

The Dichotomization of the Christological Paradox in the history of Christian Thought and Critical Biblical Scholarship

Herman C. Waetjen

Robert S. Dollar Emeritus Professor of New Testament
San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union

Again and again throughout the history of Christian thought theological apologetics has dissolved the great ironic paradox of Jesus Christ into binary oppositions. In these historical contexts cultural relevancy has prevailed, and the underlying philosophical ideology has generated a disastrous subversion of the apologetic formulations of Christology in the New Testament. By calling this dichotomization into question, this essay intends to promote a postmodern hermeneutics that preserves the christological paradox and orients the constituting consciousness of theologians and scholars to both a spirituality of “being-affected by” the biblical witness to Jesus Christ and a faith that will initiate action toward the transformation of society.

1. Introduction

The dialectics of Western philosophy have structured the ambiguities of human existence as polar opposites and constituted a kind of ontological pollution system: being vs. appearance, soul vs. body, mind vs. matter, identity vs. difference, nature vs. culture, good vs. evil, presence vs. absence, speech vs. writing, life vs. death. The two terms in each binarity, however, are not regarded as equal entities. As Jacques Derrida has shown, the second term of each pair is generally viewed negatively as an inferior reality, something to be overcome, possibly by a third entity or synthesis.¹

Characteristic of the history of Christian thought is a similar inclination toward the dichotomization of paradox. This has been especially true of the confessional formulations of Christology, which have been adopted by the Church either in accommodation with or in reaction to a particular philosophical orientation. More recently it has been evident in biblical scholarship’s quest of the historical Jesus. The New Testament’s presentation of the paradoxical unity of Jesus Christ has been dissolved into a set of polarized realities: Jesus versus the Christ, or the Christ against Jesus. The one, either Jesus or the Christ, is considered to be superior to the other, and consequently is theologically or philosophically dogmatized as the basis of Christian faith.

What is the christological truth of the Christian faith? Is it the reality of Jesus alone, apart from any and every christological attribution of deity? Is it the divine reality of the Christ, whose relationship with the physical nature of Jesus of Nazareth was nothing more than a temporary conjunction or even an illusion? Or is it the ongoing confessional activity of interpreting Jesus as the Christ eschatologically and soterio-logically on the basis of his resurrection from the dead?

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated, with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. viii. See also the chapter on “Outwork,” pp. 3-59.

Of these three alternatives, the first two have tended to be predominant throughout the history of Christian thought, and with them their attendant conceptions of salvation. The third, however, which unites the Christ title – even in all its historical variations – with Jesus of Nazareth in an acknowledgement of a pioneering conjunction of heaven and earth, of the divine and the human, is the great paradox which the New Testament promotes.

Nevertheless, already twenty-five years after the beginning of the Christian movement Christians in the city of Corinth were differentiating between Jesus and the Christ on the basis of a proto-gnostic orientation. Apparently in their view Jesus was only the physical bearer of the Christ. Since material reality, including the human body of flesh and blood, is subject to the capricious and unstable forces of Fortune, Jesus was to be cursed, while the spiritual reality of the Christ, which transcended the material world, was to be worshipped and praised. Salvation was mediated by spiritual participation in Christ's transcendence and manifested itself above all in the gift of glossolalia. The binary opposition, which these Corinthians had constituted, is implied in the Apostle Paul's refutation of 1 Cor 12:3, "No one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus anathema!' or 'Jesus be damned!' And no one is able to say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."²

2. Early Christologizing in a Context of Oppositional Dualism

In the following centuries the problem of the union of Jesus and the Christ absorbed theologians, philosophers, and ecclesiastics in a seemingly interminable dispute to resolve once for all what nature of deity could be attributed to the humanity of Jesus, and what nature of humanity could be attributed to the deity of the Christ. If Jesus was the Christ, God's Son, how real was his humanity? On the other hand, if God alone is unbegotten and eternal, and everything else belongs to God's creative activity including the Son, what kind of deity is attributable to Jesus?³

Virtually everyone who theologized out of a Platonic or Neo-Platonic perspective formulated a christology that was more or less self-contradictory and, if measured by New Testament criteria, heretical. Middle Platonism conditioned the religious philosophy of Origen while Neo-Platonism molded both sides of the Arian-Athanasian controversy that the Council of Nicea and its Nicene Creed attempted to resolve. Presupposed was the metaphysical reality of an unbridgeable chasm separating God, the One, from the created order of the Many. If, therefore, Jesus is the Christ, on which side of this rift did he originate?

Origen (185-254 C.E.) of Alexandria – and later Caesarea – formulated the first comprehensive synthesis of biblical revelation and Middle Platonism. It was a religious philosophy that, like the thought of Philo of Alexandria, attempted to integrate the Scriptures with Greek philosophy and proved to be equally contradictory. God, the One, is self-existent and eternal, but becomes Manifold through the agency of the Logos. Engendered by the One, the Logos shares in the essence of God. As Jn 1:1 declares, the Logos is *qeo,j* (God); or, in the words of Heb 1:3, the Son is "the radiance of God's glory and the representation of God's

² W. Schmidhals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth. Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen*, FRLANT, 79, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961. *Gnosticism in Corinth. An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, tr. John E. Steely, New York & Nashville: Abingdon, 1969. For another point of view as well as references to other instances of cursing Jesus, see Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians. A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Hermeneia*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, pp. 204-205.

³ See the discussion of "Christ as Divine" and "Christ as Creature" in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. I, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, pp. 172-200.

essence (*hypostasis*)." For Origen the Logos is the Son, and the Son is the Logos: "In the Logos one may see the Son, and because He is in the Father He may be said to be in the beginning."⁴ As the Logos the Son is "*homoousios tō patri*" (the same substance with the Father).⁵ Consequently, on the one hand, there never was a time when there was no Son or Logos. That is, there never was a time when God was without Consciousness or Wisdom.⁶ Yet because God's consciousness or wisdom is not identical to God, the Logos is only *qeo,j*, not *o` qeo,j* (the God).⁷

"One might assert, and with reason, that God Himself is the beginning of all things, and might go on to say, as is plain, that the Father is the beginning of the Son; and the demiurge the beginning of the works of the demiurge, and that God in a word is the beginning of all that exists."⁸

"For if human beings are according to the image, but the image according to the Father; in the first case the Father is the *h` avrch*, of Christ, and in the other Christ is the *avrch*, of human beings, and human beings are made, not according to that of which He is the image, but according to the image."⁹

"But Christ is demiurge as a beginning (*avrch*), inasmuch as He is wisdom. It is in virtue of his being wisdom that he is called *avrch*. For Wisdom says in Solomon, "God created me the beginning of His ways, for His works," so that the Logos might be in an *avrch*, namely in wisdom."¹⁰

Obviously for Origen, "Logos," "the Son," "Christ," "demiurge," "wisdom" or "Sophia," and "*arche*" are synonymous terms that refer to one and the same reality, God.¹¹ But not **the** God, with the definite article denoting the "Father" or, as Jesus refers to this supreme Being in Jn 17:3, "the only true God". The Logos, the Son, Christ, as the demiurge, is the "archetypal image ... who was in the beginning, and who by being with God is at all times God, not possessing that of himself, but by his being with the Father..."¹²

Because "the Son [the Logos] has a distinct nature of his own," there can be no union between God the Creator and the Logos. As Origen states in Contra Celsum VIII, 12,

"...they are two distinct existences (*hypostases*), but one in mental unity, in agreement, and in identity of will."¹³

⁴ Origen, *Commentary on John*, I, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 42 and II, 1. Also Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, New York: Dover, 1961, II, 355.

⁷ See Origen's discussion of *qeo,j* (God) with and without the article, II, 2.

⁸ *Commentary on John*, I, 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 21.

¹¹ "Christ," however, is something of an exception in this synonymy of designations of the Logos, for Origen also uses the "Christ" title to refer to the incarnation of the Logos, but since the Logos cannot unite with flesh, his incarnation was limited to the soul of Jesus.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 2.

¹³ Origen: *Contra Celsum*, trans. With an Introduction & Notes by Henry Chadwick, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1953, pp. 460-461. It is in VIII, 15 that Origen says, "... we ... hold that the Son is not mightier than the Father, but subordinate.

As the being who stands between the One and the Many, neither uncreated as God nor created as the spiritual and physical worlds, the Logos is “the other or second God” (*deuteron theon*). In as far as he comprehends in himself all the forms of creation, he is God’s “first cause”.¹⁴ As Harnack expresses it, “He is already the first stage of the transition from the One to the Manifold, and, as the medium of the world-idea, his essence has an inward relation to the world, which is itself without beginning.”¹⁵ Origen builds the paradox on Jn 1:1.

“First, that the Logos was in the beginning, as if he was by himself and not with anyone, and secondly, that he was in the beginning with God. And I consider that there is nothing untrue in saying of him both that he was in the beginning, and in the beginning with God, for neither was he with God alone, since he was also in the beginning, nor was he in the beginning alone and not with God, since ‘He was in the beginning with God.’”¹⁶

Because the Logos, by comprehending all the forms of creation, has “an inward relation to the world,” he does not bear the unchangeable nature of God. He is a manifestation of deity, but in as far as he is a being that God originated, he is a “hypostasis” and a “demiurge.”¹⁷ This ambiguous location of the Logos between the self-existent God and the created world subordinates the Logos to God and consequently, like the cosmology of Philo, constitutes a static hierarchical order.¹⁸

In that static hierarchical order the Holy Spirit is the transition from the Logos to the realm of the ideas and the great diversity of spirits which the Logos created. Human spirits belong to this descending gradation, and, like all created spirits, are preexistent and eternal. But, as a result of the Fall, they have been transformed into souls, incarcerated in material bodies, and subjected to the earthly warfare between angels and demons. Their sojourn on earth is designed to enable them to achieve purification and to return to “the likeness of God,” the Logos, from whom they originated.¹⁹

The contagion of sin is also a condition endemic to creation, and expiation is necessary in order to enable human souls to recover their identity as spirits and return to their origin. In accordance with the New Testament, Origen acknowledged Christ as “the incarnation of the Logos” who made expiation for humankind by offering his death as a sacrifice acceptable to God and simultaneously as a ransom paid to the devil.²⁰ But Christ, according to Origen’s Middle Platonism, cannot be a true enfleshment of the Logos, for the Logos cannot unite with matter. Consequently, the incarnation of the Logos was limited to the soul of Jesus, and through the soul with his body.²¹

For Origen, however, redemption is essentially a return to union with the Logos, and that requires knowledge. Jesus Christ, therefore, as the limited incarnation of the Logos, is principally a teacher who reveals the depths of that true knowledge which the Eternal Gospel,

¹⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, v, 39.

¹⁵ Harnack, II, 356.

¹⁶ Origen, *John*, II, 5. Also II, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 40. Also the discussion of “Christ as Divine” and “Christ as Creature” in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. I, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, pp. 172-200.

¹⁸ See Philo, “Who is the Heir,” *Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, IV, 205-206.

¹⁹ Harnack, II, 365-380.

²⁰ Origen, *John*, VI, 35-37. See also Harnack, II, 367-368, n.1.

²¹ Origen, *John*, I, 30. Also Harnack, II, 370.

revealed in the Scriptures, imparts: how human beings can purify themselves and unite with the Logos in order to recover their deity. Eschatology, therefore, determined Origen's soteriology, above all, the eschatology adopted from 1 Cor. 15:28, "... so that God might be all things in all things."²²

3. Arius, Athanasius, and the Nicene Creed

Lucian (possibly of Samosata) appropriated Origen's doctrine of the Logos but dissolved its ambiguous relationship with the Godhead. The Logos was not "the same substance (*ousia*) with the Father." Arius, his most notable student, followed him in identifying the Logos, or the Son, with the created order. If Athanasius' derogatory account of Arius's theology is reliable, Arius believed that the Son was brought into being by God's wisdom, and, therefore, by participating in this Wisdom, the Son is called Wisdom or Logos.²³ Since God cannot generate anything out of God's own essence nor communicate that essence to the creation, the Son cannot participate in God's substance (*ousia*) and therefore is totally independent of God. God alone is *anarchos* (without beginning); the Son, in contrast has an *arche* (beginning), and for Arius that is the beginning of the created order.

"Arius' philosophical presuppositions forced him to assert a difference of *ousia* between the Father and the Son and to choose the term *ktizo* (create) as the basic description of the relationship between them. But once having drawn the basic distinction in this way, his aim is to emphasize in the highest possible degree the qualifications which require to be made in the understanding of those basic distinctions."²⁴

Accordingly, although the Son is to be identified as "a creature, he is not as one of the creatures."²⁵ For within that qualification he is nevertheless the *eivkw,n* (image) and *avpau,gasma* (radiance) of the Father. He served as the demiurge by which the subsequent creation was engendered and in the fullness of time became enfleshed as a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. The salvation that this incarnate Son achieved for human beings is the divine grace of deification identical to that which the Son received from the Father. To quote Maurice Wiles again:

"The soteriological scheme is one for which it is what is 'common to us and to the Son'. His sonship is constituted by his obedience to the Father, by his willing God's will, that enables him to save us into a sonship in the same mode."²⁶

Athanasius (295-373 C.E.), in opposition to Arius, contended that Jesus as the Christ is on the other side of the rift.²⁷ He belongs to the Godhead and therefore is independent of the

²² Origen, *John I*, 37. In his reflections on Jesus as "the Lamb of God" he cites 1 Cor.15:28.

²³ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987, p. 100.

²⁴ Maurice Wiles, "In Defense of Arius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962), p. 345. My thanks to Professor Douglas McGaughey of Willamette University for this bibliographical reference.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345.

²⁶ Maurice Wiles, "Eunomius: hair-splitting dialectician or defender of the accessibility of salvation?" *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick*, (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1989) p. 159. Again, my thanks to Professor Douglas McGaughey of Willamette University for this bibliographical reference.

²⁷ Harnack., IV, 48.

creation. As the Son, he is co-eternal with the Father and of one and the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. Although Athanasius employed the designation, “the Word” or “the Word of God,” he rejected Origen’s doctrine of the Logos, and therefore did not regard the Word as the agent of creation.²⁸ God generated the world directly and without any intermediary. But mysteriously and wonderfully, the Christ, as “the fullness of all Being,” united with a body of flesh and blood in Mary’s womb in order to communicate the divine nature to all human beings.²⁹

“But he took our body – not just any body, but from a virgin inviolate and incorrupt, who had not known a man: a body pure and without stain from any human intercourse. He, the Almighty, the Artificer of the universe, made a temple for himself in the womb of a virgin: his own body. ... Thus, taking a body like our own, because all were subjected to the corruption of death, in his extreme humility he offered his own body to the Father as a victim in death.

Perceiving that corruption could not be abolished otherwise than through death, but also knowing that he himself, the Word, the Son of the Father, could not die, he assumed a mortal body. In this way, united to the Word who is above all, this body was to die for us, and furthermore, made incorruptible by the Word dwelling within it, would have the power by his resurrection to banish corruption for all others as well.”³⁰

This is the nature of salvation which Jesus as the second Person of the Trinity makes possible, and it is this soteriology that is the objective of Athanasius’ christology.³¹ Yet in spite of the Son’s incarnation, there is almost no trace of his humanity in this christology.³² For as the Christ, Jesus is inseparable from God, and the gift of deification could not be imparted if he did not participate in the unity of the Godhead. In spite of its inherent contradictions, its great virtue, as Harnack professes, was that, unlike the christology of Arius, it promoted “the religious conviction that Christianity is the religion of perfect fellowship with God.”³³

It was primarily through Athanasius’ influence on his clerical predecessor, Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria,³⁴ one of the prominent figures at the Council of Nicaea, that the core of his christology was expressed in the doctrinal declaration of the Nicene Creed.³⁵ This Creed, however, was designed to overcome the cosmological dualism of Gnostic speculation and perhaps also to resolve the ambiguity of the religious philosophy of Origen.³⁶ God is One! Judaism, New Testament Christianity, even Neo-Platonism acknowledged that. But which work was to be attributed to this One God? Creation or redemption? Or both? And if both, how could they be attributed to One God in a cultural context that was dominated by Neo-Platonic dualism? In order to reunite the work of creation and the work of redemption as the undertaking

²⁸ Although, as Harnack argues, “the gnosis of Origen was not halved,” it in a certain sense was, as Harnack himself recognizes. Arius chose the creaturehood of the Logos, while Athanasius opted for *homoousios* of the Logos. IV, 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 35.

³⁰ Athanasius, *Incarnation of the Word*, 8, 9 in Adalbert Hamman, *How To Read the Church Fathers*, New York: Crossroad, 1993, p. 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 26, n.3.

³² *Ibid.*, IV, 45.

³³ *Ibid.*, IV, 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 26. See n. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 26.

³⁶ At least, as Harnack notes, “At bottom not only was Arianism rejected, but also Origenism...” IV, 59.

of one and the same God, the theologians and clerics, who adopted the Creed of Nicaea, established the unity of God in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, but at the expense of the humanity of Jesus Christ. He is, as the revised form of the Creed asserts,

“... the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, from the being of the Father (*ek tês ousias tou patros*), God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father (*homoousion tō patri*), through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became a human being, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead.”³⁷

Not surprisingly, the christological problem remained unresolved, that is, the relationship between Jesus and the Christ, between his humanity and his deity – and, as an attendant consequence, the nature of the salvation he inaugurated. The effort to overcome the Neo-Platonic dualism that had conditioned earlier theologies and religious philosophies only aggravated the christological issue by identifying Jesus Christ ontologically with the Godhead by the usage of the hotly disputed philosophical terms: *ousia* (being) and *homoousios* (substance). But how is that descending movement from heaven to earth achieved, that is, **from** *ek tês ousias tou patros* (originating from the being of the Father) and *homoousion tō patri* (one substance with the Father) **to** “and was made flesh and became a human being”?³⁸ Is Phlp 2:7 presupposed? Did the descent involve a kenosis, an emptying of divine “being” and “substance”? Because the Creed said nothing about that, it begged the question of the union between the humanity and the deity within the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Instead of uniting the church theologically, the Creed engendered greater alienation. A coalition was formed only a few years after its adoption, which resolved to eliminate the Nicene Creed from the confessions of the church on the ground that it was unbiblical. A new formulation was needed, if only to resolve the relationship of the two natures of Jesus the Christ and, hopefully, to restore the unity of the church.

4. The Chalcedonian Creed

Approximately 125 years later a new creed was codified at Chalcedon that was directed against all those who subverted the mystery of the incarnation by asserting two natures in Jesus before the union or by contending for only one after the union.³⁹ Ironically, however, the Chalcedonian Creed did not express the christological views of the majority of the bishops of the church. It was a formula imposed on them by the Emperor Marcian and Pope Leo in order to end the turbulence and disorder of the eastern church. While maintaining the adequacy of the earlier Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds, the Chalcedonian confession acknowledged:

“... one and the same Christ in two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; nowhere is the difference of the natures annulled because of the union, but on the contrary the property of each of the two natures is preserved; each nature (*physis*)

³⁷ *Documents of the Christian Church*, selected & edited by Henry Bettenson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 36.

³⁸ See Pelikan's discussion of “The Person of the God-Man,” in *The Christian Tradition*, I, 226-266.

³⁹ Harnack, IV, 220.

coming together into one person (*prosôpos*) and one actual being (*hypostasis*), not divided or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God-Logos.”⁴⁰

In spite of its efforts to achieve an ecclesiastical compromise and political stability, the Chalcedonian formulation succeeded in resolving nothing. It was stigmatized by its own inadequacies and contradictions.⁴¹ Each of the two natures, the divine and the human, remain separate in the union of the one person, Jesus Christ. No interpenetration occurs between them. The deity has not been absorbed into the humanity, and the humanity has not been drawn into the deity. Accordingly, the divine nature of the Christ could not be communicated to the humanity of Jesus; and, consequently, the christology of the Chalcedonian Creed lacked a soteriological orientation. As Harnack concluded, “The real mystery was thus shoved aside by a pseudo-mystery which in truth no longer permitted theology to advance to the thought of the actual and perfect union.”⁴² It was an empty confession, unable to unify the church by uniting the earthly Jesus to the heavenly Christ in an incarnation that took into account the *kenosis* of Phlp 2:7 and yet at the same time postulated a doctrine of redemption.

5. Luther and Calvin

More than a thousand years later Martin Luther, in his 1539 treatise, “On the Councils and the Churches,” discussed what ecclesiastical councils can and cannot do by examining the first four ecumenical councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). His review concludes with the judgment that “... they did not thereby establish any new article of faith.”⁴³ “They set up nothing new, either in faith or good works, but rather as the highest judges, and greatest bishops under Christ, they defend the ancient faith and the ancient good works...”⁴⁴ Apparently Luther was unaware of the intrigue and manipulation involved in the creedal formulations of these councils. More significantly, however, he seems convinced that there is no discrepancy between the creeds of these councils and the christological witness of the New Testament.

“For these four articles are established far more abundantly and powerfully in St. John’s Gospel alone, even though the other evangelists and St. Paul and St. Peter had written nothing about them, though all these, together with the prophets, teach them and testify mightily to them.”⁴⁵

Luther’s own christology, it would appear, was identical to these creedal codifications.

“We Christians must ascribe all the idiomata of the two natures to His Person. Christ is God and man in one Person. Therefore what is said of Him as man must also be said of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, IV, 220.

⁴¹ Pelikan offers an illuminating review of the problems and diverse points of view in “The Continuing Debate,” *The Christian Tradition*, I, 266-277.

⁴² *Ibid.*, IV, 223.

⁴³ Luther, “On the councils and the Churches,” *Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1931, V, 241.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

Him as God, viz., Christ died, and Christ is God, therefore God died; not God apart from humanity, but God united with humanity.”⁴⁶

While this assertion seems to correspond to the Chalcedonian separation of the two natures within one person, Luther elsewhere acknowledged that the “idiomata of the two natures should also be united *and mingled*.”⁴⁷ In that respect he moved beyond Chalcedon. Nevertheless, in view of his conviction that the first four ecumenical councils “established nothing new,” it is clear that he was convinced the creeds coincide with the christological witness of the New Testament. For Luther, then, the Nicene Creed’s identification of Jesus Christ with the second person of the trinity and attendant its Neo-Platonically oriented attribution of *homoousios* to him in relation to God the Father are taught in the New Testament. Integrated into this christology was his “pleasant vision ... of a blessed strife and victory and salvation and redemption:”

“For Christ is God and man in one person, Who has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and Who cannot sin, die or be condemned; His righteousness, life and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent; and He by the wedding ring of faith shares in the sins, death and pains of hell which are His bride’s, nay, makes them his own, and acts as if they were His own, and as if He Himself had sinned; He suffered, died and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow Him up, they were of necessity swallowed up of Him in a mighty duel.”⁴⁸

This interpretation of Jesus’ saving work, however, required Luther to accentuate the deity of Jesus Christ. In contrast, his humanity is reduced to an “as if” historical reality: “[He] acts *as if* they [the sins, death and pains of hell] were his own, and *as if* He Himself had sinned.” The historical Jesus, as in the creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon, is “swallowed up” by the Christ of God.

John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, expresses essentially the same perspective:

“His [Jesus] task was so to restore us to God’s grace as to make the children of men, children of God; of the heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the Heavenly Kingdom. Who could have done this had not the self-same Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what is ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace? Therefore, relying on this pledge, we trust that we are sons of God, for God’s natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us. Ungrudgingly he took our nature

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴⁸ “Treatise on Christian Liberty,” *Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1931, II, 321. See also Luther’s “Commentary on Galatians,” *Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings*, edited and introduced by John Dillenberger, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961, pp. 134-139.

upon himself to impart to us what was his, and to become both Son of God and Son of man in common with us.”⁴⁹

As in the case of Luther, Calvin’s Christology is oriented toward soteriology, and it is a soteriology that requires the accentuation of Jesus’ deity. As intensely as the incarnation of the Son of God is stressed, Calvin was still theologizing within the Neo-Platonic dualism of the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, and within that dualism the weight naturally falls on the former. Mysteriously and wonderfully, he contends,

“...the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross, yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!”⁵⁰

That the Son of God, in his incarnation, can remain sinless is attributable, according to Calvin, to the purity of Mary’s “seed” and the sanctification of the God’s Spirit.

“...if Christ is free from all spot, and through the secret working of the Spirit was begotten of the seed of Mary, then woman’s seed is not unclean, but only man’s. For we make Christ free of all stain not just because he was begotten of his mother without copulation with man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam’s fall.”⁵¹

Unlike Luther, however, Calvin remains faithful to the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two separated natures in the one person of Christ.

“On the other hand, we ought not to understand the statement that ‘the Word was made flesh’ in the sense that the Word was turned into flesh or confusedly mingled with the flesh. Rather, it means that, because he chose for himself the virgin’s womb as a temple in which to dwell, he who was the Son of God became the Son of man - not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ.”⁵²

How that separation in union is possible, Calvin does not attempt to explain. The proof texts he cites to confirm Jesus’ deity indicate that he interprets the Jesus of the New Testament according to the christology of the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. In the Gospels, therefore, Jesus speaks as the second person of the trinity: “What Christ said about himself - ‘Before Abraham was I am’ [John 8:58] - was far removed from his humanity.”⁵³

⁴⁹ *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. By John T. McNeill, trans. And indexed by F.L. Battles, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, I, 465. See also 466.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 481.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, 482.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I, 483.

6. Cartesian Dualism and the Rise of Historical Criticism

Eventually a conjunction of influences radiating from the Reformation, the Renaissance and Cartesian philosophy produced a new hermeneutical approach to the Bible that distinguished between Jesus and the Christ on an entirely different basis. The Reformation contributed three fundamental insights: (1.) “Sola Scriptura” or Scripture as the only source of revelation, (2.) Scripture is to be interpreted out of itself and (3.) the plain, simple sense of Scripture as the only basis of interpretation. The Renaissance promoted the importance of the original languages, provided the lexical aids of dictionaries and grammars, and initiated both textual criticism and the development of a critical text of both testaments. Cartesian philosophy laid down new principles for the establishment of reliable knowledge. Mind and matter are two discrete substances. Mind is the essence of the human being, but it is only by thinking critically that it can know the truth of the material world. Through a process of doubting everything, prejudices and traditions as well as the deceivable senses are annulled; and, by the substitution of method united with critical thinking, theoretical knowledge approaching mathematical certainty is possible. Because theoretical knowledge was prejudicially limited to the domain of the natural sciences, the humanities were subjected to the methodology of the natural sciences – with far-reaching hermeneutical consequences.

If, as Luther had contended, Scripture is to be interpreted out of itself, and its literal sense is the basis for that interpretation, what is the truth of its individual writings? Moreover, if that literal sense is historical, as the Reformers contended, to what extent does it correspond to historical actuality?

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), who during his life published only one essay under his name, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, laid the foundation for the study of the Bible under a general hermeneutics.⁵⁴ While he acknowledged the Reformation principles of “Sola Scriptura” and the literal sense of the biblical text, he contended that Scripture must be read and interpreted like any other book, that is, by means of rational criticism. For Spinoza that involved the pursuit of historical understanding which required the interpretation of its individual books in terms of their original historical circumstances.⁵⁵ Like Descartes, he promoted doubt in order to eliminate dogmatic prejudices and to achieve theoretical knowledge. In this critical enterprise truth and meaning are to be differentiated, for the Bible, like any other book, conveys both necessary truths of reason that are universal and contingent meanings that are hermeneutically relative to time and place. The universal truths that are derivable from the Bible by human reason, however, must correspond to contemporary human experience. But this hermeneutical identification is a critical undertaking and should be restricted to the educated elite.⁵⁶ By inaugurating the ideology of “an unmediated knowledge of Scripture,” based on Cartesian epistemology, Spinoza laid the foundation for the Bible to become the object of historical science, but one that utilized the methodology of the natural sciences.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Roy A. Harrisville & Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1995, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

7. The First Quest of the Historical Jesus

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) followed Spinoza into this new paradigm and became the first to attempt a historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus in the context of contemporaneous Judaism. Among the fragments of his 4000 page *Apology or Defense for the Rational Worshippers of God* are two treatises which were published posthumously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “On the Resurrection Narrative” in 1777 and “On the Intentions of Jesus and His Disciples” in 1778. In them Reimarus distinguished between what he designated as the “system of Jesus” and the “system of Jesus’ disciples.”⁵⁸

Placing Jesus into the context of contemporary Judaism, Reimarus identified him with the eschatological trajectory of political messianism, which, according to its Old Testament typology, anticipated the appearance of a descendent of King David who would defeat Israel’s enemies and reconstitute the conditions of the Garden of Eden.⁵⁹ Jesus adopted this Son of David identity and was led by his vision of “the kingdom of God” to initiate a popular uprising that would result in his enthronement as the king of Israel. Reimarus divided Jesus’ career into two time frames: the waiting period and the working period. The first is intimated by Mt 10:23: “You shall by no means have completed the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” By sending out his disciples to proclaim the good news of God’s rule, Jesus expected the people to acknowledge his messiahship, join him in revolt and elevate him to kingship. When this did not materialize, he attempted to rally the people behind him by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of Zch 9:9 and by enacting a temple reformation in defiance of the sacerdotal authorities. Instead he was arrested, tried, and handed over to the Romans for execution. His efforts to actualize God’s rule by fulfilling the Son of David typology failed. His death marked the end of the “system of Jesus.” There is no evidence that he intended to establish a new religion or a new confession of faith. Baptism was an innovation of his disciples, and the Lord’s Supper should be identified as a Passover meal that celebrated the anticipated “kingdom” Jesus hoped to inaugurate.

Reimarus attributed the Christian movement to the mythologizing and theologizing of Jesus according to the other contemporaneous messianic expectation of Judaism, the eschatological trajectory of Jewish apocalypticism. Christianity, therefore, is the product of “the system of Jesus’ disciples.” By adopting the myth of resurrection, they invented the Easter event of his rising from the dead, but only after concealing his body and waiting fifty days for its decomposition. Other features were drawn from Jewish apocalypticism that gave rise to the attendant proclamation of his ascension into heaven and his imminent return to enact divine judgment. The scandal of his death on the cross was resolved by interpreting it redemptively as an act of substitutionary atonement.

The opposition between “the system of Jesus” and “the system of his disciples, which subsequently engendered the differentiation between “the Jesus of history” and “the Christ of faith,” “...hung a mill-stone about the neck of the rising theological science of his time.”⁶⁰ Although refutations from various perspectives were attempted, they were essentially ineffective. Under the influence of the rationalism of Leibniz and Spinoza history was being undermined as a

⁵⁸ See Reimarus, *Fragments*, ed. by Charles Talbert, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970. Also *Lessing’s Theological Writings. A Library of Modern Religious Thought*, trans. & introduced by Henry Chadwick, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956, pp. 12-29. Also Harrisville & Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, pp. 56-62.

⁵⁹ See Is 9:6 and 11:1-10. The trajectory is continued by Jr 22:30; 23:5-6; 30:9; Ezk 34:23-24; Hg 2:23; and Zch 3-4. After a period of dormancy, it reappears in Ps of Sol 17.

⁶⁰ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: From Reimarus to Wrede*, New York: Macmillan, 1959, p. 26.

source of truth. Lessing, who promoted the publication of various fragments of Reimarus' *Apology*, voiced this denigrating perspective: "Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."⁶¹ For Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) history as an investigation of past events can never attain to objective validity, for it is dependent on testimony and not on immediate experience conceptualized by the categories of understanding. The resulting dichotomy between "event" and "truth," combined with the Enlightenment's view that the Bible simply illustrates the truths of natural religion already accessible to reason, emancipated biblical scholars and theologians to continue the quest without epistemo-logical or religious restrictions. Accordingly, the opposition between Jesus and the Christ, promoted in earlier times by Neoplatonism, now received its legitimation by Cartesian dualism and its reinforcement by Kantian epistemology.

David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), however, moved the quest in another direction by radicalizing the historical problem in order to determine the historical foundation of the Christian faith. Compelled by Hegel's philosophical speculation to do what religion alone could not achieve, the reconciliation of the absolute opposites of the temporal and the eternal, he attempted to determine the extent to which universal truths were actualized in the history of Jesus. Is the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth necessary for the actualization of the idea of the unity between God and human beings in order to establish Christianity as the absolute religion? Since philosophy alone cannot deduce facts from history, empirical historical science must undertake that work by differentiating between myth and history.⁶²

Strauss' program to write a life of Jesus included the hermeneutics of the so-called "Mythical School,"⁶³ Hegel's distinction between *Vorstellung* (representation) and *Begriff* (concept), and Hegel's dialectics. In contrast to Hegel, however, he identified *Vorstellung* with the mythical material in the Gospels and *Begriff* with the truths that the mythical material communicates, but divorced from all historical content.⁶⁴ Every event in the Gospels' account of Jesus is scrutinized dialectically with the aid of historical criticism. The supernaturalistic view is played off against rationalism, and the rationalist view against supernaturalism, with the result that they invalidate each other. Out of this mutual cancellation the predominance of the mythical in the life of Jesus emerges.⁶⁵ The gospel tradition, however, is not entirely reduced to myth. Many bits and pieces remain with which a sketch of the life of Jesus may be composed. Strauss himself, set free from dogmatism by philosophy, was untroubled by his negative results. Because he identified the mythical as the form or representation of the concepts and the concepts, apart from their historical character, as the truths, which the mythical conveys, he was able to retain an inner core of the Christian faith. It included: Christ's supernatural birth, his resurrection and his ascension, all of which he had distinguished as mythical. These are and remain eternal truths, in spite of the fact that their reality as historical facts are negated. Supernaturalism embraced a literalistic history of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels. Naturalism and rationalism threw out religious truth with historical fact. Strauss retained religious truth by discarding historical fact and ironically ended up maintaining the wedge between "event" and "truth." Within the

⁶¹ "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," *Lessing's Theological Writings. A Library of Modern Religious Thought*, trans. & introduced by Henry Chadwick, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956, p. 53.

⁶² Christian Hartlich & Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der Modernen Bibelwissenschaft*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): 1952, pp. 131-134.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-147.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-134. Also Harrisville & Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, pp. 103-108.

⁶⁵ Schweitzer, *The Quest*, p. 80.

epistemology of the Age of Enlightenment, God's incarnation in a particular human being, like Jesus of Nazareth, remained unthinkable. Jesus and Christ continued to be antithetical realities.

Ironically, the "first quest" was concluded by Albert Schweitzer. Like his predecessors, he attempted to reconstruct the life of Jesus on the basis of an historical criticism that, by its implicit identification of history with nature, presupposed a causal nexus that precluded divine intervention. Yet after reviewing the history of the entire enterprise, he found meaning in a mystical Jesus, independent of historical knowledge. The epistemology of Immanuel Kant may well have determined this reorientation, for it was after he had completed his first doctoral dissertation, subsequently published under the title, *The Religious Philosophy of Kant from the "Critique of Pure Reason" to "Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, that he turned to theology and specifically the problems of the life of Jesus. He wanted to solve the enigma of the Last Supper by exploring its development from "the faith of Jesus into the faith of primitive Christianity."⁶⁶ His investigation led him to conclude that for both Jesus and the earliest Christian community the elements of the meal had no symbolic representation of Jesus' body and blood. The supper was simply a celebration of the future "kingdom of God" and its attendant messianic banquet, represented by the bread and the wine, over which prayers of thanksgiving were spoken.⁶⁷

Like his pioneering predecessor, Hermann Samuel Reimarus, Schweitzer identified Jesus with a particular eschatological-christological trajectory that emerged from the Hebrew Scriptures. The former had linked Jesus to the Messiah/Son of David expectation; Schweitzer opted for the trajectory of Jewish apocalypticism. Jesus, believing that the end of the world was at hand, announced the coming of a new moral order, "the kingdom of God," which would be established by "the Son of Man." But while he proclaimed the kingdom's imminence to his contemporaries, he secretly believed that when it arrived, he would be manifested as "the Son of Man." Schweitzer summarized his view of Jesus' career dramatically in his best-known book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*:

"There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign."⁶⁸

Kantian epistemology prevented Schweitzer from acknowledging the authenticity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, although that is the culminating reality of the eschatological-christological orientation that he attributed to Jesus. At the same time, it was the dualism of Kantian epistemology, specifically the shelter provided by the ahistorical realm of *The Critique of Practical Reason* that enabled Schweitzer to continue to identify himself as a disciple of Jesus.

⁶⁶ Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life And Thought: An Autobiography*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1949, p. 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁸ *The Quest*, pp. 370-371.

The failure of Jesus' "eschatological fanaticism"⁶⁹ did not disillusion him; it did not detract from his personality nor cancel the validity of his world-denying ethics as the very essence of religion.⁷⁰

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is."⁷¹

From within the epistemological perspective of Kant's practical reason Schweitzer was able to hear and obey Jesus' call to undertake a medical mission in Africa. From within that same perspective he was also able to pronounce a judgment that terminated what is now regarded as the first "Quest of the Historical Jesus."

"Those who are fond of talking about negative theology can find their account here. There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus."⁷²

8. The Shift from Jesus to the Christ

Schweitzer's verdict on the Quest had already been preempted by a German biblical theologian, Martin Kähler. In an 1892 lecture entitled, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*, he called the entire enterprise of the quest into question on the basis of the decisive question, "To what extent does historical investigation secure a foundation for religious faith?" If the Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, Kähler asks, what is the source of the revelation he brings? Is it his flesh-and-blood personhood or is it the Word that has become incarnate in him?⁷³ Is it the continuity with our being or is it the discontinuity he embodies as the enfleshment of the Word?

Kähler was by no means a docetist. He did not intend to establish a binary opposition between Jesus and the Christ. Incarnation was central to his understanding of "the biblical Christ of faith". He acknowledged the true humanity of Jesus and regarded it to be identical to ours. What distinguishes Jesus and establishes "an insurmountable barrier" between him and universally sinful humanity is his sinlessness.⁷⁴ This singular characteristic of Jesus' life, which Kähler insists must be taken into account in order to reconstruct "a fully authentic picture of Jesus" that is validated by the New Testament, defies the scientifically-determined presuppositions of historical criticism. Indeed, the empirical perspective of historical-critical theory and its foundational location in the Cartesian dualism of 'subject' and 'object' prevents

⁶⁹ The phrase is taken from Richard R. Niebuhr's *Resurrection and Historical Reason. A Study of Theological Method*, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1957, p. 11. Niebuhr offers an incisive critique of the historical criticism operating within the framework of Kantian epistemology.

⁷⁰ Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, pp. 53-59.

⁷¹ Schweitzer, *The Quest*, p. 403.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 398.

⁷³ Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus*, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953, p. 32. In English, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, trans. and ed. with an Introduction by Carl E. Braaten, Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1964, p. 58.

⁷⁴ Braaten, "Introduction" to *The So-Called Historical Jesus*, pp. 25-26.

any such oriented investigation from taking into account an idiosyncrasy like that of Jesus' sinlessness.

Kähler's attitude toward historical criticism, however, is inconsistent. While he rejects the adequacy of historical criticism in reconstructing the life of Jesus, he admits "that historical research can help explain and clarify particular features of Jesus' actions and attitudes as well as many aspects of his teaching."⁷⁵ If the Gospel traditions do not lend themselves to a discrete and certifiable differentiation between the historical realities of Jesus' life before his crucifixion and the ongoing process of interpreting his person and work that the Easter event inaugurated, how can historical criticism explain and clarify any features of Jesus' actions and attitudes? It seems that historical criticism must contradict its own methodological orientation by initially acknowledging the validity of Kähler's "historic biblical Christ of faith" and then proceeding with the historical investigation of its presentation in the New Testament Gospels.

Kähler, of course, is correct in his judgment that historical criticism cannot deliver what it seems to promise, namely the consummate knowledge that can establish the truth of the Christian faith. But his differentiation between "the so-called Jesus of history" and "the historic biblical Christ of faith" poses a dichotomy not unlike that of Kant's differentiation between empirical reason, the operational realm of historical criticism, and metaphysical reason, the operational realm of faith. "*Historisch*" or the historical, is the arena of human activity and interaction that requires critical investigation performed by a technical practice and supported by erudition. "*Geschichtlich*," the historic, according to Kähler, is identifiable with the enduring effect that a human being has on the subsequent course of history.⁷⁶ In the case of Jesus it was conveyed in a confession of faith that Paul delivered to the Corinthian Christians in 1 Cor 15: 3-5; and, as far as Kähler is concerned, nothing more is needed. For him the truth of the "*geschichtlich*" or the historic depends on the experience of conversion and the eyes of faith that it engenders. He reinforces this with an appeal to Mt 16:17 and 2 Cor 5:16

Although there are no explicit references to Kant's writings, Kähler did acknowledge that in his student days, "I swallowed down Spinoza and read Kant, Schelling, and Hegel."⁷⁷ His discrimination against "*geschichtliche Tatsachen*" (historical facts) and his advocacy of "*Glaubenserlebnisse*" (faith experiences) are inherently Kantian.

"For historical facts, which scholarship must first clarify, cannot as such become experiences of faith; and therefore the history of Jesus and Christian faith separate like oil and water."⁷⁸

Of course, "the history of Jesus" is the Jesus reconstructed by historical criticism under the influence of the Cartesian split and reinforced by Kantian epistemology. That kind of historiography identifies history with nature and therefore imposes causality on its webs of continuity. But history is also the realm of possibility and freedom. As valid as Kähler's rejection of historical criticism was vis a vis its use in establishing of the truth of the Christian faith, his dichotomy of "the historical" and "the historic" continued the Age of Enlightenment's breach between Jesus and Christ as oppositional realities.

⁷⁵ Braaten, English translation of Kähler's *Der sogenannte historische Jesus*, p. 54. German edition, pp. 26-27.

⁷⁶ Kähler, German edition, pp. 37-41. English translation, pp. 63-67.

⁷⁷ Braaten, "Introduction," p. 4.

⁷⁸ Kähler, *ibid.*, p. 51. English translation, p. 74.

The shift away from “the historical Jesus” to “the historic biblical Christ,” which Kähler inaugurated, was taken up by Rudolf Bultmann. Like Kähler he differentiated between *Historie* or objective history reconstructed by historians and *Geschichte* or history that is existentially significant for the present.⁷⁹ But through the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey and to some extent Martin Heidegger,⁸⁰ he repudiated the identification of history with nature and the subject-object split which that identification presupposed. Accordingly, in his essay, “The Problem of Hermeneutics,” he states:

“If the concept of objective knowledge is taken from natural science (in which, moreover, it may also have become problematical today in the traditional sense), then it is not valid for the understanding of historical phenomena; for these are of a different kind than those of nature. They do not exist as historical phenomena at all, without the historical subject who comprehends them. For facts of the past become historical phenomena only when they become significant for a subject who itself stands in history and participates in it, only when they speak; and that they do only for the subject who comprehends them.”⁸¹

Like his renowned teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann, Bultmann oriented himself toward Christian faith as an event in the life of the believer instead of intellectual assent to the objective event of a historically reconstructed life of Jesus. “To believe in the cross of Christ does not mean to concern ourselves ... with an objective event ... but rather to make the cross of Christ our own, to undergo crucifixion with him.”⁸² Faith is a subjective experience that leads into freedom and the search for truth. But freedom, like faith, is bound to the domain of subjectivity, to Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*; and, in view of their interdependence, they are not realizable in the realm of the cause/effect concatenation of nature.

In spite of Heidegger’s influence during the 1920’s at the University of Marburg, Bultmann remained deeply committed to a Kantian or Neo-Kantian perspective. Its epistemological orientation was compatible with his Lutheran faith, especially its doctrinal differentiation between justification by works and justification by faith. These tenets are oppositional realities, like nature and grace, or *Historie* and *Geschichte*, or like the title of his Gifford Lectures, *History and Eschatology*. To these dualities Bultmann added the contrast between the indicative, the realm of facts, and the imperative, the realm of the will. The former is the province of objectification; the latter is the sphere of encounter.⁸³ In an ever-threatening world dominated by its powers and principalities, existential security and the certitude of faith can only be experienced in the subjective sphere of encounter. Knowledge produced by human reason, with its formulation of universal principles and laws, belongs to the realm of objectification. As a foundation for faith it is to be negated as unconditionally as justification by works.

⁷⁹ But unlike Kähler, Bultmann confronted the problem of the historical Jesus.

⁸⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, pp. 227-251 for a determination of the influence Heidegger and Dilthey exercised on Bultmann’s thought.

⁸¹ R. Bultmann, “Das Problem der Hermeneutik,” *Glauben und Verstehen*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) II, 1952, p. 229. English translation: *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, London: SCM Press, 1955, p. 254.

⁸² R. Bultmann, “The New Testament and Mythology,” *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. by H.W. Bartsch, London: S.P.C.K. 1962, I, 36.

⁸³ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, pp. 205-223 for his discussion of the relationship between Bultmann’s nineteenth century Lutheranism and his Neo-Kantianism, pp. 205-223.

It was from the Marburger Neo-Kantians, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, Bultmann derived the notion of “objects,” not as the initial referent of thought, but “as the stated goal or end of thought.”⁸⁴ Objects are the formation of consciousness. “To know is to objectify in accordance with the principle of law.”⁸⁵ Accordingly, for Bultmann knowledge that is established by this process of objectification is characteristic of the domain of “works” and of law.⁸⁶ His appropriation of this Neo-Kantian position is expressed in the opening sentence of his essay, *Welchen Sinn hat es von Gott zu reden?*

If one understands to speak “of God” to be equivalent to speaking “about God,” such speech has no sense at all, for in that moment in which it occurs, it has lost its object, God. ... God cannot be spoken about in universal statements, in universal truths which are true without a correlation to the concrete existentialistic situation of the speaker.”⁸⁷

Any and every attempt to speak “about God” by the objectification of human reason is sin in its negation of the “I – Thou” relationship with God. In the same vein, faith is not determined by nor based on facts about the historical Jesus. Bultmann, therefore, could undertake a radical form-critical investigation of the Synoptic tradition without any fear of how his faith would be affected by its results. For him the Jesus that could be recovered or reconstructed by historical criticism was identifiable with what the Apostle Paul had designated “Christ according to the flesh”. Or, in Bultmann’s terminology, it is nothing more than the “*dass*” (that), that is, the fact of Jesus’ career and therefore, only the presupposition of the Christian faith.⁸⁸

Yet Bultmann did write *Jesus and the Word*, or in German simply *Jesus*. It is not, however, a life of Jesus that was typical of the nineteenth century quest of the historical Jesus. It is not oriented toward *Historie* but *Geschichte*; it is not interested in facts extracted from the Gospel tradition by a process of objectification. It is his “highly personal encounter with history,”⁸⁹ based on the oldest layer of the Synoptic tradition. He claims it is “objective, for it refrains from pronouncing value judgments;”⁹⁰ but at the same time the teaching of Jesus, which is the focus of the book, is interpreted existentially.

“The words of Jesus ... meet us with the question of how we are to interpret our own existence. That we be ourselves deeply disturbed by the problem of our own life is therefore the indispensable condition of our inquiry.”⁹¹

Not only did Bultmann interpret the earliest Jesus tradition in the light of his own “highly personal encounter with history.” Above all, he was involved in the hermeneutical problems of interpreting the “*was*” (what), that is, the content of the Christian proclamation as it is conveyed

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁸⁵ R.A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing. Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, Leiden: Brill, 1974, pp. 49-50. Quoted by Thiselton, p. 210.

⁸⁶ Thiselton, p. 211.

⁸⁷ Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1954, I, 26.

⁸⁸ Bultmann, “Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus,” *Glauben und Verstehen*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1954, I, 204-205. Also Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by Kendrick Grobel, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951, pp.3, 33.

⁸⁹ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. by L.P. Smith and E.H. Lantero, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958, p. 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

by the New Testament writings and their witness to Jesus Christ. Although he utilized the ontology of Heidegger's *Dasein* for his program of demythologization, as he designated it, in order to reinterpret the mythology of the Gospel, his Neo-Kantian dualism continued to be the epistemological framework within which he worked.

“...the figure and work of Jesus Christ must be understood in a manner which is beyond the categories by which the objective historian understands world-history, if the figure and the work of Jesus Christ are to be understood as the divine work of redemption.”⁹²

“In faith I deny the closed connection of the worldly events, the chain of cause and effect as it presents itself to the neutral observer. I deny the interconnection of the worldly events not as mythology does, which by breaking the connection places supernatural events into the chain of natural events; I deny the worldly connection as a whole when I speak of God. I deny the worldly connection of events when I speak of myself, for in this connection of worldly events, my self, my personal existence, my own personal life, is no more visible and capable of proof than is God as acting.”⁹³

Bultmann was an heir of the Age of Enlightenment. He lived and labored within the Cartesian split of subject and object as it was reinforced by his radical appropriation of Kantian dualism, and, therefore, the sum total of his work may be evaluated as nothing more than an abortive enterprise in apologetics. He affirmed the truth of revelation while the history in which it occurred was ultimately denied.

9. The New Quest or the so-called Second Quest of the Historical Jesus

What, then, is the continuity between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ? Both Reimarus and Schweitzer, the beginning and end of the first quest, had denied continuity. The Christ that had been formulated by Jesus' disciples and the subsequent Christian movement was pure fabrication. Martin Kähler, on the other hand, had rejected the entire enterprise of the quest, contending that the biblical picture of the historic Christ is the personal unity of the supra-historical revelation of God and historical reality of Jesus. In contrast, Bultmann acknowledged a minimal continuity. Jesus must be regarded as the precondition of the Christian movement. But it is the mythology of the Christ that the Easter faith generated which is the bearer of the truth of the Gospel? And it is that mythology of the Christ that Bultmann attempted to re-interpret for the modern world.

Is such a minimal continuity between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ adequate for the establishment of the historical character of God's revelation in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth? To use Bultmann's language, is Jesus only the “*dass*,” the historical proclaimer of the imminent reality of God's rule, who became the proclaimed as a result of his post-Easter identification with the Messiah and “the Son of Man”? Must the Jesus, whose life and teaching are reconstructed by historical-critical scholarship, be dismissed as “the Christ according to the flesh”?

Surprisingly, it was from within the Bultmann School that a new quest, or what is now being designated as the second quest, originated. It was not, however, simply a re-opening of the

⁹² Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, p. 80.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

earlier quest. The “either/or” character of that quest, that is, the opposition between the historical Jesus and the Christ that necessitated a historical and/or theological choice between the two, was considered to be invalid. Out of a realization that “the historical reality of revelation itself [was] endangered because “the Christ of faith” had virtually lost his historical rootedness, Ernst Käsemann, was motivated to pioneer a new quest.

“The heart of our problem lies here: the exalted Lord has almost entirely swallowed up the image of the earthly Lord and yet the community maintains the identity of the exalted Lord with the earthly.”⁹⁴

“To state the paradox as sharply as possible: the community takes so much trouble to maintain historical continuity with him who once trod this earth that it allows the historical events of this earthly life to pass for the most part into oblivion and replaces them by its own message.”⁹⁵

In spite of the skepticism that Form Criticism had evoked, Käsemann believed that the small fund of knowledge about the historical Jesus that had been constituted could be enlarged by employing the same “radical criticism”. By utilizing Jesus’ parables as formal criteria, more authentic Jesus material could be identified on the basis of the principle of dissimilarity.

“In only one case do we have more or less safe ground under our feet; when there are no grounds either for deriving a tradition from Judaism or for ascribing it to primitive Christianity, and especially when Jewish Christianity has mitigated or modified the received tradition, as having found it too bold for its taste.”⁹⁶

Presupposed in this enterprise of enlarging the fund of knowledge about the historical Jesus in order to establish continuity between Jesus and Christ is his differentiation between “mere history” (*bruta facta*) and interpreted history.

“Mere history is petrified history whose historical significance cannot be brought to light simply by verifying the facts and handing them on. ...In theological terms, this means that only in the decision between faith and unbelief can petrified history even of the life of Jesus become once again living history. This is why we only make contact with this life history of Jesus through the kerygma of the community.”⁹⁷

In other words, early Christianity rendered the brute facts of Jesus’ life meaningful to faith by a process of interpretation that Käsemann called “an ‘historification’ of mythical material.”⁹⁸ Evidently Käsemann, like his Age of Enlightenment predecessors, was operating within the

⁹⁴ E. Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*, Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1964, p. 46. German: *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960, I, 213. See Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 226, who says, “... he [Käsemann] sounded a warning about the danger of a position in which there was not a real and material continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ: the danger of falling into Docetism, or of having faith degenerate into a mere mysticism or moralism.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20. German edition, p. 192.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37. German edition, p. 205.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24. German edition, pp. 194-195.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26. German edition, p. 197.

framework of the Cartesian subject/object split and therefore assumed that historical events are essentially brute facts which require interpretation in order to achieve understanding. But, as Heidegger demonstrated, understanding is necessarily prior to interpretation and is projected into experience, whether of texts or the events of daily life in order to complete the hermeneutical circle of understanding. There is no such thing as mere history. There are no brute facts except perhaps those that are isolated from a historical sequence or structured whole; and even then they are theory laden. Interpretation without prior understanding is impossible. The projection of the pre-understanding continues consciously and unconsciously throughout life; and in that process both disclosure and concealment occur. The structure of consciousness will open as well as close the possibilities of truth that are latent in the actualities of experience. But that process is conditioned by the social construction of reality. What is disclosed and what remains concealed will be predetermined by the paradigm of reality that has structured the preunderstanding.

Accordingly, it is invalid to assess the memories of Jesus' ministry that his disciples carried into the future and re-evaluated in the light of the Easter event as "brute facts". What his activity and teaching disclosed to them will never be known, unless perhaps particular contemporaneous ideological trajectories can be identified which Jesus embraced and which he rejected. If there is any continuity between "the Jesus of history" and "the Christ of faith," it should manifest itself in the relationship between the ideo-logical trajectory with which Jesus identified himself and the subsequent eschatological and christological formulations of early Christianity.

All too quickly the second quest of the historical Jesus faded into oblivion.⁹⁹ Its virtue consisted in its efforts to establish continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This is also implicit in Günther Bornkamm's monograph, *Jesus of Nazareth*,² the first endeavor of the second quest to produce "a life of Jesus" or more correctly a critical reconstruction of Jesus' preaching and teaching.¹⁰⁰ Like Käsemann he recognized that Jesus cannot be understood apart from the reality of Easter and the early Church's theologizing of Jesus and his own eschatological interpretation of his ministry. But like Käsemann he also presupposed that facts are prior to interpretation and therefore differentiated between the "undistorted, primary facts" of the life of Jesus and the subsequent "pious interpretation" of the early Church. Significantly, however, he substituted the earlier eschatological difference between the futuristic orientation of John the Baptizer and the imminent presence of God's rule that Jesus had manifested in his deeds and words in place of Bultmann's attribution of the eschatological shift of the ages to the theologizing of the Apostle Paul. Yet, like Bultmann, he acknowledged Jesus to be the proclaimer who becomes the proclaimed. But he recognized that such traditions as Mt 5:21-22, 28, 33-37 and the claim to authority, which they express, distinguish him as more than a rabbi or even a prophet. That same authority was manifested in the immediacy of the sovereign power he exercised in his works of healing and exorcism.

⁹⁹ Ernst Fuchs, also a Bultmannian, became a leading proponent of this second quest. See his *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1964. James M. Robinson, in his monograph, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus. Studies in Biblical Theology* No. 25, London: Scm Press, 1959, has synthesized the differences between the first and second quests in terms of their conceptualization of history and their distinctive objectives. But he does not stress the necessity of the second quest's objective to establish continuity between Jesus and the Christ. Instead he contends (p. 88) that "... it is the concern of the *kerygma* for the historicity of Jesus which necessitates a new quest." Harvey K. McArthur has drawn together a variety of essays reflecting on the Gospels as sources for the life of Jesus, non-canonical materials as controls for the Gospels, new historiography, a review of various lives of Jesus written under the new quest, and the problem of historical uncertainty and Christian faith.

¹⁰⁰ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960.

“In each case a world has come to its end, be it for salvation or judgment. Its past is called into question. Its future is no longer secure – that future towards which it has been moving, according to all those traditions and laws which had been valid until then. In this sense its “time” has ended.¹⁰¹

Here it is also obvious that he followed Bultmann in maintaining a paradoxical relationship between the future and the present in Jesus’ teaching and in interpreting the terms “world” and “the kingdom of God” existentially.

For Bornkamm the continuity between Jesus and the Christ was established by the Easter event which validated him and his eschatological interpretation of his ministry as **the** eschatological event and in turn inaugurated the process of eschatological-christological confession and proclamation in and by the early Church.

10. The so-called Third Quest of the Historical Jesus

Lives of Jesus continued to be published during the 1960’s and ‘70’s even into the early ‘80’s, but without the ideological perspective of the so-called second quest.¹⁰² Establishing continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith was not a critical objective. Nor has it been a critical objective of the so-called third quest of the historical Jesus. New methodology and newly discovered sources characterize this latest quest. This is especially true of John Dominic Crossan’s 507-page monograph, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*.

Crossan begins with thirteen pages of “a reconstructed inventory” of Jesus’ sayings drawn from the four Gospels and the recently discovered Gospel of Thomas. They are metaphorically characterized as “a score to be played,” “a program to be enacted;” and the book he is writing is professed to be “an account of their inaugural orchestration and initial performance” by the historical Jesus.¹⁰³ The book itself, Crossan’s account of Jesus’ performance, is a very impressive piece of work. In many ways it justifies the opening of a still another quest. Unlike the participants in the first quest, Crossan does not presuppose that the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith (encountered in the Gospels) are mutually exclusive polarities. Although he does not appear to be motivated by the objective of the second quest, he concludes toward the end of his investigation: “I find, therefore, no contradiction between the historical Jesus and the defined Christ, no betrayal whatsoever in the move from Jesus to Christ.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus*, p.63.

¹⁰² Of all the lives of Jesus published during this period of time, Albert Nolan’s *Jesus Before Christianity*, Claremont, Cape, South Africa: David Philip, 1976, 2nd ed., comes closest to the programmatic efforts of the second quest. Like others before him, Nolan, a Dominican priest of South Africa, wants “to enable Jesus to come to life again ... by going behind the four gospels to discover ... what Jesus had to offer to the people of Palestine in his time.” His method is historical, but his primary purpose is “neither faith nor history”. It is rather to recover the truth of Jesus for the present time, more specifically from the perspective of contemporaneous life and death realities that confront the world today.

Other reconstructions of the life and teaching of Jesus written during this period of time that are worth mentioning are: Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, London: W. Collins, 1973 and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981; A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982; E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) Hendrikus Boers, *Who Was Jesus? The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989)

¹⁰³ J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant*, San Francisco: Harper, 1991, p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

Crossan proceeds to analyze his inventory of authentic Jesus tradition by utilizing theories of social anthropology, specifically those of Gerhard E. Lenski,¹⁰⁵ Ted Robert Gurr,¹⁰⁶ and Bryan R. Wilson,¹⁰⁷ as well as Greco-Roman history and “the literature of specific sayings and doings, stories and anecdotes, confessions and interpretations concerning Jesus.”¹⁰⁸ It is this critical investigation of “the score,” the thirteen pages of Jesus traditions viewed through the macro, meso, and micro lenses of theory, that differentiates this pioneering reconstruction of the historical Jesus from the previous quests.

Jesus and his followers are identified as “hippies in a world of Augustan yuppies.”¹⁰⁹ After examining Jesus’ teaching within Bryan Wilson’s sevenfold typology of religious “responses to the world”, Crossan identifies Jesus with the categories of “the thaumaturgical” and “the revolutionist.” He was a “magician” who united the magic of healing with the common meal in order to “force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God ... and with one another.”¹¹⁰ “He announced ... the brokerless kingdom of God.”¹¹¹

Crossan’s scholarship, unlike that of the first questers, does not appear to be governed by a Kantian epistemology which, because of its orientation to the immortality of the soul, is predetermined to repudiate the resurrection. In contrast to many earlier and later quests, he includes an analysis of the Easter narratives. Like the gospels, the program he enacts in his book culminates in Jesus’ death *and* resurrection. Nevertheless, in contrast to his absolute certainty that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, there is no pronouncement about the reality of his resurrection. Crossan prefers to follow “a single stream of tradition for the passion-resurrection traditions from the “Cross Gospel” into Mark, from both of them into Matthew and Luke, and from all of them into John.”¹¹² Evidently the passion-resurrection narrative of the “Cross Gospel” is considered to be the original version, and if it was constructed on the basis of an intense search of the Hebrew Scriptures from which “verses and images” were drawn, as he claims for the passion tradition,¹¹³ what is the reality of the Easter event? Historically, of course, the passion preceded the Easter event. But the death of Jesus would have had no significance apart from Easter. Therefore, theologically-historically it was the Easter event and its interpretations that preceded and determined the theological reflection on the death of Jesus.

As creative and comprehensive as Crossan’s investigation of the historical Jesus is, it is flawed on each of the three archeological levels on which he operates. His selection of authentic Jesus tradition is broad, but the hermeneutical circle in which he operates between his “reconstructed inventory” of Jesus tradition and Wilson’s overlapping typology of “responses to the world” is too limited. Jesus was not only engaged in healing and promoting an egalitarian meal; he also called for repentance. Wilson’s category of “conversionist response” must also be added to Crossan’s program of investigation. Finally, his determination of *Traditionsgeschichte*,

¹⁰⁵ G. E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

¹⁰⁶ T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

¹⁰⁷ B.R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millenium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973)

¹⁰⁸ Crossan, *Jesus*, p. xxviii.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 395-396. The “Cross Gospel,” according to Crossan, is the earliest complex of the passion-resurrection tradition, found in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, which served as the basis of the redactional expansion of the four canonical Gospels. See J.D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of the Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985) pp.125-181.

¹¹³ Crossan, *Jesus*, p. 375.

specifically the historical development of the passion-resurrection tradition originating in the “Cross Gospel, is not only grossly speculative. It is governed by a redaction criticism that does not appear to appreciate and discern the integrity of the narrative worlds of the individual Gospels of the New Testament.

Finally, to identify Jesus as a “*peasant Jewish Cynic*” simply on the basis of Nazareth’s proximity “to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris” is a conclusion that is not worthy of the scholarship Crossan has expended in his comprehensive and critical investigation. Most disappointing, however, is the defensive justification of his enterprise, which he addresses to his reader at the very end of his book:

“Because there is only reconstruction. For a believing Christian both the life of the Word of God and the text of the Word of God are alike a graded process of historical reconstruction, be it red, pink, gray, black or A, B, C, D. If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in.”¹¹⁴

What kind of reconstruction Crossan is referring to is not clear. Probably the scholarly, historical-critical reconstruction that he has undertaken to enact this project. But when did Christian thought ever advocate grounding its faith in a speculative historical reconstruction? While the text of the Word of God may be “a graded process of historical reconstruction,” the life of the Word of God is a continuous dynamic event that occurs when an individual interacts existentially with the text of the Word of God, regardless of whether it is written or oral, and is attendantly enabled to actualize the being of possibility in a particular time and place. Here at least, if nowhere else, Crossan discloses a Cartesian-like orientation involving him in the subject/object split that is characteristic of historical-critical reconstruction. Faith is grounded in that which has been scientifically established to be true. Accordingly, it is that objective truth, scientifically established that requires nothing more than intellectual assent and always stands under the control of reason. It is the kind of faith that believes because it has seen. It is the kind of faith Thomas voiced in Jn 20:25, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

More massive than Crossan’s work is John P. Meier’s projected three-volume reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Two volumes of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* have already been published. The third will probably appear in the near future. At the very outset Meier acknowledges that his project is a “scientific construct ... that does not and cannot coincide with the full reality of Jesus of Nazareth as he actually lived and worked in Palestine...”¹¹⁵ While his undertaking is historical, it has no intention of proving or attacking any faith stance. What then is its value? What is to be gained from such an investigation? Ironically, this is perhaps the best of the third quest reconstructions, but it has no other objective than to open up dialogue by serving as a “limited consensus statement”.¹¹⁶ But what is the kind of truth that has been constituted here? And what is it ultimately intended to do? Meier subsequently stresses the “Christian’s need to search for answers about the reality and meaning of the man named Jesus.”¹¹⁷ But can that be fulfilled by a “scientific construct”? If the New

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

¹¹⁵ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) I, p.1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 4.

Testament Gospels were written to enable readers to constitute narrative worlds in which they interact with that world, its characters and its events, in order to gain an experience analogous to that of Jesus' original disciples – a perspective on the Gospels that is of course debatable – how can a “theoretical abstraction” offer “answers about the reality and meaning of the man named Jesus”? Meier, however, regards objectivity to be an unrelenting pursuit in the quest of the historical Jesus, even if as a goal it is unrealizable. He does not hesitate to acknowledge his own subjectivity as a Roman Catholic scholar, but his aspiration is to present what he knows by research and reason, not what he holds by faith.¹¹⁸ Obviously his undertaking is determined by the Aquinas polarization of reason and faith. For he invites systematic theologians “to pick up where this book leaves off and pursue the line of thought further.”¹¹⁹

Anyone judging his work from within this dichotomy, however, is obliged to eulogize Meier for his integrity and his comprehensive and exhaustive treatment of the subject matter. No stone has been left unturned. His bibliography is massive; his footnotes are extensive and instructive. Social, economic, political and cultural data are blended into his historical reconstruction, but models and theories are by-passed.

Meier divides his project into four parts. The first two form the content of volume 1. The “Roots of the Problem” explicate “issues of definitions, method, and sources;” the “Roots of the Person” initiates the quest with an investigation of Jesus' birth and his years of development in his cultural milieu. Part Three, which is presented in volume two, examines Jesus' public ministry, and, because the order of events in his life is uncertain, it is arranged topically: proclamation of God's rule, table fellowship, miracles, etc.¹²⁰ Part Four will appear in a forthcoming volume three and will focus on the closing events of Jesus' career, his death and burial. The resurrection will not be included because Meier's restrictive definition of the historical Jesus will not permit him “to proceed into matters that can be affirmed only by faith.”¹²¹

Although Crossan made no pronouncements about the reality of the Easter event, he nevertheless culminated his quest of the historical Jesus with a tradition-historical analysis of the resurrection tradition. Meier's dichotomization of reason and faith precludes such an undertaking and serves to accentuate his entrapment in the Cartesian split of subject and object. It has been characteristic of the historical-critical method, as Krister Stendahl has shown, “to stress the difference between biblical times and modern times” and therefore to limit itself to a descriptive analysis of what the texts meant while relegating the hermeneutical enterprise of what the text means to the discipline of systematic theology or homiletics.¹²²

Burton L. Mack may be identified with the third quest although he has not attempted a formal reconstruction of the life of Jesus. His published writings, however, contend for a substantive opposition between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. In this respect his work bears a strong resemblance to that of Hermann Samuel Reimarus. Mack identifies the Gospel according to Mark as the source of the christological-eschato-logical interpretation of Jesus that the Christian Church has perpetuated throughout its history.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, vol. 2, 1994)

¹²¹ *A Marginal Jew*, I. P.13.

¹²² Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by G.A. Buttrick, Nashville: Abingdon, 1962, I, 418-432. Stendahl himself contends that the two tenses must be kept apart. See I, 431.

“This myth, this fantasy of an order of things without precursor, is the originary chapter of the history of the church.”¹²³

The Marcan Gospel is epitomized as a story “about a conflict that God and his Son Jesus had with Judaism, a conflict of apocalyptic proportions.”¹²⁴ The history of Jesus, as it is retrievable by critical scholarship “cannot have gone that way”. The Galilean Jesus of parable-telling cannot be correlated with the Jerusalem Jesus who confronts “the powers invested in the institutions and offices” of the architectonic center of Judaism.¹²⁵ Conflict with the temple and the synagogue should be ascribed to Jesus’ followers. Mark’s story, Mack concludes, is most probably Mark’s fiction. The evangelist wove together “two distinctively different strands of narrative material: “(1) that of movements in Palestine and southern Syria that cultivated the memory of Jesus as a founder-teacher; and (2) that of congregations in northern Syria, Asia Minor and Greece wherein the death and resurrection of the Christ were regarded as the founding events.”¹²⁶ On what basis Mack has derived this distinction from his textual sources is not clear.

His reconstruction of “Jesus in Galilee” is based on the earliest layer of the Q traditions, which he believes preserves an authentic glimpse of the historical Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, possibly even a Cynic-like sage.¹²⁷ But not as a prophet or an eschatological figure! Jesus’ style, as Q conveys it, was like that of the Cynics, “close and confrontational.” His speech was “softly spoken but extremely engaging,” “an invitation to share critical insight or perspective,” but specifically addressed to individuals in the social setting of a meal. If Jesus spoke about “the kingdom of God,” it was a non-eschatological way of life involving Jewish ideals that would infuse confidence in a confused and chaotic world. What he set in motion, Mack insists, was “a social experiment”.¹²⁸

The Christian gospel, as it is conveyed by the Gospel according to Mark, as well as the other New Testament writings, is the product of the movements that were established by Jesus’ followers. Mack differentiates five groups of Jesus people: (1) the Community of Q, (2) the Jesus School that produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories, (3) the True Disciples who composed the Gospel of Thomas, (4) the Congregation of Israel who formed the pre-Markan sets of miracle stories, and (5) the Jerusalem Pillars of Gl 2:9.¹²⁹ One or more of them underwent a sudden and remarkable transformation in the city of Antioch that turned the Jesus movement into a cult of a god called Jesus Christ. Paul’s letters bear witness to this reconstitution and its development of “the logic of the Christ myth,” particularly the Corinthian correspondence and Romans. But it was the Gospel according to Mark that gave this myth its substance by placing the life of Jesus into the framework of the highly mythologized stories of his birth, baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection. Unfortunately Mack never inquires into their function and meaning within the narrative world of Mark’s Gospel or in their earlier stages of transmission. The miracle stories, on the other hand, although they too are pre-Markan and

¹²³ B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11, 64.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60-69, especially pp. 67-68. See also B.L. Mack’s *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) pp. 114-121.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76. See also *The Lost Gospel*, Part III, “The Recovery of a Social Experiment,” pp. 105-188.

¹²⁹ B.L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995) pp. 44-45.

mythologized, are treated more congenially as memory traditions of boundary crossing which bear witness to the transformation Jesus effected in the lives of his contemporaneous Galileans.

Mack's scholarship, which is essentially descriptive, is dominated by the methods of form criticism and tradition history. He endeavors to disentangle and distinguish the traditions that constitute the Gospel and to link them to the movements the Jesus people inaugurated. Meaning is limited to differentiation, separation and classification; and the chains of causality that are postulated for the evolutionary development of the traditions are all too often simply speculative. The semantic potential that might be derived from an exploration of the unity and coherence of Mark's gospel as an aesthetic literary creation, or, for that matter, from any other New Testament text, is never contemplated.

For Mack the Gospel according to Mark is the genesis of the fraudulent myth of the Christ event that has deceived those who have embraced it and consequently identified themselves as Christians throughout the past nineteen hundred years. Even if the myth was meaningful to those who once committed themselves to it, its significance for today is hollow, even preposterous. Mack judges that there is little difference between the myths of Mark's Jesus with the power to cast our demons coming into a world to solve its problems and the Lone Ranger with his silver bullet coming into a town to solve its problems.¹³⁰ Ultimately, the tragic chain of causality that Mack traces from Mark's Christ myth into the present invalidates its truth and therefore also its legitimacy.

"This sorry plot lies at the very foundations of the long, ugly history of Christian attitudes and actions toward Jews and Judaism. The destruction of their city was only a sign. They did not vanish as was their due and thus were there to reap repeatedly the wrath of God in anticipation of the final, apocalyptic resolution.

... The Nazi enactment of the final solution forty years ago may have been tainted by pagan desires. But the rationale was Christian. The holocaust was also a gospel event."¹³¹

Marcus J. Borg, according to the Preface of his book, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, characterizes his published work by differentiating between his self-understanding as "a secular Jesus scholar" and his self-understanding as a Christian. In writing this book, however, he has combined both self-understandings in order "to speak directly and unabashedly about some of the implications that ... this material has for the Christian life."¹³²

In his personal witness Borg explains why he engages in the quest of the historical Jesus. His seminary education introduced him to a historical criticism that reduced the four Gospels to a history of tradition in which "the early Christian movement increasingly spoke of Jesus as divine and as having the qualities of God, a development that within a few centuries was to result in the doctrine of the Trinity."¹³³

Like others, Borg is oriented to the age-old differentiation between "the Jesus of history" and "the Christ of faith." Like others, that distinction leads him to postulate a trajectory that

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹³¹ Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, p. 375.

¹³² Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) p. viii. In his book *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994, p. 143, Borg identifies himself in terms of the same binary identities, but without indicating how the two are integrated.

¹³³ *Meeting Jesus Again*, p. 9.

begins with the Gospels and culminates in the creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries. The Jesus of that trajectory, he claims, “is spoken of as divine, indeed, co-equal with God, of one substance with God, begotten before all worlds, the second person of the Trinity.”¹³⁴

Unfortunately this is probably the view of most Christians today who tend to read the New Testament, especially its Gospels, uncritically in terms of the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. But is it legitimate to ascribe the christology of these creeds to Jesus as he is presented in the four Gospels? Are the Gospels and the creeds identical in their christological attributions to Jesus? And does the simplistic trajectory that Borg postulates justify the pursuit of the historical Jesus? Of course, it is precisely because of these creeds that the humanity of Jesus has been reduced and even lost. But can a critical scholarship operating from within the Cartesian dualism of subject/object recover his humanity **and** at the same time also sanction the deification, whatever kind that may be, that is attributed to Jesus in the Gospels’ formulations of the christological paradox? Generally throughout the quest of the historical Jesus critical scholarship has tended to pursue its investigation within the framework of a binary opposition that attributes superiority to one side of the two terms, namely Jesus over against the Christ.

Borg, however, struggles valiantly within the subject/object split that the employment of the historical-critical method instigates. It is a presumed paradigm shift in the discipline of New Testament scholarship that he and his fellow members of the Jesus Seminar acknowledge which makes the new quest indispensable to his dual self-understanding as “a secular scholar and “a committed Christian. While many historical critics of the first quest identified Jesus with the eschatology of Jewish apocalypticism, the new questers relate Jesus to the wisdom tradition of Judaism. Jesus the sage replaces Jesus the prophet. For Borg, this “collapse of the imminent eschatological consensus makes possible asking about the historical Jesus anew.”¹³⁵ His historical reconstruction re-presents Jesus as the author of a vision of life in the here and now instead of as a proclaimer of the imminent end of the world. Community, compassion, and the experiential reality of the Spirit and with it a relationship with God are the central aspects of his vision of life; and for Borg they readily lend themselves to contemporary evangelism.¹³⁶ Christianity can be made relevant today by substituting the wisdom teaching of Jesus in place of the Christ of faith to which the New Testament bears witness.

At the end of his integrative effort at combining critical scholarship and Christian faith, after presenting his “image of the pre-Easter Jesus,” Borg utilizes the Q tradition of Mt 8:20 and Lk 9:58 to define discipleship according to Jesus’ vision of life.

“As a journeying with Jesus, discipleship means being on the road with him. It means to be an itinerant, a sojourner; to have nowhere to lay one’s head, no permanent resting place.”¹³⁷

So far, so good! But what is the objective of this journey? What has happened to the soteriology that traditionally has been linked to christology? If the Jesus of history is divorced from the Christ of faith, salvation is limited to an itinerancy that is devoid of forgiveness, redemption,

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³⁵ Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, p. 146. See also his book, *Jesus: A New Vision. Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987) pp. 14-17. But he nevertheless devotes chapter 8 to “Jesus as Prophet: Social World in Crisis.”

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-155. Also *Jesus: A New Vision*, pp. 190-200.

¹³⁷ *Meeting Jesus Again*, p.135.

resurrection, and eternal life. What then is the Gospel? What is the good news Christianity claims to offer the world? For the sake of cultural relevancy Cartesian and/or Kantian oriented biblical scholars want to replace the New Testament Gospels with their historical-critical reconstructions of the life of Jesus. But if wisdom, or the beginning of a social experiment, is all that Christianity can proclaim, it has little if anything to offer that transcends the itinerancy of the Mosaic covenant of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In spite of all its inadequacies the historical-critical investigation of the life and teaching of Jesus is indispensable, but it can no longer be conducted on the basis of Cartesian or Kantian presuppositions. The past as it was, and as Albert Schweitzer realized, constantly escapes. It cannot be mastered! It cannot be reconstituted, for any and every such effort is predetermined by the subjectivity of preunderstanding. As Paul Ricoeur rightly contends,

“The hermeneutical approach [to history], on the contrary, begins by acknowledging this exteriority of the past in relation to every attempt centered upon a constituting consciousness, whether it be admitted, concealed, or simply not recognized as such. The hermeneutical approach shifts the problematic from the sphere of knowledge into that of being-affected-by, that is, into the sphere of what we have not made.”¹³⁸

An informed reading of the gospels will enable any and every reader to interact with these texts intelligently in order to experience the journey of discipleship with those women and men who follow Jesus in the narrative worlds in which they are re-presented. Such an experiential interaction with these narratives that combine both history and fiction can and will affect readers and transform their present into “the beginning of a continuation” of faith that will eventually “initiate” action and that action in turn will “initiate” a new causality.¹³⁹ That, as Borg has recognized, “means to give one’s heart, one’s self at the deepest level, to the post Easter Jesus who is the living Lord ...”¹⁴⁰ It must of necessity be the post-Easter Jesus who is encountered as the living Lord at the culmination of each of the Gospels’ narrative worlds, for without him as such there would be no Good News.

¹³⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellhauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) III, 228.

¹³⁹ These terms in quotation marks, along with meaning they express in this sentence, are derived from Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, II, pp. 230-240. Space prevents more from being said in this context.

¹⁴⁰ Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, p. 137.