

Is Jesus Lost?

Evangelicals and the Search for the Historical Jesus

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The ‘quest of the historical Jesus’ has been one of the dominant features in the landscape of NT studies over the past two centuries. This quest has employed the methods of rigorous, critical historical inquiry in order to understand who Jesus was as an historical person, as a Jewish man living early in the first century of the Common Era. However, in spite of this topic’s dominance in the discipline, evangelical scholars have often been reluctant to engage in this discussion. In large part this stems from the commonly felt scepticism regarding the conflicting and often negative results of the quest.¹ More to the point, the ‘rules of the game’, the methods of historical criticism, have frequently been seen by evangelicals as destructive to orthodox faith, undermining cherished evangelical doctrines such as a high Christology and a high view of Scripture.² Perhaps evangelicals can be forgiven for criticizing the critics and questioning the quest, for Jesus – the *real* Jesus – is certainly not lost and in need of any sort of ‘search and rescue’ effort.

There are many evangelicals, however, who wade boldly into the deep waters of historical Jesus studies. Scholars such as N. T. Wright,³ Craig

¹ The work of the Jesus Seminar has been particularly problematic for evangelicals. See especially Robert W. Funk et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

² E.g. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Robert Thomas and David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

³ Especially his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996); *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

Evans,⁴ Ben Witherington,⁵ and others,⁶ have made constructive and wide-ranging contributions to historical Jesus research. The international, evangelical Institute for Biblical Research is currently involved in a Jesus Seminar-like 'acts of Jesus' research project, scheduled for completion and publication perhaps by the end of this decade.⁷ As for motive, much of the evangelical initiative to this point seems to spring from one of two purposes: apologetic or exegetical. Evangelicals have responded to perceived challenges to biblical Christian faith in historical Jesus scholarship with strong apologetic appeals.⁸ Or, they have worked more behind the scenes as exegetical stagehands, producing bibliographies, introductions, and surveys of the quest or bringing to light aspects of the historical, cultural, and literary setting of Jesus and the first Christians in order to understand better the Gospel portrayals.⁹ This evangelical effort has been generally positive and persuasive, and these are not insignificant motives.

⁴ Especially his *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1995); and as co-editor with Bruce Chilton, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1994); *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999); *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999).

⁵ Especially his *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994); *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1997); *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

⁶ E.g. Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000); Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); idem, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (repr. ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994); idem, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

⁷ According to Darrell Bock, 'The State of Historical Jesus Studies in Evangelicalism', paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Ga., November 20, 2003; confirmed in private correspondence. Individual studies are published annually in the *Bulletin for Biblical Research*; see also <http://www.ibresearch.com>.

⁸ E.g. in response to the Jesus Seminar, Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds, *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

⁹ E.g. much of the material by evangelicals listed above.

Nevertheless, many evangelical scholars have recognized other good reasons for involvement in historical Jesus studies. There are deeper historical, literary, and theological reasons that encompass these two typical motives but move to a level more amenable to critical historical study. In particular, this paper will explore two realities upon which an evangelical student of Jesus and the Gospels, with a high Christology and a high view of Scripture, can and should critically engage in the quest for the historical Jesus.

The Nature of the Gospels

First, *the nature of the canonical Gospels allows for, even demands, critical historical inquiry about Jesus*. At a basic level this can be acknowledged by any curious reader of the Gospels, for they leave many historical questions about Jesus unanswered. Most of Jesus' life is simply not described, notably his formative years of adolescence and early adulthood. Issues of larger chronology are touched on in the Gospels but not emphasized, leaving scholars to wonder as to the precise dates of Jesus' birth and death, the exact beginning point and length of Jesus' public ministry, and so on. There are also general matters of Jesus' historical and cultural setting that are often simply assumed by the Gospel authors. These assumptions raise ongoing questions regarding the role of the Pharisees in first century Judea and Galilee, the beliefs and praxis of the Sadducees during this period, the socio-political and religious forces at work in Jesus' trials and execution, and a host of others.

In addition to these historical lacunae, any reader can recognize stylistic and thematic differences between the three Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. The fourth Gospel moves at a measured pace, with Jesus pausing throughout for lengthy, reflective dialogues and discourses about his divine origin and mission. The Synoptics, on the other hand, move much more quickly (especially Mark), with Jesus speaking in succinct, memorable sayings and parables, reluctant to publicize any divine origin or messianic purposes. A careful reader can perceive similar, yet more subtle, stylistic and thematic differences among the Synoptics themselves. Thus, however much one may observe a basic unity in the gospel portraits of Jesus, the distinctiveness of each of these four sketches invites careful inquiry about the person they portray.

Underlying these initial observations is the question of the genre of the Gospels, an important issue that has been examined off and on

throughout the period of modern Gospels' scholarship. The use of an established genre forms a sort of implicit contract between author and readers, outlining the acceptable parameters for reading the text while typically allowing the author flexibility within those parameters. No text is produced completely apart from established genres, however much one might modify the genre he or she is employing.¹⁰

From an evangelical standpoint, even strong statements regarding the inerrancy of Scripture recognize that this concept must be understood within the historically conditioned constraints – including the literary constraints – of the human communication used in the divine production of Scripture. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, for example, affirms that 'God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared', and that 'the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices'. Furthermore, the Statement denies that 'inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as ... the topical arrangement of material, [or] variant selections of material in parallel accounts', reflecting phenomena particularly found in the Gospels.¹¹ Certainly, Scripture is more than merely human writing, but it is just as surely not less than, nor other than, human writing.

Recent research on Gospel genre, particularly that by Richard Burridge, has affirmed that the Gospels fit best within the ancient genre of *bios* or *vita*, or ancient biography.¹² This must not be confused with modern biographies, with their more comprehensive historical and chronological concerns regarding the subject's life, and with their particular interest in

¹⁰ Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982); Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹¹ Articles VIII, XIII, and XVIII, and the exposition of the statement under 'Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation'; the statement can be found at <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/chicago.stm.txt>.

¹² Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); with a concise summary in 'About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences', in *The Gospels for All Christians* ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 113–45. See also David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 17–157; idem, 'Greco-Roman Biography', in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament* (ed. idem; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988), 107–126.

demonstrating the subject's formative influences or psychological development. Rather, while ancient *bioi* certainly have real historical interest in their subject, they

do not cover the whole life in strict chronological sequence ... Often, they have only a bare chronological outline, beginning with the birth or arrival on the public scene and ending with the death; the intervening space includes selected stories, anecdotes, speeches, and sayings, all displaying something of the subject.¹³

The death of the subject is particularly emphasized, as it was believed that 'in this crisis the hero reveals his true character, gives his definitive teaching, or does his greatest deed'.¹⁴

These general features of the *bios* genre can be seen in the Gospels. They certainly have an historical intention focused on a single individual, 'writing' what Jesus 'did and taught'.¹⁵ The details prior to Jesus' 'arrival on the public scene' are sparse, the suffering and death of Jesus is of primary focus in the Gospels, and the material in between gives episodes and teachings of Jesus displaying who he is and what his central message is. Although the Gospels give some specific chronological indicators which must be taken seriously, a general lack of concern for chronological precision is confirmed by a simple comparison of the different ordering of parallel events among the Gospels. This is the case even in recounting singular events not repeated in Jesus' ministry: in the sequence of events within a specific episode,¹⁶ of episodes described within a specific period of Jesus' ministry,¹⁷ and in the overarching frameworks of the Gospels.¹⁸ Given that Matthew and Luke probably knew and used Mark, that Luke may have also used Matthew, and that John may have known one or more

¹³ Burridge, 'About People', 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1; John 20:30–31; 21:24–25.

¹⁶ E.g. the different sequence of Jesus' temptations in Matt. 4:3–11 and Luke 4:3–13.

¹⁷ E.g. the order of events in Mark 1–5 compared with parallels in Matt. and Luke. This difference in sequence even occurs related to singular events where one source has a specific chronological indicator (e.g. Mark 4:35–41; cf. Matt. 8:23–27; Luke 8:22–25).

¹⁸ I.e. the single-Passover, Galilee-focused framework of the Synoptics compared with the multi-Passover, Jerusalem-focused framework of John's Gospel.

of the Synoptics,¹⁹ it seems that even in reading one another the Gospel authors did not view the other sequences as absolute chronologies. Thus, Luke's statement that he intends to write 'in order' (*kathexēs*) in his Gospel and presumably in Acts (Luke 1:3) refers to an order that is 'proper' or 'fitting' to the subject at hand, it is not one that is strictly chronological.²⁰

As an inclusive genre, *bioi* incorporated the various speech forms common to broader Greco-Roman historiography. The longer speeches of Greco-Roman history writing were typically summaries of what the speaker was believed to have said on a given occasion,²¹ while shorter speech forms could be paraphrased, expanded, or condensed as necessary.²² Thus, speech material was not always or even often *ipsissima verba* – the very words of the speaker – but rather an attempt at *ipsissima vox* – the very 'voice', faithful to the original message.²³ This general feature of Greco-Roman historiography must be the case at least to some extent in the Gospels, as indicated by the simple fact that, whereas the Gospels present Jesus' teaching in Greek, he almost certainly taught in Aramaic.²⁴ It is further confirmed by comparison of the variation in sayings material in the Gospels, even in recounting singular events.²⁵

While the Gospels fit well within the genre of ancient *bios*, they also have their own distinctive features that utilize the flexibility of the generic category. These features centre on the Gospel *bioi*'s distinctive understanding of who their subject is and what he has done: that the life

¹⁹ On the Synoptic Gospel relationships especially, see Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989).

²⁰ Of course, a 'fitting' order for a large-scale biographical account would be at least to some extent chronological. On Luke's use of this term, see David P. Moessner, 'The Meaning of $\square\square\square\square\square$ in the Lukan Prologue as the Key to the Distinctive Contribution of Luke's Narration among the "Many",' in *The Four Gospels 1992* ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 1513–28.

²¹ Charles W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 142–68.

²² Vernon K. Robbins, 'The Chreia', in Aune, *Greco-Roman Literature*, 1–23.

²³ Darrell L. Bock, 'The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?' in Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, 73–99.

²⁴ John P. Meier, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (vol. 1 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 255–68.

²⁵ E.g. the accounts of the exchange between Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21), or the dialogue at Jesus' hearing before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; Luke 22:54–71).

of Jesus is the unique life of the Messiah, the Son of God, manifesting God's saving sovereignty in the world in anticipation of his future dominion. Each Gospel author has redacted his inherited tradition in different ways, with different particular theological emphases, but all four Gospels share this common *kerygmatic* focus. This unique focus served to set them apart as a particular, innovative class of ancient biography which would be imitated often and greatly modified over subsequent generations.²⁶

How does this understanding of the Gospels as '*kerygmatic bioi*' relate to the quest of the historical Jesus?²⁷ At least four points stand out.²⁸ First, as *bioi* the Gospels have a basic historical purpose, an intention to describe what Jesus said and did. Second, however, as *bioi* they were not intended to provide a precise chronology regarding individual speeches and actions of Jesus. Rather, the authors adapted traditional stories and sayings of Jesus from prior sources, setting them within a broad chronological framework. Third, as *bioi* they were not designed to provide the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, at least not in all cases. They more often reflect what the authors believed to be the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus as derived from the tradition they inherited. Fourth, as *kerygma* they are supremely concerned with the theological significance of Jesus' life, with the historical concerns serving the didactic, apologetic, evangelistic, and other 'faith-building' emphases.²⁹ I would argue that acknowledging these features of the Gospels immediately opens up the range of critical historical questions that can be asked legitimately by evangelicals about the words and deeds,

²⁶ For Burridge's account of the Gospel genre's development, see his *What Are the Gospels?*, 247–51.

²⁷ In the terminology of 'kerygmatic bios' some may hear an echo of the dominant 20th century notion of the Gospels as 'expanded apostolic kerygma'. This is intentional, as I wish to affirm some connection between the Gospels and the early apostolic preaching. However, recognizing the Gospels as *bioi* precludes a merely mythical understanding of the Gospels, and demonstrates the authors' belief that this apostolic proclamation was grounded in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

²⁸ It should be noted that, even if it could be conclusively demonstrated that the Gospels are not a form of ancient *bioi*, these general features of the Gospels can still be seen in the Gospels themselves and must be accounted for in any understanding of the Gospels.

²⁹ Cf. Luke 1:1–4; John 20:30–31.

the life and aims of the historical Jesus.³⁰

The Nature of the Incarnation

There is a second, more broadly theological foundation for evangelical historical Jesus study. That is that *the nature of the incarnation allows for, even demands, critical historical inquiry about Jesus*. As Joachim Jeremias affirmed:

the incarnation implies that the story of Jesus is not only a possible subject for historical research, study, and criticism, but demands all of these. We need to know who the Jesus of history was, as well as the content of his message. We may not avoid the offense of the incarnation. And if one objects that we fail to apprehend the essential nature of faith if we make historical knowledge the object of faith, and that faith is in this way offered up to such dubious, subjective, and hypothetical study, we can only reply that God has offered up Himself. The incarnation is the self-offering of God, and to that we can only bow in assent.³¹

Of course, orthodox Christology has always affirmed the full humanity of Jesus as well as his full deity, from the point of his incarnation on. The Son of God ‘came down’ and ‘was made flesh’ and ‘became man’.³² He is ‘at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man’; ‘of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood’; ‘as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten ... of Mary the Virgin’; ‘recognized in two

³⁰ Notice carefully what is being said: one can believe that Jesus did miraculously feed large crowds, raised people from the dead, and so on. However, based on the Gospels’ genre the precise nature, the timing, and significance of these actions are open for discussion. Jesus did pronounce blessings on the outsiders and the persecuted, teach the disciples a pattern for prayer, and so on, but based on the Gospels’ genre the precise wording, original setting, and intended meaning are open for discussion.

³¹ Joachim Jeremias, ‘The Search for the Historical Jesus’, repr. in *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament* ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 8.

³² ‘The “Nicene” Creed’, in Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 25–26.

natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'.³³

What exactly did this look like for Jesus in early first century Galilee and Judea? How are we to understand the traditional attributes of God in Jewish creational and covenantal monotheism in relation to the man Jesus: his divine covenant love (*hesed*), covenant righteousness (*tsediqah*), and sacred 'otherness' or holiness (*qadosh*)? How do we perceive in the man Jesus the traditional attributes of God in Christian systematic theology: his transcendence, his omnipresence, his omniscience, his omnipotence? What does a 'God-man' look like, how does he act, what does he say, and how does he think?

The simple answer would seem to be, 'he looks like the Jesus of the Gospels'. However, as discussed above, the Gospels are first and foremost *kerygma*, thus providing theological interpretation of historical events and making explicit what may have been only implicit or even unknown when the events being described first happened. The Gospels undoubtedly give us our most direct evidence of 'what a "God-man" looks like', but even taken at face value they raise at least as many questions as they answer regarding this issue. Why does the 'God-man' seem unable to do certain things?³⁴ Why does he not know certain things?³⁵ Why does he at times seem to deflect attention from his divinity,³⁶ while at other times seem to embrace it?³⁷ More generally, how is it that the 'God-man' could not be immediately recognizable as such? Why does he do the specific things he does, in the way he does them? What is he thinking on a day-to-day basis?

At first glance John's Gospel may seem to give the most straightforward answers to these sorts of questions, offering a clear window into Jesus' self-understanding, but it presents something of a paradox. On the one hand, it is in some respects the most historically oriented of the Gospels, providing more detailed geographical and chronological indicators than the Synoptics.³⁸ On the other hand, it is clearly the most theologically oriented of the Gospels, redacted to reflect explicitly a high Christology.

³³ 'The Definition of Chalcedon', in *ibid.*, 51–52.

³⁴ E.g. Mark 6:5.

³⁵ E.g. Mark 5:30–33; 9:21; 13:32; cf. Luke 2:52, describing Jesus' growth in wisdom.

³⁶ E.g. Mark 10:17–18.

³⁷ E.g. Mark 14:62.

³⁸ On the historical concerns of John's Gospel, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

We *may* be closer to the inner self-understanding of Jesus in John's Gospel, but given the comparison with the Synoptics one suspects that we are reading the unknown, unconscious, or implicit Christology of Jesus made explicit through apostolic redaction.

In order to see the difficulties in using John as a source for Jesus' self-understanding, it is worth pausing at this point to explore the nature of the Johannine redaction of the prior Jesus tradition. In view of the 'Johannine thunderbolt' in Matthew 11:25–27 and Luke 10:21–22, and the presence of Synoptic-like sayings embedded in the Johannine discourses, one should be reluctant to pronounce with certainty that Jesus could not have spoken as represented both in the Synoptics and in John. However, even these examples actually highlight the contrast, as the 'Johannine thunderbolt' is not an extended, repetitive, thematically dualistic discourse like one finds in John. Also, any Synoptic-like sayings in John are thoroughly embedded within characteristically Johannine discourses or dialogues. Nevertheless, at least two combined factors point to the relative primitivity of a Synoptic-style Jesus tradition over against the Johannine redaction. The first is that the vocabulary and style of Jesus' teaching in John is indistinguishable from the vocabulary and style of both the Gospel narrator and the Johannine epistles. The second factor is that the Synoptic tradition is that which is explicitly referred to as Jesus tradition in the earliest Christian writings and in most of the Christian writings through the beginning of the second century.³⁹

One can get a sense of this Johannine redaction of prior Jesus tradition with an example: Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3. The setting is quite historically plausible, as is the initial dialogue understood in 'new covenant' terms.⁴⁰ Jesus' response to Nicodemus is framed by at least two traditional Jesus sayings. One is about entering the kingdom of God as a child (3:3), and the other about the heavenly son of man being exalted to fulfil God's salvific plan (3:14), and possibly one on the wind and the Spirit (3:8). Of course, these first two themes – 'kingdom of God' and 'son of man' – are the dominant themes in Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics, and probably represent Jesus' original idioms and ideas spoken within his

³⁹ E.g. 1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23–25; *1 Clem.* 13:1–3; *Did.* 8:3–10. One can also note the existence of Mark, Matthew, and Luke themselves, in addition to the many allusions to distinctively Synoptic-style tradition in the other Pauline writings and works such as Hebrews and James.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ezek. 36:24–28.

Palestinian Jewish context. The dialogue in John 3, however, quickly moves to a discourse on 'life' and the 'one-and-only (*monogenēs*) Son of God', the Johannine equivalents to the original Jesus concepts, in such a way that translators are unsure where the author understood Jesus' speech to end and his interpretation to begin. A similar analysis of the whole Gospel would seem to indicate that this is typical of John's redaction. That is, traditional Jesus material forms the foundation for further, apostolic theological reflection, making explicit what may have been only implicit in Jesus' original life and teaching. Thus we have *ipsissima vox* broadly conceived – faithful interpretations and expansions of original statements and concepts of Jesus.⁴¹

The Gospels, then, are of mixed benefit in answering critical questions about the precise nature of the incarnation in history, and other NT passages have often been invoked to aid in this discussion. Paul's hymnic citation at Philippians 2:5–11 has received special attention, especially the concept of Christ's *kenosis*, his 'self-emptying', at the incarnational step of his humiliation. However, this *kenosis* is a much-debated concept. Interpretations range from a complete emptying of the divine 'form' to a sociological description of Jesus' poverty or slave status; from a second-Adam Christology to a restatement of the Isaianic servant's 'pouring out' his life unto death.⁴² Other texts, notably Colossians 1:19, 2:9, Hebrews 2:14, 10:5, and John 1:14, similarly provide important information regarding the *fact* of the incarnation, but give little help in understanding the exact *nature* of the incarnation in historical terms, determining 'what a "God-man" looks like' in first century Galilee and Judea.

The point of all this discussion is simply to emphasize that the precise way in which the divine intersected with the human in the inner personality and daily life of Jesus of Nazareth is to a very great extent not addressed in Scripture. It seems we are left to apply the wonderfully

⁴¹ Cf. Peter W. Ensor, *Jesus and His 'Works': The Johannine Sayings in Historical Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996). This approach in general terms follows the classic lead of C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). It is suggested by the Gospel itself with its explicitly postresurrection perspective on Jesus' words and deeds (e.g. 2:22; 12:16; 14:26). See Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Spiritual Remembering: John 14.26', in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins* (ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker, and S. C. Barton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 55–68

⁴² Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 165–96.

precise-yet-ambiguous Nicene and Chalcedonian descriptions of the mystery of the incarnation quoted above. In view of this, I would argue that a balanced, 'mysterious', orthodox Christology opens the door to many critical historical questions regarding Jesus – his aims within the constraints of history, the extent and precise nature of his messianic and divine self-understanding, possible development in his self-understanding, and so on. The uniqueness and inscrutability of the phenomenon of the 'God-man' in history surely invites discussion regarding these sorts of issues.⁴³

Conclusion

The nature of the Christian faith allows for – even *demands* – critical historical inquiry about Jesus. Christianity speaks of a God who reveals himself by hiding himself as a 'marginal Jew' in backwater Galilee, a God who unveils himself by veiling himself through utterly human writings of various types in particular times and places. Christianity is a thoroughly historical faith, making theological truth claims that are based upon and about particular real events in space and time: Jesus' birth, his life, his teaching and miracles, his crucifixion, his resurrection. This means that most of the foundational theological claims of Christianity are subject to broader historical investigation, and conversely, that the foundational historical claims of Christianity are subject to broader theological study.

The Christian notion of divine-human concurrence in the writing of Scripture and the person of Jesus suggests that ultimately the oft-affirmed 'ugly wide ditch' between history and revelation may prove to be only a mirage, a 'trick of the light' from Enlightenment rationalism. It is certainly alien to the perspectives of the Gospel authors and subsequent orthodox Christianity, which claim that particularly in Jesus human history and divine revelation find their nexus. This is not to minimize the problems reflected in Gotthold Lessing's 'ugly wide ditch' regarding the ways in which human beings are to approach and understand the relationship of human history and divine revelation, or historical understanding and religious faith. For individual human beings confined to a present, particular, space-time location and attempting to discern divine action in a past, particular, space-time

⁴³ Notice the way in which this is all framed: this does not deny that Jesus *was* fully God during his earthly ministry; it simply questions whether, to what extent, and in what way Jesus *understood* his divinity. Cf. Raymond Brown, *Jesus, God and Man: Modern Biblical Reflections* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Bruce, 1967), 93–99.

location, the problems are significant ones that need to be wrestled with. Rather, the claim that human history and divine revelation converge in the person of Jesus is meant to affirm that there are ways of viewing the complementary nature of human history and divine revelation, and that ultimately, from a divine perspective outside space and time, the problem would seem to be only apparent.⁴⁴

From this perspective of divine-human concurrence in Jesus, then, one cannot exclusively examine Jesus theologically, or exclusively historically, without missing the full significance of who he is and what he has done. In line, then, with the primary *kerygmatic* emphasis of the Gospels and their authority for Christian faith, it must be affirmed that there is greater salvific significance in knowing, for example, the theological truth that 'Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures' than in knowing the historical truth that 'Jesus died to preserve Roman peace in Judea'. This does not, however, make the historical truth irrelevant or unimportant for a full understanding of Jesus. The historical truth supports and even illuminates the theological significance of the event, even as the converse happens as well.

Evangelicals can enter the deep waters of historical Jesus scholarship with confidence. Indeed, one can argue that evangelicals should be at the forefront of critical historical Jesus scholarship. Evangelicals can bring to the table a healthy blend of historical and theological concerns, both critically conceived and employed. Thus many of the questions of current historical Jesus research are within their rightful purview: What exactly did Jesus say? What did he mean by what he said? What exactly did Jesus do, and when? What was the original significance he or others at that time saw in what he did? How did others view Jesus and his public ministry? What was Jesus' self-understanding? Was there development in this during his lifetime, and if so, how and to what extent? What were Jesus' aims for his public ministry? Given the fully divine, fully human nature of both our sources and our subject, evangelicals can and should direct a critical eye to these sorts of questions, while maintaining a sympathetic ear

⁴⁴ For one evangelical approach to these issues, see C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

to the faith of the Gospel authors and a receptive heart to the person they proclaim.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This paper was originally presented at *Tolle Lege 2004* at Prairie Bible College, January 19, 2004. Thanks are due to Mark Goodacre and those at *Tolle Lege* for offering helpful comments on earlier drafts.