

The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith: Some Contemporary Reflections

Richard N. Longenecker

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The title for our lecture, "The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith," was coined over a hundred years ago, in 1892, by Martin Kähler to distinguish between the historical Jesus, or the Jesus of *Historie*, and the Christ whom the church proclaimed in its Gospels, or the Christ of *Geschichte*.¹ Fortunately, English has only one word for *History*, and so English-speaking scholars cannot on a linguistic basis easily make the distinction between "history" and so-called "meta-history." Theologically, however, Christians have always asked the question: How are we to understand relations between the historical Jesus and the Christ proclaimed in the New Testament?

The question includes issues regarding the relationship of an academic study of Jesus and a confessional affirmation of Jesus. It is also part of the larger question regarding how to understand the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Jesus in speaking about Jesus as the God-man. It is, in fact, implicit in the question that Jesus himself first asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29, par); that he then asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matt 22:41, par.), and that he continues to ask all people today: What do you think of Jesus? How should he be understood both historically and religiously? Of what significance is he for our lives - and for the Church and the world today?

The attempt to understand Jesus has produced a massive number of critical studies during the past two centuries, with certain distinctive approaches evident. In what follows I would like to divide my lecture into two parts: first, setting out a brief history of some of the most significant approaches in the critical study of Jesus; then, second, offering "some contemporary reflections" (as our title has it) on the matters raised - with a short appended "affirmation of my own convictions" at the end.

I. The "Jesus of History and Christ of Faith" Debates: Significant Approaches in the Critical Study of Jesus during the Past Two Centuries

1. Past Approaches in the Critical Study of Jesus - 1800-1975 (i.e., during most of the past two centuries):

To understand the situation today, one needs the broader perspective and background of the past two centuries. Four approaches, in particular, need be noted.

1. The Approach of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834): Jesus was the proclaimer of such great universal truths as (a) the Kingdom of God, (b) the Fatherhood of God, (c) the

brotherhood of man, (d) the infinite value of the soul, and (e) the higher righteousness of love - and he called on his followers to establish God's kingdom on earth through love and good will.

Schleiermacher was born into a family of clergymen. His father was a chaplain in the Prussian army and both grandfathers were Reformed pastors. Upon ordination, he served as a private tutor for four years, a hospital chaplain for five years, the pastor of a small Reformed church for three years, and a Professor of Theology in the University of Halle for three years. He was one of the founders of the University of Berlin, and from 1807 until his death in 1834 (about 27 years) he served as both a professor in the university and the pastor of Trinity Church in Berlin.

Schleiermacher is usually viewed as a systematic theologian - in fact, he has often been called the father of modern theology (or, the father of liberal theology). His book on systematic theology, *The Christian Faith* (first published in German [Berlin: Reimer, 1821; ET 1928]), is the best known of his writings. Yet beginning in 1804 at the University of Halle and continuing on throughout all of his time at the University of Berlin, Schleiermacher lectured mostly on the New Testament and hermeneutics, and, as a pastor, he preached almost every Sunday on a text of Scripture. From 1804-1834 (for thirty years or so) he repeatedly offered courses on almost all of the Pauline epistles (and Hebrews), and he was the first to offer courses in an academic setting on the life of Jesus.

Schleiermacher's attempt in all of his New Testament study was to teach the Church how to read the Gospels and Paul's letters. It was, for him, a task in what he called "church leadership." So he is thought of in many circles as the founder of modern hermeneutics.

In so doing, Schleiermacher argued (a) that Christianity was a genuinely new faith (thereby setting aside the Old Testament as prolegomena to Christian faith; though he wanted to retain the Jewish Scriptures in the Bible as an Appendix to the New Testament, since early Christian preaching used the vocabulary and themes of the Old Testament for its own purposes), (b) that the only historically reliable accounts of Jesus are those given about the time *after* his baptism and *before* his arrest (thereby setting aside as non-historical accounts of his birth, baptism, judicial trials, death, and resurrection), and (c) that in those accounts of Jesus between his baptism and his arrest, it is only the underlying universal principles of what he taught that are important (thereby setting aside whatever Jewish features might appear, the miracle stories that were added later, and all later ecclesiastical teaching that had intruded into the texts).

Schleiermacher was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment. Thus he denied that Christianity rested on the historical and doctrinal claims of the New Testament; rather, he insisted that it had to do only with the inward religious consciousness of Jesus, which was a consciousness of being in relation with God and absolutely dependent on God.

Orthodox critics denounced him as denuding the biblical narratives; radical critics (such as David Friedrich Strauss) thought he had not gone far enough and should have also denied theism. But it was Schleiermacher's brand of philosophical theology, biblical criticism, and hermeneutics that gained ascendancy on the European continent during the nineteenth century. And it was the rise of the *religionsgeschichtliche* school in the latter part of the nineteenth century - with its claims for Hellenistic encrustations as having obscured the message of the simple Galilean preacher - that gave an explanation in support of Schleiermacher's thesis for how Jesus had been so grievously misrepresented in the New Testament.

2. The Approach of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Jesus was an apocalyptic, eschatological Jewish Messiah figure, whose message of total commitment, while bizarre in its details, has had a profound effect on all humanity and continues to inspire today.

Schweitzer was the son of a Lutheran pastor in the Upper Alsace of Germany. He studied philosophy, music, theology and medicine at the University of Strasbourg, earning Ph.D.'s (or their equivalent) in philosophy, music and theology, and an M.D. in medicine. He published more than thirty books on

philosophy, music, theology, and biblical studies - with ten or so being on theology and biblical studies. He was also an accomplished organist. But he is probably best known as a missionary doctor at Lambaréné in the (then) province of Gabon in French Equatorial Africa, where he ministered for over fifty years and established a jungle hospital and leper colony (and was awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 1952 for his efforts on behalf of "the brotherhood of nations").

Schweitzer studied at Strasbourg under H. J. Holtzmann, who taught that Jesus was essentially a pious teacher of social ethics (*à la* Schleiermacher's view) and that all of the eschatological elements and "high" Christology of the Gospels were added later by the evangelists.

But at the age of 19, while serving as a conscript in the German army, Schweitzer was reading Matthew 10, where Jesus sent out his disciples to announce his presence throughout Galilee. And while reading he came across Matt 10:23b: "You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." Professor Holtzmann had taught him that "A Son of Man" in the Gospels always referred to the eschatological Judge at the end of time and that Jesus is here represented as saying that the end of the world would come soon. But this, according to Holtzmann, was obviously an addition by a later church editor, and so could safely be removed from the Gospel story and expunged from our view of Jesus' own self-consciousness; for Jesus was too sane to have believed such nonsense. But Schweitzer's question was: Why would the evangelist Matthew, writing thirty or forty years after Jesus' ministry and seeking to extol him through his Gospel, have placed such a statement on the lips of Jesus - that is, that the end of the world would come at the close of his Galilean ministry - when that certainly did not happen and so was patently false? It must be, Schweitzer concluded, that Matt 10:23b represents not a perversion of Jesus' teaching but, rather, the very essence of Jesus' self-consciousness: that he had high eschatological expectations and that he saw himself as the prophesied Son of Man - the expected Messiah of the final days.

In 1906, when he was 26 years old, Schweitzer published a withering attack against the Friedrich Schleiermacher - Adolf Harnack - Wilhelm Wrede consensus of his day in a book he entitled *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu Forschung*, which was published in English in 1910 under the title *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In it, he denounced the renaissance views of Jesus made popular by Schleiermacher and Harnack (which he saw as having begun with Hermann Reimarus in the eighteenth century), the claimed Hellenistic accretions of the *Religionsgeschichte* school, and the rationalistic criticism of Wilhelm Wrede. Somewhat sarcastically he asked regarding the nineteenth century "Life of Jesus" investigators: "Have they hunted down their game according to fair forest law, or has their bag been poached?" And he answered his own rhetorical question with the dictum: "Their bag has been poached!"

But Schweitzer's own positive proposals regarding Jesus were no less radical than those he denounced. For while he directed attention back to the world of first century Judaism as the proper context for Jesus and his ministry, his focus was entirely on the apocalypticism of first century Judaism. In fact, he insisted (1) that a rabid apocalypticism was the controlling feature of the Judaism of Jesus' day (all other forms of Judaism being insignificant or of a later time), and (2) that Jesus' own self-consciousness and ministry were entirely controlled by apocalyptic expectations.

Thus the ministry of Jesus, as reconstructed by Schweitzer, is set out in the Gospels in two parts: (1) in the first part, believing himself to be Israel's Messiah, Jesus tried single-handedly to call Israel to repentance and to turn the people back to God, but the nation was too wicked to respond; (2) then in the second part, beginning at Caesarea Philippi, he purposely began a program of confrontation with the nation's rulers, believing that at a crucial and strategic moment God would vindicate him and the nation would accept him as its Messiah. So from Caesarea Philippi on he "set his face to go to Jerusalem," and at Jerusalem he confronted the Jewish leaders and arranged his own arrest, trial and crucifixion - expecting at the last moment that God would intervene on his behalf. But on the cross as he was dying he finally realized the folly of it all, and so cried out in the famous cry of dereliction: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Or as Schweitzer characterized the ministry of Jesus in *The Quest*: Jesus in the first part of his ministry attempted to turn the wheel of history singlehandedly, but it would not budge; then he threw himself upon it, and it turned and crushed him in its turning. That is his victory and that is his reign!

What Schweitzer means is that (1) Jesus was terribly deluded in his own apocalyptic understanding, which was the understanding of his day, but that (2) he used that apocalyptic understanding, even though it was utter folly, to effect tremendous good.² Nonetheless, Schweitzer still called on people to be followers of Jesus of Nazareth - not by holding to what he believed about himself or to the specifics of what he taught, but by following him in his willingness to give himself for the sake of humanity. Thus the final words of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* set out the challenge of Jesus for today:

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.³

For Schweitzer, it is not Jesus' antiquated and mistaken teachings that are to be proclaimed, but Jesus' heroic spirit - which is also latent in the hearts of people generally - that inspires and is to be lived out in our lives. So he called on people to be followers of Jesus and to have "reverence for life."

This "thoroughgoing eschatological understanding" of Jesus (or, so-called "Consequent Eschatology" or "Consistent Eschatology") was not immediately well received by most in Schweitzer's day. But it soon became, in somewhat revised form, a dominant scholarly interpretation of Jesus and has framed much of subsequent discussion.

3. The Approach of Ernst Käsemann (1906-1998) and the New Quest for the Historical Jesus: While the historical details of Jesus' life and ministry cannot be recovered, certain central features of his consciousness and teaching can - such as his consciousness of standing at the turning point of the ages, his announcement of the imminent kingdom of God, his unrivaled authority, his attitude towards the law, and his offer of forgiveness to the ungodly and outcasts.

Käsemann was a student and protégé of Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) at the University of Marburg. At a time when the historical facticity of the Gospels was commonly denied, Bultmann endeavored to preserve the essence of the Christian gospel as he found it in Paul's letters and John's Gospel - all the while acknowledging the impossibility of reconstructing a "Life of Jesus." He did this, as we know, by a program of "demythologizing" the New Testament accounts - that is, by divorcing the proclamation of the gospel from the specific details ("myths" or "mythos") in which it is cast. As he saw it, what he was doing was an act of pastoral theology: for he wanted to preserve the message of the gospel while denying the facticity of the Gospel accounts. In the process, however, he made the personality of Jesus dispensable and denied any saving significance to the portrayals given in the Gospels as to how Jesus acted in Galilee and Jerusalem.

While agreeing at many points with Bultmann, Käsemann objected strongly to Bultmann's excessive negativism towards the Gospel portrayals of Jesus. For Käsemann, the logical outcome of Bultmann's denials was to make Christianity into a type of "docetism" (something that only appeared to have substance) - that is, to view the historical Jesus as merely a datum in history, but without any character; and his message and ministry as merely a cipher in history, but without any content. Rather, Käsemann began a movement that attempted to reconstruct the essence of Jesus' self-consciousness and certain central features of his message from the Gospels, but without giving too much credence to the historical details given in the Gospels.⁴

Thus, as for his self-consciousness, Käsemann proposed that Jesus saw himself as situated at the turning point of the ages, and that he spoke with the authority of God. As for his message, Käsemann believed that

he could distill the central features of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, his attitude towards the law, and his offer of forgiveness to the ungodly and outcasts.

But though the endeavors of Bultmann and Käsemann were pastorally motivated - and though both were people of faith and thought that they were saving the essence of the gospel in Paul and John from the ravages of criticism in the Gospels - most people today believe the Christian gospel cannot long endure if it is cut off from its historical roots. Nonetheless, "demythologizing" and "the New Quest of the Historical Jesus" continue on today within the Church in many popular forms.

4. The Approach of such scholars as Oscar Cullmann, W. D. Davies and George B. Caird: The New Testament generally and Jesus in particular must be understood in light of a Jewish background, and when so understood the Gospel portrayals are historically credible and the proclamation of Jesus religiously significant - both for that day and today.

Oscar Cullmann (1902-1999) was born and educated in Strasbourg. At first he was enamoured with the liberal theology of his day, but he became disillusioned in his studies with the positions of Schleiermacher and Harnack. And the stance of Albert Schweitzer, a fellow Strausborgian, repelled him. In concert with Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, his contemporaries, he felt that German theology had become captive to Enlightenment perspectives and German culture. But while sympathetic to the endeavors of Barth and Bultmann, Cullmann developed much more respect for the historical data presented in the Gospels and for the Jewish background of the Christian faith. These emphases come to the fore in his *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (ET London: Lutterworth, 1949) and *The Christology of the New Testament* (ET London: SCM, 1959).

W. D. Davies (1911 -) was born in Wales and educated at the University of Wales and the University of Cambridge. He served for a time as a congregational minister in a parish outside Cambridge, then for four years as Professor of New Testament at Yorkshire United College, Bradford, England. But in 1950 he moved to the United States, where he served as Professor of New Testament at three institutions: Duke University (1950-1955; 1966-1981); Princeton University (1955-1959), and Union Theological Seminary in New York (1959-1966).

Probably the most important intellectual influences on Davies in his formative years were C. H. Dodd at Cambridge and the Jewish scholar David Daube, who was then teaching at Oxford. The impact of Dodd's careful, non-spectacular scholarship and Daube's Jewish orientation have remained hallmarks of Davies' work through his long teaching and writing career - as witness his *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948) and *Christian Origins and Judaism: A Collection of New Testament Studies* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962).

"Davies's work," as E. P. Sanders has noted, "clearly caught the tide at its turning."⁵ For in the rising tide of dissatisfaction in the 1950's and 60's with the stances of Schleiermacher, Schweitzer, and Bultmann or Käsemann, W. D. Davies articulated a Jewish background for the New Testament - first with regard to Paul, but also with respect to Jesus - that, while not unanimously accepted, at least clearly has become dominant in the last twenty or thirty years.

George B. Caird (1917-1984) was a Scot, born in London, who studied at Birmingham, Cambridge and Oxford. After pastoring a Congregational church in London during the war, he moved to Canada and became first Professor of Old Testament at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, and then Professor of New Testament at McGill University and Principal of the United Theological College of Montreal. In 1959 he returned to Mansfield College, Oxford, where he served until his death as Professor of New Testament and also from 1970-1979 as Principal.

Caird always insisted on the importance of history within the theological enterprise and accepted the essential trustworthiness of the apostolic witness of the New Testament. In particular B with some qualifications B he believed that the Gospel accounts of Jesus provide good and accurate history. For him,

the most important continental scholars were Bo Reicke, Martin Hengel and (especially) Joachim Jeremias, scholars whose historical criticism was constructive and positive. Most of the other German theologians and New Testament professors, however, he treated with "enlightened disdain," often marveling at their influence when their work had so little to commend it.

One of Caird's lifelong preoccupations was with "A Life of Jesus" research and the importance of Judaism for an understanding of Jesus, as witness his book *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965). Caird was not a "New Quester," for he had never given up on the "old quest." What he argued was that, using proper historical and critical tools, the life and teaching of Jesus shine through the Gospels not only with remarkable uniformity but also with a high degree of historical credibility - that is, if the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus is seen in the context of first-century Jewish thought and politics.

2. Current Approaches in the Critical Study of Jesus - 1975-Present:

The past twenty to twenty-five years have been particularly turbulent in discussions regarding "the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith." Some call this period the days of the Third Quest (the "First Quest" by Albert Schweitzer; the "Second Quest" that of Ernst Käsemann, et al.).

Four important developments deserve mention - though, in many cases, what we see today tend to be revisions and reaffirmations of positions that were already taken during the past two centuries, from 1800 to 1975, as set out above.

1. One prominent position today is that of Marcus J. Borg, who in his book *Jesus, A New Vision*⁶ argues that **Jesus was a charismatic healer or "holy person," a subversive sage who undermined conventional wisdom and taught an alternative wisdom, a social prophet, and an initiator of a movement the purpose of which was the revitalization of Israel. In effect, he was the revealer of a new experience of God and his Spirit, a vision that was first revealed by Jesus to Judaism. But since Judaism was not prepared to receive Jesus' message, that message is now given to the whole world.**

Borg completed his doctorate under Caird at Oxford, defending in 1972 a dissertation⁷ that followed closely the approach of his mentor, and argued for Jesus as a social prophet whose vision was the revitalization of the nation Israel. But after graduating from Oxford, Borg came to what he calls a profound "conversion experience," an experience that led him (1) to focus solely on the religious experience of Jesus himself, apart from the historical details and confessional statements about Jesus in the Gospels, (2) to see Jesus' religious experience as a new experience that was divorced from his Jewish background, (3) to turn for an analysis of Jesus' experience to the religious experiences and spiritual formation of people today, and (4) to proclaim a gospel that builds on the latent religious impulses of people (especially those of a more pluralistic persuasion) and that parallels closely the theological tenets of Schleiermacher and Harnack. It is a vision of Jesus that resonates with much of liberal theology today and is widely proclaimed.⁸

2. Another stance is that of Richard A. Horsley, who presents **Jesus as a social revolutionary in the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds of his day, whose message in its principles has important ramifications for our day.**⁹

Horsley works primarily from the sayings of Jesus, and - based on an analysis of ancient society in the Greco-Roman world - he engages in a rigorous social reading of Jesus' teaching. Thus as Horsley reads Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, he views him as a prophet of his day whose message had far greater implications than for his day alone: Jesus had primarily a social vision for the renewal of Judaism; his vision, however, was too great for the "confines" of Judaism alone, but rather was destined ultimately to alter the entire fabric of human society. Included in Jesus' vision, as Horsley spells it out, were (1) egalitarian relationships, (2) economic cooperation and autonomy, (3) inclusion of all ethnic groups, and (4) realignment of family relations. It is a view of Jesus that overlaps somewhat with that of Borg, and is no less compatible with the thought of many today.

3. Also working from the Sayings of Jesus is the approach of Robert W. Funk, John Dominic Crossan, and the "Jesus Seminar"¹⁰: **Jesus was a Cynic-like Jewish charismatic peasant, whose teaching was witty, clever and counter-cultural, but not eschatological and certainly not focused on himself. All portrayals of Jesus of a messianic, sacrificial, redemptive, or eschatological nature in the Gospels (and in the rest of the New Testament) are the products of later church theology, which grew up around the figure of this Mediterranean cynic-like teacher and turned him into a cult figure.**

The work of the Jesus Seminar highlights three lines of evidence:

1. What is known about wandering Cynic teachers in the Greco-Roman world (thereby establishing the category);
2. Our knowledge of Q (the so-called Sayings source, consisting of approximately 230 verses of Sayings found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark) - though with these sayings arranged by vote into four categories:

Red = Jesus said it, or something like it ('That's Jesus!')

Pink = Not quite sure that Jesus said it ('Sounds like Jesus')

Gray = Probably Jesus didn't say it ('Well, maybe')

Black = Certainly not what Jesus said ('There's some mistake')

3. The Nag-Hammadi Gospel of Thomas, with its 114 Sayings of Jesus, viewed as an important fifth Gospel alongside the four Gospels of the New Testament - and, in some cases, as providing evidence of greater significance than that of the four canonical Gospels.

The position of the Jesus Seminary is eminently attractive to many academics in the North America scene, particularly those who come to the data of the New Testament with a "hermeneutic of suspicion." All three of the positions outlined so far have, in effect, largely separated Jesus from his Jewish roots and divorced New Testament interpretation from its Jewish background.

4. A fourth approach today, however, sees **Jesus firmly rooted in the Judaism of his day and a prophet to his own nation, but also accepts him as having had a Messianic consciousness, as rightly proclaimed by the Gospels as the nation's Messiah, and as acting redemptively for his people and for the world.**

Carrying on the stances of Oscar Cullmann, W. D. Davies and George B. Caird (cited above), and often appealing for support to the work of Bo Reicke, Joachim Jeremias, and Martin Hengel, this view is argued today (with varying emphases) by such scholars as Ben Meyer (recently deceased) of McMaster University¹¹, Bruce D. Chilton of Bard College¹², New York, and N. Thomas Wright, Dean of Lichfield Cathedral in England.¹³

Wright, for example, sets out the following scenario: Jesus saw himself as the eschatological prophet of the nation, who offered to Israel redemption and the end of exile. He presented himself to the nation as its Messiah. He died to counter the temple system and entered Jerusalem to fulfill the end-time Jewish hope of the return of God to Zion. In so doing, he acted out what God would do at the end of history; and in so doing, he provided redemption for all people.

There are many who generally favor such a Jewish approach to Jesus and the New Testament writings - even though there are a variety of views among them with respect to the specifics (as, e.g., the Jewish scholar Geza Vermes, and E. P. Sanders).¹⁴

II. Some Contemporary Reflections

The title of our lecture, however, also commits me to offer "some contemporary reflections" on the history of Jesus discussion and the issues outlined above. Much of what I would like to say should be given in a course in "The Christology of the New Testament," such as the one I offered a year and a half ago at McMaster Divinity College. But some comments need be made - perhaps best more anecdotally than in detail.

1. With respect to Schleiermacher's position of the early nineteenth century and its continuance today.

In many respects I agree with James S. Stewart (1896-1990), my Professor at New College, Edinburgh, who, after reading the classics and English literature at the University of St. Andrews, read theology at the Universities of Edinburgh and Bonn and became convinced that Schleiermacher was right. In fact, it was Stewart who translated and co-edited (with H. R. Mackintosh) Schleiermacher's massive systematic theology of 1821 (translated as *The Christian Faith* [1928]), thereby making it available to the English-speaking world. But he later came to believe that Schleiermacher's treatment of the New Testament was cavalier and his vision of the Christian faith, while idealistic, quite impossible.

World War I ended Stewart's studies at Bonn, and he returned to enlist in the British army, serving on the Western Front from 1916 to the war's end in 1918. From that experience he carried with him a profound consciousness of human depravity and an acute realization of the depth of injustice to which we as humans can sink, apart from God's grace. And though in his early pastoral ministry he carried on much of Schleiermacher's theology, he began to feel more and more troubled. As Stewart frequently said in class: What he found in Schleiermacher was a liberal theology that was exciting in its advocacy of Jesus as some bright shining star - but he came to believe that that message, like any bright star of the heavens, was aloof, distant, and far removed from humanity's real needs. So Stewart re-read his New Testament and came to appreciate anew the realism, historical truthfulness, and life changing power of the New Testament's proclamation. And having experienced such a conversion in his own thinking, he was driven to write the two books for which he is best known: *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1932; rpr. Nashville: Abingdon Press) and *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935).¹⁵

With Stewart, and a host of others, (1) I cannot treat the message of the Gospels as something like a bunch of cut flowers, however beautiful, but must always see it rooted in the Jewish soil of its day; (2) I cannot deal with the historical and doctrinal details of the Gospels in any cavalier fashion (i.e., any offhand, carefree, "ham-fisted," or incidental manner), but must always bow before their presentations in my efforts at criticism (like a discerning gardener dealing with prize roses); and (3) I cannot bring myself to understand Jesus and his ministry as simply the concentration of the universal principles of love and goodness, which need only be deculturalized and applied to the social conditions of our day, but must stand in awe in face of the realism, divine action, and life-changing message that the Gospels proclaim.

2. With respect to Schweitzer's position of the early twentieth century and its continuance today.

In the spring of 1958 I had the opportunity to attend the lectures of Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann at Basel. Barth was a very warm, out-going, even volatile person; whereas Cullmann in his public lectures was deliberate and fairly reserved. And whereas Barth was peripatetic and seemingly extemporaneous, Cullmann usually sat at a desk beside the lectern and read his lecture. But once during the course of that semester when referring to Albert Schweitzer, Cullmann got up from behind his desk, walked to the side of the platform, and said with evident agitation: "Imagine the nerve of the man! He denies the validity of Jesus' own self-consciousness, calling it all some bizarre hallucination of the day. Yet he still wants to call himself a follower of Jesus, and so a Christian. What he should call himself is a "Schweitzerian", for he finds his controlling thought within himself and only tries to enlist Jesus in support."

Schweitzer, of course, was a great humanitarian, who saw in Jesus a man with total commitment *and* whose radical attempt to express the thought of his day (however bizarre it may have been) for the benefit of others sets an example to be followed. Schweitzer had no problem with the facticity of the evangelists' accounts of Jesus in their Gospels. Theirs was an accurate depiction of what Jesus did, what he thought, and what he taught. It was not a question of historical or literary criticism for Schweitzer, but of interpretation. For in Schweitzer's view, Jesus was saturated in the apocalyptic thought of the day and he really did think of himself as Israel's Messiah and of his ministry as redemption for his people. But that was all part-and-parcel of the delusion of the day, which certainly cannot be accepted in our day. Rather, what we need today is to plumb the depths of our own existence and there to discover humanity's basic religious orientation, that of "reverence for life" - which Schweitzer tended to spell out in a Pantheistic fashion - and then (like Jesus in his day) apply those convictions in a manner helpful to others.

Schweitzer, indeed, can be commended for redirecting our attention back to the world of Judaism. And he can be applauded for insisting that the Gospels have not misrepresented either the self-consciousness of Jesus or the record of what he did in carrying out that Messianic consciousness. But his understanding of *both* Judaism and Jesus was, I believe, terribly flawed - so much so, that both the Judaism of the first century and Jesus have been made into caricatures beyond recognition.

3. With respect to Bultmann's "demythologizing" of the New Testament, which seeks to preserve the essence of the Christian gospel amidst the destructive effects of contemporary criticism, *and* Käsemann's "New Quest," which seeks to discover Jesus' self-consciousness and the essence of his teaching apart from any real reliance on the portrayals of the Gospels - both of which are phenomena of the mid-twentieth century.

While sympathetic to their pastoral concerns, I believe such stances to be unstable, both critically and religiously. This kind of approach is terribly schizophrenic in its separation of religious reality from historical-critical concerns - often causing its proponents to live in one world religiously and another world historically. In many ways it has turned the Christian gospel into something that Käsemann himself feared: a type of docetic religiosity. While seeking to protect the gospel apart from its historical trappings, it has, in effect, cut the cord of communication between the gospel and the world of humanity, with the result that the message of the gospel has seemed irrelevant to many outside the Church. While seeking to uphold the gospel within the Church, it has in effect emptied the churches.

4. With respect to those endeavors that (a) attempt to understand Jesus and his ministry apart from his rootage in Judaism, and/or (b) propose an interpretation which differs from that of the New Testament writers - which are stances frequently taken in the past and very common today.

History is not self-interpreting. There are many ways to interpret the same historical data, whatever the subject - as the plethora of works entitled "A History of This" or "A History of That" attests. The questions of history are not only "What is the data?", but also "Where does one start in accounting for the data?" and "What perspective does one have in understanding the data?" For my part, F. J. A. Hort of Cambridge long ago succinctly characterized the proper attitude towards the New Testament portrayals when he said:

Our faith rests first on the Gospel itself, the revelation of God and His redemption in His Only begotten Son, and secondly on the interpretation of that primary Gospel by the Apostles and Apostolic men to whom was Divinely committed the task of applying the revelation of Christ to the thoughts and deeds of their own time. That standard interpretation of theirs [i.e. that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19a)] was ordained to be for the guidance of the Church in all after ages, in combination with the living guidance of the Spirit.¹⁶

We may, of course, debate regarding the content of the apostolic message and the nature of its development in the New Testament, as well as the various writers' intentions in presenting certain portions and the extent of their shaping of that material. I have no assurance we will all agree on everything, for interpretation is a human enterprise. Nonetheless, that is where I start - with (1) Jesus situated in a first

century Jewish milieu, and (2) the apostolic interpretation of what he did, what he taught, and who he was given us in the New Testament Gospels. Without such a start and such a perspective, one should not be surprised at the multiplicity of approaches and theses proposed.

5. With respect to the methods and theses of the so-called "Jesus Seminar," which has made headlines for the past twelve to fourteen years.

As for its *methods*, the Jesus Seminar seeks via agreed-upon literary criteria to determine which sayings of Jesus in the Gospels are authentic, rating the credibility of each saying on a scale of red (probably), pink (possibly), gray (perhaps not), and black (certainly not).

The developing of literary criteria to test the various sayings of Jesus has a long history, with C. H. Dodd, for example, focusing on the criterion of "multiple attestation" and Joachim Jeremias on "semitic features" to support the authenticity of many of the sayings of Jesus. In 1967, however, Norman Perrin in his *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*,¹⁷ argued that the "burden of proof" must now be on authenticity and not on non-authenticity (that is, that one must start with the supposition that a particular saying is not authentic unless it can be proved to be authentic). And he proposed further literary criteria to be used in making such decisions - such as "dissimilarity" or "distinctiveness" (which usually means that a credible Jesus saying must be different from anything in the Judaism of Jesus' day and different from all the church's confessions) and "coherence" or "consistency" (which usually means that a saying that agrees with another saying can be accepted or rejected depending on what we have determined about that previous parallel saying). There is much we can learn when we apply such criteria to the Gospel portrayals.¹⁸ But when used in a "ham-fisted" manner, they leave us with very little on the lips of Jesus. For somewhere in the writings of Early Judaism or the later Church, it is not difficult to find parallels to something Jesus is reputed to have said *or* to relate the material in some fashion to other material we have previously rejected.

And as for its working *theses* (1) that the hypothetically reconstructed Q is our earliest witness to Jesus' teaching and self-consciousness, and (2) that the Gospel of Thomas must be accepted on a par with Q - and thus (3) that Jesus must be considered to have been originally only a peasant teacher of witty, confrontational, wisdom maxims - these claims, as stated, need a great deal of further nuancing. For, you see, I personally believe Q (i.e., the 230 or so Sayings or Logia of Jesus contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark) to have been one of the literary sources used in the composing of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. But I don't believe it was the only source, nor am I prepared to say that the Gospel of Thomas, with its 114 Sayings, antedates our Synoptic Gospels. Rather, I argue that it is a derivative collection of Sayings, which has a different form, different background and different theology than they do.

III. An Affirmation of My Own Convictions

What, then, do I believe to be the situation with regard to the "Jesus of History and Christ of Faith"? Allow me to highlight the following seven affirmations:

1. That Jesus acted and taught with such authority that those closest to him began to think of him in an exalted sense, believing that through him they were in touch with God but not really understanding what it all meant.
2. That because of God having raised him from the dead (not just *after* the resurrection, but *because of* the resurrection) those closest to him began to confess him as Messiah and Lord and to apply such a confession to their lives.¹⁹
3. That they defended their confessions of Jesus by reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, which they used in a manner compatible to the procedures and exegetical norms of the Jewish world of their day.²⁰

4. That in their proclamation of Jesus they had such materials as a Passion Narrative, an Eschatological Discourse, and a Sayings Collection, whether in written or oral form, which they used in their preaching.
5. That in constructing their Gospels, each of the four evangelists used these materials in his own manner and to contextualize the Jesus tradition for his respective audience - thus the numerous differences between them of the selection of material, arrangement of material, and wordings, even while giving a generally unified portrayal.
6. That while the portrayals of the four evangelists differ between themselves on many matters (both of event and language), they are to be seen as presenting a credible, historical portrayal of Jesus' ministry and person.
7. That the Gospels were written "out of faith and for faith" - that is, with a faith perspective in order to engender faith and support faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord - and so their readers are called on to respond in faith.

This is not to suggest that the simple abundance of historically-credible data necessitates a faith response on the part of anyone. Historical-rational probability and religious-psychological certainty are two factors that, while they must always go together, are not simply the same.

As Matthew's Gospel has it, when Peter made his great confession of Jesus ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"), Jesus' reply was "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt 16:16-17). Even having been with Jesus and having been assured by his actions and teaching were not enough. Real conviction, Jesus is presented as saying, comes only by revelation from the Father in heaven - or, to say it more prosaically: History and reason may pile up the dry wood, but it takes the heavenly fire of revelation from God to ignite the tinder.

The Gospels present us with a person who goes much beyond our expectations and often beyond our comprehension. Furthermore, they depict a redemptive scenario that, on the one hand, exceeds our fondest hopes, yet on the other is often a scandal to our innate religious sensibilities and seemingly foolish to our minds. While we want a historically credible and rationally compatible faith, we as Christians often find ourselves much like the disciples of old who, when faced with certain "hard teachings" of Jesus - and observing that many thereafter backed off from following Jesus - could only respond to Jesus' query about wanting to leave him too: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). And it is this response that continues to be our response today.