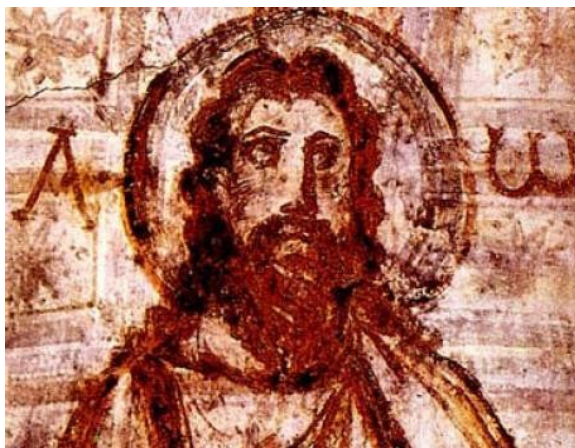


Historical Jesus: Quest, Methods and Criteria

After all, whose experience of Jesus should be considered authoritative or normative for faith and piety? Should it be the Jesus of Jim Jones, the Jesus of ultra-Pentecostals, the Jesus of the Catholic Mass, the Jesus of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Jesus of American Fundamentalism, the Jesus of the Crusades? The danger is, to borrow William Lane Craig's colourful turn of phrase, that we add a little bit of pixie dust, make a wish and believe anything we like about Jesus.¹



The canonical gospels don't simply present to the reader one perspective on the life of Jesus. Four separate canonical portraits of Jesus are given, reflecting the use of different Jesus traditions and their diverse, but overlapping, theological and literary concerns. Each gospel also contains dissenting views to the canonical norm a-- Jesus who is described by some as working for Beelzebub, of betraying God's law, and of being a drunkard.

Likewise, within the 'quest for the historical Jesus' various portraits emerge, with Jesus appearing in various books, journals and monographs in peasants apparel, a magicians gown, in the garb of an eschatological prophet, with the result that Jesus appears to have chameleon like qualities,². Different portraits, different Jesus? - do we simply adopt the latest portrait for use in worship?, or do we reject all the images in favour of retaining our own pre-scholarship or dogmatic construction? Others,, choose to take a post modern turn and adopt whichever portrait furthers their own ideological standpoint, or reject all portraits as a claim to power and objectivity.

¹ Michael Bird, "Shouldn't Evangelicals Participate in the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus'?" *Themelios* 29.2 (Spring 2004): 11

² A whole range of Jesus portraits have appeared in recent years. For an introduction to these portrait see Witherington, Ben. *The Jesus Quest : The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*.

In contrast to each of these responses to the historical Jesus, I join with a host of others who want to critique certain portraits of the historical Jesus whilst putting forward, however tentatively, an authentic reconstruction.

There are a number of ways which these portraits, like a painting in an art gallery, can be assessed. A painting in an art gallery can be assessed for its ability to evoke a response to the reader, or it can be viewed from its location in the 'history of art' and in its specialist use of tools, textures and canvas. The paintings methodology, not simply the observers emotional response, can be assessed. Likewise in assessing a portrait of the historical Jesus it is necessary not only to look at the overall picture which is produced but the methodology which allowed the construction to be formed.

As Denton, who has a keen interest in historical Jesus methodology comments,

It will not do for us to compare contemporary portraits of Jesus if fundamentally different means were used to arrive at these portraits. Comparisons and contrasts on the former level will result in the portraits talking past one another, for one portrait can criticize another as historically illegitimate only on the basis of some criteria of historical legitimacy. Such criteria are found, in critical history, in the means by which the historian claims to investigate the historical object.³

It is the purpose of this essay to examine the methodology of a number of 'Jesus questers'. Before analysing specific scholars (Chapter 2) and their respective methodologies (Chapter 3) it is necessary to comment, however briefly, on what has become known as the 'quest for the historical Jesus.'

3 Denton, Donald L.: *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies* 7

Chapter 1: The Quest for the Historical Jesus.⁴

Contemporary historical Jesus scholarship traditionally divides Jesus research into four distinct time periods which have become known as

- 1) 'The First/Old Quest',
- 2) 'The No Quest'/Interim
- 3) 'The New Quest'
- 4) 'The Third Quest',⁵

Characteristics of the 'Old Quest' 1778-1906

This period of the quest is traced from Herman Reimarus (1694-1768), so the story goes, to Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). Reimarus whose writings were published posthumously in 'Fragments' sought to split apart the faith of the first Christians ('Christ of Faith') from the 'Jesus of History'. As a philosophical descendant of Spinoza, reason became the litmus test for truth as reason can be used as a critical tool which can be held up against faith beliefs. The gospels were analysed for 'contradictions' and consistency'. If a document is inconsistent or incoherent it cannot be used as historical testimony. James Dunn, making a link with some contemporary Jesus research, summarizes Reimarus' (and Strauss') methodological presuppositions, says,

Where texts seemed to contradict other texts or were inconsistent with the universal laws which were now known to govern the course of events, the accounts in these texts should be judged unhistorical on scientific grounds. Here scientific criticism in effect was posed from the outset as a contradiction to the traditional claims of faith, a contradiction still seen as such by most scientifically educated people today.⁶

One example of contradiction in use by Reimarus is found in his discussion of the resurrection narratives. He compares the accounts of the resurrection and find that contradictions abound. After discussing the guard at the Jesus' tomb Reimarus

⁴ This history, which has become somewhat of a assumed meta-narrative, has been rehearsed many times before. See, amongst others, Porter, Stanley E.: *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* : 28-62, also Dunn, James D. G.: *Jesus Remembered* 25-135, Darrel Bock *Studying the Historical Jesus* 141-153

⁵ This meta-narrative of research has been seriously challenged by Stanley Porter in his monograph *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* . Also, and with more force in a subsequent journal article. Stanley Porter *Luke 17.11-19 and the Criteria for Authenticity Revisited Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 2003; 1; 201

⁶ Dunn, James D. G.: *Jesus Remembered*. 30

comments,

From these many contradictions we now see that the guard whom Matthew posted before the tomb will not bear the investigation by a rational mind. Thus, these fancies that were intended to divert suspicion of fraud from Jesus' disciples on the contrary strengthen that suspicion. The guards disappear at all events, and it is always possible and extremely probable, if one looks into the matter, that the disciples came to the tomb at night, stole the body, and afterwards said Jesus had risen.⁷

The gospels are unreliable due to contradictions as, using a law court metaphor, he states

Witnesses who differ so greatly in the most important points of their testimony would not be recognized in any secular court as valid and legal. to the extent that the judge could rely upon their story and base his decision on it'.

This critical understanding of the life of Jesus continued in the writings of Strauss (1835-36). In *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* he sought to present a picture of Jesus which stood against the 'supernaturalism' of Christian orthodoxy and those believers who sought a 'rationalised' form of the Christian faith--that is those who sought to do away with the miraculous whilst allowing for the authenticity of the gospels.

This is illustrated throughout his book, in particular Chapter IX, and we shall look at his discussion of the multiplication of loaves an example. Strauss mentions the view of the rationalists who see the event as '*an acceleration of the natural process*'⁸, or that of '*the distribution of bread by Jesus having led to a general distribution, the whole multitude were satisfied.*'⁹ For Strauss, the attempt to rationalise the account to make it acceptable to enlightenment sensibilities is a misreading of the texts for '*the natural expositor is put to the most extravagant contrivances in order to evade the miracle*'.¹⁰

For Strauss the presence of miraculous cannot be avoided in the gospels for it cannot simply be explained away. Strauss, however is no ally to orthodoxy, for although accepting the miraculous in the canonical gospels he disassociates the miraculous

7 Reimarus *Fragments* 171-172 From pages 177-194 he highlights '*ten such obvious contradictions*' between in resurrection accounts between the canonical gospels '*ignoring the fact that many more could be given*'

8 Strauss *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* 512

9 *ibid* 513

10 *ibid* 514

from the 'historical Jesus'. The feeding of the 5,000 *'must be rejected, as unhistorical'*¹¹ and must be replaced with a true rationalist understanding which sees it as a *'mythical derivation of this history of the miraculous feeding of the multitude' from Old testament precedents.*¹²

Reimarus and Strauss, whose Jesus' stand out from the dogmatic Christ, needs to be understood in the light of an enlightenment epistemology. By enlightenment epistemology I mean a historiographical approach which works with History as a hard scientist would work with data within a lab. The historical-critical method followed an enlightenment epistemology of (a) objectivity, (b) impartiality, (c) rationalism and (d) methodological naturalism.

- A) Objectivity in History: History is to be treated as an extension of the natural sciences as historical facts are objects in history which can be recovered by scientific method
- B) Neutrality/Impartiality: The historian could be impartial, strictly objective in his treatment of historical facts
- C) Rationalism: Human reason is the sufficient measure of truth
- D) Methodological Naturalism: The cosmos is a single harmonious structure of forces and masses. All events are predictable, the effects of causes already observable. There is no room for divine intervention.¹³

The 'Quest' continued in the works of Renan (1863), Weiss (1892), Harnack (1900) and Wrede (1901)¹⁴. At risk of generalisations these scholars used the scalpel of 'scientific-historical-enlightenment criticism' to strip away the layers of early church mythology, and reveal the 'real Jesus'.

Yet the enlightenment was not the only philosophical position at work, for in response to rationalism came the arrival of 'Romanticism' and Kant's stress on 'Moral Consciousness'. This had the effect, within 'Old Quest' Research, of stripping the supernatural from Jesus and although being sceptical about lots of the Jesus tradition, finding a Jesus who taught the romantic ideals of the fatherhood of God and infinite

11 *ibid* 515

12 *ibid* 517-518

13 See Dunn, James D. G.: *Jesus Remembered* 26-29

14 This is not an exhaustive list but a list of some of the 'key players'. For a helpful timeline Porter *The Criteria for Authenticity* 60-62

value of the human soul.

'The highest consciousness of God which has existed in the bosom of humanity was that of Jesus'. Jesus' 'great act of originality' was that, probably from the first, 'he regarded his relationship with God as that of a son with his father'. he established the universal fatherhood of God'. 'The morality of the Gospels remains... the highest creation of human conscience--the most beautiful code of perfect life that any moralist has traced'. 'A pure worship, a religion without priests and external observances, resting entirely on the feelings of the heart, on the imitation of God, on the direct relation of the conscience with the heavenly father...' "An absolutely new idea, the idea of worship founded on purity of heart, and human brotherhood, through him entered the world"¹⁵

The sketches of Jesus being offered differed from that of orthodoxy but also looked remarkably like that of post-enlightenment romanticised man. The *zeitgeist* became the driving force despite the objectivist claims of the authors. As Dunn observes, '*The trouble was, we may say, it allowed the spirit of the age to dictate not simply the language but also the agenda.*'¹⁶

Running alongside these liberal lives of Jesus is a more conservative strain of scholarship which is often neglected by those who offer overviews of the quest. These scholars, such as Alfred Edersheim¹⁷, Bernhard Weiss¹⁸ and F W Farrar¹⁹ wrote within

15 Renan, *Life of Jesus* 82,83,87-88,90 as with Albert Ritschl *The Christian Doctrine of Justification* 285, 'The Kingdom of God consists of those who believe in Christ, inasmuch as they treat one another with love without regard to differences of sex, rank or race, thereby bringing about a fellowship of moral attitude and moral proprieties extending through the whole range of human life in every possible variation'. cited in Dunn *Jesus Remembered* 45

16 'Since historical knowledge and hermeneutics are also dependant on such questions, questers of the 'Historical Jesus; and readers of the Gospels at academic level need to be aware of the deep philosophical assumptions on which particular hypotheses are based and the unresolved epistemological issues and debates continuously rumblings below the surface. In this case, the most important principle at work was in effect the conviction that Jesus, the 'historical Jesus', the Jesus stripped of dogmatic accretion, would/must have something to say to modern man, and the consequential desire to provide a mouthpiece for the restatement of that message.'
Dunn *Jesus Remembered*. 29

17 Alfred Edersheim : *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Edersheim, in his preface Vol 1 Page XI, claims to be writing from an impartial historical perspective which is not dictated to by a dogmatic agenda.

In thus guarding my meaning in the choice of the title, I have already indicated my own standpoint in this book. But in another respect I wish to disclaim having taken any predetermined dogmatic standpoint at the outset of my investigations. I wished to write, not for a definite purpose, be it even that of the defence of the faith—but rather to let that purpose grow out of the book, as would be pointed out by the course of independent study, in which arguments on both sides should be impartially weighed and facts ascertained.'

18 Weiss, Bernhard: *Das Leben Jesu*. trans *The Life of Christ*.

19 Farrar, F. W: *The Life of Christ*. Farrar is aware of the liberal lives but choosing to steer a different course, writing as a 'believer' as well as a historian.

Hundreds of critics, for instance, have impugned the authority of the Gospels on the score of the real or supposed contradictions to be found in them. I am of course familiar with such

the ‘old quest’ period but offered a more traditional, although not pre-critical, portrait of the historical Jesus which did not mirror the methodology, or share the results, of their liberal counterparts. These names, and others, are often the forgotten voices, as Stanley Porter has shown, within the overarching story of Jesus research.²⁰

The end of the ‘Old Quest’: Albert Schweitzer

Albert Schweitzer is often portrayed as the man who put an end to the ‘old’ quest. It is certainly true that Schweitzer placed a nail in the coffin of the ‘romanticised’ portraits of Jesus but more conservative scholarship, with less tendency to either adopt an enlightenment epistemology or a romanticised sketch pad, seems to have continued unabated.²¹ If Schweitzer did hammer a the nail into the coffin of ‘Romanticised’ pictures of Jesus, then coffin, to continue the metaphor, was already in production as t 15 years previously when Martin Kahler rebuked the ‘*entire life of Jesus movement* [‘*Old/First Questers*’] for leading scholarship into a ‘blind alley’.²²

However, the impact of Schweitzer is not to be minimized, as he sought to offer a comprehensive overview and devastating enthusiastic critique of previous attempts at ‘life of Jesus’ scholars. Jesus, as Schweitzer saw it, was being portrayed as a preacher of ethical ideals and his Judaic eschatological message was being ignored.

There was a danger that we should offer them a Jesus who was too small because we had forced him into conformity with our human standards and human psychology. To see that, one need only read the lives of Jesus written since the [eighteen] 'sixties, and notice what they have made of the great imperious sayings of the Lord, how they have weakened down his imperative world-condemning demands upon individuals, that he might not come into conflict with our ethical ideals, and might tune his denial of the world to our acceptance of it. Many of the greatest sayings are found lying in a corner like explosive shells, from which the charges have been removed. No small portion of elemental religious power needed to be drawn off from his sayings to prevent them from conflicting with our system of religious world-acceptance. We have made Jesus hold another language with our time from that which he

*objections, which may be found in all sorts of books, from Strauss's *Leben Jesu* and Renan's *Vie de Jesus*, down to Sir R. Hanson's *Jesus of History*, and the *English Life of Jesus* by Mr. Thomas Scott. But, while I have never consciously evaded a distinct and formidable difficulty, I have constantly endeavoured to show, by the mere silent course of the narrative itself, that many of these objections are by no means insuperable, and that many more are unfairly captious or altogether fantastic.* Taken from the preface.

20 See Porter *The Criteria of Authenticity* 32-34

21 See Porter *The Criteria of Authenticity* 37 who offers a critique of the monolithic understanding of the history of Jesus research. Also Bock *Studying the Historical Jesus* 144-145 ‘To call this period one of ‘no quest’ is probably an overstatement’ 144

22 Kähler, Martin: *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* 46

really held.²³

In contrast to the ‘romanticised’ portraits of Jesus, Schweitzer sought to paint a picture of Jesus who was not acceptable to the modern world. This Jesus was a fiery eschatological prophet who was convinced that the end of the world was at imminent. His message was less about ethical ideals but about the future kingdom which God would bring. Jesus goes to the cross to bring the kingdom of God, laying *‘hold of the wheel of the world to bring it to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him.’*²⁴ Schweitzer’s Jesus is a *‘stranger and enigma’*²⁵ to both modern society and Christianity.

The ‘No Quest’/The Interim

‘Schweitzer is thus the turning-point in the history of the ‘Quest’. He demolishes the old ‘Quest’ so successfully- and provided such a shocking alternative- that for half a century serious scholarship had great difficulty in working its way back to history when dealing with Jesus. This was the period of the great *via negativa*, when theologians applied to Jesus that tradition of reverent silence which in other traditions had been reserved for speaking about the one God’²⁶

Between Schweitzer and Kasemann, an interim period took place in which serious scholarly attention to the Jesus Quest became more limited. It is unfair to call this period the ‘no quest’ as some scholars, such as T.W. Manson and Vincent Taylor did continue to work with the historical Jesus. However, the liberal ‘lives of Jesus’ no longer dominated the world of Jesus scholarship.

This was not simply as a result of Schweitzer’s critique but was in large part due to the horrific events of the first world war, which dispelled (once and for all?) the myth of liberal optimism of humankind’s moral development, and provided a theological vacuum in which Barth’s dialectical theology and Bultman’s existentialism could take the academic high ground. Neither Bultmann or Barth showed much interest in the historical Jesus. In this brief overview of the quest it is necessary to outline, however

23 Neil, Stephen ; Wright, N. T.: *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986* 215

24 Schweitzer *Quest for the Historical Jesus* as cited in Dunn *Jesus Remembered* 47

25 Schweitzer *Quest for the Historical Jesus* ‘In either case, He will not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. Nor will He be a figure which can be made by a popular historical treatment so sympathetic and universally intelligible to the multitude. The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.’ 399

26 N.T. Wright *Jesus and the Victory of God (J&VOG)* 21

briefly, Bultmann's attitude to the historical Jesus for he is often understood as having *no* interest in Jesus, whereas, as I will show, he has *limited* interest in Jesus.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)²⁷

For an insight into Bultmann's attitude to the historical Jesus it is only necessary to read the introduction to *Jesus and the Word*. In this introduction he sets forth his theological and philosophical presuppositions. Historical study is not understood as being an objective activity (contra enlightenment) but is to be understood as *personal encounter* (existentialism), that is a '*dialogue with history*'.²⁸ Bultmann *limits attention* to the *purpose of Jesus* and discounts any study which would seek to see to find the *personality of Jesus*.²⁹ This '*purpose can only be understood as teaching*'³⁰ and only in the sense that they '*meet us with the question of how we are to interpret our own existence*'. Bultmann, therefore, offers us an existentialist historiographical approach which leads, not to a pursuit of the life of the historical Jesus, but to the Christ of Faith who confronts us in the text.

Bultmann summarizes his work, and in doing so shows us his historical skepticism, his interest in kerygma, and the exclusion of questions of authenticity and knowledge of the personality, life and actions of Jesus.

There is little more to say in introduction. The subject of this book is, as I have said, not the life or the personality of Jesus, but only his teaching, his message. Little as we know of his life and personality, we know enough of his *message* to make for ourselves a consistent picture. Here, too, great caution is demanded by the nature of our sources. What the sources offer us is first of all the message of the early Christian community, which for the most part the church freely attributed to Jesus. This naturally gives no proof that all the words which are put into his mouth were actually spoken by him. As can be easily proved, many sayings originated in the church itself; others were

27 Theissen and Winter *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* 103-112, Porter *Criteria for Authenticity* 36-47,

28 Bultmann is against the impartial and neutral history of previous generations *Jesus and His Word* 3-4

'When he observes nature, he perceives there something objective which is not himself. When he turns his attention to history, however, he must admit himself to be a part of history; he is considering a living complex of events in which he is essentially involved. He cannot observe this complex objectively as he can observe natural phenomena; for in every word which he says about history he is saying at the same time something about himself. Hence there cannot be impersonal observation of history in the same sense that there can be impersonal observation of nature.'

29 Ibid. 8

30 Ibid 10

modified by the church.³¹

Bultman at times is caricatured as being against the quest for the historical Jesus. This may well be an overstatement, but with an existentialist hermeneutic which only has interest in kerygma, historical Jesus scholarship is seriously restricted for one is “*not permitted to go beyond the proclamation, using it as a ‘source’ in order to reconstruct the ‘historic Jesus’*”³². As example of the existentialist hermeneutic is to be seen in Bultmann’s understanding of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is to be seen, not as an ethical ideal (romanticism), nor as eschatological (Schweitzer), but as an existential call to ‘*the marvellous new, wholly other*’.³³

The ‘New Quest’

Stephen Neil - ‘There was a time when at which even the suggestion that a return to the ‘Quest for the Historical Jesus’ might be possible was too far fetched to be taken seriously’³⁴

Kasemann (1906-1998) offered a rallying call for scholarship to engage more seriously in the ‘Quest’ when he delivered a lecture to former Bultmann students entitled *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*. Bultmann had led his ‘school’, so Kasemann argued, to a docetic tendency which failed to find coherence between the Christ of Faith and the Historical Jesus, that is between early church kerygma and actual events of Jesus’ life. Kasemann urged scholarship to pursue the historical Jesus, as ‘*the gospel is always waged on two fronts*’ that of the ‘*earthly Jesus*’ being ‘*understood in the light of Easter*’ and ‘*that Easter cannot be adequately understood unless account is taken of the earthly Jesus.*’³⁵

James Robinson, in his summary of the methods and procedures of the new quest, summarises the contribution of Kasemann,

He moved beyond a recognition of the validity of much of Bultmann’s position, to argue that since something can be known about the historical

31 Ibid 12

32 Bultmann *Glauben und Verstehen*, vol 1 as cited in Neil, Wright *Interpretation of the New Testament* 291

33 Bultman *Jesus and his Word*

34 Neil & Wright *The Interpretation of the New Testament* 288

35 E Kasemann *Essays on New Testament Themes* 25 cited in Neil & Wright *Interpretation of the New Testament* 290

Jesus, we must concern ourselves with working it Out, if we do not wish ultimately to find ourselves committed to a mythological Lord. The crucial issue is identified in 'the question as to the continuity of the gospel in the discontinuity of the times and the variation of the *kerygma*', i.e. whether the proclamation of the exalted Lord through the Church is in some kind of recognizable continuity with the preaching of the historical Jesus, and consequently whether the exalted Lord is in continuity with Jesus of Nazareth.³⁶

The church, Robinson argues, has two *avenues* available to Jesus. The first avenue is through an existential response to the kerygma, in this sense faith '*is not dependant on historiography*'. Yet this kerygma, Robinson goes onto say, needs to be connected to history, and thus Jesus can be approached by way of historical critical method.

[The New Quest] is committed to a *kerygma* which locates its saving event in a historical person to whom we have a second avenue of access provided by the rise of scientific historiography since the enlightenment³⁷

This new quest, like Bultmann, tended to work with the teachings of Jesus, but, in contrast to Bultmann, sought through a variety of methods and criteria to gain access to solid historical data. The gospels, in the methodology of the 'new questers' are analysed, in a piecemeal fashion, to find authentic Jesus tradition by using criteria, such as the criteria of dissimilarity and multiple attestation, to provide a firm bedrock of Jesus tradition.

The door to historical Jesus research was now firmly open, the locks of dialectical and existentialist theology could not resist the desire of those who sought to look beyond tradition at the 'historic Christ'. Borkamm, who himself participated in the new quest, sums up the desire to return to the historical Jesus.

How is it possible for faith to be content with mere tradition, although that tradition be set down in the Gospels? Faith must break through, and ask the questions that lie behind the tradition. It is impossible seriously to suggest that the Gospels and the traditions contained in them forbid us to ask the question regarding the historic Jesus. They not merely permit the attempt; they positively require it.³⁸

Form Criticism and the 'New Quest'

36 James M. Robinson *New Quest of the Historical Jesus* Ch 1

37 *ibid.* Ch. 4

38 G Bornkamm *Jesus of Nazareth* 9,22 cited in Neil & Wright *The Interpretation of the New Testament* 291

As already mentioned the ‘new quest’ generally proceeded by a method of criteria of authenticity. This criteria functions within a form-critical paradigm for the gospels are analysed to discover the ‘sitz im leben’ of the individual pericopes within the life of the early church. As heirs of Bultmann, New Quest scholars, function with a hermeneutic of suspicion as to whether the gospels go back to the Historical Jesus, and emphasise creative role of the early church. The gospels are not eyewitness testimony but the gathering of pericopes which functioned ethical-pastorally-theologically within the early church. Bultmann summarises the use of form criticism.

The proper understanding of form-criticism rests upon the judgement that the literature in which the life of a given community, even the primitive Christian community, has taken shape, *springs out of* quite definite conditions and wants of life *from which grows up* a quite definite style and quite specific forms and categories. Thus every literary category has its ‘life situation’ (*Sitz im Leben*: Gunkel), whether it be worship in its different forms, or work, or hunting, or war. The *Sitz im Leben* is not, however, an individual historical event, but a typical situation or occupation in the life of a community.³⁹

Stanley Porter makes the link between the development of the ‘criteria’, and the use of form criticism.

..the criteria to a large extent reflect the modes of thought that were typical of those who developed form criticism...the burden was placed upon those who wished to distinguish tradition and its development within the early Church from the purported authentic words and actions of Jesus.⁴⁰

The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus (1980-Present)

N.T Wright coined the phrase ‘third quest’ to describe a movement within historical Jesus scholarship which proceeded by a method which was different to that of the ‘new quest’⁴¹.

39 Bultmann as cited in McKnight, Scot: *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*. 74

40 Porter *The Criteria of Authenticity* 65

41 The phrase ‘Third Quest’ was first used in Neil & Wright *The Interpretation of the New Testament* 379 It is interesting to note that J.H. Charlesworth *Jesus Within Judaism : New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries*. prefers the phrase ‘Jesus Research’ as quest “*suggests we are in a dark room fumbling about trying to find a door. We are not on a quest*” 9, Markus Borg *Renaissance of Jesus Studies* offers the term *renaissance* to describe this new phase of research.

‘The renaissance is marked not only by new methods, but also by new results. Like all scholarly results, they are tentative and not final, the product of a particular intellectual history, radically conditioned in the way that all human knowledge is. Nevertheless, they sharply transform the image of Jesus which has dominated much of this century's scholarship’

This *renaissance* has occurred, for Borg, due to I) a new understanding of apocalyptic and eschatology II) an reemphasis on Jesus as a teacher of subversive wisdom III) Studies of the social world of Jesus have become central.

Some scholars use the term as a reference to any Jesus scholarship which has occurred since 1980⁴². However, N.T Wright, would like to highlight that the ‘new quest’ and ‘third quest’ are happening simultaneously, with works from the Jesus Seminar, Crossan and Ludemann being placed in the ‘new quest’ and scholars like Sanders, Theissen, Wright, Dunn and Meier being placed in the category of ‘third quest’.⁴³ The ‘Third Quest’ can be described in contrast to the ‘New Quest’, using Wright’s understanding of term, as offering a (I) move away from the form-critical paradigm by (II) placing Jesus thoroughly in his Jewish context. This placing of Jesus in his historical context can take place more effectively due to (III) increased understanding of the diverse positions within second temple Judaism .

I) The ‘Third Quest’ differs from the ‘New Quest’ in that it has, to some degree, shifted away from a form critical paradigm. As Wright positively affirms,

‘The much vaunted ‘normal critical tools’, particularly form-criticism, are being tacitly...bypassed in the search for Jesus’⁴⁴

The ‘New Quest’, as heirs of Bultmann, tended towards a presumption of the non-historical nature of the gospels, whereas ‘third quest’ scholars offer new hypotheses of gospel origins which reduce the need for methods based around the form critical paradigm. Methods of ‘hypothesis and verification (Wright,Sanders,Meyer)’ and ‘plausibility’ (Theissen & Winter) are more valuable than the criteria of authenticity for scholars within the ‘third quest’.

II) Jesus the Jew: ‘Third Quest’ scholars, in contrast to the ‘new quest’ seek to place Jesus thoroughly within his Jewish context. As Dunn remarks in conversation with N.T. Wright ,

For me the key characteristic of the “third quest” is setting Jesus in the context of Judaism rather than seeking to find that which distinguishes him

42 Such as Theissen and Winter *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* 141-152

43 In conversation with J. Dunn *An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul* , Wright stresses that although he first used the phrase third quest it has come to mean something different by others.

Yes, there has been a lot of discussion about the meaning of the third quest and since,as Jimmy says, I did actually introduce that phrase, I claim some sort of proprietary rights on it. When you invent a phrase, you quickly discover that phrases are like young adult children. They go away from home, get into stray company, and bring home undesirable acquaintances, and it has been thus with the third quest.....Lots of people have gone on now using the phrase “third quest” to mean really any study of Jesus done after about 1979, and that was never my intention.

44 N.T Wright *J&VOG* 87

from Judaism⁴⁵

The contribution of Geza Vermes' *Jesus the Jew*⁴⁶, who Dunn calls the '*John the Baptist of the Third Quest*'⁴⁷, was followed by Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*⁴⁸ which is '*to be reckoned as the real beginning of the third quest*'⁴⁹ Each of these books, particularly Sanders, sought to overthrow an anti-Judaic tendency in New Testament research which sought to distinguish Jesus from Judaism⁵⁰. Jesus, and in this all 'third questers' follow, is to be understood as functioning within Judaism rather than outside of it.

III) It has become easier to place Jesus within Judaism due to recent developments in our understanding of Judaism which leapt forward with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and attention being placed on second temple literature including that of the Pseudepigrapha and Josephus. In the light of this fresh understanding the following conclusions are being made, each of which impacts the context from which a portrait of Jesus is sketched by 'third quest' scholars.

- Judaism is no longer understood as monolithic but as being dynamic and purifier in nature
- No longer a sharp distinction between Judaism and Hellenism
- Second Temple Judaism is not the same as the later Rabbinic Judaism
- Eschatology within Judaism is not simply to be understood as the end of the world of space and time.

Chapter 1: Bibliography

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50 This has not always been anti-semitic in nature but the theologies of Barth and Bultmann sought to push forward an 'existentialist' and 'theology from above' hermeneutic, respectively, which downplayed the need to seriously investigate Judaism.

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