

With contributions by

Robert M. Price

John Dominic
Crossan

Luke Timothy
Johnson

James D. G. Dunn

Darrell L. Bock

A close-up, black and white photograph of a marble bust of Jesus. He has long, wavy hair and a beard, and his eyes are closed. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the stone and the contours of his face.

The Historical Jesus

FIVE VIEWS

EDITED BY James K. Beilby
& Paul Rhodes Eddy

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THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

An Introduction

Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby

Two millennia after his sojourn on earth, Jesus of Nazareth continues to capture the attention of the contemporary western world like no other figure in history. This is no less the case for popular culture than it is for the scholarly world, as his regular appearance in television specials and weekly news magazines attests. From the covers of *Time*, *Newsweek* and, yes, even *Popular Mechanics*, Jesus remains big news on into the third millennium.¹ Today, in the world of popular-level, pseudo-scholarly publications on Jesus, there is no end to the provocative and/or conspiratorial theories available. In these one can find Jesus surviving the crucifixion, getting married (most often to Mary Magdalene), having children and living to a ripe old age.² Some even claim that they have finally found his gravesite—and with it the very bones of Jesus.³ Or one can find him traveling to the East, spending years learning

¹Mike Fillon, “The Real Face of Jesus: Advances in Forensic Science Reveal the Most Famous Face in History,” *Popular Mechanics*, December 2002, pp. 68-71.

²Michael Baigent, *The Jesus Papers: Exposing the Greatest Cover-up in History* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

³Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery That Will Change History Forever* (London: HarperElement, 2007).

from the ancient Asian religions, and coming back to his culture as something of a Buddhist master.⁴ Or, again, one can find out that the true identity of Jesus has finally been discovered: Jesus was really the apostle Paul!⁵

The contemporary interest in Jesus within popular culture is, of course, fueled by a parallel interest in the academic world. At the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, what has come to be known as the third quest for the historical Jesus has been underway for three decades and shows no sign of slowing down. This essay will begin with a relatively brief history of the modern scholarly “quest” for the historical Jesus. Next, important issues and debates within the current phase—the “third quest”—will be explored. Finally, we will conclude with an introductory word about our five contributors to this volume.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

What has come to be known as the “quest for the historical Jesus” is a child of the eighteenth century and the European Enlightenment.⁶ Prior to this, the notion of a “quest” for Jesus within the world of Western Christendom would have seemed a strange proposition. For, while certain tensions were apparent within and between the accounts of the four canonical Gospels, they were still seen as able to be harmonized

⁴Holger Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India: His Unknown Life Before and After the Crucifixion* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1994).

⁵Lena Einhorn, *The Jesus Mystery: Astonishing Clues to the True Identities of Jesus and Paul* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons, 2007).

⁶Among the many helpful resources for reconstructing and interpreting the history of the quest are the following: Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Free Press, 1998); William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought, 1778–1860* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1985); Gregory W. Dawes, ed., *The Historical Jesus Quest: Landmarks in the Search for the Jesus of History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999); James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959); Bernard Brandon Scott, “From Reimarus to Crossan: Stages in a Quest,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994): 253–80; W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); William R. Telford, “Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (New York: Brill, 1994); Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998 [1996]); Walter P. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus in the Twentieth Century, 1900–1950* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1999); Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

and thus reliable.⁷ From such a perspective, the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the Gospels were one and the same. There was no need to go searching for Jesus when he could be easily found in the Gospels. It took the modern age and its skepticism of both biblical and ecclesiastical authority to ignite the quest for Jesus.

Today the most commonly used schema for delineating the history of the modern scholarly quest for Jesus recognizes four distinct stages: the “old” (or “first”) quest, the so-called “no quest” period, the “new” (or “second”) quest, and most recently the “third quest.” We will sketch each of these below, highlighting the most influential persons and ideas to emerge in each stage.

The old quest: From Reimarus to Schweitzer (1778–1906). Ever since Albert Schweitzer’s 1906 landmark survey of the (old) quest (translated into English as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*), it has become common to mark the beginning of the quest with the publication of the work of Hermann Reimarus in 1778. According to Schweitzer, Reimarus “had no predecessors.”⁸ This, however, is not quite accurate. Reimarus’s ideas about Jesus did not spring *ex nihilo* from his pen. The roots of the (largely German) old quest lie in seventeenth-century British and French deism and the biblical criticism to which it eventually gave rise. Deist critiques of the notions of divine revelation and miracles fueled a growing skepticism toward the Gospels. An array of early modern thinkers such as Benedict Spinoza, Isaac La Peyrere, Richard Simon, Thomas Woolston, Peter Annet and Thomas Morgan laid the groundwork for what would eventually emerge as the mature historical-critical method.⁹

Perhaps the clearest example of a precursor to Reimarus can be found

⁷On premodern Christian attitudes toward the Bible and its interpretive difficulties see Baird, *History*, pp. xiii-xix; Werner Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 13-39; Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007 [1987]), pp. 24-30.

⁸Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1968), p. 26.

⁹On the rise of the historical-critical method see Baird, *History*, part 1; Brown, *Jesus*, pp. 29-55; Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

in the work of the British deist Thomas Chubb (1679–1746).¹⁰ In 1738 Chubb published a book about Jesus, presenting him as “a sort of first-century Palestinian Deist, garbed in the seamless robe of reason and natural religion.”¹¹ Unfortunately, according to Chubb, much of the later Christian dogma was later foisted on the deist-like Jesus of history by the apostle Paul.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus: The “Father” of the quest. Regardless of his precursors, however, Reimarus (1694–1768), a German professor of Semitic languages, took an original and significant step in the modern study of Jesus, and with it became the “Father” of the quest. Reimarus moves beyond his deist predecessors in that he proposes a fleshed-out alternative account of Christian origins, one that situates Jewish apocalyptic thought at its center.¹² Reimarus begins by arguing for a clear distinction between the actual Jesus of history and the Gospels’ presentation of him.¹³ From Reimarus’s perspective just who was this historian’s Jesus? Simply put, “he was born a Jew and intended to remain one.”¹⁴ More specifically, Jesus was a Jew who proclaimed the “kingdom of God,” by which, according to Reimarus, he must have intended “the usual meaning of this phrase among the Jews of his time”—i.e., a political kingdom centered in Jerusalem that would be established by the Messiah through the use of military force.¹⁵ And with this interpretive move, Reimarus arrived at his famous conclusion: the real Jesus of history was a would-be Messiah figure who hoped to establish an earthly kingdom through revolutionary force—but these hopes were dashed when he was arrested and crucified. How then did the Christian faith arise? Reimarus’s answer is daring: Hoping to finally attain the riches

¹⁰In fact, Charlotte Allen (*Human Christ*, p. 76) dignifies him with the title of “probably the originator of the quest for the historical Jesus.” On Chubb’s view of Jesus and/or his role as a precursor to the quest see Allen, *Human Christ*, pp. 76–80, 108–9; Baird, *History*, pp. 54–56; Brown, *Jesus*, p. 46.

¹¹Baird, *History*, p. 55.

¹²On the deistic influence on Reimarus see Henk J. De Jonge, “The Loss of Faith in the Historicity of the Gospels: Hermann S. Reimarus on John and the Synoptics,” in *John and the Synoptics*, ed., Adelbert Denaux (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), pp. 409–21.

¹³Hermann S. Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, reprint ed., ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 64.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 124.

and glory they had planned on receiving when Jesus became king, his disciples stole his body, fabricated a resurrection story and eventually concocted “the doctrine of a spiritual suffering savior of all mankind.”¹⁶

Reimarus wrote all of this and more, put the manuscript in his desk drawer, and there it remained until he died. Concern for the consequences that might follow kept him from publishing it. Upon his death, his daughter gave the manuscript to a friend, the German literary critic Gotthold Lessing, and gave him permission to publish it anonymously. This he did, claiming he had found the text in the Wolfenbüttel Library in Hamburg, and presenting it to the public in small sections (“fragments”) between 1774 and 1778. It was only many years later that the truth was revealed and Reimarus’s true identity discovered.

Over the last few centuries only a few have concluded, similar to Reimarus, that Jesus was in fact a politically minded revolutionary.¹⁷ Nor have many agreed with him that Jesus’ disciples consciously intended to perpetrate a religious fraud for selfish gain. Rather, it is certain elements of his method that have continued to find relevance in later stages of the quest. First, the firm line drawn by Reimarus between the Jesus of history and the Christ figure of the Gospels has remained an unquestioned presupposition for many scholars throughout the quest. Second, Reimarus raised a question that continues to be hotly debated to this day: namely, what role, if any, does historical investigation of Jesus have to play within the context of the Christian faith? Here Reimarus’s own answer is clear:

Now, where the doctrine is not controlled by the history but vice versa, both history and doctrine are to this extent unfounded; the history because it is not taken from events themselves . . . ; and the doctrine because it refers to facts that originated in the writers’ thinking only after the doctrine was altered and which were simply fabricated and false.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p.129.

¹⁷Those who have adopted this model in one form or another over the last century include Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (London: Methuen, 1931); S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Scribner, 1967); George Wesley Buchanan, *Jesus: The King and His Kingdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984); Robert H. Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: the Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

¹⁸Reimarus, *Fragments*, p. 134.

Finally, in setting Jesus firmly within the world of Jewish eschatology, Reimarus ignited a debate that continues raging to this day—the question of to what extent, if any, Jesus embraced views associated with first-century apocalyptic eschatology. Schweitzer, who likewise believed that Jewish eschatology held the key to understanding Jesus (though in a manner different from that argued by Reimarus), praised Reimarus at this very point.¹⁹

Between Reimarus and Strauss: Early “lives” of the old quest. Following his survey of Reimarus’s thought, Schweitzer turns in *Quest of the Historical Jesus* to consider what he dubs “the lives of Jesus of the earlier rationalism.”²⁰ Names such as J. J. Hess, F. V. Reinhard, E. A. Opitz, J. A. Jakobi and J. G. Herder dominate this period. A characteristic feature of these studies was an embrace, to one degree or another, of “rationalist” explanations of the Gospel materials.²¹ These early pioneers of the quest tended to place their emphasis on Jesus’ moral teachings and did their best to render him palatable to the more rational, “enlightened” thought of the times.

The work of two scholars in particular is worth noting. In his four-volume *A Non-supernatural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth* (1800–1802), K. H. Venturini offers various “rational” explanations for the reported miracles of Jesus. For example, Jesus’ miracles of healing are explained by the fact that Jesus was a proficient herbalist, always accompanied by his “portable medicine chest.”²² Adding a twist of conspiracy to things, Venturini also argues that Jesus, along with his cousin John the Baptist, was nurtured and groomed by a covert faction of the Essenes. Although undergoing crucifixion, Jesus only appeared to die and was later revived in the tomb with the help of an Essene collaborator, Joseph of Arimathea.²³ While few could take Venturini’s theory seriously at the time, since the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the attendant burst of interest in the ancient Jewish sect

¹⁹Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 23.

²⁰Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 27–37.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 161.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 44.

²³The idea that Jesus merely appeared to die on the cross—later dubbed the “swoon” theory—had already been proposed in 1744 by Peter Annet in his *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered*.

of the Essenes, Venturini-like theories have come to life again. They remain, however, generally the fruit of either eccentric scholars or non-academic conspiracy theorists.²⁴

In the 1828 work of H. E. G. Paulus, *The Life of Jesus as the Basis of a Purely Historical Account of Early Christianity*, we find the epitome of the eighteenth-century “rationalist” approach to Jesus. Here Paulus famously does his best to explain the miraculous elements in the Gospels as nothing more than the disciples’ mistaken interpretations of what were, in fact, purely natural events in the life of Jesus. And so, for example, the account of Jesus walking on the water is explained as something of an optical illusion—Jesus had been walking in the shallow water off the shores of the Sea of Galilee, but from a distance it had appeared to the disciples that he was farther out, and thus walking upon the very waves themselves. From Paulus’s view, and in good liberal fashion, this approach should not in any way detract from the achievement of Jesus, since it is not his miracles but rather his admirable character that truly matters.

D. F. Strauss: Jesus and “myth.” One of the most influential figures of the “old” quest is David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874). His book *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, originally published in 1835, became one of the most controversial studies of Jesus ever written.²⁵ Like his more robust rationalist predecessors, he was a thoroughgoing methodological naturalist. But to Strauss’s mind, the rationalist attempts to explain the Gospels as mistaken interpretations of historically occurring natural phenomena entirely missed one of the most important elements of the

²⁴With respect to the former see John M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Myth* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1984); Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life Story* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992). With respect to the latter see, e.g., Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (New York: Summit, 1991). For a survey and critique of various twentieth century claims that Jesus survived the crucifixion see Gerald O’Collins and Daniel Kendall, “On Reissuing Venturini,” *Gregorianum* 75 (1994): 241–65.

²⁵*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). Strauss would go on to produce *A New Life of Jesus*, 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), which was intended for a wider, more popular readership. Then, within a year, he would publish a critique of Schleiermacher’s (Strauss’s former teacher) book on Jesus: *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher’s The Life of Jesus*, ed. and trans. Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977 [1866]).

Gospels—namely the robust religious imagination of the early followers of Jesus and the expression of this imagination in the category of myth. In comparison to the theories of his predecessors, Strauss explains, the advantage of the “mythical view” is that it “leaves the substance of the narrative unassailed; and instead of venturing to explain the details, accepts the whole, not indeed as true history, but as a sacred legend.”²⁶ As Schweitzer notes, while Strauss was not the first to use the notion of myth to understand the Gospels, he applied this interpretive lens in a more ruthlessly consistent fashion than anyone before him.²⁷

Armed with this critical perspective, Strauss’s study of Jesus largely consists of analyzing the various contents of the Gospels with an eye to unmasking and explaining the many instances of myth contained therein. Over and over again, Strauss concludes, early Christian imagination served to fabricate material about Jesus out of various Old Testament stories and concepts. In the end, all that was left for Strauss, historically speaking, was a small core of bare facts about Jesus.

While the response to Strauss was swift and overwhelmingly negative—with some more conservative voices going so far as to claim that he was the “antiChrist”—the impact of Strauss’s work on the quest is felt to this day, and he continues to function as something of a patron saint for those who aspire to hard-nosed criticism of the Gospels.²⁸ In several ways he anticipated important future developments in critical study of the Gospels. His consideration of the myth-making process at work within the early oral Jesus tradition would eventually develop and mature, almost a century later, into the discipline of form criticism. His privileging of the category of myth would be followed by the single most influential New Testament scholar of the twentieth century—Rudolf Bultmann. And his use of comparative non-Christian religious material foreshadowed the full flowering

²⁶Strauss, *Life*, p. 56.

²⁷Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 79.

²⁸For example, Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar dedicated their first major volume (*The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993]) to Strauss (along with Galileo and Thomas Jefferson). Funk’s Westar Institute has also created the “D. F. Strauss Medal” to honor scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of Jesus, recipients of which include former Anglican Bishop John Shelby Spong and John Dominic Crossan.

of this method at the end of the nineteenth century in the *Religions-geschichtliche Schule* (i.e., the old “history of religions school”) made famous by Wilhelm Bousset and others.

Finally, we can recognize in Strauss a quality that is both admirable and all-too-rare within the history of the quest: an explicitly stated self-consciousness concerning the religio-philosophical presuppositions that guide (both motivationally and methodologically) his critical study of Jesus. He was always quite forthright about the influence of Hegel on his study of Jesus: “My criticism of the life of Jesus was from its origin intimately related to Hegelian philosophy.” Equally self-revealing is his comment: “I am no historian; with me everything has proceeded from a dogmatic (or rather anti-dogmatic) concern.”²⁹ Strauss has often been criticized for allowing his Hegelianism to infect his historical study of Jesus. And while this is a point well taken, no scholar has ever come to the quest free of philosophical presuppositions and religious (or antireligious, as the case may be) biases. What can be learned from Strauss here is that metacritical values and assumptions always already influence one’s historiographical philosophy and method, and that every Jesus scholar owes it to oneself and one’s fellow scholars both to be self-aware about these influences and, where appropriate, to explicitly state and defend them. We will pick up this issue again below.

Between Strauss and Schweitzer: Later “lives” of the old quest. The negative historical results and resultant skepticism of the Gospels displayed in Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* spurred a variety of reactions. At one extreme, Bruno Bauer, taking his cue from Strauss’s critical methodology and concept of myth, pushed the thesis to its furthest possible point and concluded that *all* was myth and *nothing* was history—Jesus never was an actual person in history.³⁰ With this move Bauer became a leading early proponent of the “Christ-Myth” theory, with others like Paul-Louis Couchoud, Arthur Drews and John M. Robertson eventually following in his wake.³¹ While Bauer’s Christ-Myth the-

²⁹Cited in Brown, *Jesus*, p. 204.

³⁰On Bruno Bauer see Schweitzer, *Quest*, 137-60; Brown, *Jesus*, pp. 227-31.

³¹Paul-Louis Couchoud, “The Historicity of Jesus: A Reply to Alfred Loisy,” *Hibbert Journal* 37

ory has had minimal impact on the scholarly quest, it captured the attention of Karl Marx and became a common feature of Soviet Marxist thought.³²

In the face of such skepticism, others sought to shore up some basis for the historical credibility of the Gospels. One effect of this effort was the rise of modern source criticism of the Gospels. During this time, the “two-source” theory of Gospel relations came to prominence—the view that Mark was written first and that, along with an early written collection of Jesus’ sayings labeled “Q” (from the German word *Quelle*, meaning “source”), was used by both Matthew and Luke in the composition of their Gospels.³³ One of the attractive features of the two-source theory is that it allows Mark (with no embarrassing infancy narrative) and Q (sayings of Jesus without any narrative and thus without miracles) to provide a generally reliable basis from which to reconstruct the life of Jesus. Though the two-source theory has always faced its challengers, it remains to this day the most widely held solution to the infamous “Synoptic Problem.”³⁴

While Schweitzer’s famous account of the old quest is largely focused on the German scene, other things were happening elsewhere. In France, Ernest Renan, an erstwhile Roman Catholic, produced his famous *Life of Jesus* in 1863, which went on to become a best-selling work with multiple editions. Renan’s book presents a Jesus who began as a wise teacher of ethical principles who reveals the loving character of the heavenly Father, but who, inspired by apocalyptic hopes, eventually became a would-be messiah who was crucified for his efforts. Like his

(1938): 193-214; Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth*, 3rd ed., trans. C. D. Burns (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998 [1910]); John M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology* (London: Watts, 1900).

³²See Zvi Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx’s Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977).

³³On the rise to prominence of the two-source theory see Baird, *History*, pp. 295-311.

³⁴For a defense of the theory, see Robert Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). For recent critiques of the two-source theory from different perspectives see Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005); A. J. McNicol, D. B. Peabody and L. Cope eds., *One Gospel from Two: Mark’s Use of Matthew and Luke* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2002); Armin D. Baum, *Der mündliche Faktor und seine Bedeutung für die synoptische Frage* (Tübingen: Francke, 2008).

rationalist German counterparts, Renan denied any room for the supernatural in his reconstruction.

One might raise the question here of why there are not more conservative voices in the choir of first questers? Part of the answer lies in the fact that more conservative renderings of Jesus are short on new and daring proposals, following a course instead that is heavily dependent on the Gospel accounts themselves. In the history of the quest, old news (i.e., traditional conclusions about Jesus) is often regarded as no news. Beyond this, many of the more conservative studies of this time were written as responses to the more radical proposals rather than as independent lives of Jesus. Be that as it may, from Frederic Farrar and Alfred Edersheim in Britain to August Neander and August Tholuck in Germany, more conservative voices played a significant role in the ongoing European deliberations concerning the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth.³⁵

Culminating the old quest: Wrede and Schweitzer. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the critical quest had left in its wake a wonderfully “liberal” Jesus—a Jesus stripped of the more unenlightened entanglements associated with the Gospels and Christian orthodoxy such as miracles and divine status. This Jesus was a moral reformer to be sure, a teacher who revealed the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of humankind, and the simple tenets of a reasonable, love-based religion. This Jesus, elaborated by such theological giants as Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack, could still appeal to an enlightened European culture.

As the new century dawned, however, two new voices served to cut the ground from beneath this reasonable, manageable Jesus of the old quest. In 1901 William Wrede produced his famous essay on the “messianic secret” theme in the Gospel of Mark. Among the implications of his study was the disturbing conclusion that, contrary to the current liberal consensus, the Gospel of Mark did not supply the generally reliable chronological framework for the life of Jesus that so many of the

³⁵Frederic Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Portland, Ore.: Fountain, 1972 [1874]); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols., 8th ed. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1896). On Neander and Tholuck see Baird, *History*, pp. 235-42, 283-86.

nineteenth-century questers had relied on. Rather, in a move that foreshadowed future redaction-critical studies, Wrede argued that both Mark's framework and much of its detail derives not from reliable traditions about Jesus, but from fabrications fed by post-Easter theological reflection of the early church.³⁶

In 1906 Albert Schweitzer published his renowned *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*—a book so far-reaching in its impact that its publication date now marks the end of the old quest (though not an outcome that Schweitzer necessarily desired or anticipated). Following the prior work of Johannes Weiss, Schweitzer argued strongly that the proper context for understanding Jesus was Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. In this context, Jesus appears not merely as a (liberal) social reformer and teacher of love, but as an end-times enthusiast who fervently believed that his own sufferings would play a vital role in the apocalyptic culmination of this world. In Schweitzer's memorable words:

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.³⁷

For Schweitzer, Jesus was ultimately a failed apocalyptic prophet—he predicted the end of the world and it never came. What then is salvageable from Jesus for the contemporary Christian faith? Once the eschatological beliefs of Jesus are dispensed with as an outdated Jewish worldview, one can still embrace the message of love that characterized Jesus' teachings.³⁸

³⁶William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic, 1971 [1901]).

³⁷Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 370-71.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 207.

The (so-called) “no quest” period: From Schweitzer to Käsemann (1906–1953). It is common to designate the next period of time as that of “no quest,” which suggests that the quest came to a halt for nearly a half-century. As many have pointed out, this is simply not true. During this time, a good number of studies on Jesus were produced.³⁹ Nonetheless, it is true that within certain German circles (which no doubt created some ripple effects beyond themselves) the quest for the historical Jesus was severely hampered by some new developments in the field. Two of these developments can be tied to Schweitzer’s book.

First, a common criticism of Schweitzer’s regarding those questers who had come before him was that they inevitably “found” in their sources a Jesus created in their own image—or at least a Jesus who was very palatable to them. As George Tyrrell’s memorable analogy put it, whenever the scholar gazes into the deep well of history in search of Jesus, there is always the real hazard of seeing merely one’s own reflection gazing back, and mistaking that for Jesus.⁴⁰ This insight about inevitable scholarly subjectivity fostered skepticism of ever arriving at an objective portrait of Jesus.

Second, Schweitzer’s own conclusions about Jesus—that, ultimately, he was something like a wild-eyed and ultimately mistaken prophet of doom—left little for modern Europeans to embrace. Schweitzer put it delicately:

The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it found him it could bring Him straight into our time as a Teacher and Savior. . . . But he does not stay; he passes by our time and returns to his own.⁴¹

Beyond these two effects of Schweitzer’s work, at least two other factors served to call into question the viability of the quest. The first involves the rise of a new method of Gospel analysis: form criticism. Between 1919 and 1921, three important German works, au-

³⁹See Weaver, *Historical Jesus*; Dale C. Allison, “The Secularizing of the Historical Jesus,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27 (2000): 149-50.

⁴⁰George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913), p. 44.

⁴¹Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 399.

thored by K. L. Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, launched New Testament form-critical studies. Of these, Bultmann's *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* quickly became the classic statement of this approach for years to come.⁴² While form criticism focuses on the question of the pre-Gospel oral Jesus tradition, it brought with it (particularly in Bultmann's influential version) several methodological assumptions that served to further amplify skeptical attitudes toward the Gospels as historical sources. Among these was the conviction that the Gospels were a mixture of historically rooted tradition and early Christian mythology reflecting the post-Easter faith. And so, in the eyes of many, form criticism served to reveal that a largely impenetrable veil of myth separated the modern scholar from the Jesus of history.⁴³ This conviction led Rudolf Bultmann to conclude:

I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources do not exist.⁴⁴

Through Bultmann's influence (particularly in Germany), this skeptical perspective did much to douse hopes that the Jesus of history could ever be recovered in any detail.

If the first three factors presented historical obstacles to the quest, the fourth added to this a *theological* objection. An early articulation of this theological assault on the quest came in the form of Martin Kähler's famous little book, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*

⁴²Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963 [1921]). On the rise and nature of form criticism see Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969); Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, "The Gospel Behind the Gospels," in *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 252–312.

⁴³It is worth noting that form-critical analysis can be used without adopting these skeptical presuppositions. See, e.g., Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1953); Stein, *Synoptic Problem*, pp. 217–28.

⁴⁴Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 8. Although John Painter argues that Bultmann had more optimism and a greater interest in the historical Jesus than is often portrayed; see "Bultmann, Archaeology and the Historical Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 619–38.

(1892). In essence Kähler argued that the quest was theologically unnecessary—even illegitimate. It was little more than a journey down “a blind alley” since “*the historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ.*”⁴⁵ For Kähler, what is at stake is the very nature of Christian faith: the certitude of mountain-moving faith cannot be dependent on the always tentative and changing conclusions coming out of the quest. Thus for Kähler, “Christian faith and a history of Jesus repel each other like oil and water.”⁴⁶ Kähler’s convictions were picked up and deepened in the influential theological movement of post-World War I neo-orthodoxy. Here leading (mostly German) theological voices of the twentieth century such as Karl Barth, Emil Brünner, Paul Tillich and even Bultmann himself expressed their theological reserve regarding quest-like activity. The apostle Paul himself provided the biblical proof text: “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth we know him no more” (2 Cor 5:16 kjv). Furthermore, from the neo-orthodox perspective, any attempt to render the Christian faith dependent on an objective, historical foundation was seen as a violation of the defining Reformation principle of “justification by faith alone.”⁴⁷ In sum one could describe the neo-orthodox assessment of the quest as not unlike that of many contemporary people’s perspective on human cloning: “It can’t be done; and if it can, it shouldn’t.”

As noted earlier, despite these challenges, the conviction that the Jesus of history *could* (historically) be pursued and *should* (theologically) be pursued continued right on through this period. It was during these very decades that notable works on Jesus by the British scholars T. W. Manson and C. H. Dodd were produced.⁴⁸ D. M. Baillie captured well the sentiment of many during this time:

I cannot believe that there is any good reason for the defeatism of those

⁴⁵Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, ed. and trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp. 46, 43 (emphasis in text).

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 74. For a more detailed discussion of Kähler see Carl E. Braaten “Revelation, History, and Faith in Martin Kähler,” in introduction to *The So-called Historical Jesus*, pp. 1-38.

⁴⁷See William Baird, *The Quest of the Christ of Faith: Reflections on the Bultmannian Era* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1977); James M. Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1959), pp. 9-47.

⁴⁸See T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); idem, *The Founder of Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1970).

who give up all hope of penetrating the tradition and reaching assured knowledge of the historical personality of Jesus. Surely such defeatism is a transient nightmare of Gospel criticism, from which we are now awakening to a more sober confidence in our quest of the Jesus of history.⁴⁹

The new quest (1953–1970s). Several ironies are tied to what has come to be known as the “new” (second) quest for the historical Jesus. The first involves the fact that it was launched in Bultmann’s very presence by one of his own former students who, along with most of the significant scholars in this quest, largely shared Bultmann’s generally skeptical views regarding the Gospels as historical sources. This forces the question: What could ever motivate a group of Bultmannian scholars to renew the very quest that had been largely abandoned by their own professor—Rudolf Bultmann himself—due to seemingly insurmountable historical and theological roadblocks? The answer to this question is tied to an occurrence at the University of Marburg, Germany (where Bultmann taught), in 1953.

Ernest Käsemann and the beginning of the new quest. It is customary to trace the beginning of the new quest to a very specific date: October 20, 1953. On this date, Ernest Käsemann presented a lecture titled “The Problem of the Historical Jesus” at an annual meeting of Bultmann and his former students.⁵⁰ He began by noting the factors, both historical and theological, that had contributed to the demise of the first quest in Germany. But he went on to suggest that these obstacles could not be the end of the story—and his reason for saying so was, interestingly enough, decidedly *theological* in nature:

we also cannot do away with the identity between the exalted and the

⁴⁹D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1948), p. 58.

⁵⁰Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in his *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 15–47. For a variety of perspectives on the new quest see Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, eds., *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964); P. Joseph Cahill, “Rudolf Bultmann and Post-Bultmannian Tendencies,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 153–78; Ralph P. Martin, “The New Quest of the Historical Jesus,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 23–45; John Reumann, “Jesus and Christology,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 501–64; Robinson, *New Quest*.

earthly Lord without falling into docetism. . . . Conversely, neither our sources nor the insights we have gained from what has gone before permit us to substitute the historical Jesus for the exalted Lord. . . . The clash over the historical Jesus has as its object a genuine theological problem.⁵¹

And so, motivated (among other things) by the desire to avoid recapitulating something like the ancient heresy of docetism—the denial of Jesus’ true humanity—Käsemann called for a renewal of the quest on the grounds of theological necessity. Ironically, whereas the old quest began with Reimarus’s attempt to reveal an unbridgeable gulf between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith presented in the Gospels, the new quest was inspired by the necessity of demonstrating *continuity* between them.

Fruits of the new quest. Within three years of Käsemann’s call for a renewal of the quest, another of Bultmann’s former students, Günther Bornkamm, answered that challenge with a slim volume entitled *Jesus of Nazareth*.⁵² From the very first sentence, it is clear that the pessimism surrounding the no quest period has not been entirely dispelled within the new quest: “No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus.”⁵³ But, while Bornkamm does explicitly deny that we can any longer pursue an historical understanding of Jesus “along biographical, psychological lines,” he nonetheless clearly affirms that not all is lost; we can still talk about “occurrence and event” in the life of Jesus.⁵⁴ Bornkamm goes on to reconstruct something of the characteristic teachings and conduct of Jesus. When it comes to the question of whether Jesus thought he was the Messiah, he agrees with Bultmann’s view that Jesus never proclaimed himself to be the Messiah as such. However, he manages to retain some continuity here between history and faith when he states that “the Messianic character of his being is contained *in* his words and deeds and *in* the unmediatedness of his historical appearance.”⁵⁵

⁵¹Käsemann, “Problem,” p. 34.

⁵²Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey and James Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 178 (emphasis in text). For appreciative, while critical, reflections on Bornkamm’s study, see Leander E. Keck, “Bornkamm’s *Jesus of Nazareth* Revisited,” *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969): 1–17.

Other studies followed, though not all were hampered by vestigial Bultmannian pessimism. Beyond Bornkamm, significant figures in the new quest period (in terms of methodology and/or practice) include Herbert Braun, C. H. Dodd, Ernst Fuchs, Ferdinand Hahn, Leander Keck, Norman Perrin, Edward Schillebeeckx and Ethelbert Stauffer.⁵⁶ In 1959, the formal name for this stage of the quest was secured when James Robinson published his survey and assessment, titled *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*.⁵⁷

During this phase of the quest, a number of new developments took place in Gospels research. First was the rise of redaction criticism in the 1950s.⁵⁸ The thrust of the redaction-critical enterprise is driven by the conviction that the authors of the Gospels did not function as mere collectors of earlier tradition, but rather allowed their own literary and theological tendencies to shape the gospel texts. One of the effects of this perspective was to add a new layer of editorial fabrication that separates the reader of the Gospels and the historical Jesus, this one a factor of the literary creativity of the Gospel authors themselves. Second, the Q document took on a new importance in this era as many within the Bultmannian wing of scholarship came to see it not merely as a supplementary sayings list, but rather as a full-blown “Gospel” in its own right.⁵⁹ In time, these first two developments would coalesce, and redactional analysis of perceived editorial layers of Q itself got underway.⁶⁰ Today a number of scholars have pressed on to attempt to identify

⁵⁶Herbert Braun, *Jesus of Nazareth: the Man and His Time*, trans. E. R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979 [1969]); Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*; Ernst Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. A. Scobie (London: SCM, 1964 [1960]); Ferdinand Hahn, *Historical Investigation and the New Testament: Two Essays*, ed. Edgar Krentz, trans. Robert Maddox (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983 [1974]); Leander Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971); Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979 [1974]); Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (London: SCM, 1960 [1957]).

⁵⁷James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959).

⁵⁸See Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

⁵⁹The first move in this direction was the 1956 dissertation of Heinz Tödt, later published as *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. D. M. Barton (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965 [1959]).

⁶⁰The most influential study here has been John Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

the early Christian communities and sociological forces behind each hypothesized layer of Q.⁶¹

Finally, it was during the new quest that criteria designed to determine the potential historical authenticity of the Gospel material were more formally assessed and utilized.⁶² Most notorious among these authenticity criteria is the “(double) dissimilarity” criterion, which states that

the earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church.⁶³

The end of the new quest. Unlike the terminus points of the old and no quest periods, there is no universally agreed upon date that marks the demise of the new quest and the beginning of the third quest. The most common assessment is that the new quest period slowly ground to a halt over the course of the 1970s.⁶⁴ There were a variety of reasons for this, and most have to do with reactions—for or against—the Bultmannian tendencies within the new quest. Some, like Schubert Ogden, moved back toward a more pessimistic perspective reminiscent of Bultmann himself.⁶⁵ Others, seeing the new quest as little more than an exercise in “puttering around in Bultmann’s garden,”⁶⁶ challenged its methodology, its meager results or both.⁶⁷ Even the

⁶¹E.g., Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1993).

⁶²Dennis Polkow surveys over twenty different criteria used by scholars up through the 1980s; see “Method and Criteria for Historical Jesus Research,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 26 (1987): 336-56.

⁶³Perrin, *Rediscovering*, p. 39. For a history and critique of this criterion see Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 1-171.

⁶⁴By 1974 some were talking about the “post-New Quest period”; e.g., see John Reumann “Lives of Jesus’ During the Great Quest for the Historical Jesus,” *Indian Journal of Theology* 23 (1974): 53.

⁶⁵Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1982).

⁶⁶Walter P. Weaver, “Forward: Reflections on the Continuing Quest for Jesus,” in *Images of Jesus Today*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. xiii.

⁶⁷E.g., Raymond E. Brown, “After Bultmann, What?—An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 1-30; John G. Gager, “The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts about Method,” *Journal of Religion* 54 (1974): 244-72; James MacDonald, “New Quest—Dead End? So What about the Historical Jesus,” in *Studia Biblica 1978*, vol. 2: *Papers on the Gos-*

question of whether the new quest was really “new” at all was raised.⁶⁸ In any case, by the early 1980s it was becoming increasingly clear that something “newer” than the new quest itself was underway—and the “third quest” was born.

The third quest (1980s–present). The term “third quest” was first coined by N. T. Wright in a 1982 article.⁶⁹ While it is widely used today, there remains debate as to what exactly it refers to and whether in fact it even exists as such. Some dismiss the term as unhelpful, arguing either that the hard distinctions of “old,” “no,” “new,” and “third” quests serve erroneously to ignore the very real *continuity* throughout the history of the quest⁷⁰ or, at the very least, that what we call the “third” quest is simply a revitalization of the “new” quest.⁷¹ Even among those who embrace the label “third quest,” a significant disagreement about its definition remains. Wright originally used the term in a synchronic fashion—to demarcate not a distinct chronological period, but rather a new methodological orientation. Thus for Wright and some others the new (or “new ‘new,’” or “renewed”) quest and the “third” quest are both operative today, running as parallel tracks with distinct methodological approaches (the former continuing in the broad skeptical wake left by Bultmann and, before him, Wrede; the latter departing from that influence, being more Schweitzerian in nature).⁷² Others, however, have

pels, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), pp. 151-70.

⁶⁸E.g., Van A. Harvey and Schubert M. Ogden, “How New is the ‘New Quest of the Historical Jesus,’” in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), pp. 197-242.

⁶⁹N. T. Wright, “Towards a Third ‘Quest’? Jesus Then and Now,” *ARC* (Montreal, Quebec) 10 (1982): 20-27. While others have proposed alternate rubrics for this current stage of Jesus studies—e.g., “post-Quest” (Tatum, *In Quest*, p. 102); “Jesus research” (J. H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism* [New York: Doubleday, 1988], p. 26)—it appears that Wright’s “Third Quest” has won the day.

⁷⁰E.g., Allison, “Secularizing,” pp. 141-45; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 56, 239-42; Tom Holmén, “A Theologically Disinterested Quest? On the Origins of the ‘Third Quest’ for the Historical Jesus,” *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001): 189. Weaver (*Historical Jesus*, pp. xi-xii) questions the appropriateness of the common four-stage typology given its indebtedness to an overly narrow, parochially German perspective.

⁷¹E.g., Telford, “Major Trends,” pp. 60-61.

⁷²N. T. Wright, “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols.; ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:799-800; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), chaps. 2-3. Those who appear to follow Wright’s synchronic approach include Pieter Craffert, “Historical-Anthropological Jesus Research: The Status of Authentic

rejected Wright's original definition and instead use the term "third quest" in a diachronic sense—to designate the all-inclusive current (since the late 1970s / early 1980s) chronological stage of the quest.⁷³ It appears that the majority of scholars today use the term "third quest" in this chronological fashion, and we will do the same in this essay.

Unlike the other stages of the quest, the beginning of the third quest is not easily marked by a specific year. For convenience's sake, some have proposed 1985 as the inauguration of the third quest, since this year saw both the publication of E. P. Sander's groundbreaking volume *Jesus and Judaism* and the launch of the Jesus Seminar.⁷⁴ Things are not that neat and simple, however. Others trace the origins of the third quest back into the late 1970s with works such as Ben Meyer's *The Aims of Jesus*.⁷⁵ In any case, disagreement on the precise launch date of the third quest notwithstanding, there is widespread agreement that a new stage of the quest was incrementally inaugurated through the 1970s and early 1980s with works by scholars such as Meyer, Sanders, Anthony Harvey, John Riches, Geza Vermes, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan and Robert Funk (with his launching of the Jesus Seminar).⁷⁶ Since then the last three decades have seen a flood of scholarly works

Pictures beyond Authentic Material," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 58 (2002): 440-71; Craig Evans, "Assessing Progress in the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 4 (2006): 54; and Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996): 62-76 (although Funk relabels Wright's "third questers" the "pretend questers" [p. 64]).

⁷³E.g., Colin Brown, "Quest of Historical Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 337; John Dominic Crossan, "What Victory? What God? A Review Debate with N. T. Wright on *Jesus and the Victory of God*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997): 346-47; Donald L. Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies: An Examination of the Work of John Dominic Crossan and Ben F. Meyer* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 4-8; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, pp. 7-12; Witherington, *Jesus Quest*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁴E.g., David Gowler, *What are They Saying about the Historical Jesus?* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2007), p. 27.

⁷⁵Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

⁷⁶Meyer, *Aims*; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Mellen, 1984); John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); Robert Funk, "The Issue of Jesus," *Forum* 1 (1985): 7-12; Anthony Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1980); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); idem, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

on Jesus. Among these studies are multivolume projects like those by John Meier and N. T. Wright;⁷⁷ landmark works like Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* and James Dunn's *Jesus Remembered* (with both of these scholars being contributors to this present volume);⁷⁸ insightful survey's such as Mark Allan Powell's *Jesus as a Figure in History*, Theissen and Merz's *The Historical Jesus*, and Ben Witherington III's *The Jesus Quest*;⁷⁹ and a number of useful reference works, status reports and resource guides, such as those produced by Darrell Bock (also a contributor to this volume).⁸⁰

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE THIRD QUEST CONTOURS AND QUESTIONS

The bulk of the remainder of this essay is devoted to canvassing the broad contours and some of the important questions that characterize the present state of the third quest. First, a range of methodological issues will be touched on. We will begin with the question of the viability of the quest itself, and move from there to terminological issues, issues related to philosophy of historiography and historical method,

⁷⁷John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); vol. 2, *Mentor, Message and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); vol. 3, *Companions and Competitors* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); vol. 4, *Law and Love* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1: *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); vol. 2: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); vol. 3: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

⁷⁸John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); see as well Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, vol. 1, *Jesus und das Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁷⁹Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus* (1998); Witherington, *Jesus Quest* (1995).

⁸⁰Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Darrell Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, eds., *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). See also Chilton and Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus*; James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight, eds., *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Craig A. Evans, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison and John Dominic Crossan, eds., *The Historical Jesus in Context* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); and especially Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *The Handbook of the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (Boston: Brill, forthcoming).