reinforced by the findings and subsequent conclusions of §3.2.4.

3.2.4 Second Stratum: Gospel of Mark

3.2.4.1 Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The preceding section concluded that Crossan's gospel presupposition with regard to the original stratum of the *Gospel of Peter,* the so-called *Cross Gospel,* is no longer tenable. This section examines and evaluates Crossan's views on the *Gospel of Mark.* Such a study is incomplete without an analysis of Crossan's views on Mark's literary relationship to the three strata in the *Gospel of Peter* (the *Cross Gospel* and the two later strata)*.* Therefore, for the sake of argument, Crossan's set of gospel presuppositions remains the *starting-point* for any discussion in this section on source relations. However, in terms of evaluation and final conclusions this section will agree with the conclusions reached in the previous section.

The first question that this study on Mark needs to answer concerns Mark's *Vorlage* for his passion-resurrection narrative. In Crossan's theory Mark's *Vorlage* is the *Cross Gospel*. Crossan defended the priority of its passion narrative over the other passion narratives on the basis of close proximity to biblical prophecy (see §3.2.3.2). It is now his task to provide reasons why Mark and the later evangelists, having made use of the *Cross Gospel's* passion narrative, were unwilling to accept its story of visible resurrection as a suitable ending to their gospels. In order to answer this question comprehensively, Crossan's understanding of the historical situation and theological vision of Mark will have to be explored (see §3.2.4.3).

The second question concerns the origins of the resurrection narrative in Mark 16:1–8, the so-called 'empty tomb story'. Since the interpretation of this story is inextricably linked to a conception of its genesis, it is important that Crossan's proposals with regard to its originating context are critically evaluated. During the last fifty years or so many divergent proposals regarding the origins, transmission and composition of the empty tomb tradition have been put forward. Bultmann called it a 'secondary construction' and an 'apologetic legend' (see Botha 1989:206); form- and redaction-critics view it as a combination of tradition and redaction but cannot agree on the extent and role of each in the formation of the story (see Botha 1989:196); Spong (1994:63) in line with Schillebeeckx concludes that the empty tomb story reflects a liturgical development during which resurrection belief came to be associated with visiting the holy sepulchre where a cultic celebration took place;

Fisher (1999:59) proposes that the story is based in oral tradition and on eyewitness accounts, thereby providing a core of historicity; Botha (1989:197) views it as an example of oral traditional composition and understands it as an 'utterance' and not a 'text'; lastly, Crossan argues that the empty tomb tradition is 'a deliberate Markan creation' (1976:145; 1999:12). Crossan's analysis of Mark 16:1–8 as the complete creation of Mark himself to serve as the purposeful ending to his gospel will have to be critically evaluated and compared with other recent proposals regarding the origins, the transmission, and the composition of the empty tomb tradition.

3.2.4.2 The Story of Visible Resurrection and Mark

Crossan's answer to the question as to why Mark had to reject the resurrection account of the *Cross Gospel* as an ending to his gospel is as follows: Markan theology was based on a dyad of passion and *parousia,* not on a dyad of passion and immediate vindication (1991a:396).[67] Later on in this study Crossan's understanding of Mark's historical and theological setting will be examined (see §3.2.4.3). At this point it is important to ask whether there are any traces of this resurrection account to be found in Mark in the chapters preceding chapter 16. Crossan answers the question in the affirmative and argues that Mark relocated or retrojected details from the story of visible resurrection back into the earthly life of Jesus in line with his redactional theology (1988:347; see also §3.2.3.5). Therefore, says Crossan, to speak of downright rejection of the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection narrative by Mark is incorrect. Instead of rejection there is retrojection. Koester (1990:240) sums it up as follows: 'Fragments of the epiphany story of Jesus being raised from the tomb, which the *Gospel of Peter* has preserved in its entirety, were employed in different literary contexts in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.' Koester thus accepts that there was an older form of the story of visible resurrection, a text now lost, that circulated in the early church and that was used by three gospels but was preserved in its entirety in only one, namely the *Gospel of Peter.* In light of our earlier conclusion on the *Cross Gospel,* Koester's theory is to be preferred at this point: Mark (and Matthew) definitely

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[67] As was discussed in §3.2.3.4, the main reason why the other evangelists do not accept the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection account is the inability to have authentications and authorizations of the risen Lord if the resurrection and ascension coincide as they do in the story of visible resurrection.

made use of a form of the visible resurrection story but this story was not part of what Crossan calls the *Cross Gospel.*

The first example of a narrative detail that is found both in the story of visible resurrection and in Mark is the confession that Jesus is in truth the Son of God. This confession is narrated in the *Gospel of Peter* 11:45 and Mark 15:39. In the story of visible resurrection it is the united response of those who have just witnessed the glorious and epiphanic resurrection-ascension of Jesus; in Mark it is the response of only one man, the centurion, who has just witnessed the manner of Jesus' death. According to Crossan, Mark must have had his reasons for locating this detail to exactly this dramatic point in the story of Jesus' life and death. A glimpse of Markan theology shines through: faith is evoked not by epiphanic manifestation but through suffering (1988:334). Koester, on the other hand, thinks that the confession of the centurion in Mark is poorly placed and clumsily motivated (1980:129). More instances of redaction-critics presenting divergent views on Markan redactional theology are to follow (see §3.2.4.5).

Crossan furthermore argues that Mark retrojected the escorted resurrection-ascension scene from the story of visible resurrection back into the life of Jesus as a transfiguration story. The transfiguration story appears in Mark 9:2–8 and Crossan interprets it as a foretaste and model not of resurrection but of *parousia* (1988:350). It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse and evaluate this proposal in detail. Suffice it to say that Bultmann already proposed that the transfiguration story was originally a resurrection account (1968:259). Lüdemann (2004:34) agrees and adds that 'in general the possibility of inserting adapted Easter stories into the life of Jesus can hardly be disputed.' Lüdemann speaks in the plural about 'Easter stories.' Indeed, the transfiguration story is not an isolated case. There are other pericopes in the gospels (nature miracles) that show clear signs of being retrojected apparition stories (cf. Mk 6:45–52; Lk 5:1–11). Or maybe it is wrong to put it this way because for the early community of believers there was no 'before' and 'after' Easter; there was only the continued, salvific presence and leadership of the (now) exalted Jesus. Apparition stories celebrate the present Jesus and as such they are the effects of Easter faith (Crossan 1976:152). Mark places these stories safely in the narrative of the earthly life of Jesus in which they take the form of a nature miracle or as in Mark 9:2–8 a transfiguration story. Other evangelists locate them both before and after Easter. Together these stories make up the apparition tradition. They derive from a common

matrix and express the community's faith in Jesus' continuing presence and leadership in his radically new and transcendental mode of existence (Crossan 1991a:404). In the next section it will become clear why Mark, who was certainly not averse to the apparition tradition, insisted to locate apparition and epiphany stories solely in the earthly life of Jesus and not after the latter's resurrection.

3.2.4.3 Historical and Theological Setting of Mark

Proposals for a date and setting of Mark have been varied as this gospel provides very little indication of its supposed immediate context (Botha 1993:55). According to Botha (1993:30) two major views have established themselves: Mark was written either shortly before the destruction of the temple in Rome or shortly after the war in Galilee. Crossan is an exponent of the second view. He proposes that Mark was composed by an unknown author soon after the First Roman War (66 to 73–74 CE) and addressed to a community of Galilean Christians who had suffered severely from lethal persecution (1996:17). Mark's relentless criticism of the Twelve Apostles in general, of the so-called 'inner Three' in particular, and of Peter the most, Crossan interprets either as *reassurance* for those who failed Jesus during the recent persecution or, probably more likely, as *criticism* of other Christian communities (esp. the Jerusalem community) that depended (mostly) on traditions about Peter, the Three and the Twelve for their theological viewpoints; viewpoints that were characterised by a lack of understanding and acceptance of both Jesus' suffering destiny and the Gentile mission (1996:18). With this backdrop of communal situation and redactional theology in mind, it is not surprising to see that Mark refrains from ending his gospel in line with Paul's received tradition which centres on the occurrence of apparitions to the recognised leaders of the church. Mark could not end his gospel with appearances to these leaders because at the time of his gospel's composition opponents were propagating viewpoints in their names that Mark strongly disagreed with. Furthermore, there were literary constraints: since he had depicted the disciples as models of failure right through his gospel, they could not now be turned into recipients of risen visions—such would not fit the story line. Mark's alternative is an empty tomb and an undelivered message that 'the disciples and Peter' should get out of Jerusalem and go to Galilee because it is there that Jesus will reappear to them, not in risen apparition but in imminent *parousia.* As for the interim: it is the time of suffering and absence and patience under trial, not the time of presence and intervention (1988:348). Mark's

overall purpose is to present an absent Jesus in his newly created anti-tradition of the empty tomb to replace the present Jesus of the apparition tradition (1976:152). Jesus is indeed the risen Lord, but his resurrection simply means his departure from this earth pending a now imminent return in glory (1991a:396). In fact, to speak of apparitions in the period between passion and *parousia* is to invite and commit the same mistake made by the false prophets and false Christs that Mark warns against in chapter 13:5–6 and 21–22 (1991a:396). History has taught Mark that Jesus would not reappear between passion and *parousia,* not even at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. A tradition of resurrection appearances had kindled the hopes and expectations that he would do exactly that. These hopes, however, were dashed. Mark and his community are experiencing the epoch of the risen Lord, not in apparition and presence, but in witness (during trials) and suffering. But the *parousia* is imminent and soon they will see 'the kingdom of God come with power (Mk 9:1)' in their beloved Galilee.

For this eschatological understanding of Mark Crossan is highly indebted to Werner Kelber who wrote his book *The Kingdom in Mark* in 1974 (Crossan 1988:347). Kelber in turn built on the Lohmeyer-Lightfoot-Marxsen thesis, that Mark has a Galilee-versus-Jerusalem structure within which Galilee is seen by Mark as the promised land of salvation (see Botha 1993:31–32). Marxsen (1969:94) put it like this: 'Galilee is the place where Jesus worked, where—hidden in the proclamation—he is now working, and will work at his *parousia.*' Marxsen (1969:209) identifies the orientation to Galilee and the imminent *parousia* awaited there as the two motifs that acted as impetus for the formation of Mark. A key verse within this interpretive structure is Mark 16:7. This verse contains the message of promise uttered by the young man at the tomb: 'He (i.e. Jesus) is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' Jesus had indeed told the disciples earlier in Mark 14:28: 'But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' Within the context of Markan redactional theology, the Lohmeyer-Lightfoot-Marxsen thesis interprets these verses as referring to Jesus' eschatological appearance in glory in Galilee. Crossan, as was shown, follows suit.

3.2.4.4 *The Empty Tomb Tradition and the Developing Tradition*

Redactio-critical studies on the later gospels illustrate that the imminent expectation of Mark and his community could not be sustained. In a study on the transmission of the empty tomb story from Mark into Matthew and Luke, Marxsen (1969:210) points out

that it was fully understandable that Matthew and Luke rejected one (Matthew) or both the motifs (Luke) that had been decisive in the formation of Mark, namely the orientation to Galilee and the imminent *parousia* anticipated there. As redactors these later evangelists had to 'extend' Mark so that Mark could be read as a continuous account into the present time, namely the epoch of the missionizing church. Therefore, they adjusted Mark's ending (and later copyists added a conclusion to Mark). However, in so doing they radically changed Mark's eschatologically-oriented and open-ended empty tomb story—Luke even more so than Matthew. Luke's only reference to Galilee is in Luke 24:6: 'He is not here, but has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee.' Of course the references to Galilee as meeting-point were incompatible with Luke's creation of a Jerusalem-oriented mission that stood symbolically for the centre of salvation history from which the gospel would go out into the world. For Luke the historian there is no imminent *parousia* beckoning in Galilee; now is the epoch of mission during which the gospel is being preached, *beginning at Jerusalem* (Lk 24:47)*.* This is not a case of selective reporting, but of total remodelling of an earlier tradition! Matthew, likewise, accepts the new epoch of mission and the delay of the *parousia*, yet he retains the promise of Mark 16:7 about Jesus' going ahead into Galilee, albeit in a non-eschatological sense. Matthew makes sure that the promise materialises as post-resurrection apparition, first to the women in Jerusalem, then to the disciples in Galilee. The promise is first uttered by the angel at the tomb (Mt 28:7) and afterwards it is on the lips of none other than Jesus himself who appears to the women in verses 9–10. The reaction of the women on hearing the words of the angel is what radically separates Matthew from Mark. In Mark 16:8 they are afraid, they flee and keep quiet; in Matthew they leave the tomb quickly with fear and joy and run to tell the disciples (Mt 28:8). For Crossan (1999:14) this drastic redactional work on the side of Matthew is proof that he did not accept Mark's ending as referring to an acceptably implicit risen vision. Matthew created the (almost redundant) apparition of Jesus to the women in Mt 28:9–10 to efface the Markan ending and to prepare for the apparition to the disciples on the mountain in Galilee (Mt 28:16-20). Still, the empty tomb story of Mark appears as the basic narrative adequate to explain Matthew 28:1–10 (Crossan 1988:351). The same applies for Luke. What both these authors added was redactional activity (Crossan 1976:139–41). With regard to John's gospel Crossan suggests that John, although drawing on the entire synoptic tradition for most of his passion-resurrection account, used Luke 24:1–12 as

the principal source for his version of the empty tomb story (1988:351). With regard to the empty tomb story in the canonical stratum of the *Gospel of Peter*, Crossan observes that the redactor drew on Mark for sequence and content with a few themes and residual influences from John (1988:285–9). More will be said about this gospel's empty tomb story in §3.2.4.5 and §3.2.4.12.

In short then, for Crossan there are no versions of the empty tomb tradition before Mark, and those after Mark all derive from him (1976:135; see also §3.2.4.6). Secondly, none retains the apocalyptic urgency of Mark and his motif of the absent risen Jesus.

3.2.4.5 Conclusions on the Historical and Theological Setting of Mark

Building on the work of earlier NT redaction-critics, Crossan has thus attempted to map out Mark the evangelist: his historical situation, his theological vision, his purposefully created anti-tradition of the empty tomb, and the subsequent and radical adaptation of this tradition by the later evangelists. For Crossan Mark 16:1–8 is about a deliberate absence of the risen Lord and an undelivered message of the coming Lord. It is time to evaluate Crossan's argument. How persuasive is it? §3.2.4.3 opened with the cautious observation by Botha (1993:55) that Mark actually provides very little indication of its supposed immediate context. Botha adds that the so-called references to context can be understood to be evidence only in the light of certain assumptions (1993:32). A good case in point is the Galilean orientation and the Galilee-versus-Jerusalem structure. Does Galilee in Mark feature as just a narrative site or does it also play a role in a historical situation in Galilee at the time when the evangelist wrote? The evidence necessitates to say that Galilee is indeed an important narrative site in Mark as it is the location of Jesus' ministry, but there simply are no unambiguous, obvious references to the historical audience of Mark. In Mark 14:58 and indirectly in Mark 16:7 Mark's Jesus is talking to his disciples. No clear clues are provided by the narrator to interpret these verses otherwise. If, in fact, Galilee and the communities in Galilee were important to Mark at the time of writing, he has failed quite spectacularly to communicate this concern (1993:38). Botha's comments have the potential to seriously undermine Crossan's elaborate analysis of the Markan context. Is Crossan indeed assuming too much when he argues that in Mark Galilee is both place and symbol, and that Mark 16:7–8 is about 'the Jerusalem community, led by the disciples and especially Peter, that has never accepted the call of the exalted

Lord communicated to it from the Markan community' (1976:149)? An answer to this question can only be formulated in full after the originating context of the empty tomb story has been discussed in §3.2.4.6 up to §3.2.4.8.

With regard to Crossan's passion-*parousia* dyad, many NT scholars today from very diverse backgrounds part ways with Crossan and argue that Mark 14:58 and Mark 16:7 do not refer to the *parousia* but to a post-resurrection appearance(s). It goes without saying that by concluding thus these scholars also reject Crossan's argument that Mark's empty tomb story functions as a deliberate anti-tradition to the apparition tradition. Stein (1973:450) believes that the strongest argument in favour of a post-resurrection appearance is the reference to Peter in Mark 16:7. If Mark were written after 65 CE Peter is already dead. Why tell the dead Peter to go to Galilee to experience the *parousia*? Lincoln (1989:285) agrees and concludes that Peter's being singled out for special mention is less likely with a reference to the *parousia*, whereas the naming of Peter with the other disciples makes sense in terms of resurrection appearances as also referred to in 1 Cor 15:5. Lüdemann likewise interprets Mark 16:7 as a continuation of Paul's received tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:5 that makes mention of an appearance to Peter and the Twelve (2004:87–88). Lüdemann's interpretation is not surprising as he considers apparitions the key to explaining the origins of Christianity (see §3.2.2.5). Perkins (1992:35) concludes that Mark 16:7 points back to Mark 14:28 which clearly promises a reunion with the risen Lord, and the purpose of this reunion is to be regrouped for mission. After all, the disciples will have to be the agents of the spread of the gospel into the world that must precede the *parousia* (Mk 13:10). C. F. Evans also stresses the element of commissioning in the promise of Jesus that he will go ahead of the disciples into Galilee. Evans even asserts that Mark 16:7 is not concerned with a literal post-resurrection journey but with the future mission to Gentiles, symbolised by 'Galilee' (see France 2002:577). The broad spectrum of conservative scholarship interprets Mark 16:7 as a promise of a post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. These scholars make special effort to link up Mark, not just with Paul's received tradition, but also with the later account in Matthew that describes a meeting in Galilee (cf. Van Bruggen 1987:249; France 2002:577; Wright 2003:623). Lastly, several scholars—among them Bultmann (1963:285), Stein (1973:445), McCant (1978:71) and Lindars (1993:126)—regard Mark 16:7 as a later Markan insertion into the original empty tomb story. These scholars read Mark in terms of tradition plus redaction and observe that Mark 16:7

must be a later redactional element as the story is far more coherent if verse 7 is omitted. Even the *Gospel of Peter* does not include the words of Mark 16:7 in its account of the women at the tomb. In light of this Johnson (1965:17) argues that the *Vorlage* used by the *Gospel of Peter* was not Mark but rather a pre-Markan written account of the women at the tomb story. McCant (1978:72) disagrees and proposes that the *Gospel of Peter* used Mark as his *Vorlage* but left out the message of Mark 16:7 and the subsequent guilty silence of the women. The Markan motif of failure on the part of the disciples and the women never featured in the *Gospel of Peter* and therefore the redactor had no need for Mark 16:7 in his presentation. Crossan, eager to avoid any pre-Markan versions of the empty tomb story, agrees with McCant and assumes that Mark 16:7 was too specifically Markan for the redactor of the *Gospel of Peter* to include in his account. Moreover, the 'as he told you' in Mark 16:7 had no anterior referent in the *Gospel of Peter* as it had in Mark in Mark 14:28 (1988:290). Interestingly, this leaves us with an empty tomb story in the *Gospel of Peter* without appearances of Jesus to women and/or disciples at the tomb and without even the announcement of a future meeting between the risen Lord and the disciples in Galilee. Understandably so, because Jesus had already appeared; appeared to his enemies after which he ascended into heaven. However, according to Crossan, the *Gospel of Peter* anticipates an apparition of Jesus to the disciples in the later verses (14:58–60). But since Jesus is 'risen and gone' (verse 13:56b), Crossan concludes that this appearance to the disciples will not be a post-resurrection and pre-ascension appearance as in Matthew and Luke, but will be a return from heaven to earth, as in John 20–21 (1988:289).

In conclusion, Crossan has made a considerable attempt to describe the Markan context. But it has to be recognised that his set of conclusions on the historical and theological setting of Mark and how this setting is brought to bear on the empty tomb story in Mark 16:1–8 is just one set of conclusions over against many others. It was shown that in numerous (recent) studies on Mark, Mark 16:7 is definitely not interpreted as a reference to the *parousia* but as a reference to a risen apparition, which naturally leads to a radically different purpose for the story and arguably for the gospel as a whole. Whence this diversity? Botha has warned that assumptions play a role in determining the context of a text; that we bring our own experiences and expectations to our texts, especially when faced with ambiguities and obscurities (1993:52). Botha's advice is that 'considering the diverging and contradictory

conclusions arrived at when the Markan context is described, one cannot help but realise that perhaps some of our assumptions need to be re-evaluated' (1993:38). It is time to turn to some assumptions with regard to the originating context of Mark 16:1–8. What are Crossan's assumptions in this regard and how do they affect his overall interpretation of the empty tomb story?

3.2.4.6 The Origins of the Empty Tomb Tradition

It is Crossan's assumption that the empty tomb story in Mark is Mark's own creation. Crossan has been postulating this theory since 1976 and so far, he asserts, no compelling external reasons (newly discovered independent sources) or internal reasons (persuasive seams between tradition and redaction) have been brought forward to change his opinion (1988:283). His theory is confirmed by three mutually supportive arguments. First, there are no versions of the empty tomb tradition before Mark.[68] Second, those after Mark all derive from him.[69] Third, the empty tomb story in Mark is completely consistent with and required by Markan redactional theology (1976:135). Sleeping male disciples in the garden of Gethsemane and women disciples at the tomb intending to anoint Jesus' body are Mark's own redactional frames for the passion-resurrection story (1999:12). They are the named disciples and they are models of failure. The heroes are the unnamed ones: the woman at Bethany who anoints Jesus beforehand for burial (Mk 14:3–9), and the centurion who confesses him after witnessing his death (Mk 15:39).

Proposing that Mark created the empty tomb story in Mark 16:1–8 immediately raises questions about the preceding and closely connected verses: Mark 15:40–47. These verses relate the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea and describe the spectator role of the women both at the scene of crucifixion and burial. Did Mark also create these narrative units? Crossan argues that the unit describing the women

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[68] Against the early Koester whose view on the origins of the empty tomb story was mentioned earlier (see §3.2.3.7): 'Studies of the passion narrative have shown that all gospels were dependent upon one and the same basic account of the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus. But this account ended with the discovery of the empty tomb.'

[69] In a previous section (§3.2.4.4) it was demonstrated that all other versions are indeed to be located later in the stream of developing tradition than Mark, even the *Gospel of Peter's* version which shows signs of being a conflation of Mark, John and possibly the *Epistula Apostolorum* (Lüdemann 2004:135). For the unique position of Johnson see §3.2.4.12

watching the crucifixion in Mark 15:40–41 is received, pre-Markan tradition. Mark knew of the existence and names of these female disciples. Most likely this unit is historical fact. How would we otherwise even know about the brute fact of Jesus' crucifixion (1999:13)? But Mark 15:47 about the women watching the tomb where Jesus had been laid is Markan creation. It is the necessary connection between the preceding unit and the one that follows in Mark 16:1–8 (1999:12). The unit on Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea in Mark 15:42–46 Crossan also considers Markan creation. Arguments to support this view are the absence of data from pre-Markan tradition and the presence of several problems for post-Markan tradition (1999:22). The pre-Markan tradition provided Mark with nothing more than a presumed burial of Jesus by his enemies (*Cross Gospel* 6:21). Enemies would bury Jesus out of mere obedience to the law as prescribed in Deuteronomy 21:22–23. Yet a friend would do it out of love for Jesus. But only a friend with access to power *could* do it. So, Crossan argues, Mark created the in-between character of Joseph: an individual on the side of power but somehow also on the side of Jesus (1996:172; cf. Mahoney 1974:112). In the narrative he becomes, rather ambiguously, 'a respected member of the council who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God' (Mk 15:43). This individual is provided with a name and a place: Joseph of Arimathea. Creative fiction adds names (1996:177).

The developing post-Markan tradition is aware of the dilemmas surrounding this fictitious character. With regard to the duality of Joseph's personality (*with* power but *for* Jesus), each later evangelist solves the ambiguity in his own way: Matthew calls him a straightforward disciple and a rich man (Mt 27:57); Luke mostly copies Mark and therefore still calls him a member of the council, be it a dissenting one (Lk 23:50–51); John calls him a secret disciple (Jn 19:38), and the redactor of the *Gospel of Peter* calls him a friend of Pilate and of the Lord (*Gos. Pet.* 2:3). Each later evangelist also solves the dilemma of the identity and security of Jesus' body in his own way. It might reasonably be assumed that Joseph, being a pious Jew, would have buried Jesus out of piety or a sense of communal duty (Crossan 1999:20). But then, would he not have done the same for the other two crucified criminals and could this not lead to a mix-up of corpses? The developing tradition makes sure that the possibility of mistaken corpse identity is ruled out, for whereas Mark simply mentions 'a tomb' in which Jesus' body is placed (15:46), the *Gospel of Peter* changes this into 'his own tomb' (6:24), to which Matthew adds the word 'new' (27:60), with Luke (23:53) and John (19:41)

rephrasing it as 'a tomb in which no one had ever been laid' so as to avoid any possible confusion or ambiguity regarding the identity of Jesus' earthly remains.

Crossan thus observes an original burial tradition that has sprung from extraordinary creativity and a developing tradition that is protesting (1976:152), that is exercising damage control (1991a:394). What all of this conceals is that by Easter morning, those who cared did not know where the body of Jesus was, and those who knew did not care (1991a:394). There was only the unspoken hope on the side of Jesus' followers that those who had crucified Jesus would have buried him out of obedience to the law. But hope is not history (1996:171).

The story of Jesus' burial is the necessary prelude to the empty tomb story. According to Crossan, together these two stories are completely consistent with Markan redactional theology. They testify to Mark's extraordinary literary creativity, theological concern and apologetic bent. And as Markan creations they totally lack historicity (1999:18).

3.2.4.7 Critical Responses to Crossan's Theory on the Origins of the Empty Tomb Tradition

In two relatively recent studies Botha (1989:196) and Fisher (1999:59) argue that the efforts to understand the origins and significance of Mark's empty tomb story in terms of tradition versus redaction have unfortunately achieved radically conflicting results and little further advance is to be made in this way. Crossan, as we saw, does not attempt to understand the story in terms of continuity between tradition and redaction. In his theory there simply is no received (oral) tradition, there is only redaction or creative interpretation or, put more simply, invention. Does this mean that Crossan has provided us with a viable escape from the tradition-redaction stalemate and offered us a new perspective? It does not seem so.

Firstly, despite his radical redaction-criticism, Crossan is still within the conventional tradition-versus-redaction model. This model assumes that tradition can be distinguished and separated from redaction, and so, tradition can be 'extracted' from a text (Botha 1991:306). It follows that if there is an absence of tradition, there is redaction only, as is Crossan's argument with regard to Mark's burial and empty tomb stories. Crossan thus interprets the textual data of Mark 15:40–16:8 within the conventional model of tradition versus redaction which in turn fits within the wider literary paradigm. There is nothing essentially new in Crossan's approach, and

therefore, he is not able to provide an escape from the tradition-redaction impasse or offer fresh insights into the genesis and interpretation of Mark's burial and empty tomb stories.

Secondly, Crossan is not wholly consistent in arguing his case: at one stage he calls Mark 16:1–8 'a complete creation of Mark himself' (1976:145); somewhere else he asserts that Mark composed his account in 16:1–8 from the literary residue of *Secret Mark's* story of the resurrected young man (1988:284). It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the *Secret Gospel of Mark* in detail. What is extant of this gospel are two fragments: the account of a dead man raised and the account of the raised man's family (Crossan 1991a:429). The unit 'dead man raised' is about a rich young man whom Jesus raises from the dead. The setting is a garden, a tomb, and a stone which Jesus rolls away (1991a:329). Crossan together with Koester and Schenke hold to the minority view that *Secret Mark* came first and that the *Gospel of Mark* is a censored version of *Secret Mark*—censored, because *Secret Mark* could be interpreted erotically in the context of a nude baptismal ceremony. Crossan considers it likely that both editions were produced by Mark himself within a short span of time (1991a:328–9). For the second edition (canonical Mark) Mark excised the story of the resurrected young man, dismembered it and relocated its textual debris to Mark 16:1–8 and also Mark 14:51–52 (1991a:415).

What interests us here is Crossan's method: Crossan is very eager to establish literary relations between *Secret Mark* and canonical Mark based on words and phrases shared, such as 'tomb', 'young man' and 'roll(ed) away the stone from the door of the tomb' (1988:284). Yet to a large degree these same words and phrases are shared with the *Cross Gospel*, the text that Crossan considers to be Mark's *Vorlage* for at least the passion narrative. Why does Crossan not even allude to the possibility that Mark could have composed his account in 16:1–8 by using terminology from the *Cross Gospel,* such as 'tomb', 'young men', 'door' and 'stone'? It is true, the *Cross Gospel* does not consistently use the word μνημεῖον for tomb like canonical Mark and *Secret Mark* do. The *Cross Gospel* varies it and also refers to the tomb with the Greek words ταφος and μνῆμα (Swete 1892).[70] In fact, it continues to do so in its story about the women at the tomb, a story that Crossan does not consider part of the

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[70] Apart from referring to the tomb as μνημεῖον, Matthew also uses the word ταφος. Luke uses the word μνῆμα twice.

Cross Gospel but part of a later stratum of the *Gospel of Peter* and therefore dependent on the intracanonicals, mainly Mark. Does this by the way indicate a compositional unity that Crossan has all but eliminated with his stratification of the *Gospel of Peter* into three strata over a period of more than a hundred years? Crossan answers this question in the negative and argues that what we see at work here is the redactional device of word integration: the redactor simply mixed up the three terms for tomb over the three strata so that divergent terms no longer drew attention to divergent sources (1988:27). We return to the issue of the literary strata in the *Gospel of Peter* later. For now, let us accept Crossan's gospel presuppositions with regard to the *Cross Gospel* and Mark. The following scenario presents itself: there was an independent resurrection narrative available to Mark (in fact, the only one) which included a tomb, a rolling stone, a door and two young men (who are also referred to as 'two men'). Such being the case, why does Crossan with regard to Jesus' burial argue that the pre-Markan tradition (i.e. the *Cross Gospel*) provided Mark with *nothing more* than a presumed burial by his enemies, most likely in a dishonourable limed pit, not an honourable tomb (1999:18)? Crossan defends this stance by dividing the *Gospel of Peter* into three strata. From the first stratum, the *Cross Gospel*, he takes verse 6:21 to refer to a hasty burial by enemies: 'And then they drew the nails from the hands of the Lord and laid him on the earth.' Verses 6:23–24 that describe the burial by Joseph of Arimathea Crossan considers part of the second stratum, the stratum that is dependent on the canonical gospels, composed a hundred years later by a redactor (Crossan 1996:224). These verses read as follows:

> [6:23] And the Jews rejoiced and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he had seen all the good that he [=Jesus] had done. [6:24] And he took the Lord, washed him, wrapped him in linen and brought him into his own sepulchre, called Joseph's Garden. (see Appendix)

It is true, these verses fit in rather awkwardly because the next verse (7:25) goes on to say that 'the Jews and the elders and the priests, perceiving what great evil they had done to themselves, began to lament and to say, "Woe on our sins, the judgment and the end of Jerusalem is drawn nigh."' This is a very different emotion from the one described in verse 6:23 and one wonders if such a radical change of emotion makes sense. Clearly, verse 7:25 is the proper response to all the things that had happened a little earlier: the tearing of the temple curtain, Jesus' last cry and death, the three-hour

darkness and the earthquake. It follows that verses 6:23–24 are a later insertion. The question is, how much later? Is Crossan's theory that postulates a time-gap of one hundred years between the first and second stratum of the *Gospel of Peter* tenable? Crossan seems to overlook the simple fact that the word 'tomb' first mentioned in the second-stratum verse 6:24 features highly in the resurrection scene later which Crossan considers a first-stratum passage. In other words, a key-word in a first-stratum passage (ταυ̂ο") was introduced first in a second-stratum passage. This points to a much closer unity of the text than Crossan is willing to allow. In fact, without the anecdote about Joseph and his burying of Jesus we are left with an original stratum, the *Cross Gospel*, that at one point (verse 8:30) introduces a tomb into the story without having described the actual placing of Jesus in it. No other narrative on Jesus' death leaves out this important detail. And neither does Acts 13:29 which, like the *Cross Gospel*, describes the burial of Jesus by enemies. Acts 13:29 says: 'they took him down from the tree and laid him in a μνημει̂ον (tomb).' Earlier Crossan defended the independence of the *Cross Gospel* on the basis of 'consecutive cohesion' (see §3.2.3.7). To counteract this statement an example of lack of cohesion was provided. Here is another example. And now the incoherence has become a defect in the story line: how did Jesus' body from being 'laid on the earth' (6:21)—which points to nothing more than a hasty burial in a limed pit—end up in what was to all appearances a grand tomb (8:32–3)? It is not likely that the *Cross Gospel* as a written document—for this is Crossan's theory— survived for so long with this defect in its story line.

Crossan states that a good theory solves more problems than it raises (1996:29). Unfortunately, his chronological stratification of the *Gospel of Peter* with considerable time-gaps between the literary layers seems to *create* more problems than it solves. Crossan needs to stratify the *Gospel of Peter* so as to uphold two of his main assumptions: first, the original layer of the *Gospel of Peter,* the *Cross Gospel*, is much older than Mark, but also second, the traditions of burial and empty tomb flow exclusively from Mark's pen as 'out of the blue' Markan creations. Yet how well do these two assumptions taken together explain the data? It was demonstrated that the *Cross Gospel*, available to Mark at the time of writing (in Crossan's theory), provided him with plenty of raw material for his burial and empty tomb sequence, just as *Secret Mark* did. In light of this, is it still valid to speak about Mark 15:40–16:8 as the 'complete creation of Mark himself' (Crossan 1976:145)? More importantly, how conceivable is it that there was nothing else going on in the Markan community and in

the wider Christian community that could have prompted the emergence, transmission and composition of the burial and empty tomb sequence except Markan creativity, ingenuity and apologetics? Dunn's question applies here (even though he does not specifically have Mark's burial and empty tomb stories in mind): 'Was there no Jesus tradition known and used and circulated until Mark gave it life by writing it down (2003:171)?' It remains to be seen whether Crossan has offered the most plausible historical explanation for the data in front of us. We are confronted once more with the old methodological questions and dilemmas (see §2.4.2.2 and §2.4.2.6): Crossan as the tradition-critic *par excellence* wants to stay exclusively within the individualistic literary paradigm. His literary mindset views the gospel writers as scholars at a desk in a study lined with texts. Gospel traditions are transmitted, revised and reinterpreted within a literary milieu and there is linear, accumulative development from an original core or version. And in the case of the burial and empty tomb stories, there is the all-encompassing input of the redactor who fills up an acutely-felt historical vacuum or composes a story that functions as a springboard for communicating a personal message to the community. The persisting predominance of exclusive dependency on the literary paradigm is not surprising. After all, we do have written texts that clearly circulated as written texts otherwise there would not be what we call 'the synoptic problem'. However, by focussing so exclusively on the text as the final *product* does the literary paradigm not overlook the *process*? Botha (1991:306) proposes that in order to solve questions about the interpretation of the texts as we have them, we must first face the critical question as to how the *transmission* of these texts in their historically communicative contexts should be envisaged. Botha encourages a reorientation from tradition as materials to tradition as experience (1989:201). In the next section several alternative proposals with regard to the origins and transmission of Mark in general and Mark's empty tomb story in particular will briefly be discussed. It will be shown that each one of these (recent) proposals is a move away from the exclusively literary paradigm from which Crossan operates.

3.2.4.8 Alternative Proposals regarding the Origins of Mark's Empty Tomb Story

Crossan's assumption that the empty tomb story was created by Mark has already come under considerable criticism in the previous section. A little later we will return to this issue, but first a related aspect: Markan creation implies Markan priority. For Crossan Mark functioned as the first or the 'original' version from which all other

versions derived. This idea of a first version or original tradition has recently been refuted by quite a number of scholars from diverse backgrounds. Rejecting the process of linear development that underlies it, Botha invites us to think of gospel traditions as something like a cloud, an extensive range of processes overlapping and influencing one another (1993:41). What this metaphor conveys is that there are no demarcations: traditions cannot easily be distinguished from one another and neither can tradition from redaction. All tradition *is* interpretation because it is *people* that bring traditions to life and live through them (1991:322). But this means that we must let go of the idea of the 'original'. Dunn, currently the greatest critic of exclusive dependency on the literary paradigm, also warns against the conceptualisation of tradition as linear, as 'composed of a series of (literary) layers' (2003:144; see also §2.4.2.6). Like Botha he argues for a much more diverse and fluid transmission process of the Jesus tradition and he rejects the idea of an 'original' version or tradition. In §3.2.4.13 Dunn's viewpoints will be examined in more detail.

A more fluid transmission process can only be envisaged if one recognises the role of orality (see §3.2.4.13). Both Dunn (2003:149) and Botha (Botha & Craffert 2005:22) do so: they argue that first-century Palestine was an oral rather than a literary culture which makes it overwhelmingly probable that the earliest transmission of the Jesus tradition was by word of mouth. Now oral traditions do get written down at some point in the transmission process and once recorded might look very much like a literary tradition (Dunn 2003:150). But this is not the case with Mark. The written Mark still retains stylistic features characteristic of oral tradition. Therefore Dunn (2003:167) and Botha (1991:306) assume that the tradition retold by Mark is retold in oral mode, rather than as a distinctively literary exercise. Botha classifies Mark as 'oral traditional literature' (1991:306). This is how he defines the concept:

> The narrative making up the Gospel of Mark was not transmitted verbatim through memorisation, nor did it come into being as creative interpretation; instead it was, as "oral literature", composed and recited with slight variations at various performances, and *the text as we now have it* is but an instance, a reflection of one performance of that traditional *process* (1991:307).

Mark, in other words, does not merely contain oral tradition, but is oral traditional composition. As a casual written transcription of what had been performed orally, it

displays the essential aspects of oral composition such as a formulaic style (e.g. repetition, excessive use of καιv, and patterns of threes) and the use of themes like callings, healings and miracles (1991:318–21). For these conclusions on Mark, Botha relies heavily on the theories and empirical research of Lord and Parry, experts on oral culture and traditions (Botha 1991:307). Botha's resulting picture of Mark differs radically from Crossan's. Instead of viewing Mark's origins and transmission within a setting of 'solitary authorial isolation' (Dunn 2004:486), Botha proposes storytelling; multiple oral performances that transmit, celebrate and reflect on the Jesus event; in short, a whole new way of envisaging the 'traditioning process' (Dunn 2003:169). And since a storyteller wanted to tell a full-length story about Jesus, he had to assemble short, anecdotal stories about Jesus and make them part of an extended narrative. Such an extended oral narrative tradition could have emerged fairly soon after Jesus' crucifixion among Jesus' initial followers in Palestine (Botha 1993:41). Crossan, as we saw, envisages such a development only after a long time had passed and he views it as a contained literary exercise.[71] In view of the *ethos* of ethical radicalism in Mark, Botha considers it plausible that the Markan storytellers were teachers who led an itinerant, marginal existence (1993:42). To view them as official guardians of the Jesus traditions would be incorrect, however; they were part of and actively helped shape the traditions (1989:201). In contrast with Botha, Dunn defines the teachers as 'repositories of community tradition' (2003:152). According to Dunn there had to be some control and the teachers exercised it (2003:154). Dunn subsequently sums up the oral tradition as 'informal controlled tradition' (2003:156). Botha agrees that the storytellers performed their stories in an informal and unceremonious social context as Mark's style is similar to that of popular writings and lacks liturgical elements (1989:200). This context could, however, have included the synagogue because before 70 CE the synagogues had the character of a secular meeting place (Botha 1993:47).

The question now is whether all of the above has any implications for understanding and interpreting Mark. Botha and other scholars on Mark's oral aspect definitely think so. First, as oral traditional literature Mark was performed in many

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[71] Compare *Formgeschichte* that also regards the written Mark as the first attempt at unifying into an extended narrative a great number of short stories that had been circulating independently for a long

contexts before various audiences. This means that one must not expect to find in Mark explicit references to a certain group's private conflicts. Crossan's description of a 'Markan community' is therefore a bit of a misnomer (Botha 1989:201; cf. Dunn 2003:173). Likewise, interpreting the negative portrayal of the disciples in Mark, as a reflection of leadership struggles in the 70s is far-fetched and overlooks the simple fact that oral narrative tends to be strongly polemic: an audience is instructed through warning examples of how not to behave (Dewey 1989:42). Third, a distinctive Markan compositional device is sandwich or intercalation which involves a framing event and an insert event. Crossan notes that Mark uses this device in his own peculiar way by combining literary structure and theological purpose (1998a:565): Peter's denials and Jesus' confession are juxtaposed so as to interpret one another. For Crossan intercalation is a device that fits within the literary paradigm and is something that the redactor makes use of to convey his message to his readers. However, intercalation or 'ring composition' (Dewey 1989:38) can just as well or better be explained as a common feature of oral narrative. With a listening audience in mind, balanced patterns such as intercalations should be thought of as 'acoustic responsions' (1989:39). Oral composition operates on the acoustic principle of echo: what is new is framed in terms of what is already known (1989:40); happenings are formulated in an endless chain of association (1989:42). In this regard Botha speaks about 'the power of associations' (1989:206). It means that oral texts function within a sphere of motifs and themes (Botha 1989:205). Specific people and characters matter less than types and roles (Botha 1989:202). Moreover, as communication events oral stories are 'inside' events: they reflect the culture, values and beliefs of the group (Botha 1989:201).

How does all of this work itself out with regard to the empty tomb story? Fisher is of the opinion that Mark's empty tomb story is the frozen variant of the orally performed miracle story regarding Jesus' escape from death which was written down due to the delay of the coming of the kingdom of God (1999:61). It presents Jesus' resurrection as a problem still to be solved (1999:76). Central to the story is the image of the empty tomb. This is an ambiguous image. It cannot immediately be viewed as evidence for resurrection (1999:74). Yes, it might imply bodily resurrection; it might also imply a direct ascension to God, after which no body is to be found in the earth (cf. Elijah in 2

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period. *Formgeschichte* furthermore views the transmitters of these stories as tradents and not talented narrators (see Botha 1989:200; 1991:307).

Kings 2:11–18); it might even, at first glance, imply foul play, theft. Fisher (1999:75) argues that the empty tomb story reflects Mark's own situation of uncertainty and the situation of the early church at a time when the concept of resurrection was widely debated and proclaimed, yet remained elusive. But this feature does not weaken the essential message of this gospel as it is one of Mark's purposes to stir the imagination of his audience, to force the audience to enter into the story to finish it. There is no better way to do so than by creating an open end (1999:72). Dewey also believes that the open ending of Mark reflects performer-audience interaction and must have functioned very well before a live audience. Mark is parabolic in function and in an oral setting a performer can make sure that the point of the parable is grasped. But when Mark became just a writing and the living oral tradition ceased, the open ending became intolerable to its readers and a longer ending was needed (1989:43). Botha (1989:208) argues that the story of the empty tomb is not about resurrection, but about the vindication of Jesus and his cause. As the vindicated hero-martyr (Jesus' character *type*), Jesus somehow escapes the destruction of death, much like Elijah in the Old Testament (2 Kings 2:11–18) and the divinised heroes in Greco-Roman lore (1989:206). Here we see the power of associations at work. The miraculous opening of the tomb door triggers another association, that of God's powerful intervention. It reflects something of what Mark and his audience themselves expected (1989:205). Botha (1989:203) sees a thematic unity between the burial and the empty tomb stories due to the triple naming of the women (Mk 15:40; 15:47; 16:1) which he considers a characteristic of oral composition (1989:203). Like Fisher (1999:72) Botha observes that the language of Mark 16:1–8 is highly suggestive and sparks visual images in the listener—the ultimate objective of the oral process (1989:206). But, says Botha (1989:209), we can no longer interpret the events of Mark 16:1–8 in the same way and with the same verbal art. We are outside Mark's world and the culture, values and beliefs that underlie this world. Can we still interpret them as *historical* events? This question will have to be grappled with in the next three sections.

3.2.4.9 *The Question of Historicity*

It was shown earlier that Crossan views the burial and empty tomb stories as Markan literary creations that totally lack historicity. We must now investigate whether scholars who view Mark as oral traditional composition reach similar or different conclusions in this regard. Fisher (1999:59), as we saw, bases Mark's empty tomb story firmly in oral

tradition and consequently assumes that it is based on eyewitness accounts and has a core of historicity. Granted, the eyewitnesses (i.e. the women) were somewhat unreliable (1999:75); strong emotion might have distorted the accuracy of their report (1999:63); but still, after an initial silence, these women reported their experiences, and their oral reports reached Mark, the itinerant preacher (1999:76). In re-telling the story, Mark reduced it to an absolute minimum of detail. Moreover, had it been his own composition he would definitely have avoided women as the sole witnesses of the event (1999:72). Women, after all, lacked qualification to serve as legal witnesses (Craig 1997:259; Wright 2003:608). William L. Craig concludes from the two aspects mentioned above, that is, women as discoverers of the empty tomb and Mark's unadorned narrative, that the empty tomb story has historical reliability (1997:258–9). Two criticisms are in place here: first, with regard to the role of the women in the story, all too often the constraints imposed by the story line of Mark are overlooked. This story line represents *all* the disciples as fleeing and deserting Jesus at his arrest (Mk 14:50), leaving only women followers to be present at the crucifixion and at the burial which allows them to see the tomb in which Jesus' body is laid (Mk 15:40, 47). We know that Crossan gives the women the additional role of female models of failure in line with Markan redactional theology (1999:11). One may not agree with Crossan's interpretation, but it has to be recognised that Crossan at least attempts to understand the datum of the women within the narrative context of the source. Craig seems to exclusively focus on the role of women in historical and legal terms at the cost of understanding their role in the immediate context. Second, with regard to Mark's narrative restraint, Fisher (1999:72) argues that Mark's 'minimalist approach' is actually a narrative device which serves the purpose of stirring the listener's imagination. It might even reflect a deliberate reticence on the side of the storyteller due to the elusiveness of the core event, the resurrection of Jesus (1999:75). Again, in an attempt to control the data, Craig skips this immediate context, the narrative context of the source, and takes the narrative restraint to be an indication of historical authenticity. Craig's argument for the historicity of the empty tomb is thus weakened due to flaws in his historical method. We noted earlier (see §2.5) that data have to be understood and interpreted in the necessary contexts and that a high number of tacit contexts unfortunately invalidates the results. Botha warns that 'it is noteworthy how glib NT scholars and theologians are about the so-called historical events making up the resurrection of Jesus. Simplification is a serious outrage against the past, and

unscientific' (1989:206). But, someone may ask, cannot even Mark's *oral* aspect guarantee at least a core of historicity, as Fisher has argued (1999:59, 71)? Not necessarily so. The oral literature model is not a return to naïve historical positivism. It recognises history as orally communicated story. At what stage a story enters a tradition is not known. But within the model of oral traditional composition, the stories are authenticated not by virtue of their historical reliability, but on the authority of the speaker and by the reception of hearers (Botha 1989:206). The challenge for the storyteller is to make the hero of the past live in the imagination of the audience, not to restore historical actuality (1989:202). Therefore, 'genuinely early oral tradition', a term used by Wright (2003:612), and historical reliability are not necessarily two sides of one coin. Historical constraints, that is, the historical possibilities open to people at a specific time vary from age to age. It is each generation's task and it is our task now to develop a plausible historical reconstruction of the events of Jesus' burial and empty tomb as recorded in Mark 15:42–16:8. As the events described in these two stories stand or fall together, a historical reconstruction must include both.

3.2.4.10 *Historical Reconstruction of Burial and Tomb*

Rejecting the historicity of Jesus' burial and tomb as described in Mark, Crossan concludes that history as such merely presents us with the stark probability that Jesus' body was left on the cross and was devoured by wild animals and birds of prey (1994a:154). To corroborate this statement Crossan quotes Martin Hengel who wrote that quite often victims of crucifixion were not buried (1994a:124). The reason for this was obvious: crucifixion was both punishment and deterrent. What better deterrent than a (dead) body hanging in public view with birds pecking away at it (McCane 2004:254)? Crossan is aware of evidence to the contrary, namely of crucifieds being buried or being granted burial, but he systematically plays down this evidence in three instances. First, Deuteronomy 21:22–23 and the Temple Scroll of the Essenes prescribe burial by sunset (Crossan 1996:166). Crossan is not sure whether this command was actually practised at the time or whether it was merely an ideal (1996:167). Second, there is Josephus who describes burial of crucifieds before sunset in *Jewish War* 4.317 (Crossan 1996:166). In response Crossan comments that 'it is useful to cite it (i.e. Jewish burial practice) against the Zealots' (1996:166), thereby dismissing Josephus' report as anti-Zealot polemic. Third, Philo mentions the possibility that the body of a crucified could be released to friends or families on festal

occasions as an act of mercy (1996:167). Crossan knows that he cannot dismiss this literary evidence lightly since there is also material evidence to corroborate it: a crucified skeleton discovered in 1968 north of Jerusalem, buried in the family tomb with nail, wood and ankle still fixed together. The discovery proves, very importantly, that crucifieds could receive honourable (secondary) burial. But again, Crossan softens any hopes here by commenting on the rarity of the case: only one such victim has been discovered to date (1996:168).

Several New Testament scholars have presented valid points of criticism against Crossan's argument for Jesus' non-burial. McCane (2004:258) notes that the norm prescribed in Deuteronomy 21:22–23 and the Temple Scroll had currency at the time of Jesus. Jews did not customarily leave bodies of executed criminals hanging past sunset on the day of death, but asked for permission to bury them lest the land be defiled (cf. Brown 1988:236). McCane (2004:269) furthermore exposes Crossan's faulty reasoning with regard to the discovered skeleton. Since it was an accident that this victim was preserved in such a way as to identify him as a victim of crucifixion, it is incorrect to infer from this one exceptional, accidental case that burial was very rare for crucified malefactors. Had the soldiers been able to extract the nail, it would never have become known that these were the remains of a crucified one! Therefore, it is not surprising that the remains of only one crucifixion victim were discovered to date; it is actually surprising that we have identified even one.

McCane does not deny that there are elements of hope and apologetics in the burial accounts of the gospels (such as the 34 kilogram fit-for-a-king mound of spices that John mentions in Jn 19:39!), yet he does not want to throw out the baby with the bath water as Crossan does (2004:263). He believes that it is possible to reach a very high degree of historical confidence about a burial for Jesus based upon evidence from the gospels and a variety of other sources (2004:253). These are his findings: in accordance with Jewish religious and cultural norms, one or more members of the Sanhedrin obtained the body of Jesus from Pilate and arranged for a dishonourable interment before sunset in a tomb reserved for Jewish criminals. From an early date the Christian tradition tried to conceal this fact, but the best evidence clearly shows that Jesus was buried in shame (2004:253) which meant two things: burial away from the family tomb, and burial without the proper rites of mourning being performed (2004:259).

What is this 'best evidence' that McCane refers to which must prove that Jesus received a dishonourable burial at the hands of those who were also involved in his condemnation and death? The first piece of literary evidence is Acts 13:29. This text was already mentioned in §3.2.4.7. It refers to a burial by 'the people of Jerusalem and their rulers', and even though a tomb is mentioned we have to interpret this tomb within the context of dishonourable burial and locate it at a burial ground reserved for criminals condemned by the Jewish authorities, the so-called 'court's graveyard' (Bostock 1994:202). Secondly, John 19:31 states that the *Jews* asked Pilate to have the bodies taken down from the crosses. Thirdly, the *Apocryphon of James*[72] which contains dialogues between Jesus and the apostles mentions a shameful burial for Jesus (Lüdemann 2004:142): 'Do you not know that you have yet to be … crucified <without> reason, and buried <shamefully>, as (was) I?' Lüdemann points out that the literal translation of the last part is 'quickly buried in the sand like me' (2004:142) which agrees with Crossan's theory that if Jesus was buried by his enemies, it was probably in a shallow, unmarked grave (1994a:154). The *Cross Gospel* might refer to such a hasty burial in verse 6:21 which states that the Lord was 'laid on the earth'. So far then, we have four pieces of literary evidence that point to at least a burial for Jesus, not by friends or family, but by his opponents who most probably interred him in a cemetry for criminals. Based on recent archaeological evidence, Brown (1988:243) concludes that the burial grounds for convicted criminals were located next to the place of crucifixion and were nothing more than hollows quarried in the rock wall of the execution hill into which the corpses were placed. Interestingly, both John 19:41 and *Epistula Apostolorum* 9:3 confirm the fact of nearness. They explicitly mention that Jesus was buried close to the place where he was crucified (Lüdemann 2004:141).

We must now turn to the synoptic gospels. And here we find something that McCane calls 'strikingly significant' (2004:264): despite embellishments and attempts to dignify the burial of Jesus, these accounts also admit that Jesus was buried in shame (2004:266): none of them has Jesus buried in the ancestral tomb in Nazareth nor is there any mention of mourning rites being performed—the two characteristics of an honourable burial. It is not until we get to the canonical stratum in the *Gospel of*

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[72] Schneemelcher (1991:287) allows the assumption that the *Apocryphon of James* might date from a period as early as the second half of the first century.

Peter that specific acts of mourning are mentioned (verses 12:52–53). This gospel also mentions the fact that Joseph washed Jesus' body (verse 6:24) and washing the body formed part of an honourable burial (Brown 1988:242; McCane 2004:257). Therefore, the *Gospel of Peter* can be considered the first to cross the boundaries of Jewish custom by attempting to depict the burial of Jesus as honourable. The other evangelists know from their cultural and religious background that it is impossible for a person condemned of blasphemy by the Jewish authorities to receive an honourable burial. The law stipulated that a person executed by the Jewish authorities (the Beth Din) is not forgiven and therefore both death and shameful burial must expiate for sin and bring about forgiveness (Bostock 1994:203). Mark's story line has Jesus condemned by the Sanhedrin on the charge of blasphemy (Mk 14:63; Mt 26:65), and so the mode of burial is accordingly. Mark relates the dishonourable burial of Jesus at the hands of a law-observant member of the Sanhedrin in sober terms. Still, his story is an improvement on Acts 13:27–29 which speaks of the role players as 'the people of Jerusalem and their rulers who did not recognise Jesus'; the Markan Joseph is 'waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God' (Mk 15:43). Matthew describes Joseph as 'a rich man who had himself become a disciple of Jesus'. This is clearly an embellishment on Mark. Pilate would never have given the body of a crucified would-be-king to one of his disciples (Brown 1988:236). Furthermore, the women do not appear to have any cordial relations with this 'disciple' who buries Jesus. They sit opposite the tomb and watch as the events unfold (Mt 27:61). Luke and John and, as we saw, the *Gospel of Peter* add their own unique embellishments to the story. These will not be explored any further here, for it has by now become clear that of all the gospel accounts, Mark gives us the most plausible picture of the burial of Jesus—plausible in terms of his own story line; in terms of the wider literary evidence; and in terms of cultural practices and norms at the time. Whether the account is in fact historical remains to be seen. But this is the picture that emerges from the evidence so far: at the night of the crucifixion the body of Jesus lay buried in a tomb reserved for criminals (probably resembling some hollow in a rock) located in the court's graveyard. This graveyard must be distinguished from some common grave from which bones of individuals were not recoverable. From the court's graveyard bones of individuals could be gathered for secondary burial (Brown 1988:237).

Both Crossan and Lüdemann follow another line of reasoning. They do not regard Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin as historically probable. This trial focuses on the title

claims of Jesus rather than his temple action and must therefore be viewed as a reflection of Markan theology and 'prophecy actualised' (Crossan 1996:108–10; Lüdemann 2001:101). It follows that if Jesus was not convicted by the Sanhedrin on the charge of blasphemy, these authorities did not have an obligation to bury Jesus in the court's graveyard after the latter's execution (McCane 2004:262). We are thus presented with an alternative chain of reconstructed historical events: Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem at Passover after his act of symbolic destruction or abolition of the temple (Lüdemann 2001:102; Crossan 1996:65). Caiaphas the high priest and Pilate had standing agreements and orders concerning Passover whereby any subversive action involving the Temple and its crowds would beget instant punishment with immediate crucifixion (Crossan 1996:117). Therefore, after Jesus had been handed over by the Jewish aristocracy, Pilate acted swiftly and had Jesus crucified to serve as public warning and deterrent. Crossan assumes that Jesus' body was subsequently devoured by wild animals or thrown into a shallow grave by the Roman soldiers (1994a:154). Concerning this second option Sawicki (1994:180, 257) writes the following:

> The gospel stories mention a gentle enshrouding, a magnanimous laying out, and a loving tomb side vigil; but a limed pit is much more probable. Like countless others of the "disappeared," Jesus was not important enough to trouble the governor with a trial or the death squad with returning the remains to the family. Lime eats the body quickly and hygienically. Therefore we find virtually no skeletal remains of the thousands crucified outside Jerusalem in the first century…. Calvary had been a quarry in antiquity, and after executions the police dumped the bodies into any convenient hole together with some lime to cut the stench.

Lüdemann (2004:61) agrees with Crossan that non-burial is probable which would make all the references to Jesus' burial mere presumptions. On the other hand, Lüdemann considers it possible that the burial of Jesus is one of those cases in which the Roman authorities released the corpse, possibly to avoid unrest. In such a case, some devout Jew(s) deposed Jesus from the cross and buried him in obedience to the law, but where the body was put will forever remain a mystery (2004:62).

With regard to Jesus' burial we are thus left with a few possible scenario's, dismal indeed, but nevertheless historically realistic: scavenging animals, a limed pit, an unknown tomb upon burial by devout Jews, or a tomb in the court's graveyard upon burial by Sanhedrists. The last scenario underlies Mark 15:42–47 and Acts 13:29: the

Sanhedrin took responsibility for the corpse and buried Jesus in the court's graveyard. Whether one of these Sanhedrists was in fact a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathea is hardly relevant. But it is relevant that the tomb is described as just 'a tomb' which implies that there was nothing specific about it to identify it later as the tomb of Jesus. Mark adds that it was cut out of rock, but this could hardly be considered a mark of distinction as many graves of executed criminals were like 'hollows quarried in the rock wall (Brown 1988:243)'. Mark is aware that mistakes could easily have occurred, that here his story is vulnerable, and therefore, with a care that betrays apologetic concern, he records in Mark 15:47 that the women observed where the body of Jesus was laid. Proleptically this has to give his empty tomb story credibility. In that story Mark describes the tomb in loftier terms: the stone in front of it is very large and the tomb itself is so spacious that somebody can enter it and sit in it (Mk 16:4–5). All of this forms part of an attempt by Mark to create a suitable narrative context for the events that are taking place in Mark 16:1–8. But by describing the tomb of Jesus as some dignified 'free-standing carved tomb' (Perkins 1994:436), Mark distances himself from the tradition of shameful burial for Jesus by hostile opponents as reflected in Acts 13:27–29 and the *Apocryphon of James.* Gundry (1993:987) cautiously remarks that it is in Mark's gospel that the process of ridding Jesus' burial of disgrace is started.

It is time to pause. Where in all of this did history abandon the primitive church, and apologetics, hope and faith take over? From watching how Mark and the other gospel accounts increasingly bestow honour on Jesus' body, Crossan asks, 'What was there at the beginning that necessitated such an intensive volume of apologetic insistence (1994a:154)?' Lüdemann (2004:52, 61) is of the opinion that the gospel accounts show all the signs of a cover-up; that they are involved in an exercise of gradually disinfecting a tradition that had become unacceptable for the hero of the new faith. Lüdemann's reaction is understandable, yet he may be judging the gospel writers too harshly here. Unbridled creativity and perfect cover-up is not what their accounts reflect. There is a limit beyond which no one goes. No gospel writer opts for an unambiguous honourable burial for Jesus in Nazareth of Galilee among his kinsfolk. An obvious reason for this may be provided: it was logistically impossible. Yet it is much less obvious why no gospel writer involves the family and/or the disciples in the burial (cf. Mk 6:29 which relates the burial of John the Baptist by his disciples). In Luke and John the disciples have not fled (to Galilee). They are definitely around and so is

Jesus' mother (Jn 19:25). Several of them visit the tomb after the announcement of the women later. Why not have them appear on the scene of the burial as well and participate in for instance the performance of some mourning rites? Could it be that apart from Mark's story line which has Jesus condemned by the Sanhedrin (leaving no other option open than a shameful burial by members of this body) there was in fact an originating event to this extent that constrained both Mark and the later accounts?

History attests to an uncertainty and absence of knowledge—one could almost say a disinterest—as to the exact place of Jesus' burial, and this remained the case for over three hundred years (Wedderburn 1999:65; McCane 2004:268). Even in the heat of debate there is no evidence that there ever was any opening up of tombs to produce a body or demonstrate the lack thereof (Wedderburn 1999:61).[73] This contrasts with, for instance, the recorded knowledge of the tomb of James the Just around 180 CE and the interest in Jesus' place of birth from as early as the mid-second century (Wedderburn 1999:63–64). This silence of history can point to two things: either the early church simply did not know where the tomb was (Lüdemann 2001:111) or the early church made the conscious or unconscious decision not to remember and venerate a grave so poignantly associated with shame (McCane 2004:268).

It is now time to present our best historical reconstruction of Jesus' burial and tomb. Firstly and most importantly, it has to be recognised that absolute certainty as to the historical fact of Jesus' burial is beyond reach. Having said this, two kinds of evidence seem to point to a burial for Jesus: first, historical evidence in the form of norms and practices in the first century CE with regard to the burial of victims of crucifixion, and second, the literary evidence, and here we point to especially the *kind of growth* that the developing tradition attests to: a growth that in many respects

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[73] Craig (1985:59) and Perkins (1992:35) defend the historicity of the empty tomb by emphasising that Jewish polemic presupposed that the tomb was empty. However, like Wedderburn, Mahoney (1974:160) and Carnley (1987:57) point out that Jewish polemic proves nothing because all that it presents us with is indeed a *presupposition.* The continuing Christian tradition nowhere suggests that hostile Jews in fact examined the suspected tomb of Jesus, and neither is there any evidence that Christians were able repeatedly to return to the tomb to confirm the women's story. It was rather a matter of claim and counter-claim and arguing from silence. Therefore, from the perspective of Jewish polemic it cannot be established that there actually *was* a tomb, accessible and recognisable and known to have been occupied by Jesus.

translates into protest and embellishment, yet on the whole shows signs of being controlled and kept within bounds. To sum up, Jesus was most probably shamefully buried involving a tomb that would afterwards be difficult to identify.

3.2.4.11 Historical Reconstruction of Mark 16:1–8

Crossan rejects the historicity of the empty tomb story and so does Lüdemann. For these two scholars everything after Jesus' death is a historical vacuum. There are no earthly remains of Jesus that can be traced; there is no identifiable tomb for women to watch and to visit later—these are just narrative details carefully designed by Mark to prepare for the empty tomb story. Lüdemann concludes the following with regard to Mark 16:1–8: 'The historical yield is nil: in the story we merely find the claim that the crucified Jesus has been raised (2001:114).' For Lüdemann the empty tomb narrative is a story already cast in the form of a reflection (2004:33). The belief in Jesus' resurrection was there and subsequently the mind constructed a situation in accordance with convictions about what must be or have been the case (Wells 1999:141). And so, the empty tomb story came to fufill the purpose of answering questions from adherents and even opponents (Lüdemann 2004:138). Wright vehemently opposes such a theory. He does not believe that Mark 16:1–8 functioned as 'the historicising explanation of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus' (2003:628). Like Fisher (1999:76) Wright argues that the discovery of the empty tomb is presented as a puzzle in search of a solution (2003:628). Craig agrees and concludes that the story's ambiguity and its lack of apologetic and theological motifs confirm that it never functioned as an apologetic device of early Christians. Instead, it shows all the signs of being a primitive and factual account (1985:58). Still, Lüdemann has a point when he comments that, as the empty tomb tradition and the apparition tradition were brought increasingly closer together in the later accounts, an appearance of Jesus in the vicinity of the empty tomb did function as an apologetic device to stress the bodily character of Jesus' resurrection (2004:138).

The crucial question remains: 'Why did *Mark* tell *this kind of story*?' Botha interprets the gospel of Mark as the life-story of the vindicated hero-martyr Jesus. Within such a pattern the empty tomb story completes in powerful imagery the vindication of Jesus and his cause (1989:208). Mark does not end the story with its hero dead on a cross. Instead, the hero is granted a place among a small group of distinguished people who mysteriously escape death and whose bodies are not found. The fact that the hero is

first buried in a tomb with a large stone rolled in front of it only enhances the miraculous and saving nature of God's intervention.

It may well be that the 'hero' pattern provides us with an important clue for understanding Mark 16:1–8. Crossan referred to this story pattern as the dyadic persecution-vindication theme which became for him the framework for interpreting the *Cross Gospel* (see §3.2.3.4). The moment a text is shaped by this ancient symbolism of the persecution and vindication of the righteous sufferer, historical judgements must be suspended. Passion prophecy is the substratum of such texts and therefore, to say it in Crossan's words, we are in the realm of prophecy historicised, not in the realm of history remembered (see §3.2.3.2). Vindicated innocence is what matters in such stories, whether expressed in terms of an empty tomb as in Mark or in terms of immediate communal ascension to God's throne as in the story of visible resurrection in the *Gospel of Peter.*

There is a second clue. Earlier this study concluded that Mark belongs to a type of literature defined as oral traditional composition which implies a context of storyteller and audience. It was stated that the storyteller aims to make Jesus live in the imagination of the audience. Byrskog (2004:471) in writing about the connection between oral performance and rhetoric adds that the storyteller's purpose also includes convincing the audience. In the case of Mark the audience has to become convinced of the heroic, faithful and exemplary character of Jesus who is rewarded with some post-mortem fate. However, historical actuality, specific events and unique persons are less important in oral traditional composition than patterns, types and imaginative and evocative qualities (Botha 1989:202).

Therefore, based on genre and type of literature, must we conclude that the empty tomb story totally lacks historicity? Not quite. Scholars that defend the historicity of the empty tomb tradition regard the detail regarding the discovery of the empty tomb by *women* as a strong piece of evidence in favour of historical authenticity. It is argued that fabrication would have produced culturally more credible witnesses. That this argument is not as unassailable as it looks at first sight, we explained earlier (see §3.2.4.9; cf. Carnley 1987:60). Craig (1985:58), however, argues in addition that the repeated listing of the women's names is significant because it points to the fact that these women were still known in the primitive church and so could not be associated with a false account. Bauckham (2003:53) concludes the same and even offers an explanation for the divergences between the lists: an evangelist would only include a

woman's name in a given list if she was well-known to him and if he was sure that she had actually witnessed the event described, whether crucifixion, burial or angelophany and empty tomb. So, are the women as eyewitnesses, as the 'living and surviving voice (Bauckham 2003:41),' our guarantee to historicity after all? Unfortunately, the troublesome fact that we have very *divergent* accounts about events that more or less the same small group of women supposedly witnessed and participated in neither Craig nor Bauckham satisfactorily addresses.[74] Nevertheless, that *women* were somehow involved in an event that involved Jesus' grave shortly after the latter's death is accepted as a historical nucleus even by scholars who proceed minimally when it comes to historically reconstructing the events of Easter. Botha ventures to say that some women (or only Mary of Magdala) noticed some irregularity at the suspected tomb of Jesus possibly at the third day, since it was a Jewish custom to visit the grave of the deceased within three days to check against apparent death (Botha 1989:208; Craig 1985:52). Wedderburn also insists on a role for the women but, like Botha, he is unable to define it with any exactness:

> Did the women find Jesus' tomb again, but find it empty? Or was it simply a matter of not finding the body, leaving open the question of whether it was findable at all, or whether they looked in the right place? … Yet the women's failure to find the body could in itself be enough to ensure them a valid place in the tradition, as an important link in the chain of events and arguments that led to the rise of belief in Jesus' resurrection (1999:60).

Wedderburn concludes that the fruitless search for a body proved later to be immensely fruitful in the formation of Christian tradition. It opened up the way for the assertion of Jesus' resurrection according to at least one understanding of what 'resurrection' meant and involved (1999:65). Botha also stresses the importance of consequent developments. He assumes that miracles performed by the disciples and post-burial appearances of Jesus secured the growth of the Jesus movement (1989:208). In other words, an insignificant event involving women gained significance from consequent meaningful events and developments.

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[74] Bauckham (2003:54) argues that the differences between the gospel narratives of the women's visit to the tomb may well reflect rather directly the different ways in which the story was told by various of the women. This is the resort to memory and oral transmission of which more will be said in §3.2.4.13

But is it not possible to ascertain more concerning the historical events that underlie the story of the empty tomb? It does not seem so. According to Botha these events are lost in the mists of time (1989:209). Carnley (1987:60–61) admits to the meagreness of the evidence and concludes with a tinge of desperation:

> For, try as we may, and with all the positive good will in the world, we simply do not have sufficient evidence to say for certain whether the empty tomb is a very primitive story whose kernel is factual, or whether in fact it is a later development, the product of faith, given a particular set of theoretical presuppositions about what might necessarily be involved in resurrection belief.

Carnley (1987:61) adds that even if it were possible to secure the bare historicity of the emptiness of the tomb, the ambiguity of its *meaning* would still be staring us in the face. What happened inside the tomb is not described by Mark and therefore remains outside the sphere of historical inquiry. However, the more we decide that *what* we have (the burial and empty tomb sequence) is a sequence of objective historical events, the more we reduce what presumably happened to the body of Jesus in the tomb to the dimensions of a bodily resuscitation (see also §1.3.1). This is too high a cost. Alternatively we allow the story to remain in Mark's world. And for ourselves as inhabitants of a different world we allow room for 'a reverent agnosticism about bodies and tombs' (Eddy 1990:329).

Here our historical investigation with regard to corpse, occupied tomb and empty tomb ends. And whereas Crossan radically rejects the historicity of Mark 15:42–16:8, we proceed cautiously but minimally: most probably Jesus was shamefully buried; women might have gone looking for the tomb, possibly on the third day; things did not go quite the way they had anticipated; amidst confusion about the missing body hope arose that God had vindicated him and this hope received a boost when stories of visions to disciples started to circulate. Alternatively, the appearance stories came first and originated in Galilee; the empty tomb tradition attempted to fill a gap as to what had happened in Jerusalem during those early days after the crucifixion. Since the disciples had fled to Galilee where their leader, Jesus, appeared to them for purposes of instruction and commissioning, and since the women had earlier shown an interest in Jesus' body and had reported some irregularities concerning the suspected grave, it was only natural that in the burial and empty tomb tradition women would play the major role.

3.2.4.12 Evaluation on Source Relations

This in-depth study on the stories of burial and empty tomb in Mark started with several questions. The first question concerned Mark's *Vorlage.* Crossan postulates that the *Cross Gospel* is the single independent version of the linked passion-resurrection narrative that served as a common source for Mark and the other evangelists. Crossan admits that the process of literary dependence of the canonicals on the *Cross Gospel* is quite different from the synoptic model of text-in-front-of-me copying (1996:25). Mark for instance engages in retrojecting parts of the *Cross Gospel* into the earlier life of Jesus (see §3.2.4.2). Still, it is Crossan's 'operational theory' (1988:17) that the *Cross Gospel* stood at the beginning of a single stream of tradition on the passion and resurrection of Jesus. It was written around 40 CE. Two more strata were inserted a hundred years later (around 150 CE) as the text came under pressure to conform to the canonical gospels (1996:224).

This study has demonstrated that *Cross Gospel* priority over Mark and the other canonicals, implying the existence of the *Cross Gospel* as an early and independent literary source, is an untenable postulate that raises more problems than it solves (see §3.2.4.7). By following the 'trail of the tomb' (cf. Crossan 1996:127) this study illustrated once more that the *Cross Gospel* lacks consecutive cohesion (see also §3.2.3.7): Jesus suddenly lies buried in a tomb in verse 8:30 even though verse 6:21 implies that he was hastily buried in a limed pit. A text suffering from such incoherence can neither be an independent version nor the oldest version that remained the only one available for about thirty years (if indeed Mark is dated around 70 CE). Denton is right when he concludes that source relations and consequent stratification are not the absolute presuppositions that Crossan understands them to be (2004:67; see also §2.5). Therefore, at this point in our study we reaffirm the conclusion that was reached at the end of §3.2.3 (see §3.2.3.7): the presupposition that the *Cross Gospel* is an early, independent and written passion-resurrection account that functioned as the prototype for all other passion-resurrection narratives is untenable. Instead we accept the *Gospel of Peter* as a single literary source and date it with Johnson around 90 CE. We do not deny that the *Gospel of Peter* contains older traditions, but we refrain from identifying these as an independent source or sources located in chronological, literary layers.

A second question that was asked at the beginning of this study on Mark concerned the origins of the empty tomb story. Crossan, arguing from his own

operational theory of *Cross Gospel* priority, concluded that Mark decided not to make use of this source when it came to relating the stories of Jesus' burial and tomb. Instead Mark chose to create alternative stories in line with his theology (see §3.2.4.6). The careful observer notices that Crossan stays safely if not rigidly within the literary paradigm and the tradition-versus-redaction model. Moreover, the process that he depicts is one of linear development: the *Cross Gospel* is the original version and single source for the continuing tradition. Mark rejects this tradition for its resurrection narrative, creating instead an alternative empty tomb tradition, which in turn becomes the single source and prototype for all other versions of this story. It is significant that Johnson who also operates within the tradition-versus-redaction model does not agree with Crossan on this point. Johnson postulates that there existed in the early church two prototypes in the form of two completely independent empty tomb traditions: the guard at the tomb story and the women at the tomb story (1965:122).[75] No extant gospel text or layer in a text is, however, identical with either one of these prototypes (against Crossan!). Johnson further argues that due to the absence of certain apologetic motifs, the women at the tomb story in the *Gospel of Peter* is more primitive than the story in Mark and is therefore not based on Mark 16:1–8 but on a pre-Markan written account of the story which is closer to the prototype (1965:120). Johnson does not deny that there are 'novelistic developments' (1965:32) in the women at the tomb story in the *Gospel of Peter*. Elements such as the fear of the Jews and mourning certainly reflect lateness and an advanced stage of development (1965:35). However, absent from the story are important apologetic motifs such as the command to the women and the reference to Galilee (Mk 16:7), the silence of the women (Mk 16:8), the appearance of the risen Lord (Mt 28:9) and the presence of the disciples at the tomb (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:3). Based on this, Johnson concludes that the primitive form of the women at the tomb story, unencumbered and unconflated by later apologetic motifs, was still available at the time when the *Gospel of Peter* was written and so, despite some definite late features, the *Gospel of Peter* testifies to an *arrestation* in the development of the tradition in instances where there were no specific impulses at work for change (1965:35). This is an important insight: traditions

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[75] The position of the early Koester is similar: there was an older text now lost that ended with the story of the empty tomb, i.e. the women at the tomb story (see §3.2.3.7 and §3.2.4.6). Secondly, there was the epiphany story of Jesus leaving the tomb which was used by the *Gospel of Peter*, Mark and Matthew, i.e. the guard at the tomb story (see §3.2.4.2).

do not develop in an even manner chronologically and geographically. It follows that the products of the transmission process, the gospel texts, may display a combination of both very early and very late elements. Johnson sums it up as follows (1965:126):

> The combination of primitive material with strong novelistic development points to the availability of early tradition, the isolation of that tradition from the developments reflected in portions of the church (…), and the composition in a later period and environment.

A test case: Crossan takes much effort to explain everything in the *Cross Gospel* as early and primitive: its closeness to passion prophecy, its depiction of the Jewish leaders as perpetrators, its depiction of the Jewish people as repentant, its merging of resurrection and ascension into one event. Elements that he views as late are safely allocated to a later stratum. The underlying assumption is that a text must have existed with just primitive material, with only early features. Crossan attempts to uncover this text. He isolates what to him is primitive material in the *Gospel of Peter* and pins it down as the first literary layer which he provides with a name: '*Cross Gospel*'. However, in all of this Crossan overlooks the fact that traditions resemble a cloud rather than a straight line (see §3.2.4.8), and that the products of the transmission process, the gospel texts, reflect all the influences that they have been exposed to right through the process. This being the case, it is virtually impossible to equate a text, any text, with the original version of the story. Crossan goes one step further and attempts to equate a *layer* in a text with the original version, but not only does the selection process turn out to be inevitably subjective, in the end there is also no proof that this literary layer ever circulated as an independent literary source, as a story in its own right. No wonder Crossan's findings with regard to the *Cross Gospel* fail to convince and adequately explain all the data. Johnson, on the other hand, makes no attempt to pin down any extant text or layer in a text as a prototype. He assumes that there were two prototypes in the early church, two original empty tomb stories, but all he aims for is to approximate them, to identify the most primitive form of the tradition from the extant gospel texts (1965:35). Furthermore, while certainly recognising that there was development in the tradition (see §3.2.3.6), Johnson admits that this process was not always linear and accumulative but that there were instances in the gospel traditions of arrestation in development.

Crossan stands alone in identifying two texts, the *Cross Gospel* and Mark 15:42–16:8, as the two prototypes that mark the beginning of the transmission of the Jesus tradition with regard to burial and empty(ing) tomb. For Crossan this process resembles linear and accumulative growth within the literary paradigm. It is a process of two literary sources accruing redaction. Although operating within the same paradigm and the same tradition-versus-redaction model, Johnson does not agree with Crossan on what the two prototypes are. Furthermore, he doubts straightforward linear development in all instances. Earlier we spoke about the tradition-redaction stalemate (see §3.2.4.7). We are witnessing something of it here. Are there alternatives?

3.2.4.13 Evaluation on the Oral Tradition Model

In §3.2.3.7 the position of Aitken and the recent Koester with regard to the origins of the passion narratives was considered a shift in focus. These scholars propose cultic recitation of a foundational story or cult legend as the originating context of the passion narratives resulting in a multiformity of traditions. §3.2.4.8 examined the position of Botha and others who envisage the transmission of Mark in terms of multiple oral performances and the written *Gospel of Mark* as but an instance of that process. Botha's rethinking on the origins and traditional process of Mark is part of the same shift. It is a move away from the scribal uniform to the oral multiform. Dunn was mentioned in §3.2.4.8. Currently, a number of scholars, mainly conservative, regard his application of the oral tradition model to historical Jesus studies and gospel interpretation as *the* worthy alternative to the literary tradition-versus-redaction model. Therefore it is necessary to analyse his methodology in more detail here and find out whether he really offers us the 'new perspective' in gospel-critical studies, as proclaimed in the title of his latest book: *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (2005).

Dunn invites us to move away from the idea(l) of an 'original' version and focus instead on the originating impulse or event which gave birth to the tradition (2003:153). After all, what marks the beginning of the Jesus tradition is not some prototype but the faith-creating and transformative *impact* that Jesus made on his followers (2004:478), resulting in a living oral tradition with each oral performance functioning in and of itself as an 'original' (2003:153). It follows that variants in the gospel traditions should be explained as much or more in terms of performance

variation within a living oral tradition than in terms of editorial redaction (2003:169). Dunn emphasises that performance variation is integral to, even definitive of, oral tradition (2003:154). The original impact of the event was diverse in character and so the tradition that ensued was multiform *from the first*. It is clear, Dunn wants to move away from the concept of a developing and continuing literary tradition from a prototype. Dunn no longer visualises the traditioning process as a straight line with a small dot at the beginning but as a circle with a large mark in the middle. He applies the oral tradition model to the whole of the traditioning process. Even the evangelists, who finally committed the material to writing, were performers (2003:170). They wrote in the traditionally oral way, exploiting their freedom to make 'variations within the same' (2003:154). In all of this variability is a positive principle of orality and not a negative sign of degeneration and corruption (2003:175). And the stability is there also: it is found in the *theme* of the story or in its *core* element which the performers tended to retell with fidelity (2005:52; cf. Botha 1991:311).

Dunn's methodology includes an assumption that has far-reaching consequences for his overall results. It needs to be evaluated here. As we saw, Dunn defines an oral performance as an 'original' in the sense that it (re)tells the original impact of an originating event or impulse. Dunn expects considerable and significant continuity between the one who makes the impact, the impact itself, and the oral (re)telling of the impact because he says that 'the impression left by Jesus tells us quite a lot about Jesus—that is, about the Jesus-who-made-the-impact' (2004:480). This is a positive evaluation of oral performance/tradition as to its reliability as testimony to Jesus. No wonder, Gordon Fee utters a sigh of relief in a brief review on Dunn's latest book:

> At last, here is an accessible book by a noted New Testament scholar who takes seriously, and thus builds a strong case for, the role of orality/aurality among the early followers of Jesus. In so doing, Dunn also builds a strong case for the essential reliability of the Gospel materials (Dunn 2005:back cover).

But is Fee correct in correlating orality and reliability? Dunn has so far not been able to prove that a setting of thirty-odd years of oral performance and creative storytelling can and will preserve a tradition more authentically than the 'academic' setting of a scholar at a desk, composing, editing, writing and drawing his material mostly from written texts. Dunn's hope is that the performers—the apostles, teachers,

elders and bards—would have acted as repositories of community tradition and that the community would have been able to recognise the consistency or inconsistency of a performance as they related it to their store of tradition (2003:151–2). Unfortunately, Dunn admits that the role of the community in checking the performances of the tradition and the kind of criteria that were applied in order to ascertain which form of the tradition was true to its originating impulse are two issues that he has not yet sufficiently explored and that will have to be debated another day (2003:170). Thus there is still a lot of unmapped territory with regard to Dunn's model. To the two issues mentioned above could be added Dunn's failure to take into account the rhetorical implication of the orally performed and aurally received Jesus tradition. Dunn emphasises performance as corporate celebration at the expense of performance with the intention to persuade and convince the audience (Byrskog 2004:471). Furthermore, Dunn has not yet faced the challenge of the influential theory of *homeostasis*. He only mentions this theory in passing (2003:154). *Homeostasis* argues that societies and groups that perform oral tradition censor the past and celebrate only those items of the tradition that are relevant to the present situation, to the extent that the present becomes the past, fact and fiction merge in an oral symbiosis (Byrskog 2004:468–9).

Lastly, Dunn is not clear on the relationship between the individual and the group. On the one hand, he speaks about an original impact that was diverse and an ensuing Jesus tradition that was multiform (2003:173); on the other hand, he asserts that the original impact drew those impacted together in shared response (2004:479), resulting in a shared memory and corporate celebration which marked the beginning of the Jesus tradition as community tradition (2004:482). How and where do individual and collective memory meet or part ways in Dunn's model? Again, the community is said to regularly perform its tradition, but it is also said that the community acknowledges 'proficient performers of the tradition' who are appointed to keep alive the tradition (2003:151). How does Dunn distinguish between the collective and individual efforts to perform, reflect on and sustain the tradition?

The evangelists (the authors of the gospels) are also considered performers in Dunn's model. Gerhardsson (2005:16–17) rejects this description and role for the evangelists. He locates the evangelists in the last phase of the traditioning process, the phase when the material is finally committed to writing. He thinks that this phase needs special treatment and that Dunn has overlooked this fact to his own detriment.

Byrskog (2004:468) asks the following about the written gospels and the gospel writers:

> Are the gospels a written outflow of the ongoing oral traditioning or do they, after all, reflect the memories and theological profile of single individuals who employ the performances in order to communicate their own viewpoints? … How should we define this subtle relationship between the authors as part of an oral traditioning process and as prolific individuals using the oral tradition as some kind of resource for their own literary and theological achievement?

Byrskog questions are right on the mark. Dunn stresses communal memory and group identity (2003:171) at the expense of individual talent, creative composition and theological idiosyncrasy. In Dunn's model it is almost as if the performers (including the evangelists) exist by virtue of the group. Performers are 'acknowledged' by the group and they perform the tradition within the 'community's horizons of expectation' (2003:151). But is appropriateness of performance to context as far as we can go in explaining the distinctiveness of each gospel? It is clear, there is a dubious tension in Dunn's oral tradition model: between the communal and the personal and this can have far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of the written gospels.

On the whole one gets the impression that the diversity of the tradition does not unsettle Dunn very much; in fact, it confirms his central premise that the Jesus tradition in its early phases of transmission was oral and aural in nature. Regarding the oral principle of 'variation within the same', Dunn daringly concludes that it puts us directly in touch with the tradition in its living character, as it was heard in the earliest Christian groups and churches, and can still be heard and responded to today (2003:175). Compare this with tradition-criticism that considers the diversity of the tradition (multiple versions or parallel traditions) a basic historiographic problem in the data on Jesus (§2.4.2.2).

In the final analysis we need to find out whether the model of oral traditioning and composition is able to explain the data better than the tradition-versus-redaction model. Returning now to Mark's gospel, we conclude that the interpretation of Mark as oral traditional literature by scholars such as Dunn, Botha and Dewey is well-argued and best explains the data. Having said this, we emphasise that within this model the performer or storyteller must not be viewed as a mere collector of (eyewitness) acounts, stories and anecdotes which were subsequently memorised and retold. Neither can his role be restricted to that of guardian or custodian of the tradition. Botha

emphasises the storyteller's shaping influence on the tradition (1989:201; see also §3.2.4.8). Indeed, storytellers were skilled and talented individuals whose narrations were dynamic, thriving and unique (Botha 1991:307). By looking at the structure and unity of Mark, one detects the talent of a skillful narrator. Kelber (1976:156–57), writing as a tradition-critic within the literary paradigm, comments on the impressive structure of Mark 14–16: how all of the major Markan themes converge in those chapters. Clearly, whether we envisage the traditioning process as (mainly) oral or whether we envisage it as solitary authorial isolation, the role of the performer or writer as a skillful and creative composer can never be underestimated. We agree in full with Byrskog's depiction above of the 'subtle relationship between the authors (of the gospels) as part of an oral traditioning process and as prolific individuals using the oral tradition as some kind of resource for their own literary and theological achievement'—even though Byrskog is not yet sure how exactly to define this relationship. But Crossan is not off the mark when he interprets the burial and empty tomb stories in Mark as Markan creations depicting Markan theological themes. As they fit into the rest of Mark, these stories have the unmistakable stamp of the 'prolific individual'.

A serious problem with Crossan is, however, that he will not allow an oral period for Mark. Neither does he allow for an interpretation of Mark in terms of oral composition, using oral techniques of composition. Consequently, Crossan's interpretation of Mark is at times misguided (see §3.2.4.8). Crossan wants to control the tradition history of Mark but by interpreting the empty tomb story as a Markan creation dated around 70 CE he implies that during the crucial period of roughly 30–50 CE there was only one story circulating, the passion-resurrection narrative called the *Cross Gospel,* together with the performed tradition of some creedal statements. In the fifties two Sayings Gospels were added: *Thomas* and *Q.* Where does that leave stories on Jesus' life? In Crossan's inventory of the Jesus tradition by chronological stratification they appear late and in written form with no presumption of a preceding oral phase (1991a:427). For Dunn this is the dilemma that tradition-criticism presents us with: the awkward gap of an oral period unfilled and unexplained (2005:52). And yet, as Fisher has argued, the lateness of the written tradition actually indicates that the oral tradition was strong—most likely coupled with a fervent belief in the imminence of the *parousia* (1999:63). Denton concluded earlier that tradition-criticism is not the *sine qua non* of a historical handling of the data (see §2.5). This statement takes on added meaning as Dunn observes that the presumption of orality for the early stages of the Jesus

transmission is a 'brutal fact' that no one can escape any longer (Dunn 2005:53). It is true, studies on orality, (il)literacy and oral culture abound and the insights and models from disciplines like socio-linguistics are being applied to gospel and historical Jesus studies with impressive results. Dewey (1989:34) refers to the concept of 'oral hermeneutics'. Against solitary authorial isolation Aitken and Koester mention the role of communal cultic practice in the generation of tradition. Crossan will have to review his stance on orality[76] and his (over)dependency on the individualistic literary paradigm lest he finds himself relegated to the sideline as an archaic scholar very soon.

What about the other gospels? Within the tradition-versus-redaction model Crossan views Mark's burial and empty tomb stories as the prototype, the original version. The others are directly or indirectly dependent on him and merely add their own redactional activity as was outlined in §3.2.4.4. Dunn (2005:52–3) admits that the feature of fixity and flexibility among the gospels *could* be explained in terms of literary redaction but he prefers to explain it in terms of performance variation within a living oral tradition as this explanation takes into account the oral period. Botha (1991:316) also thinks that the possibilities of orality research for re-thinking the synoptic problems are extensive. Lüdemann (2004:33) remarks that the possible role of oral traditions always needs to be considered, and he is referring in particular to the burial and empty tomb stories here. It is clear, the monopoly of the tradition-versus-redaction model has ended. The written gospels are viewed more and more as the 'tip of the iceberg' of the Jesus tradition. Editorial (literary) redaction for the last phase of the traditioning process is certainly not ruled out, but it is deemed necessary that the earlier stages are re-envisaged as oral in character.

But this new perspective leads to an important question. How are stability and diversity accounted for in the oral phase? With regard to stability it must be noted that in their oral performances storytellers always produce the gist, the nucleus of stories. As a consequence, historical reminiscence is likely to be found in the nucleus of stories, if anywhere (Dunn 2005:52). Interestingly, this is exactly what the burial and empty tomb stories exhibit. Despite diversity there is a structure of stability: the burial stories in the gospels contain the nucleus of a shameful burial. In the same way, the empty tomb story's nucleus is the image of the empty tomb. Acknowledging this

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[76] See §2.4.2.7 for an outline of Crossan's position on the role of the oral tradition in gospel studies.

feature of stabilising themes within oral performance does not mean that performance variation is minimised. The diversity in the traditions is there and needs to be accounted for. Dunn asserts that diversity is a phenomenon that was there from the start; the traditions were multiform *from the first* due to the diverse character of the original impact (2003:173). Dunn furthermore recognises that variation continued to creep in as the performers made the performance fit the context (2003:169). Over against this stands the concept of a developing and continuing tradition within the tradition-versus-redaction model (see §3.2.3.6). This model assumes an original version at the start and a redactor who, driven by apologetic and novelistic motifs, altered his source and even created new narrative material. Earlier this model and the assumptions that underlie it came under severe criticism (see §3.2.4.12) It was demonstrated that visualising redaction, and thus diversity in tradition, as linear development from an original version has reached an impasse. Is Dunn's way of visualising diversity a valid alternative? It should be noted that when Dunn postulates diversity *from the start*, his motive is conservative since he aims to preserve continuity between the original impact and the retelling of this impact. The concept of a developing tradition, on the other hand, identifies forces or apologetic motifs that are at work upon the prototype to alter it, implying that after a long enough period of time the original version is partly or wholly covered by layers of redaction.

Whatever the interpretive model(s) one employs, no one can deny that the burial and empty tomb stories in the gospels evidence apologetic development and novelistic embellishment. This casts doubt on Dunn's optimistic assessment of diversity and variability as 'integral to the tradition's living character and not a departure from authenticity' (2003:169). Against Dunn we maintain that the kind of diversity that is encountered in the burial and empty tomb stories cannot merely be explained in terms of the impact's *diverse* character (whatever Dunn means by this) or in terms of the performance fitting the context. Much more was going on in these stories as our historical reconstruction of burial and tomb has demonstrated. Recalling now our earlier conclusion that *all* tradition, including oral tradition, is interpretation (see §3.2.4.8), it is not implausible to argue that apologetic and novelistic motifs were already at work in the phase of the oral traditioning process, even though they only came to the surface in the final phase of the actual writing down of the story. Rhetorics and *homeostasis* could be considered some of the forces responsible for apologetic development within the oral traditioning process.

Dunn says that he wants us to reflect, not so much on *what* we look at as the *way* we look at it (2003:157). In light of the above there are now two ways to look at for instance the motif in Matthew to have the risen Lord appear to the women at the tomb (Mt 28:9). The first way views the motif as mere redaction of Matthew on Mark. It takes place, strictly speaking, in the mind of Matthew only, who sits at a desk pen in hand and Mark's gospel in front of him. The second way is to view the motif as a theme or nucleus that was absorbed much earlier in the communities that Matthew formed part of and with whom he celebrated the stories of and about Jesus. In this case all that Matthew did was select and include this detail in his gospel story; the community had already traditioned this material, it was already 'community tradition' (Dunn 2004:482) This second way of looking at diversity has the advantage of including the oral phase but it raises a whole new set of questions. Apologetic development and novelistic embellishment in the oral phase touch on issues like rhetorics, *homeostasis,* the censoring role of the community, the performing and editing role of the evangelist and the application of criteria of authenticity, not just as the tradition was transmitted, but also as the tradition was being performed and celebrated. These issues, understandably, cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say that the challenge for scholars like Dunn is right here. If Dunn can adequately deal with the above underexplored aspects of the oral traditioning process, his approach can in truth be called 'a new perspective'.

Crossan's interpretation of the non-Markan burial and empty tomb stories in terms of editorial literary redaction is certainly valid, as Dunn himself admits (2005:52). Crossan's attitude is essentially pragmatic: the multiple versions of the burial and empty tomb tradition create a basic historiographic problem. Since redaction-criticism is able to explain the divergences aptly and convincingly, this tool will be used to explain the data and no more is needed. The oral tradition model, on the other hand, requests Crossan to reconceptualise the parameters within which he envisages the processes of the performance and the transmission of the Jesus tradition taking place. So far Crossan has extended his parameters beyond literary constraints only once and this was when he proposed female ritual lament to complement male exegesis in the generation of the original passion-resurrection narrative (1998a:573). Whether this is a sign of good things to come remains to be seen.

This section opened by recognising the move from scribal uniform to oral multiform as a shift in focus. The question was asked whether this shift, this new perspective

would be able to offer an escape from the stalemate achieved by the tradition-versus-redaction model that operates so exclusively within the literary paradigm. An analysis and evaluation of Dunn's oral tradition model followed. It yielded these findings: firstly, recognising an oral phase for the performance and transmission of the Jesus tradition is valid and necessary and removes the pressure to look for a prototype as each (frozen) performance is in and of itself an 'original'. Secondly, although Dunn's model emphasises such a phase, it still needs to be improved and refined in order to account more adequately for the stability and especially the *diversity* in the oral traditioning process. Thirdly, although Dunn prefers to explain diversity in terms of performance variation, he admits that there is no knock-down argument in explaining the character of the Jesus tradition. Diversity *can also* be explained in terms of literary redaction (2005:52–3). Fourthly, more than once Dunn implies or explicitly states that oral *living* tradition is in a better position to preserve authentic Jesus material than a literary tradition (2003:169, 173, 175) but this constitutes a flaw in his methodology as no argued evidence is put forward. Fifthly, Dunn's model emphasises the role of the community at the expense of the input of the individual.

It is clear from these findings that an improved and refined oral tradition model is needed. Will such a model be able to account for the entire process of the traditioning of the material? No, we agree with Gerhardsson (2005:16) that there was final redaction by the evangelists during the last phase when the oral tradition was committed to writing. The written gospels are the outflow of the oral traditioning process but at the same time they are the creative compositions of prolific individuals who used the oral tradition as some kind of resource for their own literary and theological achievement (Byrskog 2004:468). Diversity in the written gospels can thus be accounted for in multiple ways as this section has demonstrated. The list includes:

- o diverse character of the impact
- o oral performance fitting the context or horizon of the audience
- o apologetic motifs for change in the oral phase
- o novelistic embellishments in the oral phase
- o editorial redaction on oral traditions by composer of written source
- o literary redaction on written source

Since there is clearly not just one way to account for the diversity in the written gospels, the best way forward in gospel-critical studies today is not just one model but a combination of models.

3.2.4.14 Final Conclusions

Our evaluation of source relations and the oral tradition model could not prevent the slaughter of some of Crossan's 'holy cows'—presuppositions that, as our study progressed, turned out to be more of a hindrance than a help in explaining the data. We mention four: the existence and independence of the literary source called the *Cross Gospel*; the deliberate and exclusively *literary* creation of the burial and empty tomb stories in Mark; the empty tomb story in Mark as the prototype from which all subsequent versions of the women at the tomb story derive; and last but not least, tradition-criticism as the *sine qua non* of a historical handling of the data. Crossan calls these presuppositions prior historical judgements that are based on present evidence but require constant future testing against new theory, method, evidence, or experience (Crossan 1998a:109; see also §2.3.5). So far Crossan has not altered his position on any of these presuppositions, but this study on Mark presented new theory, method and evidence against which the above presuppositions were tested and found wanting.

Our second point of criticism relates to the second presupposition and concerns Crossan's outline of Markan redactional theology. More than once, his conclusions in this regard come across as unfounded and even biased. Does this confirm Dunn's view that the method of redaction-criticism can become increasingly speculative in its application and uncertain in its outcome (2003:170)? We saw that scholarly support for interpreting Mark 16:1–8 as anti-tradition and Mark 16:7 as referring to the *parousia* is low (see §3.2.4.5). Even so, Crossan detects an antithesis of apparition tradition to anti-tradition in the early faith communities and he overexploits this antithesis in his overall interpretation of Mark. If one considers Crossan's reticence to include post-resurrection appearances in a historical reconstruction of earliest Christianity, this interpretation becomes understandable.

The process by which Crossan arrives at a non-historical interpretation of the empty tomb story carries some conviction. Crossan is pushed to this interpretation from three perspectives. The first one is data control. The complex *The Empty Tomb* is number 275 in Crossan's inventory (1991a:445–6):

> **275-** *The Empty Tomb* [2/1] : (1a) Mark 16:1–8 = Matt. 28:1–10 = Luke 24:1–11; (1b) John 20:1, 11–18; (1c) *Gos. Pet.* 11:44; 12:50–13:57.

This complex does not fulfil the criteria of first stratum (Mark is a second stratum source) and multiple attestation (Mark is the only independent source). It is therefore marked with a minus (-). §3.2.1 explained that a minus indicates that Crossan views this complex not as historical or symbolic event but rather as product of the Jesus tradition. §2.4.2.2 explained that data control as the first and foundational phase of Crossan's historical method is extremely important and must precede interpretation. A point of criticism is in place here: the decision to interpret the complex *The Empty Tomb* as product of the Jesus tradition is not as interpretation-free as Crossan wants us to believe. In Crossan's method (as in all methods) the phase of data control does not take place within a vacuum. Crossan's method proceeds from historical judgments or gospel presuppositions and is based on the classic methodological model of tradition-criticism. Within this model Mark is considered the only independent source. Had Crossan, however, operated from within the oral tradition model it would no longer be possible to speak of Mark as the only independent source because the method of oral traditioning views the gospels as multiple oral performances. Thus method determines data control. At the same time method is not the neutral entity that Crossan portrays it to be. Method is not immune from historicality (see §1.3.2). It follows that interpretation is never bracketed, not even in the first phase of data control.

What are Crossan's other frames of reference for interpreting the empty tomb story non-historically? The *narrative context of the source* confirms for Crossan a non-historical interpretation. Crossan interprets the empty tomb story as a deliberate Markan creation since it reflects Markan redactional theology from beginning to end. Obviously, creation implies non-historicity. Even though no scholar agrees with Crossan on this particular originating context for Mark's empty tomb story, most share Crossan's non-historical interpretation of the story (see §3.2.4.9). There must therefore still be another context or frame of reference that unites all those who interpret the empty tomb story non-historically. It is the *context of worldview or horizon* which was discussed in detail in §3.1.4. The empty tomb story contains the image of the empty tomb. This image can imply resurrection. The youth makes it explicit when he says to the women: 'He is risen.' This translates into the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead. This is not a historical possibilty open for many a scholar today. Crossan argues that for him there is only an *ethical* position left open, that is, to interpret this transcendental claim metaphorically and theologically, not literally and

historically (see §3.1.4). Consequently, the story in which this claim is embedded also has to be interpreted non-historically.

Since the burial story is so closely linked to the empty tomb story in Mark, it is important to investigate what the interrelated phases of data control and data interpretation yield with regard to this story. *Burial of Jesus* is complex 70 in Crossan's inventory of the Jesus tradition (1991a:438):

> **70+** *Burial of Jesus* [1/2] : (1) 1 Cor 15:4a; (2a) *Gos. Pet.* 5:15b; 6:21; (2b) Mark 15:42–47 = Matt. 27:57–61 = Luke 23:50–56; (2c) John 38–42; (2d) *Gos. Pet.*2:3–5a; 6:23–24.

In accordance with his method Crossan marks this complex with a plus (+) which means that he considers it to be authentic Jesus material. This complex does indeed fulfil the criteria of first stratum and multiple attestation. Crossan identifies two independent sources: *First Corinthians* and the *Cross Gospel.* The latter is the prototype for all other versions of the burial account. Notice that the prototype only involves a presumed hasty burial in obedience to Deuteronomy 21:22–23. The actual *Gospel of Peter* relates the burial by Joseph of Arimathea but is at the *end* of this stream of tradition.

Despite the plus (+) as outcome for the phase of data control, §3.2.4.10 explained Crossan's rejection of the historicity of Jesus' burial—hasty or elaborate. What is at work here is the reciprocity between data control and data interpretation. Denton (2004:71) comments that the two operations of data control and data interpretation can never be described as distinct and isolated from one another. Data are always understood and interpreted in contexts. Crossan's interpretation of the burial of Jesus is a classic example of this interplay. Despite tradition-criticism's positive historical assessment reflected in the plus (+), two contexts convince Crossan that the burial as historical event is implausible. The *narrative context of the sources* confronts Crossan with the procedure of prophecy historicised in the prototype (the *Cross Gospel*): there is intertextuality of the OT text, namely a reference to Deuteronomy 21:22–23. In addition, among the multiple later versions of the tradition Crossan observes intense redactional activity which must point to damage control (1991a:394). Crossan concludes that the burial accounts convey hope, not history. The second context that convinces Crossan that Jesus' burial as described by the evangelists lacks historicity is the *context of history and archaeology.* Crossan argues that this context points to

non-burial for crucifieds. §3.2.4.10 pointed out, however, that Crossan does not handle the relevant evidence in a balanced way. He appears predisposed towards non-burial for crucifieds and interprets the evidence accordingly. Crossan states that method is our best hope for honesty (1999:5). We conclude that the application of self-conscious and self-critical method is not sufficiently in evidence with regard to Crossan's interpretation of the datum of Jesus' burial.

This ends our analysis and evaluation of Crossan's treatment of the burial and empty tomb stories in the *Gospel of Mark.* Crossan has attempted to 'reconstruct the past interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse' (Crossan 1999:3). History is mere reconstruction, but reconstruction is all there is. In the case of the ancient stories of burial and empty tomb in Mark there was precious little that could be historically reconstructed. Several frames of reference steered Crossan towards a non-historical interpretaton of Mark 15:42–16:8. Which frame of reference exercised the most influence cannot be known. What is known is that the method of tradition-criticism determined data control. And in the case of Jesus' burial, data interpretation overruled data control. It demonstrates once more that Crossan is more of a holistic historiographer than he is willing to admit (see §3.2.2.6)

3.2.5 Summary

In §3.2.1 the objective for the study on the literature concerning the resurrection of Jesus was formulated as follows: demonstrate that the decision to interpret the claim 'Jesus is risen' metaphorically is reinforced and corroborated from the context of the intra- and extracanonical sources on the resurrection of Jesus. Has this study achieved its aim? Crossan asserts that a correct handling of the sources is crucial since one's method stands or falls by it (Denton 2004:67). Consequently, Crossan has been meticulously careful to outline his method for the microcosmic level of the literary tradition on the resurrection of Jesus. But it is in this very area that Crossan stumbles. There are several major conclusions on this level that clearly must facilitate the non-historical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection but that lack methodological consistency. Firstly, the decision to interpret 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 for the most part non-literally is methodologically flawed. Data control based on Crossan's two main criteria of authenticity must lead to a historical interpretation of the apparitions. Secondly, the decision to postulate that a layer in the *Gospel of Peter* was the first and

independent narrative on the passion and resurrection of Jesus is methodologically problematic. This layer lacks the necessary consecutive cohesion. Moreover, transmissional analysis is not able to confirm that this text ever circulated as a single independent literary source. Thirdly, the decision to interpret Mark's empty tomb story as a literary creation is methodologically restrictive as it ignores the rich possibilities for an oral interpretation of this gospel.

Crossan, no doubt, has his reasons for interpreting the above three sources the way he does. §3.2.2.5 explained why Crossan downplays the importance of historical post-resurrection apparitions in the emergence of early Christianity. §3.2.3.2 explained why Crossan prefers the *Cross Gospel* as prototype. The priority and early date of this gospel fit in with Crossan's reconstructed history of earliest Christianity in which historical recall was absent and was replaced by intense exegesis of the scriptures. Lastly, Crossan's decision to interpret Mark as literary creation solves the problem of the transmission history of this text. There simply was nothing until Mark called it into being.

Thus Crossan's historical reconstruction of earliest Christianity and its Easter faith includes some 'unmethodological' conclusions, but they are argued conclusions. Having to account for some data by explanation and argument rather than by stated method is not in itself necessarily problematic (Denton 2004:74). Data do get shaped by the historian's interpretive decisions. In any method of historiography the reciprocity between data control and data interpretation will show through. If a non-methodologically grounded explanation accounts best for the data and prevents collapse of overall coherence, it is justified. Ultimately what matters is the significant picture or hypothesis that is emerging. A good and valid historical hypothesis gets in all the data, constructs a basically simple and coherent overall picture and does not create new problems in other fields. Crossan presents the following hypothesis regarding the birth of Christianity: Easter faith started as an empowering movement, a Kingdom movement, long before Jesus' death, and it was this faith *as empowerment* that survived, despite execution. The empowering presence of one and the same Jesus was there before and after Easter; what changed was his mode of existence (Crossan 1996:210; see also §3.1.5). The validity of this hypothesis will be discussed in the next and last chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR   **HISTORICAL JESUS AS RISEN LORD—A VIABLE OPTION?**

There is ever and always only one Jesus. This, according to Crossan, is what Paul's seed metaphor means (1999:46). For incarnational or sarcophilic (i.e. 'flesh-loving') Christianity this one Jesus is the historical Jesus *as* risen Jesus (1999:47). In §1.5 Crossan's viewpoint with regard to Jesus' bodily resurrection was explained in some detail. Crossan considers himself an exponent of incarnational Christianity. For this type of Christianity 'the fleshly, bloodly, bodily resurrection of Jesus is absolutely necessary' (Crossan 1999:2). Chapter 3 has made it clear that by making this statement Crossan is definitely not saying that Jesus was raised from the dead, in the flesh, literally and historically. On the contrary, for Crossan the Easter event was not a concrete but a symbolic event, a dramatic historicization of something that took place over a much longer period. In fact, it is still taking place today. Wherever and whenever believers experience the embodied life and death of the historical Jesus as powerfully efficacious and salvifically present in this world, there 'bodily resurrection' is occuring (1999:46). But why does Crossan use terms like 'fleshly', 'bloodly', and 'bodily' to refer to the resurrection of Jesus, if he does not understand it literally and concretely, but metaphorically and symbolically? Crossan does so in order to make it unambiguously clear that he is a monist, not a dualist. Monism affirms a nondualistic humanity. It rejects the dualism of flesh against spirit and instead adheres to a monism of enfleshed spirit, which Crossan calls *sarcophilia* (1999:39). For Crossan, monism also proclaims a nondualistic, undivided and truly sarcophilic christology: the flesh-and-blood body of the earthly Jesus carries as risen Lord the wounds of his historical execution (1999:47). Those wounds raise questions, questions about the *life* of Jesus. And so incarnational Christianity with monism as its basic orientation furnishes the theological rationale and justification to do historical Jesus research and after having reconstructed the historical Jesus to say and live what that reconstruction means for present life in this world.

Some opponents to Crossan's argument must briefly be mentioned here. Luke Timothy Johnson (1999b:61) sees in Crossan's methodology a classic example of historical reductionism: a theological conviction concerning the humanity of Jesus is

identified with a process of historical reconstruction. For Johnson the humanity of Jesus is important (as it has always been for catholic Christianity) but he rejects historical reconstruction as the appropriate path to that humanity. The early Christian communities wrote from the standpoint of Jesus' *resurrection* and left us a portrayal of Jesus in their writings that is accessible, not through historical analysis, but through literary and religious apprehension (1999b:72). It is via these two means that an image comes into focus, the image of the biblical Christ which is valid for Christian faith. Johnson delegitimises historical Jesus research. To him, reconstructing the historical Jesus of the past for the purpose of grounding faith is a form of idolatry (cf. Kelber 1999:89).

Lüdemann, like Johnson, emphasises the centrality of the confession of early Christianity that God raised Jesus from the dead. He argues that those who deny the resurrection and replace the risen Christ by the historical Jesus are constructing an invalid 'Jesuology' (2004:198–99). In §3.2.2.5 Lüdemann's objections to Crossan's reconstruction of earliest Christianity were listed. At this point we ask whether Crossan really proposes to have the risen Christ replaced by the historical Jesus. Crossan's reply is that he does not propose this. His argument involves history *and* faith, more precisely, the dialectic between historical reconstruction and Christian faith within incarnational Christianity (1999:1–2). A historically-read Jesus does not necessarily lead to faith. Only when such a historically-read Jesus is believed to be the manifestation of God is it possible to speak of a theologically-read Christ. The structure of Christianity is: *this is how we see Jesus-then as Christ-now* (Crossan 1994a:200). Lüdemann maintains that it is futile to build faith on the foundation of the historical Jesus whether for the believers then or for us now, because the formative event of early Christianity was not the contemplation of the historical Jesus but the visionary experience of the Risen One (2004:138). It is the visions that have to be accounted for because without them there would be no Christianity (2004:173).

Kelber (1999:113) warns against an overemphasis on a singular aspect of the tradition at the high cost of oversimplifying Christian complexities, limiting Christian identities, and excluding Christian experiences. The three scholars referred to above—Crossan, Johnson, and Lüdemann—incline toward equating truth with the intelligibility of one monolithic aspect of the tradition, be it the historical Jesus, the biblical Christ, or an even more limited aspect of the tradition like visionary experience.

By so doing they distort what can be known about the Christian tradition and miss a great deal of what is important to know.

A good case in point is Crossan's minimal development of the aspect of Jesus' presence now. At one point Crossan asserts that Christian faith is the experience of the continued, empowering presence of absolutely the same Jesus in an absolutely different mode of existence (1996:210). Nowhere, however, does he articulate what he means by the presence of Jesus in 'an absolutely different mode of existence'. Lüdemann correctly asks for a little more concreteness in this regard (2004:173). Elsewhere Crossan affirms what Jesus' presence is *not* or rather *not only*: it is not just the spirit of Jesus that lives on in the world, or his followers that live on in the world. Then follows a positive statement: it is Jesus' embodied life that remains powerfully efficacious in this world (1999:45). By saying this Crossan has subtly changed from speaking about Jesus' presence in seemingly ontological terms to speaking about it in terms of effect, of impact. This is an ambiguous if not a reductionist way of speaking about the presence of Jesus and the way this presence is experienced.

Carnley's thinking on the presence of Jesus in the community of faith is more developed. Carnley proposes that in order to hold together history and faith (i.e. past event of Jesus' resurrection and present datum of Jesus' presence) one must work, not only with historical and theological models, but also with an epistemological model, namely a model for understanding the means of apprehending the reality of the raised Christ in the present. Only in this way a single unified view on the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus can be achieved (1987:28). The Spirit—also referred to in the New Testament as Spirit of Christ, Holy Spirit or Spirit of God—is the medium of the presence of the raised Christ with his people (1987:258–9). Recognising the presence of the Spirit of Christ involves memory of the life, death and character of the historical Jesus (1987:310). This shared common memory is important for promoting a sense of community among Jesus' followers. But the epistemology of resurrection faith involves more than just remembering; it also involves knowledge of the living presence of the raised Christ in the faith community by means of the Spirit. Carnley insists that this presence is an objective, spiritual presence, particularly in the life of Christian fellowship (1987:298). Therefore, he also defines the Spirit as the 'living Spirit of the fellowship of faith' (1987:364) or 'the distinctive Spirit of Christian fellowship' (1987:361).

Crossan also recognises Spirit or spirit as community builder. He calls it the 'invisible glue that holds any group together around some past memory, present purpose, or future project' (Crossan & Reed 2004:281). But this is how far Crossan goes. He does not refer to the Spirit as an objective spiritual presence that can be known. For Crossan it is the *content* of the Spirit that counts. Since the Spirit can be invoked as the Spirit of God, the ultimate question is: what is the *character* of that God whose Spirit has overtaken you (2004:281)? And similarly: what is the *character* of that Jesus whose Spirit you claim to have? Naturally, for Crossan, the answers lead back to the God of justice (1998a:586) and to the historical Jesus (1999:47).

For Carnley the historical Jesus alone cannot explain resurrection faith. The Church's proclamation as a *whole* reports something concerning Jesus (1987:354). Restricting resurrection faith to the historical Jesus boils down to negating the centuries-long presence and activity of the Spirit of Christ in the community of faith (1987:361). It falls outside the scope of this chapter to evaluate Carnley's proposals in more detail. At times he seems to equate the Spirit of Christ as objective spiritual reality with the spirit of Christian fellowship as subjective experience (1987:255, 364). But it is his positive contribution to point to the need for an epistemology of faith: how does the contemporary Christian know the actuality of the present Christ? Crossan does not sufficiently answer this question. He asserts that the 'embodied life and death of the historical Jesus continues to be experienced by believers' (1999:46), but he does not articulate what the structure of this experience is, unless he means by it a return to the drawing board again and again, generation after generation, in order to reconstruct the historical Jesus and live by what this reconstruction means for present life in this world (1999:47).

Historical reconstruction will indeed always be approximation. Still, with Crossan we maintain that reconstructing the historical Jesus is indispensable for Christian faith. Without the historical Jesus, what could serve as a corrective to the harm tradition can do and has done? Carnley never mentions the possibility of a tradition that strays, morally and ethically. Yet some parts of the Christian tradition challenge both the honesty of Christian history and the integrity of Christian conscience (Crossan 1996:36). In such cases historical reconstruction must serve as a corrective to the harm tradition has done. Kelber (1999:105) proposes a validation for historical Jesus reconstruction as an 'ethics of remembering'. Remembering facts has become a moral imperative in the twenty-first century CE. The facts of history—the wars and the

genocides—are so abhorrent and unbelievable that the natural response has become to ignore or to obscure. And yet, or for this very reason, they are in dire need of rememorization (Kelber 1999:105). Facts must be privileged more than faith or ideology, even when it concerns faith in Jesus. Never must facts be downplayed in order to salvage faith.

A final point: Crossan's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection and the Easter faith is metaphorical but it is not metaphysical. What is meant by this? Crossan departs for the most part from the literal, realist and this-worldly interpretation of orthodox incarnational Christianity, but this does not mean that his vision is *other*-worldly. On the contrary, the metaphor of Jesus' resurrection points to God's justification of this earth. Easter faith is nothing less than an imitation of the historical Jesus and a participation in bringing about God's reality (see also §3.1.5). Through it all there is intense loyalty to this earth, to the flesh-and-blood humanity that inhabits the earth. Crossan's broad metaphorical understanding of resurrection as renewal of this earth prevents him from interpreting resurrection as mere personal survival. Consequently, nowhere does Crossan express the hope for literal and individual resurrection as a reversal of personal death and mortality. Some might consider this a blind spot in Crossan's interpretation of the symbol of resurrection. It must be realised, however, that belief in personal resurrection is a late rather than an early phenomenon in the history of the monotheistic Jewish faith. The orientation of the Jews of the Old Testament as expressed in their scriptures is mostly corporate and this-worldly (see §3.1.3). And contradictory as it may sound, the this-worldly orientation requires faith. It requires one to trust and believe that life below under God is enough and all there is, and consequently, should be utilised to the full. The Psalmist says: 'The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings. The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time on and forevermore' (Ps 115:16–18a). Even when the belief in individual resurrection of the body came on the scene in Judaism, its originating context was the symbolic world of the apocalyptic which included the hope that this world would be radically renewed. The French theologian Jacques Pohier challenges believers today to adopt a this-worldly orientation and to realise here and now what can be realised of the alliance between God and us, between God and our world (1986:108). Pohier asserts in line with Origen that it is not the essential task of Christianity to resolve the question of death (Pohier 1986:100). Nor did Jesus primarily come to resolve the

question of death. Instead, he came to inaugurate a new type of relationship, in this world, between God and human beings, and as a result a new type of relationship between human beings (1986:101). Crossan's conclusions on Jesus' vision and program are similar to Pohier's (see §3.1.5).

The oft-heard criticism against the this-worldly orientation is: 'but how can anything make sense without (literal) resurrection and without eternal life?' A first and obvious rebuttal is that millions of those who deny any form of afterlife prove that life can be invested with meaning without belief in an afterlife (Pohier 1986:83). More importantly, what these critics forget is that the reverse argument also applies and has been used by Christians to their own detriment. It runs as follows: 'since a glorious future awaits us in the life to come, what meaning can this earthly life possibly have in comparison? Let us not invest in it; this earth is in any case lost.' Paul already had to warn the believers in Thessalonica to calm down and mind their own business after some had spread the rumour that the day of the Lord had already come (1 Th 4:11; 2 Th 2:2). Basically the Thessalonians had to be redirected from the other-worldly to the this-worldly orientation. It demonstrates that the much-praised 'meaning' that is derived from the prospect of resurrection and eternal life can easily become dysfunctional or distorted to the extent that it yields unproductiveness and a relinquishing of human responsibilities. Paul makes it clear what he thinks should be the effects of any teaching on and contemplation of resurrection and the age to come: 'Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain' (1 Cor. 15:58).

Resurrection is a symbol. It can 'work'—whether interpreted literally or metaphorically—but no interpretation of the symbol of resurrection is exhaustive or free from ambiguity. Moreover, the symbol of resurrection needs to take its place within the constellation of a worldview. It cannot on its own invest all of life's drama's with meaning. Pohier believes that one can only begin to comprehend the meaning of this life after the other-worldly orientation or realm has consciously been bracketed:

> ... it is a matter of discovering the intrinsic meaning of the realities of our human condition independently of their possible extension into eternity or their possible suppression in favour of eternal life. It is a matter of discovering the meaning and the savour of God and the realities of faith independently of the value that they may have for raising the dead…. Above all, we shall have to discover that we shall only be able to look at the question of death and the resurrection

of the dead in a better way if we first seek and experience the meaning and the substance of our mortal realities, the savour that God can have in this world (1986:108).

Pohier pleads for meaning within finite space and time. He considers it invalid to claim that realities do not make sense unless they last forever (1986:85). Cupitt (2005:265, 268) is on the same wave-length when he asks people to be religiously committed to the way they live their lives here and now, to translate belief in God (including belief in the resurrection) into commitment to existence.

Fortunately, the polyvalence of the symbol of resurrection allows for both a this-worldly and an other-wordly interpretation. The first elaborate utilisation of the symbol of resurrection in the scriptures is in Ezekiel 37. Its orientation is concretely this-worldly. God's words to the oppressed people via the prophet are: 'I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel' (Ezk 37:12). Here resurrection stands metaphorically for restoration. Crossan also anchors the symbol of resurrection in finite space and time, in this world and as hope for this world. It is valid to do so, even though Crossan's interpretation—like any other—is not free from ambiguity and challenge. For Crossan, the symbol of resurrection points to God's justification of the world, that is, God making the world divinely just (2003:55). However, how to act if one perceives that no progress is made in this regard; that instead meaningless suffering, unhappiness, and injustice prevail? Pohier says that at such moments the focus must remain fully on this world in order to banish the evil from the world as much as is in one's power (1986:108). It must certainly not be a time to get out the binoculars and stare at an anticipated future and ideal world.

For Crossan the historical Jesus as risen Jesus still carries the 'wounds of history' (1999:47). At the same time he epitomises the divine meaning of life. The historical Jesus is the risen Lord.

APPENDIX

The *Gospel of Peter* stratified according to Crossan

(1988:409–13;1996:223–7)

Crossan's three strata in the *Gospel of Peter* are indicated below as follows:

- o original stratum (or *Cross Gospel*) ⇨ ordinary print
- o (intra)canonical stratum ⇨ italicised
- o redactional stratum ⇨ underlined

[1:1] But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod nor any of his judges. And as they would not wash, Pilate arose. [1:2] And then Herod the king commanded that the Lord should be marched off, saying to them, "What I have commanded you to do to him do ye."

[2:3] Now there stood there Joseph, the friend of Pilate and of the Lord, and knowing that they were about to crucify him he came to Pilate and begged the body of the Lord for burial. [2:4] And Pilate sent to Herod and begged his body. [2:5a] And Herod said, "Brother Pilate, even if no one had begged him, we should bury him, since the Sabbath is drawing on. For it stands written in the law: the sun should not set on one that has been put to death."

[2:5b] And he delivered him to the people on the day before the unleavened bread, their feast. [3:6] So they took the Lord and pushed him in great haste and said, "Let us hale the Son of God now that we have gotten power over him." [3:7] And they put upon him a purple robe and set him on the judgment seat and said, "Judge righteously, O King of Israel!" [3:8] And one of them brought a crown of thorns and put it on the Lord's head. [3:9] And others who stood by spat on his face, and others buffeted him on the cheeks, others nudged him with a reed, and some scourged him, saying, "With such honour let us honour the Son of God." [4:10] And they brought two malefactors and crucified the Lord in the midst between them. But he held his peace, as if he felt no pain. [4:11] And when they had set up the cross, they wrote upon it: this is the King of Israel. [4:12] And they laid down his garments before him and divided them among themselves and cast the lot upon them. [4:13] But one of the malefactors rebuked them, saying, "We have landed in suffering for the deeds of wickedness which we have committed, but this man, who has become the saviour of men, what

wrong has he done you?" [4:14] And they were wroth with him and commanded that his legs should not be broken, so that he might die in torments. [5:15] Now it was midday and a darkness covered all Judaea. And they became anxious and uneasy lest the sun had already set, since he was still alive. <For> it stands written for them: the sun should not set on one who has been put to death. [5:16] And one of them said, "Give him to drink gall with vinegar." And they mixed it and gave him to drink. [5:17] And they fulfilled all things and completed the measure of their sins on their head. [5:18] And many went about with lamps, <and> as they supposed that it was night, they went to bed (or: they stumbled). [5:19] And the Lord called out and cried, "My power, O power, thou hast forsaken me!" And having said this he was taken up. [5:20] And at the same hour the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was rent in two. [6:21] And then they drew the nails from the hands of the Lord and laid him on the earth. And the whole earth shook and there came a great fear. [6:22] Then the sun shone <again>, and it was found to be the ninth hour.

[6:23] And the Jews rejoiced and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he had seen all the good things that he (Jesus) had done. [6:24] And he took the Lord, washed him, wrapped him in linen and brought him into his own sepulchre, called Joseph's Garden.

[7:25] Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, perceiving what great evil they had done to themselves, began to lament and to say, "Woe on our sins, the judgment and the end of Jerusalem is drawn nigh."

[7:26] But I mourned with my fellows, and being wounded in heart we hid ourselves, for we were sought after by them as evildoers and as persons who wanted to set fire to the temple. [7:27] Because of all these things we were fasting and sat mourning and weeping all night and day until the Sabbath.

[8:28] But the scribes and Pharisees and elders, being assembled together and hearing that all the people were murmuring and beating their breasts, saying, "If at his death these exceeding great signs have come to pass, behold how righteous he was!" [8:29] The elders were afraid and came to Pilate, entreating him and saying, [8:30] "Give us soldiers that we may watch his sepulchre for three days, lest his disciples come and steal him away and the people suppose that he is risen from the dead, and do us harm." [8:31] And Pilate gave them Petronius the centurion with soldiers to watch the sepulchre. [8:32] And with them there came elders and scribes to the sepulchre. And all who were there, together with the centurion and the soldiers, rolled

thither a great stone and laid it against the entrance to the sepulchre [8:33] and put on it seven seals, pitched a tent and kept watch. [9:34] Early in the morning, when the Sabbath dawned, there came a crowd from Jerusalem and the country round about to see the sepulchre that had been sealed. [9:35] Now in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers, two by two in every watch, were keeping guard, there rang out a loud voice in heaven, [9:36] and they saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw nigh to the sepulchre. [9:37] That stone which had been laid against the entrance to the sepulchre started of itself to roll and give way to the side, and the sepulchre was opened, and both the young men entered in. [10:38] When now those soldiers saw this, they awakened the centurion and the elders—for they also were there to assist at the watch. [10:39] And whilst they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, [10:40] and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. [10:41] And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, "Hast thou preached to them that sleep (Crossan 1996:226)?" [10:42] and from the cross there was heard the answer, "Yea."

[11:43] Those men therefore took counsel with one another to go and report this to Pilate. [11:44] And whilst they were still deliberating, the heavens were again seen to open, and a man descended and entered the sepulchre.

[11:45] When those who were of the centurion's company saw this, they hastened by night to Pilate, abandoning the sepulchre which they were guarding, and reported everything they had seen, being full of disquietude and saying, "In truth he was the Son of God." [11:46] Pilate answered and said, "I am clean from the blood of the Son of God, upon such a thing have you decided." [11:47] Then all came to him, beseeching him and urgently calling upon him to command the centurion and the soldiers to tell no one what they had seen. [11:48] "For it is better for us," they said, "to make ourselves guilty of the greatest sin before God than to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and be stoned." [11:49] Pilate therefore commanded the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing.

[12:50] Early in the morning of the Lord's Day Mary Magdalene, a woman disciple of the Lord—for fear of the Jews, since (they) were inflamed with wrath, she had not done at the sepulchre what women are wont to do for those beloved of them who die—took [12:51] with her women friends and came to the sepulchre where he was

laid. [12:52] And they feared lest the Jews should see them, and said, "Although we could not weep and lament on that day when he was crucified, yet let us now do so at his sepulchre. [12:53] But who will roll away for us the stone also that is set on the entrance of the sepulchre, that we may go in and sit beside him and do what is due?— [12:54] For the stone was great,—and we fear lest anyone see us. And if we cannot do so, let us at least put down at the entrance what we bring for a memorial to him and let us weep and lament until we have again gone home." [13:55] So they went and found the sepulchre opened. And they came near, stooped down and saw there a young man sitting in the midst of the sepulchre, comely and clothed with a brightly shining robe, who said to them, [13:56] "Wherefore are ye come? Whom seek ye? Not him that was crucified? He is risen and gone. But if ye believe not, stoop this way and see the place where he lay, for he is not here. For he is risen and is gone thither whence he was sent." [13:57] Then the women fled affrighted.

[14:58] Now it was the last day of unleavened bread and many went away and repaired to their homes, since the feast was at an end. [14:59] But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and mourned, and each one, very grieved for what had come to pass, went to his home.

[14:60] But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew took our nets and went to the sea. And there was with us Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord . . .

Alternative stratification by Dewey (1990:124):

Dewey's four strata in the *Gospel of Peter*:
- o   original stratum: story of the vindicated just one / passion account
     2:5c–5:15a; 5:16–6:21; 8:28b
- o   secondary stratum: epiphany story / resurrection account
     8:28a; 8:29b–9:37; 10:39b; 10:40; 11:45
- o   tertiary stratum: fragments and redactional elements
     2:3–4; 6:23b–24; 10:41–42; 1:1–2; 2:5a,b; 6:22–23a; 8:29a
     10:38–39a; 10:43; 11:46–49
- o   final redactional stratum: the *Gospel of Peter*
     7:25; 7:26–27; 11:44; 12:50–13:57; 14:58–60

The most striking difference between Dewey and Crossan concerns the moment of vindication. For Crossan vindication is in visible resurrection. According to Dewey, the vindication of the righteous is acknowledged in the death of the Lord (1990:111). This story is the first layer (1990:123–24). The epiphany story is a secondary layer. It functions as an intensification of the vindication expressed earlier. As miraculous apparition it outshines the muted exaltation of the crucified just one (1990:118).

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