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THE JESUS SEMINAR'S SEARCH FOR THE AUTHENTIC SAYINGS OF JESUS:
AN EXAMINATION OF PHASE ONE
OF THE SEMINAR'S QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

by

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

The Jesus Seminar's Search for the Authentic Sayings of Jesus: An Examination of Phase One of the Seminar's Quest for the Historical Jesus

by

Randy W. Nelson

During a six year period the Jesus Seminar evaluated 1,544 versions of 518 different sayings. The goal was to determine the authenticity of these sayings according to various degrees of historical reliability. The results constitute Phase One of the Seminar's efforts, and have since been published as *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993). Although the Jesus Seminar has undertaken three more Phases, the purpose of this paper is to examine and evaluate only the first Phase. Part One, "Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Work in Phase One," consists of two chapters. Chapter 1, "Phase One of the Jesus Seminar's Work," considers the beginnings of the Jesus Seminar, the two goals for Phase One, four motivations, methodologies, and the voting outcomes of the semiannual meetings. Chapter 2, "The Jesus Seminar and Its Critics," surveys the many objections that have been raised about the Seminar's work. In particular, scholars have challenged the Seminar's assumptions, methodologies, and results. Part Two, "Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Quest for the Historical Jesus," likewise consists of two chapters. In chapter 3, "The Jesus Seminar and the Tradition of Quests," the various quests for the historical Jesus are surveyed, specifically, the Old Quest, the New Quest, and the Third Quest. The Jesus Seminar's quest finds its closest analogy in the Old Quest for the historical Jesus. Chapter 4, "A Modest Proposal for a Limited Quest," proposes a quest for the historical Jesus, albeit a limited quest. The limitation to the quest is largely due to the methodology employed, namely, historical criticism. In this chapter, the three steps of this method, i.e., research, synthesis, and implications, are delineated and evaluated for contributions and limitations.
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INTRODUCTION

Like prospectors digging for gold, the Fellows (voting members) of the Jesus Seminar carefully sifted through the Jesus tradition in hopes of uncovering nuggets of authentic sayings that would reveal the "real" (historical) Jesus who had been buried beneath the rubble of hellenistic myth. In 1985 Robert Funk created the Jesus Seminar to begin a collective effort in distinguishing the authentic sayings of the historical Jesus from the voices of the early church. Over a six year period, the Seminar catalogued and evaluated 1,544 versions of 518 different sayings attributed to Jesus in the first three centuries, C.E. The goal of the Jesus Seminar was to determine the authenticity of each saying according to varying degrees of historical reliability. The Seminar's conclusions are now colorfully displayed in The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

Having completed this first phase, the Seminar turned its attention to phase two, the identification of the authentic deeds of Jesus. This second phase was actually anticipated by Funk in 1985. ¹ Recently, this phase was completed and the results published as The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do? (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997). The Jesus Seminar is now in the midst of its third phase, the creation of a profile of the historical Jesus based upon the databases of authentic sayings and deeds. This particular phase was not a part of the Seminar's original agenda. In fact, Funk thought that such profiles were best left to the work of individual scholars.

Nonetheless, the Seminar has decided to undertake this project. Like other recent quests for the historical Jesus, the Jesus Seminar recognizes that it is impossible to write a "life of Jesus." Still, like most contemporary Jesus scholars, the Jesus Seminar is committed to the possibility of reconstructing a portrait of the historical Jesus, that is, writing a historical albeit partial profile. Along with creating a profile of the historical Jesus, the Seminar is simultaneously working on a fourth phase, namely, a new history of the gospel tradition. The Seminar's goal in this phase is to replace Rudolf Bultmann's *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Phase four was a part of Funk's original vision for the Jesus Seminar.²

For the purpose of this dissertation, research will focus primarily on phase one of the Jesus Seminar's work. In tracing the "paper trail" of the Seminar, it was somewhat necessary to rely upon the comments of Robert Funk, founder and co-chair of the Jesus Seminar. Where possible, observations were included from other Seminar Fellows, such as, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, Arthur Dewey, W. Barnes Tatum, Charles Hedrick, Hal Taussig, and Mahlon Smith. Although Funk is a legitimate spokesman for the Jesus Seminar, it is recognized that his views do not always represent those of individual members.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. In Part I, "Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Work in Phase One," the goal is to examine and evaluate what the Jesus Seminar is doing in the first phase of its efforts. Chapter 1, "Phase One of the Jesus Seminar's Work," introduces the founder and Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, delineates the

²Ibid.
two goals for Phase One, describes the Seminar's system of voting, as well as the Seminar's motivation, methods, and results. In chapter 2, "The Jesus Seminar and Its Critics," the motivation, methods, and results of the Seminar are evaluated, specifically the objections that have been raised by fellow scholars.

In Part 2, "Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Quest for the Historical Jesus," the work of the Jesus Seminar is taken to task. Chapter 3, "The Jesus Seminar and the Tradition of Quests," demonstrates that the work of the Seminar is not completely new. Rather, the Jesus Seminar stands within a long tradition of quests for the historical Jesus. In this chapter, a careful examination is made of three such quests, the Old Quest, the New Quest, and the Third Quest, in order to better understand the work of the Jesus Seminar.

Chapter 4, "A Modest Proposal for a Limited Quest," proposes a quest for the historical Jesus, albeit a limited quest. The limitations to this proposed quest are largely due to the methodology employed, namely, historical criticism. In this chapter, the three steps of this method, i.e., research, synthesis, and implications, are delineated and evaluated for contributions and limitations.
Part One: Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Work in Phase One

CHAPTER 1: PHASE ONE OF THE JESUS SEMINAR'S WORK

A. Beginnings of the Jesus Seminar

1. Creation of the Jesus Seminar

Not only was the Jesus Seminar the brain-child of Robert Funk, but apart from his intentional and persistent efforts, the Seminar would never have moved beyond its ideational conception. But who is Robert Funk? Funk, a one-time ordained minister for the Disciples of Christ Church, received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in 1953. During the course of his academic career Funk served as Professor of New Testament Studies at Emory University, Drew University, and Vanderbilt University. He left his position at Vanderbilt in 1969 to found a Religious Studies Department at the University of Montana, Missoula. From 1974 until his retirement in 1986, Funk served as the Chair of this Department. Aside from these appointments, Funk has been the Executive Secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature (1968-73) and the Director of the American Academy of Religion (1968-73). Funk currently serves as Editor of Semeia, Publisher of Polebridge Press, Director of Westar Institute, Co-Chair of the Jesus Seminar, and Editor of Foundations & Facets Forum. Having published widely in the field of N.T. Studies, Funk has focused his attention on hermeneutics, especially the interpretation of the parables of Jesus. To be included among Funk's major works are: Language, Hermeneutics, and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology (1966), Jesus as Precursor (1975), Parables and Presence

While preparing to write a book on the historical Jesus in the early 1980s, Funk searched for a critical list of Jesus' authentic sayings. Much to his dismay Funk discovered that Jesus scholars had neglected this important step in Jesus research.³ To correct this shortcoming, Funk founded in 1985 and continues to chair the Jesus Seminar, a professional organization of North American gospel scholars. This organization actually remained nameless until the Seminar's first meeting when members agreed upon the name, "Jesus Seminar."⁴ The original sponsor of the Seminar was Polebridge Press, Polebridge, Montana.⁵ Funk had created this publishing house in 1981 and has since served as its publisher.

In 1986 Funk formed Westar Institute, a private non-profit research institute headquartered in Sonoma, California, to become the legal home of the Jesus Seminar.⁶ Funk's intentions for Westar Institute, however, were much broader than for the Jesus Seminar; it was to serve as a scholarly 'think tank' and an advocate for religious literacy.⁷ Funk writes, "The overarching goal of the Westar Institute is to bring the highest levels of


⁴Funk, "Form and Function," 51.

⁵Polebridge Press was later moved to Sonoma, California, to reside with the Westar Institute.

⁶In 1995, Westar Institute was relocated to Santa Rosa, California.

⁷Westar Institute Membership Form.
scholarship in religion into direct contact with a broad public that aspires to genuine literacy in matters biblical and religious." To accomplish this goal, Westar Institute sponsors numerous academic groups, such as, the Creeds Seminar, the Canon Seminar, the Social Facets Seminar, the New Testament Apocrypha Seminar, the Literary Facets Seminar, the Hebrew Bible Seminar, the Greek Grammar Seminar, the Bible, Narrative, and American Culture Seminar, the Fundamentalist Seminar, the American Myth Seminar, and the Apocalypse and Prophecy Seminar. These groups meet jointly with the Jesus Seminar at a common location twice per year to advance religious literacy. For Funk, this is not merely an academic exercise: "Religious literacy is essential to: Understanding world conflicts, Comprehending cultural dissent, Bring religious claims into perspective, Liberation from evangelical bullies, Appreciating one's religious heritage, Inoculation against religious fanaticism."9

Although the Westar Institute now sponsors the efforts of the Jesus Seminar, Polebridge Press continues to publish the Seminar's journals. Shortly before forming the Jesus Seminar, Robert Funk created and serves as editor of Foundations and Facets Forum, a quarterly journal to function as a forum for the discussion of the Jesus Seminar. Funk actually identified a three-fold purpose for Forum: to extend the conversation of the Jesus Seminar beyond the semiannual meetings, to provide opportunity for authors to try out new ideas, and to open up the question of the Bible in the American tradition.10 In

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9Westar Institute flyer (undated).
summary, Funk writes, "our central purpose, of course, will be to form a coherent record of the progress of biblical scholarship on its journey into the future."\textsuperscript{11}

A more popular means of communicating the Jesus Seminar's results, along with other religious information, came with the creation in 1987 of \textit{The Fourth R}, a bi-monthly magazine sponsored jointly by the Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar. Although originally intended to be called \textit{Western Readings} or \textit{WestWord: A Journal for Epic, Rhetoric, and the Bible}, \textit{The Fourth R} actually began as \textit{Westar Magazine}. Funk describes the purpose for this new magazine.

The magazine attempts to link the imaginative and religious traditions of Western antiquity with American traditions, old and new. It probes and examines the similarities and differences between redeemer stories from the past and contemporary stories like Superman; between sacred spaces in the Bible and in the American West; between ancient and modern heros; between traditional and civil religion; between religion viewed as an intellectual affair and religion from a social perspective. All this and more spelled out for the reader who prefers lucid, nontechnical prose to scientific jargon.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Westar Magazine} made it to the press only three times in 1987. During 1988 \textit{Westar Magazine} was not published. In 1989, the magazine resurfaced as \textit{The Fourth R} and continues to be published bi-monthly. The fourth 'R,' of course, is religion, which Funk believes is as important as the proverbial three 'R's': reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Aside from publishing these two journals, Polebridge Press has produced the books of the Jesus Seminar. The first book to be published was \textit{The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition} (1988), edited by Robert Funk, Bernard Brandon Scott, and James

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{12}Westar Magazine subscription form.

2. **Fellows of the Jesus Seminar**

The Editorial Board of Polebridge's *Foundations and Facets* series served as the organizing committee of the newly formed Jesus Seminar: Robert Funk (Chair), John Dominic Crossan, Fred Francis, Burton Mack, and Robert Tannenhill. (Funk would later share the Chair of the Jesus Seminar with Crossan). Together this committee secured the first members ("Fellows") of the Seminar, initially scholars associated with Polebridge's *Foundation and Facets* series. In all, 29 scholars are listed by the Jesus Seminar as
"Charter Fellows." With these Charter Fellows in place, the Jesus Seminar offered three levels of membership: Active and Corresponding Fellows (the category of Corresponding Fellows was later dropped), Associates and Student Associates, and Research Associates (later merged as "Associates"). A Steering Committee was organized to oversee the work of the Seminar. Listed as the 1988 members of this Committee are: Robert Funk (Co-Chair), John Dominic Crossan (Co-Chair), Ron Cameron (Program Chair), Karen King (Members-at-Large), James Butt (Chair, Dialogues and Storiers), John Kloppenborg (Chair, Aphorisms), John Lown (Co-Chair, Parables), and Bernard Brandon Scott (Co-Chair, Parables).

But why a seminar of scholars? Funk desired to move beyond his personal opinion to establish a collaborative judgment on the sayings of Jesus. Funk points out that such a collective effort is not new in the history of scholarship. Like textual criticism committees, the Jesus Seminar intends to use voting as means of determining a majority

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14 Another category of membership added, but later dropped was Pen Fellows. These scholars, living or dead, would be nominated and elected by current Fellows, and would participate in the Seminar by means of their written record. Funk nominated the first candidates: Norman Perrin, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Dibelius, Günther Bornkamm, Joseph Klausner, and Joachim Jeremias. See Robert Funk, "Pen Fellows," Forum 1.1 (1985): 31-32.

15 Funk, et al, The Parables of Jesus, 94.
opinion. A common phrase used by the Seminar to describe the result of this effort is "scholarly consensus."

Originally, membership as a Seminar Fellow was limited to 30 scholars and was by invitation only.¹⁶ Later, however, membership as a Fellow was unlimited and open. Fellow Mahlon Smith observes, "What makes the Jesus Seminar unique is that it is open to both established and younger scholars, all of whom are given equal voice and vote on matters pertaining."¹⁷ Funk, in fact, took great efforts to ensure that there were no *prima donnas* who controlled the discussions or who intimidated younger scholars. Although membership with the Jesus Seminar became open, Marcus Borg notes the requirement for a Fellow was, and continues to be, typically a Ph.D., in relevant areas of gospel research.¹⁸ Associate Members, on the other hand, usually lack the technical training but are nonetheless interested in the Jesus tradition. These non-specialists were encouraged to attend the Seminar's semiannual meetings and participate in discussion.¹⁹ The Associates voted and their votes were recorded, but only the votes of the Fellows counted in determining the authentic sayings of Jesus.²⁰

¹⁶Funk, "Form and Function," 56.


¹⁹Funk, "Form and Function," 55.

Although the Jesus Seminar began in 1985 with 29 Charter Fellows, that number varied significantly over the next six years. The Seminar does not make available the names of all its members. For various reasons, some scholars preferred not to have their names published on the Seminar's list of Fellows. With the publication of its first book in 1988, *The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition*, the Seminar could identify 97 scholars as Fellows.²¹ By the publication of *The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition* (1991), 57 Fellows are listed.²² In the appendix of *The Five Gospels* (1993), which marks the end of

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phase one, the Jesus Seminar introduced 74 scholars as Seminar Fellows.\textsuperscript{23} But what of the claims that over 200 scholars participated in the work of the Jesus Seminar?\textsuperscript{24} Fellow W. Barnes Tatum acknowledges that the 200 participants in the Seminar were evenly divided between Fellows (voting members) and Associates (non-voting members).\textsuperscript{25} This means that roughly 100 scholars served as Fellows during the six years of phase one. At any given meeting, however, only 25-30 Fellows were present to participate in the discussion and voting.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{24}This is the claim of both Funk (\textit{The Five Gospels}, 34) and Borg (\textit{Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship}, 162).


\textsuperscript{26}Although Marcus Borg estimates the participation of 30-40 Fellows at the semiannual meetings, these numbers are not supported by the voting records. See Borg, \textit{Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship}, 162.
B. Two Goals of Phase One

1. Identify and Inventory the Sayings of Jesus

At its first meeting, Funk set two goals for Phase One of the Jesus Seminar's work. The first goal was to identify and inventory all the sayings attributed to Jesus in the first three centuries, C.E. The preparation of this primary inventory or "raw list" was already underway by John Dominic Crossan. By the Seminar's third meeting, this resource was available as *Sayings Parallels: A Workbook for the Jesus Tradition* (1986).\(^{27}\) This first goal, then, was accomplished by an individual rather than by the collaborative work of the Jesus Seminar. Crossan's *Sayings Parallels*, which provided various English translations of more than 1000 versions of 503 items (roughly 440 independent sayings), served as the official workbook of the Jesus Seminar.

The purpose for Crossan's *Sayings Parallels* was not only to catalog the sayings of Jesus, but to show that the exact same saying often appears in different sources, genres, and versions within the Jesus tradition. To make the comparative material accessible, Crossan arranged different versions of the same saying in parallel columns. When a similar teaching occurred in another genre, this was indicated by an asterisk and a cross-reference. To facilitate the evaluation process, Crossan divided these sayings into four categories according to literary form: 33 parables, 287 aphorisms, 81 dialogues, and 88 stories. Crossan defined parables narrowly as metaphorical stories, aphorisms more generally as non-narrative sayings, dialogues as discursive interaction between Jesus and

others, and stories as narrative sequences that contain sayings of Jesus. Crossan acknowledges that these genre categories are not rigid, but he believes that they are helpful for a comparative analysis of parallel texts.

For sources, Crossan drew not only from the canonical gospels, but extracanonical literature including the apostolic fathers, papyrus fragments, patristic quotations of lost gospels, and Nag Hammadi texts such as the Gospel of Thomas, Apocryphon of James, and the Dialogue of the Savior. In spite of the wealth of comparative material, Crossan's work was incomplete. Not all of the church fathers were listed. Also missing were several sayings attributed to Jesus in other Nag Hammadi writings, such as, the Gospel of Peter.

2. Establish a Critical List of Authentic Sayings

For the second goal of Phase One, the Jesus Seminar sought to establish a "critical list" of authentic sayings, sayings which probably originated with Jesus himself: "We intend to examine every fragment of the traditions attached to the name of Jesus in order to determine what he really said—not his literal words, perhaps, but the substance and style of his utterances. We are in quest of his voice, insofar as it can be distinguished from many other voices also preserved in the tradition."28 The Seminar recognized at the outset that it was impossible "to recover the precise words of Jesus."29 For this reason, the Seminar sought the ipsissima vox ("very voice") of Jesus, rather than the ipsissima verba ("very words") of Jesus. The "voice of Jesus," for the Jesus Seminar, refers to the


substance or sense of what Jesus said rather than to the specific words that he used. At the Seminar's first meeting, however, John Dominic Crossan would further clarify the Seminar's search by arguing that the Seminar actually seeks the *ipsissima structura* ("very structure") of Jesus' sayings. Explaining Crossan's clarification, Funk writes, "Jesus may have performed an aphoristic core in a variety of ways without altering the fundamental meaning of the aphorism."30 To identify authentic sayings, according to Funk, it is necessary to consider the basic structure or core of a saying rather than its specific wording. Seminar Fellows generally accepted Crossan's clarification in theory, which makes sense given the Seminar's traditio-historical approach. In practice, however, the voting records of the Seminar indicate that the Fellows were as concerned with wording as structure.

C. The Jesus Seminar's System of Voting

1. Those Famous Colored Beads

At the Jesus Seminar's St. Meinrad meeting (fall 1985), the Seminar made a resolution to vote on the authenticity of the sayings under consideration. Funk argued that it was necessary to vote so that conclusions could be drawn and advances made. Scholars are hesitant to do this, according to Funk, because they prefer to leave issues open for further study and debate.31 The particular method of voting decided upon has since become the Jesus Seminar's trademark both in New Testament Studies and in the popular media. The Fellows agreed to cast votes anonymously on individual or groups of

30 Funk, "Polling the Pundits," 32.

sayings by placing an appropriately colored bead into a covered box.

Following in the tradition of the red-letter Bible, Funk proposed two colors, red (authentic) and black (inauthentic), by which to vote. Some Fellows, however, thought that a two-color system was too simplistic. Funk writes, "scholars are accustomed to fine distinctions; members of the Seminar balked at making everything black and red."³² It was finally agreed that four colors would be used, with each color representing the degree of authenticity. Two different interpretations of these colors were suggested. In Option One, red indicates "I would include this item unequivocally in the data base for determining who Jesus was," pink indicates "I would include this item with reservations (or modifications) in the data base for determining who Jesus was," gray indicates "I would not include this item in the primary data base, but I might make use of some of the content in determining who Jesus was," and black indicates "I would not include this item in the primary data base for determining who Jesus was." Option Two proposed that red means "words that Jesus probably uttered," pink means "words that could probably be attributed to Jesus," gray means "words that could probably but not certainly be attributed to later voices," and black means "words that Jesus almost certainly did not utter."³³ Both options were formally adopted. Later these designations were popularized by Leif Vaage: red signifies "That's Jesus!" pink signifies "Sure sounds like him," gray signifies "Well, maybe," and black signifies "There's been some mistake."³⁴ Although both options for

³²Ibid., 114.


interpreting the four colors were adopted, Funk acknowledges that each Fellow had his/her own unique understandings of the categories.\textsuperscript{35}

The use of colored beads not only provided a vivid illustration of voting outcomes; it determined whether or not a saying was included in the Jesus Seminar's database of authentic sayings. At the St. Meinrad meeting (fall 1985), the Fellows adopted for this database the following rule: to be included in the database of authentic sayings, a particular saying must receive two-thirds combined red and pink vote by Fellows present; if an item receives a two-thirds combined gray and black vote, it is to be excluded from the database of authentic sayings.\textsuperscript{36} This rule, however, was later changed by the Seminar when it realized that ambiguous results were often produced.\textsuperscript{37} To solve this problem, the Seminar adopted a system of weighted averages. This system, according to Funk, avoids the anomalies of the previous system and provides for a fairer representation of Seminar Fellows.

This system seemed superior to a system that relied on majorities or pluralities of one type or another. In a system that made the dividing line between pink and gray a simple majority, nearly half of the Fellows would lose their vote. There would only be winners and losers. Under weighted averages, all votes would count in the averages.\textsuperscript{38}

Weighted averages, then, are not simply a matter of majority vote. By the time of the

\textsuperscript{35}Funk, "The Beatitudes and Turn the Other Cheek," 114.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 119-120.


Williamette (spring 1987) meeting, this new system was in place.

When contemplating a system of weighted averages, Funk considered a four point system in which a red vote would receive four points, a pink vote three points, a gray vote two points, and a black vote one point. But Funk believed that a four point system would skew the results so he opted for a three point system: "If red were given 3, pink 2, gray 1, and black zero—since black is a wholly negative category—the results would be more reliable."\(^{39}\) The way the weighted average system works is this: after the Fellows have anonymously cast their final vote with the appropriate colored bead, the beads are tallied and the sum is divided by the number of voters; that sum is then divided by three to convert the vote to a 1.00 scale of percentages. A computer analysis of the voting provided a weighted average that determined the color to be assigned to specific sayings: A weighted average of .7501 and up resulted in a designation of red, .5001-.7500 in pink, .2501-.5000 in gray, and .0000-.2500 in black.\(^{40}\)

From the very beginning of its collective effort, the Jesus Seminar exhibited a general pattern of voting. It was clear from the outset, for example, that red was expected to be rare: "Red should be reserved for words and aphorisms that conform in both form and content to what Jesus may have said."\(^{41}\) The designation pink, on the other hand, indicates some reservations about authenticity: "Pink means that Jesus said something

\(^{39}\) Funk, "Poll on the Parables," 57.

\(^{40}\) Fellow James Hester calculated the weighted averages using Multiplan and Excel on a Macintosh Plus computer.

similar to the recorded words. However, pink suggests that the original words have been altered or edited to suit the later social circumstances of the rapidly spreading Christian movement.\textsuperscript{42} Funk acknowledges that some Fellows were unable to vote red on any saying, while others would not vote beyond gray. Those who typically voted gray and black believed that few, if any, of the sayings in the gospel tradition actually go back to the historical Jesus. Regarding a gray vote, Marcus Borg observes, "gray frequently functioned as an 'I'm not sure' vote."\textsuperscript{43} Because of the voting procedure, it was expected that most sayings would be voted black or gray. Funk writes, "As a consequence, the vote tends to be skewed towards the black end of the spectrum."\textsuperscript{44}

2. Preparation for Voting

Prior to each semiannual meeting, it was agreed that a preliminary ballot would be mailed to each Fellow in an effort to determine the most controversial sayings. Once the difficult sayings were identified, Funk would assign papers to various scholars, usually but not always Seminar Fellows. When completed, these Seminar Papers were distributed to the Fellows and served as voting recommendations for the Seminar.\textsuperscript{45} For example, M. Eugene Boring's paper, "Criteria of Authenticity: The Luckan Beatitudes as


\textsuperscript{43}Borg, \textit{Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship}, 163.

\textsuperscript{44}Funk, et al, \textit{The Parables of Jesus}, 21. Marcus Borg affirms this predilection for black votes: "Moreover, within the Seminar itself, we are not agreed about everything; indeed, we are not unanimous about anything, except for many black votes" (Borg, \textit{Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship}, 170).

\textsuperscript{45}In its archives at Westar Institute, the Jesus Seminar has on file a master list of Seminar Papers.
a Test Case,"\(^{46}\) served as a recommendation to Seminar Fellows at the St. Meinrad (fall 1985) meeting.\(^{47}\) Seminar Papers were to be read prior to the meetings so that sessions could be reserved for dialogue and debate. Some Papers were summarized at the meetings and all were included in the discussion. Many of the Seminar Papers would later be published in Forum.

Marcus Borg says that some blocks of material were unanimously voted black based upon the recommendation of a study group within the Seminar.\(^{48}\) For these "black lists" a vote was not usually taken. An example of this is the designation of black for several Q sayings without casting a single vote. Mahlon Smith writes,

> A few Q sayings are not included on ballots prepared for the Toronto meeting [fall 1989]. These are sayings the origin of which most scholars do not trace back to Jesus. In every case, the saying in question is probably derived from the Old Testament or is a common expression in Greek or Hebrew. These sayings will be presented in Red Letter Mark as black by consensus unless objections are raised by members.\(^{49}\)

Four sayings were included in this recommendation: Not by Bread Alone (Lk. 4:4b//Mt. 4:b), Do not Test the Lord (Lk. 4:12b//Mt. 4:7), Worship God Alone (Lk. 4:8b//Mt. 4:10), and Gnashing of Teeth (Lk. 13:28a, Mt. 8:12b, Mt. 13:42b, Mt. 13:50b, Mt. 25:30b, DialSav 14e). From the voting record of the Toronto meeting, it would seem that this

\(^{46}\)Boring's paper was later published under the same title in Forum 1.4 (1985): 3-38.

\(^{47}\)For a response to Boring's recommendation, see Funk, "The Beatitudes and Turn the Other Cheek," 104-110.

\(^{48}\)Marcus Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 179, n8.

recommendation was acceptable to the Seminar Fellows.

Another example of a "black list" can be seen in preparation for the Xavier (fall 1990) meeting. One sub-committee, consisting of Marcus Borg, Bruce Chilton, Perry Kea, Robert Miller (Program Co-Chair), and Philip Sellew, reviewed all the Special Luke (L) material and recommended that a number of sayings be accepted as black. Included on this "black list" are: Jesus at Twelve (Lk. 2:49), Little Flock (Lk. 12:32), Master and Steward (Lk. 12:47-48a), Much and More (Lk. 12:48b), Unrighteous Mammon (Lk. 16:9), Faithful and Unfaithful (Lk. 16:10-12), Exaltation and Abomination (Lk. 16:15), Ten Lepers (Lk. 17:14b, 17-19), Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:5b, 9b), Like a Snare (Lk. 21:34-35), and Lk. 12:21. Another sub-committee considered the Special Matthew (M) material. Led by Arthur Dewey (Program Co-Chair), this sub-committee proposed the following "black list" for sayings in Matthew: 3:15; 5:14a; 5:17-20; 5:32a, b; 6:1a; 6:1b; 6:32; 7:02b; 7:15; 10:107; 10:8a; 10:9: 10:23; 10:25b; 10:26a; 10:41-42; 11:14; 11:28-30; 12:36-37; 13:18-23; 13:37-43; 13:49-50; 13:51-52; 15:24; 16:6; 16:8-11; 16:13, 15; 17:20a; 18:4; 18:10, 14; 18:19-20; 18:35; 19:9; 21:24, 27b; 22:14; 22:40; 22:42; 23:2-3; 24:40-41; 24:42; 24:51b; 25:31-46; 26:10-13; 26:28c; 26:64. Roughly 90 sayings were judged black by this sub-committee. The voting record of the Xavier meeting would indicate that the recommendations of these two sub-committees were accepted by the Seminar Fellows.

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Prior to the semiannual meetings, Seminar Fellows completed a mail-in ballot. When the Fellows actually met, they discussed and debated the various issues of authenticity on a given saying. Only after the discussion had been exhausted did the Fellows vote their scholarly judgments. But this raises a significant question: did the face-to-face exchange between Fellows influence voting outcomes? Following the Notre Dame (fall 1986) meeting, James Butts observed, "A comparison of this [preliminary mail-in] ballot's results with the results of the final Notre Dame ballots shows that for all eleven kingdom sayings in Mark the trend was consistently away from red and pink votes and toward gray and black." Butts attributes this in part to Burton Mack's paper, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark." Marcus Borg made the same observation about the Williamette (spring 1987) meeting: "The final balloting reflected a considerable shift toward the gray and black end of the spectrum compared to the preliminary ballot taken by mail before the meeting." Roy Hoover confirmed both Butts and Borg when he compared the mail-in votes with the final votes for the Luther Northwestern (fall 1987) meeting. The comparison revealed to Hoover "a trend toward the 'graying' of the vote." It would seem, then, that the scholarly exchange of ideas at the semiannual meetings contributed to the Fellows' skepticism regarding the Jesus tradition.

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Before moving on, one more voting phenomenon should be observed. In particular, some sayings were voted on more than once, frequently with quite different voting outcomes. James Butts comments, "Fully satisfactory explanations for this rather embarassing situation do not readily come to mind. The same members of the Seminar do not always attend every Seminar meeting and the fact of changing population probably is part of the changing results of the voting. It is unlikely, however, that this factor of changing attendance accounts fully for such a dramatic shift in the results of the voting."\textsuperscript{54} Another possibility, according to Butts, is the changing issues under discussion at the different meetings. By way of example, Butts compares the voting results of the St. Meinrad (fall 1985) meeting with the Notre Dame (fall 1986) meeting. At St. Meinrad, the Fellows discussed Boring's paper, "Criteria of Authenticity," before voting favorably on kingdom sayings in Mark. In contrast, the Fellows voted more negatively on those same sayings at the Notre Dame meeting, following Burton Mack's paper, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark." Butts concludes, "This shift in the issue at stake was probably a decisive factor in skewing the results for this text as well as in a number of other instances, although it is odd that such a radical change of direction in the assessment of the authenticity of these texts, as well as numerous others, should occur so quickly and unobtrusively."\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54}Butts, "Probing the Polling," 103.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid.
D. Motivation of the Jesus Seminar

1. Respond to Widespread Interest in Jesus

It is precarious to speculate about a person's motives. This is no less true in the world of academia. Motives in scholarship, if known, however, can provide great insight into the driving force behind the research as well as potential biases in that research. Fortunately, in regard to the Jesus Seminar it is not necessary to rely upon speculation. From the beginning, Funk has clearly stated the Seminar's motives. In particular, at the Seminar's inaugural meeting Funk identified four motivating factors for the Seminar's efforts: respond to widespread interest in Jesus, contribute to a new period in North American scholarship, create a new fiction of the historical Jesus, and recover the revelatory language of Jesus.  

The first motive, according to Funk, was to respond to the widespread interest in what Jesus actually said, not only among students but among the laity as well. "Make no mistake: there is widespread and passionate interest in this issue [of Jesus], even among those uninitiated in the higher mysteries of gospel scholarship. The religious establishment has not allowed the intelligence of high scholarship to pass through pastors and priests to a hungry laity, and the radio and TV counterparts of educated clergy have traded in platitudes and pieties and played on the ignorance of the uninformed."  

Funk believes that this interest among the laity is the direct result of ecclesiastical

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56These four motives, along with Funk's entire inaugural speech, were later published as, "The Issue of Jesus," 7-12.

57Ibid., 8.
censorship. Arthur Dewey, a Seminar Fellow, attributes this censorship more specifically to fundamentalists and televangelists, who play upon the biblical illiteracy of their audiences. Because academic interest exists among the laity, and in spite of ecclesiastical censorship, Funk is convinced that scholars have an obligation to make the best of scholarship accessible to lay people.

From its inception, the Jesus Seminar has been committed not only to public disclosure but also to public accountability. At the Seminar's inaugural meeting, Funk said,

*We are not embarking on this venture in a corner. We are going to carry out our work in full public view; we will not only honor the freedom of information, we will insist on the public disclosure of our work and, insofar as it lies within our power, we shall see to it that the public is informed of our judgments. We shall do so, not because our wisdom is superior, but because we are committed to public accountability...If we are to survive as scholars of the humanities, as well as theologians, we must quit the academic closet...At all events, we must begin earnestly to report on our work to a wider public and then to engage that public in conversation and conference.*

The Seminar has diligently sought to make its results accessible to the public, regularly making press releases about its voting outcomes. The Seminar has also used other media to "get the message out," such as making available to the public both audio and video

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60 Funk, "The Issue of Jesus" 7, 10.
cassettes about the historical Jesus. The Seminar has sponsored conferences and workshops for lay people. The Jesus Seminar has gone so far as to take its message on the road. There is even talk of a movie based upon the results of the Seminar's work.

By the publication of The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition (1988), Funk observed that the Jesus Seminar had "found wide and enthusiastic support." The Seminar's success, according to Funk, is partly because of the failure of three distinct groups: scholars, the church, and TV evangelists. Whereas scholars "have too long buried [their] considered views of Jesus and the gospels in technical jargon and in

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62 For example, the Jesus Seminar sponsored three workshops on October 16-20, 1996, at the Flamingo Hotel, Santa Rosa, California. The workshops were: Robert Funk, "Jesus for a New Millennium," John Spong, "Reading the Gospel with Jewish Eyes," and James Vander Kam, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible."

63 In a letter to Westar Associates, Funk writes, "To better explain its methods and results (to friends and critics alike), a large-scale Jesus Seminar on the Road program will travel to New Orleans on November 22-23 (site of the 1996 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature," in a letter dated March 20, 1996. Similar roadtrips were made on January 17-19, 1997, one at First United Methodist Church, Sarasota, Florida, and another one simultaneously at Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa.

64 A movie is a distinct possibility since the Seminar has been retained as a consultant for a movie about Jesus' life, tentatively entitled, "Christ the Man." The film would be sponsored by Brooksfilms and directed by Paul Verhoeven, who is himself a Fellow of the Jesus Seminar. See Arthur J. Dewey, "The Jesus Seminar: New Discussions on the Gospels," 136. See also Steinhauser and McAteer, The Man in the Scarlet Robe, 6-7.

obscure journals...The church has failed in its historic mission to educate the public in the fourth 'R,' religion."66 Funk believes that it was in this vacuum of religious knowledge that TV evangelists rose to positions of prominence in our society. Funk observes, "The public is poorly informed of the assured results of critical scholarship, although those results are commonly taught in colleges, universities, and seminaries. In this vacuum, drug store books and slick magazines play on the fears and ignorance of the uninformed. Radio and TV evangelists indulge in platitudes and pieties."67 In contrast to these religious leaders, "the Jesus Seminar is a clarion call to Enlightenment. It is for those who prefer facts to fancies, history to histrionics, science to superstition, where Jesus and the gospels are concerned."68

While the Seminar has enjoyed success among some sectors of American society, Funk acknowledges that the Seminar has also been the object of persecution. This hostility was actually anticipated by Funk.

What we are about takes courage, as I said. We are probing what is most sacred to millions, and hence we will constantly border on blasphemy. We must be prepared to forbear the hostility we shall provoke. At the same time, our work, if carefully and thoughtfully wrought, will spell liberty for other millions. It is for the latter that we labor.69

Arthur Dewey would later confirm the fulfillment of Funk's prophecy: "since its inception the Jesus Seminar has been denounced from pulpits, sensationally played up in

66 Ibid.


68 Ibid.

the press, and subjected to various allegations and invective."\textsuperscript{70} Another Fellow, Mahlon Smith, observed that the Jesus Seminar has been criticized by scholars as well as laity: "Censure and invective come as often from the learned elite as from a poorly informed public. That the Jesus Seminar has been railed at in pulpit, press, and ivory tower is neither surprising nor the cause of undue alarm."\textsuperscript{71} These kinds of criticisms, Funk acknowledges, have come from the theological left as well as the theological right: "the work of the Seminar has drawn criticism from the skeptical left wing in scholarship—those who deny the possibility of isolating any historical memories in the gospels at all. Of course, it has also drawn fire from the fundamentalist right for not crediting the gospels with one hundred percent historical reliability."\textsuperscript{72}

Funk appears to be more concerned about persecution from the theological right, which he observes has been hostile to critical scholarship since the time of the Enlightenment. Funk notes that especially prior to World War II such "theological tyranny" was commonplace: "The fundamentalist mentality generated a climate of inquisition that made honest scholarly judgments dangerous. Numerous biblical scholars were subjected to heresy trials and suffered the loss of academic posts."\textsuperscript{73} Funk worries that even today fundamentalists wield an unusual amount of power, much of which has

\textsuperscript{70}Dewey, "The Jesus Seminar," 133.

\textsuperscript{71}Mahon Smith, "For Those Who Cast Stones," 2.

\textsuperscript{72}Funk, et al, \textit{The Five Gospels}, 5.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 1.
been directed against the Jesus Seminar. As evidence for this, Funk points to the loss of an academic post by one Fellow and the inability of other Fellows to acknowledge their participation in the Seminar.\textsuperscript{74}

2. \textbf{Contribute to a New Period in North American N.T. Scholarship}

The Jesus Seminar was also formed, according to Funk, to respond to a new period in biblical scholarship. This is especially true in New Testament Studies where scholars now have access to new sources,\textsuperscript{75} new study instruments,\textsuperscript{76} new translations of New Testament apocrypha,\textsuperscript{77} new paradigms,\textsuperscript{78} as well as new foundations in editing and publishing primary source materials, upon which they are building new edifices of interpretation. Funk observes that these developments are taking place primarily in North American scholarship, which now "threatens to come of age."\textsuperscript{79} Funk believes that New

\textsuperscript{74}Funk, et al, \textit{The Parables of Jesus}, xii. In regard to the loss of an academic position, Funk is most likely referring to John Lown who was asked to resign from Point Loma Nazarene College, San Diego, for his participation in the Jesus Seminar. Lown now teaches at Francis Parker School, San Diego, and continues to serve as a Fellow for the Seminar.

\textsuperscript{75}Funk identifies the Gospel of Thomas, the Apocryphon of James, and the Dialogue of the Savior, as examples of these new sources.

\textsuperscript{76}For example, Funk's \textit{New Gospel Parallels} and Crossan's \textit{Sayings Parallels}.


\textsuperscript{78}Funk says that scholars have discovered new paradigms "to parables and aphorisms as metaphors and poetry, to narratology, to reader-response criticism, to social description and analysis, and to many other promising ventures," in "The Issue of Jesus," 8.

\textsuperscript{79}Funk, "The Issue of Jesus," 9.
Testament Studies stands at the threshold of a new stage in academic history, a stage in which a new tradition of scholarship is in the process of being created.

Funk is convinced that the Jesus Seminar will play a significant role in the creation of this new scholarship. One of the ways it will do this, Funk says, is by uniting a New Testament scholarship that has until now been fragmented and isolated:

Our endeavors must be cumulative and reciprocal in the last analysis in order to frame our individual proclivities and eccentricities by the highest degree of scholarly objectivity. My idiosyncrasies will be counterbalanced by your peculiarities. Our common finitude will be baptized in collective wisdom.  

This cumulative scholarship can be accomplished by intentionally building upon the work of previous scholars. Funk points specifically to 60-plus books that have been written by Fellows of the Seminar and the writings of its patron saints, Amos N. Wilder, Norman Perrin, and Fred O. Francis. Funk is convinced that only as they interact with these exemplary scholars and with each other can they hope to become cumulative in their efforts, and thus make a significant contribution to this new stage in North American scholarship.

3. Create a New Fiction of the Historical Jesus

The third motive for the creation of the Jesus Seminar was to create a new fiction of the historical Jesus, a fiction based upon the best of this accumulative scholarship.

What we need is a new fiction that takes as its starting point the central event in the Judeo-Christian drama and reconciles that middle with a new story that reaches beyond new beginnings and endings. In sum, we need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus

\footnote{Ibid., 10.}
differently in the grand scheme, the epic story... We require a new, liberating fiction, one that squares with the best knowledge we can now accumulate and one that transcends self-serving ideologies. And we need a fiction that we recognize to be fictive.\(^1\)

By fiction, Funk means an arbitrary selection of real participants and events arranged in a connected and chronological order. In this way, all narratives ("stories") are fictions, whether they are narratives about ourselves, our nation, the Western tradition, or the history of the world. Relying upon Frank Kermode's, *The Sense of an Ending*, Funk points out that the problem with some fictions, especially religious fictions, is that people forget they are fictive and thus regress into myth.\(^2\)

This third motive, of course, is based upon the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, a distinction to be examined more thoroughly in an upcoming section. Relevant for the discussion here is that Funk rejects the traditional portrait of Jesus, namely, the Christ of faith, because it has regressed into myth, i.e., a fiction not recognized to be fictive. This regression into myth, according to Funk, has occurred among the majority of American society, who interpret the biblical narratives literally. "The Bible has become mostly myth in Kermode's sense of the term, since the majority in our society do not hold that the fictions in the Bible are indeed fictive."\(^3\) Funk does not attempt to falsify the traditional portrait of Jesus. Funk, in fact, believes that fictions are not subject to proof or falsification. Nonetheless, fictions can, according

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\(^1\)Ibid., 12.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Ibid.
to Funk, lose their "operational effectiveness." Funk believes that this happens to all fictions when they can no longer account for enough of what we take to be real. The "we" here must refer to scholars, since Funk has already indicated that most Americans accept the traditional portrait of Jesus. Therefore, the Jesus Seminar was created partly to benefit scholars for whom the traditional portrait of Jesus has lost its operational effectiveness.

4. **Recover the Revelatory Language of Jesus**

But why was it necessary for the Jesus Seminar to concentrate on the sayings of Jesus, rather than his activities? One reason is that the Seminar believes the sayings of Jesus constitute the most reliable tradition. Another reason, according to Funk, is that the language of the historical Jesus alone opens up the fantasy of the kingdom of God. This fourth motive for the creation of the Jesus Seminar is developed by Funk in his programmatic essay, "From Parable to Gospel: Domesticating the Tradition." Building upon Bultmann's dictum, "The proclaimer became the proclaimed," Funk argues that while Jesus' parabolic language created a secondary world called the kingdom of God, the primitive Christian communities domesticated this language by assimilating Jesus into the tradition and by superimposing upon the tradition the categories of their habituated life-world. Because of the complexity and centrality of this fourth motive, it must be examined more closely.

In "From Parable to Gospel," Funk describes his indebtedness to the

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phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Of interest to Funk is Husserl's concept of Lebenswelt ("life-world"), which is that sphere of reality that most waking adults take for granted. This life-world is characterized by belief in the existence of other people and the common experience of a shared reality. The "natural attitude" of most adults is the suspension of doubt in regard to this reality. In contrast to this received or habituated life-world, Funk introduces J. R. R. Tolkien's concept of secondary life-worlds. According to Tolkien, a true fairy tale creates a secondary world which, through the suspension of doubt, provides a new horizon of meaning. But as this secondary life-world begins to compete with the inherited life-world, the latter seeks to discredit it. "However, the establishment of a new fantasy demonstrates the magic beyond truth: all our worlds are fantasies. A fantasy is nothing more or less than a circumspective totality of significations to which we give ourselves." Thus, Funk maintains that all life-worlds, whether habituated or secondary, are fantasies.

But what in the world does phenomenology have to do with the historical Jesus? Funk believes that Jesus of Nazareth used parables and aphorisms to create a secondary life-world, a fantasy that he called the "kingdom of God." For Funk, then, it is the revelatory language of Jesus, and not Jesus himself, that conveys the kingdom of God.

The Christian faith is rooted in the language of Jesus rather than in the primitive Christian kerygma or the Easter event, contrary to Bultmann. To sum up the previous argument, parable, aphorism, and parabolic act are the

85 Funk here relies upon the analysis of Husserl found in Alfred Schutz' The Structures of the Life-world.

86 Funk, "From Parable to Gospel," 17.
threshold opening onto the new reality, the fantasy, called the kingdom.\textsuperscript{87}

Funk is convinced that the language of Jesus reveals the kingdom of God and is therefore the only proper object of Christian faith. The historical Jesus in this scheme is simply the purveyor of this kingdom language. The good news is not that "Jesus has come in the flesh," but that he has revealed a secondary life-world, the fantasy of the kingdom. This kingdom, however, arrives not in the person of Jesus but in his revelatory language. If this is true, Funk reasons, then the recovery of the language of Jesus should be the objective of any quest for the historical Jesus. But this is no simple task, according to Funk, for the language of Jesus has become domesticated by the primitive Christian communities as the tradition moved from parabolic speech-act to narrative gospel. This process of domestication, as well as the Jesus Seminar's method for recovering the language of Jesus, will be discussed more fully later. Suffice it to say at this point, the fourth reason for the formation of the Jesus Seminar was the recovery of the revelatory language of Jesus which alone is the proper object of Christian faith.

While the first two motives are purely academic, motives three and four are clearly theological (ideological?). More than this, it would appear that these theological (ideological?) motives are the driving force of the Jesus Seminar. The ultimate goal of the Jesus Seminar is "constructing a new picture of the historical Jesus."\textsuperscript{88} Elsewhere, Funk writes, "In pursuit of the historical Jesus, they [the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar] used their collective expertise to evaluate the authenticity of more than 1,500 sayings

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{88}Westar Institute Membership form.
attributed to him [Jesus]."89 Arthur Dewey puts it this way, "The ultimate aim of the Jesus Seminar is to lay the basis for a new picture of Jesus."90 The Jesus Seminar, then, is on a theological (ideological?) quest for the historical Jesus.

E. Methods of the Jesus Seminar

1. Methodological Assumptions: Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom

As with any historical investigation, such as that undertaken by the Jesus Seminar, numerous presuppositions precede and support the methodology applied. In The Five Gospels, Funk describes seven assumptions of modern critical scholarship that were foundational in the Seminar's quest for the historical Jesus. Funk calls these assumptions, "Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom."91 Since the Seven Pillars capture the essence of the Seminar's assumptions, they will be used as a heuristic tool for understanding the Seminar's methodological assumptions.

The first pillar of scholarly wisdom is the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. With the rise of historical reason in the wake of the Enlightenment, historians began to distinguish between fact and fiction in their study of the past. It is this distinction, according to Funk, that led scholars to search for the "real" (historical) Jesus behind the Christian facade; thus the quest for the historical Jesus was born.

The problem of the historical Jesus was provoked initially by the

89 One-page flyer, "The Jesus Seminar," distributed by the Westar Institute.


revolutionary worldview produced by the rise of modern science and critical reason. The radical shift in worldview required an equally revolutionary approach to the question of Christian origins on the part of the intellectually honest biblical scholar, who could no longer submit historical judgments to the dictates of ecclesiastical dogma.92 Funk, in fact, believes that the "modern critical study of the Bible begins with the revolt of scholarship against the theological tyranny of the churches."93

For the Jesus Seminar, the Christ of faith is an "imaginative theological construct" which the early Christian communities superimposed upon the historical Jesus.94 Funk argues that "the evangelists [gospel writers] have so modified, reshaped, and extended the material that the historical figure of Jesus is obscured by a curtain of Christian piety and story telling."95 This superimposition of a mythical figure can also be observed in the writings of the apostle Paul, who, according to Funk, was not interested in the historical Jesus but rather borrowed from hellenistic mystery religions for his conceptualization of a dying/rising lord.96 For the Jesus Seminar, then, the historical Jesus is factual while the Christ of faith is the church's mythical creation.

Although the church has affirmed this Christ of faith, modern men and women can no longer accept it: "The Christ of creed and dogma, who had been firmly in place in the Middle Ages, can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens

93Ibid., 19.
through Galileo's telescope."97 What is needed, Funk believes, is the separation of the mythical Christ of faith from the real historical Jesus, traces of whom "cry out for recognition and liberation from the firm grip of those whose faith overpowered their memories."98 And it was precisely for this recognition and liberation that Robert Funk formed the Jesus Seminar. The historical Jesus, then, stands as a corrective to the Christ of faith. Even more strongly, the historical Jesus is necessary to overthrow the Christ of faith.

The next three pillars of scholarly wisdom address the nature of the canonical gospels. The second pillar is that the synoptic gospels are closer to the historical Jesus than the Gospel of John. While the synoptics present Jesus as a sage who speaks in aphorisms and parables, the Fourth Gospel portrays a "spiritual" Jesus, sent down from heaven to reveal the Father through lengthy discourses. In its voting on the authentic sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar did not identify even a single saying unique to John that could be traced back to the historical Jesus. Although John 4:44 was identified as authentic, this determination was based upon the authenticity of synoptic parallels (Mk. 6:4//Mt. 13:57//Lk. 4:24//Thom. 31:1). "The words attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are the creation of the evangelists for the most part, and reflect the developed language of John's Christian community."99 Pillars Three and Four are basically the two

97Ibid., 2.


tenets of the Two-Source Theory. Markan priority and the Q-hypothesis. According to Pillar Three the Gospel of Mark was written prior to Matthew and Luke and served as a source for them. But what of the agreement between Matthew and Luke apart from Mark, roughly 200 verses, the so-called "double-tradition?" Pillar Four states that this double-tradition is best accounted for by the existence of a second source. For convenience, scholars have called this hypothetical source, "Q," from the German word Quelle which means "source." Q is primarily a collection of sayings and parables with little narrative context.

The liberation of the eschatological Jesus comprises the fifth pillar. Since the writings of Johannes Weiss (1892)\textsuperscript{100} and Albert Schweitzer (1906),\textsuperscript{101} the portrait of Jesus as an eschatological prophet has dominated New Testament scholarship. Funk believes that this domination was largely due to historical factors, such as the rejection of liberal theology in the face of World War I and neo-orthodoxy's lack of interest in the historical Jesus. But with the end of World War II and the reemergence of interest in the Jesus of history, Funk is convinced that the evidence for an eschatological Jesus has begun to erode. The Jesus Seminar, according to Funk, has contributed to this erosion through its discovery of a non-eschatological Jesus whose speech, like that of a sage, is characterized by aphorisms and parables. The voting record of the Seminar reveals that


the Fellows consistently rejected eschatological sayings attributed to Jesus.
But how does Funk account for the apocalyptic portrait of Jesus in the gospels? He believes that Jesus rejected the apocalyptic message of John the Baptist, but after Jesus' death his disciples, who did not fully grasp his message, reverted back to the apocalypticism they had learned from John the Baptist. Funk writes,

Jesus' followers did not grasp the subtleties of his position and reverted, once Jesus was not there to remind them, to the view they had learned from John the Baptist. As a consequence of this reversion, and in the aura of the emerging view of Jesus as a cult figure analogous to others in the hellenistic mystery religions, the gospel writers overlaid the tradition of sayings and parables with their own 'memories' of Jesus.\(^{102}\)

So then, for the Jesus Seminar, the Jesus portrayed in the gospels is an apocalyptic prophet who is being transformed into the Christ of faith, while the historical Jesus is a non-eschatological sage.

The sixth pillar of scholarly wisdom is that a fundamental difference exists between oral and print cultures, and that the historical Jesus is to "be found in those fragments of traditions that bear the imprint of orality: short, provocative, memorable, oft-repeated phrases, sentences, and stories."\(^{103}\) This form critical assumption is based upon the belief that Jesus was an orator and that the Jesus tradition was initially transmitted orally. "Jesus was an oral teacher, he was probably bilingual, and he was itinerant. These three features of Jesus' life tell scholars that at its inception the sayings tradition of Jesus was fluid, unstable, uncodified."\(^{104}\) But what does Funk mean by


\(^{103}\)Ibid.

"fluid?" The fluidity of the tradition, according to Funk, means that the tradition was freely modified and created by the oral performer to address new audiences and new circumstances. "Jesus no doubt altered his aphorisms and parables from time to time, from occasion to occasion, adapting them each time to his audience."105 Marcus Borg observes that what was true for Jesus was equally true for his disciples: "[Jesus'] followers modified and created sayings for at least two reasons: they adapted early material to new situations and settings; and they created new material, either to address new situations, or to express new convictions about the significance of Jesus."106

But if we no longer have access to this oral tradition, how is it possible to recover the historical Jesus? Funk points out that a deposit of the oral tradition exists within the written records. The scholar's task is to identify this deposit and then work backward through the oral tradition to the oral speech of Jesus. "Jesus' own words lie, as it were, at the bottom of the layers of tradition."107 But how did the Jesus Seminar work backward through the oral tradition? Although the issue of methodology will be addressed later, there are some assumptions involved in this process. One such assumption is that the sayings embedded in the gospel provide the most reliable tradition. Following in the steps of Wrede and Bultmann, the Seminar maintains that the recorded events and chronology of Jesus' life in the gospels are largely the creation of the evangelists: "They

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105 Ibid., 3.

106 Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 170-71.

are fictive and secondary."¹⁰⁸ The evangelists, according to Funk, were not simply conveyors of a fixed tradition; rather, the evangelists created and altered traditional material to meet community needs.¹⁰⁹

Less likely to be modified were the sayings of Jesus. But what type of oral speech was characteristic of Jesus? The Jesus Seminar is adamant in its response to this question: parables and aphorisms were the forms of choice for the historical Jesus.

A *parable* is a brief narrative or picture. It is also a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or the common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought...Aphorisms and *proverbs* are striking one-liners. An aphorism is a short, provocative saying that challenges the established, accepted view of things. A proverb embodies common sense.¹¹⁰

Because of their clarity and conciseness, these two forms were easily remembered and orally transmitted. Marcus Borg writes, "The earliest forms of the parables and aphorisms are thus seen as the bedrock of the Jesus tradition. Both are wisdom forms of speech, and taken together point to Jesus as a 'wisdom teacher. About this, there is the greatest consensus within the Seminar."¹¹¹

Another assumption about the oral tradition is that even though the sayings of Jesus provide the most reliable tradition, they too experienced the fluidity of oral transmission. The Seminar, in fact, believes that most of the sayings tradition was

¹⁰⁸Funk, "The Emerging Jesus," 11.


¹¹¹Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 168.
created by the early church and placed upon the lips of Jesus. Funk observes, "the authors of the canonical gospels did not hesitate to ascribe all sorts of words to Jesus, in keeping with the habits of the time, simply because they thought him a wise teacher and therefore a repository of wisdom sayings and parables. In addition, many followers believed that Jesus continued to communicate directly with his disciples after his death." The ascription of other sayings to Jesus by his disciples is affirmed elsewhere by Funk: "Sages attracted wise words the way a magnet attracts iron filings."

So even though the Seminar addressed the most reliable tradition in Phase One, it was nonetheless skeptical: "the trend of critical assessment is clearly abundant: only a very small portion of the words attributed to Jesus actually go back to him." How then is it even possible to distinguish authentic and inauthentic sayings? The Seminar maintains that even though the oral transmitter did not remember exact words, alterations in the sayings tradition were restrained by two factors: the core (structure) of the saying and fixed words or phrases. These two restraining factors will be examined more


113Funk writes, "Members of the primitive Christian community would readily have accepted the view that words spoken by others, for example, a Christian prophet, were also to be understood as words actually spoken by Jesus. They simply did not distinguish the two," in "The Hitching Post," Westar Magazine 1.3 (1987): 2.


115Ibid., 16.

116Funk, et al, The Gospel of Mark, 3. Elsewhere, Funk writes, The fluidity of talk is restrained by two factors. One is the structure of stories or sayings; the other is the use of fixed words or phrases. Otherwise, in oral communities purveyors of the tradition freely omitted, invented, modified, enlarged," in The Parables of Jesus, 3.
thoroughly in a later section.

The seventh and final pillar of scholarly wisdom is that the burden of proof now lies with those who would claim authenticity for a saying of Jesus. Funk states, "the gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand. Supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so."\textsuperscript{117} The Jesus Seminar has accepted the burden of proof, examining in detail the Jesus tradition for evidence of authenticity. Having identified a core of authentic sayings, the Seminar now places the burden of proof upon those who would assert the authenticity of sayings outside this core.

2. Methodological Approach: Scientific Historiography

Before examining the specific methodology employed by the Jesus Seminar, it will be helpful to consider their general approach to historical investigation. Regarding this approach, Borg writes, "The Jesus Seminar was a skeptical group, reflecting the methodological rigor and skepticism that (quite properly, given the nature of the sources) defines modern Jesus scholarship generally."\textsuperscript{118} The working assumption of the Seminar, then, was methodological skepticism: "when in sufficient doubt, leave it out."\textsuperscript{119} Funk observes that with the rise of critical study there came a new (scientific) historiography,

\textsuperscript{117}Funk, et al, \textit{The Five Gospels}, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{118}Borg, \textit{Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship}, 163.

one with its own rules for determining historicity. Funk writes, "To be a critical scholar means to make empirical, factual evidence—evidence open to confirmation by independent, neutral observers—the controlling factor in historical judgments."120

A significant voice in this new approach to history, according to Funk, is Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), a German theologian associated with the religionsgeschichte ("history of religions") school. In particular, Troeltsch developed three principles that have become the basis for modern historiography: probability, analogy, and correlation. The principle of probability affirms that historical conclusions must always be tentative, open to new sources of information. A consequence of this principle is that historical knowledge is not based upon certainty, but probability. The principle of analogy states that historians must evaluate the unknown by what is known. In other words, present experience is a valid basis for interpreting the past. According to the principle of correlation, even though historical events are unique they occur in relationship to other events. Troeltsch's three principles of modern historiography play a central role in the Jesus Seminar's approach to the historical Jesus. In fact, Funk suggests that no historical knowledge is possible apart from the principles of probability, analogy, and correlation.121

3. Methodology: Form and Substance

The Jesus Seminar employed a variety of methods in its efforts to determine the authentic sayings of Jesus. The Seminar, however, adopted no formal method for evaluating the sayings of Jesus. To be sure, papers were presented and suggestions were

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121Ibid., 20-21.
made about various methodologies, but ultimately Fellows were free to apply whatever method or criteria they deemed fit. In an effort to summarize some of these methods, Funk has listed in *The Five Gospels* various rules: 12 Rules of Written Evidence and 18 Rules of Oral Evidence. These rules, however, are just as much conclusions about authentic sayings as they are criteria of authenticity. A better way to understand the Jesus Seminar's method is to discuss the role of form and function in judging authenticity. These two categories were actually identified by Funk at the inception of the Seminar. In a one-page article, "Testing the Waters at Bay," Funk responded to several hypothetical questions about the Seminar's work. Questions two and three address the issue of methodology: What shall be our methodology for a formal analysis of the sayings of Jesus? What shall be our methodology for a substantive analysis of the sayings of Jesus? The first question of formal analysis is concerned with the role of literary form in the determination of authenticity. In response to this question, Funk lists two books, both by John Dominic Crossan: *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (1983) and *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (1985). The more significant of these books for identifying the methodology of the Seminar is *In Fragments*, which occupied much of the discussion at the Seminar's inaugural meeting. To facilitate this discussion, the Seminar commissioned three scholars to review *In Fragments*: Bernard Brandon Scott, Werner Kelber, and Vernon Robbins. These reviews were discussed at the meeting.

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and later published in *Forum.*\(^{124}\)

In *In Fragments,* Crossan employed a method he calls "formal analysis," a method he equates with "traditio-historical criticism" in his *Four Other Gospels.* Crossan began his work by identifying 133 aphorisms attributed to Jesus in Mark and Q, as well as their variants in other canonical and extracanonical sources. Crossan defined this distinct literary form as "a concise statement of a principle or precept given in pointed words."\(^{125}\) Like proverbs, aphorisms are isolable from their context and involve an intensifying of language. But, in contrast to proverbs which were based upon collective wisdom, aphorisms were based upon personal insight and authority. Aphorisms, in fact, stand over and against common wisdom. Crossan's goal in *In Fragments* was to determine how the aphoristic tradition works and what the aphoristic tradition does with its material. In describing this methodology, Crossan writes,

> My method was, first, to establish a transmissional analysis for each of those 133 sayings... Second, during those analyses a basic generative model for the aphoristic tradition began to form itself and this was adapted and developed as the work progressed.\(^{126}\)

As Crossan studied the transmission of the aphoristic tradition, he observed the way in which the aphoristic core, i.e., the basic structural unit of the aphorism, generated a

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\(^{126}\)Ibid., ix.
variety of forms. The aphoristic core, for Crossan, is a generating matrix with an inherent proclivity to evolve. In other words, the aphoristic core developed within the tradition according to its own tendency, i.e., intrinsic law of structural development. Crossan noticed that individual sayings tended to combine and form aphoristic compounds, which in turn coalesced into small complexes called clusters. Crossan points to Thomas and Q as examples of this clustering process. Eventually, aphoristic clusters attached themselves to conclusions, dialogues, and stories.

Through his investigations Crossan was able to trace the aphoristic tradition along a straight line of linear development, thus allowing him to reconstruct the transmissional process. Based upon this information, Crossan created a generative (or generic) model which describes the rules and regulations that govern the transmission of the aphoristic tradition. Through these efforts, Crossan was able to identify three distinct levels of aphoristic tradition: original (oral speech-act), transmissional (oral transmission of tradition), and redactional (transmission of textual tradition). Bernard Brandon Scott provides a concise description of Crossan's work.

From one point of view, Crossan is furthering Bultmann's analysis of the meshalim in his History of the Synoptic Tradition. Crossan is creating a taxonomy for aphorism, seeking its rules of transmission. These rules fall under three headings: the genre itself, its variation in transmission (how it undergoes changes in word and structure), and its transformation (how it grows from single item to larger units).\textsuperscript{127}

Regarding the variations in transmission, Crossan observed three types of alterations in the aphoristic tradition. First, there were the performancial or stylistic variations in which

\textsuperscript{127}Scott, "Picking up the Pieces," 15.
the aphoristic core was retained but the structure was altered, e.g., contractions, expansions, substitutions, transpositions, and conversions. Second, hermeneutical variations occurred, which resulted in substantive changes in the meaning of the aphorism. Finally, Crossan observed translational variations in which change took place in the construction of a given text. For Crossan, the historical Jesus is to be found prior to any of these variations, at the beginning of the transmissional process.

In "Testing the Waters at Bay," Funk raised a second hypothetical question: "What shall be our methodology for a substantive analysis of the sayings of Jesus?" At issue in this question is the role of the substance or content of a saying in determining authenticity. Funk responded to this question by referring to his then forthcoming article, "From Parable to Gospel: Domesticating the Tradition." In this article, Funk describes his understanding of the substance of the sayings of the historical Jesus, as well as the transformation these sayings underwent in the transmission of the tradition. For Funk, Jesus' sayings are pervaded by a tension which was created by Jesus' intentional use of hyperbole, antithetical statements, and structural ambiguity. This tension, according to Funk, is accentuated by the subversive message of Jesus' sayings. Funk writes,

> Both the form and content of the language of Jesus indicate that he announces a fundamental reversal of the destinies of men. This reversal is related to expectations as informed by the everyday or received world. Moreover, this reversal is a perpetual state of affairs in the kingdom: whatever man comes to expect, to rely on, is perpetually refused; but to him who expects nothing, who is truly profligate, who is a genuine victim in the ditch, the kingdom arrives as a gift.128

Through his parables and aphorisms, Funk believes, Jesus sought to subvert the

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deceptive, habituated life-world of his hearers and in its place offer ultimate reality, the fantasy of the kingdom. Because the secondary world of the kingdom involves a cosmic inversion of received certainties, Funk realizes that some people will prefer the security of their inherited life-world. So even though the kingdom of God arrives in the revelatory language of Jesus, some people will opt out of this parabolic fantasy.

The substance of Jesus' sayings, then, is their subversive nature. And yet the sayings of Jesus in the gospels do not appear so subversive. Funk argues that the Jesus tradition was domesticated as it moved from parabolic speech-act to narrative gospel. In other words, the tension that characterized the subversive language of the historical Jesus was released as Jesus was painted into the narrative picture, God was made immanent, the terms of Jesus' language were assimilated into the categories of the habituated life-world, and eventually the primitive Christian communities included themselves within the tradition. These developments in the tradition, however, "lead to the disenchantment of the fantasy, so that the arrival of the kingdom is pushed off into the future...the messiah must then return to achieve what he did not achieve the first time through."129 Significant for Funk is the conviction that Jesus does not appear in the phenomenal field of his own language, but is instead simply the herald of the miraculous arrival of the kingdom of God. Funk believes that the primitive Christian communities domesticated the tradition in order to release the tension in the language of Jesus and thus eliminate the risk of subverting their inherited life-world. Funk calls this a "Pharisaic ploy to manage the

129 Ibid., 15.
The domestication of the tradition, Funk says, can be observed in the transmission of the tradition. In its original oral form the language of Jesus, which was characterized by parables and aphorisms, was not self-referential; it simply conveyed the fantasy of the kingdom. But as the tradition moved from orality to literality it became self-referential: "Self-reference means that attention is being diverted from the kingdom as fantasy to Jesus as the future bringer of the kingdom." Funk identifies two linguistic steps in which this process can be observed. The first linguistic step is the creation of the pronouncement story in which Jesus' sayings were set within a minimal narrative context. But once Jesus appears in a narrative, Funk believes, the parabolic and aphoristic form begin to become self-referential. The second linguistic step is the miracle story, in which Jesus is assimilated into secular categories and portrayed as a thaumaturge, i.e., a miracle-worker. The narrative gospels would now seem to culminate the domestication of the tradition. Funk, however, argues, "The gospel form is not itself a further stage in the same linear development. It is rather a compromise in which the community of faith gives expression to its life-world and then embeds Jesus in it." The result of this, according to Funk, is a kerygma which is the fully mythologized expression of the faith of the primitive community. "It is mythological in the sense we have been using the term: the Christ as God's messiah and the deity itself are thought to be immanent to the life-

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\(^{130}\)Ibid., 18.

\(^{131}\)Ibid.

\(^{132}\)Ibid., 19.
world of the community."

Although the historical Jesus is embedded into the habituated life-world of the primitive communities, Funk argues that the subversive nature of Jesus' message is not completely lost. Funk says that even though the tradition is domesticated, it recalls elements of Jesus' original subversive message.

…the Jesus tradition clearly contravenes the tradition of interpretation which was superimposed upon it... The gospels embody paradoxes and anomalies, which means that they arrest and even reverse the trend visible in the miracle stories and legends: the words of Jesus are an uneasy memory in tension with the emerging secular faith (faith that squares with interpretive categories of the received world).¹³⁴

By exploring these anomalies and tracing the development of the tradition, Funk believes that it is possible to recover the revelatory language of the historical Jesus, the substance of which is the subversive message of the kingdom.

Funk recommends the criterion of dissimilarity for identifying the core of the Jesus tradition. This is based upon the belief that Jesus is offering a radically new life-world through his message of the kingdom, a message utterly distinct from first-century Judaism and incipient Christianity. Troublesome to Funk are those who attempt to locate Jesus within the Jewish apocalyptic of late antiquity. By doing this, Funk believes, these modern scholars "only indulge the proclivities of the primitive community and contravene the bedrock of the Jesus tradition."¹³⁵ Funk observes this same trend in the current

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid.

sociological movement which seeks to locate Jesus generally within the habituated life-
world of first-century Judaism.

It may be true that Jesus stands in full continuity with his 'conceptual-
cultural antecedents,' but in that case he would not be very interesting. As
Whitehead has said, 'It is more important that something be interesting
than true.' To be sure, discontinuity cannot be assumed; it can be accepted
only on unequivocal evidence. And it is this evidence which the parables
and aphorisms of Jesus offer in abundance...For this reason, the quest of
the historical Jesus can be renewed only as a quest aimed at the life-world
inspired by the fantasy of the kingdom, in relation to the habituated life-
world which functioned and functions as its 'out of which.'\footnote{136}

Funk argues that since the language of the historical Jesus subverted the received life-
world and conveyed the fantasy of a secondary life-world, namely, the kingdom of God, it
was therefore completely distinct from first-century Judaism. Funk concludes, "the
measure of success may thus be the extent to which this quest contravenes the tradition to
which it belongs. Put theologically, the strength of the tradition lies in its power to
invoke its memory against its own proclivity to domesticate the tradition."\footnote{137}

How does the Jesus Seminar understand and apply the criterion of dissimilarity?

Seminar Fellow J. Ramsey Michaels offers this description,

The theory is that the tradition was 'corrupted' at points by reading back
into Jesus' mouth certain ideas that actually arose later in the Christian
church, as well as other ideas current in the thought world of contemporary
Judaism. The intent of the Seminar is to filter out these corruptions and so
create a 'relatively' pure tradition. In this way the old-fashioned
assumption that Jesus was absolutely unique and unparalleled in history is
maintained with a vengeance; the Gospel material about Jesus is to be
accepted as true only to the degree that it presents him as neither a Jew nor

\footnote{136} Ibid., 22.

\footnote{137} Ibid., 24.
a Christian.\textsuperscript{138}

The criterion of dissimilarity, then, has two parts. To be excluded from the authentic sayings of Jesus are: sayings consistent with formative Judaism and sayings consistent with incipient Christianity. The second part of this criterion came to be known as the criterion of social formation.\textsuperscript{139} Summarizing the Seminar's methodology, Marcus Borg writes: "post-resurrection sayings and events are by definition not attributable to the historical Jesus; ideas demonstrably the creation of a particular evangelist are manifestly secondary; single tradition material is suspicious; narrative elements affected by the Hebrew Bible are secondary; words of Jesus citing the Hebrew Bible are secondary; items reflecting distinctions made only by the later community are clearly secondary; and items reflecting social formation of any kind are clearly secondary."\textsuperscript{140}

By way of summary, the Jesus Seminar's methodology can be divided into two groups: those methods that evaluate the form of Jesus sayings and those methods that evaluate the substance of Jesus' sayings. Regarding the form of Jesus' sayings, the Seminar applied the method of traditio-historical criticism, which traces the development of specific literary forms within the history of the tradition. Characteristic of Jesus' oral speech, according to the Seminar, are parables and aphorisms. These two forms, then,


\textsuperscript{139}James Butts, "This new criterion of social formation argues that no material can be attributed to the historical Jesus if that material contains evidence of dealing with some situation or issue for which considerations of community formation are dominant," in "Probing the Polling," 111.

\textsuperscript{140}Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," 89-90.
constitute the bedrock of the Jesus tradition. The substance of Jesus' sayings, on the other hand, is their subversive nature. By applying the criterion of dissimilarity, the Jesus Seminar is able to distinguish the unique message of Jesus from first-century Judaism and the later voices of the primitive Christian communities. It was primarily through his parables and aphorisms that Jesus attempted to subvert the habituated life-world of his hearers and to offer in its place the fantasy of a secondary life-world called the kingdom of God. In form and substance, then, the Jesus Seminar places priority on the parables and aphorisms of Jesus.

4. Sources of Jesus' Sayings

Prior to its application of critical methods, the Jesus Seminar endeavored to establish a "raw list" of all the sayings attributed to Jesus in the first three centuries C.E. This inventory of Jesus' sayings was accomplished with Crossan's Sayings Parallels (1986). Included among the sources of Jesus' sayings, of course, were the canonical gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Seminar identified 420 individual sayings in Matthew, 392 in Luke, 177 in Mark, and 140 in John. Within the Pauline corpus, the Seminar discovered eight sayings in four different epistles: I Corinthians (2:9; 9:14; 7:10b-11b; 11:23-25), I Thessalonians (5:2-4b), I Timothy (1:15b; 5:18b), and II Timothy (2:12b). An additional 17 sayings were found scattered throughout the New Testament: ten in Revelation (2:7a, 11a, 17a; 3:3b, 5b, 6, 13, 22; 13:9a; 16:15a), four in Acts (1:1-11; 6:8-14; 7:54-60; 20:35c), two in James (1:25b; 5:12), and one in II Peter (3:10a).

But the Jesus Seminar did not limit itself to canonical sources. Funk writes, "Canonical boundaries are irrelevant in critical assessments of the various sources of
information about Jesus."\(^{141}\) So, in its deliberations the Seminar considered side-by-side canonical and extracanonical texts in its quest for the authentic words of Jesus. Among this wealth of literature, Funk distinguishes five types of gospels: narrative gospels, sayings gospels, infancy gospels, passion gospels, and fragments of unknown gospels. Among the extracanonical writings, the Seminar examined numerous Greek papyri fragments: Papyrus Egerton 2 (three sayings), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1 (nine sayings), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654 (16 sayings), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655 (five sayings), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840 (one saying), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224 (three sayings). Also considered were numerous sayings within the writings discovered at Nag Hammadi: 202 sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, 29 in the Dialogue of the Savior, 28 in the Apocryphon of James, and three in the Gospel of Peter.

Other extracanonical sources considered by the Seminar were writings of the apostolic fathers and patristic quotations of heterodox documents. The Jesus Seminar identified a total of 76 sayings attributed to Jesus in the apostolic fathers: 28 sayings in the Didache, seven in I Clement, 14 in II Clement, nine in Polycarp's *To the Philippians*, eight in the epistles of Ignatius, four in the Epistle of Barnabas, three in the Shepherd of Hermes, and one in Justin. References to heterodox documents within patristic sources include the Gospel of the Nazoreans (eight sayings), the Gospel of the Ebionites (four sayings), and the Gospel of the Hebrews (one saying).

Borrowing imagery from archaeology, the Seminar distinguished different layers or strata within the Jesus tradition. According to this model, later strata represent different

stages in the developing tradition. By identifying these stages of development scholars are able to establish a chronology for the various sources of the Jesus tradition, and thus provide an approximate date for these sources. The stratification of sources adopted by the Jesus Seminar is illustrated by the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-150 C.E.</td>
<td>Gospel of Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-100 C.E.</td>
<td>Matthew, Luke, John, Egerton Gospel, Gospel of Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-80 C.E.</td>
<td>Mark, Signs Gospel, Didache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60 C.E.</td>
<td>Sayings Gospel Q, Gospel of Thomas, Letters of Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-50 C.E.</td>
<td>Oral Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-30 C.E.</td>
<td>Jesus of Nazareth (crucified in 29 C.E.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In its stratification of sources, the Jesus Seminar locates Q and the Gospel of Thomas at the earliest stratum of the written tradition, 50-60 C.E.

In regard to Q, the Jesus Seminar recognized that Q was a hypothetical source, dependent upon the theory of Markan priority. Nonetheless, the Seminar asserted that Q was a complete written document by the time it was used by Matthew and Luke and that it was an organized sayings gospel, similar in genre to Thomas. The Jesus Seminar accepted the work of Seminar Fellow John Kloppenborg, in which he stratified Q into three distinguishable layers of tradition: Q1 consists of wisdom material; Q2 is an apocalyptic overlay; and Q3 has material about John the Baptist. For the Jesus Seminar, the historical Jesus is to be found in the earliest stratum of Q, namely, Q1.

Along with Q, the Gospel of Thomas plays an important role for the Jesus

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Seminar because it provides a "significant new independent source of data for the study of the historical Jesus." ¹⁴⁴ This means that Thomas did not use Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John as a literary source, even though there are numerous parallels: 47 parallels to Mark, 40 to Q, 17 to Matthew, four to Luke, and five to John; the remaining 65 sayings are unique to Thomas. These parallels, however, do not indicate a literary relationship, according to Funk, but are most likely the result of dependence upon an older common tradition. Funk identifies four reasons for concluding the independence of Thomas: there is no pattern of relationship between Thomas and the synoptics; the order of Thomas is random; the editorial work of the synoptics is absent from Thomas; and Thomas is sometimes closer to the original version. Funk not only maintains that Thomas is independent of the canonical gospels, but he argues that Thomas, in its written form, predates the canonical gospels.

The earliest written sources for the Jesus tradition are Q and Thomas in its original form. Scholars speculate that the original versions of Q and Thomas were composed around 50-60 C.E., a scant two or three decades after Jesus’ death. Both documents went through revisions, perhaps more than once, in which new material was added and old material modified. The second editions of each also predate the canonical gospels and probably the fall of Jerusalem (70 C.E.). ¹⁴⁵

In its stratification of Thomas, the Seminar has identified two layers of tradition:

Thomas1 which contains sayings parallel to the canonical gospels and Thomas2 which is comprised of sayings unique to Thomas.

For Funk, Thomas also provides proof for the existence of an ancient genre of


sayings gospels. Funk argues that the discovery of Thomas in 1945 answered forever the genre question for the Q-hypothesis: "Before the discovery of Thomas, some scholars opposed the Q-hypothesis because they doubted the existence of a 'gospel' made up entirely of the words of Jesus. The discovery of Thomas has erased that doubt."\textsuperscript{146} As sayings gospels, then, both Q and Thomas occur early in history of the developing tradition, bridging the gap between oral tradition and narrative gospels.

F. Results of the Jesus Seminar

1. The Scholars Version (SV)

Aside from cataloguing and evaluating the sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar has created a new critical text of the original Greek canonical gospels.\textsuperscript{147} On the basis of this text, the Jesus Seminar prepared its own translation, the Scholars Version (SV).\textsuperscript{148} The SV was used for the Seminar's \textit{The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition} (1991) and \textit{The Five Gospels} (1993). The crowning efforts of the translating committee came with the publication of \textit{The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version}, which was edited by

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\textsuperscript{148}The general editors of the SV were Robert Funk and Julian Hills, and the editors of the apocryphal gospels are Ron Cameron and Karen King. The Translation Panel included Harold Attridge, Edward Beutner, John Dominic Crossan, Jon Daniels, Arthur Dewey, Robert Fortna, Ronald Hock, Roy Hoover, Arland Jacobson, John Kloppenborg, Helmut Koester, Lane McGaughy, Marvin Meyer, Robert Miller, Stephen Patterson, Daryl, Schmidt, Bernard Brandon Scott, Philip Sellew, Chris Shea, and Mahlon Smith.
\end{flushright}
Robert J. Miller. 149 The Complete Gospels is unique in that it includes alongside canonical texts numerous extracanonical texts, such as the Signs Gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, the Secret Book of James, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Gospel of Mary, the Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James, the Gospel of Peter, the Egerton Gospel, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri 840, and the Secret Gospel of Mark. The goal of the translators of the SV was "to produce in the American reader an experience comparable to that of the first readers--or listeners--of the original." 150 The Jesus Seminar emphasizes that the SV is free from the dictates of ecclesiastical authorities. Important for the Seminar is the fact that "The Scholars Version is authorized by scholars." 151

2. Voting Outcomes of the Semiannual Meetings

Between 1985 and 1991, the Jesus Seminar examined 1,544 versions of 518 different sayings attributed to Jesus. With the publication of The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (1993), the Seminar's conclusions became generally accessible. These results are vividly portrayed through the Seminar's color coding of Jesus' sayings: red, pink, gray, and black. In the "Index of Red & Pink Letter Sayings" in The Five Gospels, 15 sayings (2.9%) are listed as red. 152 In these sayings, the Jesus Seminar has the greatest degree of historical confidence. Less assured, but still


151 Ibid., xviii.

152 Ibid., 549-553.
included in the database for determining the historical Jesus, are an additional 75 sayings (14.5 %) that have been designated pink. That makes a total of 90 sayings that likely go back to the historical Jesus. The remaining 418 sayings (82.6 %) were colored either gray or black, meaning that they were most likely the creation of the early church.

The results of the Seminar's work have tremendous implications for Jesus research and gospel studies. This is made obvious, when the sources of Jesus' sayings are examined. Table 1 below indicates the authenticity of Jesus' sayings as found in individual sources, which are listed in order of historical reliability.

**Table 1: Voting Outcome of Semiannual Meetings According to Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sayings</th>
<th>Red (%)</th>
<th>Pink (%)</th>
<th>Grey (%)</th>
<th>Black (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>3 (1.5%)</td>
<td>40 (19.8%)</td>
<td>67 (33.2%)</td>
<td>92 (45.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>14 (3.6%)</td>
<td>65 (16.6%)</td>
<td>128 (32.7%)</td>
<td>185 (47.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>11 (2.6%)</td>
<td>61 (15.5%)</td>
<td>114 (27.1%)</td>
<td>234 (55.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>18 (10.2%)</td>
<td>66 (37.3%)</td>
<td>92 (52.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PolPhil</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didache</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>4 (14.3%)</td>
<td>16 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POxy 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POxy 654</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4 (25.0%)</td>
<td>7 (43.8%)</td>
<td>5 (31.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POxy 655</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3 (60.0%)</td>
<td>1 (20.0%)</td>
<td>1 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POxy 1224</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DialSav</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (3.4%)</td>
<td>2 (7.0%)</td>
<td>26 (89.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (0.7%)</td>
<td>5 (3.6%)</td>
<td>134 (95.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Clem</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (14.3%)</td>
<td>1 (14.3%)</td>
<td>5 (71.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Clem</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2 (14.3%)</td>
<td>4 (28.6%)</td>
<td>8 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ApJas</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
<td>27 (96.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline Corpus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (10.0%)</td>
<td>9 (90.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GElb</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (25.0%)</td>
<td>3 (75.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnabas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (25.0%)</td>
<td>3 (75.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEger2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNaz</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPet</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHeb</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POxy 840</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Peter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Luke and Matthew fared well largely because of their common source, Q. Along with Q, Thomas ranked high with a total of 21.3% of its 202 sayings to be included in the database for reconstructing the historical Jesus.

Aside from the voting outcomes of these semiannual meetings, it is insightful to consider some of the straw polls taken at these meetings as well as the conclusions drawn by Seminar Fellows. For example, at the St. Meinrad (fall 1985) meeting, Charles Hedrick inquired, "Is Thomas simply a rewrite of the canonical gospels?" No one raised their hand, indicating that a consensus of Fellows accepted the independence of Thomas.153

After the Notre Dame (fall 1986) meeting, Fellow James Butts summarized the voting outcomes with four propositions: "Jesus used the symbol of the kingdom of God as well as general kingdom conceptuality and images," "For Jesus, the kingdom of God was not an eschatological nor apocalyptic phenomenon," "No kingdom sayings in Mark, Q, or the Gospel of Thomas unequivocally and undoubtedly preserve what Jesus was referring to when he used the symbol of the kingdom of God and its associated conceptuality and images," and "The criterion of social formation is a legitimate basis upon which to decide the 'authenticity' of material attributed to Jesus."154 Oddly, not one kingdom saying will be printed in red, even though the Seminar acknowledged that Jesus' message was primarily about the kingdom. That most kingdom sayings will be printed in


pink indicates some hesitancy on the part of Jesus Seminar Fellows. Butts believes that this hesitancy is the result of the vanishing eschatological Jesus and the use of the criterion of social formation.\textsuperscript{155}

Support for Butt's conclusion on the vanishing eschatological Jesus can be found in a straw poll that was taken at the Notre Dame meeting. The issue considered for this poll was whether or not Jesus preached an imminent end to the world.\textsuperscript{156} 30 of 39 Fellows who voted (or roughly 77%) denied that Jesus preached an eschatological message. Regarding these results, Butts observes,

If the position of these thirty scholars is at all representative of trends among biblical scholars generally, then a significant shift in scholarly understandings of Jesus is occurring. The view of Jesus as the proclaimer of the eschatological kingdom of God is no longer dominant as it once was. The eschatological kingdom of Jesus' proclamation is disappearing. Not surprisingly, the voting at Notre Dame on the kingdom sayings reflects this loss of the eschatological Jesus. This impact is most apparent in the fact that almost all of the kingdom sayings contained in the thoroughly apocalyptic Gospel of Mark ended up being excluded from that material to be used for determining who Jesus was and what he said about the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{157}

Marcus Borg has gone further than Butts in proclaiming the demise of the eschatological Jesus.\textsuperscript{158}

Significant for the Williamette (spring 1987) meeting was the decision to vote on

\textsuperscript{155}Ibid., 102n.

\textsuperscript{156}Dart, \textit{The Jesus of Heresy and History}, 158.

\textsuperscript{157}Butts, "Probing the Polling," 111.

11 historical questions regarding the death of Jesus. These historical questions, which were sometimes framed as declarative statements, were voted upon anonymously using the familiar system of four different colored beads. In voting on historical questions, the beads took on slightly different meanings. Fellow Marcus Borg notes that in these instances, "red means a high degree of agreement (in the range from 'certainty' to 'most probably'), pink a lesser degree of agreement (in the range from 'probably' to 'more likely than not'), gray means that one has gone over the line into 'more likely not,' with black indicating a high degree of disagreement."\textsuperscript{159} Table 2 below reveals the results of the Seminar's voting.

Table 2: Voting Record on Historical Questions at the Williamette Meeting\textsuperscript{160}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Statement</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Pink</th>
<th>Gray</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did the historical Jesus foretell his own death in a way beyond the perceptive powers of anyone living in dangerous times or engaged in dangerous activities?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jesus predicted his own death.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The tradition of foretelling the death of Jesus goes back to the historical Jesus.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The tradition of foretelling the death of Jesus originates with the early church.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The charge under which Jesus was executed was &quot;King of the Jews.&quot;</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jesus performed some anti-temple actions.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jesus spoke some anti-temple words.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{159}Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," 83n.

\textsuperscript{160}Marcus Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," 82-86. The colored results have been calculated on the basis of weighted averages, a system actually not implemented for voting on sayings until the Westar meeting (spring 1988).
8. Jesus was crucified.  
   32  2  1  0  Red

9. Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem.  
   32  2  2  0  Red

10. Jesus was crucified during the season of Passover.  
    21  8  6  1  Red

11. There was no Jewish trial of Jesus before the Roman authority executed him, and there was no Jewish crowd involved in his condemnation.  
    29  3  0  1  Red

At issue in question one of table 2 was whether "perceptive powers" referred to unusual human insight or unique powers of foreknowledge. In spite of the ambiguity, Fellows were nearly unanimous in rejecting question one. The vote was more divided over question two, which states, "Jesus predicted his own death." With scattered voting, the designation of gray ("more likely not") is not very helpful. It would probably be more accurate to say that there was little agreement on question two for Seminar Fellows. Equally diverse were the votes on questions three and four, although responses to question four indicate that the Fellows lean toward the attributing of the foretelling tradition to the early church. That Jesus was charged as "King of the Jews," as statement five suggests, finds little agreement among Seminar Fellows. More positive were voting results on questions six and seven. Most of the Fellows believe that Jesus performed some anti-temple actions and spoke some anti-temple words. The greatest agreement among the Fellows is found on the last four questions. The Fellows' response to questions eight, nine, and ten indicate confidence in the tradition that says Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem during the Passover. Equally definitive was the response of the Fellows to question eleven. Marcus Borg offers this interpretation of the voting outcome: "Although various church bodies in recent years have declared that the Jewish people bear no continuing responsibility for the death of Jesus, the vote at the Seminar indicates
the Fellows believe that the Jewish people did not have the responsibility in the first place.\textsuperscript{161}

As with the Williamette (spring 1987) meeting, historical questions were raised and voted upon at the Luther Northwestern (fall 1987) meeting. Table 3 below reveals the responses of the Seminar Fellows. In regard to the responses to questions one and two, Fellow Roy Hoover offers this interpretation: "One significant implication of the two forms of this question is a different historical judgment about the origin of the church: (1) that the church began 'in the mind of Jesus,' or (2) that the church began with the response of the disciples to the resurrection.\textsuperscript{162} Because of the brevity of questions one and two, it is difficult to agree with Hoover's interpretation, unless, of course, a thorough discussion followed the voting. But Hoover provides no evidence of such a discussion. At best, the results indicate that Jesus had disciples (red vote) and that he more than likely recruited these disciples (pink vote). It should be noted, however, that there was much less agreement about Jesus' recruitment with the wide distribution of votes barely resulting in a pink designation (.5208).

Table 3: Voting Record on Historical Questions at Luther Northwestern Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Statement</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Pink</th>
<th>Gray</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jesus recruited disciples.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A group of disciples traveled with Jesus.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Was Jesus in conflict with Pharisees?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{161}Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," 86.

\textsuperscript{162}Hoover, "Sayings from Q, Parables Round Two," 115.
Responses to question three about Jesus’ conflict with Pharisees, according to Hoover, reveal another division within the Jesus Seminar. Hoover observes, "there is significant difference of historical judgment among Fellows about whether references to such conflicts in the gospels reflect the experience of the historical Jesus, or are more plausibly to be understood as evidence of conflicts in which the church became involved in the course of its social formation."\textsuperscript{163} The wide distribution of votes gives credence to Hoover's observation but it must be acknowledged that the resultant designation is pink (.5632), indicating that most of the Fellows believe that the conflict originated with the historical Jesus.

Two methodological issues were disputed at the Atlanta (fall 1988) meeting during considerations of the Lord’s Prayer.\textsuperscript{164} Both issues arose from a discussion of Hal Taussig's paper, "Lord's Prayer as a Composition of Prayer Fragments by Q." The first issue raised was whether or not the historical Jesus would even teach a formulaic prayer such as the Lord's Prayer. Taussig argued that Jesus was not interested in institutionalizing set forms of religious practice. Fellow Robert Miller observes, "Taussig pointed out that none of the models of the historical Jesus in use among the Fellows could accommodate such a Jesus. This is not evidence as to whether Jesus did or did not have such an interest. It is an issue of clarification about the models we use to assess and

\textsuperscript{163}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{164}Both methodological issues and the discussions that ensued are chronicled by Robert Miller in his article, "The Lord's Prayer and Other Items from the Sermon on the Mount," \textit{Forum} 5.2 (1989): 180.
evaluate historical evidence.\textsuperscript{165} In response to Taussig, Arthur Dewey suggested that formulaic structure is more indicative of an oral culture than of institutionalization. Phillip Sellew pointed out that Q presents the Lord's Prayer as a communal prayer, implying that it was a petition of an early Christian community. Based upon Thomas 14:1,\textsuperscript{166} Stephen Patterson argued that Jesus may have actually opposed the very practice of prayer. John Dominic Crossan offered a different interpretation of Thomas 14:1: Thomistic Christianity urged one not to pray because life should be characterized by constant communion with God. It seemed that the Seminar was at an impasse. To move forward, it was proposed that the Fellows vote on the question, "Did Jesus pray?" The vote resulted in a red designation, affirming that the historical Jesus did in fact pray.\textsuperscript{167}

The second methodological issue raised by Taussig's paper was whether the Lord's Prayer should be voted on as a whole or voted on in parts. Taussig suggested that the Prayer be divided into individual phrases which would then be voted upon. Some Fellows rejected this recommendation, arguing that this type of analysis is inappropriate for the Lord's Prayer because it is a literary unity in Q and there is no independent attestation for division. This was the position argued by John Dominic Crossan and Ron Cameron. Phillip Sellew recommended that the Fellows do both: vote on the Lord's

\textsuperscript{165}Ibid., 180.

\textsuperscript{166}Thomas 14:1 reads, "If you fast, you will give rise to sin for yourselves; and if you pray, you will be condemned; and if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits." Interestingly, this verse barely received a pink vote (.51) at the Westar (spring 1990) meeting.

\textsuperscript{167}The actual vote was 16 red, 7 pink, 0 gray, and 2 black.
Prayer as a whole and then vote on individual parts which might be traceable to the historical Jesus. The majority of the Fellows agreed with Sellew, while dissenters continued to challenge the consistency of the Jesus Seminar. In the aftermath, Robert Miller writes,

It seemed to this reporter that the Seminar flinched when faced with the Lord's Prayer. It wavered in its fidelity to established methods. Studying my notes and reviewing the video tapes of our discussions, I failed to find any coherent and reasoned rebuttal of the objections against dividing up the Prayer...The result of the voting clearly indicates that the majority of the Seminar did not heed these objections. Why it did not is not clear. Yet, in the absence of a concerted answer to the objections, it is hard to avoid the nagging suspicion that the accusation of 'failure of nerve' may have some truth to it.\textsuperscript{168}

At the Seminar's Westar (spring 1989) meeting, the Fellows responded to a straw poll about eschatological questions. There responses can be observed below in Table 4.

\textbf{Table 4: Voting Record on Eschatological Questions at the Westar Meeting}\textsuperscript{169}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Statement</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Pink</th>
<th>Gray</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple and/or Jerusalem.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jesus expected the world to come to a cataclysmic end in the near future.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Jesus expected the kingdom of God to come in the near future.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jesus expected the Son of man to appear and usher in the new age.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{168}Miller, "The Lord's Prayer and Other Items from the Sermon on the Mount," 183.

\textsuperscript{169}The list of questions and the resulting record of votes were printed on a Jesus Seminar flyer entitled, "General Questions on Jesus and the Future." In this context, the colors have the following meaning: red = strongly agree; pink = agree; gray = disagree; black = strongly disagree.
4. Jesus expected to return as the Son of man and usher in the new age.

4b. Jesus announced the presence of the Kingdom of God.

5. Apocalyptic language in the Bible does not require believers to expect the world to come to a cataclysmic end as the result of the direct intervention of God.

6. Taking the bible seriously means expecting Jesus to return as the Son of man and usher in the new age.

7. Should a nuclear holocaust occur, or other cosmic catastrophe, which resulted in the destruction of the earth, that would be the result of the direct intervention of God.

8. The language used to describe the future Kingdom in the New Testament is mythic and symbolic.

9. There will be a future fulfillment of the Kingdom proclaimed (inaugurated) by Jesus.

Regarding statement one, the vote was evenly distributed among the four colors, even though the resultant color was pink. Most of the Fellows believe that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple and/or Jerusalem. The Fellows were nearly unanimous on statement two, rejecting any apocalyptic expectation on the part of Jesus. On statement two-b, the Fellows were evenly divided on Jesus' expectation of the impending kingdom of God. In response to statement three, a majority of the Fellows denied that Jesus expected the Son of man to appear to usher in the new age. Even more Fellows, according to the votes on statement four, rejected the notion that Jesus believed himself to be that Son of man. Responses to statement four-b indicate that the Fellows were nearly unanimous that Jesus announced the presence of the kingdom of God. Statements five through seven are not helpful in regard to the Fellow's understanding of the historical Jesus, but they do reveal their aversion to apocalypticism. Most Fellows agreed with
statement eight, that the language used to describe the future kingdom in the New Testament was mythic and symbolic. Given the Fellow's belief that Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was present (see responses to statement four-b), it is odd that here the word "kingdom" is prefaced by the adjective "future." Also, it is strange that the Fellows are equally divided in response to statement nine: There will be a future fulfillment of the kingdom proclaimed (inaugurated) by Jesus. It appears that half of the Fellows believe that the kingdom of God is completely present, while the other half affirms both a present and future dimension to the kingdom.

4. **Emerging Portrait of Jesus**

So what kind of Jesus emerges from the database of red and pink sayings? As mentioned earlier, the Jesus Seminar intends to address this issue as part of Phase Three of their efforts. Nonetheless, in a 1989 article Funk drew some implications from the work of the Seminar, relying especially upon a Seminar Paper presented by Leif Vaage at their Toronto (fall1989) meeting. The title of Funk's article is telling: "Jesus the Social Gadfly."| In his paper, Vaage had argued for the authenticity of several Q sayings found in Luke, 7:33-34, 9:57-58, 9:59-60, and 14:26.| On the basis of these sayings, the historical Jesus emerges, in contrast to the ascetic John the Baptist, as one who was "on the town" eating and drinking to excess. Unlike John, Jesus chose to be a public figure,

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171 Of these four sayings, three eventually received a pink vote, while the fourth received a gray vote, Lk. 7:33-34.
one who did not concern himself with proprieties and who associated with the dregs of society, e.g., toll collectors and sinners. He also challenged law and custom by his deviant behavior and absurd admonitions. Summarizing the work of Vaage, Funk concludes, "He appears to be a tramp or street person, or perhaps a wandering sage like the Cynic philosophers common in the Mediterranean world. Jesus seems to live on the margins of society, at variance with ordinary norms."  

In another article, Funk develops further his conclusions about the historical Jesus. Funk contends that the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is no longer viable; it has died a "scholarly death." The historical Jesus, Funk believes, never expected the end of the world, nor did he expect to return after his death. Jesus was indeed crucified, according to Funk, but he never predicted his death, let alone have foreknowledge of it, and he never intended to found a new social order, such as the church. And Jesus never spoke of himself as the Messiah, but he had much to say about the Kingdom of God, a mythic and symbolic kingdom which was present in his words and deeds. In this kingdom, people would experience the reversal of roles, especially the rich and the poor, and enjoy full reciprocity.

So then, who is the historical Jesus? Funk says, "Jesus was a popular teacher," who "enjoined subversive forms of social behavior and practiced those same tenets

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172 Funk, "Jesus the Social Gadfly," 9.
174 Funk, "The Jesus That Was," 5.
himself."¹⁷⁵ The historical Jesus, according to Funk, was a non-apocalyptic, subversive teacher, who offered an egalitarian kingdom. Funk has discovered a parallel for this image in the ancient Mediterranean world, namely, the wandering Cynic sage. Funk believes that this interpretation has validity because it avoids the last temptation:

The last temptation is to create Jesus in our own image, to marshal the facts to support preconceived convictions. This fatal pitfall has prompted the Jesus Seminar to adopt as its final general rule of evidence: Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 6.

CHAPTER 2: THE JESUS SEMINAR AND ITS CRITICS

Introduction

Since the publication of *The Five Gospels* (1993), which colorfully displays the complete results of Phase One of the Jesus Seminar, there have been numerous responses. Some scholars have responded favorably, commending the Seminar for provoking discussion on the topic of the historical Jesus\(^1\) and for attempting a fresh translation of the gospels.\(^2\) Although these positive responses are worth noting, they pale in comparison to the many criticisms leveled against the work of the Seminar.\(^3\) In particular, scholars have raised serious objections to the assumptions, methodologies, and conclusions of the Jesus Seminar. Richard Hays' comment captures the ethos of these objections: "In fact—let it be clearly said—most professional biblical scholars are profoundly skeptical of the


\(^3\)These criticisms can be found not only in the many book reviews of *The Five Gospels*, but also in the plethora of articles that challenge various aspects of the Seminar's work. Three full-length monographs have also been highly critical of the Jesus Seminar: Michael Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, ed., *Jesus under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Gregory Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God: Recovering the Real Jesus in an Age of Revisionist Replies* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995); and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996).
methods and conclusions of this academic splinter group." In this chapter, the challenges to the Jesus Seminar's work will be surveyed in an effort to determine the impact of the Seminar on current Jesus research. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to challenge some of the rhetoric that has come to characterize the Jesus Seminar.

A. **Challenges to the Jesus Seminar's Rhetoric**

1. **Leading the Way in Current Jesus Research?**

One of the difficulties in evaluating the work of the Jesus Seminar is distinguishing the reality from the rhetoric, the fact from the fiction. The most blatant example of this is Funk's assertion that the Jesus Seminar is responsible for the current renaissance in Jesus research: "The Jesus Seminar was organized under the auspices of the Westar Institute to renew the quest of the historical Jesus." It is hardly possible that the Seminar, which began in 1985 and did not complete its efforts until 1993, initiated current Jesus research. As will be shown in the next chapter, the Third Quest for the historical Jesus has its roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s, growing exponentially in the 1980s, and showing no sign of waning in the 1990s. So, far from renewing the quest for the historical Jesus, the Jesus Seminar must be considered a late comer to current Jesus research.

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6Although the Jesus Seminar completed Phase One at its spring 1991 meeting, its final results were not widely accessible until the publication of *The Five Gospels* in 1993.
Aside from asserting that the Jesus Seminar initiated current Jesus research, Funk has implied that the Seminar is leading the way in such research. Although its major work has only recently been published, the Jesus Seminar has made its ongoing results accessible from the beginning through its journal, *Foundation and Facets Forum*. From Funk's rhetoric, one gets the impression that since the Seminar's inception in 1985 Jesus scholars have been wringing their hands as they anxiously awaited the results of the Seminar's semiannual voting so that they could be about the work of reconstructing the historical Jesus. But if one examines the many books on the historical Jesus written since 1985, it becomes apparent that no Jesus scholar utilizes the Jesus Seminar's conclusions for his/her reconstruction of the historical Jesus. In fact, between 1985 and the publication of *The Five Gospels* in 1993, the Seminar was completely ignored by other Jesus scholars. Although the Seminar enjoyed much attention from the popular press during this time, it received no response from American biblical scholarship. From the literature, it would appear that European scholarship has also found little use for the work of the Jesus Seminar.

This lack of scholarly response to the Jesus Seminar is troubling, given the Seminar's commitment to academic accountability. Funk writes, "Critical scholars

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practice their craft by submitting their work to the judgment of peers. Untested work is not highly regarded."\(^9\) Yet for eight years the Jesus Seminar's work remained untested. With the publication of The Five Gospels (1993), the Seminar's work began to be tested, but the response has been overwhelmingly negative. Consider, for example, N. T. Wright's comment about The Five Gospels: "There is such a thing as the serious contemporary search for Jesus in his historical context. This particular book makes no contribution to it."\(^10\) Howard Clark Kee goes beyond Wright's comment, suggesting that the Jesus Seminar has actually detracted from serious Jesus Studies: "One can hope that the publications of the Jesus Seminar and others developing along comparable lines will be recognized for what they are--peripheral, prejudicial pronouncements--rather than being taken as a substantutive development in responsible scholarly study of the historical Jesus."\(^11\)

2. Attaining a Scholarly Consensus?

The phrase "scholarly consensus" is used frequently by the Jesus Seminar, even though at times its meaning is ambiguous, if not misleading. Does "scholarly consensus" mean a consensus among the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar? Or does it mean a consensus among all Jesus scholars? The ambiguity of the phrase is compounded by the Seminar's


own inconsistent usage. Sometimes, Funk defines "scholarly consensus" in the former qualified sense, as do other Fellows of the Seminar. This can be seen in Funk's comment, "Voting does not, of course, determine the truth; voting only indicates what the best judgment is of a significant number of scholars sitting around the table."¹² Paul Hollenbach likewise states, "The results will be the current consensus of a limited but representative group of biblical scholars on all the words of Jesus."¹³ Marcus Borg too limits his usage of "scholarly consensus" to the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar: "What the voting does do, however, is to measure current scholarly opinion. It discloses the degree to which there is presently a consensus within this group of scholars."¹⁴ As a final example, W. Barnes Tatum writes, "Certainly this critical list does not represent the scholarly consensus about the teachings of Jesus. But the list does represent the collective judgment of a diverse group of scholars who worked collaboratively for more than half a decade asking and answering, on a saying-by-saying basis, whether or not this word expressed the voice of Jesus."¹⁵ In these examples, "scholarly consensus" is clearly used in a qualified sense to refer only to the conclusions of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar.


¹⁴Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 163.

¹⁵Tatum, John the Baptist and Jesus, 7.
At other times, however, Funk uses the phrase, "scholarly consensus," in a general sense, such that the results of the Seminar "represent a consensus of current scholarship."\(^{16}\) This general use of "scholarly consensus" is especially clear when Funk explains,

In a sense, the formation of a scholarly consensus customarily takes place by 'voting,' although the voting occurs covertly and over a long period of time. One scholar discovers a fact, or proposes a theory, publishes his work, and other scholars approve and adopt his work or disapprove and reject it, all normally in writing. Eventually, the body of scholars generally agrees to such proposals and a consensus is formed, or disagrees and a different proposal is advanced. In the Jesus Seminar, as in textual and translation committees, we are merely trying to shorten the cycle by asking scholars to express their minds on specific items under consideration.\(^{17}\)

Through a democratic process of discussion and voting, Funk believes that the Jesus Seminar is able to accelerate the tedious cycle of scholarly debate and thus more quickly achieve a "scholarly consensus." Charles Hedrick too uses "scholarly consensus" in a general sense: "I am simply curious to see what contemporary scholars would determine the 'essential' Jesus to be at this stage in the history of scholarship."\(^{18}\) The impression given is that the results of the Jesus Seminar represent the current opinion of a majority of scholars.

\(^{16}\) Funk, et al, *The Five Gospels*, 1-2. Elsewhere Funk writes, "It is the aim of the Jesus Seminar to determine whether an informed scholarly consensus obtains with regard to sayings that can, with some degree of certainty, be attributed to Jesus," in "The Beatitudes and Turn the Other Cheek," \(^{3}\). And again, "The Jesus Seminar is attempting to discover whether there is a consensus among scholars of the gospels regarding what Jesus said," in "Don't Look for Jesus in Clouds of Glory," \(^{1}\).


biblical scholars. But as we will see, this simply isn't so.

What does it mean to call this consensus scholarly? In the literature of the Jesus Seminar, the Fellows have been variously described as "leading scholars,"\textsuperscript{19} "established academic scholars,"\textsuperscript{20} "gospel specialists,"\textsuperscript{21} and a "distinguished group of biblical scholars."\textsuperscript{22} Funk writes, "The scholarship represented by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar is the kind that has come to prevail in all the great universities of the world."\textsuperscript{23} This description of Seminar Fellows is intended to contribute to the Seminar's academic credibility. So too is the fact that Funk not only listed the names of the 74 Fellows of the Seminar in the appendix of The Five Gospels, but he provided their credentials, i.e., academic degrees and current positions. The Seminar, then, claims to attain a "scholarly consensus," because the Fellows are respected scholars in the field of gospel studies.

It is not only important to the Jesus Seminar that its Fellows are academically credible but that they are representative of mainstream biblical scholarship. Marcus Borg explains, "'Mainstream' biblical scholarship refers to the type of biblical scholarship practiced in most university department of religious studies and in seminaries of mainstream denominations."\textsuperscript{24} Funk notes that the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar not only


\textsuperscript{20}Funk, et al, The Parables of Jesus, xii.


\textsuperscript{22}One-page flyer, "The Jesus Seminar," distributed by Westar Institute.


"teach at leading colleges, universities, and seminaries in the U.S. and Canada," but they "represent every major denomination and tradition."25 Elsewhere Funk writes, "The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, like critical scholarship generally, represent a wide spectrum of religious belief,"26 and "The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar represent a wide array of Western religious traditions and academic institutions."27 Marcus Borg echoes Funk's comments: "Fellows reflected a spectrum of contemporary scholarship...Fellows also reflected the spectrum of mainline denominations."28

How have other biblical scholars responded to the Jesus Seminar's use of the phrase "scholarly consensus?" Some scholars observe that the voting pattern of the Seminar reveals a lack of unanimity. The voting outcomes, in fact, were often spread evenly over the four colors, hardly revealing a consensus. Birger Pearson observes,

It should be noted that the results of the Jesus Seminar's work do not reflect unanimity: many of the same sayings got red votes from some and black votes from others. Thus it cannot be assumed that all of the scholars listed in the Roster of Fellows of the Jesus Seminar (The Five Gospels, 553-7) agree with everything presented in the commentaries to individual pericopae. The presence of their names in the roster, on the other hand, would seem to require them to bear some responsibility for the published results.29

Not only is there a lack of unanimity, but the resultant color is frequently difficult to


26Ibid., 94.


28Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 162.

understand given the diversity of voting. N. T. Wright says that on some votes the majority of Fellows voted red or pink, and yet because of the weighted average system the resultant color was gray.\textsuperscript{30} How does such a voting outcome represent a consensus, even among the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar?

Luke Johnson believes that the 74 Fellows of the Seminar are too small a sample of New Testament scholars to represent anything like a consensus. Johnson points to the nearly 7,000 members of the Society of Biblical Literattrue, not to mention the thousands of substantial scholars who do not participate, to illustrate his point.\textsuperscript{31} If Johnson's numbers are accurate, then the Jesus Seminar Fellows make up less than one percent of North American biblical scholars. The results of this small sampling, therefore, cannot be considered a "scholarly consensus" among American scholars, let alone international scholars.

Marion Soards is also troubled by the Jesus Seminar's use of the phrase, "scholarly consensus." Soards is bothered by the implication that truth in scholarship is simply the majority opinion: "the whole project is (to this reviewer) painfully American. The report [\textit{The Five Gospels}] results from a process that alleges to establish truth by asserting a majority opinion—as if democracy, (here, in fact, not fully participatory democracy, but a selective democratic group) guarantees the veracity or validity of conclusions."\textsuperscript{32} Ben Witherington is also concerned about scholarship that is determined by majority vote,

\textsuperscript{30}Wright, "Five Gospels but No Gospel," 124.

\textsuperscript{31}Johnson, \textit{The Real Jesus}, 2.

\textsuperscript{32}Soards, Review of \textit{The Five Gospels}, 272.
especially since, as history has shown, the majority is frequently wrong. Along with Soards, Witherington wonders if the democracy practiced by the Jesus Seminar is selective, rather than fully participatory. Witherington writes, "While the voting may make the process appear democratic, the preselection of the fellows, the exclusion of the majority of scholars, the disregard for the vox populi and, perhaps most tellingly, the disregard for the opinions of scholars of previous generations, shows that we are dealing ultimately with an elitist and not a democratic approach."\(^{33}\) Soards and Witherington correctly conclude that a "scholarly consensus" is not determined by majority vote, and even if it was, the Jesus Seminar is hardly representative.

The Jesus Seminar's lack of representation has dominated recent discussion about the Seminar's work. In his evaluation of *The Five Gospels*, Richard Hays comments on the unbalanced make-up of the Seminar:

Contrary to the impression fostered by the book--the findings reported here represent the idiosyncratic opinions of one particular faction of critical scholars...The participants in this poll where those who chose to take part over a span of eight years in a seminar sponsored, not by one of the major scholarly societies such as the *Studorium Novi Testamenti Societas* or the Society of Biblical Literature, but by Funk's maverick entrepreneurial venture, the Westar Institute, located in Sonoma, California. This self-selected group, though it includes several fine scholars, does not represent a balanced cross-section of scholarly opinion.\(^{34}\)

So, far from being representative of mainstream biblical scholarship, the Jesus Seminar consists of scholars who maintain a minority opinion. Their conclusions, then, can hardly


\(^{34}\)Hays, "The Corrected Jesus," 43, 48.
be equated with the attainment of a "scholarly consensus." The fact that the Jesus Seminar presents itself in this way leads Hays to rightly conclude: "They are of course free to publish these views, however, their attempt to present these views as 'the assured results of critical scholarship'--is one must say it--reprehensible deception."\textsuperscript{35}

Charles Talbert echoes Hays' concern about the Seminar's lack of representation. Absent from the list of Fellows, Talbert observes, are scholars from numerous centers of biblical scholarship, such as, Harvard, Yale, Duke, Chicago, Vanderbilt, Southern Methodist, Princeton Seminary, Union Seminary in New York, Catholic University, and Union Seminary in Richmond. Talbert comments, "Although the Seminar presents itself as the scholarly option over against ecclesiastical fundamentalists and others similarly unenlightened, this is not so. It represents only a small rivulet in NT scholarship, and a rivulet that is outside the mainstream."\textsuperscript{36} Talbert is also concerned about the lack of scholars from evangelical institutions, as well as the absence of key Jesus scholars, such as, E. P. Sanders and John Meier. Marlor Soards, in fact, believes that the make-up of the Jesus Seminar is so unbalanced that its results are tainted: "The particular make-up of the Jesus Seminar jeopardizes the neutrality of the conclusions of the work reported in this book, for the assumptions about Jesus held by this group--about the style and content of his 'authentic' teaching--preclude recognizing many possible authentic sayings attributed

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 47.

to Jesus in the canonical (primarily synoptic) Gospels."\textsuperscript{37} It would appear that "the deck has been stacked" in the make-up of the Jesus Seminar, challenging both its historical objectivity and its assertion of attaining a "scholarly consensus."

In response to these criticisms, Funk has argued that membership in the Jesus Seminar continues to be open: all are welcome to join! Ben Witherington, however, questions the sincerity of this offer given the Seminar's explicit theological bias:

Even on a charitable interpretation of things, one must conclude that the steering committee of the Jesus Seminar had as one of its major agendas the presentation of a 'critical' portrait of Jesus that must necessarily be distinguished from the fundamentalist or traditional portraits. The we/they language is unmistakable, and it calls into question the claim to be taking an unbiased approach. In fact in personal conversations with some of the members of the Jesus Seminar, I have been told that one of the major intentions of some of the prime movers in this group was to attack and discredit American fundamentalism and the images of Jesus it offers.\textsuperscript{38}

It should be clear by now that the Jesus Seminar is not just attempting to liberate the historical Jesus from the tyranny of the Christ of faith, but to liberate American culture from the theological tyranny of the church. Charles Hedrick, for example, thinks that the traditional portrait of Jesus has too long dominated our culture: "The current conservative swing in the culture of our country suggests to me that identifying more probable aspects of the Jesus tradition belonging to the 'historical Jesus' can be a liberating experience for both scholar and consumer of scholarship alike. The tyranny of the 'hermeneutical Jesus' has for too long gone unchallenged!"\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37}Soards, Review of The Five Gospels, 272.

\textsuperscript{38}Witherington, The Jesus Quest, 44.

\textsuperscript{39}Hedrick, "The Jesus Seminar," 34.
A significant insight into the make-up of the Jesus Seminar has been offered by Craig Blomberg. After a careful investigation of the roster of Fellows listed in The Five Gospels, Blomberg observes that 36 out of 74 members have a degree from, or teach at, one of three schools: Harvard, Claremont, and Vanderbilt. (Regarding doctoral degrees, 14 Fellows have Ph.D.'s from Claremont, nine from Harvard, and eight from Vanderbilt). With nearly half of its members having ties to only three schools, Blomberg correctly concludes: "the Jesus Seminar does not come anywhere close to reflecting an adequate cross-section of contemporary New Testament scholars."\(^{40}\)

Howard Clark Kee questions not only the lack of representation within the Jesus Seminar, but also the lack of participation by its members. Kee writes,

> The Seminar's claim to speak for the majority of scholars is grossly inaccurate. Many of those listed as members of the Seminar are merely on the mailing list and do not attend to vote. The active participants are a small segment of New Testament scholars, and some listed as members have published studies on the historical Jesus radically different in their conclusions than those set out by Funk in The Five Gospels.\(^{41}\)

In other words, many of the Fellows are members in name only; they do not participate in the Seminar's semiannual meetings. Again, the phrase "scholarly consensus" is hardly appropriate.

Aside from the lack of participation, equally troubling has been the high turnover rate of Seminar Fellows. The drop-out rate is, in fact, staggering. In 1985, the Jesus

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Seminar began with 29 Charter Fellows. By the publication of *The Parables of Jesus* (1988), 97 Fellows are listed; of these, 19 are Charter Fellows and 78 are new Fellows. In 1991, with the publication of *The Gospel of Mark*, 57 Fellows are listed: 15 Charter Fellows, 23 1988 Fellows, and 19 new Fellows. In its most recent publication, *The Five Gospels* (1993), the Jesus Seminar claimed 74 Fellows. The make-up of this group is as follows: 16 Charter Fellows, 14 1988 Fellows, 12 1991 Fellows, and 32 new Fellows. This means that dropped out are 13 (45%) of the Charter Fellows, 64 (82%) of the 1988 Fellows, and seven (37%) of the 1991 Fellows. With this kind of turnover, it is not surprising that between 1991 and 1993 the Jesus Seminar found it necessary to add 32 new Fellows. These 1993 Fellows, who came on board as the Seminar was completing Phase One, now comprise nearly half of the Seminar Fellows.

But the question still remains: why is there such a high drop-out rate among the Jesus Seminar Fellows? Craig Blomberg offers this explanation:

As many as 200 scholars participated in JS over the years, but the final group dwindled to 74. People dropped out for various reasons. Some expressed discomfort with how the radical fringe of New Testament scholarship were disproportionately represented on the JS. Others voiced disagreement with Funk's propagandistic purposes of popularizing

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42 A list of Charter Fellows can be found in *Forum* 1.1 (1985): 30.


46 Although James Butts appears in the 1988 roster, he is absent in the 1991 roster, only to appear again in the 1993 roster. This accounts for the 16, rather than 15, Charter Fellows, in the 1993 list.
scholarship in a way designed explicitly to undermine conservative Christian credibility.\textsuperscript{47}

It appears, then, that the unusually high turnover of the Seminar Fellows is largely the result of disagreement over the Seminar's lack of representation, as well as, the theological agenda promoted by Seminar leaders.

Aside from asserting that Seminar Fellows represent mainstream biblical scholarship, Funk claims that the Fellows are "leading scholars," "gospel specialists," and a "distinguished group of biblical scholars." Again, Funk seeks to equate the Seminar's conclusions with a "scholarly consensus." While not attempting to build an ad hominen argument, Craig Blomberg has picked up this gauntlet.\textsuperscript{48} After investigating the published works of the 74 Fellows, Blomberg has divided these scholars into three groups. The first, and smallest, group consists of 14 scholars whom Blomberg identifies as leading names in the field of historical Jesus studies. As examples of this group, Blomberg points to John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. A second group is made-up of roughly 20 scholars, those who keep abreast of the field but have not published widely, such as, Marvin Meyer and Karen King.

Most disturbing in Blomberg's research is the group of "relative unknowns," who comprise over 50% of the Jesus Seminar Fellows. While half of this group has published one or two articles, the other half have published nothing in the field of New Testament Studies. Blomberg bases this conclusion on an exhaustive study of two comprehensive

\textsuperscript{47} Craig Blomberg, "The Seventy-Four 'Scholars': Who Does the Jesus Seminar Speak for?" \textit{Christian Research Journal} (Fall 1994): 34.

\textsuperscript{48} Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus," 19-20.

3. **Objective Historiography?**

The Seminar appears to offer only two options in regard to Jesus: either the Christ of faith proclaimed by fundamentalists or the historical Jesus reconstructed by the Jesus Seminar. N. T. Wright has observed this false dichotomy:

There are only two positions allowed, it seems. One must either be some kind of closed-minded fundamentalist, adhering to some approximation of the historic creeds of the Christian church; one notes that this lumps together Athanasius, Aquinas, Barth, Panneberg and Moltmann along with the TV evangelists who are among the real targets of the polemic. Or one must be non-judgmentally open to the free-for-all hurly-burly of Gnosis, Cynicism, esoteric wisdom, folklore and so on represented by various groups in the first three centuries—and to the baby-and-bathwater methodological skepticism adopted by the Seminar.\(^{50}\)

Funk offers a constant diatribe against "fundamentalists," yet it is unclear who is the precise object of his wrath. At times Funk appears to equate televangelists with fundamentalists; at other times Funk seems to identify as fundamentalists all those who adhere to traditional beliefs. In the former case, Funk uses the term too narrowly, while

\(^{49}\)Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 3.

\(^{50}\)Wright, "Five Gospels but No Gospel," 120.
in the latter case he overgeneralizes, identifying all theological conservatives as fundamentalists. Since numerous studies, both historical and sociological, have been done on North American Christian fundamentalism in recent years,\footnote{For recent studies on American Fundamentalism, see especially Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., Fundamentalisms Observed (3 volumes. The Fundamentalist Project. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).} it seems odd that Funk would use this term so vaguely, unless, of course, he was attempting to build an \textit{ad hominem} or strawman argument against traditional Christianity. Given Funk's commitment to overthrow the Christ of faith by liberating the historical Jesus, this may just be the case. At any rate, it is clear that Funk's theological (ideological) agenda taints any hopes of attaining a "scholarly consensus."

Many scholars believe that the Seminar's theological (ideological) bias undermines its claim of objectivity. But what exactly is the Seminar's bias? It would appear from the comments thus far that the Jesus Seminar has a theological axe to grind with traditional Christianity. This observation is confirmed by Luke Johnson: "From the start, then, we see that the agenda of the Seminar is not disinterested scholarship, but a social mission against the way in which the church controls the Bible, and the way in which the church is dominated by a form of evangelical and eschatological theology--that is, a theology focused both on the literal truth of the Gospels and the literal return of Jesus--that Funk finds intolerable."\footnote{Johnson, \textit{The Real Jesus}, 6.}

Rather than begin with a historical interest it appears that the Jesus Seminar actually began with a theological (ideological) agenda, namely, the undermining of
traditional Christianity as represented by Chalcedonian christology. "The aim of the quest is to set Jesus free. Its purpose is to liberate Jesus from the scriptural and credal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him." In Asserting an antithesis between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, the Seminar blames Jesus’ disciples and Paul for rewriting history and replacing the historical Jesus with the mythical Christ. The disciples, according to the Seminar, simply didn’t "get it." Having misunderstood the message of Jesus, upon his death they reverted back to the apocalypticism they had learned from John the Baptist. And instead of preaching Jesus’ message, these first disciples preached Jesus. This leads Funk to distinguish between the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus. Not only did the disciples preach about Jesus but so did Paul, who furthered the error by incorporating hellenistic myth into the tradition. Again, Paul is identified as the culprit who invented traditional Christianity.

One senses hostility toward the church, both ancient and modern, in the rhetoric of the Jesus Seminar. Funk writes, "As I look around me, I am distressed by those who are enslaved by a Christ imposed on them by a narrow and rigid legacy. There are thousands, perhaps millions, of Americans who are the victims of a mythical Jesus conjured up by modern evangelists to whip their followers into a frenzy of guilt and remorse--and cash

53Funk, Honest to Jesus, 300.

54Ibid., 31. Or, as Funk puts it elsewhere, "They turned the Iconoclast into an icon," 11. This, of course, is reminiscent of Bultmann’s dictum: "The proclaimer became the proclaimed." Or more recently, John Dominic Crossan has stated, "The Parabolist became the parable."
those who continue to espouse the mythical Christ, according to Funk, are naive fundamentalists who have duped the majority of American Christians into accepting the traditional portrait, largely for the purpose of power and financial gain. The battle lines drawn by the Seminar are clear: scholars versus traditionalists. Funk, in fact, believes that scholars have an obligation to enlighten traditionalists with the "assured results of critical scholarship."56

Because they find the traditional portrait to be historically inaccurate and rationally untenable, the Jesus Seminar considers it their duty to reform the Christian religion. Unlike the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century, however, the Seminar seeks not to correct the church but to save Christianity from the church. The reformation envisioned would be the result of exposing the Christ of faith as an historical fraud and offering in its place their reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The subtle move from the descriptive task (history) to the normative (ethics), appears to be the driving force behind the Jesus Seminar. Christianity, according to the Seminar, should replace the traditional portrait of Jesus with the scholar's reconstruction of the historical Jesus because it is more credible for the modern age. By setting the historical record straight, the Jesus Seminar hopes to overthrow the traditional portrait of Jesus and establish the historical Jesus as the proper object of Christian faith. This should be clarified because the Seminar does not really seek to replace the Christ of faith with the historical Jesus. Rather, the Jesus Seminar points to the teachings of the historical Jesus.

55Funk, Honest to Jesus, 19.

as central to Christian faith. In fact, Funk states that faith in the historical Jesus is nothing short of idolatry.

*Jesus himself is not the proper object of faith.* This proposition, I realize, is a radical departure from traditional views. Jesus called on his followers to trust the Father, to believe in God's domain or reign. The proper object of faith inspired by Jesus is to trust what Jesus trusted. For that reason, I am not primarily interested in affirmations about Jesus but in the truths that inspired and informed Jesus. To call for faith in Jesus is to substitute the agent for the reality, the proclaiming for the proclaimed...Jesus himself should not be, must not be, the object of faith. That would be to repeat the idolatry of the first believers.

So then, for the Jesus Seminar the Christ of canon and creed is replaced by the teachings of the historical Jesus as the proper object of Christian faith.

Although Funk admits that the traditional portrait of Jesus dominates the church, past and present, he is hopeful that the results of the Seminar's work will serve as a catalyst to bring about a new reformation. "The attempts to recover the roots of Jesus of Nazareth have nearly always resulted in some reformation or other. I'm not suggesting we are the next Luther, but our work belongs to that same pattern."\(^{57}\) Since fundamentalism can survive only in an atmosphere of biblical illiteracy, according to John White, scholarship will bring deliverance.\(^{58}\) The Jesus Seminar, then, seeks not only

\(^{57}\)Russell Shorton, "Cross Fire," *Gentleman's Quarterly* 64.6 (1994): 118. Elsewhere, Funk observes, "A reformation is imminent when a movement reviews and revises the records of how it got started. The renewed quest is the precursor of that revision," in *Honest to Jesus*, 306.

to deliver the historical Jesus from the gospels but the American people from the tyranny of the churches which presently proclaim the Christ of faith. Reminiscent of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the church door of Wittenberg, Funk concludes his book, *Honest to Jesus*, "These are my twenty-one theses. If I had a church, I would scotch tape them to the door."  

B. Challenges to the Jesus Seminar's Assumptions

1. Form Critical Assumptions

N. T. Wright is troubled by the Jesus' Seminar's assumptions about oral tradition, assumptions rooted in the form critical methodology utilized by the Seminar. The Seminar, according to Wright, assumes that only isolated sayings circulated during the oral period. The Seminar asserts that the Evangelists were ancient "storytellers" and that "oral memory best retains sayings and anecdotes that are short, provocative, memorable--and oft repeated."  

This leads the Seminar to dismiss extended narratives as part of the "storytellers license." To support their claim, Wright says, the Jesus Seminar provides examples from non-oral cultures within the modern Western world. This is hardly a fair analogy! Appealing to recent studies on oral culture (e.g., Wansbrough and Bailey), Wright takes the Seminar to task. Wright acknowledges that oral cultures are indeed "storytelling" communities. The repetition of stories, Wright argues, actually fixed the tradition rather than make it fluid as the Seminar asserts. "Such stories, especially when they are involved with memorable happenings that have determined in some way the

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59 Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 314.

existence and life of a particular group in question, acquire a fairly fixed form, down to
precise phraseology (in narrative as well as in recorded speech), extremely early in their
life—often within a day or so of the original incident taking place."61 This careful
transmission of tradition, Wright points out, includes not only individual proverbial
sayings but large narratives and extended dialogues. In contrast to the Seminar, Wright
boldly states, "The storyteller in such a culture has no license to invent or adapt at will."62
Wright's comments stand as a necessary corrective to the Jesus Seminar's
misunderstanding about the transmission of oral tradition, namely, that only short
memorable sayings (i.e., parables and aphorisms) circulated during the oral period.

Like Wright, Jeffrey Gibbs has called into question the Jesus Seminar's assertion
about the "storytellers license." Regarding the role of oral memory in the transmission of
tradition, Gibbs points to the work of Albert Lord, professor of Slavic and Comparative
Literature at Harvard.63 Lord clearly demonstrates, according to Gibbs, that oral cultures
were capable of transmitting longer units of material, such as, prose narratives, ballads,
epics, and historical songs. From this, Gibbs argues that large portions of the Jesus
tradition could have been preserved and transmitted with sufficient accuracy.64 In other

61Wright, "Five Gospels but No Gospel," 141.

62Ibid., 142.

63In particular, Gibb refers to Albert Lord, "The Gospels as Oral Traditional

64Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Search for the Idiosyncratic Jesus: A Critique of the Jesus
words, the authentic sayings of Jesus need not be limited by their shortness, as done by the Jesus Seminar. Gibbs also argues that the Evangelists were not analogous to ancient storytellers, who freely invented words and placed them upon the lips of their characters. Specifically, Gibbs challenges the Seminar's evidence to support the Evangelists' "storyteller's license," namely, the writings of two ancient Greek historians, Herodotus and Thucydides. Gibbs argues that the example of Thucydides (c. 400 B.C.?) hardly establishes the ancient practice of "storytelling," especially since Thucydides himself attempts to get as close as possible in his quotes to what was actually said.\(^{65}\) To this, Gibbs adds his own example: Polybius, a Greek historian who lived two centuries closer to the time of Jesus. In his *Histories*, Polybius distinguishes his historical method, which sought to discover "the words actually spoken," from the method of Timaeus who wrongfully composed sayings and placed them upon the lips of certain speakers. Gibbs concludes, "Clearly, there was a tradition in ancient storytelling that would freely invent sayings and attribute them to a figure now in the past. But it is not accurate to say that all ancient storytellers, not to speak of those who were interested in recording and interpreting history, were like this."\(^{66}\) In other words, the Jesus Seminar cannot simply assume that the gospel narratives were of the genre "storytelling," when the genre of "history-writing" was equally accessible to them in the ancient world.

Craig Blomberg is also concerned that the Jesus Seminar too easily attributes fabrication to the Evangelists. Blomberg writes, "There is not a single piece of hard data

\(^{65}\)Ibid., 24.

\(^{66}\)Ibid.
demonstrating that early Christians felt free to create out of whole cloth sayings of Jesus which he never spoke." Blomberg acknowledges that during oral transmission the Jesus tradition was paraphrased, abbreviated, combined, and variously applied. This, however, is a far cry from asserting that the early church freely invented sayings and placed them upon the lips of Jesus. Blomberg is also unconvinced by those who assert that Christian prophecy can account for creativity on the part of the gospel writers. According to this theory, prophets who spoke in the name of the risen Lord had their words intermingled with the Jesus tradition. In response, Blomberg states that there is no evidence, either inside or outside the canon, to suggest that prophets' words were confused with the words of the earthly Jesus. Blomberg points to the research of David Hill and David Aune to support this position.

2. Assumptions about Sources

Critics have been quick to challenge the Jesus Seminar's use of sources, especially its stratification of sources into four stages of developing tradition: a first stage (30-60 C.E.) which contains the Pauline corpus, Q, and the Gospel of Thomas; a second stage (60-80 C.E.) the Gospel of Signs, Secret Mark, and the Didache; a third stage (80-100

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67 Blomberg, "The Seventy-Four 'Scholar,'" 36.

68 Representative of this view would be M. Eugene Boring, Sayings of the Risen Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).


70 David Aune, Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).
C.E.) the four canonical gospels and the Gospel of Peter; and a fourth stage (100-150 C.E.) the Gospel of Mary. (See chart one in chapter one). Howard Clark Kee inquires, "How are these levels to be distinguished, since there is no documentary evidence to support this elaborate thesis?" Kee believes that the Seminar is able to maintain this thesis only on the basis of a previous commitment: "By the prior assumption that the historical Jesus was a non-apocalyptic figure who conceived God's rule as all around him, though difficult to discern, and who had a poetic sense of time in which present and future melted together." Kee rightly concludes that the stratification of sources which plays such a significant role for the Jesus Seminar in the dating, and thus the determination of authenticity, of sayings, is based upon circular reasoning.

Scholars have not only challenged the Seminar's model for the stratification of sources, but more specifically its location of the Gospel of Thomas in the earliest stratum, 30-60 C.E. Thomas, according to the Seminar, is not only an early source of the Jesus tradition, but a source that is independent of the canonical gospels. Fellow James Butts writes, "Most of the members of the Jesus Seminar who have participated in its deliberations thus far clearly agree that the Gospel of Thomas is to be regarded as an independent and especially trustworthy witness to the tradition of Jesus sayings." What Butts observes among the Jesus Seminar Fellows, Marcus Borg sees as occurring within

73Ibid.
74Butts, "Probing the Polling," 108.
the whole of New Testament scholarship. Borg writes, "By the 1980s, a generally (though not universally) accepted twofold conclusion was being reached: Thomas is independent of the canonical gospels and contains some materials as early as anything in them." Based upon this understanding of Thomas, it is not surprising that the Jesus Seminar identified a larger percentage of authentic sayings in Thomas than in the canonical gospels. Of the 202 sayings in Thomas, 43 (21.3%) were included in the database of authentic sayings. Although these results seem meager, they surpass the Seminar's identification of authentic sayings in the canonical gospels: Luke (19.9%), Matthew (18.1%), and Mark (10.8%).

Richard Hays was one of the first to challenge the Seminar's early dating of Thomas. Hays points out that most scholars identify Thomas as originally a second century document and that many believe that Thomas is literally dependent upon the canonical gospels. Hays is not so much troubled by the Seminar's position on Thomas as he is by their lack of intellectual honesty on a controversial point of scholarship. Hays writes,

Here some suspicion begins to arise concerning the candor of the editors of this book. They claim that they want to make the results of the best of critical scholarship available to the public, but their working method trades upon a controversial and implausible early dating of Thomas, without offering the reader any clue that this is a shaky element in their methodological foundation.76

The Jesus Seminar is surely free to argue its position on Thomas, but Hays is concerned

75Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 164.

that the Seminar simply states as fact positions that are much debated among scholars.

Charles Talbert is also critical of the Jesus Seminar's view on Thomas. Talbert argues that the "attempt to use the Coptic Gospel of Thomas as an early independent source for historical information about Jesus and to regard it as presenting the earliest form of the saying is a minority viewpoint rejected by the majority of NT scholars."\(^{77}\) Most scholars, Talbert points out, regard Thomas as a second-century gospel with gnostic tendencies that exhibits literary dependence upon the canonical gospels. Luke Timothy Johnson agrees with Talbert's observation, except for associating Thomas with Gnosticism. Johnson writes, "Although scholars debate whether the Gospel of Thomas should be regarded as 'Gnostic,' there is fairly wide agreement that in its literary form it postdates the canonical Gospels and should probably be dated at the very earliest to the mid-second century."\(^{78}\)

Ben Witherington likewise is critical of the Seminar's early dating of Thomas. He rejects this view for at least two reasons. First, since Thomas was discovered alongside a very eclectic set of ancient documents, it is unlikely to provide reliable information on Jesus. "If one can judge a document by some of the company it keeps, there is little encouragement to see Thomas as providing access to the early Jesus tradition or as giving us many clues about the authentic Jesus tradition."\(^{79}\) The second reason for rejecting Thomas as an early and reliable source, according to Witherington, is that there is no

\(^{77}\)Talbert, "Political Correctness Invades Jesus Research," 250.

\(^{78}\)Johnson, The Real Jesus, 22.

\(^{79}\)Witherington, The Jesus Quest, 49.
evidence to support a first-century dating. Witherington points out that the evidence is, in fact, quite limited: aside from the fourth century Coptic versions of Thomas found at Nag Hammadi, scholars have access to early Greek fragments (P.Oxy.1) which were written no later than 200 C.E. and the first reference to the GTh found in Hippolytus, between 222-235 C.E. On the basis of this evidence, Witherington concludes,

Thus it is right to be skeptical of using Thomas as a major source for reconstructing the teaching of the historical Jesus, not least because of the document's theological tendencies. These tendencies, especially its Gnosticizing agenda, are not found in the Synoptic Gospels and should be seen as telltale signs that the Gospel of Thomas likely arose, at least in its present form, in the second century when Gnosticism was well developed.\(^80\)

Whether or not Thomas was gnostic continues to be debated. Nonetheless, Hays, Talbert, and Witherington all agree that the majority position in New Testament studies today is that Thomas is a second century document that was largely dependent upon the canonical gospels. Most scholars, however, remain open to the possibility of a few independent and authentic sayings within Thomas but deny that it is a completely independent first-century document. Frans Neirynck is troubled by the Seminar's failure to be forthright on this point: "The independence of Thomas (cf. S. J. Patterson) is not uncontested, but neither in the Introduction [of The Five Gospels] nor in the comments on Thomas could I find a reference to the alternative position."\(^81\)

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\(^{80}\)Ibid., 50.

\(^{81}\)Frans Neirynck, Rev. of The Five Gospels, Robert Funk (et al), In Ephemerae Theologicae Lovaniensis 70 (1994): 162.
Birger Pearson points out that there is absolutely no evidence to support an early 'first edition' of Thomas. Like other scholars, Pearson admits the possibility of early and independent tradition in Thomas, but he believes that such judgments must be made only after a careful examination of individual logia. Pearson observes that the redactions in Coptic Thomas reveal a de-eschatologization of the tradition, as well as, a mystical (probably Syrian) type of Christianity. "The assumptions about the Gospel of Thomas made by the Jesus Seminar," according to Pearson, "are quite naive, though in actual fact even they could only find two of its singly attested sayings (i.e. saying lacking canonical parallels) to warrant so much as a pink rating (Sayings 97 and 98), a judgment with which I have no quarrel."\textsuperscript{82}

How divided are scholars on the dating and independence of Thomas? In a helpful article, "Jesus in the Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels," James Charlesworth and Craig Evans survey the scholarship on these important issues.\textsuperscript{83} On Thomas, Charlesworth and Craig observe that most scholars believe that Thomas contains primitive, pre-Synoptic material. Having said that, they are quick to point out that it is no small task to determine which logia are indeed primitive. The caution and reserve displayed by Charlesworth and Craig are a far cry from the bold assertions of the Jesus Seminar. They, in fact, make an interesting observation that has important implications for our study. Charlesworth and Craig write,


S. L. Davies...overstates the case when he claims that a 'consensus is emerging in American scholarship that the Gospel of Thomas is a text independent of the Synoptics and that it was compiled in the mid to late first century.' To document this assertion he cites studies by R. D. Cameron, C. W. Hedrick, S. Patterson, and J. H. Sieber, all of whom are students of either Helmut Koester or James Robinson. All we know is that the view that Thomas is early and independent has been a consensus for some time at Claremont and Harvard.\(^4\)

Outside of the Claremont-Harvard axis, Charlesworth and Evans identify numerous American scholars who have reservations about such claims, e.g., Craig Blomberg, Raymond Brown, Charles Carlston, Bruce Chilton, Craig Evans, Joseph Fitzmyer, John Meier, and Klyde Snodgrass.

How has Thomas fared in the current Jesus research? Outside of the Jesus Seminar, and those scholars associated with it (e.g., Crossan), no other Jesus scholar utilizes Thomas for his/her reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The words of John Meier most likely capture the general attitude: "Since I think that the Synoptic-like sayings of the Gospel of Thomas are in fact dependent on the Synoptic Gospels and that the other sayings stem from 2d-century Christian gnosticism, the Gospel of Thomas will not be used in our quest as an independent source for the historical Jesus."\(^5\)

By dating Thomas to 30-60 C.E. and using it as an independent source, the Jesus Seminar has truly advocated a minority position; intellectual honesty would demand that they present it as such.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., 487n.

\(^{5}\)Meier, A Marginal Jew, 139.
C. Challenges to the Jesus Seminar's Methodology

1. Privileging and Isolating the Sayings of Jesus

Following in the footsteps of Rudolf Bultmann, the Jesus Seminar privileged the sayings of Jesus. This concentration on the sayings tradition is done for at least two reasons. One, since it considers Jesus to be primarily a teacher, it focuses on the sayings of Jesus. E. P. Sanders, well aware of this danger, writes, "When the study of Jesus is equated with the study of his sayings, there is an unspoken assumption that what he really was, was a teacher."\(^{66}\) Sanders himself begins with the deeds of Jesus, especially in regard to the temple, to avoid the unnecessary assumption involved in concentrating on his sayings. Marcus Borg offers this insight, which is especially appropriate for the Jesus Seminar: "Ironically, twentieth century scholarship has sought to distance itself from the late nineteenth century focus on Jesus as teacher; yet our preoccupation with his words suggest that the understanding of Jesus as primarily a teacher remains."\(^{67}\)

The second reason that the sayings tradition is privileged is because Bultmann and other form critics believed that the chronology and events described in the canonical gospels were largely fiction. Most reliable was the sayings tradition, especially those sayings that were short and memorable, e.g., parables and aphorisms. Focusing on the sayings alone, however, skews the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus. Birger Pearson correctly observes, "The Jesus Seminar's exclusive attention to sayings tradition, reminiscent of the emphases of the now old 'New Quest,' inevitably issues in skewed

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\(^{67}\)Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," 91n.
results." Since "actions speak louder than words," Pearson believes it is better to locate the sayings of Jesus within the broader framework of his actions. Again, the work of E. P. Sanders would stand as an example of this better approach.

Richard Hays is likewise troubled by the Seminar's isolation of Jesus' sayings from a more comprehensive reconstruction of his life and death. Hays writes, "The Jesus constructed by the Jesus Seminar is a talking head, whose teachings bear no intelligible relation to his death on a cross." Charles Talbert objects to the Jesus Seminar's attempt to detach the individual sayings of Jesus from their canonical context. Talbert traces this strategy to the heretics of the early church: "What the Jesus Seminar offers is a modern analogy to those ancients who deconstructed texts, pagan and Christian, in order to rearrange some of their parts into an alien system." Helpful here is Anthony Harvey's concept of "constraints." Harvey argues that individuals and events are understood only within their historical context by the psycho-social framework of contemporary observers. If Jesus' sayings, then, are to be understood correctly, we must attempt to make sense of them in the context of first-century Palestine from the perspective of a hellenistic Jew. To do otherwise is to eliminate the constraints of meaning. Ben Witherington correctly states, "We can make an aphorism mean whatever we want it to mean if we denude it of

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91Anthony Harvey, Jesus and the Constraints of History (London: SCM Press, 1982).
both its literary and its historical context.\textsuperscript{92} Yet, this is precisely what the Jesus Seminar does.

2. **Application of the Criterion of Dissimilarity**

Central to the Jesus Seminar’s methodology is its application of the criterion of dissimilarity. This criterion, which the Seminar calls “distinctive discourse,”\textsuperscript{93} states that an authentic saying must be distinct from both first century Judaism and incipient Christianity. Funk believes that this criterion is necessary because while Jesus is "pointing to a radically new life-world, he is simultaneously breaking with the old."\textsuperscript{94} Troubling to Funk is the sociological movement which attempts to locate Jesus within his "conceptual-cultural" antecedents. What is interesting about Jesus, according to Funk, is that which is entirely unique. The Jesus Seminar, then, applies the criterion of dissimilarity because they believe that Jesus stands in radical discontinuity with his socio-historical setting. It is ironic that Seminar Fellow Bruce Chilton seemingly rejects this criterion.

This [the application of the criterion of dissimilarity] is as sensible as assuming that the antique chair you wish to restore is unlike any other chair in that period. Armed with such a belief, your work on the chair with an electric sander would be catastrophic in its consequences. It is no wonder the use of this criterion has been followed by a vogue to portray Jesus as a Gnostic. The result is as unlikely as a chrome armchair in an

\textsuperscript{92}Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, 47.


\textsuperscript{94}Funk, "From Parable to Gospel," 21.
Edwardian house: chic, but unconvincing.  

And yet Funk's arguments for the criterion of dissimilarity are intended to justify its use by the Jesus Seminar.

Even Funk is not consistent in making a case for the utter uniqueness of Jesus. Elsewhere, Funk asserts, "[Jesus] was a Jew and regarded everything he did as consonant with Judaism. It is often forgotten that Jesus remained a Jew."  

Moreover, Funk argues for the principle of correlation to understand Jesus more accurately, when, in fact, this principle contradicts the criterion of dissimilarity. Funk writes, "the principle of correlation prevents historians from tearing Jesus out of his first-century, Jewish, Galilean context: he was and remains irrevocably tied to that time and place. Who and what he was is linked to the customs, to the history, to the language, to the symbols and concepts, to the aspirations of that era."  

Funk's comments here are insightful and accurate, but they contradict the very argument he attempts to make in justifying the Seminar's use of the criterion of dissimilarity.

Richard Hays points out that the application of this criterion has two serious consequences: most of the material in the gospels are excluded for being too Jewish or too Christian and Jesus is a "free-floating iconoclast, artificially isolated from his people.

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95 Bruce Chilton, "Silver Blaze Rides Again: Two Recent Historical Approaches to Jesus," Reflections 84.2 (1987): 11.


97 Ibid., 21.
and their Scripture, and artificially isolated from the movement that he founded."\(^{98}\)

Another critic of the Jesus Seminar's use of the criterion of dissimilarity is Charles Talbert.\(^{99}\) Talbert raises three specific objections. First, Talbert wonders if anyone can be understood if totally detached from their cultural setting.

Such assumptions lead to an idiosyncratic Jesus. No one, including Jesus, can be understood if totally detached from one's culture and represented only by what is distinctive about one. If Jesus' teaching is distinctive, it is due to his selectivity and his relative valuing of what he shared with his times, not his utter difference from his Jewish past and/or Christian followers.\(^{100}\)

Talbert's second criticism is the Seminar's rejection of the Aramaic expressions found on Jesus' lips in the gospels. Talbert finds this especially troubling since Aramaic was Jesus' primary language of discourse. Yet the Seminar voted black, as Talbert notes, on numerous Aramaic expresssions, such as "Amen" (Mark 3:28), "Talitha Koun" (Mark 5:41), "Ephphatha" (Mark 7:34), "Abba" (Mark 14:36), "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabach-thani" (Mark 15:34), "Bar-Jonah" (Matthew 16:17), and "Cephas" (John 1:42).

Thirdly, Talbert objects to the Jesus Seminar's inconsistent application of the criterion of dissimilarity. Talbert offers four examples of this inconsistency. One, Mark 12:17 ("Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's) is printed in red by the Seminar, yet this tradition can be found in the early church (Romans 13:6-7). Two, Matthew 5:39 (don't retaliate) and 5:44a (love enemies) are likewise printed in red, but

\(^{98}\)Hays, 45.


\(^{100}\)Ibid., 248.
they too are consistent with the early church's teachings (Romans 12:17-20, I Peter 2:20b and 3:9). Three, Matthew 6:9 ("our father") is considered authentic even though the early church referred to God as father (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). Four, the Seminar rejects as inauthentic those sayings that contain a futurist eschatology because this was characteristic of both John the Baptist and the early church. But Talbert points out that "ancient Judaism knows of a realized/inaugurated eschatology as well as a futuristic eschatology."\textsuperscript{101} So why does the Jesus Seminar reject futurist eschatology but not present eschatology? Compounding this problem is the fact that the apostle Paul appears to have both a present and future eschatology. These four inconsistencies, Talbert says, demonstrate the lack of scholarly objectivity by the Seminar as well as their confessional bias.

Like Talbert, Ben Witherington wonders if a totally unique individual would be comprehensible to his culture. Witherington writes, "If one uses this sort of criterion as an ultimate or final litmus test, one is bound to end up with only the distinctive or unique sayings and a Jesus who has nothing in common with either his Jewish heritage or his later Christian followers. Of course the idea of Jesus being totally idiosyncratic, without analogy, is highly improbable."\textsuperscript{102} Christopher Tuckett actually believes that the assumptions entailed in the criterion of dissimilarity actually predetermine the outcome: "The Jesus who is so unlike both his milieu and the movement which followed him begins to stretch credulity at times...All this produces, with an almost predestinarian

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., 249.

\textsuperscript{102}Witherington, \textit{The Jesus Quest}, 46.
inevitability, a result which is identical with the initial presupposition."\textsuperscript{103}

D. A. Carson explains that the criterion of dissimilarity is completely inadequate for historical research, and that this is no less true for Jesus research. Carson writes,

Such criteria has been criticized repeatedly. Jesus was, after all, a first-century Jewish man. To begin by arguing that he must not sound like one is akin to arguing that Churchill must never sound like an Englishman. To turn around and say that Jesus must not sound like the church, either, is to assume that perhaps the most influential man in history never said anything that the church believed, cherished and passed on.\textsuperscript{104}

Jeffry Gibbs develops further the second half of Carson's criticism, namely, that the authentic words of Jesus are not discontinuous with the later voices of the church. Gibbs argues, "This criterion assumes that the oral traditionists, and the later evangelists, were almost completely unfaithful to the teaching of the one they regarded as their Master. It assumes that, within the space of one generation at most, the disciples of Jesus lost the vast majority of Jesus' authentic teachings, and substituted in their place teachings that were alien, even contradictory to what Jesus actually said."\textsuperscript{105} It seems unreasonable, Gibbs says, to simply assume that the preservation of Jesus' teachings was of such little importance to those who believed Jesus to be the Son of God. And yet, this is precisely the assumption of the Jesus Seminar when it employs the criterion of dissimilarity.

\textsuperscript{103}Tuckett, Review of The Five Gospels, 252.


\textsuperscript{105}Gibbs, "The Search for the Idiosyncratic Jesus," 28.
3. **Historical Positivism**

Jesus Seminar scholars appear confident that their historical method will enable them to uncover the historical Jesus buried beneath the rubble of hellenistic myth. Historical positivism has contributed greatly to this optimism. Central to historical positivism is the belief that historians are neutral observers who have direct access to the past so that their historical conclusions are known with absolute certainty. The rhetoric of historical positivism permeates the writings of the Seminar, when it presents itself as objectively reconstructing the historical Jesus with complete certainty. Even a small sampling of the Seminar's rhetoric confirms this. Funk, for example, has stated, "The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar are critical scholars. To be a critical scholar means to make empirical, factual evidence--evidence open to confirmation by independent, neutral observers--the controlling factors in historical judgments." ¹⁰⁶ This leads the Seminar to equate their historical Jesus with the "real" earthly Jesus. Funk writes, "To know the truth about Jesus, the real Jesus, one had to find the Jesus of history." ¹⁰⁷

Although the Jesus Seminar employs the rhetoric of historical positivism, it is clearly promising more than it can deliver. Few historians today would be willing to make the same kinds of claims about their historical conclusions. N. T. Wright correctly assesses the grandiose claims of the Jesus Seminar:

> The puzzle about this is that it buys into exactly the sort of positivism that is now routinely abandoned by the great majority of scholars working in the fields of history and texts—including by several members of the Jesus

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¹⁰⁷Ibid., 2.
Seminar themselves. The idea that by historical investigation one might arrive at a position of unbiased objective certainty, of absolute unconditioned knowledge, about anything, has been shot to pieces by critiques from a variety of points of view. All knowledge is conditioned by the context and agenda of the knower; all reconstructions are somebody's reconstructions, and each 'somebody' sees the world through their own eyes and not their neighbor's.108

Given the fact that historical research requires subjectivity and is based upon probability, one would expect a degree of humility about historical conclusions. "The best practitioners of critical historiography, therefore, are careful to make clear the character of their craft as a limited mode of knowing, depending on the frailties of the records of memory and the proclivities of self-interest."109 The rhetoric of historical positivism found in the literature of the Jesus Seminar is a far cry from this kind of reserved scholarship.

E. Challenges to the Jesus Seminar's Conclusions

1. Reversal of the Burden of Proof?

The final pillar of the Jesus Seminar's "Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom" states that the Seminar's work has resulted in the reversal of the burden of proof. Previously, the gospel tradition was accepted as historical unless proven otherwise. Now, with the efforts of the Jesus Seminar completed in Phase One, Funk believes, the burden of proof is on those who would claim authenticity. Ben Meyer, however, raises some serious objections to this supposed reversal.

Pillar #7 has been in doubt at least since the 1960s, when Willie Marxsen, among others, punctured the burden of proof balloon: 'If I want to declare something to be historical, I must prove it. If I want to declare something

108 Wright, "Five Gospels, but No Gospel," 125.

109 Johnson, The Real Jesus, 85.
to be unhistorical, I must prove that, too' (The Beginnings of Christology [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969]). Scholars of the most diverse tendencies have recognized the methodological sanity of this view: It tends to eliminate the role of mere supposition.\textsuperscript{110}

Equally concerned about the placement of the burden of proof is Robert Yarbrough, who insightfully inquires, "One wonders how much of history in general, ancient and modern, would be accessible if such a Troeltschian hermeneutics of suspicion were consistently applied."\textsuperscript{111} Yarbrough argues that the radical skepticism implied by this approach actually results in skewed history. To substantiate this argument, Yarbrough offers this perceptive quote from Martin Hengel: "It is remarkable that where there is a radical mistrust of the ancient sources because of their 'bias,' the possibilities of the scholar's own biased imagination extend all the further because all the boundary posts have been taken down."\textsuperscript{112} As will be shown, this creative license on the part of the historian is precisely what has occurred in the work of the Jesus Seminar.

2. A Non-Eschatological Jesus?

Pillar #5 of the Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom is, according to the Jesus Seminar, "The liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus of the aphorisms and parables from Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus."\textsuperscript{113} Seminar Fellow Marcus Borg acknowledges,


\textsuperscript{111}Yarbrough, "The Gospel according to the Jesus Seminar," 14.


"The seminar consistently voted as 'black' all sayings in which Jesus is reported to have spoken of 'the end of the world,' a last judgment, the coming of 'the Son of man,' or his own second coming."¹¹⁴ As a result of the Seminar's voting, Funk asserts, "The view that Jesus expected the world to end momentarily, made popular by Albert Schweitzer nearly a century ago, has died a scholarly death."¹¹⁵ Borg confirms Funk's assertion: "the old consensus that Jesus was an eschatological prophet who proclaimed the imminent end of the world has disappeared."¹¹⁶

Richard Hays is one of many scholars to question the Seminar's insistence on overthrowing the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. Hays notes,

This must be deemed a 'methodological problem' because the Jesus Seminar employs its conviction that Jesus was a non-eschatological thinker as a stringent criterion for sorting the authenticity of the sayings material. Everything that smacks of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology is firmly consigned black. A 'cameo essay' explains the reasons for this decision roughly as follows: the gospels contain sayings proclaiming God's rule as both present and future; Jesus could not have said both things, the future eschatology appears to be 'bombastic and threatening'; therefore, Jesus must have spoken of God's rule only as a present reality.¹¹⁷

Hays observes that this kind of circular reasoning is applied systematically to all the sayings of Jesus so that all hints of future eschatology are removed from the teachings of Jesus. The circular argument goes: We know that Jesus was a non-eschatological sage

¹¹⁴Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, 166.

¹¹⁵Funk, "The Jesus That Was," 2.


because his authentic sayings were non-eschatological, and we know his authentic sayings were non-eschatological because Jesus was a non-eschatological sage. David Catchpole offers this insightful comment: "it is hardly surprising that Jesus should emerge as a sage if you demand as a *sine qua non* for authenticity that a saying be an aphorism or a parable."¹¹⁸ In other words, the assumptions and methodologies of the Seminar largely determine their results.

Ben Meyer correctly points out that Pillar #5 is more a supposition than a pillar of scholarly wisdom. Meyer writes,

Still pillar #5 was honored through the last century until in 1892 Johannes Weiss appeared to topple it. Who has reestablished it? The Jesus Seminar merely supposes it. But since the Jesus Seminar systematically dismisses all those words of Jesus conveying eschatological themes and motifs, mere supposition is hugely problematic.¹¹⁹

Howard Clark Kee is in agreement with Meyer, seeing the Seminar's reconstructed Jesus as more a supposition than a valid conclusion resulting from a careful investigation: "In spite of these claims about objectivity, the presuppositions of Funk and the group are evident from the outset. Jesus was a traveling sage who traded in wisdom."¹²⁰ Luke Johnson rightly concludes, "Far from representing a consensus of scholarship, this is one of the 'assumptions' of the Jesus Seminar fellows that puts them perhaps most at odds


with other researchers into the historical Jesus."\textsuperscript{121}

Birger Pearson challenges the Jesus Seminar's assertion that Jesus' disciples reverted back to the apocalypticism of John the Baptist upon the death of their master, who had become a wandering sage. Pearson rightly inquires, "By what canon of historiography such a view of Jesus is developed is a mystery, for it is not only intrinsically improbable but strains credulity to its breaking point."\textsuperscript{122} That the first Christians interpreted Jesus' message in light of their developing christology is most probable says Pearson. It is also likely, according to Pearson, that these Christians preserved much of Jesus' own teaching. Pearson points out that historical critical methods, when applied wisely, yield reasonable results. As an example of this, Pearson shows how scholars have been able to utilize this tool to distinguish between Jesus' eschatology, which focused on the coming kingdom of God, and that of the early church, which focused on the coming of Jesus as the Son of Man.\textsuperscript{123} By what evidence, Pearson inquires, does the Jesus Seminar completely dismiss the eschatological sayings of Jesus?

The 'evidence' leading to the 'erosion' of the eschatological Jesus paradigm is not cited, for the very good reason that it does not exist! On the contrary, all of the real evidence that has come to light since Weiss and Schweitzer--the massive evidence now available in the Dead Sea Scrolls is probably the most important--only serves to confirm the fact that the apocalyptic worldview was pervasive in 1st-century Jewish Palestine. And this evidence is of direct relevance to the study of the historical Jesus. So one begins to wonder about a possible 'hidden agenda' in the rejection

\textsuperscript{121} Johnson, \textit{The Real Jesus}, 24.


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 324.
of eschatology by the Jesus Seminar.124

Pearson is right in his observation about the apocalyptic milieu of Jesus' day. It is
difficult to imagine how Jesus' contemporaries would have interpreted him in a non-
apocalyptic way. It again becomes clear that the Jesus Seminar is relying upon circular
reasoning, assuming the conclusion in the premise.

The Jesus Seminar not only relies on circular reasoning, but it has created a false
dichotomy: either a totally present kingdom or a totally future kingdom. But as Richard
Hays correctly observes, this dichotomy fails to consider an alternate solution:
"Characteristic of early Christian preaching is its proleptic eschatology, its conviction that
God's coming kingdom has already begun to impinge upon the present in such a way that
God's final justice is prefigured--but hardly fully realized--now."125 This inaugural
("already, but not yet") eschatology is able to account for the teachings about both a
present kingdom as well as a future kingdom. Because the Seminar's conclusions rely
heavily upon a false dichotomy, this issue needs to be considered further. A brief
historical overview should help clarify our discussion.

The portrayal of Jesus as a "this-worldly" teacher who proclaimed the presence of
the kingdom of God was largely undermined at the turn of the twentieth-century by
Johanness Weiss and Albert Schweitzer. These two scholars attributed a "consistent
eschatology" to Jesus, in which the kingdom of God was completely future. No one
seriously challenged their position until C. H. Dodd argued that Jesus proclaimed a

124Ibid., 323.

125Ibid., 46.
kingdom which was entirely present.\textsuperscript{126} Dodd's "realized eschatology" removed any future element from Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. Scholars were now presented with two options regarding the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching: either a totally future kingdom (i.e., the consistent eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer) or a totally present kingdom (i.e., the realized eschatology of Dodd). Most scholars opted for the former.

Following World War II a mediating position was offered by Werner George Kümmel.\textsuperscript{127} Kümmel observed in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God a fulfillment in the present as well as a promise in the future. Side-by-side in the teachings of Jesus were sayings that announced the inauguration of the kingdom and sayings that predicted a future consummation of the kingdom. Oscar Cullman not only adopted Kümmel's understanding of Jesus' inaugural eschatology but he provided a helpful analogy: D-Day and V-Day.\textsuperscript{128} In casting out demons, Cullmann asserts that Jesus demonstrated the defeat of evil powers by the kingdom of God even though he anticipated a future completion of that victory. The inauguration of Jesus' victory is comparable to D-Day (June 6, 1944) when the Allied troops invaded the beaches of Normandy. For all practical purposes, this event signaled the defeat of Germany. The actual victory, V-Day


(May 8, 1945), would occur only after some mopping-up operations. In like manner, Cullmann reasoned, the return of Christ will see the consummation of an already active kingdom. George Eldon Ladd furthered the insights of Kümmel and Cullmann, arguing that the Greek word for "kingdom," basileia, means "reign" or "rule," rather than "realm." From this, Ladd argued, God's reign is now only partly realized awaiting a future fulfillment.  

From this brief historical survey it would seem that the Jesus Seminar has indeed created a false dichotomy between either a completely future kingdom or a completely present kingdom. In fact, the Seminar argued that future elements in the teaching of Jesus could be dismissed as secondary, thus making this a criterion for authenticity. This is troubling since the Seminar is aware that a third alternative exists, namely, an inaugural (or proleptic) eschatology. In fact, at the Seminar's Westar (spring 1989) meeting, a straw poll reveals that half of the Fellows seemed to hold to an inaugural eschatology in their understanding of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.  

Although the Fellows strongly affirmed Jesus' teaching on the presence of the kingdom and rejected any expectations on Jesus' part about a cataclysmic end of the world, half believed that Jesus expected the kingdom to come in the near future. Half of the Fellows also believed, "There will be a

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130 See, "Table 4: Voting Record on Eschatological Questions at Westar Meeting" in chapter one.
future fulfillment of the Kingdom proclaimed (inaugurated) by Jesus."¹³¹ Not only is there a mediating position between a completely present and completely future eschatology, it seems that many of the Fellows adhere to this position.

An important point is missing from the criticisms about the Jesus Seminar's portrait of Jesus as a non-eschatological sage. The point is this: the Seminar has created a false dichotomy between apocalyptic literature and wisdom literature. Research in recent years has demonstrated that there is no clear demarcation between apocalyptic literature and wisdom literature. In fact, wisdom sayings can be observed in apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic sayings can be observed in wisdom literature. George Nickelsburg states, "Although Israelite wisdom texts like Tobit, Sirach, and Baruch hold the Mosaic Torah in high regard and contain much (proverbial) instruction about (sometimes Torah-related) human conduct, they also have a high regard for the prophetic tradition, including its concern about future events, and they place the sage, scribe, or teacher in the role of an inspired spokesman of God and interpreter of Torah and prophets."¹³² While scholars of apocalyptic and wisdom acknowledge the blurring of distinction, the Jesus Seminar utilizes a false dichotomy to dismiss the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus and thus create a portrait of a non-eschatological, sapiential Jesus.

¹³¹ "General Questions on Jesus and the Future," undated flyer printed by the Jesus Seminar.

Although Funk and Borg have declared the death of the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, the evidence simply doesn't bear this out. In Germany, the apocalyptic portrait of Jesus is still considered one of the assured results of critical scholarship. Consider, for example, the writings of Martin Hengel (1968), Oscar Cullman (1970), Joachim Jeremias (1971), Peter Stuhlmacher (1988), and Joachim Gnilka (1990). Since much of current Jesus research is occurring in America, it is telling that the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is still popular. This can be seen in such Jesus scholars as, Howard Clark Kee (1970), Richard Hiers (1973), Ben Meyer (1979), E. P. Sanders (1985), G. R. Beasley-Murray (1986), Paula Fredriksen (1988), Maurice Casey (1991), John Meier (1991), and N. T. Wright (1997). Although the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet no longer dominates current New Testament Studies, it has hardly been overthrown. In fact, when compared to other recent proposals for the historical Jesus, the apocalyptic portrait is clearly the majority position.

3. Jesus, the Cynic Sage?

Richard Hays is not only troubled by the Jesus Seminar's dismissal of apocalyptic sayings, but by their portrayal of Jesus as an itinerant Cynic philosopher. Hays writes,

The depiction of Jesus as a Cynic philosopher with no concern about Israel's destiny, no connection with the concerns and hopes that animated his Jewish contemporaries, no interest in the interpretation of Scripture, and no message of God's coming eschatological judgment is—quite simply—an ahistorical fiction, achieved by the surgical removal of Jesus from his Jewish context.\(^{133}\)

It would seem that the Jesus Seminar had a difficult obstacle to overcome, namely, the

\(^{133}\)Hays, "The Corrected Jesus," 47.
Jewishness of Jesus. More graphic than Hays, Birger Pearson states, "The Jesus of the Jesus Seminar is a non-Jewish Jesus. To put it metaphorically, the Seminar has performed a forcible epispasm on the historical Jesus, a surgical procedure removing the marks of his circumcision."\(^{134}\) Jesus as a Cynic sage hardly makes sense given Jesus' socio-historical setting.

Ben Witherington wonders, if Jesus was a traveling sage who traded in proverbial wisdom, how did he generate so much hostility let alone get himself crucified. "Since Jesus is characterized by the Seminar as a man with a laconic wit given to exaggeration, humor and paradox," Witherington suggests, "he seems a much better candidate for a late-night visit with David Letterman or Jay Leno."\(^{135}\) Robert Yarbrough argues that the portrait of Jesus offered by the Jesus Seminar fails a basic principle of historiography, namely, the need for a cause sufficient to explain the effect. In regard to the Jesus tradition, the effect demanding the cause is the rise of the church and the preaching of Jesus' resurrection by A.D. 30s. In other words, what caused the gospel writers to make such extraordinary claims about Jesus if little or none of it was true. Regarding the Jesus Seminar's portrait of the historical Jesus, Yarbrough correctly concludes, "But such a view of Jesus is not just theologically insulting, it is historically problematic. It reduces Jesus to a question mark and the church to either an enigma, an absurdity, or a swindle."\(^{136}\)


\(^{135}\)Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, 56-57.

\(^{136}\)Yarbrough, "The Gospel according to the Jesus Seminar," 18.
The Cynic sage thesis has been challenged in recent years. Hans Dieter Betz, for example, believes, "the proponents of the 'Jesus as Cynic' hypothesis have made it easy to criticize it simply on methodological grounds."\textsuperscript{137} Betz offers several damaging criticisms that render the Cynic sage theory highly improbable. First, there is no evidence of a Cynic presence in the Galilee of Jesus' day. Betz writes, "The presumed presence of Cynics in the Galilean society in which Jesus lived is mostly fanciful conjecture."\textsuperscript{138} Two, since the Cynic movement was not monolithic, it is impossible to establish a "typical Cynic." Three, the genre of choice among Cynics, the biography (bios), has no parallel in Christian literature. Betz is troubled by the attempts to equate Q with the Cynic biography, such as done by Downing and Vaage, because Q lacks the biographical framework found in Cynic biographies. Four, parallels between the Jesus movement and Cynicism may be based upon a common philosophical position in the ancient world. Paul Eddy adds this insight: "We are left with the problem that those aspects of the behavior of Jesus and his early followers that some claim as Cynic parallels are in fact 'paralleled' by a variety of wandering moralists and/or ascetic types of which the Roman world was never in short supply."\textsuperscript{139} To these four criticisms presented by Betz, Eddy offers a fifth, namely, that Jesus' use of aphoristic wisdom is best understood within the context of Jewish wisdom.


\textsuperscript{138}Ibid.

rather than Hellenistic Cynicism. Given Jesus' Jewish heritage, including his use of parables, this context makes more sense.

4. Constructive History

One of the interesting twists in the work of the Jesus Seminar is that even though they boast of objectivity and certainty, they have ultimately created Jesus in their own image. Ironically, the Jesus Seminar employs the rhetoric of historical positivism, but has as one of its goals the creation of a new fiction of Jesus, a fiction that has "operational effectiveness" for modern men and women. It seems contradictory to promise the "assured results of critical scholarship," while at the same time writing constructive history. Luke Johnson has noticed this same inconsistency.

On the one side, its members seek credibility by invoking the language of critical historiography: they claim to be scientific, to assess the data without bias, to be free from the constraints of ecclesiastical authority. They say they are engaging in value-free research, letting the chips fall where they may...On the other side, the Seminar also claims the privilege of constructive history to provide an alternate version of Jesus that the world (and above all the church) is supposed to take seriously.  

The Jesus Seminar has done what consumer advocates call "bait and switch." Having drawn readers with the promise of neutrality and certainty, the Seminar offers instead its interpretation of the evidence and its reconstruction of Jesus.

The Jesus Seminar indeed claims to be doing critical historiography, but its conclusions reveal a methodology of revisionism. Regarding this historical approach, Craig Evans writes,

140 Ibid., 436.

Revisionism, which is what in essence we are taking about, is a problem that plagues most disciplines concerned with history. Gender issues, ethnic issues, social and economic issues currently drive much of contemporary scholarship. In effect, we want to find our cause championed by the heroes of the past. For Christians this often means Jesus has to be seen advocating a particular Christian agenda. Consequently, it is often not a quest for the historical Jesus as it is a quest for justification of our views.\textsuperscript{142}

In the end, the Jesus Seminar has done nothing more than create a portrait of the historical Jesus that supports its prior theological (ideological) commitments.

Although the Jesus Seminar has only now entered Phase Three, the reconstruction of the historical Jesus, Funk has offered some preliminary conclusions. As pointed out in chapter one, the portrait of the historical Jesus emerging from the efforts of the Jesus Seminar is a "social gadfly" or "comic savant," who associated with the dregs of society, taught counter-culture sayings, and practiced subversive behavior. This Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet but a popular teacher who proclaimed the present reality of the kingdom of God, an egalitarian kingdom in which people experience the reversal of roles and full reciprocity. The closest analogy in the ancient world, according to Funk, is the wandering cynic sage. The historical Jesus constructed by the Jesus Seminar is a non-eschatological teacher of social ethics. The Seminar's focus on the sayings of Jesus reveals their conviction that Jesus was primarily a teacher.

The kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus, according to the Jesus Seminar, is a present ("this-worldly") reality. The Jesus portrayed by the Jesus Seminar proclaims nothing less than an egalitarian kingdom. Although the kingdom of God is a present

reality, according to the Seminar, it is purely symbolic. Through his proclamation of the kingdom, Jesus offered an alternate life-world, one that stood in opposition to the habituated life-world. Jesus' hearers only need to give up what they perceive to be real and participate in this fantasy called the kingdom. The image here is of a Don Quixote who wanders about the countryside inviting people to share in his imaginary world. But unlike Don Quixote, Funk asserts, "In his authentic parables and aphorisms, Jesus provides a glimpse of another reality, one that lies beyond the present conceptual horizons. His words and deeds open onto that reality."\textsuperscript{143}

The portrait of the historical Jesus constructed by the Jesus Seminar appears to be a secularist and a politically correct social critic. Ben Witherington offers this insight: "Perhaps they wish to see themselves as sages offering counterculture wisdom."\textsuperscript{144} This is incredibly ironic, given the Seminar's warning: "Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you."\textsuperscript{145} Yet it is difficult to imagine what is not congenial to the Jesus Seminar about an anti-establishment Jesus who sides with the marginalized of society. There can be no doubt that the egalitarian kingdom ethic taught by the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar would have challenged first century Jews, and perhaps even some modern-day traditionalists. The question is whether or not this Jesus challenges or confirms the theological (ideological) commitment of the Jesus Seminar. The latter appears to be the case.

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\textsuperscript{143}Funk, \textit{Honest to Jesus}, 19.

\textsuperscript{144}Witherington, \textit{The Jesus Quest}, 57.

That the Jesus constructed by the Jesus Seminar resembles Seminar Fellows has not gone unnoticed. Robert Yarbrough offers this insightful observation: "It is hardly coincidental that in the midst of mainline academia's this-worldly egalitarian liberationist theologies we suddenly learn that Jesus was a this-worldly egalitarian liberationist." Yarbrough's insight has been confirmed by a number of other observers, including Charles Talbert, who writes, "The Jesus of Crossan and the Jesus Seminar is indeed a mirror image of the left wing civil religion that dominates North American universities and theological schools at this point in time...Their Jewish Cynic is a politically correct Jesus, appropriate for their own time and places." Not only is the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar politically correct, but his demeanor resembles that of a university professor, so observes David Timmer: "The Seminar's Jesus certainly fits the bill: he is a skeptical and ironic sage with a tolerant and inclusive disposition and deep suspicion of authority. He has everything he needs, except a corduroy jacket and a well-worn pair of hiking boots, to blend into the faculty lounge of any North American university. And, of course, he has the added virtue of annoying the clerics." Not only has the Jesus Seminar given into the last temptation, Howard Clark Kee is convinced that the Seminar manipulated the evidence to do so.

Such manipulation of the evidence in order to rid Jesus of an apocalyptic outlook and any sense of himself as God's agent of renewal is only the late


twentieth-century counterpart of earlier scholarly attempts to recreate Jesus in a form more compatible with the current intellectual climate. Ironically, it betrays that the Seminar, which claims to represent a major segment of New Testament scholarship but which is actually a tiny minority, has succumbed to what Funk calls the 'last temptation,' which is to 'create Jesus in our own image,' to marshal the facts to support preconceived convictions.\textsuperscript{149}

Kee's comments, and the observations of other scholars, rightly challenges the Seminar's portrait of the historical Jesus as a non-eschatological Cynic sage. In fact, it would appear that the Jesus Seminar has manipulated the evidence to support a predetermined portrait. Given the theological (ideological) agenda of the Seminar, to undermine traditional Christian beliefs, this should not be surprising.

The Jesus Seminar has promised a Jesus who is relevant to our times. And yet, they have constructed a historical Jesus who is a mirror-image of themselves. Perhaps the Jesus Seminar is attempting to validate its own theology (ideology). Birger Pearson offers this insight:

A group of secularized theologians and secular academics went seeking a secular Jesus, and they found him! They think they found him, but, in fact, they created him. Jesus the 'party animal' whose zany wit and caustic humor would enliven an otherwise dull cocktail party--this is the product of the Jesus Seminar's six year's research. In a sense, the Jesus Seminar, with its ideology of secularization, represents a 'shadow image' of the old 'New Quest'--and its ultimate bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{150}

By all indications the Jesus Seminar has indeed constructed a portrait that is all too congenial to its own ideological commitment, namely, secularism.


This raises an interesting question: Given the Jesus Seminar's commitment to marketing their portrait of the historical Jesus, who's buying it? Surely not the majority of American Christians who, Funk says, continue to affirm the Christ of faith. The Jesus Seminar has also failed to win converts from fellow Jesus scholars whose response has ranged from apathy and embarrassment to chastisement and ridicule. The favorable response that the Jesus Seminar so desires has only been found among like-minded secularists. This can be seen in the fertile ground found by the Seminar among Unitarian-Universalist churches. In a recent article for *The Fourth R*, Unitarian-Universalist Will Moredock stated, "The historical Jesus [constructed by the Jesus Seminar] has the potential to unite Unitarians who come to the fold from both scientific and humanist and Christian traditions. On the one hand, this is a Jesus whose birth and death conform to the laws of nature. On the other hand, this is a Jesus whose life challenged the laws and customs of Roman-occupied Palestine." After all the rhetoric, it appears that the Jesus Seminar is merely "preaching to the choir" of American secularists.

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Part Two:

Evaluating the Jesus Seminar's Quest for the Historical Jesus

CHAPTER THREE

THE JESUS SEMINAR AND THE TRADITION OF QUESTS

Introduction

For the Jesus Seminar, the critical list of Jesus' authentic sayings is to serve as a "database" from which to reconstruct the historical Jesus.¹ "In pursuit of the historical Jesus, they [the Jesus Seminar Fellows] used their collective expertise to evaluate the authenticity of more than 1,500 sayings of Jesus attributed to him."² It must be recognized, however, that such a "quest" for the historical Jesus is not new in the history of New Testament scholarship. In fact, there have been two identifiable periods in which the historical Jesus was the object of rigorous study by New Testament scholars: the "Old Quest" and the so-called "New Quest." In recent years scholars have also observed a renaissance in Jesus research, leading some to talk of a "Third Quest." To appreciate fully the work (motives, methods, and results) of the Jesus Seminar, the Seminar must be

¹The actual task of reconstruction, according to Funk, "was to be excluded from the agenda of the Seminar and left to individual scholars working from their own perspectives," in Robert Funk, et al, The Five Gospels, 35. In 1997, however, the Seminar decided to enter a third phase, the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

²One-page flyer, "The Jesus Seminar," distributed by Westar Institute. As stated earlier, the reference to more than 1,500 sayings is somewhat misleading. It is more accurate to say that the Jesus Seminar examined 1,544 versions of 518 sayings.
understood as standing within the tradition of these quests for the historical Jesus.

A. The Old (German) Quest for the Historical Jesus

1. The Enlightenment: Catalyst for the Old Quest

Since, as will be shown, the Jesus Seminar's quest most closely resembles the Old Quest, it is especially important to consider carefully the factors that gave rise to the Old Quest. The foundation for the Old Quest was the Enlightenment. Significant for our study is the emergence of historical positivism and secularism, two characteristics of the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar that distinguishes them from other quests for the historical Jesus.

In the eighteenth-century, the Enlightenment ushered in the modern age for Western civilization. Two distinct movements converged, giving rise to this "Age of Reason."3 The first movement was the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance, which can be seen in the beliefs of human dignity and worth, and individual freedom of choice. Rather than naively submit to authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical, people pursued personal choice. The second movement was the scientific revolution, which was fueled by the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. The scientific revolution was complemented by a philosophical revolution, initiated by the rationalism of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes' rationalism, in which doubting was the first principle of philosophy, was too abstract for most people. The empirical reason of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and John Locke (1632-1704), which was much more concrete, won the day.

Because nature was orderly, it was believed that empirical reason could discern inherent laws and principles which would ultimately lead to the betterment of humankind. Progress, it seemed, was inevitable as science advanced society beyond the ignorance and superstition of the past.

The Enlightenment made a tremendous impact on nearly every area of life and thought, thus introducing a new worldview to Western culture. Two areas are of particular interest for our study: history and religion. The area of history was initially ignored by Enlightenment thinkers, who were more interested in empirical studies of the present world and predictions about the future world. From the perspective of many, the past was of little value since it was filled with the ignorance and superstition of ancient people. Scholars, however, became interested in the past when it was believed that history, just like nature, contained inherent laws and principles. By applying scientific methodologies to history, Enlightenment thinkers were convinced that discernable patterns would emerge, allowing them to predict the unfolding of history. One of the assumptions to accompany this scientific approach to history was naturalism, the belief in a closed universe of cause-and-effect. Since all reality exists within time and space, it was reasoned, all phenomena can be explained in terms of material causation. This, of course, left no room for divine intervention, i.e., special revelation or miracles. Miracles, in fact, were identified as pre-scientific myths (non-historical fictions).

One of the methods to emerge from a scientific approach to history was historical positivism, whose beginning can be traced to Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte was especially influenced by seventeenth-century British empiricism as epitomized by Francis
Bacon. Like Bacon, Comte believed that all knowledge was ultimately scientific and that science would improve the quality of human existence. One limitation on science, according to Comte, was that only the phenomena (observable reality) could be known. But if science could not know the essence of reality, Comte reasoned, such essence could not be known. In regard to history, Comte was confident that the historian could objectively discern the inherent laws that govern history such that historical knowledge would be as certain as scientific knowledge.

In his six-volume book, *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42), Comte attempted to discern social order in history. He concluded that social order was to be found in the progress of human thought (or society) through three distinct and necessary stages: theogic, metaphysical, and positive (scientific). In the theological stage, humans explain life in terms of divine power. Religion, according to Comte, evolved from Fetishism to Polytheism to Monotheism. Society, during this stage, was authoritarian and militaristic. The second stage, the metaphysical, was characterized by abstract ideas that were influenced by legal and ecclesiastical authorities. The positive (scientific) stage, according to Comte, was the goal of human history. Comte believed that this stage would lead to a utopia, in which society would be ruled by scientists committed to positive facts and scientific method. Religion, in this stage, would be reduced to universal reason and devoid of reference to God. The purpose of religion would simply be to substantiate social ethics.

Another contribution to the historical method can be seen in the work of Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923). Troeltsch, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin,
argued that theology does not have access to super-historical absolute truth. Religious claims, according to Troeltsch, are relative to their cultural setting. Influenced by the liberalism of Ritschl and the historicism of Dilthey, Troeltsch developed three principles that have become the cornerstone of modern historiography: probability, analogy, correlation. As noted earlier, the principle of probability states that historical conclusions must always be tentative, open to new sources of information. According to the principle of analogy, historians must evaluate the unknown based upon the known. The principle of correlation states that even though historical events are unique, they occur in relationship to other events.

There is a second area influenced by the Enlightenment that is significant for our study, namely, religion. Two issues were involved here. First, most people had wearied of the religious persecution that followed the Reformation. Dogmatism, which was seen as the enemy of progress, gave way to a new period of religious tolerance. A second issue is the exaltation of autonomous reason. No longer intimidated by ecclesiastical authorities, individuals exercised their personal freedom to choose in religious matters. Many who exalted reason, however, were not merely passive in accepting or rejecting church dogma; they became aggressive in attacking what they perceived to be irrational beliefs. Scientific judgment based upon reason and empirical evidence would be the test of truth, not ecclesiastical authoritites. The battle lines were drawn between rational (natural) religion and revealed religion.

The attacks on the traditional beliefs of institutionalized Christianity can be seen as a part of secularization. In his *History of Theology* (1968), Bengt Hägglund observed,
"The culture of the Enlightenment was distinguished by its increasing secularization. The new form of natural science pointed toward an immanent explanation of the world. A secular culture developed, independent of church and confessions." Hågglund identified four characteristics of this secularization. First, secularism emphasized rational (natural) religion, in which divine revelation was either rejected or subordinated to reason. Second, secularism tended to moralize, i.e., reduce religion to the promotion of good morals. Third, secularism advanced individualism in that religion become a private matter to be determined not by ecclesiastical authority but by personal choice. Fourth, secularism advanced humanism which emphasized interest in "this-worldly" concerns. Since all knowledge is attained by the scientific method, according to the secularist, religious (spiritual and supernatural) claims were deemed invalid. Secularism, then, can be understood as the attempt to remove all vestiges of ancient myths and superstition from each area of life, including the religious. Secularists were especially troubled that religions, including Christianity, were distracting people from "this-worldly" concerns (e.g., science, politics, charity) by proclaiming "other-worldly" issues (e.g., the supernatural, the spiritual realm, the after-life). To remedy this situation, secularists attempted to establish a secular Christianity more in line with rational (natural) religion.

The rational (natural) religion that arose to challenge the revealed religion of Christianity was Deism. Deists believed that God created the universe as a first cause but has since allowed creation to unfold according to inherent laws and principles. Like an

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"absentee landlord," God is distant (transcendent) and does not intervene in human affairs. Deists rejected divine revelation and miracles, and attacked the church for promoting them. The goal of Deists was to rid the world of institutionalized religion in favor of a secular religion that would validate science by providing an intelligent Creator, and insure social order through natural law ethics.

An American example of Deism can be found in Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). Like the European Deists, Jefferson rejected the miracle stories in the gospels and focused on the ethical teachings of Jesus. Jefferson actually put this theory into practice by literally cutting out the miraculous from the gospels and pasting Jesus' ethics into a journal. The result was: "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels" (1805).\textsuperscript{5} In an 1813 letter to John Adams, Jefferson revealed his methodology: "I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and by arranging the matter which is evidently his [Jesus'], and which is as distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill."\textsuperscript{6}

The attempts of Deists to undermine traditional Christianity were in part successful due to their numerous polemics in pamphlets, articles, and books. Historian Roland Stromberg correctly observes, "The deistic writers, who were shrewd propagandists, while they failed to establish their positive creed, perhaps succeeded in what may have been their chief intent, to embarrass and discredit traditional

\textsuperscript{5}Most recently published as, Thomas Jefferson, \textit{The Jefferson Bible} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., 17.
Christianity. One of the reasons the Deists failed to advance their religion is that the masses of people were not as "noble minded." But this created a problem for the Deists, because they believed that reason was universally accessible. Stromberg offers this insight:

Deists alleged that all men have within them the light of reason enabling them to perceive all necessary religious truths without the unworthy crutch of revelation; but, on the other hand, almost all of them added that in fact most men do not have such ability, only the enlightened few do. To reconcile the contradiction they were driven to assert (a typical deistic utterance) that a conspiracy of priests had corrupted mankind and kept them in bondage.

In the end, Deism was the religion of the intelligensia (intellectual elite) and never became popular with the masses. Although Deists were committed to the secularization of religion, they failed to undermine traditional Christianity. Nonetheless, it was the commitment to a secular Christianity that gave rise to the Old Quest for the historical Jesus. For, if the Christ of faith (Jesus in canon and creed) was no longer tenable for the modern world, some Enlightenment thinkers reasoned, then perhaps the historical Jesus could be called upon to salvage the Christian religion. Interestingly, this is the same motivation to which the Jesus Seminar appeals to justify its quest for the historical Jesus.

2. Three Phases of the Old (German) Quest

Although the Old Quest manifested itself in England, France, and the United States, it was largely a German phenomenon. More than this, both the rise and demise of

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8Ibid., 130.
the Old Quest can be traced to the influence of German scholarship. For the purposes of this dissertation, only representatives of the German manifestation of the Old Quest will be considered.\(^9\) The Old Quest as it unfolded in Germany can be roughly divided into three overlapping phases: the rationalist phase, the liberal phase, and the history-of-religions phase.\(^10\) While we survey these three phases, the Jesus Seminar’s indebtedness to the Old Quest should become apparent. At the end of our review of the Old Quest, in an effort to clarify the affinity between these two quests, both similarities and differences will be delineated. Although the Jesus Seminar’s quest is not identical to the Old Quest, the Old Quest clearly provides the closest analogy.

The rationalist phase of the Old Quest is represented by Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768). Although a generalization, Reimarus has been credited with beginning the Old Quest for the historical Jesus.\(^11\) During his lifetime, Reimarus, a Professor of


\(^10\)These three phases were distinguished by Charles Anderson who developed further Albert Schweitzer’s own distinction. See Anderson’s _Critical Quests of Jesus_ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

\(^11\)Since Albert Schweitzer’s _Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung_ (1906) began with Reimarus, scholars have used Reimarus as a marker for the beginning of the Old Quest, even though they now recognize Reimarus’ indebtedness to the writings of earlier English Deists, e.g., John Toland, Matthew
Oriental Languages at the University of Hamburg, circulated among friends a manuscript he had written, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehter Gottes* (*Apology or Defense in Behalf of the Rational Worshippers of God*). Reimarus' *Apology* was a rational defense of Natural Religion as well as a polemic against traditional Christian beliefs, e.g., the deity of Christ, the trinity, Jesus' resurrection, and substitutionary atonement. In fact, Reimarus rejected the portrait of Jesus presented in canon and creed. Out of fear of reprisal, however, Reimarus refused to have the manuscript published. Shortly after Reimarus' death in 1768, family members entrusted the *Apology* to the care of Gotthold E. Lessing (1729-81). Between 1774 and 1778, Lessing published Reimarus' manuscript under the title *Fragmente eines Ungenannten*.\(^\text{12}\) The first six fragments were largely a defense of Natural Religion, specifically rejecting divine revelation and miracles. In these fragments, Reimarus also identified Jesus as a teacher of rational (natural) religion and a Christian as anyone who is rational and follows the ethical teachings of Jesus.

In the seventh and final fragment, *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, Reimarus distinguished between the aims of Jesus and the aims of his disciples. He writes, "I find great cause to separate completely what the apostles say in their own writings from that which Jesus himself actually said and taught, for the apostles were

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Tyndale, Peter Annet, Anthony Collins, and Thomas Woolston.

themselves teachers and consequently present their own views."\textsuperscript{13} Attempting to understand Jesus against the background of Judaism, Reimarus concluded that Jesus never intended to start a new religion but rather reform the Judaism of his day, particularly as represented by the Pharisees. Jesus affirmed the Mosaic law, including ceremonial laws, though he preferred the moral law. The good news of Jesus' proclamation was that in him the kingdom of God would be established on earth. Reimarus concluded that Jesus was a moral teacher who sought the renewal of Israel not the creation of a new religion. Jesus' intention was to establish the kingdom of God, a kingdom that was temporal and political. Jesus hoped to become Israel's earthly Messiah and to secure Israel's independence from Rome.

When Jesus' preaching failed to usher him into power, Reimarus contended, he tried to incite an uprising against Rome. Unfortunately, Jesus overestimated his popularity and was instead arrested and executed for insurrection. Jesus' cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" indicates that God had refused to help Jesus carry out his intention of establishing a messianic kingdom. Reimarus concluded, "It was then clearly not the intention or the object of Jesus to suffer and to die, but build up a worldly kingdom, and to deliver the Israelites from bondage. It was in this that God had forsaken him, it was in this that his hopes had been frustrated."\textsuperscript{14}

How, then, did the religion of Christianity get started? Reimarus argued that Christianity actually had its origin in the disciples, especially the apostle Paul, rather than

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Reimarus, Fragments}, 64.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, 150.
in Jesus. After Jesus' death the disciples stole the body and proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead and would return shortly to establish the kingdom of God. Beyond this, the disciples invented numerous miracle stories and applied them to the life of Jesus. The disciples, then, "strayed completely from their master in their teaching and in their lives, abandoning his religion and his intention and introducing a completely new system."15 This new system, according to Reimarus, was nothing more than a myth. Christianity, then, began as a fraud initiated by Jesus' own disciples, and this, according to Reimarus, to continue enjoying the comfort of preaching the gospel. "As, then, the new doctrine of the apostles was an undoubted fabrication, they must have invented it with a preconceived motive in their mind and will. Now as the former motives of the apostles, invariably and up to the time of the fabrications, had aimed at worldly wealth and power, it follows with all moral certainty that the possession of worldly wealth and power was also the object of the apostles in the fabrication of the new doctrine."16

How was Reimarus able to distinguish between the aims of Jesus from the aims of the disciples, if the only records that remained came from the hands of the disciples? Reimarus states that the evangelists carelessly left traces of Jesus' real intentions in their gospels: "It is evident with regard to the old system [i.e., the aim of Jesus to call Israel to renewal], all depends upon whether the evangelists, in their history of Jesus, left unintentionally and through sheer carelessness, a few remaining traces of the reasons which influenced them at first in attributing to their master the object of becoming a

15 Ibid., 102.

16 Ibid., 243.
worldly deliverer of Israel."\textsuperscript{17} The role of the historian, according to Reimarus, is to recover these traces and thus discover the actual Jesus. Reimarus’ legacy is to be found in the distinction he made between the aims of the actual Jesus and the aims of the disciples. Whereas Jesus called for the renewal of Israel, his disciples upon his death proclaimed his resurrection and imminent return, thus creating the Christian religion.

The second and perhaps largest phase of the Old Quest was the liberal phase. The word "liberal" here is not a reference to a particular theological position but to a particular nineteenth-century theological movement characterized by a critical view of the gospels and an optimistic view of humankind. Representative of the liberal phase is Adolph Harnack (1851-1930). Following in the footsteps of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Harnack attempted to salvage Christianity from rationalism. In contrast to Schleiermacher, however, Harnack believed that Christianity was a historical religion and thus susceptible to historical criticism. This included the position that the gospels were more theological than historical. Also, unlike Schleiermacher, Harnack rejected the Gospel of John as historically unreliable and embraced instead the two-source theory which accepted Markan priority and the existence of a sayings source called 'Q.' Harnack's contribution to Jesus studies can be seen in the publication of his lecture notes, \textit{Das Wesen des Christentums} (1900).\textsuperscript{18} Although translated into English under the title, \textit{What is Christianity?} a more accurate translation would be \textit{The Essence of Christianity}. The

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 135.

essence to which Harnack refers is the gospel ("good news") of Jesus' teachings. Harnack acknowledged that it was impossible to write a biography of the life of Jesus, but he nonetheless identified the historical Jesus as an ethical teacher whose message was unique, distinct not only from hellenistic religions but even Judaism.

The essence of Jesus' message, according to Harnack, was threefold: "Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming. Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul. Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love." 19 The role of the church, according to Harnack, was to transform society into the kingdom of God, a kingdom characterized by love and ethics. Harnack believed that the early church distorted the essence of Christianity rather than preserved it. Whereas Jesus proclaimed the gospel, the church proclaimed him, thus changing the gospel of Jesus into the gospel about Jesus. Although Jesus was an exemplary man, Harnack was concerned that the church had turned him into the divine Son of God. Harnack believed that it was possible to move beyond this distortion and recover the actual teachings of Jesus. The historian's task, according to Harnack, is to get behind the sources to recover Jesus' essential message and challenge the tyranny of ecclesiastical dogma. The historian must extract the "kernel" (essence of Christianity) from the "husk" (hellenized formulations of the church). The kernel is "the rule of the holy God in the hearts of individuals," while the husk is the apocalyptic language of the kingdom. 20


20Ibid., 56.
The third phase in the Old Quest for the historical Jesus is the history of religions phase. *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ("The history-of-religions school") of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century attempted to understand Christianity within the context of its religious environment. Through their efforts, many parallels were discovered between Christianity and other contemporary religions. Because of these shared elements, the history of religions school concluded that Christianity was not unique but was rather the result of syncretism. In other words, Christianity had borrowed its primary concepts from other religions, namely, Stoicism, Rationalism, Greek mystery religions, Gnosticism, Mysticism, and Judaism. Inspite of these influences on formative Christianity, the history of religions school maintained that Jesus' message was unique, unaffected by other religions. Jesus, in effect, is the hero of religious history.

Representative of the history-of-religions phase in the quest for the historical Jesus is Wilhelm Bousset. Bousset's *Kyrios Christos* (1913)\(^{21}\) described how the image of the "real" Jesus was changed into the Christ of faith by the early church. Bousset actually identified four stages in the development of the Christ myth: first, the Palestinian church began to speak of Jesus as the apocalyptic "Son of Man;" next the hellenistic churches portrayed Jesus as a divine mystical figure; third, the apostle Paul borrowed from oriental mystery religions in his identification of Jesus as a preexistent divine being, who died and rose again; and lastly, the author of John described Jesus in terms of the gnostic redeemer myth. Although all four stages contribute to the perversion of the

historical Jesus, Bousset credits the Apostle Paul with the creation of Christianity. For Bousset, as with the liberal quest, the historical Jesus was an ethical teacher of the kingdom of God.

3. The Making of a Secularizing Quest: The Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar

The Old Quest for the historical Jesus was diverse, even in its German manifestation. Nonetheless, certain generalization can be made, particularly the type of quest that it was and what characteristics this entails. The best way to describe the Old Quest is as a secularizing quest. Secularization, as mentioned previously, grew out of the Enlightenment and was largely an attempt to remove all vestiges of ancient myths and superstition from every area of life, including the religious. Secularists exhibited a fourfold commitment: rational religion, moralizing, individualism, and humanism. One of the main concerns of secularists was that religion was distracting people from "this-worldly" interests with "other-worldly" concerns. To remedy this situation, secularists set out to replace traditional Christianity with a secular Christianity. The Old Quest is best understood as the logical conclusion of this process.

Because the Jesus Seminar shares so many of the characteristics of the Old Quest, it too is best understood as a secularizing quest. But what exactly are these characteristics? The primary characteristic of both quests is their motivation, namely, to overthrow the Christ of faith, as epitomized by Chalcedonian christology, because he is no longer tenable for the modern world. The goal of both quests is to secularize Christianity by removing the shackles of dogmatic orthodoxy and setting free the historical Jesus. The assumption in both the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar is that the
Christ of faith is a mythical figure created by the early church. As a result of this assumption, these quests have emphasized a radical discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

A second characteristic of a secularizing quest is that scholars seem compelled to attack those who would propagate the Christ of faith. Since the church, both early and modern, promotes this view, it is summarily attacked. From the perspective of the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar, the early church betrayed the Jesus tradition and distorted the message of Jesus. Although both quests identify the disciples as the culprits, they differ on the motivation of the disciples. Reimarus, for example, believed that the disciples were largely motivated to alter Jesus' teaching for financial gain. The Jesus Seminar, on the other hand, suggests that the disciples did not fully understand the message of Jesus, so that at his death they reverted back to the apocalypticism they had learned from John the Baptist. Both the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar, however, agree that the apostle Paul must be credited with the invention of Christianity through his blending of the Jesus tradition with hellenistic myth. The propagation of the Christ myth did not end with early Christianity, according to secularizing quests, but became formulated in various creeds and continues to be proclaimed in the churches. For this reason, the modern church has become the object of anti-ecclesiastical rhetoric in both the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar.

A third characteristic shared by the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar is the rhetoric of historical positivism. Both quests claim historical objectivity in their research as well as historical certainty in their results. But how can they be so confident about
their efforts when they both believe that the sources about Jesus, namely the canonical gospels, are theologically writings? It seems that these scholars are equally convinced about their ability to use critical tools to get behind the sources. This could be done, they believed, by identifying the traces of the historical Jesus in the gospels, traces of which have been unwittingly left there by the Evangelists. Scholars of the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar are optimistic about their ability to reconstruct the historical Jesus. This naive optimism becomes obvious when these scholars confuse the historical Jesus with the "real" Jesus, as though the historian’s reconstruction is equivalent to the man who lived and breathed in first-century Palestine. As argued in the previous chapter, such optimism is misplaced, as historical research cannot reproduce the "real" anyone. It would appear, then, that the Old Quest did naively what the Jesus Seminar is now doing intentionally.

A fourth common characteristic is the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus as a non-eschatological teacher of kingdom ethics. For both the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar, the kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus is a present reality. These two quests differ only on their understanding of the ethics of the kingdom. Whereas this ethic was identified as an ethic of love in the Old Quest, it is identified as an ethic of egalitarianism and reciprocity in the Jesus Seminar’s quest. Both quests agree, however, that the historical Jesus, or rather his teachings, are the proper object of Christian faith. The pursuit of a secularizing quest by the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar has led to their portrayal of the historical Jesus as a secularist. Having evaluated the Seminar’s portrait of Jesus in the previous chapter, it is time to consider the critical responses to the
Jesus constructed by the Old Quest.

4. The Demise of the Old Quest

At the turn of the twentieth-century the Old Quest met its demise, largely at the hands of German scholars. The greatest criticism against the Old Quest, and the one that led to its demise, was its defective historical method. The central issue was: how could objective historians reconstruct a portrait of Jesus that looked so very much like them? Contributing to the demise of the Old Quest were Johannes Weiss (1863-1914), Martin Kähler (1835-1912), William Wrede (1859-1906), and Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). In *Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes.*,²² Johannes Weiss investigated Jesus' teaching on the "kingdom of God." Based upon his study, Weiss concluded that Jesus' prophetic proclamation of repentance in light of the imminent end of the world and the coming kingdom of God placed him within the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic. Jesus, according to Weiss, came to believe that he was the "Son of Man" who would come on the clouds of heaven. In contrast to the liberal portrait of Jesus as an ethical teacher, Weiss concluded that the historical Jesus is best understood as an apocalyptic prophet. This apocalyptic Jesus predicted not the improvement of society but its impending judgment and doom. Weiss concluded that an apocalyptic Jesus held no relevance for the modern world. His view, however, made little impact on scholarship until it was incorporated into Schweitzer's landmark book, *Von Reimar zu Wrede* (1906).

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Martin Kähler, in Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus (1892), condemned the quest for the historical Jesus. He believed that the quest was "a blind alley," historically impossible and theologically unnecessary. The life-of-Jesus movement, according to Kähler, was too confident about its historical method, when, in fact, its method was quite limited. For example, scholars of the Old Quest attempted to get behind the sources to construct their portrait of the historical Jesus. The sources, however, do not lend themselves to this approach since they are fragmentary (i.e., incomplete) and biased (i.e., contain the personal testimonies and confessions of believers in Christ). How, then, did questers accomplish their task? Kähler observed,

"It is plainly evident that the imagination which thus orders and shapes the Gospel materials is being guided by still another force, namely, by a preconceived view of religion and ethical matters...But when Christology appears in the form of a 'Life of Jesus,' there are not many who will perceive the stage manager behind the scenes, manipulating, according to his own dogmatic script, the fascinating spectacle of a colorful biography."\(^{24}\)

Rather than complete their task with objectivity and certainty, Kähler argued, the scholars of the Old Quest were quite subjective, offering nothing more than the creative results of their own imaginations. Kähler was also concerned that Old Quest scholars were attempting to understand Jesus utilizing the principle of analogy. This principle, Kähler


\(^{24}\) Kähler, The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ, 55-56.
believed, was not applicable to Jesus because he was unique not only in degree but kind.25 Unlike any other person in human history Jesus was sinless. For this reason, Kähler concluded, the principle of analogy was not helpful in understanding Jesus.

Having challenged the Old Quest for its inadequate historical method, Kähler turned to theological concerns. Kähler pointed out that the historical Jesus was simply an historical reconstruction that owed more to the creative imagination of Old Quest scholars than to historical fact. The historical Jesus, according to Kähler, is nothing more than an abstraction with no foundation in history. Since the historical Jesus is a subjective and tentative reconstruction, it can never be the basis of Christian faith. Kähler inquired, "How can this figure of Jesus--this tentative residue remaining after the work of critical subtraction--which must now, for the first time, be ingeniously evoked from the mist of the past, be the object of faith for all Christians?"26

Kähler was the first to articulate the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith that had been previously assumed in the Old Quest. In response to this distinction, Kähler argued the historical Jesus conceals rather than reveals the Christ of faith. Kähler wrote,

...the historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ. The Jesus of the "Life-of-Jesus movement" is merely a modern example of human creativity, and not an iota better than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. In this respect historicism is just as arbitrary, just as humanly arrogant, just as impertinent and 'faithlessly gnostic' as

25Ibid., 52-53.

26Ibid., 103.
that dogmatism which in its day was also considered modern.\textsuperscript{27}

Not only did the historical Jesus conceal the Christ of faith, according to Kähler, but historical research limited access to the Christ of faith. Because of its complicated methodology, Kähler believed that historical research makes the Christ of faith inaccessible to the general public.

The "real" Jesus, for Kähler, is the kerygmatic Christ who is revealed in the gospels and proclaimed in the churches. "The real Christ, that is, the Christ who has exercised an influence in history, with whom millions have communed in childlike faith, and with whom the great witnesses of faith have been in communion—while striving, apprehending, triumphing, and proclaiming—this real Christ is the Christ who is preached. The Christ who is preached, however, is precisely the Christ of faith."\textsuperscript{28} Kähler's challenge to the life-of-Jesus movement, then, was twofold. First, he observed that the historical method of these questers was limited, thus undermining the historical confidence of the Old Quest. Second, Kähler argued that historical reconstructions of Jesus have never and can never be the basis of Christian faith. The 'real' Jesus, for Kähler, was the risen Lord proclaimed in the church, past and present.

William Wrede also contributed to the demise of the Old Quest by challenging the historical possibility of the quest. In his \textit{Das Messiasgesheimnis in den Evangelien}

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 66.
(1901), Wrede stated that the author of the Gospel of Mark was theologically motivated in the development of the secrecy motif which ran throughout his gospel. Wrede argued that the gospels, as we have them, are not objective historical biographies. Although scholars of the Old Quest had accepted this, they were nonetheless confident that traces of the historical Jesus could be identified in the gospels. Contrary to the Old Quest, Wrede pointed out that the gospels, including the Gospel of Mark, do not provide straightforward history with direct access to the historical Jesus. In Mark, Wrede observed a theological theme running throughout the gospel, namely, the messianic secret. This theme, according to Wrede, reveals more about the Evangelists and his particular community than about the historical Jesus. Wrede was convinced that little could be known about the historical Jesus from the gospels. By identifying Mark as primarily a theological writing, Wrede destroyed confidence in the historical possibility of the Old Quest.

In his monumental book, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (1906), Albert Schweitzer weighed the scholarship of the Old Quest in a balance and had found it wanting. Although he had overlooked Kähler's 1892 book, Schweitzer nonetheless concluded with Kähler that scholars of the Old Quest had

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constructed the historical Jesus after their own image while attempting to make him relevant to the modern world. Like Kähler, Schweitzer recognized the anti-ecclesiastical agenda of the Old Quest: "The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma."31 Schweitzer observed that the historical Jesus of the Old Quest was "a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb."32

Unlike Kähler, however, Schweitzer did not simply dismiss the quest as historically impossible, for he believed that the historical Jesus could be recovered, if only scholars exercised greater objectivity in historical research. Ignoring the historical skepticism of Wrede, Schweitzer used the gospels, especially Matthew, rather uncritically to construct his own portrait of the historical Jesus. Schweitzer maintained the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, as he initiated his own quest. Building upon the work of Weiss, Schweitzer discovered that the historical Jesus was a Jewish apocalyptic prophet who had proclaimed the imminent end of the world. Jesus' "consistent (thoroughgoing) eschatology," as Schweitzer called it, placed the messianic kingdom into the future when the "Son of Man" would appear. In fact, Jesus had hoped that his death would force God's hand and immediately usher in the kingdom of God.

31 Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 4.

32 Ibid., 398. This classic quote from Schweitzer is second only to George Tyrell's comment that the historical Jesus of the Old Quest was "only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well," in Christianity at the Crossroads (London: Longmans Green, 1910): 44.
Quite poetically Schweitzer writes,

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.\(^33\)

But how could the scholars of the Old Quest have missed the obvious apocalyptic elements in the gospels? Schweitzer concluded that their desire to make Jesus relevant for the modern world clouded their historical judgment.

Schweitzer agreed with Weiss that a portrait of the historical Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet does not hold theological relevance for the modern world. "The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma."\(^34\) Theological significance for Schweitzer was to be found in the risen Christ: "But the truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help us. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world."\(^35\) Schweitzer, then, in agreement with the Old Quest continued the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. And like the Old Quest, Schweitzer

\(^33\)Ibid., 370-371.

\(^34\)Ibid., 399.

\(^35\)Ibid., 401.
was convinced that a quest for the historical Jesus was historically possible. In stark contrast to the Old Quest, however, Schweitzer argued that the historical Jesus is irrelevant to Christian faith. The proper object of Christian faith, for Schweitzer, was the risen Christ. For most of the twentieth-century, Schweitzer's insights would be accepted by New Testament scholars and his portrait of the historical Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet would likewise dominate.

4. Impact of Bultmann on the Quest for the Historical Jesus

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) accepted Schweitzer's (and Kähler's) conclusion that the historical Jesus was irrelevant for Christian faith. He likewise affirmed that the kerygmatic Christ alone was the proper object of Christian faith. In fact, for Bultmann it was theologically unnecessary to attempt to reconstruct the historical Jesus: "It is therefore illegitimate to go behind the kerygma, using it as a 'source,' in order to reconstruct a 'historical Jesus' with his 'messianic consciousness,' his 'inner life' or his 'heroism.' That would be merely 'Christ after the flesh,' who is no longer."36 Bultmann's aversion to "works-righteousness" here is clearly rooted in his Lutheran pietism. In spite of his rejection of the quest, Bultmann did allow for some continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Bultmann stated,

The Jesus Christ who is God's Son, a preexistent divine being, is at the same time a certain historical person, Jesus of Nazareth; and his destiny as a person is not only a mythical occurrence but at the same time a human destiny that ends with crucifixion. The historical and mythical here are

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peculiarly intertwined.\textsuperscript{37}

Nonetheless, Bultmann was adamant that Christian faith is not dependent upon historical "facts."

Although Bultmann accepted Schweitzer's conclusion about the theological irrelevance of the historical Jesus, he rejected Schweitzer's optimism toward the gospels.

In agreement with Wrede, Bultmann believed that a quest for the historical Jesus was historically impossible given the theological nature of the gospels: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist."\textsuperscript{38} For Bultmann, all that could be known about Jesus with any historical certainty was the "thatness" (dass) of Jesus, i.e., that Jesus existed and that he died on a cross, and not the "whatness" (was) of Jesus' life.\textsuperscript{39}

Although some scholars would later use form critical methods to work back though the gospel tradition to recover the historical Jesus, Bultmann maintained that form criticism puts us in touch not with the historical Jesus but with the literary forms created by the


\textsuperscript{38}Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Scribner, 1934): 14. In fairness, it must be noted that Bultmann later modified (clarified) his position to include the possibility of some historically accurate information about Jesus.

early Christian communities. The results of form criticism, according to Bultmann, tell us more about the early church than they do about Jesus.

Bultmann was not completely without concern for the historical Jesus, especially his teachings. The criterion of dissimilarity, in fact, is traced to Bultmann. In *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921), Bultmann wrote, "We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus, where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features." In 1967, Norman Perrin coined the phrase "criterion of dissimilarity" to describe this principle of Bultmann. Perrin also gave this criterion its classic definition: "if we are to ascribe a saying to Jesus...we must be able to show that the saying comes neither from the Church nor from ancient Judaism." In his *Jesus and the Word* (1926), Bultmann dismissed the events and chronology of the gospels as the work of the evangelists. Building upon the work of the history-of-religions school, Bultmann concluded that the gospels were significantly influenced by hellenized Christianity, and, yet, the authentic message of Jesus is unique. Using various criteria, Bultmann evaluated the sayings of Jesus and found only a handful to be authentic. In these sayings, Bultmann discovered that Jesus was the bearer of the word. The word, as Bultmann understood it, was Jesus' existential call for people to embrace authentic living.

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Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus is clearly rooted in the existentialism of Martin Heidegger, who was reacting against the extremes of rationalism and romanticism. Instead of detached observation in life, the existentialists advocated subjective participation. For them, authentic existence could only be experienced when one has faced angst (the ontological dread of non-being) and chosen to embrace life in spite of its absurdity. For Bultmann, authenticity was possible only through faith in God's love as disclosed in Christ.

What, then, was Bultmann's contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus? Bultmann's use of form criticism convinced him that the gospels were primarily theological writings, rendering the quest historically impossible. The existential theology of Bultmann led him to conclude that such a quest was theologically irrelevant. With neither historical possibility nor theological relevance, the quest layed dormant for several decades until it was resurrected paradoxically by some of Bultmann's students.

B. The Short-lived New Quest for the Historical Jesus

1. Käsemann's Challenge and the Post-Bultmannian Response

In a 1953 lecture, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus,"\textsuperscript{42} which was addressed to the "old Marburgers" (i.e., Bultmannians), Ernst Käsemann attempted to move beyond Bultmann's historical skepticism by challenging Bultmann's former students\textsuperscript{43} to discover


\textsuperscript{43}That Käsemann intended his challenge to be limited to Bultmann's former students can be seen not only from the context of his speech, but from a later comment by Käsemann himself: "The purpose of my paper on the historical Jesus was to revive
continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ proclaimed by the early church, lest they be accused of docetism. Käsemann, however, did agreed with Bultmann that a "life of Jesus," i.e., a complete biographical account of Jesus' life, cannot be written, that the gospels are theological documents, and that the kerygmatic Christ is alone the proper object of Christian faith.

Unlike Bultmann, however, Käsemann was convinced that Christian faith cannot be divorced from its historical roots. Without an historical base, Käsemann believed, Jesus would simply become a myth as he had in docetism. Regarding the motive of the New Quest, Ben Meyer has correctly observed that the intention was "to reintroduce Jesus into theology as more than a mere factual presupposition."44 Käsemann also rejected Bultmann's radical skepticism toward the gospel tradition: "there are still pieces in the synoptic tradition which the historian has to acknowledge as authentic if he wishes to remain a historian at all."45 For Käsemann, then, a quest for the historical Jesus, which sought a partial reconstruction, was both historically possible and theological necessary.

Käsemann's challenge received responses from fellow post-Bultmannians. The phrase "post-Bultmannian" was coined by James Robinson in 1959: "This second phase of post-war German theology may be designated as 'post-Bultmannian' in the stricter debate within the circle of Bultmann's pupils," in Heinz Zahrnt, Die Sach mit Gott (Munich: Piper, 1966); ET: The Question of God (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1969): 253.


sense: led by outstanding pupils of Bultmann, it is based upon a thorough appreciation of the achievements of Bultmann's brilliant career, and could not have taken place without these achievements. Yet it sees its task as that of carrying through a critical revision of Bultmann's position, out of which revision the theological synthesis of the future will grow. The first part of this new programme to get seriously underway is with regard to the problem of the historical Jesus.\(^{46}\)

Cullen Murphy notes that Käsemann's 1953 lecture "effectively ushered in the post-Bultmann age.\(^{47}\) To be included among the post-Bultmannian responses to Käsemann challenge are: Günther Bornkamm (1956),\(^{48}\) Ernst Fuchs (1956),\(^{49}\) Ianz Conzelmann (1959),\(^{50}\) James M. Robinson (1959),\(^{51}\) Gerhard Ebeling (1962).\(^{52}\)

\(^{46}\)Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 12.


\(^{51}\)A *New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Robinson's book was more a herald of the New Quest than a contributor to that quest.

James Robinson designated these post-Bultmannian responses to Käsemann's challenge as "the so-called New Quest." It is new because it "has to do with a quite different kind of quest based upon new premises, procedures and objectives, a quest that may well succeed in a way the other did not."\(^{53}\) This included a rejection of the historical positivism that had characterized the Old Quest. In its place, the New Quest offered an existential approach to historical investigation which was really an extension of Bultmann's existential interpretation of the gospels. According to this existential approach to history, historians should concern themselves with the inside of events rather than the mere externals, such as facts and causes. When approached in this manner, history offers an existential encounter between the historian and the event that leads to self-understanding and the possibility of authentic existence. Robinson states, "A quest of the historical Jesus involves an attempt to disengage information about the historical Jesus from its kerygmatic colouring, and thus to mediate an encounter with the historical Jesus distinct from the encounter with the kerygma."\(^{54}\) This encounter, for the New Quest, involves the historical Jesus confronting us with an existential decision. It was this call to decision that provided the New Quest with the continuity it sought between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

It is impossible to understand the New Quest apart from the New Hermeneutic that grew out of it. Two scholars of the New Quest, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, are credited with initiating this New Hermeneutic, which never grew very far beyond its

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\(^{54}\)Ibid., 79-80.
post-Bultmannian roots. Fuchs and Ebeling built upon Bultmann's interpretive approach to Scripture, namely, demythologizing, where biblical texts were interpreted both critically and existentially. To this, Fuchs and Ebeling added a philosophy of language that was indebted to the work of Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer.

According to Heidegger and Gadamer, since language is grounded in being, it does more than just impart information; it conveys reality. Because of this, the act of reading can lead the reader to a new horizon of understanding. As the reader interprets the text, the text interprets the reader, resulting in a "fusion of horizons" in which previous ways of understanding are shattered and the reader is challenged to embrace a new understanding of existence. The text, then, becomes an authentic "language event" for the reader.

Critical methodolgies were not rejected by the New Hermeneutic, for they indeed had their place. The role of historical criticism was to remove the later theological accretions of the early church in order to delimit the language of Jesus.

In many ways Bultmann's former students, even though they sought a corrective to Bultmann's historical skepticism, were nonetheless indebted to his presuppositions and methodologies. John Reumann correctly notes, "While the New Quest continues to recognize the kerygma as the 'cutting-edge' of the gospel (always viewing Jesus as the Christ, and never just as Jesus), and while a 'proved' Jesus is still regarded as both historically impossible and theologically a contradiction, it is held that a quest back through the kerygma will reveal a Jesus behind it who, particularly in his sayings, is
consistent with, and of a pattern with, the church's proclamation." So then, even though the post-Bultmannians believed that a quest for the historical Jesus was historically possible and sought continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, they agreed with Bultmann that only the latter is the proper object of faith. The continuity they found, however, was not so much historical as it was theological. Both the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, according to scholars of the New Quest, called for an existential decision of faith. But whereas Jesus proclaimed an existential message, the church proclaimed Jesus as the existential message. M. Eugene Boring has rightly observed, "Bultmann and the post-Bultmannian 'New Quest' exemplify how existential hermeneutics can allow Jesus to be the apocalyptic figure he was and still be reinterpreted in the New Testament and by contemporary theology as mediating the word of God in a way that addresses later, non-apocalyptic generations."^56

2. The Jesus Seminar's Roots in the New Quest

The Jesus Seminar and the New Quest are radically different, although they do share some common elements. This commonality is due, in part, to their mutual indebtedness to the work of Bultmann. Both the New Quest and the Jesus Seminar adopt Bultmann's skepticism toward the canonical gospels, identifying much in the gospel tradition as embellished or fabricated by the Evangelists. Like Bultmann, the Seminar and the New Quest also privilege the sayings of Jesus because they were


believed to provide the most reliable tradition and because they convey the essence of Jesus' ministry. Both groups use Bultmann's criteria of dissimilarity to distinguish authentic sayings in the Jesus tradition, resulting in minimal results and the neglect of Jesus' socio-historical context. Beyond the sharing of a common Bultmannian heritage, the Jesus Seminar and the New Quest have in common the conviction that a quest for the historical Jesus is historically possible and theologically relevant. Although the Jesus Seminar and the New Quest share these common elements, the Jesus Seminar is no mere extension of the New Quest. Whereas the New Quest stressed the unity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, the Jesus Seminar, following in the footsteps of the Old Quest, emphasize discontinuity. Also, unlike the New Quest, and Bultmann for that matter, the Jesus Seminar seeks to overthrow the Christ of faith and establish their portrait of the historical Jesus as the proper object of Christian faith. For Bultmann and the New Quest, this would be knowing "Christ after the flesh."

3. The Failure of the New Quest

The New Quest has not been without its critics. Some scholars challenged the legitimacy of using existential hermeneutics for historical studies. Others questioned the New Quest's neglect of Jesus' socio-historical context. And still others were critical of the criterion of dissimilarity, which was applied to the sayings of Jesus to determine authenticity. Craig A. Evans said, "because of its heavy reliance upon the negative


criterion of dissimilarity, the Jesus tradition that is accepted as authentic, which turns out to represent only a slim portion of the tradition as a whole, may be indeed distinctive to Jesus, but not necessarily representative or characteristic of his teaching and ministry as a whole.\textsuperscript{59}

Criticism also came from within the Bultmann camp itself, particularly on the continuity proposed by the New Quest between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ. Norman Perrin writes, "This is a bold assumption indeed! In the first place it ignores the variety of kerygmata in the New Testament itself, the existence, in fact, of a multiplicity of Christs of different kerygmata; and in the second place, it ignores equally the possibility of tension between the results of historical-critical research and the kerygmata of the New Testament."\textsuperscript{60} Under the weight of these criticisms, the New Quest began to wane shortly after its beginning.

Although significant in the history of New Testament scholarship, the New Quest was short-lived. Its demise is described well by Colin Brown,

If Harnack's Jesus had the face of a liberal Protestant, and Schweitzer's the heroic demeanor of Nietzsche's superman, the Jesus of the New Quest was a existential philosopher whose presence in history was barely discernable behind the kerygma. He is encountered in a kind of existential vacuum from which the historical conditions of the 1st century were largely excluded. The New Quest ended scarcely two decades after it started. Its demise coincided with the end of the Bultmann era and the


\textsuperscript{60}Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, 233.
passing of existential philosophy.\textsuperscript{61}

The New Quest, with its unique assumptions, methods, and results has ended, yet interest in the historical Jesus continues to grow.

C. The "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus

1. The Current Renaissance in Jesus Research

Although the Old Quest and the so-called New Quest have come and gone, many scholars today are now observing a renewed interest in the historical Jesus among New Testament scholars.\textsuperscript{62} Because of the large number of scholars involved in this renaissance in Jesus Research, some observers are referring to a "Third Quest." The


phrase "Third Quest" was actually coined by N. T. Wright in 1988.\textsuperscript{63} Since then it has become commonly used to refer to recent Jesus studies. James Charlesworth, however, prefers the phrase, "Jesus Research," since it avoids association with previous theologically motivated quests: "Let us remember that this rubric is not another quest for the historical Jesus which was a search instituted to serve primarily theological needs. Jesus research denotes the study of the expanding evidence of Jesus' particular time to discern what life was like in the first century, in Palestine, and when the Temple was still the center of attention."\textsuperscript{64} Since Charlesworth's distinction is not convincing, the two phrases, "Third Quest" and "Jesus Research," will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{63}Wright, "History and Theology," 379.

Although James Charlesworth dates the beginning of current Jesus research to around 1980, this is not completely accurate.\(^\text{65}\) As early as 1973, Gustav Aulen observed, "It can scarcely be contested that research concerning Jesus now has greater possibilities at its disposal than it had earlier and that it has thus entered into a new phase."\(^\text{66}\) For examples of this new phase, Aulen points to the works of C. H. Dodd (1970), Herbert Braun (1969), and Joachim Jeremias (1971). More recent observers of Jesus Research likewise identify writings on Jesus from the 1960s and 70s as part of the Third Quest, writing such as, S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (1967), Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (1968), David Flusser, *Jesus* (1969), John W. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (1973), and Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (1973).\(^\text{67}\) Moreover, too many books from the mid-late 1960s and early 1970s share the same concerns and interests of more recent books on the historical Jesus. When dating the commencement of the Third Quest, it is best to locate it on the heels of the New Quest, roughly the mid-1960s.

2. **Contributors to the Third Quest**

One of the difficulties in describing the Third Quest is the tremendous diversity of scholars, sources, methodologies, and results. N. T. Wright correctly observes, "The

\(^{65}\)James Charlesworth, "From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings," 221.


current wave of books about Jesus offers a bewildering range of competing hypotheses. There is no unifying theological agenda; no final agreement about method; certainly no common sets of results.\textsuperscript{68} Because current Jesus Research is not only diverse but vast, any survey will be at best cursory. In spite of this, the material must be simplified in some fashion if the Third Quest is to be comprehensible. Toward such a simplification, we will begin with a survey of the prominent scholars in the Third Quest. These scholars will be organized according to geographical location and/or religious heritage, i.e., German, Jewish, British, North American Catholic, and North American Protestant. Having surveyed these scholars, some characteristics of the Third Quest will then be delineated.

Many of the earliest works of the Third Quest came out of Germany. Although these writings came on the heels of the New Quest, they were clearly distinct from it. The primary difference is that scholars of the Third Quest focused their attention more on the socio-historical context of first-century Jewish Palestine in their attempts to reconstruct the historical Jesus. Significant here have been Martin Hengel (1968),\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{68}Wright, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 800.


Since the primary characteristic of current Jesus Research is the attempt to locate Jesus within the Judaism of first-century Palestine, it is significant that many respected Jewish scholars have contributed to the Third Quest. Major contributions have come

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from Asher Finkel (1964),\textsuperscript{76} S. G. F. Brandon (1967),\textsuperscript{77} David Flusser (1968),\textsuperscript{78} John Bowker (1973),\textsuperscript{79} Geza Vermes (1973),\textsuperscript{80} M. Bazes (1976),\textsuperscript{81} Gaalyahu Cornfeld (1982),\textsuperscript{82} David Winter (1982),\textsuperscript{83} Ellis Rivkin (1984),\textsuperscript{84} Harvey Falk (1985),\textsuperscript{85} Bernard Lee (1988),\textsuperscript{86} and Irving Zeitlin (1988).\textsuperscript{87}

British scholars have made and continue to make important contributions to the

\textsuperscript{76} The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth: A Study of Their Background, Their Halachic and Midrashic Teachings, the Similarities and Differences (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964).

\textsuperscript{77} Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity (New York: Scribner's, 1967).


\textsuperscript{79} Jesus and the Pharisees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).


\textsuperscript{81} Jesus the Jew--The Historical Jesus: The True Story of Jesus (Jerusalem: Alpha, 1976).

\textsuperscript{82} The Historical Jesus: A Scholarly View of the Man and His World (London: SCM Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{83} The Search for the Real Jesus (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982),

\textsuperscript{84} What Crucified Jesus? The Political Execution of a Charismatic (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984)

\textsuperscript{85} Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).


\textsuperscript{87} Jesus and the Judaism of His Time (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).


91 *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: SCM Press, 1982).

92 *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).


97 *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

Britain was the formation of the "Jesus Seminar" of the British New Testament Conference.

Without a doubt the majority of contributions to the Third Quest have come from North American scholars. In the early 1970s, perceiving the growing interest in the historical Jesus in North America, Fortress Press published major works from the Old Quest "to encourage a fresh discovery of and a lively debate with this tradition so that our own work may be richer and more precise." 99 During the 1980s, interest in the historical Jesus continued to grow, as can be seen in the creation of the "Historical Jesus Section" in the Society of Biblical Literature (1981). 100 Both Protestant and Catholic North American scholars have made major contributions to the Third Quest. For Catholic scholarship on the historical Jesus, see Ben Meyer (1979), 101 Donald Goergen

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100 The Historical Jesus section is a sub-group of the Society of Biblical Literature that was organized in 1981 by Paul Hollenbach and John Miller.


North American Protestant scholars, from a variety of theological perspectives, have significantly impacted current Jesus Research. To be included among these contributors are: Howard Clark Kee (1970), 106 George Edwards (1972), 107 Richard Hiers


112 Jesus: The King and the Kingdom (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984).

113 A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984); idem, Profiles of a Rabbi: Synoptic Opportunities in Reading about Jesus (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); idem, The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1992).

114 Jesus and Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1985); idem, The Historical Figure of Jesus (London: Penguin Press, 1993).


The amount of major works on the historical Jesus is overwhelming. The variety of scholars indicate that the current quest transcends geographical and religious boundaries. This brief survey of contributors to recent Jesus research reveals that the Third Quest appeared in the late-1960s and early-1970s. In the 1980s and 90s, this renewed interest in Jesus grew exponentially. As biblical studies is about to enter the twenty-first-century, Jesus research shows no sign of waning. If anything, Jesus studies appears to be gaining momentum as Jesus scholars continue to make advances in the quest for the historical Jesus.

3. Characteristics of the Third Quest

Although this survey of current Jesus Research focused only on main works, it becomes clear just how overwhelming is the scholarship of the Third Quest. To


120 *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1993).

121 *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1994).

characterize this quest is an equally formidable task, especially since the Third Quest is pursued by such a wide range of scholars, using a variety of methods and arriving at different portraits of the historical Jesus. Nonetheless, two characteristics stand out. First, there is a new appreciation among scholars for the Jewishness of Jesus. This observation was made as early as 1974 by Jewish scholar, Shalom Ben-Chorin: "the modern Jewish image of Jesus is far more positive than the medieval image. Not only is the historicity of Jesus rarely denied, but much of the gospel material (particularly the synoptics) is readily accepted. Jesus' preaching and parables and prayers, his nationalism, and his life and death are seen to be comprehensible only in a Jewish context." In recent years, James Charlesworth has likewise observed that Jesus research exhibits a "new appreciation of Jesus as a Jew who belongs to the complex world of early Judaism (c. 250 B.C. to c. A.D. 200)." Related to this new appreciation for the Jewishness of Jesus is a second characteristic of the Third Quest, namely, a greater interest in first-century Palestine. Scholars of the Third Quest appear more committed to understanding the complex world of first-century Judaism in order to comprehend Jesus more thoroughly against this background. E. P. Sanders has rightly observed, "The dominant view today seems to be that we can know pretty well what Jesus was out to accomplish, that we can know a lot about what he said, and that those


two things make sense within the world of first-century Judaism."\textsuperscript{125}

What has led to the resurgence of interest in the historical Jesus? Helpful here is William Telford's observation that two major factors have contributed to recent Jesus Research: "the broadening of the scholars source-base and the application of new critical methods and approaches (especially those of the social sciences)."\textsuperscript{126} Regarding this source base, Telford distinguishes between foreground data and background data. Foreground data, according to Telford, would include the various traditions about Jesus, e.g., sayings, miracles, passion narrative, etc. In contrast, background data is information about the general socio-historical milieu in which Jesus lived.\textsuperscript{127} The concept of background in the Third Quest, however, is used in a qualified sense. James Charlesworth rightly notes,

On the one hand, we will see how the elusive background of Jesus' life is now much clearer than it was even twenty years ago, and, on the other hand, we will see how the amorphous concept "background" tends more and more to seep over into the preconceived foreground. The Judaism of Jesus' day was richer and more variegated than we had supposed; and Jesus himself had closer contacts with that Judaism than many New Testament specialists had previously presumed.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} Sanders, \textit{Jesus and Judaism}, 2.

\textsuperscript{126} Telford, "Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus," 47.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{128} Charlesworth, \textit{Jesus within Judaism}, 5. In 1982, the Jewish scholar, David Winter, had already observed this trend: "But the last decade has seen an amazing transformation. Now, the Jesus of history seems more accessible than ever. Like archaeologists swarming over a prime location, historians and theologians have turned with gusto to the original documents, parallel historical records and the geographical sites, and at every turn have found a clearer and clearer picture emerging of Jesus of Nazareth," in his \textit{The Search for the Real Jesus} (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-
The foreground and background data in the Third Quest, then, work together in a hermeneutical circle. According to E. P. Sanders, this is simply good historiography: "There is as is usual in dealing with historical questions, no opening which does not involve one in a circle of interpretation, that is, which does not depend on points which in turn require us to understand others. Historians always work in this kind of circle, moving from evidence to tentative conclusions, then back to the evidence with renewed insight, and so on."\(^ {129}\)

Regarding background data, there has been an explosion in our knowledge of Second Temple Judaism. N. T. Wright observes, "The most obvious feature [of Jesus Research] is that the massive researches into second Temple Judaism have forced scholars to rethink what might be involved in understanding Jesus within this background."\(^ {130}\) This new background data includes: a new edition of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,\(^ {131}\) the Dead Sea Scrolls,\(^ {132}\) the Targums,\(^ {133}\) rabbinic

\[\text{Barlow Co., 1982): 8-9.}\]

\(^{129}\) Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 10.

\(^{130}\) Wright, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 800.

\(^{131}\) James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985). Whereas this new edition contains 52 complete documents and 13 reconstructions, the previous 1913 edition consisted of only 19 pseudepigrapha. Only a few Third Questers, however, have made use of the helpful background information found in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, e.g., E. P. Sanders and James Charlesworth.

\(^{132}\) The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in 1947, have served to shed tremendous light on Second Temple Judaism. For an English translation of the scrolls, see Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968). For scholars who use this source in the Third Quest, see Gerd Theissen, Geza
literature, an unedited version of Josephus' *Testimonium Flavianum*, and Hellenistic sources which include Greek magical papyri and

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Vermes, Harvey Falk, John Riches, and James Charlesworth.

133 A "Targum" is an Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible. Bruce Chilton stands alone in the use of the Targums, particularly the Isaiah Targums, for his reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

134 Rabbinic literature is a broad category covering the majority of ancient Jewish writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jewish pseudepigrapha, Mishnah, Tosefta, Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, midrashic collections, Targums, and mystical writings. More narrowly rabbinic literature refers to the collection of Jewish writings during the second and third centuries C.E. Many scholars find these documents to be useful, e.g., Martin Hengel, Gerd Theissen, Geza Vermes, John Bowker, Harvey Falk, Irving Zeitlin, Anthony Harvey, Morton Smith, and E. P. Sanders.

135 Regarding recent archaeological discoveries, James Charlesworth comments, "In the past three decades, spectacular discoveries are proving significant for research on the historical Jesus," in *Jesus within Judaism*, 104. Charlesworth lists among these discoveries recent excavations of Jerusalem which have unearthed massive athletic arenas, multi-lingual inscriptions, religious hymns, and stone vessels for ritual purification. Also significant, according to Charlesworth, have been the discoveries of first-century synagogues in Palestine, the Apostle Peter's house, the Temple Mount, the bones of Jehohanan, a man crucified, and the site of crucifixions. Charlesworth is one of the few scholars that make use of this information in his reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

136 In the past, scholars have been hesitant to use the *Testimonium Flavianum* of Josephus for historical information about Jesus because of the obvious editorial work by Christian scribes. In 1971, however, scholars discovered a tenth-century Arabic copy of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, one that was unaltered and therefore contained historically accurate information about Jesus. Aside from this foreground data, many scholars have found Josephus to be a helpful source of background information: Gerd Theissen, S. G. F. Brandon, John Bowker, Sean Freyne, John Meier, Morton Smith, Marcus Borg, Richard Horsley, Douglas Oakman, and James Charlesworth.

137 Morton Smith alone makes use of the Greek magical papyri in his reconstruction of the historical Jesus.
Graeco-Roman rhetorical texts. It is on account of these new and multiple sources, that scholars feel confident about their reconstruction of the historical Jesus. James Charlesworth concludes, "The new research on Jesus will be different from and more informed than previous attempts, primarily because of the increased documentary evidence and phenomenal archaeological discoveries."139

The foreground data for Jesus research has taken two forms. The first is the conviction that the canonical gospels are a reservoir of historical information about Jesus. Significant here is the observation of E. P. Sanders:

What is characteristic of many of these works [on the historical Jesus] is that, despite the recognition of how difficult it is to be certain of the historical reliability of any individual pericope, the authors seem confident of the ability to present a reasonably accurate sketch of what Jesus taught and how he behaved. One finds, for example, in the works of Jeremias, Dodd, Vermes and Meyer, new, or at least freshly stated, overall descriptions of Jesus which are coherent, which are based on material in the Gospels, and which intend to answer historical questions on historical grounds. The dominant view today seems to be that we can know pretty well what Jesus was out to accomplish, that we can know a lot about what Jesus said, and that those two things make sense within the world of first-century Judaism.140

Sanders' comments have been echoed by numerous other Jesus scholars, such as, Raymond Brown, Marcus Borg, Craig Evans, and James Charlesworth.141 These Jesus

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138 The Graeco-Roman rhetorical texts are used in the Third Quest by Burton Mack and Vernon Robbins.

139 Charlesworth, Jesus within Judaism, 27.

140 Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 1-2.

141 Raymond Brown observed, "Most scholars today are less agnostic than Bultmann about the historical Jesus and admit a continuity between the evaluation of Jesus during the ministry and the evaluation of him in the NT," in "Who Do Men Say That
scholars are not asserting the historical veracity of every datum of the canonical gospels. Rather they seek to move beyond the historical skepticism that characterized a previous generation of scholars.

Another source of foreground data on Jesus is the the Nag Hammadi Codices.\textsuperscript{142} The use of these texts as a source of information about Jesus has caused no small debate in New Testament studies.\textsuperscript{143} There has been no scholarly consensus on the relevance of the Nag Hammadi Codices for Jesus Research. A source of contention has been the

\begin{quote}
I Am?"--Modern Scholarship on Gospel Christology" Horizons 1 (1974): 38. Marcus Borg states that "there are signs that the extreme historical skepticism that has marked most Jesus study in this century is abating," in Jesus: A New Vision, 15. Craig A. Evans commented that "the New Testament Gospels are now viewed as useful, if not essentially reliable, historical sources. Gone is the extreme skepticism that for many years dominated gospel research," in "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology" TS 54 (1993): 14. James Charlesworth said, "Today, in contrast to Bultmann's time, it is now being recognized that there is considerable and reliable bedrock of historical material in the Gospels...American specialists...Scottish New Testament experts...Israeli historians...German professors...English scholars...Swiss New Testament experts...Dutch scholars...Australian specialists...Italian experts...are all, and independently, recognizing that in its broad outline the Gospels' account of Jesus is substantially reliable and true," "Jesus Research in Chaotic Creativity," 6-7.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{142}The Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC) were discovered in a cave near Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. Hidden in a large clay jar were 13 codices, i.e., leather-bound books, which contained 51 tractate, of which 41 were previously unknown. These Coptic manuscripts date to around 350 C.E., although the original texts may have been as early as the second or third centuries C.E. For a complete history of the discovery of the NHC, see James Robinson, "The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices" BA 42 (1979): 206-224. For an English translation of the NHC, see James Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library in English (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988).

dating of the original documents behind these fourth-century Coptic manuscripts. Some scholars have argued that some of the Nag Hammadi codices, particularly the Gospel of Thomas, are independent of and earlier than the canonical gospels. Related to the use of Thomas as foreground data is the recent stratification of the Synoptic Sayings Source, 'Q.' 'Q' has played a significant role in the previous quests for the historical Jesus, and it continues to do so in the Third Quest. In an effort to get even closer to the historical Jesus, some scholars, most notably John Kloppenborg, have recently identified different layers of tradition in 'Q.'

Aside from this foreground data that have come to characterize the Third Quest, the second factor leading to the increase in Jesus Research has been the application of two recent methodologies: a broad historical approach that seeks to move beyond the historical positivism of the Old Quest and a social-scientific criticism that attempts to locate Jesus more firmly in his socio-historical context. The older methods of source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and traditio-historical criticism still play a role in the Third Quest, at least to varying degrees depending upon individual scholars.

Some scholars of current Jesus Research have chosen to use methods such as a broad historical approach, e.g., S. G. F. Brandon, Geza Vermes, Ben Meyer, Anthony Harvey, and E. P. Sanders. These scholars begin their research by asking broad historical questions about Jesus, such as, What were the intentions of Jesus? How was

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145 Ben Meyer begins with this question in his *The Aims of Jesus.*
Jesus interpreted by his contemporaries, given the historical and cultural "constraints" of his time? This is the question with which Anthony Harvey begins his reconstruction of the historical Jesus. By "constraints," Harvey means the limits placed on interpretation and meaning. Perception and understanding, according to Harvey, are largely influenced by culture. People and events take on meaning via the cultural conventions of the time. Jesus, likewise, must be understood within the constraints of his historical setting.

Related to this broad historical approach, has been the application of social-scientific methods to the cultural milieu of Jesus' day. This method is relatively new, as indicated by Paul Hollenbach's advocacy of social-scientific criticism in his 1983 article, "Recent Historical Jesus Studies and the Social Sciences." Using the categories of Robin Scroggs, Hollenbach distinguishes two different ways in which scholars have attempted to make use of the social sciences in Jesus Research: social description and social theory. Jesus scholars who neglect this new tool, Hollenbach believes, typically reduce Jesus to a teacher of ideas and someone who would have been incomprehensible in his social setting.

Jesus scholars, according to Hollenbach, should minimally use the tool of social

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148Hollenbach approvingly quotes an observation by Bruce Malina: "meanings in history will always be perceived in terms of some social system." See Paul Hollenbach, "Recent Historical Jesus Studies and the Social Sciences," 66.
description, which is analogous to Telford's understanding of background data. As an example of social description, Hollenbach points to William Farmer's book, *Jesus and the Gospels* (1982), in which "Farmer develops his understanding of Jesus as a 'social reformer' (29), with some reference to the Palestinian social setting."\textsuperscript{149} A better approach can be seen in *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (1980), where John Riches makes use of social science theories of explanation. Specifically, "Riches makes explicit and substantial use of social anthropology, in particular M. Douglas' work, in order to understand the social character of language, as well as to understand his religious sayings as the 'related to the broad range of social and political questions...of the first century' (ix)."\textsuperscript{150} The best use of social-scientific criticism in Jesus Research, Hollenbach argues, is the use of social science models, which appeal to "social matrices" and "social types" in order to do controlled historical reconstruction.\textsuperscript{151} Since Hollenbach's article, several other scholars have incorporated the insights of the social sciences into their quests for the historical Jesus, e.g., Marcus Borg, Richard Horsley, Douglas Oakman, F. Gerald Downing, Sean Freyne, Irving Zeitlin, John Meier, and John Dominic Crossan.

But what about the motivation for the Third Quest? The Old Quest and the New Quest were motivated not so much by historical necessity as by theological relevance. The Old Quest sought for theological reasons to reconstruct the historical Jesus in

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 71.
distinction from the Christ of faith, while the New Quest sought to find continuity between the two. Some observers of the Third Quest, however, are unable to identify any obvious theological motivation for current Jesus Research. Craig Evans notes, "There have appeared, however, several studies in the seventies and eighties which do not always espouse a particular theology nor are committed to finding an historical Jesus that is necessarily relevant to faith."¹⁵² This comment is echoed by N. T. Wright, "The methods [of current Jesus Research] owe less to theological a prioris and more to the normal canons of historiography: hypothesis and verification, and testing of sources as part of that process."¹⁵³

But if there is no obvious theological motivation for the Third Quest, then why are scholars today so interested in the historical Jesus? In response to this question, James Charlesworth replies, "Jesus research is not a search for the historical Jesus. It is a response to many stimuli, some deriving from intracanonical writings, including Paul's letters, others from the extracanonical documents, others still from amazingly unexpected archaeological discoveries, which are both literary and non-literary."¹⁵⁴ From these comments, it would appear that the Third Quest simply arose from the new foreground and background data now available. This sentiment is echoed by E. P.

¹⁵²Craig Evans, "Jesus of Nazareth," 15-19. As examples of scholars who evince no apparent theological agenda in Jesus Research, Evans points to C. H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, Geza Vermes, John Bowker, Bruce Chilton, Ben Meyer, Anthony Harvey, Gerald Sloyan, Harvey Falk, and E. P. Sanders.

¹⁵³Wright, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 800.

¹⁵⁴Charlesworth, "From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings," 225.
Sanders: "A second aspect of the current situation [in Jesus research] is that such questions about Jesus as those contemplated here are being asked without special reference to the debate about the relationship between knowledge about the historical Jesus and Christian faith."\(^{155}\)

The assertion that the Third Quest lacks theological motivation is not completely accurate. Of the works written on the historical Jesus in recent history, a majority offer a theological motivation, or at the very least a theological justification, for their efforts to reconstruct the historical Jesus. Indicative of this is a comment by James Charlesworth, "From the very beginnings of Christian faith the reality of history is paramount to the kerygma. Jesus' earliest followers never falsified history...It is theologically legitimate to seek historical understanding. Faith cannot be equivocal; it always elicits questions. It is always yearning to understand as couched in the well known phrase fides quaerens intellectum."\(^{156}\) This theological legitimation for Jesus Research is echoed by such diverse scholars as John Meier and Marcus Borg.\(^{157}\)

Some scholars of the Third Quest even acknowledge a theological or ideological

\(^{155}\)Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 2.


\(^{157}\)Although Meier denies the necessity of the historical Jesus for Christian faith, he nonetheless finds it necessary to justify his work: "Yet I maintain that the quest for the historical Jesus can be very useful if one is asking about faith seeking understanding, i.e., theology, in a contemporary context," in his, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person, 198. And Borg writes, "Yet what the historical Jesus was like is not irrelevant to the Christian faith, even if historical knowledge about him is not essential, a sine qua non," in Marcus Borg, Jesus: A New Vision, 14.
agenda in their quest for the historical Jesus. An example of this is Richard Horsley, who in the context of discussing Latin American Liberation Theology introduces his book on the historical Jesus: "Thus, insofar as the material below helps to illuminate conditions and events among the Jewish peasantry at that time and more indirectly to illuminate the activity of Jesus and his movement, the book may be relevant to some of the new questions now being brought to biblical history."\textsuperscript{158} Helmut Koester, however, offers this warning to scholars of the Third Quest: "We are again on the way toward a human Jesus who is just like one of us, one who holds values that are very close to our ideological commitments, a Jesus who is a social reformer and who attacks patriarchal orders, a Jesus, who, as a real human person, can stand as an example and inspiration for worthy causes."\textsuperscript{159} Previous quests for the historical Jesus have been pursued not so much out of historical necessity as theological relevance; the same appears to be true for the Third Quest.

What about the results of the Third Quest? As might be expected, the results are nearly as diverse as the scholars themselves. In spite of this, from the time of Johannes Weiss (1892) and Albert Schweitzer (1906), through the work of Rudolf Bultmann (1921) and the New Quest, the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet has tended to dominate. James Charlesworth observes, "most experts on Jesus and the Judaism of his day have concurred that he was significantly influenced by apocalyptic thought and that

\textsuperscript{158}Horsley, and John Hanson, \textit{Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs}, xviii.

his message was eschatological." ¹⁶⁰ Some scholars, however, would challenge Charlesworth's observation, such as, Marcus Borg, who writes, "the old consensus that Jesus was an eschatological prophet who proclaimed the imminent end of the world has disappeared...Combined these factors have produced a growing conviction: the mission and message of Jesus were 'non-eschatological.'" ¹⁶¹

The portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet can be seen in the earlier works of the Third Quest, e.g., Martin Hengel, Herbert Braun, Oscar Cullmann, C. H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, Richard Hiers, John Reumann, Graham Stanton, James Dunn, I. Howard Marshall, C. F. D. Moule, and Howard Clark Kee, as well as later works, e.g., Ben Meyer, John Riches, Rainer Riesner, Anthony Harvey, E. P. Sanders, James Charlesworth, Paula Fredriksen, Maurice Casey, and John Meier. The portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is still popular among scholars in Germany, Britain, and North America.

Within the Third Quest, however, new images of Jesus are emerging. For some scholars the historical Jesus is best understood as a Charismatic Miracle-Worker. This can be seen in the work of Geza Vermes, Morton Smith, Gerard Sloyan, Marcus Borg, Sean Freyne, Irving Zeitlin, and Gaalyahu Cornfeld. ¹⁶² Other scholars identify the

¹⁶⁰ Charlesworth, "Jesus Research Expands with Chaotic Creativity," 10.


¹⁶² Vermes, Jesus the Jew; idem, Jesus and the World of Judaism; and idem, The Religion of Jesus the Jew. Vermes sees parallels between Jesus and other Jewish hasid, "holy men," e.g., Honi the Circle-Drawer and Hanina be Dosa. Smith, in Jesus the Magician, refers to Jesus as a "magician." Sloyan refers to the historical Jesus as a "teacher" and a "mystic," in Jesus in Focus. Freyne, in Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels,
historical Jesus as a Jewish Religious Leader: David Flusser, John Bowker, Harvey Falk, and Bruce Chilton. Still others view the historical Jesus as a Political Revolutionary, e.g., S. G. F. Brandon, George Buchanan, and Alan Segal, or a Social Prophet, e.g., Gerd Theissen, Donald Goergen, and Richard Horsley.

4. **The Jesus Seminar and the Third Quest**

Basically three views have emerged to understand the relationship between the Jesus Seminar and the Third Quest. One view is to see all current Jesus research, including the Jesus Seminar, as a continuation and development of the New Quest. Writing in 1981, R. J. Banks observed that the New Quest was still going strong, even if

uses the Hebrew word *hasid* ("holy man") to describe the historical Jesus. In *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time*, Zeitlin identifies the historical Jesus as a "charismatic religious virtuoso" and a "pious Palestinian Jew." In *The Historical Jesus*, Cornfeld refers to Jesus as a Galilean *hasid*, "holy man."

Flusser identified the historical Jesus variously as a "Jewish preacher," a "Jewish miracle-worker," and a Pharisee of the liberal-wing of the Hillel School. See his *Jesus*. Bowker, in *Jesus and the Pharisees*, refers to Jesus as a "rebellious Jewish elder." Falk refers to Jesus as a "Pharisee of the Hillel School," in his *Jesus the Pharisee*. In *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible*, Chilton identifies Jesus as a "Galilean rabbi," who proclaimed a realized eschatology.

Brandon, in *Jesus and the Zealots*, argues that even though Jesus was not a Zealot, he became associated with the Zealot movement, which ultimately lead to his death by the Romans for insurrection. See also Buchanan, *Jesus: The King and the Kingdom*, and Alan F. Segal, "Jesus, the Political Revolutionary," in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus within Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991): 199-225.

Theissen prefers the terms "social reformer" and "itinerant prophet." See his *Sociology of Palestinian Christianity and The Shadow of the Galilean*. Goergen portrays the historical Jesus as a "compassionate sage" and a "non-eschatological prophet." See his three-volume set on the historical Jesus, *A Theology of Jesus*. In *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs and Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, Horsley calls Jesus a social prophet, a resister, and a liberationist.
the legitimacy of some of its methods had been called into question. More recently, William Telford has stated, "Better to think that we are all engaged in the New Quest with the insights, questions, emphases of recent studies as further developments of that quest...In sum, we should be wary of announcing the arrival of a New Age (and leave that to the verdict of history) but we should recognize and respond to a 'revitalization movement' in Jesus Studies." By defining the New Quest so broadly, both temporarily and substantively, Banks and Teleford are able to include all Jesus Research since Kasemann's 1952 lecture under the rubric, "New Quest."

A second view identifies the Jesus Seminar as a movement parallel to, but independent of, the Third Quest. N. T. Wright, for example, distinguishes from the Third Quest a concurrent Post-Bultmannian quest, which is really a continuation of the New Quest. Although current Post-Bultmannians work with somewhat different premises and methods, Wright is convinced that they are deeply rooted in the Bultmann school. It is within the Post-Bultmannian New Quest that Wright locates such diverse scholars as, Gunther Bornkamm, Joachim Jeremias, Burton Mack, John Dominic Crossan, and the Jesus Seminar. In contrast to the New Quest, Wright identifies a


168 N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996): 34.

parallel movement which he calls the "Third Quest." Unlike the New Quest, according to Wright, this Third Quest lacks a theological agenda and is more attentative to the Jewish background of Jesus. Wright states,

For while the so-called 'New Quest' was still cautiously arguing about presuppositions and methods, producing lengthy histories of tradition out of which could be squeezed one or two more drops of authentic Jesus-material, a quite different movement was beginning in a variety of places and with no unified background or programme. Fortified by the Jewish materials now more readily available, these scholars worked as historians, under no doubt that it is possible to know quite a lot about Jesus of Nazareth and that it is worthwhile to do so—the two things which the orthodox Bultmann school had denied. This movement of scholarship has become so pronounced that it is not fanciful to talk in terms of a "Third Quest."\(^{170}\)

Among scholars of the Third Quest, Wright lists: S. G. F. Brandon, Geza Vermes, Ben Meyer, Anthony Harvey, Marcus Borg, E. P. Sanders, and Gerd Theissens.

A third and better view for relating the Jesus Seminar to the Third Quest is to understand the Jesus Seminar as parallel to the Third Quest, like Wright, but not necessarily a continuation of the New Quest. The verdict of history seems to be that the New Quest has ceased, even if the precise date of its demise cannot be given. Kasemann's 1953 paper, which inaugurated the New Quest, was given as a challenge to Bultmann's immediate students and it was these students who responded to it. By 1968, John Reumann could speak of his Jesus Research as done "in the wake of 'the New Quest' of the historical Jesus."\(^{171}\) Reumann later spoke of the dawning of a "post-New

\(^{170}\) Wright, "History and Theology," 379.

Quest period." Walter Weaver rightly observes that the New Quest "failed to summon any substantial effort and finally revealed itself as largely a puttering around in Bultmann's garden...its assumptions remained mostly confined to Bultmann's insights, i.e., existential interpretation based on stringent form-critical analysis." The Jesus Seminar, then, is not merely a continuation of the New Quest.

If the New Quest is over, then why not simply consider the Jesus Seminar a part of the Third Quest? Although the Jesus Seminar is concurrent with the Third Quest, it is clearly distinct from it. One of the main characteristics of the Third Quest, as stated above, is the attempt to locate Jesus more squarely within the Judaism of first-century Palestine. In contrast, the Jesus Seminar, via the criterion of dissimilarity, isolates Jesus from his socio-historical context. In fact, the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus for the Jesus Seminar is a wandering cynic sage philosopher. The Jesus Seminar appears to be at odds with the Third Quest. Funk would agree with this statement, but probably conclude that this was so much the worse for the Third Quest.

From Funk's perspective, the Jesus Seminar alone is doing serious Jesus research,


\[173\]Walter Weaver, "Reflections on the Continuing Quest for Jesus," in James Charlesworth and Walter Weaver (eds.), *The Images of Jesus Today*, xiii. Consider also the observation of James Charlesworth: "During the late sixties and early seventies the new quest began to wane...Moreover, many fine New Testament scholars, here and abroad, have moved appreciably away from the liberal disdain for history and the hyper-preoccupation with strictly theological agendas...the Bultmannian school is dead," in "From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings: The Emergence of Jesus Research," 223-224.
while scholars of the Third Quest are merely "pretend questers." Funk writes, "Third Questers,' as N. T. Wright calls them, grant the distinction between the historical Jesus and the creedal Christ but express no real interest in, or regard for, the Jesus of history beyond historical curiosity...Third Questers are really conducting a search primarily for historical evidence to support claims made on behalf of creedal Christianity and the canonical gospels. In other words, the third quest is an apologetic ploy."

So then, where does Funk locate the Jesus Seminar? Funk refers to the Seminar's work as the "reNEWed quest." Funk writes, "I capitalize the "NEW" to indicate that the precursor of this quest was the new quest of the 1950s." Funk here recognizes the indebtedness of the Jesus Seminar to the New Quest, but he clearly distinguishes the two.

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174 Funk, Honest To Jesus, 64.

175 Ibid., 65.

176 Ibid., 64.
CHAPTER FOUR: A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR A LIMITED QUEST

Introduction

Although a number of criticisms have been raised about the work of the Jesus Seminar, my main concern is the Seminar's "bait and switch" approach to historiography. Having baited readers with the promise of historical positivism, the Seminar switches to deliver nothing more than historical revisionism. So where does this leave the quest for the historical Jesus? Just as Martin Kähler called for the end of the Old Quest because of its defective historiography and theological deficiency, even now Luke Johnson calls for the termination of current Jesus research. It is the thesis of this chapter that the quest for the historical Jesus should not be rejected, but instead should be pursued intentionally and cautiously. The grandiose claims, both historical and theological, of the Jesus Seminar must be tempered by a realistic assessment of the methodology of Jesus research, namely, historical criticism. Because limits are inherent to the methodology of historical criticism, these limits must be established at the very beginning so that scholars understand both the possibility and significance of the quest for the historical Jesus. In this chapter, an outline for a quest will be proposed, albeit a limited quest, in which each of the three steps of historical criticism, i.e., research, synthesis, and implications, will be carefully delineated and evaluated for contributions as well as limitations. Before considering these three steps, it is necessary to "lay the ground rules" for pursuing a quest. These rules include describing the role of the Jesus scholar, defining categories, and delimiting the object of study.
A. **Prolegomena to a Limited Quest**

1. **Role of the Jesus Scholar in a Limited Quest**

   A significant limitation in Jesus research is the very Jesus scholars who contribute to that research. Just as Bultmann rightly proclaimed that "no exegesis is without presuppositions,\(^1\) so there is no Jesus research without the assumptions of the Jesus scholar. Just as historical events and people are limited by socio-historical constraints, so are historians. Historians not only approach their research from their unique historical and cultural perspective, but they also bring to bear their personal interests and commitments. One of the key criticisms of previous quests for the historical Jesus was that Jesus scholars have a tendency to create a portrait of the historical Jesus after their own image. Although this tendency cannot be denied, it is not insurmountable if precautions are taken.

   Bultmann's recognition of the influence of presuppositions did not prevent him from interpreting the New Testament. Through preunderstanding (an awareness of one's presuppositions), Bultmann hoped to diminish but not eliminate the role of presuppositions. This approach can be seen in the Jesus research of E. P. Sanders and John Meier. Both of these Jesus scholars attempt to be as objective as possible in their constructions of the historical Jesus. To establish some level of accountability, Sanders and Meier acknowledge their theological commitments. While Sanders identifies himself

as a "liberal, modern, secularized Protestant,"Meier admits that he works out of a Catholic context. The goal of both scholars is to be forthright about their commitments so that their historical conclusions are not suspect. To the extent that they are able, Sanders and Meier seek to bracket their faith commitments so that they might do their work as "objective" historians. Historian C. Beham McCullagh correctly observes, "people cannot achieve a state of utter neutrality, committed to no values or principles, without projects or interests," but he is equally convinced that historians can practice sufficient detachment to render their historical conclusions reliable. Sanders and Meier, then, stand as examples of Jesus scholars who appear to have attained this level of detachment.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between theological (ideological) commitments and theological (ideological) agendas. Everyone indeed has theological (ideological) commitments, but not everyone attempts to impose those commitments on others. The intent to impose theological (ideological) commitments is what is meant by agenda. Sufficient detachment requires that Jesus scholars eliminate theological (ideological) agendas and bracket theological (ideological) commitments. Some Jesus scholars, however, seem to have a theological (ideological) "axe to grind." The problem is that such agendas taint research and skew conclusions. This was true in the Old Quest

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where scholars were largely motivated by the ideology of secularization. Both Kähler and Schweitzer observed this ideological agenda and its negative impact on the "objectivity" of Old Quest scholars. Even today some Jesus scholars appear to have theological (ideological) agendas. In chapter three, it was argued that the Jesus Seminar is following in the footsteps of the Old Quest in the pursuit of secularization. Again, it is legitimate for Jesus scholars to have theological (ideological) commitments as long as they are able to detach themselves from these commitments to do their research. Otherwise, as is now the case with the Jesus Seminar, fellow scholars will become highly skeptical about historical conclusions.

Numerous places in historical research are vulnerable to the influence of theological (ideological) agendas. In particular, historical criticism requires the Jesus scholar to frame questions, to develop categories, to value sources, to interpret data, and to draw inferences. Beyond this, Jesus scholars often must rely upon conjecture and speculation to fill in the "gaps" left by fragmentary sources. History is indeed a reconstructive effort which "seeks to take the often sparse and accidental evidence of past human events and connect them in some meaningful pattern."5 Because there is so much room for subjectivity in historical research, Jesus scholars must be especially careful to avoid theological (ideological) agendas and bracket theological (ideological) commitments. To be sure, Jesus scholars are interested in the implications of their historical conclusions, but they must first understand Jesus within his socio-historical

context before they attempt to make him relevant for their own.
2. Precise Categories for a Limited Quest

The quest for the historical Jesus is primarily a quest for *historical* knowledge about Jesus. But how is this historical knowledge attained? Following the Enlightenment, scholars applied newly developed historical methods to sources about Jesus in their effort to access the man from Nazareth. Inspired by the naive optimism of the Age of Reason, Jesus scholars of the Old Quest believed that historical criticism, along with their own neutrality, would guarantee direct access to the past rendering their historical conclusions certain. Although the Old Quest failed, due in part to this historical positivism, historians are unable to return to a precritical period. For this reason, Jesus scholars today continue to use historical criticism in the quest for the historical Jesus. Unfortunately, a number of these scholars make the same mistake as the Old Quest by failing to recognize the limits of their methodology. Since categories help to establish these limits, it is important that these categories be carefully defined.

The first category to be defined is history. The term "history" actually has two distinct meanings. On the one hand, history refers to what actually occurred in the past. In this sense, people and events of the past are historical. On the other hand, history refers to what the historian can prove about the past based upon the admissible evidence. Much of what is historical in the prior sense is not historical in the latter sense. There are numerous events in the past that are historical in that they actually happened, yet for whatever reason they are inaccessible, or at least unprovable, for the historian. This might occur, for example, when little or no evidence exists about a past event or person. Historical in this latter sense is what the historian can reasonably conjecture about the
past applying historical criticism to the extant sources. To distinguish between these two meanings of historical, the terms (actual) historical and (demonstratable) historical will be used.

When speaking about Jesus, scholars use commonly accepted categories, such as the earthly Jesus, the historical Jesus, and the Christ of faith. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that Jesus scholars often intend quite different meanings by these terms, and frequently define them inconsistently. In a similar way, scholars use the name "Jesus" to refer to different aspects of the man from Nazareth. Although it is tedious and potentially muddles the water, it is necessary to clearly define the terms used to describe Jesus as well as to develop new ones in order to develop categories that establish the appropriate limits of Jesus research.

Most Jesus scholars define the "earthly Jesus" as the physical man who actually lived in first century Palestine. The assumption here, however, is that the physical dimension of the earthly Jesus is all there is. This is problematic since the canonical gospels portray the earthly Jesus as more than human. One is struck by the commonness of the supernatural in the ministry of Jesus as presented in the gospels. Healings, exorcisms and nature miracles are regularly attributed to the earthly Jesus. Also, each of the four gospels, in various ways and to various degrees, attribute a divine quality to the earthly Jesus. The Evangelists characterize Jesus as one who not only performed supernatural feats but as one who revealed God and even exercised divine prerogatives, such as forgiving sins against God. The Gospel of John develops further this divine quality, portraying the earthly Jesus as the divine Word become flesh. I am not here
making historical judgments about whether or not these divine qualities actually go back to the earthly Jesus; I am simply stating that this is the way the gospel writers portray the earthly Jesus.

The portrayal of the earthly Jesus with divine qualities can also be seen in the Pauline epistles, as well as post-apostolic writings. In the Christological debates of the third and fourth centuries, one can see the early church struggling to come to terms with both the humanity and deity they perceived in the earthly Jesus. Recently, M. Eugene Boring has coined terms that help distinguish the human from the divine in the earthly Jesus: the empirical Jesus and the transcendent Jesus. The "transcendent Jesus" is the Jesus who is portrayed as one in whom God was present and active. For our purposes, we will refer to the divine quality attributed to the earthly Jesus as the earthly (transcendent) Jesus. In contrast, the humanity of the earthly Jesus will be designated as the earthly (empirical) Jesus. The terminology adopted here is not intended to make historical judgments about the nature of the earthly Jesus. The purpose of such terminology is to clarify the discussion about the earthly Jesus so that the quest for the historical Jesus can be advanced.

The earthly (empirical) Jesus lived in time and space, had specific physical features (e.g., height, weight, etc.), was observed by others, and died a physical death. Since this earthly (empirical) Jesus is deceased and his bodily remains unavailable, he can only be known through extant sources. As these sources are interpreted and evaluated,

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the historian begins to develop a composite picture that best accounts for the admissible evidence. The resultant portrait is the historian's hypothetical reconstruction of the earthly (empirical) Jesus based upon the canons of critical historiography. This reconstruction is not the earthly (empirical) Jesus but the historian's Jesus, or better yet, "the historical Jesus," which approximates but does not exhaust the earthly (empirical) Jesus. A careful definition of the historical Jesus, then, would be: the historical Jesus is the historian's reconstruction of the earthly (empirical) Jesus applying the tools of critical historiography to extant sources. The Jesus scholar can expect to accomplish no more than this in the quest for the historical Jesus. Yet, in stark contrast, the Jesus Seminar claims that their portrait of the historical Jesus is none other than the "real" Jesus.

Such a narrow definition of the historical Jesus was first proposed by Martin Kähler in response to the excesses of the Old Quest.7 James Robinson, who heralded the New Quest, embraced a similar narrow definition.8 Many scholars of current Jesus research likewise affirm that their quest is for a narrowly defined historical Jesus. John Meier, for example, defines the historical Jesus as "the hypothetical reconstruction of a past figure by purely scientific means."9 This narrow definition of the historical Jesus is necessary because it rightly establishes two limitations that are inherent to historical criticism but frequently ignored by Jesus scholars, such as the Jesus Seminar. First, the


historical Jesus accounts for only one aspect of the earthly Jesus, namely, the earthly (empirical) Jesus. This allows for the possibility that there might be more to the earthly Jesus than can be accessed by the methodology of historical criticism. A second limitation established by this narrow definition of the historical Jesus is the recognition that the historical Jesus is a theoretical construct; it is not the earthly (empirical) Jesus. People and events are too complex to be fully comprehended in their totality, whether by a contemporary observer or a present-day historian. In regard to people, we can never know all their inner feelings, motivations, or aspirations. Moreover, unlike other empirical sciences, historiography cannot repeat an event or reproduce a person. Rather, historians sift through the fragmentary evidence of history in order to provide a glimpse of the past. This means that the historical Jesus does not exhaust the totality of the earthly (empirical) Jesus but only approximates him. The Jesus Seminar's claim to reproduce the "real" Jesus is historically naive.

Who then is the Christ of faith? Martin Kähler, and more recently Luke Johnson, have correctly defined the Christ of faith as the kerygmatic Jesus who is portrayed in the gospels and proclaimed in the churches as the risen Lord. The Christ of faith, for these scholars, is the Christ of the apostolic preaching who is now powerfully present through the Holy Spirit. But, how is the Christ of faith known? Kähler and Johnson rightly claim that the Christ of faith is experienced through the eyes of faith and in believing prayers. This is the Jesus who has been the object of Christian faith and adoration for nearly 2000

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years. This is also the Jesus who has been attacked by the Jesus Seminar, which claims that historical criticism disproves the Christ of faith. But is historical criticism really able to render such judgments? This is the topic of the next section.

3. **Proper Object of Study in a Limited Quest**

   Every field has its proper object of study. The physical sciences, such as physics, biology, and chemistry, are properly limited to physical realities. It would be improper to use the tools of these fields to make assertions about non-physical realities, e.g., the transcendent and supernatural, whether positive or negative. They are simply the wrong tools for the project. Knowing the proper object of study assists in establishing the appropriate limits of a particular field. Similarly, narrative criticism, which attempts to read the gospels holistically as literature, is proper for evaluating the literary aspects of the gospels. It is completely inadequate, however, for making historical judgments.

   Again, it is the wrong tool for the task at hand. Although some Jesus scholars appeal to anthropology and sociology, the primary tools for Jesus research come from the field of critical historiography. But, like the two previous examples, historical criticism is limited to its proper object of study. But what is the proper object of study for historical criticism? And what are the appropriate limits of this particular field of study?

   People and events in time and space are the proper object of study for historical criticism. The tools of this method, then, are limited to the temporal and empirical. Historians can rightly study material objects from the past, draw inferences from these objects, and determine material causations. Using our previously defined categories, the earthly (empirical) Jesus is the proper object of study for historical criticism. It is
inappropriate, however, for the historian using the tools of historical criticism to study objects beyond this established limit. This creates a serious problem for Jesus scholars since the gospel writers present Jesus as one in whom God was present. But, how can the historian qua historian render historical judgments about the divine presence? The tools of critical historiography are simply not appropriate for making such judgments. M. Eugene Boring has correctly observed that the earthly (transcendent) Jesus "cannot be studied and talked about using the language, categories, and methods of the historian."\(^{11}\) The most that the historian can say is that the Evangelists, and perhaps even Jesus' contemporaries, perceived a divine presence in Jesus. For the historian to affirm or deny this divine presence is to go beyond the limits of historical criticism. Surely the historian can make such judgments, but the historian dare not claim that these are historical judgments. Rendering judgments on the earthly (transcendent) Jesus is more appropriate for theological studies than historical research. It must be stated clearly that this is not a limitation on the earthly Jesus but on the method of historical criticism.

An important point needs to be made at this time. Because historical criticism is limited to its proper object of study, the results of historical criticism do not exhaust what we count as knowledge. Clearly there are other modes of knowing, such as rationalism, empiricism, intuitionism, and phenomenology. And yet one gets the impression that certain Jesus scholars, such as the Jesus Seminar, implicitly reduce all knowledge to the historical. Readers of some Jesus books are presented with a false dichotomy in regards to knowledge: either historical (true) or unhistorical (false). There are indeed people and

\(^{11}\)Boring, "The 'Third Quest' and the Apostolic Faith," 348.
events that are unhistorical, i.e., fictional, but this is different from claiming that whatever is not historical is false. Luke Johnson has rightly pointed out that much of what we count as knowledge is neither historical nor unhistorical, "things like alienation and forgiveness, compassion and despair, meaning and value, love and hope."\(^{12}\)

A difficulty issue confronting Jesus scholars today is the historical problem of Jesus' miracles. Prior to the Enlightenment the miracles of Jesus, as well as predictive prophecy, were regularly used in apologetics to defend Jesus' divinity. With the rise of historical criticism, the role of miracles greatly diminished. In fact, Christian apologists today find themselves defending miracles rather than using miracles as evidence in defense of Christianity.\(^{13}\) Before considering the historical problem of Jesus' miracles, it will be helpful to define exactly what is meant by a miracle. Some define a miracle as an extraordinary, yet natural, event. Although this definition poses no problem for the historian, it is rarely the meaning intended by most people. Others might define a miracle as an inexplicable event. But then the questions arise: Inexplicable for whom? Inexplicable for how long? The most helpful definition of a miracle is: a unique and supernatural event where God is determined to be the immediate cause. A miracle, then, is an action that has divine causation.

\(^{12}\)Johnson, The Real Jesus, 82.

\(^{13}\)Most recent books on Christian apologetics include a chapter in defense of miracles. See, for example, William Lane Craig, Apologetics: An Introduction (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984). Several books have been written specifically to address the "problem" of miracles, e.g., Francis Beckwith, David Hume's Argument Against Miracles: A Critical Analysis (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1989); Colin Brown, Miracles and the Critical Mind (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Richard Swinburne, The Concept of Miracle (New York: Macmillan, 1970).
The historical problem of Jesus' miracles is this: How can the Jesus scholar, functioning as a historian, render historical judgments on divine causation? This problem is compounded because Jesus scholars recognize that the miracle stories are central to the ministry of Jesus, appearing throughout the gospel narratives and occurring in every layer of the gospel tradition (Mark, Q, M, L, and John). The Evangelists regularly attribute supernatural phenomena to Jesus, such as healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles.\textsuperscript{14} Earlier we stated that it was inappropriate for the historian qua historian to render historical judgments on the earthly (transcendent) Jesus. Does this same impropriety hold for the actions of the earthly (transcendent) Jesus? While functioning as a historian, the Jesus scholar may make only three possible affirmations about a reported miracle. One, some contemporary observers perceived an extraordinary event. Two, these same observers interpreted the event as a miracle. Three, a dramatic physical change occurred as a result. Because of the limitations of historical criticism, it is improper for the historian to claim more than this.

So in what sense, if any, are miracles historical? Whether or not an event can possibly be (actual) historical largely depends upon the historian's presuppositions. If the historian assumes naturalism, the belief in a closed universe of material causation, then miracles cannot by definition be (actual) historical. This makes it unnecessary to consider the epistemological question of whether or not miracles are (demonstrable) historical. Only when the historian presupposes the possibility of the supernatural, does

\textsuperscript{14}David Aune has identified within the canonical gospels: 17 healings, 6 exorcisms, and 8 so-called nature miracles. See Aune's article, "Magic in Early Christianity," \textit{ANRW II/23.2}, 105-157.
(demonstrable) historical become an issue. At this point someone might interject that the assumption of naturalism is intrinsic to historical criticism. If this interjection is correct, then Jesus' miracles can be dismissed a priori as (actual) unhistorical. But the question remains: Is the assumption of naturalism a necessary component of historical criticism?

Naturalism is a foundational belief. In other words, naturalism is a belief with no philosophical foundation to support it; naturalism can be assumed but in cannot be proven. Some scholars, most notably Wolfhart Pannenberg and Ben Meyer,\(^\text{15}\) have challenged the assumption of naturalism. Ben Meyer, for example, has argued that the historical method that emerged from the Enlightenment is in need of revision because it is hostile to the classical western religious heritage. "For the heritage of Christian belief affirms as indispensable what the heritage of modern culture excludes as impossible."\(^\text{16}\) Meyer asserts that Enlightenment historiography has created a false dichotomy: either intellectual honesty or traditional Christian belief. In contrast to this dichotomy, Meyer is convinced that belief in the possibility of miracles does not require a sacrificium intellectus.

Meyer's challenge to naturalism is based upon his acceptance of Bernard Lonergan's phenomenology of knowledge (or critical realism), which "disposes of certain


shortcuts such as the a priori dismissal of the prophetic and miraculous as unhistorical."\textsuperscript{17} For Meyer, phenomenology allows the historian to move beyond the impasse created by the Enlightenment in regard to miracles. In particular, Lonergan's phenomenology enables the historian to perceive the transcendent in history and thus make historical judgments, even establishing some miracles as historical fact. Meyer is not suggesting that every report of a "miracle" should be accepted as historical but that miracle reports should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

But if naturalism is not inherent to historical criticism, does this mean that miracles can be both (actual) historical and (demonstrable) historical? Some recent Jesus scholars, such as Ben Meyer and Graham Twelftree, have responded positively to this question.\textsuperscript{18} The historian's task, for these scholars, is not simply to summarize the evidence but to interpret and to evaluate the evidence according to the canons of the critical historiography. Yet, the historian's work is still incomplete until causation is considered. Herein lies the problem: How can the historian qua historian determine divine causation? Since it is beyond the limits of historical criticism to render historical judgments on divine presence, it seems reasonable that rendering historical judgments on divine causation is similarly beyond the limits of historical criticism. As with the divine presence, the determination of divine causation is more appropriate for the fields of philosophy and theology.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{18}Ben Meyer, The Aims of Jesus; Graham Twelftree, Jesus the Exorcist (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).
What then is the historian to do with the numerous miracles attributed to Jesus in the gospels? Since judgments about miracles are beyond the limits of historical criticism, historians are faced with a dilemma: how can historians account for the evidence of miracles (unable to dismiss the miracles a priori as (actual) unhistorical) while the methodology of historical criticism does not allow historians to render historical judgments on miracles? Compounding this dilemma is the narrow definition of the historical Jesus as the historian's reconstruction of the earthly (empirical) Jesus based upon the application of historical criticism to the extant sources. John Meier has attempted to overcome this dilemma by proposing that the historian bracket historical judgment about Jesus' miracles and consider the miracles from the perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries.\(^{19}\) Meier's "perspectival approach" (my term) seems reasonable, but as we will see it actually detracts from the quest for the historical Jesus rather than contributes to that quest.

What can a historian legitimately say about a reported miracle? Meier allows for the historian to affirm two propositions: an extraordinary event occurred for which there is no reasonable cause, and some observers claimed that the event was a miracle, i.e., caused by God.\(^{20}\) The first proposition is clearly inadequate. To call the event "extraordinary" is to make a value judgment that the historian is not in a position to make.


\(^{20}\)Ibid.
More importantly, how can a historian assert that there is no reasonable cause? The historian simply does not have exhaustive knowledge of the past to make such a claim. Meier also appears unaware of those who offer naturalistic explanations for Jesus' miracles. Sanders, for example, believes that "miracles" can be explained as wishful thinking, exaggeration, the conscious wish to deceive (not applicable to Jesus), and psychosomatic healing. Regarding "miracles" that defy these explanations, Sanders suggest that perhaps we are simply ignorant of the range of natural causes.\(^\text{21}\) It seems more reasonable for the historian simply to affirm that an event was perceived by some observers to be extraordinary and that these same observers interpreted the event as a miracle. Meier concludes this section by rightly observing that historians, who attempt to affirm or to deny the perceptions and interpretations of Jesus and his contemporaries on the miracles, cross the line separating the historian from the philosopher or the theologian.

It would seem that this would be the end of Meier's discussion on Jesus' miracles. After all, if the historian cannot render historical judgments on Jesus' miracles, then these miracles must necessarily be bracketed from historical consideration. But Meier is far from being done with the miracles of Jesus. Having moved Jesus' miracles beyond the limits of historical criticism, Meier devotes the next 400 pages of his second volume to describing Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles. But how is this possible? It seems to me that Meier can only make this move through a logical inconsistency in the application of his methodology. Before presenting my own approach, an approach that follows Meier's methodology to its logical conclusion, we need to consider further

\(^{21}\text{Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus, 143.}\)
Meier's perspectival approach.
Meier introduces four questions that he believes are legitimate for the historian to consider regarding Jesus' miracles. These four historical questions reveal how far Meyer goes beyond his own methodological limits. The first question is: Are the reports of Jesus' miracles totally the invention of the early church or can some of them be traced back to the historical Jesus? One problem with this question is that it seems to confuse the terms "historical Jesus" and "earthy Jesus." If the historical Jesus is a theoretical construct as Meier has rightly defined it, then historians cannot trace characteristics back to their constructions, they can only attribute characteristics to them. This lack of consistency is no small matter for Jesus research, as can be seen in the work of the Jesus Seminar.

Another problem with this first question is that it does not contribute to our quest for the historical Jesus. Even if the historian were able to trace back some of the miracle reports to the earthly Jesus using various criteria of authenticity, the historian, as Meier has rightly argued, is unable to render historical judgments about these reports. Historians can affirm that these reports are (demonstrable) historical but they cannot judge reported miracles to be (demonstrable) historical because such judgments are beyond the limits of historical criticism. If the historical Jesus is the historian's reconstruction of the earthly Jesus using historical criticism, then information that cannot be evaluated via this method cannot be included among the admissible evidence. This means that the perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries on Jesus' miracles cannot be uncritically admitted for consideration in the construction of the historical Jesus.

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22 Ibid., 517.
Meier's second question for the historian is: Are the miracles attributed to Jesus in the gospels typical of other reported miracles in the ancient world? In principle, this appears to be a valid question for historical consideration. The problem again is that the results of such research contributes nothing to our construction of the historical Jesus, since the historian cannot render historical judgments on miracles, whether those of Jesus or other reported miracles. For example, what would it mean to say that Jesus' miracles are different from other ancient miracles? Or to say that Jesus' miracles are the same as other ancient miracles? Some scholars, such as Morton Smith, have argued that Jesus' "miracles" were really acts of magic like other ancient magicians. Other scholars, such as Geza Vermes and Marcus Borg, have seen parallels to Jesus' miracles in the Jewish hasid ("holy men") or wandering charismatics like Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa. But, if Meier is right that historians cannot render historical judgments on reported miracles, and I am convinced that he is, then the conclusions about miracles reached by Smith, Vermes, and Borg contribute nothing to our construction of the historical Jesus.

Meier's third and fourth questions are closely related: Did Jesus perform extraordinary actions that he and his followers claimed to be miracles? and What did

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23Ibid.


these miracles mean to Jesus and his contemporaries in the context of Jesus' ministry?\textsuperscript{26} As with the first question, these two questions inquire about the perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries. As stated previously, if the historian cannot make historical judgments about reported miracles, then an uncritical summary of these reports cannot be included among the admissible evidence for constructing the historical Jesus. Meier's last two questions, like the first, detract from rather than contribute to the quest for the historical Jesus.

These four questions offered by Meier are an attempt to solve a dilemma created by Meier's narrow definition of the historical Jesus and limited methodology in regard to miracles. Meier's way out this dilemma is to suspend historical judgment in summarizing the perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries on Jesus' miracles. Meier considers such a summary to be (demonstrable) historical in the sense that the historian can determine the perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries from the available evidence. But, as I have argued above, Meier's definition of the historical Jesus does not allow for the inclusion of an uncritical summary of Jesus' miracles. The perspective of Jesus and his contemporaries on Jesus' miracles may be historically interesting but it does not contribute to the construction of a portrait of the historical Jesus.

In his attempt to account for the well-attested miracle tradition in the gospels, Meier has failed to follow his Jesus research to its logical conclusion. Even though Meier defines the historical Jesus narrowly and acknowledges that a historian qua historian cannot render historical judgments on reported miracles, he nonetheless approaches Jesus' miracles

\footnote{Meier, \textit{A Marginal Jew}, volume two: 517.}
miracles historically. While suspending historical judgment on the reported miracles, Meier attempts to establish the historicity of the reports themselves. But again, even if the historian can establish that Jesus and his contemporaries interpreted some of Jesus' actions as miracles, what does this information contribute to the historian's construction of the historical Jesus? The perspectival approach is simply not helpful in the quest for the historical Jesus. But is there a better way?

It is more consistent to bracket not historical judgment about miracles but the miracles themselves. It has already been argued that every field is limited to its proper object of study. Historical criticism is the wrong tool for studying not only the divine presence but divine causation. It is best, then, for the historian to bracket references to the divine presence in the earthly Jesus and the miracles attributed to the earthly Jesus, leaving their study to more appropriate fields such as philosophy and theology. The proper object of study for historical criticism is the earthly (empirical) Jesus. It is invalid for the historian to make historical judgments about the earthly (transcendent) Jesus or the acts of the earthly (transcendent) Jesus. To be sure, the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus will be non-supernatural, but this reflects a limit not on the earthly Jesus but on the empirical and temporal methodology of Jesus research, namely, historical criticism. It is beyond the limit of historical criticism to affirm or to deny more than this.

This raises an important question: Isn't the quest that I am proposing, one in which the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus is non-supernatural, just like the quests that I have been criticizing? On the surface this is definitely true, but I would argue that there is a substantial difference. Whereas the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar use
historical criticism to dismiss the earthly (transcendent) Jesus, I recognize the inherent limitations of this critical methodology. Although historical criticism is appropriate for the study of empirical and temporal realities, it is wholly inadequate for studying the transcendent. Historical criticism can neither deny nor affirm the transcendent; it is the wrong tool for the task at hand. So while I bracket the earthly (transcendent) Jesus from historical considerations, the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar attempt to overthrow the earthly (transcendent) Jesus, arguing that the earthly (empirical) Jesus exhausts the earthly Jesus. In actuality, the earthly (empirical) Jesus is the only earthly Jesus that can be known using the tools of historical criticism. But this is not a limitation of the earthly Jesus but of the methodology. Also, the results of historical criticism give us only a glimpse of the earthly (empirical) Jesus, approximating but not exhausting the earthly (empirical) Jesus. The historical Jesus is nothing more than a theoretical construction arrived at by applying historical criticism to the extant sources. Historical criticism in no way gives direct and complete access to the earthly Jesus, not even the earthly (empirical) Jesus. Neither the sources nor the method permit this. In fact, when historical criticism is given reign over all fields of study, the earthly Jesus becomes reduced to the historical Jesus and Christianity becomes reduced to ethics.

With regard to miracles, my approach brackets the miracles of Jesus from historical criticism not because they are not (actual) historical but because they are beyond the limits of historical criticism to judge as (demonstrable) historical. In contrast, the Jesus Seminar argues that Jesus’ miracles are not (actual) historical and offers naturalistic explanations to account for their presence in the gospels, much as was done in
the Old Quest. Although this dissertation has concentrated on phase one of the Jesus Seminar's work, the identification of authentic sayings, chapter four intends to consider the quest in its entirety. During phase two, the Jesus Seminar met in the spring 1993 to consider the healings attributed to Jesus in the gospels. Funk describes the Seminar's position on Jesus' miracles. Miracles that fall under the category of nature miracle, e.g., walking on water, stilling the storm, resurrection, etc., are approached as either fiction or myth. Regarding the healings and exorcisms, the Jesus Seminar takes an explanatory approach, finding material causation in the psyche of Jesus' "patients."

In preparation for its spring 1993 meeting, the Seminar enlisted Stevan Davies to write a paper describing his perspective on Jesus' healings. A version of this paper was subsequently published in The Fourth R, a popular magazine of the Westar Institute. Davies argues that Jesus was neither a shaman nor a magician. The closest analogy that Davies can find for Jesus' healings is modern-day "faith healers," who facilitate "healing" through the faith of others. Davies describes how this might have occured in first-century Palestine. Because of the stressful environment of Roman occupied Palestine and the interiorization of guilt, people developed conversion (psychosomatic) disorders. Jesus was able to "heal" those with conversion disorders because of their faith in his ability to

27H. E. G. Paulus, for example, explained Jesus' walking on the water as a misperception on the part of the disciples who actually observed Jesus walking on a sandbar. Paulus is also to be credited with the swoon theory, which explained Jesus' resurrection as resuscitation caused by the cool of the tomb. See Paulus, Das Leben als Grundlage einer Geschichte des Urchristentums (Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1828).


arrange their forgiveness. Jesus' healings, then, like those of modern-day faith healers is psychotherapeutic in nature. Davies observes that the same environment that can cause conversion disorders can also lead to dissociative disorders which are manifest in the gospels as "demon possessions." Davies has succeeded in offering rational explanations for the reports of Jesus' healings and exorcisms. In the end, however, Jesus is portrayed as an exorcist even though demons do not exist, and a healer even though the illnesses were psychosomatic. It seems more reasonable to bracket the miracles of Jesus for consideration in a field of study more appropriate, such as theology or philosophy.

B. Research in a Limited Quest

1. Relevant Background Data in a Limited Quest

Proper research in a quest for the historical Jesus must begin with a basic understanding of critical historiography. In historical research, scholars begin with the assumption that people and events do not arise out of a historical vacuum. Rather, people and events have historical particularity, such that they are to be understood within the historical and cultural setting of their time. People and events, in fact, are perceived and interpreted according to historical and cultural "constraints." These constraints establish limits in the range of possible meanings. This is true not only for texts but for individual sayings and deeds. For Jesus scholars, this means that the historical setting of first century Palestinian Judaism must be carefully studied if their interpretation of the earthly (empirical) Jesus is to have historical credibility. In fact, an adequate appreciation of

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30Anthony Harvey is to be credited with developing the helpful concept of "constraints." See his Jesus and the Constraints of History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).
Jesus' historical context is necessary for the Jesus scholars to overcome the tendency to "modernize" Jesus, i.e., create Jesus after their own image.

If the earthly (empirical) Jesus is to be understood historically, he must be understood within his historical context. This is a necessary first step before a consideration of the foreground data, the records of Jesus' sayings and deeds. In fact, the foreground data is properly interpreted only against the background of its historical context. But what is this context? Broadly speaking, the context of Jesus' day is second temple Judaism, the time from the building of Zerubbabel's temple (515 B.C.E.) to the destruction of Herod's temple (70 C.E.). As scholars have come to recognize, Judaism prior to 70 C.E. was far from uniform. Scholars can no longer speak of a normative Judaism for this time period, but rather refer to the various strains of Judaism.

Recent archaeological activity in Galilee provides insight into the daily life of Jesus' day. Although these discoveries are helpful to understand this time period, contemporaneous literature provides the best information on the world of Jesus' day. As with other ancient studies, historians are limited to a handful of extant sources. For Jesus scholars, the surviving literature includes the O.T. Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea


Scrolls, and the writings of Josephus. Although this literature does not provide exhaustive information on Jesus' socio-historical setting, it surely provides the necessary background against which to make sense of the earthly (empirical) Jesus. This background information can be mined more thoroughly with the use of social scientific criticism as some Jesus scholars have done, such as, Richard Horsley.

2. **Available Foreground Data in a Limited Quest**

Having familiarized themselves with Jesus' socio-historical setting, Jesus scholars are now prepared to consider the foreground data of Jesus. Although foreground data typically includes remains (physical evidence) and records (literary sources), only the latter is available to the Jesus scholar. Surely there are remains that provide valuable background information but only extant sources contain information on the deeds and sayings of Jesus. Before considering specific records, it is necessary to identify the inherent limitations in utilizing ancient sources. First, extant documents are fragmentary, providing only a glimpse of the past. Second, this glimpse is provided by an author with a limited perspective. In other words, the author was both subjective and selective in writing. Third, the purpose of the author is frequently different from that of the historian.

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The primary sources for the study of the earthly Jesus continue to be the canonical gospels. Jesus scholars of every theological stripe utilize Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for their construction of the historical Jesus, with various degrees of historical skepticism. As with other ancient sources, there are limitations in the historian’s use of the canonical gospels. Most significantly, whereas the historian seeks historical knowledge about the earthly Jesus, the gospel writers were interested in presenting the earthly Jesus as more than human. The gospels were clearly written from the perspective of faith and for the purpose of illiciting faith. Since historical criticism is appropriate only for the study of the earthly (empirical) Jesus, the Jesus scholar must attempt to distinguish information about the earthly (empirical) Jesus from information about the earthly (transcendent) Jesus. But how can this be accomplished? In the next two sections, we will consider the tools and criteria used to make these judgments.

Other possible sources beyond the canonical gospels for constructing the historical Jesus are the extracanonical writings, many of which were discovered for the first time at Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945. Prominent among these writings is the Gospel of Thomas. No small debate has evolved about the role of Thomas in Jesus research. Some Jesus scholars, such as those among the Jesus Seminar, utilize Thomas as an early and independent source for their construction of the historical Jesus. Other Jesus scholars, such as E. P. Sanders and John Meier, dismiss Thomas as a late and dependent source providing no value for Jesus research. The issues and arguments involved in this debate are far been the scope of this chapter to address.
Having delimited the sources for Jesus research, we are confronted with a methodological problem: should the Jesus scholars begin with the sayings or deeds of Jesus? Some Jesus scholars begin with the sayings of Jesus, but this entails several assumptions. First, it assumes that the sayings tradition is more reliable ("the bedrock of the Jesus tradition"). This may or may not be true, as oral cultures appear capable of transmitting not only isolated sayings but extended narratives. Second, it assumes that Jesus was primarily a teacher, which, again, may or may not be true. In fact, this assumption leads to a circular argument when the historical Jesus is portrayed as first and foremost a teacher. Third, it assumes that sayings have meaning independent of actions.

As some Jesus scholars, such as E. P. Sanders, have cogently argued the actions of a historical figure speak louder than their words. Since this is true, it seems best to begin with the deeds of Jesus and attempt to understand the sayings within this context. But isn't this problematic for my approach, which brackets Jesus' miracles from historical consideration? This would indeed be the case if the miracles were the only deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels. But this is not so. The gospels record numerous non-miraculous deeds as well, e.g., Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus' cleansing of the temple, Jesus' interaction with social outcasts, Jesus' participation in Judaism, and Jesus' crucifixion.

3. **Appropriate Research Tools in a Limited Quest**

In the various quests for the historical Jesus, different critical tools have been used to determine the earliest sources and forms of the Jesus tradition. In this section, we will evaluate the usefulness of three such tools, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction
criticism. Although this section rehearses previous scholarship, the intention is to establish the inherent limitations of each tool, limitations that are infrequently acknowledged by Jesus scholars. The Jesus Seminar, in fact, considers these tools to be included among "The Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom."³⁴ But, as will be seen, these tools are based upon theories--good theories to be sure, but theories nonetheless. If new evidence were discovered or better theories proposed, the landscape of research tools for Jesus research could be radically altered. This is not to suggest that Jesus research is founded on a "house of cards," but it does suggest that Jesus research does not have a rock solid foundation. The point is this: Given the limitations of these research tools, Jesus scholars should be more cautious about their historical claims.

During the Old Quest, Jesus scholars relied heavily upon the tool of source criticism. The purpose of source criticism was to identify the sources utilized by the Evangelists, hoping to determine the earliest sources. Scholars had observed that the first three gospels agreed in order and wording in numerous parallel passages. This gave rise to the synoptic problem, namely, what is the literary relationship among the synoptic gospels? Although there were some speculations about an Urgospel (pre-Markan gospel), the theory to emerge was the two-source hypothesis. According to this theory, Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, thus making Mark the earliest gospel. To account for the "double-tradition" (235 parallel sayings) between Matthew and Luke, source critics speculated that Matthew and Luke relied upon a second source. This hypothetical second source, which largely appeared to be a collection of sayings, became known as "Q" after

the German word *Quelle* ("source").

In all three quests for the historical Jesus, the two-source theory has dominated, so that Mark has enjoyed a privileged position among the four canonical gospels. In recent years, scholars have paid more attention to the sayings source Q. Some scholars have attempted to stratify this hypothetical document, according to chronological layers: Q1, Q2, and Q3.35 Other scholars have speculated about the Christian community that gave rise to the earliest stratification of Q.36 The highly speculative nature of these recent studies, where theory is built upon hypothesis, offers little hard evidence for the construction of the historical Jesus.37 Nonetheless, current Jesus scholars appear to not only privilege the Gospel of Mark but also those sayings that are part of the "double-tradition" known as Q.

Like all critical tools source criticism, with its proposal of the two-source theory, is not without problems. One of the contributing factors to the demise of the Old Quest was William Wrede’s proposal that even the earliest gospel, Mark, exhibits a theological interest, namely, "the messianic secret."38 The Gospel of Mark, it appeared to Wrede, was


37The highly speculative nature of these studies has not gone unnoticed. See, for example, Christopher Tuckett, *Q and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); and David Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

already responding to theological controversies in incipient Christianity. But if Mark is indeed a theological writing, scholars wondered if access to the historical Jesus was still possible. Another problem for the two-source theory has been recent attempts to resurrect the Griesbach theory by William Farmer.\textsuperscript{39} According this theory, Matthew was written first, then Luke used Matthew as a source, and finally Mark used both Matthew and Luke as sources to write an abridged gospel. Although the Griesbach theory has not posed much of a threat to the two-source hypothesis, it is not without some evidentiary support, e.g., patristic evidence and minor agreements between Matthew and Luke. Importantly, if the Griesbach theory is correct there is no need to propose a hypothetical document to account for the double-tradition.

Some of those who accept Markan priority have questioned the existence of Q. Some scholars, such as Austin Farrar and Michael Goulder, have suggested that the double-tradition can best be accounted for by Matthew's use of Luke as a source.\textsuperscript{40} Although the two-source theory has the greatest probability, these other options remind us that it is still a theory. The Q source, which plays an important role in current Jesus research, must also be recognized for what it is, namely, a hypothetical document. Scholars have reconstructed Q from the "double-tradition," but this probably does not exhaust the contents of Q. Moreover, there is no way to determine the proper order of Q


for its reconstruction.

What does source criticism contribute to Jesus research? If one accepts the two-source hypothesis, and there are good reasons to do so, then Jesus scholars are able to identify two sources behind Matthew and Luke, namely, Mark and Q. Earlier sources, however, should not be automatically equated with historical. The authors of Mark and Q have theological interests and concerns just as much as Matthew and Luke. The two-source hypothesis also contributes to Jesus research by enabling Jesus scholars to take advantage of another tool, redaction criticism, which we will discuss shortly.

Another critical tool to emerge from historical criticism is form criticism. Rather than arising out of a quest for the historical Jesus, however, form criticism emerged out of an interest in the *Sitz im Leben* ("situation in life") of the early church that gave rise to the oral forms of the Jesus tradition. Early practitioners of form criticism, such as Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, identified various oral forms, e.g., apophthegm, sayings, miracle stories, historical stories, and legends, and speculated about the *Sitz im Leben* that gave rise to them. A basic assumption of form critics was that Christian communities preserved and developed Jesus tradition that met the needs of the community.

Form critics developed theories to account for the oral transmission of the Jesus tradition during this period. Bulmann's evolutionary model stands as an example of this.\(^4\) Bulmann believed that the Jesus tradition evolved from an original pure form and

developed in a linear fashion according to principles of intrinsic causation. For Bultmann, the tool of form criticism provided great insight into the life of the earliest Christian communities. In the New Quest, however, form criticism was used by Bultmann's students as a tool to identify and eliminate later accretions. In current Jesus research, John Dominic Crossan has contributed to form criticism by creating a model for the development of aphorisms.

Although form criticism has correctly identified evidence of the oral transmission of Jesus tradition, there is no consensus on the nature of the tradition, specifically whether are not the tradition was fixed or fluid during oral transmission. Form critics assumed that the Jesus tradition was analogous to folk literature in the fluidity with which oral performers modified the oral tradition. In contrast, the Scandinavian school has argued that the Jesus tradition was fixed according to the transmission of oral tradition in later rabbinic Judaism.42 The Jesus tradition, according to the Scandinavian school, was rigidly transmitted according to established rules of memorization. Because Jesus' disciples understood his teachings to be the "New Torah," they guarded both form and content much in the same way rabbinic students preserved the oral law. The Scandinavian school has not gone unchallenged, most notably by Morton Smith, William

Davies, Jacob Neusner, and Werner Kelber.\textsuperscript{43} The issue of fixed or fluid is far from resolved. The difficulty is primarily due to the lack of evidence from the period of oral transmission. Scholars simply do not know how the Jesus tradition was transmitted during this period. The point is that form criticism, at least in regard to oral transmission, is limited by its speculative nature.

A significant contribution of form criticism has been the identification of individual literary forms within the gospels. The value of genre identification for interpretation cannot be overestimated. Genre criticism, in fact, is one of the greatest contributions of form criticism to New Testament studies. Some scholars have carefully studied the literary world of the first century to identify and define the literary forms embedded in the gospels.\textsuperscript{44} Other scholars have shown how genre identification establishes interpretive expectations and strategies.\textsuperscript{45} Jesus scholars today are in a better position to interpret their ancient sources because of these efforts.


\textsuperscript{44}See, for example, David Aune, \textit{The New Testament in its Literary Environment} (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

A tool to emerge out of the New Quest for the specific purpose of Jesus research was redaction criticism. In the late 1950s three scholars independently compared parallel accounts in the synoptic gospels and arrived at similar conclusions, namely, Gunther Bornkamm, Willi Marxen (who is credited with coining the term *Redaktionsgeschichte*), and Hanz Conzelmann. The goal of redaction critics was to identify the editorial work of the Evangelists in order to determine the Evangelist's theological interests and emphases. Assuming the two-source hypothesis, redaction critics compared parallel passages in the synoptic gospels to determine how Matthew and Luke modified their primary source, Mark. Redaction criticism had clearly moved beyond the form criticism out of which it grew, for form critics considered the Evangelists to be mere "cutters and pasters" of the Jesus tradition.

One contribution of redaction criticism to Jesus research is the recognition that the Evangelists were redactors (editors) of the Jesus tradition. (This recognition would later give rise to narrative criticism which approaches the gospels as literary works in their own right). A second, and related, contribution of redaction criticism is its interest in the Evangelists' theological purposes in writing their gospels. In Jesus research, redaction criticism can be used to distinguish the redactional work of the Evangelists from their sources. Redaction criticism, however, is not without limitations. To begin with, redaction criticism is based upon a theory of gospel relations, namely, the two-source theory. Although this theory is well established, it is nonetheless a theory such that redaction critics should be modest in their assertions. This is especially true in regard to speculations about theological motivation, such as, why did Matthew or Luke modify
their assumed sources (Mark and Q) in this or that way?

4. Admissible Evidence in a Limited Quest

Having identified the available foreground data, the Jesus scholar still has the task of evaluating these sources to determine the admissible evidence for constructing the historical Jesus. Although various criteria of authenticity have been devised for the sayings of Jesus, these criteria are equally fruitful when applied to the deeds of Jesus, as demonstrated by John Meier.46 The goal of this step is to apply the criteria of authenticity to the deeds and sayings of Jesus in order to determine which ones are authentic, or, using my terminology, (demonstrable) historical. These authentic deeds and sayings then become the database of admissible evidence for constructing the historical Jesus. But what of the sayings that fail the criteria of authenticity? Is it reasonable to conclude that these sayings are inauthentic, or (actual) unhistorical? It is beyond the limit of these criteria to make such judgments. All that the historian can affirm is that certain deeds and sayings have been judged to be authentic by the various criteria of authenticity. This in no way implies that the remaining deeds and sayings are judged inauthentic, for other criteria might be developed that can render judgments of authenticity. In other words, the criteria of authenticity can make positive judgments, affirming authenticity, but not negative judgments, denying authenticity. The historian can only judge what is (demonstrable) historical via these current criteria, not what is (actual) historical. This will become more clear as each of the criterion are considered.

One of the criteria of authenticity can be traced back to the work of Rudolf Bultmann, namely, the criterion of dissimilarity.\(^{47}\) Norman Perrin, however, is to be credited with coining the phrase and giving the criterion its classic definition: "if we are to ascribe a saying to Jesus...we must be able to show that the saying comes neither from the Church nor from ancient Judaism."\(^{48}\) In other words, a deed or saying can be identified as authentic if it is distinct from the Judaism out of which the earthly Jesus came and from the Christianity that emerged in the wake of his death and resurrection. The criterion of dissimilarity is valuable in judging the authenticity of unique deeds and sayings. But surely no one would assert that deeds and sayings that are not unique, i.e., have parallels in Judaism or Christianity, can be judged to be inauthentic, or (actual) unhistorical. If this assertion could be made, then the earthly Jesus could not have done and said things consistent with his Jewish heritage. The point is that the criterion of dissimilarity can be used to judge certain deeds and sayings to be authentic but it cannot be used to make judgments about inauthenticity.

The criterion of multiple attestation has been in use since the New Quest. It basically says that if a deed or saying occurs in more than one layer of the gospel tradition, e.g., in Mark, Q, M, L, or John, it is probably authentic. As with the criterion of dissimilarity, the criterion of multiple attestation can be used to judge authenticity but not inauthenticity. Imagine if every deed and saying, whether for the earthly Jesus or any


historical figure, required multiple attestation for authenticity. Not very much could be affirmed. Where we find multiple attestation for a deed or saying, we probably have an authentic saying. But this does not imply that deeds and sayings with single attestation are inauthentic.

A third criterion is embarrassment, which states that records of embarrassing deeds and sayings are reliable because the early church would not have fabricated such sayings. A fourth criterion is the criterion of difficult deeds and sayings which asserts that the church would have more than likely removed them or smoothed them over unless, of course, they were well established in the Jesus tradition. A fifth and final criterion that could be used is the criterion of coherence. According to this criterion, deeds and sayings are admitted to the database of authentic sayings if they do not conflict with the deeds and sayings admitted under other criteria. Although these five criteria are not new or innovative, they do provide the Jesus scholar with a means by which to judge deeds and sayings to be authentic, and thus to be included in the database of admissible evidence for constructing the historical Jesus. But as pointed out, these criteria are limited to affirming that certain deeds and sayings are (demonstrable) historical, rather than denying that other deeds and sayings are (actual) historical.

B. Synthesis in a Limited Quest

1. Constructing a Coherent Portrait in a Limited Quest

Having completed the step of research, the next step in historical criticism is synthesis. This is where the historian synthesizes the admissible evidence into a plausible hypothesis. This hypothesis is the historian's interpretation (description) of the
evidence. Do historians consider all interpretations to be equally valid? Historian C. Behan McCullagh writes, "Historians require that interpretations of past events, people and societies be true, fair and of an adequate explanatory scope."49 "True," for McCullagh, means that the interpretation correlates with the evidence, while "fair" means that the proposed interpretation is neither intentionally misleading nor unbalanced in explaining the evidence. The bottom line appears to be that valid historical interpretations must have explanatory adequacy, accounting for the admissible evidence. McCullagh points out that valid interpretations are "constrained by the evidence."50 The evidence, in other words, avails itself to a limited number of interpretations.

For the Jesus scholar, the hypothesis derived from a synthesis of the admissible evidence is the resultant portrait of the historical Jesus. In regard to the validity of the Jesus scholar's portrait, E. P. Sanders rightly observes, "One is looking for a hypothesis which explains more (not everything), which gives a good account (not the only one) of what happened, which fits Jesus realistically into his environment, and which has in view cause and effect."51 To the extent that the Jesus scholar's interpretation is true and fair, it is a valid historical interpretation. These interpretation are not only constrained by the evidence, for the Jesus scholar, but by the plausibility of a given portrait in Jesus' socio-historical context. A helpful criterion in this regard is Klausner's text. Joseph Klausner argued that a good hypothesis about Jesus should locate him believably within Judaism

50Ibid., 20-21.
51E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 58.
and yet explain why the movement initiated by him eventually broke from that same Judaism.\textsuperscript{52} Klausner's test can be supplemented by John Meier's criterion of rejection and execution, which states that the plausibility of particular portrait is directly proportional to its ability to explain Jesus' death by crucifixion.\textsuperscript{53}

2. Avoiding Reductionism in a Limited Quest

One of the trends that can be observed in current Jesus research is the plurality of portraits that have been proposed. Some scholars are embarrassed by this phenomenon, thinking that it calls into question the credibility of Jesus research. This, however, is not necessarily the case. Historian C. Behan McCullagh offers this keen insight: "Different descriptions of the same thing cannot all be true if they are inconsistent, but otherwise they can all be true."\textsuperscript{54} The plurality of portraits, then, only cause a problem for Jesus research if the various portraits contradict one another. But, is it possible that these various portraits complement rather than contradict? An analogy might be helpful here. Suppose that a historian was to describe the life of former president Ronald Reagan in terms of his political career. Such a portrait, if it was true and fair, would have historical validity. But, because people are multifaced, no historian would claim that such a description exhausts the person of Ronald Reagan. In Jesus research, the various portraits of the historical Jesus may each contain a grain of truth. It is only when Jesus scholars

\textsuperscript{52}Joseph Klausner, \textit{Jesus of Nazareth: His Times, His Life, and His Teachings} (London, 1925).

\textsuperscript{53}Meier, \textit{A Marginal Jew}, volume one: 177.

\textsuperscript{54}McCullagh, \textit{The Truth of History}, 69.
claim that their portrait of the historical Jesus is exhaustive does this cause the plurality of portraits to be an embarrassment for Jesus research.

Some scholars have argued for an either/or approach to the portraits of the historical Jesus as either an apocalyptic prophet and or a wandering sage. As noted in chapter two, however, scholars of the Hebrew Bible no longer accept the false dichotomy between prophetic literature and wisdom literature. This can be seen as well in Ben Witherington’s portrait of the historical Jesus as a prophetic sage.55 Does this mean that any and all portraits of the historical Jesus are valid? Absolutely not. A number of portraits lack explanatory adequacy, such as, S. G. F. Brandon’s portrait of Jesus as a political revolutionary, Morton Smith’s portrait of a magician, or the portrait of a cynic sage proposed by Burton Mack, John Dominic Crossan, and the Jesus Seminar. These portraits simply don’t account for enough of the admissible evidence. The portrait of a cynic sage also lacks plausibility because there is no evidence of cynic influence in the Galilee of Jesus’ day.

3. Tentative Conclusions in a Limited Quest

When Jesus scholars propose their hypothetical construction of Jesus, it is with the recognition that historical conclusions are based upon probability. Certainty is an illusion in critical historiography, and Jesus research is no exception. Having said this, it must be equally acknowledged that “although historical conclusions are always fallible, when they are well supported by evidence they deserve to be believed very probably true,

55Ben Witherington, Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom (Minneapolis: Fortress/Augsburg Press, 1994).
that is, as telling us something about the world."\textsuperscript{56} This raises an important question for Jesus research: Does the Jesus scholar's portrait of the historical Jesus count as historical knowledge? If historical interpretations of people and events are true and fair, they have historical validity. Surely interpretations that have validity should be counted as historical knowledge. This should be no less true for Jesus research.

The Jesus scholar must exercise modesty in historical claims. The sometimes grandiose claims of some Jesus scholars is hardly warranted by the results of historical criticism. In fact, the results of historical criticism must remain tentative, allowing for the possibility of new sources or new criteria. In Jesus research, historical knowledge about Jesus is indeed possible. This knowledge, however, can never claim to be conclusive. The court of appeals must remain forever open.

D. Implications of a Limited Quest

1. Prescribed Role for the Historical Jesus in a Limited Quest

At this point the Jesus scholar has completed the first two steps of historical criticism, research and synthesis. The third step to be completed is implications. This final step, however, must be carefully distinguished from the previous two. In the step of implications, historians consider the contemporary relevance of their historical conclusions for application in a variety of other fields, such as, economics, politics, philosophy, theology, etc. Although it is reasonable for historians to draw implications from their historical conclusions, these implications are not historical judgments. The historian, in other words, is no longer functioning as a historian, but rather as an

\textsuperscript{56} McCullagh, \textit{The Truth of History}, 5.
economist, political commentator, theologian, or philosopher. An illustration might prove helpful here. Richard Horsley has correctly identified a social concern on the part of Jesus for the poor and marginalized.\textsuperscript{57} Few doubt the explanatory adequacy of Horsley's historical conclusions on this. Now suppose Horsley approaches an economist and argues that Jesus' practice of charity and outreach are normative for today. This would indeed be a valid implication of Horsley's historical research. This implication, however, is not based upon a historical judgment; it is rather Horsley's prescription of his historical conclusions for his contemporary setting. Implications drawn by the historian, then, should be presented not as historical knowledge which by its nature is descriptive but as the historian's prescription for their current situation.

Helpful for understanding the role of implications in Jesus research is the distinction between three types of knowledge.\textsuperscript{58} The first type of knowledge is historical knowledge. This is the knowledge attained through the steps of research and synthesis in historical criticism. In Jesus research, the historical knowledge attained is the historian's construction of a portrait that approximates the earthly (empirical) Jesus, or more simply, the historical Jesus. Knowledge of the historical Jesus requires no faith commitment but is accessible to all via the method of historical criticism. A second type of knowledge is historic knowledge, which is the significant knowledge drawn from historical knowledge.


\textsuperscript{58}These three types of knowledge have been adapted from Norman Perrin. See his book, \textit{Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus} (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1967): 234-237.
The assumption here is that some, but not all, historical knowledge is relevant for the contemporary situation. This type of knowledge is the same as the third step in historical criticism, namely, implications. Implications, as just argued, are not based upon historical judgment; rather, it is the historian's application of historical conclusions. A third type of knowledge is faith-knowledge. Faith-knowledge is not concerned so much with the empirical and temporal but with "transhistorical" (non-historical) realities,\textsuperscript{59} such as, the idea of God and his activity in the world. This is knowledge about the (transcendent) Jesus, whether earthly or risen, that is accepted within the context of faith.

In this third step of implications, it will be shown that the historical Jesus has relevance for our contemporary society. This historic knowledge, however, is not based upon historical judgment but upon the application of historical conclusions. In other words, the Jesus scholar is no longer function as a historian but as something else, depending upon the field of study in which the historical Jesus is applied. The historical Jesus also contributes to faith-knowledge, even though faith-knowledge is not based upon historical knowledge. But what possible value does historical knowledge hold for faith-knowledge? Historical knowledge is beneficial to faith-knowledge in at least three ways. First, the historical Jesus corrects false christologies which reduce the earthly Jesus to a mythical figure, such as, docetism. The New Quest was largely launched as a corrective to Bultmann's existential theology which had reduced the earthly Jesus to a myth of history. Second, the historical Jesus can provide some content for faith-knowledge.

\textsuperscript{59}"Transhistorical" is the term used by Norman Perrin to talk about those realities that are neither temporal nor empirical. In other words, Perrin rightly asserts that there are realities that are beyond the limits of historical criticism to judge.
Faith-knowledge certainly embraces more than can be known via historical criticism, but it does not embrace less. The historical knowledge provided by this critical method can provide a foundation upon which to build faith-knowledge, even though it is not the proper object of Christian faith. Third, the historical Jesus can be utilized as a source in christological formulations which tend to emphasize the transcendent quality of Jesus. Historical knowledge of Jesus can be included with faith-knowledge to devise a creed that fairly represents but does not exhaust the "real" Jesus.

The distinction between historical judgment and contemporary application is especially important in Jesus research. A case can indeed be made for the relevance of the historical Jesus but this is no longer a historical judgment. A number of Jesus scholars move naively from the descriptive to the prescriptive, as though historical knowledge about Jesus is definitive for Christian faith. Some Jesus scholars, in fact, prescribe decisions of faith in their historical Jesus.60 M. Eugene Boring rightly warns against those who "call for faith in their reconstruction and theological interpretation of the real Jesus. Whoever makes decisions on these matters is no longer functioning as historian."61 Surely Jesus scholars can make these prescriptions but they cannot call them historical judgments.

60It is probably more accurate to say that these Jesus scholars call for faith in their reconstruction of the teachings of the earthly Jesus about the kingdom of God. This, of course, is in keeping with Bultmann's dictum: the proclaimer became the proclaimed.

61Boring, "The 'Third Quest' and the Apostolic Faith," 350. Among those who make such grandiose claims, Boring identifies Burton Mack, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Surely the Jesus Seminar could be added to this list as well.
As stated previously, the quest for the historical Jesus is primarily a quest for historical knowledge about Jesus. As we have seen, Jesus research is limited by its methodology so that it can provide only a glimpse of the earthly (empirical) Jesus. If this is true, then it is inappropriate for Jesus scholars to present their theoretical constructions as the proper object of Christian faith. Unfortunately, as Luke Johnson has correctly observed, "The most destructive effect of the Jesus Seminar and recent Historical Jesus books has been the perpetuation of the notion that history somehow determines faith, and that for faith to be correct, the historical accounts that gave rise to it have to be verifiable." Johnson, following in the steps of Martin Kähler, rightly identifies two reasons why history cannot be the basis of Christian faith. First, since historical conclusions are tentative, they can never sustain the commitment of faith. In other words, if the historical Jesus is to be the proper object of Christian faith, the question then becomes, which historical Jesus? With the plurality of portraits proposed by Jesus scholars, portraits that are probabilistic and non-conclusive, the historical Jesus cannot support faith commitments. Second, Christian faith is not directed at historical facts about Jesus but at the risen lord. The historical Jesus provides only a glimpse of the earthly (empirical) Jesus, and really only a shadow of the "real" Jesus. Christian faith has never been in a theoretical construct, which is what the historical Jesus is, but in a living

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Johnson, The Real Jesus, 141. Johnson's insight has been echoed by John Meier: "the proper object of Christian faith is not and cannot be an idea or scholarly reconstruction, however reliable. The object of Christian faith is a living person, Jesus Christ, who fully entered into a true human existence on earth in the first century A.D., but now lives risen and glorified, forever in the Father's presence," in "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," Theological Studies 51 (1990): 22.
person.

2. **Contemporary Relevance of a Limited Quest**

What are some valid implications that can be drawn from the historical Jesus? The historical Jesus provides basic historical knowledge about the earthly (empirical) Jesus; the method of historical criticism permits no more than this. But such knowledge is valuable in itself just as historical knowledge about any significant person sheds light on the past. More than this, since historians draw implications from the lives of other historical figures, relevance can be found in the historical Jesus for contemporary society. For example, many people today find the earthly (transcendent) Jesus presented in the canonical gospels to be unapproachable and unbelievable. By constructing a portrait that approximates the earthly (empirical) Jesus, Jesus scholars can provide a Jesus who is understandable. Such a portrait does not require any kind of faith commitment but is accessible to all via historical criticism.

Even though the historical Jesus is not the proper object of Christian faith, there is much that modern men and women can learn from the historical Jesus. Historical criticism can not only confirm the existence of the earthly Jesus, but it can provide limited historical knowledge about the man, such as his ethics, lifestyle, and ministry. This historical knowledge, however, is not equivalent to Christianity as the Jesus Seminar would have us believe. Christianity is far more than this as the next section asserts.

3. **Theological Relevance of a Limited Quest**

Some scholars, such as Martin Kähler and Luke Johnson, have wrongly asserted that the quest for the historical Jesus holds no value for Christian theology. The quest is
"blind alley" that could even hinder Christian faith. Other scholars, such as found in the Old Quest and the Jesus Seminar, incorrectly maintain that the historical Jesus is definitive for Christian theology. In fact, for these scholars christology is reduced to the historical Jesus. The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. As long as the historical Jesus is recognized as a theoretical construction, surely it can be included in theological reflection. Christology, after all, is the attempt to construct a portrait that approximates the "real" Jesus. Since Jesus research sheds light on the earthly (empirical) Jesus, this information can be incorporated into the formulation of a christology. The historical Jesus, then, can serve as a source of theological reflection for christology.

A perennial question for Jesus research is: What is the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith? Scholars of the Old Quest, with the Jesus Seminar in their footsteps, argued that there was a radical discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Whereas the former was historical (real), the latter was a mythical figure fabricated by the early church. In fact, one of the motivating factors of the Old Quest was the desire to overthrow the Christ of faith as characterized by the creed of Chalcedon. This christological creed, according to Old Quest scholars, was no longer tenable for modern men and women. But as I have attempted to show in this chapter, historical criticism cannot render historical judgments on transcendent matters. It is the wrong tool for the job. The historical Jesus, then, poses no threat to the Christ of faith.

In contrast to the Old Quest, the New Quest attempted to identify theological continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, so that the former was not
reduced to a myth. This approach is similar to my own but I attempt to distinguish more carefully between historical knowledge and faith-knowledge. Whereas the former is attained by the work of the historian, the latter comes from theological reflection. So, instead of identifying theological unity, I prefer to speak of phenomenological unity. In other words, the field of historical criticism provides historical knowledge, while the field of theology provides faith-knowledge. These are two very different types of knowledge, one attained by reason alone and the other accepted by faith in revelation. To seek theological continuity, as the New Quest did, is to blur the distinction between these two phenomena, as though historical knowledge is theological. On the other hand, if both phenomena correspond to a unified reality, then some kind of unity can be expected. For lack of a better term, this can be called phenomenological unity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has intended to contribute to Jesus research by proposing a quest that clearly establishes the inherent limitations of historical criticism. As we have seen, the historical method, which is central to Jesus research, is limited by the perspective and subjectivity of the historian, by the perspective and fragmentary nature of the sources, by the proper object of study, by research tools and criteria, by hypotheses in reconstruction. The resultant portrait of the historical Jesus is the historian's interpretation of the earthly (empirical) Jesus based upon the admissible evidence. If this portrait has explanatory adequacy, it indeed contributes to our historical knowledge about the earthly Jesus, but it is hardly the proper object of Christian faith. If Jesus research is to advance, Jesus scholars must begin to acknowledge the limits of the quest for the historical Jesus, limits
inherent in the very methodology they use.
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