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The peril of modernizing Jesus and the crisis of not contemporizing the Christ

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KEY WORDS: Historical Jesus; hermeneutics; christology

Introduction

Interpreters from Albert Schweitzer through to John Dominic Crossan have noticed the perils of modernizing Jesus.¹ More recently Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz have suggested that of all the questions historical Jesus scholars should ask an important one is, 'how much have we modernized the historical Jesus?'² There are several reasons why modernizing Jesus is thought to be perilous.

(1) Modernizing Jesus renders him liable to all sorts of anachronisms. For instance, there seems little dispute that Jesus exhibited an open-table fellowship and welcomed many who were outcasts of Israelite society, but to typecast Jesus as an egalitarian or a feminist is anachronistic and misleading.³ However, one cannot teach a course on Jesus without utilizing language and analogies that are in some sense anachronistic to the first century but meaningful to the twenty-first century. Describing Jesus' prophetic action in the temple (Mk. 11:15-17) like someone expelling tourists out of the gift shop of Westminster Abbey certainly is an anachronistic analogy, but perhaps an apt one if it conveys the dramatic and provocative nature of the incident. As long as these analogies exhibit some kind of correspondence to beliefs and events in the first century they are not necessarily misleading but are a worthwhile didactic tool.

(2) It is perilous to modernize Jesus on the grounds that it includes projecting onto him various ideologies and presuppositions. In his devastating critique of

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- 1 By 'modernizing Jesus', I mean the process whereby the portrait of Jesus drawn by an author more readily reflects and represents the beliefs, aspirations, values and judgments of the author and his environment than they do of a first century Galilean Jew.
 - 2 Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, 'Der umstrittene historische Jesus. Oder: Wie historisch ist der historische Jesus?' in *Jesus als historische Gestalt: Beiträge zur Jesusforschung. Zum 60. Geburtstag von Gerd Theissen*, ed. Annette Merz (FRLANT 202; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 3-7.
 - 3 See critiques by Kathleen E. Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002); John H. Elliott, 'Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian: A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory', *BTB* 32 (2002), 75-91.

the first quest for the historical Jesus, Schweitzer could state that the portrait of Jesus that emerged was 'a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb'.⁴ In contrast, Schweitzer's depiction of Jesus as a failed apocalyptic visionary meant that the 'historical Jesus will be to our own time a stranger and an enigma.'⁵ Schweitzer's contention was that such an apocalyptic figure cannot be moulded into a modern person. Here one observes the double edged sword to Schweitzer's program: the modernized Jesus is historically untenable, but the historical Jesus is practically irrelevant to the modern world apart from some vague spiritual ebb that purportedly flows forth from him.⁶ As if history was doomed to repeat itself, it would appear that the modernizing of Jesus has continued unabated even after Schweitzer. Grant Osborne writes:

The new Jesuses have suspiciously resembled the old in the sense that the so-called pure historians have also 'modernized' him and created a list of figures that would fit their own times quite well. A brief perusal of the pictures developed in recent decades will illustrate this: the existential Jesus of Käsemann and Bornkamm; the itinerant cynic philosopher of Funk and Crossan; the Spirit-filled teacher of wisdom of Borg; the revolutionary social activist of Horsley; the prophet of Sophia of Fiorenza – all depict a Jesus who finds a perfect niche in the modern world more than one that fits the actual biblical and historical portrait.⁷

(3) The peril may be said to exist because Christianity must not be permitted to find in Jesus its champion or founder. The first quest was typified by the ambition to destroy the orthodox picture of Jesus enshrined in ecclesiastical dogma and creeds and to compensate for the loss by unearthing in the aftermath of the critical investigation a Jesus worthy of respect in the annals of religious history. More recently, Maurice Casey has chastised N.T. Wright because his monograph on Jesus could potentially 'mislead many people into maintaining a traditional

4 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (trans. W. Montgomery; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945), 396. Cf. George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans Green, 1909), 49; Joachim Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 5-6; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), xxviii; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 330; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking of the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; 3 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001), 1:5.

5 Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 397.

6 Simon Gathercole ('The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*', *TynBul* 51 [2000], 261-83) has noted how Schweitzer himself was equally dogmatic in his attempt to distance Jesus from modern theology.

7 Grant R. Osborne, 'History and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels', *TrinJ* 24 (2003), 5-6.

form of Christian belief'.⁸ Paul Hollenbach believes a key function of historical Jesus research is to overthrow 'the mistake called Christianity'.⁹ In response, one cannot cut the cords between Jesus and Christianity (early or modern) just because someone does not like Christianity.

It seems that modernizing or not modernizing Jesus will flounder on some aspect of history or theology. This is a point adequately pressed in Henry Cadbury's learned book *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*.¹⁰ The issues that Cadbury raised are as much alive today as they were when Cadbury wrote. It will be of value to reconsider Cadbury's warning against the backdrop of recent Jesus scholarship so as to warn ourselves of the perilous hazards of studying Jesus. Beyond that it may be possible to sketch a solution as to how we can study the historical Jesus without falling onto the perilous shards of modernizing.

The California Jesus

Several scholars have cast Jesus in the mould of an egalitarian Jewish peasant who stands in proximity to the tendencies of Cynic philosophy. Cynicism was a movement in the Greco-Roman world deriving principally from Diogenes of Sinope (fourth century BC). Cynics were typified by a simple and counter-cultural lifestyle which emphasized minimal possessions, freedom, living according to nature, itinerant movements, and renunciation of social norms.¹¹ Several commentators have noted the points of continuity between Jesus and Cynic philosophers.¹² For instance, the injunction in the mission discourses against carrying even meager provisions (Mk. 6:8-9; Mt. 10:9-10; Lk. 9:3; 10:4; 22:35-36) mirrors the Cynic garb (Diogenes Laertius 6.13). Likewise, the aphorisms in the Jesus tradition possess commonalities with numerous Cynic utterances (cf. Mk. 2:17 and Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 8.5 about doctors and the sick). Consequently,

8 Maurice Casey, 'Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N.T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*', *JSNT* 69 (1998), 100, n. 19.

9 Paul Hollenbach, 'The Historical Jesus Question in North America Today', *BTB* 19 (2000), 20.

10 Henry Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1962 [1937]).

11 Cf. B. Fiore, 'Cynicism and Skepticism', in *DNTB*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 242-45.

12 Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (trans. James C. G. Greig; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 54; Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 14-15.

several scholars argue that Jesus was a Jewish-like Cynic.¹³ As a hybrid Jewish Cynic, Jesus annunciated a social critique against religious, economic and patriarchal inequalities and espoused his own radical egalitarianism in the face of Roman power. Jesus and his followers were 'hippies in a world of Augustan yuppies'.¹⁴ Care is also taken also to insulate Jesus from any intense eschatological or apocalyptic expectation.

There are several devastating criticisms that have been leveled against the Cynic hypothesis.¹⁵ I offer only a short summary: (1) The assumption upon which the hypothesis depends is that Galilee was largely hellenized and urbanized. However, recent archaeological and literary studies have tended to emphasize the Jewish nature of Galilee and the type of urbanization and hellenization

13 Cf. e.g. F. G. Downing, 'Cynics and Christians', *NTS* 30 (1984), 584-93; idem, *Christ and the Cynics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); idem, *Cynics and Christian Origins* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992); idem, 'Deeper Reflections on the Jewish Cynic Jesus', *JBL* 117 (1998), 97-104; idem, 'The Jewish Cynic Jesus', *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teaching of Jesus and its Earliest Records*, eds. Michael Labahn and Andreas Schmidt (JSNTSup 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 184-214; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 72-88, 421-22; idem, 'Open healing and open eating: Jesus as a Jewish cynic?' *Biblical Research* 36 (1991), 6-18; idem, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998); Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 67-77; idem, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 47, 114-16; idem, 'Q and a Cynic-Like Jesus', in *Whose historical Jesus?*, eds. William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 25-36; David Seeley, 'Jesus and the Cynics Revisited', *JBL* 116 (1997), 704-712; Leif E. Vaage, 'Jewish scripture, Q and the historical Jesus: a cynic way with the word?' in *Sayings source Q and the historical Jesus*, ed. A. Lindemann (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 479-95.

14 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 421.

15 Cf. H. D. Betz, 'Jesus and the Cynics: Survey and Analysis of a Hypothesis', *JR* 74 (1994), 453-75; Richard A. Horsley, 'Jesus, Itinerant Cynic or Israelite Prophet', in *Images of Jesus Today*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Valley Forge, PA: TPI, 1994), 68-97; Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic sage or Son of God? Recovering the real Jesus in an age of revisionist replies* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint/Victor, 1995); Paula Fredriksen, 'What You See Is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus', *Theology Today* 52 (1995), 79-86; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 66-74; Paul Rhodes Eddy, 'Jesus as Diogenes? Reflections of the Cynic Jesus Thesis', *JBL* 115 (1996), 449-69; David E. Aune, 'Jesus and Cynics in First-Century Palestine: Some Critical Considerations', in *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth and L. L. Johns (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 176-192; Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 117-145; idem, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 58-92; Craig A. Evans, 'The Misplaced Jesus: Interpreting Jesus in a Judaic Context', in *The Missing Jesus: Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 11-39.

associated with a Cynic presence in Galilee is entirely absent.¹⁶ Jonathan Reed comments: 'In this context it should be stressed that lacking a substantial component of gentile inhabitants, having only two Jewish cities in their infancy of Hellenization, and lacking much evidence for interregional trade, notions of Cynic itinerants influencing Jesus or his first followers makes little sense. Though the scholarly comparison of Jesus' teaching with that of Cynicism merits attention as an analogy, any genealogical relationship between Jesus and Cynics is highly unlikely.'¹⁷

(2) Henry Chadwick suggests that Downing minimizes the differences between early Christianity and Cynicism. There are no references to Jesus or his followers committing acts that Cynics were infamous for such as defecating, masturbating or copulating in the streets.¹⁸

(3) Much of the Cynic thesis depends on the work of Kloppenborg who stratifies Q into an earlier sapiential (Q¹) and a later prophetic layer (Q²).¹⁹ The earliest edition of Q was supposedly a Cynic-like document with prophetic and apocalyptic accretions added later.²⁰ Against this view is the problem of how one distinguishes between composition and redaction.²¹ We do not actually possess Q; all we have are Gospel manuscripts which overlap in certain material. I believe that the best explanations for this phenomenon is the two source hypothesis, viz.,

16 Cf. Eric M. Meyers, 'Jesus and His Galilean Context', in *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods*, eds. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 57-66; Séan Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (WUNT 125; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2000), 176; Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (SNTS 118; Cambridge: CUP, 2002); E. P. Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity*, eds. I. Dunderberg et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 3-41.

17 Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg: TPI, 2000), 218.

18 Hendry Chadwick, 'Review of *Cynics and Christian Origins*', *JTS* 45 (1994), 209-10.

19 John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); idem, *The Shape of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); idem, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

20 Cf. F. Gerald Downing, 'Quite like "Q" – A Genre for Q: The "Lives" of Cynic Philosophers', *Bib* 69 (1988), 196-225; Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 59; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 338; Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 420-42; L. E. Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts: Jesus' followers According to Q* (Falley Forge: TPI, 1994); idem, 'Q and Cynicism: On Comparison and Social Identity', in *The Gospel behind the Gospels*, ed. R. A. Piper, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 199-229; idem, 'Jewish Scripture, Q and the Historical Jesus: A Cynic Way with the Word', in *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus*, ed. A. Lindemann (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 479-95.

21 Cf. Christopher M. Tuckett, 'A Cynic Q?' *Bib* 70 (1989), 349-76; idem, 'On the Stratification of Q: A Response', *Semeia* 55 (1992), 213-22; Dale C. Allison, *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1997), 4-7, 41-42; Dennis Ingolfsland, 'Kloppenborg's Stratification of Q and Its Significance for Historical Jesus Studies', *JETS* 46 (2003), 217-32; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 152-58.

Mark and Q were the earliest sources and Matthew and Luke incorporated these sources into their composition. But to assume that one can use the manuscripts of Matthew and Luke to discriminate between composition and redaction in Q is sheer make-believe. Does anyone think that they can use the text of Luke and Matthew to determine pre-Marcian redaction of Mark? Moving through the various strata of material beginning with Matthew/Luke through to Q^{Lk}/Q^{Mt} to Q to Q³ to Q² to Q¹ to a Q community is building a fanciful conclusion premised on grossly speculative hypotheses with a dubious methodology.

(4) There is also a strong methodological objection to the Cynic approach. Although historical reconstruction is highly indebted to studies in background and environment one must avoid what Samuel Sandmel called 'parallelomania'.²² Analogy does not prove genealogy. Philo quotes the Cynic tradition extensively, but this does not necessarily make him a Cynic.²³ Furthermore, Jesus as he appears in the Gospels is malleable enough to fit into various leadership moulds: rabbi, sage, healer, exorcist, prophet, messiah, etc. Jonathan Knight concludes that: 'The Cynic hypothesis remains an unconvincing explanation of the Jesus movement, despite the vigour with which it has been argued.'²⁴

It is worth pointing out that a conspicuous feature of the Cynic hypothesis is that the Jesus it concocts has a striking resemblance to the ideological profile of its proponents, viz., white liberal middle-class Anglo-Americans who are reacting against a perceived influx of fundamentalist apocalypticism in the political realm. This 'Cynic Jesus' may be a convenient icon in an anti-Reagan or anti-Bush rally, but it comes at a price, that is, it is historically suspect. John P. Meier writes: 'A completely un-eschatological Jesus, a Jesus totally shorn of all apocalyptic traits, is simply not the historical Jesus, however compatible he might be to modern tastes, at least in middle-class American academia.'²⁵ On a sardonic note, Richard Burridge declares that the Jesus Seminar, 'has produced a Jesus who is not Jewish in his teaching, but more like a Greek wisdom teacher or philosopher, and he's against sexism, imperialism and all the oppressiveness of the Roman empire. In other words, he's a Californian.'²⁶ Gerd Theissen is similar: 'The "non-eschatological Jesus" seems to have more Californian than Galilean local colouring.'²⁷

22 Samuel Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', *JBL* 81 (1962), 2-13.

23 Betz, 'Jesus and the Cynics', 474.

24 Jonathan Knight, *Jesus: An Historical and Theological Investigation* (London: Continuum, 2004), 54.

25 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:317. Cf. Cadbury (*The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 26): 'Thus the apocalyptic element in the gospels has been frequently laid almost exclusively to the account of the evangelists, not because there is any real evidence that Jesus also did not share it, but mainly because it is uncongenial to the present day critic.'

26 Richard A. Burridge and Graham Gould, *Jesus Now and Then* (Grand Rapids, MI: London: Eerdmans/SPCK, 2004), 32.

27 Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 11.

The peril of this 'Californian Jesus' is much more than the bad history created by it, one must reckon with its cultural implications. The works of Mack and to a lesser degree Crossan, minimize the Jewishness of Jesus in favor of a Hellenistic framework. This allows them locate Jesus in a stream of counter-cultural sapiential philosophical traditions rather than in Jewish apocalypticism.²⁸ One cannot help but notice that this de-judaizing²⁹ of Jesus possesses some similarity with Walter Grundmann's *Jesus der Galiläer* which, written in Nazi Germany, advocated that Jesus was an ethnic Galilean and not a Jew.³⁰ I am not accusing Mack and Crossan of anti-semitism, but it seems apparent that their works are analogous to older monographs that endeavoured to deny the Jewishness of Jesus.³¹ I have read a lot of kaffuffle as to how Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is blatantly anti-semitic³² and yet the de-judaizing of Jesus by the Jesus Seminar and others has met with little resistance from academia. Yet history shows that Christianity has done the most unforgiving violence to the Jewish people on those occasions when Jesus' Jewishness was denied or minimized.

The big tent revival Jesus

Those on the conservative end of the theological spectrum have not been immune from the inclination to modernize Jesus. The Jesus sometimes espoused in the evangelical tradition often looks like a traveling evangelist who proclaims his deity, announces his intent to die for sins, proffers some stringent moral advice for the interim, and bids himself adieu as he moves on to the next crusade.

I suspect that this casting of Jesus in an evangelical image is attributable to the emphasis in Protestant thought on reducing Christology to a function of so-

28 Mack (*Myth of Innocence*, 73) writes: 'The Cynic analogy repositions the historical Jesus away from a specifically Jewish sectarian milieu and toward the Hellenistic ethos known to have prevailed in Galilee.'

29 By 'de-Judaizing' I do not mean 'anti-Jewish' or completely 'un-Jewish'. De-alcoholized wine still retains a small measure of alcohol, but not enough to impact the drinker. Thus by 'de-Judaizing' I mean the act of moving Jesus' Jewishness to the periphery or else negating its effect by blanketing it with a Hellenistic overlay.

30 Walter Grundmann, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judenteum* (Leipzig: George Wigand, 1941), 175. Cf. Joseph Klausner (*Jesus of Nazareth* [trans. Herbert Danby; London: Allen & Unwin, 1929], 233) and Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 79, n. 233.

31 Although this is sometimes overstated, see Peter M. Head, 'The Nazi Quest for an Aryan Jesus', *JSHJ* 2 (2004), 59-90.

32 Cf. Robert L. Webb and Kathleen E. Corley, eds., *Jesus and Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ: The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History* (London: Continuum, 2004).

teriology.³³ In such portraits of Jesus' life, we are given a picture of a sinless birth, a sin-bearing death and a lot of moralizing in between. The entire life and teaching of Jesus becomes little more than an overture to Calvary.³⁴ A more complex and careful expression of this view derives from a passage by Robert Stein:

Whereas Israel longed for the coming of the Messiah to restore its political fortunes and free it from its enemies, Jesus saw Israel's need differently. What Israel needed was the once-and-for-all sacrifice that would solve the deeper and more important need of its relationship with God. How could human forgiveness be achieved? And how could the righteous standing before God resulting from this forgiveness be lived out in daily life? Jesus saw that this was the greatest need facing the people of Israel. As a result, he understood his messianic mission as bringing about the new covenant promised by the prophets through the sacrificial offering of himself. With this would come the answer to Israel's and humanity's greatest need – forgiveness, which allowed sinful people to have fellowship with a holy God.³⁵

Stein's statement is open to manifold criticisms: (1) Stein eclipses the significance of Jesus' mission to Israel by perceiving Jesus' vocation as being principally to create the conditions necessary for universal atonement. I would regard the predictions of Jesus' suffering and vindication as authentic (cf. Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34, 38-39; 14:25, 35; 12:1-12; Lk. 11:29-32/Mt. 12:38-40; Lk. 13:33; Jn. 3:14-15; 8:28; 12:23, 32; 13:31; 17:5; 21:19).³⁶ Thus, Jesus went to Jerusalem to die not just to minister.³⁷ Even so, the problem with Stein's proposal is that he then reduces Jesus' mission essentially to a soteriological date at Golgotha. The result is, first, Jesus' ministry is abstracted from the social and political climate of first-century Palestine. Second, Stein fails to ascribe proper weight to the wide range of material in the Gospels that centers on Jesus' mission to Israel.

In contrast, hopes for national restoration provide a plausible context for Je-

33 Paul Tillich (*Systematic Theology* [3 vols.; Digswell: James Nisbet & Co., 1968], 2:174): 'Christology is a function of soteriology. The problem of soteriology creates the Christological question and gives direction to the Christological answer.' Cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 676; Colin Brown, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus', in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J.I. Packer*, eds. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 68-70.

34 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 14.

35 Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 151-52.

36 Cf. H. F. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection* (WUNT 2.20; Tübingen; Mohr/Siebeck, 1986); Craig A. Evans, 'Did Jesus Predict His Death and Resurrection?' in *Resurrection*, eds. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A Hayes and David Tombs (JSNTSup 186; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 82-97.

37 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 593.

sus' ministry.³⁸ Jesus' announcement of a 'gospel' has as its background the programmatic announcement that the day of national restoration was dawning (Is. 40:9-11; 41:26-27; 52:7-10; 61:1; *Pss. Sol.* 11:1-4; 4Q521 2.12).³⁹ The appointment of the twelve in Mk. 3:13-19 was a symbolic prophetic action announcing Jesus' intention to restore the nation. Jesus is remembered for limiting his mission and that of his disciples to Israel (Mk. 7:27; Mt. 10:5-6; 15:24; Lk. 13:34-35/Mt. 23:37-38). Elsewhere Jesus is remembered for saying that at the renewal of all things the disciples would judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk. 22:30/Mt. 19:28). Jesus' call to discipleship was itself a call to mission and a summons to join his risky kingdom movement whereby followers became agents of the kingdom's arrival and heralds of the coming judgment.⁴⁰ In the mission discourses⁴¹ the 'disciples were not evangelistic preachers sent out to save individual souls for some unearthly paradise. They were couriers proclaiming a national emergency and conducting a referendum on a question of national survival'.⁴² It was in light of economic injustices in rural Galilee, in the shadow of an imminent political confrontation between Israel and Rome, and in view of religious tensions over which Jewish group spoke for God that Jesus set forth the challenge of what it meant for Israel to be Israel. Jesus announced and embodied the in-breaking of the kingdom of God through his message and mighty deeds. The participation of the nation in this kingdom would ride entirely on how it responded to him. As Caird wrote: 'He believed that Israel was at the cross-roads, that she must choose between two conceptions of her national destiny, and that the time for choice was terrifyingly short'.⁴³ This point should not be taken to reduce Jesus' mission to politics and sociology. Jesus' death can be understood as effecting atonement for Israel's violation of the covenant and Adam's rebellion against God. The death of Jesus must be coordinate with his mission of national restoration or else the mission

38 Dt 30:4; Ps 107 :2-3 (= 106:2-3 LXX); Is. 11:11-12; 35:10; 43:5; 49:5-6, 22-26; 56:8; 60:4, 9; 66:20; Je. 3:18; 31:10; Ezk. 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 34:12-16; 36:19, 24-28; 37:21-23; 39:27-28; Zp. 3:20; Zc. 8:7-8; 10:9-12; 2 Macc. 1:27-29; 2:18; Sir. 36:11-22; 48:10; Bar. 4:37; 5:5; 4 Ezra 13:39-50; Tob. 13:4-5; 14:5-6; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.131-33; Philo, *Praem. Poen.* 117, 164-70; *Pss. Sol.* 8.28; 11.1-5; 17.31, 44; *T.Jos.* 19.2-12 (Arm); 1 *Enoch* 57.1; 90.33; *Jub.* 1.15-18; 23.27-32; 2 *Bar.* 29.1-30.3; 78.7; *T. Benj.* 9.2; 10.11; *T.Mos.* 10.7-10; *Sib. Or.* 3.265-294; 1QM 2.1-3, 7; 3.13; 5.1; 11Q19 18.14-15; 57.5-6; 59.9-13; CD 2.11-12; *m.Sanh.* 10.3; *t.Sanh.* 13.10; *Tg. Isa.* 53; *Tg. Hos.* 14.8; *Tg. Mic.* 5.1-3; Lk. 13:28-29/Mt. 8:11-12; Jn. 11:52; Lk. 24:21; Acts 1:6; 26:7; Rev. 21:12. Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 77-119; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 202-9; McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 5-14.

39 Cf. Cadbury (*The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 9): 'It is doubtful, of course, whether Jesus used a word "gospel" at all, but if he did its content was almost certainly very different from most that goes under its name in any sort of American pulpit.'

40 Cf. Mk. 1:17; 3:14; Lk. 10:2/Mt. 9:37-38; Lk. 9:60; Jn. 4:35.

41 Mk. 6:7-13, 30-31 (= Mt. 10:5-14; Lk. 9:1-6); Lk. 10:1-12/Mt. 10:1-42.

42 George B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (rev. and ed. L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 361.

43 George B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone, 1965), 8.

to Israel is reduced to a salvation-historical bottleneck that must be somehow traversed before the real mission of going to the cross can follow.

(2) Stein views Jesus as operating with a concept of messiahship that is entirely different to Jewish expectations of a political messiah who would restore Israel's fortunes. On the one hand the fact that Jesus was crucified as a messianic pretender strongly suggests that Jesus did make a messianic claim and that his claim was strenuously rejected by the Jerusalem leadership. But to conclude from this that Jesus conceived of his messiahship as being apolitical and, therefore, chiefly soteriological in function is a grave mistake.

To begin with, messianic hopes in the second-temple period were marked by their diversity and it remains debatable as to whether hope for a messianic figure was widespread. Nonetheless, literary sources indicate that among some Jews there was indeed hope for a political messianic deliverer in the first century (e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-32, Josephus, *War* 6:312; 1QS 9:10-11; CD 12:22-23) and Roman authorities were also aware of such an expectation (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; Suetonius, 4.5). However, these hopes represent an intensification of themes found in Israel's sacred traditions. There is the hope for a new Davidic monarchy in the Old Testament (Hg. 2:20-23; Je. 33:15-26; Ezk. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Am. 9:11-15; Mi. 5:2-3; Zc. 6:12-13; 9:9-10; 12:7-13:1) and several passages fueled exegetical speculation towards a coming messianic deliverer (e.g. Gn. 49:10; 2 Sa. 7:12-16; Nu. 24:17; Is. 4:2; 9:7; 11:1). After acknowledging the diversity of messianic beliefs in various sources, one could draw a general job description of the Messiah along the lines of: defeat Israel's enemies, rebuild/renew the temple, inaugurate Israel's new exodus, regather the exiles, and reign in righteousness and peace. This was, however, a political mandate, one that Jesus apparently embraced even if he significantly redefined it (but the redefinition did not mean de-politicizing). Several sayings and narratives could be enlisted to demonstrate how Jesus related his messianic mission to Israel's restoration. For instance, the saying found in Lk. 7:22/Mt. 11:5-6 echoes a collage of passages from Isaiah (Is. 26:19; 28:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:18; 43:8; 61:1). The question posed to Jesus by John's disciples pertains to the identity of Jesus. Jesus' response is to correlate his preaching and healing ministry with the Isaianic signs of restoration. Significantly, raising the dead and preaching good news to the poor were predicated of the Messiah in 4Q521 2:10-12.⁴⁴ Recognition of the national dimension to Jesus' ministry should not imply that Jesus' messiahship had no soteriological function in relation to sin. First, Jesus conceived of his death as having redemptive significance for Israel (Mk. 10:45). Second, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was probably read messianically by some Jews.⁴⁵ The qualification is that the servant is the representative of the nation and his vicarious sufferings are to be understood as part of the saga

44 On the authenticity see Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 205.

45 Zc. 3:8; 1 *Enoch* 62-63; *Tg. Isa.* 53:10; and of course in early Christianity, Lk. 22:37; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet. 2:21-25.

in Isaiah 40-66 as to how Israel's restoration will become a reality. Third, it was quite possible for notions of the messiah to be combined with priestly traditions (e.g. Zc. 3:1-10; Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1-17; 11QMelch 2:5-9, 13, 25) and martyr traditions (4 Macc. 17:22) which could easily ascribe to the messiah or his death an atoning function. Yet this atonement theology must be located against the backdrop of the messianic task as being the restoration of Israel.

(3) Stein moves too quickly to atemporal theological categories. Stein is quick to point out the universal significance of Jesus' death as making available the reconciliation of humanity to God. Theologically speaking the notion is entirely legitimate, but Stein bypasses the vehicle which brings it. According to Paul, Luke and John, the inclusion of Gentiles and the prospect of eternal life are possible only via the story of Christ as the fulfillment of the story of Israel. In the end it is a transformed Israel that transforms the world.⁴⁶

It must be asked, what are the cultural implications of a historical study of Jesus that focuses so narrowly on his death as the supreme aim of his mission? I think it contributes to a tendency amongst evangelicals to privilege those portions of scripture which speak of salvation exclusively as deliverance from eternal judgment. This is despite the fact that the word for salvation in the New Testament, σωζω, usually denotes escape from death and not merely the salvation of souls.⁴⁷ It is with good reason that evangelicals remain wary of anything resembling the social gospel of old liberalism,⁴⁸ but there is a tendency by some authors to paint Jesus as a figure who is concerned exclusively with the deliverance of souls and not saving persons in their entirety. That is not to deny that there is a strong commitment amongst evangelical churches and organizations for acts of compassion and justice, but a lacuna exists in the framework of some scholars who reduce Jesus' mission to atonement theology.

My evaluation of two different strands of Jesus research is meant to highlight the type of problems encountered in the project and to underscore what are some of the significant cultural implications that arise from such portraits of Jesus. (I have employed the parodies of the 'California Jesus' and 'Big Tent Re-

46 T. W. Manson, *Only to the House of Israel? Jesus and the Non-Jews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 24.

47 Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 245; John G. Stackhouse, ed., *What Does It Mean to Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).

48 See Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1897) and more recently Bruce J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). Note, again, the shrewd comments of Cadbury (*The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 89): 'Did Jesus really have a social outlook at all? The answer to this question depends on how one defines 'social'. Probably it can be defined in such a way as to be applicable to Jesus. The word has a breadth of meaning... But as the term is commonly used today there seems a strange excess, not to say anachronism, in so strongly connecting Jesus with its various connotations.'

vival Jesus' in the good faith that they will be perceived as bringing some humor to this stale and prosaic debate about Jesus). That being said, can the historical Jesus actually be done?

A method for the madness: how to marry the spirit of the age without divorcing the historical Jesus

After half a century of post-Cadbury Jesus questing, scholars are quite aware of the perils of modernizing Jesus – the problem is that it seems to be continuing any way. What I will suggest is a possible direction for historical Jesus study in light of this problem. My concern is not in investigating the method of how-to-do a historical Jesus study, rather, I am interested in the hermeneutical horizons that make such a study possible. A study that avoids the perils of modernizing but still emerges from the task with something to say about Jesus to our modern world.

A prolegomenon to historical Jesus research

No-one builds a tower without first estimating how much it will cost (Lk. 14:28-30). Likewise, no-one joins in on the quest for the historical Jesus without first asking if it can be done. There are several issues that come up for discussion: presuppositions, hermeneutics, and history.

Presuppositions. The immediate problem that interpreters encounter in studying the historical Jesus is how to traverse 2000 years of history and culture without transporting our own beliefs and biases in the process. This leads inexorably to the problem posed by presuppositions. Rudolf Bultmann wrote: '*There cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis... Historical understanding always presupposes a relation of the interpreter to the subject matter that is... expressed in texts*'.⁴⁹ Dale C. Allison similarly states: 'We also always bring with us a story, formed or half-formed, a story about Jesus, a story made up of expectations and presuppositions that tacitly guide us in our use of criteria.'⁵⁰ As already outlined above, both the 'California Jesus' and the 'Big Tent Revival Jesus' are indicative of what happens when pre-understanding over-impacts the study. Postmodern literary theorists might cheer and urge that due to commitments to our communities and our inherent presuppositions we should abandon the Jesus quest altogether and compensate for the loss by adopting a reader-orientated hermeneutic. Joel Willitts urges scholars not to try to escape their presuppositions but to embrace them as bringing fresh perspectives to Jesus research.⁵¹

49 Rudolf Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?' in *Existence and Faith* (London: SCM 1964), 343-44 (italics original).

50 Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 36.

51 Joel Willitts, 'Presuppositions and Procedures in the Study of the "Historical Jesus": Or, Why I Decided Not to be a "Historical Jesus" Scholar', *JSHJ* 3 (2005), 61-108.

The problem with this is that it reduces debate to competing forms of pre-understanding rather than situating discussion primarily in textual study.

There is no question then as to whether or not we are products of our own interpretative communities; that conclusion is inescapable. Presuppositions shape our own narrative world and all sense data is filtered through them. One must ask though are we slavishly bound by them? Presuppositions are fences not dungeons. And much like a fence with presuppositions one can look above them, peek through them and even tear them down where necessary. I. Howard Marshall writes:

There is much debate as to whether such a thing as unbiased exegesis can exist or whether all of us are unconsciously affected by the presuppositions that we bring to the study of the text. Perhaps in principle it is impossible for modern readers to discover what Mark was trying to say or what his first-century readers would have gotten out of his text, but I am not so pessimistic about this. The point about the impossibility of presuppositionless exegesis must be conceded; nevertheless, its significance is easily exaggerated.⁵²

Anthony Thiselton declares: 'The problem of pre-understanding, however, does not give grounds for the cynical response that the modern interpreter understands the Bible only on the basis of his own presuppositions. For there is an ongoing process of dialogue with the text in which the text itself progressively corrects and reshapes the interpreter's own questions and assumptions.'⁵³ There is a hermeneutical spiral whereby one's reading of historical texts is influenced by presuppositions, but one's presuppositions are in turn shaped, challenged, undone or renewed by the very act of reading texts.

It may be objected that the multiplicity of views of Jesus is substantial evidence that such pictures are self-portraits of the authors or else projections of presuppositions onto Jesus. I would reply that the diversity of beliefs does not prove that such beliefs are not well-grounded.⁵⁴ The relativity of all belief does not demand the relativity of all knowledge. Additionally, the constellation of Jesuses exhibit points of continuity with each other in discussing characteristic elements such as the kingdom of God, the setting of Galilee, purpose of calling the twelve disciples, and the crucifixion etc.⁵⁵ The various images of Jesus may not be identical, but they are more or less recognizable as an attempt to understand Jesus of Nazareth. In sum, the task is not to peddle one's presuppositions

52 I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 25.

53 Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 439.

54 C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 321-25.

55 Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 13.

and call it exegesis, but to carry out the type of open and detailed study that will hopefully vindicate those presuppositions.⁵⁶

Hermeneutics. How can one purport to 'know' things about historical persons and events through reading ancient texts? In other words, how does one grasp the authorial intent of a text when the author is absent, the text is often polyvalent, and the interpreter is far from a neutral observer? Whence is meaning: author, text or reader?

This is no place to begin a massive tome on the pros and cons of deconstruction, reader-response criticism and postmodern hermeneutics. Suffice to say that reading texts will never be same and the bridge back to modernity has been thoroughly burned (with some good reasons too). The outcome of the more radical postmodern reading strategies is that authorial intentions are inaccessible and textual meanings are indeterminate. One no longer reads for meaning, but is left with deconstructing a text or else using it ideologically.

I do not intend (nor feel competent to) criticize a whole guild of study, but I wish to state that I do not find the reader-orientated approach all that compelling. I am also conscious that there is a diversity within reader-orientated hermeneutics and my criticism may not apply to all. First, it is no small measure of irony that the many scholars who deny authorial intent insist on arguing this point by publishing literary works on the subject matter, somehow expecting their authorial intent to be discernible enough to persuade others to adopt their point of view. Second, there seems to be no final basis for illegitimizing certain interpretations or asking why some readings should be preferred to others. How does one reject an anti-semitic reading of the Gospels that calls for anti-Jewish policies? In the absence of authorial intentions or textual determinacy we are left with literary pluralism or hermeneutical relativism. Texts can be used to sculpt a masterpiece or create a monster, and there is no longer any critical basis to call one a beauty and the other an abomination since such readings are self-authenticating and there is no authorial-textual magistrate to render judgment. But pluralism is an oppressive ideology as it cannot tolerate those who fail to worship at the pantheon of pluriformity, and relativism is a Trojan horse that smuggles in the paradigm of Thrasymachus, Machiavelli, and Nietzsche that elevates power over truth. Hence postmodern literary theorists have slain one of the heads of the modernist hydra (especially its pretentious claims to absolute truth) only to have seven more dragons rise in its place.

This is not to deny that there exists a role for reader-response criticism within a historical approach to the Gospels. In order to understand the Gospels one might attempt to determine how the Gospels may have been received and understood by the implied reader in a first-century context.⁵⁷ The reader, after all, remains

56 Bruce D. Chilton, 'An Evangelical and Critical Approach to the Sayings of Jesus', *Them* 3 (1978), 85.

57 Cf. Peter Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark's Early Readers* (SNTS 125; Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

part of the process whereby meaning is distributed through the text. Historical and literary criticism remains deeply interested in the initial *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text on its immediate audience as part of the communicative event.

One is still left with the epistemological and literary problem of overcoming the lack of accessibility to flesh and blood authors, the multivalent nature of texts, and the active part of the reader in the interpretive process. A promising approach to this conundrum is *critical realism*. By *critical* I mean that the path to understanding an ancient text is through dialogue with the text and fellow readers in order to discover a plausible reading of a text that possesses the most explanatory power. By *realist* I suggest that historical knowledge is a real possibility through the effort to understand the intentionality of the text in its historical milieu. The caveat is, however, that things which can be historically known are never known independently from the knower. Hence the critical realist approach steers a path between the 'naïve realism' of positivism (i.e. modernity) and the 'anti-realism' of phenomenism (i.e. postmodernity).⁵⁸

Critical Realism does not deny the distance between the horizons of author, text and reader but attempts to fuse the horizons together in order to create meaning.⁵⁹ Given that some portions of the New Testament may be, to use Eco's terminology, closed texts which evoke a predetermined response, the historical-critical method can be employed in the effort to discover the calculated responses that emerge from the text. In particular I follow Vanhoozer when he claims that textual intentionality is itself the 'enacted' intentionality of the author.⁶⁰ Interpretation is not the search for a disembodied mind lurking beneath the text, instead interpretation is the science of approximating and appropriating a communicative act enmeshed in a text by an author. The reader engages the text not from a position of epistemological privilege but in relation to fixed points that orientate the reader to the author through the text: sharing a language, similar mental processes, a desire to communicate and to understand, a capacity for social interaction, belonging to a similar community.⁶¹ The conditional nature of all knowledge does not eliminate the historical task; rather it redirects it towards a more realistic objective in the search for paradigms and probabilities, not certainty or absolutes.

58 Ben F Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1989); idem, *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994); Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 31-46 (esp. 35); Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 110-11; J. López and G. Potter, eds., *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (London: Athlone, 2001); Donald L. Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies* (JSNTSup 262; London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004), 82-101, 210-25.

59 Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 440; Wright, *The New Testament in the People of God*, 64.

60 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 254-59.

61 Cf. Meyer, *Critical Realism*, 34.

History. Paul Tillich spoke of 'the semantic confusion about the meaning of the term "historical Jesus"'.⁶² What is denoted by the phrase the 'historical Jesus'? In the first quest, the historical Jesus was understood to be a figure purged of supernatural status and ecclesiastical dogma but remained a moral hero for the romantic rationalist. According to the second quest, Jesus was the person dissimilar from Judaism and early Christianity but remained nonetheless properly basic to the faith of the early church.

A better definition is that the historical Jesus is the picture of Jesus that emerges from the application of historical tools and by the formation of historical hypotheses.⁶³ The historical Jesus is not the 'real' Jesus. The search is for the reconstruction of Jesus who provided the momentum and direction for the phenomenon of early Christianity. Joachim Gnilka asserts: 'The aim of the historical work is to investigate the relationship between Jesus and the NT witness of faith, between his proclamation and that of the post-Easter community, as presented in the NT and especially in the Gospels.'⁶⁴ There appears to be no likelihood, then, of studying Jesus as an individual of religious history since he is available only through the faith and theology of the early church. Such an approach creates a deeper problem, viz., whether it possible to discover a historical Jesus through the theological layers of the Gospels and the Jesus tradition. Martin Kähler and Luke Timothy Johnson have argued that because the Gospels do not separate history from theology themselves, there can be no possibility of a strictly historical Jesus.⁶⁵

Joel Green concedes that the Gospels are, broadly speaking, 'historical narratives'. At the same time he contends that the Gospels are more concerned with significance than verification. He writes: 'The Gospels come with an invitation, but one of a different sort – namely, to embrace their understanding of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, to embrace this interpretation of those events, to indwell the world of meaning, the metanarrative underlying these narratives and present in their pages by the coordination of these events in the life of Jesus.'⁶⁶ Green's point about the function of the Gospel narratives as being chiefly concerned with the significance of Jesus is well taken and a corrective to strictly historicist concerns. However, this approach could potentially pose an unnecessary dichotomy between event and meaning unless one carefully plots the trajectory of meaning from history to meta-narrative. We must inoculate against the view

62 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:123.

63 Cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1: 25, 31.

64 Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 12.

65 Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996).

66 Joel B. Green, 'In Quest of the Historical Jesus: Jesus, the Gospels, and Historicism Old and New', *CSR* 28 (1999), 558, 560.

that the meta-narratives formulated by the Gospel authors do not depend on any prior historical experience (as epitomized by the radical form critics). After all, one can manufacture a constellation of meaning, praxis, symbol and identity apart from empirical episodes through community founding myths.

Thus we encounter the problem of referentiality. When the Gospel authors narrate that Jesus said, 'Yours sins are forgiven' what are they referring to? Is the referent a memory of an event, the experience of having sins forgiven, or the soteriology of the Matthean-Marcan-Lucan-Johannine communities? Alternatively one might agree that the Gospels create a symbolic universe, conjure up new patterns of thought, evoke new epistemic lenses that include faith, and spawn a world of meaning, but the momentum behind the meaning is an event, viz., the generative effect of the memory of Jesus.

But what about the Gospels themselves? Are they conducive to writing a study of the historical Jesus? Approaches which deny the historical utility of the Gospels for reconstructing the life of Jesus due to either the lateness of the sources or the theological agenda of the Evangelists, but then proceed to formulate a hypothesis about the historical Jesus, are essentially creating a vacuum and filling it with fantasy.⁶⁷ Alternatively, I would advocate that the Gospels are generally reliable and coherent sources for studying the historical Jesus.⁶⁸ The Gospels are not lives of Jesus written with some kind of spurious objectivity. It is apparent that theological, didactic, rhetorical and apologetic interests have shaped the texts and the traditions beneath them. At the same time the Gospels are not simply theological responses to social situations, concocting images of Jesus out of thin air to be conscripted as weapons of polemic at their behest. Lemcio argues that the Evangelists are consciously interested in the past of Jesus.⁶⁹ This is confirmed by the continued use of the name 'Jesus' and the absence (with a few exceptions) of the titles 'Christ' and 'Són of God' as terms of addresses for Jesus in the Gospels which underscores a sustained awareness of the pre-Easter history of Jesus.⁷⁰ The Gospels are the interpretation and application of

67 Cf. Cadbury (*The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 46-47): 'When I read a life of Christ that in the most careful approved fashion describes at length the unhistorical character of the gospels and the aspects of their viewpoint which are to be rejected as late and secondary, but then proceeds to construct a portrait of the Master shot through with modern standards of value, I feel like saying, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"'

68 Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987); Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (NSBT 3; Leicester: Apollos, 1997); Birger Gerhardsson, *The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).

69 Eugene E. Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels* (SNTS 68; Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

70 Leander E. Keck, *Who is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2000), 3.

the memory of Jesus for readers in the Greco-Roman world.⁷¹ Thus the Gospels have an extra-textual referent beyond themselves in the historical figure of Jesus, but the Jesus story that they narrate collides with and impacts the stories of the author and the audience. What the Evangelists produce is not the Christ of faith ostentatiously superimposed onto the historical Jesus; instead, the Gospels offer a dramatic representation, much like a docu-drama, of Jesus' actions in the past and his voice for the present available through the communal memory of Jesus. The Gospels emanate both bias and biography, authenticity and artistry, fact and faith, history and hermeneutic.⁷² Perhaps the question of the historical Jesus and the Gospels needs to be posed quite abruptly as Freyne does: 'Either we accept that the early followers of Jesus had some interest in and memory of the historical figure of Jesus as they began to proclaim the good news about him, or we must abandon the process entirely'.⁷³

Additionally, there can be no question of absolutely separating history and theology. The fact remains that there is no such thing as uninterpreted history,⁷⁴ and this is most certainly true of the Gospels. That does not justify the conclusion that because there is no such thing as unbiased history that there is no history at all. By the same token, attempts to peel off the layer of theology from the history are doomed to flounder for two reasons, first, at the exegetical level there is no foolproof way of distinguishing between tradition, composition, and redaction in any given pericope. Second, the Gospels interweave history and theology into their narrative sub-structure to the point that to extract history from theology would cause a barrage of literary masonry to collapse on the interpreter. The upshot is that Jesus researchers must content themselves with finding history *through* theology – postulating the historical entity that generated a movement, produced a memory and shaped a world of meaning in the early church.⁷⁵

The historical project concerns developing paradigms and hypotheses that possess the most explanatory power, that is, they provide the most holistic, simplistic, comprehensive and persuasive account of all the known variables in studying Jesus. Allison states: 'As historians of the Jesus tradition we are storytellers. We can do no more than aspire to fashion a narrative that is more persuasive

71 On the Jesus tradition as 'memory' see Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing of Jesus*, 17; N. A. Dahl 'Anamnesis: Memory and Commemoration in Early Christianity', in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 28-29; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 130-31; Michael F. Bird, 'The Formation of the Gospels in the Setting of Early Christianity: The Jesus Tradition as Corporate Memory', *WTJ* 67 (2005), 113-34.

72 Bird, 'The Formation of the Gospels', 134.

73 Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: Continuum, 2005), 4.

74 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 94-96; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 87-89; James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday 1989), 166.

75 Bruce D. Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 51.

than competing narratives, one that satisfies our aesthetic and historical sensibilities because of its apparent ability to clarify more data in a more satisfactory fashion than its rivals.⁷⁶ A historical hypothesis is much like a still life painting and it becomes a question of which painting has the greatest amount of clarity and eye for detail. It is a task which demands a variety of artistic/scholarly depth in being able to paint both a landscape (Judaism and the early church) as well as a portrait (Jesus), and superimpose the latter inside the former without distortion or anachronism. The task then is to construct a portrait of Jesus that has more historical color than other explanations of his person and mission.

Finally, what is the role and function of historical Jesus research in the wider discourse of Christology? (1) Historical Jesus study is a form of narrative theology whereby the Jesus story is explored in relation to the Christian belief-mosaic that it generated. Study of the historical Jesus is a form of 'Christology from below' and anchors 'Christology from above' in historical analysis.⁷⁷ In this sense I am insisting on the quest for the historical Jesus as a theological project.⁷⁸ After all, historical study must be performed with some theological presumption and the history of Jesus emits far-reaching theological significance.⁷⁹ (2) Historical Jesus research also maintains the historical otherness of Jesus over and against tendencies towards subjectivism. The notion that the real Jesus is encountered in worship, prayer, and Bible reading is not illegitimate in itself. Even so, it can easily degenerate into Christological solipsism or docetism whereby the experience is the only referent permitted.⁸⁰ To retreat from the multiplicity of historical Jesuses to the safer shores of the Christ of faith will create a problem that Kähler did not foresee: whose faith and which Christ? Which 'Christ of faith' is more legitimate than others: the Christ of the Ebionites, the Gnostics, the Pauline churches, of Mormonism; and how do we adjudicate between them or are such beliefs self-authenticating? The historical Jesus is one of many arbiters who can be called upon in this debate. (3) The apologetic value of historical Jesus study for either the *reliability* of the tradition or for the *relevance* of Jesus should not

76 Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 35-36. Cf. Cadbury (*The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 191): 'That is the task of all history; the evangelic episode is no unique one. First the labor of criticism and research, and then the artistic, poetic reconstruction.'

77 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man* (London: SCM, 1968), 21-30.

78 On the theological significance of the historical quest for Jesus see Robert Morgan, 'The Historical Jesus and the Theology of the New Testament', in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament*, eds. N. T. Wright and L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon: 1987), 187-206; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1: 198-200; Eberhard Jüngel, 'The Dogmatic Significance of the Question of the Historical Jesus', in *Theological Essays II*, ed. J. B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 82-119; Brown, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus', 67-83.

79 Michael Bird, 'Should Evangelicals Participate in the "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus"?' *Them* 29 (2004), 13.

80 Cf. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, 347.

be ignored either.⁸¹ (4) As to the status that should be afforded to the 'historical Jesus' it is not privileged since that would elevate that the historical-critical method to canonical status and turn scholars into modern day scribes.⁸² The historical Jesus is no more authoritative than the Cappadocian father's Jesus or the Jesus of modern theology. The historical Jesus is merely one voice in a conversation on Christology wrestling with questions that are nearly 2000 years old: who is Jesus and what does he mean today?

The fail safe: the Jewishness of Jesus

The solution that Schweitzer and Cadbury broach in overcoming modernizations of Jesus is quite straightforward: keep Jesus Jewish. In Schweitzer's case this meant orientating Jesus amidst the hopes and aspiration of apocalypticism. According to Cadbury, it meant keeping Jesus in conversation with Judaism not modernity. Nevertheless taking the Jewishness of Jesus as axiomatic is not all that simple for two reasons. First, how Jewish was Jesus? Proponents of the Q-Thomas/Cynic Jesus hypothesis either purposely dislodge Jesus from being Jewish (Mack) or redefine his Jewishness so broadly as to make it more compatible with a wider Mediterranean context (Crossan). In contrast, participants in the third quest accept and prosecute the Jewishness of Jesus as paradigmatic. Indeed, it is the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus that is arguably the distinguishing feature of the third quest. Second, if one accepts Wellhausen's dictum that Jesus was not a Christian but a Jew, one is still faced with the question of what kind of Jew?⁸³ At this point commentators are far from united and disagree as to how Jesus expressed his Jewishness, be it as a Galilean holy man (Geza Vermes, Marcus Borg), a rabbi (Bruce Chilton), sage (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ben Witherington), eschatological prophet (N. T. Wright, E. P. Sanders), social prophet (Richard Horsley) or apocalyptic seer (Dale Allison).⁸⁴

Nevertheless, a Jewish Jesus constrains modernizations by seeing Jesus in conversation and confrontation with his times rather than ours. That means that intra-Jewish disputes about halakha, the status of Samaritans, paying imperial taxes, and maintenance of purity stipulations are more likely to feature as topics of Jesus' interest than feminism, globalization, or church growth strategies.

So what? Contemporizing the Christ

Christology operates with one important assumption: Jesus matters. By virtue

81 Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, 321-55.

82 Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, 325.

83 Cf. Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Jewishness of Jesus: Facing Some Problems', in *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus within Early Judaism*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 123-36; Tom Holmén, 'The Jewishness of Jesus in the "Third Quest"', in *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teaching of Jesus and its Earliest Records*, eds. Michael Labahn and Andreas Schmidt (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 143-62.

84 See the recent overview of scholarship in Knight, *Jesus*, 15-56.

of its participation in Christological discourse it means that the historical Jesus is intellectually, theologically and pastorally significant. All pedagogues and preachers want to find in Jesus their hero and their sponsor. Consequently, for better or worse, there will always be a compulsion to give Jesus a soap box to address our contemporary world. This can lead to distortion and anachronism, but it is a risk one must accept since to fail to ask the question 'so what?' will reduce historical Jesus study to 'an inane and prosaic catalogue of biographical facts'.⁸⁵

It is apparent that both the quest for Jesus and modernizing of Jesus existed side by side from the very beginning of the Jesus movement. Stanley Porter comments: 'The quest for the historical Jesus, in fact, clearly began soon after Jesus' death and is reflected in the writings of the early Church.'⁸⁶ Likewise, in the words of Cadbury: 'The modernization of Jesus must have begun almost immediately in Christian circles.'⁸⁷ The Gospels both constrain our modernizations but are simultaneously a model of how to modernize Jesus without losing sight of the history of Jesus. Cadbury quips that the Gospels 'are a standing enemy as well as a standing ally to the modernization of Jesus'.⁸⁸ The canonical Gospels intertwine history (the remembered Jesus), hermeneutic (what Jesus means in light of post-Easter faith) and proclamation (heralding the good news of Jesus to the Greco-Roman world). A canonical approach to the Gospels means far more than merely utilizing the canon as the source and context for all discussion. A truly canonical approach to the Gospels will endeavour to imitate *how* the Evangelists themselves produce their literary achievement by excavating the history of Jesus embedded in the texts, asking what Jesus means to peoples of the twenty-first century, and announcing to the world at large the significance of Jesus. I would suggest that Jesus scholars need to press the theological implications of their findings with more rigour. Theology, dogmatic and practical, will always be a necessary sequel to the historical Jesus task, otherwise the entire enterprise risks falling off the Christological radar and drowning in irrelevance in a postmodern world that finds historical questions somewhat extraneous. The task will be to show the relevance of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God to our contemporary communities.

Conclusion

In the foregoing arguments I have tried to show that the peril of modernizing Jesus continues to plague scholars. Moreover, this problem crosses confessional lines and encompasses both liberals and conservatives alike. The solution I have offered is to commit ourselves to a greater study of literary theory and epistemol-

85 Bird, 'Should Evangelicals Participate', 13.

86 Stanley E. Porter, 'Luke 17.11-19 and the Criteria For Authenticity Revisited', *JSHJ* 1 (2003), 204.

87 Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 17.

88 Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, 44.

ogy as a prolegomenon to historical Jesus research. The historical task should be more self-critical rather than abandoned in light of the postmodern critique of historical study. Jesus' Jewishness should be taken as axiomatic and, though it can lead to its own problems, it provides a sufficient safe-guard for modernized readings of Jesus. Finally, we must bring attention to the theological significance of the quest for the historical Jesus in the hope that from the study will emerge a portrait of Jesus which has something to say to our contemporary world.

Abstract

This essay points out the continuing tendency amongst researchers to modernize Jesus and suggests a framework for doing historical Jesus studies which avoids the perils of modernizing Jesus but still emerges from the project with something to say about Jesus that is of relevance to the contemporary world. The temptation to modernize Jesus can be curtailed by developing a prolegomenon to Jesus research (concerning presuppositions, hermeneutics, and history), taking the Jewishness of Jesus as axiomatic, and situating historical Jesus studies in the wider discourse of Christology.

By Faith, Not by Sight Paul and the Order of Salvation

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

How, according to the teachings of Paul, does the individual receive salvation? That is the focal question behind this book. Against some recent scholars Gaffin argues that it is both a meaningful and an appropriate question to ask. So what does the application of salvation to sinners involve for Paul? Does he distinguish between salvation accomplished (*historia salutis*) and salvation applied (*ordo salutis*) and, if so, how, and how important is the latter for him? And what exactly is the place of justification in his theology? Gaffin argues that:

'No matter how close justification is to the heart of Paul's gospel, in our salvation, as he sees it, there is... a reality, that is deeper, more fundamental, more decisive, more crucial: Christ and our union with him, the crucified and resurrected, the exalted, Christ. Union with Christ by faith – that is the essence of Paul's *ordo salutis*.'

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ISBN: 1-84227-418-X / 216x140mm / 128pp / £8.99

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