

Eschatology and the Quest for the Historical Jesus

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The title "eschatology and the quest for the historical Jesus" correctly points to the fact that this long-standing quest has been deeply marked by debates over the exact character of the eschatological hope preached by Jesus. It is not too much to say that, for many authors of the modern period (from around 1780 to the present), Jesus' eschatology is the key to his personhood, to his mission, message and meaning. The question of Jesus' eschatology is a well-fought-over terrain. In this essay we can only hope to outline the history of the debates, in the process discussing a few key texts. But first a few terminological precisions are in order.

I

Of the two main terms used in the modern discussion, eschatology and apocalyptic, eschatology is the broader, umbrella-like term, apocalyptic the narrower, more controversial term (although every element in this field has been controverted). Eschatology, (etymologically, the doctrine about the "last things"), refers both to the final destiny of the individual and to the final destiny of all humanity (or large collectivities within humanity, e.g., the elect people of God, believers, the "just"). Eschatology treats such subjects as resurrection from the dead, the particular and general judgment, heaven, hell (Gehenna), the intermediate state, purgatory, eternal life (beatific vision), the immortality of the soul, the kingdom of God and the return or (second) coming (*parousia*) of Christ; in brief, final salvation or damnation. There have often been Christians who are unhappy with the finality of much biblical eschatology, e.g., as presented in Matt 25:31-46. These Christians have developed the theory of the final restoration of all things (*apokatastasis panton*, Acts 3:21; cf. Matt 17:11 parallel to Mark 9:12, Col 1:20). Their pioneering hero is Origen. Eschatology thus covers a broad field. It is normally only treated to a full extent in theological textbooks and biblical dictionaries¹.

The term apocalyptic covers a narrower range of topics. Its viewpoint is generally concerned with visions of humanity's *collective* future, both in this world and in a heavenly eternity, often expressed in the formula "the kingdom [or reign or kingship] of God". It is a formula or phrase not found as such in the Hebrew Bible, except in the book of Daniel where it becomes the dominant theme, mentioned at the conclusion of every chapter or set of chapters.² In Daniel 7:13-14 it is combined with the mysterious figure of "one like a Son of Man" (NRSV: "like a human being"). (Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the idea of a divine control over or intervention in history is expressed by verbal expressions like "God reigns" (especially found in the Psalms) or the Day of the Lord (found especially in the Prophets, e.g., Amos 5:18-20; Isa 13:6, 9, 13 (Holy War traditions)).³ In the Septuagint the phrase "kingdom of God" is found in Wisdom 10:10, in connection with the patriarch Jacob. Its meaning there is not self-evident but its parallel is "knowledge of holy things" (Gen

1 E.g., B.T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington DE: M. Glazier, 1988); idem, *Trinity-Kingdom-Church* (NTOA 48; Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2001), pp. 137-184; Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988); Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970); Herbert Vorgrimler, *Hoffnung auf Vollendung* (Vienna: Herder, 1980); Hans Küng, *Eternal Life?* (New York: Doubleday-Image, 1985); B.E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2003); Edoardo Scognamiglio, *Ecco, Io Faccio Nuove Tutte Le Cose* (Padua: Messagero, 2002); Alois Winkelhofer, *HTG* 1.327-336.

2 J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); idem, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 1998); Mariano Delgado, Klaus Koch, Edgar Marsch, *Europa, Tausendjähriges Reich und Neue Welt: Zwei Jahrtausende Geschichte und Utopie in der Rezeption des Danielbandes* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003).

3 John Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979); Christian Grappe, *Le Royaume de Dieu* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001); Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

28:12, 17, 22). This passage in Wisdom did not influence the Synoptic Gospels.⁴

When one analyzes the phrase "kingdom of God", one notices that it involves the combination of a political term "kingdom", with a religious term, "God". It means that the user wants his politics to have something to do with his religion and his religion to have something to do with his politics. This is often such a dangerous combination that governments go to great lengths to separate church and state. Their efforts are not without reason when one considers the harm caused by such utopian projects as the Soviet Union and the Third Reich (Reich means kingdom or empire). Nevertheless, in many pre-modern forms of the great world religions such a separation is not desired even today.⁵ The tensions to which it leads, for example in Iran, Iraq and Israel, should help us to understand both the abiding fascination as well as the danger inherent in this theme of the kingdom of God. We are advised to proceed with caution.

II

Let us return to Daniel. When its night vision of the kingdom given to the one like a Son of Man enters the gospel tradition, it leads to a number of theological developments which can only be listed here. (It is important to see the implications of the theme.)

(1) Christology. The heavenly scene in Dan 7:13-14 involves a transfer of power from one divine figure (the Ancient of Days) to another (the one like a Son of Man). The sense of this scene was more clearly understood after the decipherment of the royal library at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) beginning in 1929. But already in the gospels the identification of Jesus with the Son of Man (whether by himself or by his followers) quickly led to understandings of Jesus as more than a man. The road to the Christological doctrines of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451), that Jesus was true God and true man, was opened.⁶

(2) Early Jewish and Christian reflection on the kingdom of God and on God's plan of salvation for his people led them to a rough periodization or *theology of history*. This periodization can take the simple two-step form: "this world", "the world to come" (e.g., Matt 12:32; Eph 1:21). It can take the fuller form of seven periods: e.g., from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to David (note how in this Christian scheme Moses is passed over), from David to the exile, from the exile to Jesus, from Jesus to his return in glory. This scheme is based on the seven days of Genesis 1 combined with the thousand years of Psalm 90:4, and results in the millennium of Rev 20:1-10; cf. 2 Pet 3:8.⁷ We find an extract of it in the genealogy of Matt 1: 1-18.

(3) The term "to judge", as in the phrase "he will come again in glory to *judge* the living and the dead", when understood biblically, as in the book of *Judges*, is not restricted to hearing cases and rendering judicial decisions. It means everything involved in the term "to govern".⁸ In this sense the future glorious Messiah is expected to govern the earth for a lengthy period of time, in conditions of justice and peace (see Matt 6:33 and Rom 14:17). In this way the kingdom of God involves the realization of human hopes for *social justice*, an *ethic*, what would later be called a utopia.⁹ Such a hopeful vision can fire the imagination

4 Chrysostome Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou La Sagesse de Salomon* (Etudes Bibliques, n.s., 1, 3, 5; Paris: Gabalda, 1983, 1984, 1985), 2.628-632.

5 See R.A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

6 Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959); R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1994); Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), esp. pp. 181-6.

7 Viviano, *Trinity-Kingdom-Church* (see note 1); Alfred Wikenhauser, "Die Herkunft der Idee des tausendjährigen Reiches in der Johannes-Apokalypse", *Römische Quartalschrift* 45 (1937) 1-24; "Weltwoche und tausendjähriges Reich", *Theologische Quartalschrift* 127 (1947) pp. 399-417.

8 See *TDNT* 3:921-954 (Friedrich Büchsel and Volkmar Hemtrich), and *TWAT* 8. 408-428 (H. Niehr); *ABD* 3.1104-1106 (T.L.J. Mafico).

9 F.E. and F.P. Manual, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Belknap, 1980); Sir Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 20-48.

and lead to resistance to what are considered unjust regimes, to revolution, to (wars of) liberation, to new regimes. To this extent kingdom talk can be very dynamic and history-making, whether for good or ill. Since in the gospels the kingdom of God is presented as a divinely-given free gift (a grace) given at an unexpected future date (Mark 13:32; 1 Thess. 5:2; Acts 1:3-7), the wide range of theologies of grace applies here to the question: what can we do to *hasten* (2 Pet 3:12) its coming? The options range from the quietist "We should do nothing but wait" to the Pelagian "We should take matters into our own hands and start building the kingdom here and now." (This is the dangerous option and it is not to be found in the New Testament.) A middle option may be called the John the Baptist model: we do not claim to build the kingdom directly but we *prepare* the way of the Lord's coming (Matt 33; Luke 1:76; Isa 40:3).

(4) Finally, a distinction needs to be clearly seen between the end of the present eon or age or period of salvation history, as announced for example in Matt 28:20 (in modern careful translations), and the end of the *cosmos* in the sense of a final conflagration (*ekpyrosis*) or destruction of the planet. Such an end is taught in Stoic philosophy, echoed in 2 Peter 3: 10-11; compare Mark 13:31 and parallels; Matt 5:18.¹⁰ So when modern scholars hostile to an apocalyptic prophetic Jesus proclaim that there never was an "end of the world" Jesus, they are narrowly correct.¹¹ But they miss or obfuscate the high probability that there was an "end of the *era*" Jesus. The revolutionary vision remains intact in his message, despite their best efforts to make it disappear.

III

Having mapped out the territory, let us now turn to the history of the quest for the historical Jesus and its relation to his eschatology.

Prehistory of the quest. Before such a peculiarly modern quest could begin, certain conditions had to be present.¹² The first was that the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) had to be written and accepted by what is sometimes called the Great Church. The writing of them took place between A.D. 69 and 120, granted the existence of pre-canonical sources like Q and oral and written free-floating traditions.¹³ Alongside this process of the canonization of the four, there occurred the gradual exclusion of the many apocryphal gospels, of which the two most important are the Proto-evangelium of James and the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁴ The latter plays an important role in the current quest. Once the four canonical gospels were in place, the process of how to relate them to one another could begin.¹⁵ One approach was to try to edit them into a single gospel harmony or fusion. This

10 See, for example, K.H. Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe. Der Judasbrief* (HTKzNT 13.2; Vienne: Herder, 1976); Henning Paulson, *Der zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief* (KEK 12:2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); J.H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude* (AB 37C; New York: Doubleday, 1993).

11 M.J. Borg, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God", *The Christian Century* (22 April 1987) 378-380; idem, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Lewiston ME: Mellen, 1984), esp. p. 261.

12 L.T. Johnson and W.S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity, 2000).

13 W.G. Kiimmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1988); Daniel Marguerat, ed., *Introduction au Nouveau Testament* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000).

14 Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds. *New Testament Apocrypha* (2 vols.; Louisville: WJK, 1991-1992; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: de Gruyter, 1995).

15 Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000).

was done by Tatian and, by trial and error, was abandoned after some time. Irenaeus was the first to attempt a complete theological synthesis of both Testaments and of all four gospels. His attempt was successful, but only at a certain level of generalization. Although his work was well received, it did not solve all the problems. Clement of Alexandria saw that John was different from the three synoptic gospels; he called it the "spiritual" gospel.¹⁶ Under pressure from pagan critics like Celsus, Origen tried to overcome the contradictions between the four.¹⁷ Augustine also wrote a work *On the Consensus of the Gospels*.¹⁸

Here we must introduce another distinction. Once Christianity became a predominantly Gentile religion and entered the Greco-Roman cultural world, its dialogue partner at the theological level became Hellenistic philosophy. Its roots in Judaism and in Jewish apocalyptic thought began to be obscured, even though Daniel remained in the Christian biblical canon, and even though the first Christian biblical commentary was on Daniel (Hippolytus, in Rome).¹⁹ To live like a Jew became a reproach already in Gal 2:14, and this reproach intensified in Ignatius of Antioch (ca. AD 115). As the Roman empire became at least nominally Christian with Constantine (ca. AD 311), Christian leaders began to quarrel among themselves over elevated issues of Trinitology and Christology, heavily dominated by reference to John's gospel.²⁰ The other gospels were however still read to the people and could still influence their moral values and practice beneficently. But the apocalyptic element gradually ceased to be understood. To be sure, not every aspect of apocalyptic was lost. The people were attached to the hope of a personal, bodily resurrection, and this could not be Hellenized away by the Platonizing theologians. In addition, other key apocalyptic elements entered the Nicene Creed: the final judgment, the glorious return of Christ, of whose "kingdom there will be no end". This last phrase was derived from Dan 7:14 and Luke 1:33. In its original context it did not contradict a this-worldly realization of the kingdom. But at the time the creed received its final shape, in a cultural context dominated by exaggerated neo-Platonic spiritualism and eternalism, the phrase could easily be interpreted to refer exclusively to eternal life in heaven. All connection with a hope for this world, this planet, was abandoned. The imperial authorities could rest secure. The common people were left with the ethics of the gospels, but not with their promise for this world. Salvation was now of the individual, no longer of the community.²¹

In the Middle Ages matters remained in this area as they had been, for the most part. But three innovations are worth mentioning. First, Joachim of Fiore revived the effort to conceive a theological periodization of history, this time a Trinitarian one: the age of the Father (the Old Testament), the age of the Son (the New Testament, the Church), the age of the Holy Spirit (the simplified church of the future). Crude though this schema was, it did contain the revolutionary potential inherent in the message that salvation history in this world was not over. God would intervene again. The status quo was relativized, its spell was broken.²² The second innovation was the invention of a new literary genre, the writing

16 Clement of Alexandria, cited in Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 6.14.7, transl. G.A. Williamson (Baltimore MD: Penguin, 1965), p. 255.

17 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, transl. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

18 Augustine, *De Consensu Evangelistarum Libri Quattuor*, ed. Franz Wehrich (CSEL 43; Vienna: Tempsky, 1904), written around A.D. 400; or PL 34, 10441230; see also L.T. Johnson (note 12 here), pp. 106-108; English translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 6 (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1999), pp. 65-236.

19 Hippolyte de Rome, *Commentaire sur Daniel*, ed. Maurice Lefèvre (SC 14; Paris: Cerf, 1947); cf. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, transl. G.L. Archer (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1958).

20 A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); T.E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (SNTS MS 13; Cambridge: University Press, 1970).

21 B.E. Daley (see note 1 above); Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

22 Margaret Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969); Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 3 (Paris: Aubier, 1961), pp. 437-558; idem, vol. 4 (Paris: Aubier, 1964), pp. 325-344.

of a "modern" life of Christ. This genre, popular ever since, was pioneered in the voluminous life of Christ by Ludolf the Carthusian, of Saxony (ca. 1300-1378). This work, full of pious reflections on the events in the life of Jesus, was one of the most popular books of the late Middle Ages.²³ But this new genre, though a forerunner of the quest, could not yet be called a quest of the *historical* Jesus, because it did not yet make a sharp distinction between a critically tested historical portrait of Jesus and a theological-devotional portrait. It remained within the framework of ancient historiography, where history is regarded as a branch of rhetoric, a storehouse of instructive or edifying examples. The third innovation was the insertion into the greatest theological synthesis of the Middle Ages, the *Summa of Theology* of Thomas Aquinas, of a lengthy analysis of the principal "mysteries" (i.e., events) of the life of Christ (*Summa theol.*, III, qq. 39-54).²⁴ This insertion broke through the rather and Christological discussions of the hypostatic union and theories of redemption, to reconnect with the gospel story. In regard to eschatology, Thomas did not live to complete that portion of his final *Summa*. But, in his earlier *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that section is complete. It is clear there that he maintains a full doctrine of resurrection (as well as the natural immortality of the soul), and the judgment, both "particular" (of the individual, immediately at death, Luke 23:43) and general, collective, at the return of Christ.²⁵ This delicate synthesis was maintained only with the greatest difficulty in the later Middle Ages because theology had lost the apocalyptic perspective which gave it meaning and coherence.

The sixteenth century Protestant reformation so concentrated on Paul that little progress was made in the study of the Synoptic gospels.²⁶ Those most interested, the Anabaptists, were so severely persecuted that they could produce hardly any academic theology.²⁷ But in the seventeenth century, within the more liberal wing of the Reformed tradition, there took place a revival of Christian humanist erudition in the spirit of Erasmus represented first by Hugo Grotius and Johann Jakob Wettstein, who attempted a more historical, less ideological or polemical, understanding of the New Testament.²⁸ The search was on for classical parallels. Then came what has been called Baroque philosemitism.²⁹ In Italy, the Netherlands and England scholars became interested in the Jewish, rabbinical context of the New Testament. Ugolini and Surenhusius translated many rabbinical texts into Latin, e.g., the Mishnah, with Maimonides' commentary.³⁰ John Lightfoot wrote a four volume commentary on the New Testament out of rabbinic materials, a work still in print.³¹

At the same time however, as a reaction to the European wars of religion culminating in the

23 Ludolphus de Saxoniam, *Vita Jesu Christi*, 4 vols. (Paris: Palme, 1870); idem, *Vie de Jésus Christ*, 2 vols. (Paris: Duprat, 1860). As a forerunner of Ludolph's work may be mentioned the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, formerly attributed to St. Bonaventure, by a 14th century Tuscan Franciscan; French translation by Enry de Riancey (Paris: Poussielgue, 1959).

24 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols. (Allen TX: Christian Classics, 1981), vol. 4, pp. 2217-2258; J.P. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères: La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1999); idem, *Le Verbe incarné*, 5 vols. thus far (Paris: Cerf, 2002-3).

25 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 4 (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), chaps. 79-97, pp. 297-349.

26 An outstanding exception to this generalization is Calvin's commentary on *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1994; orig. 1555). Note also Martin Bucer, *On the Kingdom of Christ*, in: Wilhelm Pauck, *Melanchthon and Bucer* (LCC 19; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

27 See G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

28 Grotius' philological criticism is contained in his *Annotationes in Vetus et Novum Testamentum* (Amsterdam: J. Blaev, 1642). Wettstein's edition of the Greek New Testament, with abundant classical parallels, came out a century later, 1751-2.

29 H.J. Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1952); Ferdinand Dexinger, "Philosemitismus", LTK3 8 (1999) 264-267.

30 William Surenhusius' translation of the Mishnah appeared in Amsterdam in 6 vols., 1698-1703. Blaise Ugolini's *Thesaurus*, with translations of some Talmud tractates, was published in 34 vols. between 1744 and 1769, in Venice.

31 John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (6 vols, Cambridge 1658-1678).

Thirty Years War (1618-1648), a new attitude to the Bible arose in advanced circles (e.g., Spinoza and Hobbes).³² This attitude was marked by deism and rationalism. The Bible was to be read as any other ancient book, stripped of its inspiration and supernatural, divine authority. Above all, no miracles were to be accepted at face value. At its worst (e.g., Voltaire) this hostility led to shallow mockery of the Old Testament and to anti-Jewish attitudes. For much of the Enlightenment, Jews were only to be tolerated on condition that they abandon their particular way of life. (Montesquieu here represents an honorable exception.)³³

At the same time this dogmatically free way of reading the Bible could lead, in more serious thinkers, to a recognition of the apocalyptic eschatology of Jesus that lay on the surface of the Synoptic gospels (Reimarus, published in extracts by G.E. Lessing) for those who could open their eyes.³⁴ Given however the prevailing Newtonian model of knowing, viz., that all truths had to be like mathematical truths, universal, timeless, necessary, Lessing ran up against the "ugly ditch" separating historical data from mathematical truths.³⁵ This roadblock was soon removed by Herder's rediscovery of the poetry of the Bible and especially by Schleiermacher's romantic idealist method of historical *Einfühlen* (understanding through historical empathy and imagination, controlled and supported by data contemporary with the biblical text).³⁶ This psychological method was worked out just at the moment when the great era of archeological discoveries had begun, first at Pompeii, then in Egypt, Babylonia, and later in Palestine and Syria.³⁷ The deciphered texts provided a context for the Bible read historically. The stage was set now for the specific object of this essay, eschatology and the quest for the historical Jesus.³⁸

IV

The modern quest for the historical Jesus, the *first quest* (1835-1906), began with the remarkable, extensive work by a young genius at Tübingen: David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* (1835-1836). It was translated into English twelve years later by another young genius, the future novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), and also into French.³⁹ Its contributions to our subject are as follows. (1) With a passionate erudition that had mastered the previous relevant literature, Strauss examined the gospel traditions with a careful eye for any inconsistencies between them. Critics criticized him for the ice-cold way in which he catalogued tiny discrepancies in the passion narratives, as Jesus is bleeding to death on the cross for our redemption. (2) He made a sharp distinction between strict history and what he called myth. This means that non-miraculous, non-supernatural elements like the ethical and parabolic teaching of Jesus were passed over quickly as historical and non-controversial.

32 Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

33 Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990).

34 H.S. Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. C.H. Talbert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970; orig. 1774-78).

35 G.E. Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Stanford CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1956); Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); G.A. Kaplan, *Answering the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor MI: UMI, 2003), esp. pp. 9-33.

36 J.G. Herder, *Theologische Schriften*, ed. Christoph Bultmann and Thomas Zippert, Werke 9.1 (Frankfurt: Deutsche Klassiker, 1994; composed 1796-97); F.D. Schleiermacher, *Werke*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Meiner, 1911), pp. 135-206; French transl. *Hermeneutique*, by Christian Berner (Paris: Cerf, 1987); orig. ed. 1838; English translations by Jack Forstman and James Duka (Atlanta: Scholars, 1978); Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: University Press, 1998); Franz Mussner, *Geschichte der Hermeneutik* (Vienne: Herder, 1970); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 136-139. D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

37 C.W. Ceram, *Gods, Graves and Scholars* (New York: Knopf, 1951).

38 H.-J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982); J.W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984).

39 D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

(These would then become the unshakeable basis for later liberal-ethical, neo-Kantian lives of Jesus.) In examining the more mysterious narratives like the Transfiguration he would note the Old Testament background: not just the theophanies in Exodus 24 and 1 Kings 19, but the shining face of Moses in Exod. 34:29-34. This was a helpful contribution, though it does not by itself explain everything in the gospel story, much less guarantee that the story was a pure fabrication, since later authors relate their experiences in terms marked by earlier literary forms and expressions, without this meaning that nothing new ever happens.⁴⁰ The term myth in this context is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can have a positive meaning. In this sense, a myth is a deeply true story in poetic form, often a story of national or civic origins. It is a form of hyper reality, larger than life. Legends tend to attach themselves to founding figures like Christopher Columbus, George Washington, King Alfred, even though they themselves were quite historical people. Other stories, such as the fall of Adam and Eve or the swallowing of Jonah by the whale or Pyramus and Thisbe may not be narrowly historical, or at least not demonstrably so, but they contain deep moral and psychological insight, the kind of truth that can be found in great fiction. The walls between this kind of myth and history are not airtight. On the other hand, myth often in popular usage has a negative sense. It simply means an untrue story. This is the sense found in the Bible itself (1, Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1: 14; 2 Pet 1: 16). As a son of both the Enlightenment and of romantic idealism (whose philosopher Schelling strongly promoted the positive sense of myth), Strauss used the term in both senses, but especially in the negative sense.⁴¹ And this of course offended greatly his orthodox readers. (3) On one point Strauss was a traditionalist. He accepted that Matthew (not Mark) was the oldest and thus the most historically reliable gospel. So, when he found myth in Matthew, it meant that the reliability of the whole gospel tradition was called into question. He also held that John's gospel was not, for the most part, an independent historical source. Although this is commonly accepted in critical circles today, at the time it saddened not only mystics and theologians but also romantic idealist philosophers, since John was their favorite gospel.⁴² Strauss' powerful challenges in this area, the critical testing of the dating, origin and historical reliability of the gospels, provoked the New Testament scholars of the next generations to arrive at new conclusions: the earliest complete gospel was Mark, and before and alongside Mark there had been an anonymous collection of Jesus' sayings (not miracles or parables or supernatural events or sufferings). This sayings source (in German *Logien-Quelle* or Q for short) was preserved scattered in Matthew and Luke and could be reconstructed from them, in all about 200 verses.⁴³ The hypothesis was also formed that Q represented the original Aramaic Matthew, now lost, which had been spoken of by church authors beginning with Papias (second century). If so, it would be the work of an apostolic eye-witness. Then it was noticed that, although Mark does not quote Q directly, he echoes similar traditions in about 30 cases. When you have two early, independent witnesses to the same tradition, you have come as close as is humanly possible in the study of ancient history to bedrock, to historically reliable material. All this came out of Strauss' shock therapy. (4) Before we leave Strauss, we must mention his view of the eschatology of Jesus. Strauss saw with complete clarity that Jesus taught a future hope of a new divine intervention in history which would be the full realization of the kingdom of God on earth. In other words, Strauss saw that the historical Jesus held to an apocalyptic eschatology to be realized in the near future. Strauss never doubted this. But Strauss was also concerned, as a religious thinker, to present a living message to his readers. He thought that Jesus had simply been in error on this point, that this message was meaningless for modern men,

40 D.C. Allison, *A New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), esp. pp. 271-290.

41 B.T. Viviano, "The Genres of Matthew 1-2: Light from I Timothy 1:4", *RB* 97 (1990) 31-53, and the literature there cited on myth.

42 W.G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964). The indices in these works guide the reader to the discussion of John.

43 Adolf von Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1908; J.S. Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

theologically useless. Strauss then attempted to replace Jesus' message of the kingdom, not to mention the received Christological and soteriological teaching of the Church, with a romantic idealistic religion of a liberated humanity. (In this sense he made his contribution to the revolution of 1848.)⁴⁴ For our purposes it is important to see that, on this point of Jesus' eschatology, Strauss remained paradigmatic for most theologians up until Moltmann and Metz in the 1960s. That is, Jesus' message is simply not taken seriously. It is regarded as an embarrassment and is replaced with something else.

In discussing Strauss we have already mentioned the technical breakthroughs of the next generations: the priority of Mark, the discovery and then the reconstruction of Q. The key names here are C.H. Weise, H.J. Holtzmann and Adolf von Harnack. Closer to our central concern is what happened in the burgeoning production of liberal lives of Jesus. We have already seen that Jesus' specifically social apocalyptic eschatology was rapidly lost with the increasing Hellenization of Christian theology. The kingdom of God had not been a theme of theology for over a millennium. It was rediscovered as of intellectual interest by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793).⁴⁵ There he devotes the third of its four chapters to the kingdom, understood in an eighteenth century agnostic way as the ethical commonwealth. The kingdom on this view was no longer a divine gift but a human project of collective social effort. *We* build the kingdom. (In this brief sketch we cannot hope to do justice to such a subtle thinker as Kant. In fairness however it must be said that (a) he was not a crude Pelagian; (b) despite his evasions, he was deeply marked by Christian thought and the deep piety of his Bible-reading parents. It is perhaps due to their influence that he was able to rediscover and to "retrieve" this central gospel value.) Kant's chapter on the kingdom exercised a decisive influence on nineteenth century theology after Strauss and especially after the collapse of romantic idealism due to the (temporary) failure of the revolutions of 1848. In the liberal lives of Jesus, the Galilean became a teacher of Kantian ethics. Kant had glorified the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31), in the form of the categorical imperative, as the supreme ethical wisdom.⁴⁶ The kingdom of God was interpreted as the kingdom of these formal moral values. It was the era of Cultural Protestantism. The advancing colonial empires were to be filled with the cultural content of these Kantian Christian values. Churches were built to look like theaters or lecture halls where the great writers of the day could hold forth (e.g., Ralph Waldo Emerson). The symbiosis of Christ and culture was nearly perfect.⁴⁷ The goal was to *build* the kingdom, *now*. (The phrase "to build the kingdom" is not found in the Bible.)

This tidy package was first unraveled by a little book published in 1892 by Johannes Weiss: *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*.⁴⁸ It bluntly affirmed that Jesus' central message was that God was to bring his kingdom soon and suddenly. Jesus, picking up from the beheaded Baptist, was preparing the people for its coming. He was so aware of its nearness that he sometimes spoke of it as already present (Matt 12:28 and its parallel in Luke 11:20 Q). But mostly he speaks of it as in the near future (Mark 1: 15; Matt 6:10, 33; Mark 14:25). It is not a product of Darwinian evolution or direct human effort. The effect of the book was like that of a brick hurled at a plate glass window. The book was so offensive because liberal theology had a bad conscience about its suppression of Jesus' eschatology. It was not ignorant of it. It simply hoped to keep it a dirty little secret. Thanks to Weiss the liberal emperor was seen to have no clothes. Weiss's scholarly elders tried to reason with him.

44 M.C. Massey, "The Literature of Young Germany and D.F. Strauss's Life of Jesus", *Journal of Religion* 59 (1979) 298-323; Massey, *Christ Unmasked: The Meaning of the Life of Jesus in German Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

45 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998).

46 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), paragraph 7, p. 30; *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1996); *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1998).

47 H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

48 Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

They knew he was a superbly trained, brilliant, promising (he was 29) exegete of the Göttingen history-of-religions school, a hope of the future. Under pressure from the tremendous outcry provoked by the book, Weiss caved in: he granted that, even though his book told the *historical* truth, it was a hermeneutically-pastorally useless truth. For contemporary Christians the liberal neo-Kantian line was the right message. This calmed things down for a time. But a theology which prided itself on its historical foundations could not long remain satisfied with such a compromise. As other members of the school (e.g., Wilhelm Bousset, Hermann Gunkel) were integrating newly deciphered data from Assyria, e.g., cosmic combat myths, with Genesis and Revelation, the accuracy of Weiss' reading of the gospels was only reinforced.⁴⁹ Worse was still to come for the liberals.

In 1906 a young Alsatian Lutheran pastor and many-sided genius (musician, theologian, philosopher, medical doctor, missionary in Africa, and eventually Nobel peace prize winner), Albert Schweitzer, published a book whose English title is *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.⁵⁰ It took the form of a research report. It surveyed the 19th century lives of Jesus from Reimarus to Wrede, rightly giving pride of place to Strauss, but also covering, with due contempt, Ernest Renan and the Kantians (e.g., Albrecht Ritschl). Schweitzer used Weiss' little book as a razor with which to slit the throats of the authors he surveyed. That is to say, he exposed the inadequacy of their presentation of Jesus' eschatology. With Schweitzer's work (and the First World War), the first quest for the historical Jesus came to an end. Yet the triumph of the apocalyptic viewpoint was delayed for a time, one might say until 1964. And even till today its victory is far from being universally acknowledged.

(Before we leave the Göttingen School, a word of clarification is in order. Modern evangelical theologians reproach Bousset for his denial of the *dogma* of the divinity of Christ.⁵¹ This is a serious charge, and it is not without some foundation. But before the Göttingen historians are condemned on this point, it should be pointed out in their defense that they were all raised on Harnack's *History of Dogma*. Now one of Harnack's most original theses, whether right or wrong, was that the concept of Christian *dogma* was a post-biblical, Hellenistic-Byzantine development of a particular cultural type. For Harnack, this culturally determined expression had come to an end with Luther. This did not mean that Luther denied the divinity of Christ. It did mean that he denied the necessity of this cultural form of theological expression. In this sense then the Göttingen scholars may have denied the dogmatic form of the doctrine, but this does not mean that they denied the doctrine itself.)⁵²

The next stage in the story is the period from roughly 1919 to 1964. This is the period of *the second quest*, of dialectical theology, of form criticism, of existentialist lives of Jesus, of the Luther renaissance (Holl and Althaus). During the 1920s our story does not advance very fast. The dialectical theologians, notably Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, said that they were not interested in history or historical exegesis or the historical Jesus. They were interested in Paul (read as direct divine revelation, sometimes called positivism of revelation), in theological exegesis, in church dogmatics, in the revitalization of the

49 Gerd Lüdemann, "Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule", in Bernd Moeller, ed., *Theologie in Göttingen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987) 325-361; idem, *TRE* 28 (1997) 618-624; Wilhelm Klatt, *Hermann Gunkel* (FRLANT 100; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon GA; Mercer Univ. Press, 1997; orig. 1901); B.T. Viviano, "Apocalypse et Culture: l'interprétation de 1 Co 15,20-28," in *Mysterium Regni* (FS. Vittorio Fusco; Bologna: Dehoniana, 2001), pp. 739-756.

50 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968; orig. 1910).

51 L.W. Hurtado, "New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset's Influence," *TS* 40 (1979) 306-317; idem, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

52 Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover, 1961; orig. 1885; K.H. Neufeld, Adolf von Harnack: *Theologie als Suche nach der Kirche* (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1977).

Reformation heritage, in prophetic preaching, to some extent even in the church. The two best known pioneers of form criticism, Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius, at first sympathetic to dialectical theology, each did write a short life of Jesus. The shock of Germany's defeat in 1918 made North German Protestants confessionally defensive. Bultmann's case is instructive. On the one hand, he shared with Barth a concentration on justification by faith alone (not an explicit theme of the Synoptic gospels), an interest he supported with the help of his Marburg colleague Martin Heidegger's existential phenomenological decisionism (what is important is that your *will* has made a decision, not your intellect; the content of your decision is also not important). Both Barth and Bultmann rhetorically and verbally affirmed the centrality of eschatology, but they did so in such an existential way that its apocalyptic, social and ethical content was hollowed out. (Barth, Bultmann and Dibelius all returned to the ethics of Jesus in the late thirties, but by then the damage was done, the horse was out of the barn, catastrophe could no longer be avoided.) Bultmann added a special twist. For him, the teaching of Jesus did not belong to Christian theology; it belonged to the history of Judaism. Jesus was primarily a rabbi. His historicity in its details is irrelevant for Christians; what counts, for Christians, is the fact of his crucifixion.⁵³

During the Second World War an honorable exception is represented by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life out of fidelity to the ethics of Jesus. But he too regarded the eschatology of Jesus as pre-modern.⁵⁴

After the war, some members of the Bultmann School rebelled against the master. The easy dismissal of the historical Jesus and his teaching was no longer acceptable, to students or professors. Ernst Käsemann wrote essays on Jesus, Günther Bornkamm a widely read biography of Jesus, Hans Conzelmann an influential lexicon article on Jesus, Herbert Braun a selective sketch.⁵⁵ For all of them Jesus' emphasis on the love command was meaningful, but neither his eschatology nor its related Christology of the coming Son of Man were. The accent remained individualistic and existentialist.

After the war but outside of the Bultmann School, things were more promising. Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time* took seriously the second coming of Christ, to the great dismay of Cullmann's colleagues.⁵⁶ Forged in the crucible of the war, Cullmann's idea was motivated not only by the biblical data, but also by the awareness that Christians needed to affirm the active and intervening lordship of Christ, over against the many mad claimants to the throne of the Son of Man. Cullmann's view was supported by Bultmann's successor at Marburg, W.G. Kümmel.⁵⁷ Cullmann and Kümmel were not only impressed by future-oriented texts like Matt 6:10; Mark 1:15; 13:26; and the future hopes expressed in Jewish pseudepigrapha, Daniel, and the War Scroll of Qumran. They also argued that Jesus' reticence about the exact timing of the future event (Mark 13:32; Matt 24:36) allowed some room in his own thinking for the delay of the coming of the Day of the Lord, even though Jesus did expect it to come soon (e.g., Mark 9:1). Joachim Jeremias filled in more and more of the Jewish background of Jesus' actions and teachings, especially his parables, but remained evasive on what he called Jesus' "self-realizing eschatology".⁵⁸

53 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1951), pp. 3, 293.

54 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959; orig. 1937).

55 Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" (1953), in his *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), pp. 15-47; idem, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 1-65, 82-137; idem, *Jesus Means Freedom* (London: SCM, 1969); Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 1961); Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973; orig. 1959); Herbert Braun, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979; orig. 1969).

56 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964; orig. 1946).

57 W.G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment* (London: SCM, 1961).

58 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1963), pp. 21, 229; idem, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's 1971), pp. 96-108.

In Britain the field of New Testament studies was dominated by Charles Harold Dodd. On the basis of the Oxford-Cambridge tradition of Platonism and Johannism in Anglican theology, Dodd tried to interpret the sayings of Jesus about the coming of the kingdom in the future so as to harmonize them with the sayings about the kingdom being already present (by sign, anticipation, foretaste, in germ) in the ministry of Jesus, and also to make them fit with the comparatively less apocalyptic gospel according to John (but cf. John 14:3, 18, 28; 21:22).⁵⁹ In this program of "realized eschatology", Dodd was supported by the Anglican J.A.T. Robinson as well as by his fellow Congregationalist G.B. Caird.⁶⁰ This line will have a North American sequel. This second quest was petering out.

But first we should add a word about what the Roman Catholics were doing (and not doing) during the twentieth century. The pioneer of modern Roman Catholic biblical studies was M.-J. Lagrange. Alerted by the lively debate around Johannes Weiss' little book (whose second edition he reviewed), Lagrange wanted to write his own book on the subject. His censors blocked this, and forced him to turn the manuscript into a book on messianism.⁶¹ But his teaching inspired one of his most productive disciples, Joseph Bonsirven, to produce a book on the kingdom once the coast was clear (1957).⁶² It was flawed, full of Bergsonian evolution, but it was a first step. (Several Catholics wrote learned lives of Christ at this period. One of the best was by Giuseppe Ricciotti.⁶³ But they tended to be long on Near Eastern background, and short on critical judgment, due to the heavy censorship in the period 1907-1958.) When the clouds lifted, Rudolf Schnackenburg wrote a very thorough and careful book on the kingdom which some consider the best ever written.⁶⁴ However that may be, it arrived in time to free the Second Vatican Council from a too simple identification of the kingdom on earth with the church. The Council cautiously took some first steps in the rediscovery of this theme, steps which have been developed by subsequent church documents.⁶⁵

The story so far has given the impression of brief periods of historical lucidity and honesty (Weiss and Schweitzer, Cullmann and Schnackenburg) followed by periods of theological evasion. This state of affairs is in part due to the weakness of exegesis, left to itself, to impose its discoveries on the broader theological-ecclesial community. Exegesis needed the heft, the sustained, repetitive, reflective, even incantatory, power of systematic theological thought to break through the resistance of the Platonic mind. All the furniture in the theological mind had to be rearranged. The breakthrough occurred in 1964, to simplify, with the publication of Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* (in German; English translation 1967).⁶⁶ With this work Jesus' apocalyptic eschatology was taken seriously by mainstream systematic theology for the first time since Irenaeus.

59 C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1935; repr. 1961).

60 J.A.T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (London: SCM, 1957); G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

61 M.-J. Lagrange, *Le messianisme chez les juifs* (Paris: Gabalda, 1909); Bernard Montagnes, ed., *Exégèse et Obéissance: Correspondance Cormier-Lagrange* (1904-1916) (Paris: Gabalda, 1989), pp. 46n., 125, 133; B. Montagne, *Le Père Lagrange 1855-1938* (Paris: Cerf, 1995).

62 Joseph Bonsirven, *Le Règne de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1957).

63 Giuseppe Ricciotti, *The Life of Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1947).

64 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963).

65 Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church* (1964), paragraph 5; *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, paragraph 39; Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970); Jacques Schlosser, *Le Règne de Dieu dans les Dits de Jésus* (Paris: Gabalda, 1980); Helmut Merklein, *Die Gottesherrschaft als Handlungsprinzip* (Würzburg: Echter, 1978); encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer* (1990), chap. 2; *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Vatican 1991), paragraphs 34, 58, 63, 80.

66 Jürgen Moltmann, *A Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper, 1967).

It did not happen by accident. Moltmann's mind was prepared by the biblical theology movement initiated by Karl Barth and continued by Cullmann, transmitted to Moltmann by his Heidelberg teacher Gerhard von Rad. Moltmann's experience as a prisoner of war had already deepened his character. The final mental push was provided by the thought of the Jewish Marxist atheist religious thinker Ernst Bloch, especially his major work *The Principle Hope*.⁶⁷ (Bloch was expelled from East Germany as too religious; he settled in Tübingen where he was found to be too Marxist.) It was the period of the Marxist-Christian dialogue. Moltmann saw, in his dialogue with Bloch, that the Bible and the church had resources of hope for humanity *even in this world*, resources which were not being used, out of fear of disturbing the status quo. Hope for this planet had been handed over to the Marxists. This would not do. Moltmann discovered in the biblical messages of Exodus (the liberation from Egyptian slavery), the resurrection from the bonds of death, and Jesus' promise of the coming of the kingdom to earth, the resources he needed to answer Bloch and the Marxists, to give new hope to Christians drooping under the depressive messages of Death-of-God theology, demythologizing, the Cold War, and analytic philosophy. Moltmann's breakthrough concept was quickly taken up and carried forward by both Protestants (Wolfhart Pannenberg, Douglas Meeks)⁶⁸ and Catholics (J.B. Metz)⁶⁹ in Europe and North America. Latin America awoke from its centuries of mental slumber with its own brand of Liberation Theology (Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff).⁷⁰ R.A. Horsley and Warren Carter continue their research on the kingdom announced by Jesus and its relation to world empires ancient and modern.⁷¹ Weiss' insight had finally found a home in Christian systematic theology.

But Moltmann's success was not complete. Beginning at the University of Chicago, *the third quest* for the historical Jesus began in the last two decades of the twentieth century. A professor of New Testament there, Norman Perrin, who had once been an excellent historian of interpretations of the kingdom of God, decided to turn against apocalyptic expectations.⁷² The kingdom for him became a poetic symbol of an ideal state of justice, no longer a religious hope. The parables were reduced to beautiful artifacts, for aesthetic appreciation.⁷³ (Perrin turned against apocalyptic expectations because they seemed too fantastic, mythological, unmodern to him.) The prophetic fire was extinguished once again. His Chicago ally, John Dominic Crossan, after years of aesthetic, formal analyses of the parables and aphorisms, often outstanding, very successful, and devoid on his part of any claim to historicity, took the fateful step of claiming to write a book on the *historical* Jesus.⁷⁴ He did not accept an apocalyptic Jesus; he did not want to repeat what others had done. His new move was to claim that the Gnostic Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* (found intact in 1946 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt) was an early independent historical source for the teaching of Jesus. It was pointed out that the *Gospel of Thomas* as we have it (fragments in Greek were known before the 1946 Coptic find) showed knowledge of all four canonical gospels and therefore it must be later than they are. This objection was answered by an appeal to an (uncontrollable) earlier stratum of the *Gospel of Thomas* which was prior to or at least independent of the four. Another strategy is to say that the historicity of each logion must be

67 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle Hope* (Cambridge MA: M.I.T. Press, 1986).

68 W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969); M.D. Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

69 J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969); idem, *Followers of Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1978).

70 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973); Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980).

71 R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987); idem, *Jesus and Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); idem and N.A. Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah and Matthean Sociology", *JBL* 119 (2000) 503-520.

72 Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

73 Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

74 J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

evaluated separately. Some may be early, some late.⁷⁵ (The *Gospel* consists of 114 separate logia or sayings.) This has become the common opinion. Another objection is that the *Gospel of Thomas* as we have it clearly expresses a Gnostic soteriology. To this two answers are made: (1) the Gnostic elements belong to a late stratum; (2) the Gnostic elements are early and show that Jesus himself was a Gnostic teacher. The canonical four have misrepresented him.⁷⁶ Crossan does not count any of the canonical gospels as primary, preferring to them the earliest stratum of Thomas, the Egerton fragment, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Logia source (i.e., Q) and a "Cross Gospel" reconstructed from the Gospel of Peter. What this list omits is Mark. In accepting Q, Crossan accepts the earliest stratum of Matthew and Luke. To be sure, the three Synoptics reflect considerable theological elaboration. But a Jesus tradition without narratives about him is inherently improbable, hence the need for Mark. Both Q and Mark present a Jesus who is an apocalyptic prophet and exorcist. The efforts to de-eschatologize Q are not convincing (e.g., the work of J.S. Kloppenborg). Out of these new moves, Marcus Borg has developed a portrait of Jesus as a holy man, as an ironical sage, as a man of prayer and gentleness who shows us the way to a loving God. Eschatology plays little role here. (Borg, as a product of Oxford, carries on the Dodd-Caird line.⁷⁷

This portrait has been criticized as culturally too easily adapted to a West Coast interest in undemanding spiritualities, close in spirit to New Age esoterics and to American Buddhism. Obviously no service to historical truth (supposing there is such a thing) will be done by denying that Jesus was holy, a man of prayer, united with his heavenly Father, leading disciples on a nonviolent path to love of God, neighbor and even enemies. These features have been part of the Jesus tradition from the earliest strata. The problem with the third quest arises rather from what is left out or played down, namely, the prophetic and apocalyptic elements. Often the very word kingdom is so loosely translated as to cover up any link with Daniel. Other examples are: (1) the denial by the Jesus Seminar in California, founded by Robert Funk, that Jesus pronounced the woes over the unrepentant cities (Matt 11:20-24 paralleled in Luke 10:13-15 = Q); (it has been suggested that their Jesus is too politically correct to do such a rude thing); (2) their lowering the probability that Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13 paralleled in Luke 11:2-4 = Q).⁷⁸ To be sure, this prayer, for the coming of the kingdom to earth (in the near future) as it (already) is in heaven, played a key role in Weiss' argument.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Jewish parallel, the Kaddish, close as it is to the first half of the prayer, is not certainly datable till long after the gospels. Already Marcion had to rewrite the prayer to suit his prejudices: "thy holy Spirit come to us and purify us."⁸⁰ It must nevertheless be honestly conceded that, in the present cultural religious climate, a purely sapiential, pietist Jesus has found a market niche. It fulfills a real spiritual need, however distorted or selective its historical foundation.

The Dodd-Caird line is also carried further by the Anglican bishop of Durham, Nicolas Thomas Wright. In his voluminous work he tries to renew the Third Quest by holding five questions in tension.⁸¹ The five questions concern: (1) the Judaism of Jesus' day; (2) Jesus'

75 S.J. Patterson, "The End of Apocalypse", *Theology Today* 52 (1995) 29-58 (criticized by D.C. Allison in his *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (see below), pp. 122-129); Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma CA: Polebridge, 1993).

76 Elaine H. Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003); E.H. Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and of John", *JBL* 118 (1999) 477-496.

77 See note 11 above; M.J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity, 1994).

78 *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, ed. R.W. Funk and R.W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

79 Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation* (see note 48 above), pp. 73-74.

80 See the apparatus to any Greek New Testament, at Luke 11:2, or the NRSV translation of the Bible.

81 N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1: *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); vol. 2: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) Wright, *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); "Jesus, Quest for the Historical," in *ABD* 3:796-802.

aims; (3) the causes of his death; (4) the early church; (5) the writing of the gospels and their nature. It will be clear at once that only questions 2 and 3 directly concern the historical Jesus. By trying to deal with too many issues, Wright may have spread himself too thin and lost focus, blurring the distinctions between historical research and theology, between history and journalism.

On the sore point of eschatology, Wright is aware that, if he remains with Caird, he will be accused of "abandoning eschatology" altogether. Granted that this accusation would be partly unfair (he strongly affirms the resurrection of Jesus, for example), it remains true that Wright has great difficulty with the idea of a new, future divine intervention in the historical process. We can sympathize with him when he rejects the idea that Jesus expected the end of the world, i.e., of the space-time universe. It is also a step in the right direction when he says that Jesus expected the end of the present world order, i.e., the end of the period when the Gentiles were lording it over the people of the true God, and the inauguration of the time when this God would take his power and reign and, in the process, restore the fortunes of his suffering people.⁸² But he misses the seven ages (or five empire) scheme in the background; he limits the fulfillment to Israel as the People of God (thereby missing the universal sweep of Daniel 7:13-14 and of Jesus); he claims Jesus' prophetic predictions were fulfilled adequately in the events of A.D. 70, so that there is no further future hope for believers on earth, no literal return of Christ for judgment. Pertinent to Wright's options is a discussion of literal versus metaphorical understandings of apocalyptic images of the end time events, e.g., the sun will be darkened, the stars will fall (Mark 13: 24-25). While most scholars would agree that end time discourse in Daniel and the gospels is full of symbols, and while some readers would dismiss the symbols as empty and meaningless, among theologically minded interpreters many would try to respect the intention of the texts to refer to a future divine intervention in human history. Wright prefers to avoid a this worldly hope coming from God in Christ. The issue is not so much literal versus metaphorical. It is rather, granted metaphors, what is behind them? Only the events of A.D. 70 (so Wright) or something more? In addition, some critics suspect Wright of an apologetic motive: he wants to spare Jesus committing an error on the exact timing of the end time events. This concern is unnecessary, because of clear biblical statements that Jesus grew in knowledge (Luke 2:40, 52) and because of the theological doctrine of Jesus' self-emptying (Phil 2:7).⁸³

Fortunately for historical scholarship, there remain in our day scholars who continue to affirm the truth which Weiss so boldly proclaimed, that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, who could be tough as well as tender, who not only offered the individual sufferer and sinner healing and forgiveness, but also promised a new divine intervention in history for suffering, oppressed, misled humanity, a hope for all seekers of justice, peace and joy. In America the multivolume biography of Jesus by J.P. Meier represents a solid contribution,⁸⁴ besides the pointed shorter work by D.C. Allison,⁸⁵ enriched by many examples from the history of religious and social anthropology, and the work of E.P. Sanders. In the French-speaking world there are the recent biographies by Daniel Marguerat and Jacques

82 Wright, *Contemporary Quest*, p. 48.

83 D.C. Allison, "Jesus and the Victory of Apocalyptic," in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, ed. C.C. Newman (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), pp. 126-141.

84 J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); vol. 2: *Mentor, Message and Miracles* (1994); vol. 3: *Companions and Competitors* (2001). The eschatological message of Jesus is discussed in 2:237-506.

85 D.C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), esp. pp. 61-155, 222-241; B.T. Viviano, "The Historical Jesus in the Doubly Attested Sayings", *RB* 103 (1996) 367-410, repr. in *Trinity-Kingdom-Church* (see note 1 above), pp. 21-63.

Schlosser,⁸⁶ and in Germany the works by Theissen-Merz and Joachim Gnilka.⁸⁷

As we come to the end of this all too rapid survey, a few red threads are visible. The rigorously historical investigation of Jesus had to wait till the late 18th century. Only then were all the historical data in place, plus the mental freedom to bracket all post-Easter Christological developments. The new idea was to look with concentration on the teaching and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth in the three years, A.D. 28-30. What did he teach and preach? Once this strictly defined, narrow question was asked, the answer was not far to seek: he taught and preached, not exclusively but mainly, the soon to come kingdom of God, as spoken of in the book of Daniel. Once this answer was given, as already by Reimarus and Strauss, one could decide that Jesus was mistaken, or accept it and try to make theological sense of it, in one way or another. Or one could try to interpret it away, so that Jesus said or meant something other than it seemed on the surface. That is the story we have told.

In the version of historical reality here recounted, the heroes of historical truth are Weiss and Schweitzer, and the heroes of theological truth are Moltmann and Metz. All that deviates from them is misleading.

In the postmodern cultural context, however, the very idea that there could be such a thing as an objective historical truth is often regarded as naive, uncritical, unattainable. We could call this epistemological postmodernism. But this idea can also be regarded as politically suspect, even dangerous, as hegemonistic, imperialistic, reflecting the desire to impose a "master narrative" on the vagaries of history. We could call this literary postmodernism or the hermeneutics of suspicion. On this view, the different lives of Jesus are only time-bound social constructs, with little or no basis in historical reality. We could call this sociological postmodernism.

In the course of our survey we have in fact made implicit use of every one of these three postmodern critical approaches, to expose and to set aside views we regarded as unsound. So we did not end up in a dead end, an epistemological nihilism. To be sure, the attainment of historical truth in ancient history is very difficult. But it makes a difference whether one thinks it is at least possible to attain historical truth or not. If one thinks it is possible, one keeps trying, asymptotically, to come closer and closer to this goal. If one thinks it is not possible, then it is better to stop trying.

86 Daniel Marguerat, *L'Homme Qui Venait de Nazareth* (Paris: du Moulin, 2001); Jacques Schlosser, *Jésus de Nazareth* (Paris: Noesis, 1999).

87 Gerd Theissen, Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Jesus' eschatology is discussed on pp. 240-280. Theissen has pressed further the question of criteria in research on Jesus, from dissimilarity to plausibility: Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung. Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (NTOA 34; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1997), reviewed *JBL* 118 (1999) 551-553 (C.A. Evans); tested by Dietrich Rusam, "Sah Jesus wirklich den Satan vom Himmel fallen (Lk 10.18)?" *NTS* 50 (2004) 87-105; Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1997); Gnilka's treatment of Jesus' eschatology is found on pp. 80-159.

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