

Writing History, Constructing Religion

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Chapter 1

Writing History, Constructing Religion

James G. Crossley and Christian Karner

A wide variety of religions, cultures and languages have something akin to the conventional English use of the word ‘history’ in the dual senses of a description of past events or an all encompassing term for the whole collection of these events (Breisach, 1987, pp. 371, 372–383). Stories, epics, genealogies and biographies of important figures from the past are not difficult to find in religious traditions. History is obviously not something that can easily be ignored in the study of religion.

In Islam, Judaism and Christianity there are grand overviews of history from Creation through to the end times. In these monotheistic faiths, calendars are set according to key events in the sacred past so that such events can be continually remembered. Some of the famous religious traditions originating from Asia are often – albeit problematically – thought to ideally extol an ahistorical attitude, an other-worldly emphasis on the changeless, and a cyclical conception of time. However, it would be a one sided and simplistic account, which stressed only such aspects of these religious traditions and neglected their concern for events of the past. Critically commenting on significant attempts, not least by western scholars, to provide a theology of Sikhism, Beryl Dhanjal points out the following:

Writers say that God is one, omnipotent, infinite, eternal, absolute, immense, omnipresent, spirit and light etc., which is not untrue, but nor is it distinctive ... Much writing concentrates more on history than theology. A recent booklet from the Sikh Missionary Society contains thirty-four pages of ‘history’ and two and a half on actual belief. This is not an uncommon situation. (Dhanjal, 1994, p. 174)

For all the well-known traditions of asceticism, meditation and search for *nirvana* in Buddhist traditions, a figure in human history is found throughout this diverse movement, namely Buddha. Moreover, not only are there a wide range of biographies across different Buddhist traditions but there are also Buddhist historians of the Buddhist past, such as the monk Bu-ston (1290–1364), author of *Chos-'byun* (*History of Buddhism*), a history of Buddhism up to the fourteenth century CE. Hinduism is widely associated with a long tradition of epic literature, stories of kings and genealogies. Lest it be thought that Hinduism – itself a highly problematic term that imposes an artificial unity on a highly heterogeneous range of beliefs, practices and identities – is exclusively concerned with things transcendent, Christian Karner’s second chapter in this volume shows that periodization and an authorized version of the past can be of crucial importance and a matter of no small controversy in the here and now for present day Hindu nationalism in India.

The telling of history in the construction of a 'religious' past frequently has an explicitly moral element. The prophets revered in the Islamic tradition (right up to Muhammad) came to correct misguided teaching and establish true faith. In the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, Israel and Israelites are often judged by their behaviour: behave well and prosper or behave badly and face exile (cf. Clines, 1979). This retributive history was also to become important in early Christianity (Trompf, 2000). As such moral views of history show, writing history and constructing religion are often closely interwoven social practices that are anything but a detached chronicling of bygone events of the sacred past. The writing of history and the constructing of religion are, of course, tied up with power and hence with the social construction of insiders and outsiders, of friends and foes. The 'official history' of the Bible can be read from different perspectives and has obvious modern day political implications, particularly in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict (Whitelam, 1996). For example: how would a Palestinian read the Exodus and Conquest stories of the Bible, a part of 'official' Jewish and Christian history? The long-standing controversy over the mosque built on what has been claimed to be Ram's birthplace in Ayodhya, India (see Karner's second chapter in this volume), was no more a quibble over aesthetics than Stalin's removal of Trotsky from photographs of Lenin was reducible to the 'disagreeable' state of his moustache. In these cases the protagonists are actively engaged in reconstructions of how the past 'really was' in order to justify beliefs in the present and ideas concerning the future.

An implication of all this is that history cannot so easily be separated from popular understandings of that most slippery of terms 'myth'.¹ It would be simplistic to describe myths as solely concerned with questions of origin, taboo, authority, life and death taking place in the distant past, not least because 'history' can serve similar functions. Perhaps the distinction is unnecessary, perhaps myth and history can – on the level of political logic and purpose – be closely related and, at times, indistinguishable (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1978; Kunin, 1995; and Kunin in this volume)? The phenomenon of postmodernism has brought questions of ideology sharply into focus and raises all sorts of questions, many of them uncomfortable. Adopting a working definition of ideology as language and behavioural practices that serve either the reproduction or the subversion of existing power structures (Augoustinos, 1998), a range of highly pertinent questions emerges: are the official histories of a given religion narratives of power that marginalize or exclude alternative versions and subversive voices? Who controls what we are told about the past? Are the writing of history and the construction of religion so immersed in ideology that nothing of the past can be known to the historian of a given religion? Should anyone even care? How might we critically engage with (academic) theories of religions and their histories as well as with the very concepts they utilize in an all-too-often non-reflexive manner?

This book is an attempt to address questions such as these and others related to them. The two introductory chapters raise general issues surrounding the academic study of history and religion. In Chapter 2, *Defining History*, James Crossley provides an introductory discussion of recent and still current debates raging over the nature of history (for example, narratives, theory, 'history from below', objectivity and neutrality) with some consideration of the impact these debates may have on the study of religion. In Chapter 3, *Postmodernism and the Study of Religions*, Christian Karner provides an introduction to the varied themes and concepts associated with

postmodernism (for example, discourse and ideology, power, knowledge and identity) and how they can be mapped onto the study of religions.

Subsequent chapters provide specific and detailed analyses of historical, ethnographic, textual and theoretical examples of history being written and religion(s) being constructed. While all chapters reflect their author's own interests and areas of expertise, the inevitable exclusion of countless other – equally pertinent – (empirical/historical/textual) examples and contexts is counter-weighted by a systematic attempt running throughout the entire volume to address the above-mentioned range of epistemological and methodological, theoretical and conceptual challenges.

In Chapter 4, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, Philip Goodchild observes that the idea of 'religion' representing cross-cultural cultural forms is limited to a certain Western (and peculiarly modern) metaphysical concept of truth. Goodchild argues that the study of religion should include a cultural hermeneutic, a careful interpretation of given traditions of thought and activity and their alternative conceptualizations of truth and value. This chapter presents a thought-provoking way of critically interrogating the history and semantic/ideological content of 'religion' and 'culture' as key-concepts in modern Western consciousness, the ideological assumptions and motivations of those writing about and/or 'against' religion, and the political implications as well as ethical possibilities of trying to understand 'it'.

In Chapter 5, *Postmodernism Before and After: The Fate of Secularization*, Alan Aldridge analyzes the postmodernist rejection of meta-narratives of history with especial focus on the secularization thesis and one of its major exponents, the sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson. Aldridge argues that although Wilson's work may seem to be a monolithic piece of modernist social science and a prime target for postmodernist critique, critical engagement with Wilson shows that he is much more subtle and nuanced. While critical of postmodernist analysis, Aldridge does not reject it outright as a sceptical but sympathetic reading can illuminate certain aspects of social life that may otherwise be overlooked. Aldridge's chapter makes two particularly significant contributions to this volume: first, he presents an insight into a range of religious phenomena and identities in our contemporary, Western, consumer-oriented and arguably postmodern society; second, he critically examines the construction of theoretical paradigms and the classification of religious phenomena therein; as a result, Aldridge is able to interrogate the problematic, though often taken-for-granted division between modernism and postmodernism.

In Chapter 6, *The Crisis of Representation in Islamic Studies*, Hugh Goddard analyzes the problems involved in the wide variety of contemporary voices claiming to speak for Islam, be they Muslim or non-Muslim, non-violent or violent, illiberal or liberal, interactive or non-interactive. Goddard discusses how these differing views can colour approaches to understanding Islamic history, including the distortion of basic factual information for not-so-hidden political agendas and the dangers of a violent Islamophobia that can and does arise from this. Goddard concludes that the representation of Islam and Islamic history is of crucial importance for community relations both at local and global levels.

In Chapter 7, *Living Yesterday in Today and Tomorrow: Meskhetian Turks in Southern Russia*, Kathryn Tomlinson provides a discussion of the ways in which a group of people among whom she has conducted anthropological fieldwork construct their identities, variously drawing – in the post-Communist era – on the labels

'Turkish', 'Soviet' and 'Muslim'. It is argued that the Meskhetian Turks' approach to the past is of an ontological (mythic) as opposed to an epistemological/theoretical kind, emphasizing a practical (or practiced/lived) engagement with the past rather than a detailed concern for historical accuracy or a preoccupation with origins. Tomlinson suggests that if powerful outsiders frame their discussion of the past, present and future of the Meskhetian Turks in terms of a conventional epistemological approach to history, this will result not only in a distortion of the Meskhetian Turks' relation to their past and hence in a lack of meaningful cross-cultural communication, but could have further detrimental consequences to an already marginalized group of people.

In Chapter 8, *Who's Afraid of Jesus Christ? Some Comments on Attempts to Write a Life of Jesus*, Maurice Casey discusses how powerful social groups can determine the outcome of critical historical scholarship and even distort factual information with particular reference to the writing about the historical Jesus in the context of Nazi Germany and Christian communities both ancient and modern. Casey then proceeds to argue that through careful attention to primary sources it is possible to establish verifiable facts about Jesus even if the narrative in which such facts are placed are human constructs.

In Chapter 9, *History From the Margins: The Death of John the Baptist*, James Crossley examines the beheading of John the Baptist in the context of Jewish rewriting of history and a nod in the direction of certain anthropological approaches to history. It is suggested that the people responsible for this story were a minority group facing the very real possibility of persecution and that this affected their rewriting of history. Crossley also looks at how this group's writing of history interacted with political and social attitudes, particularly the construction of gender.

In Chapter 10, *If Isaac Could Speak ... : Redefining Sacrifice*, Maria Varsam presents a critical feminist-literary approach to a well-known narrative of sacrifice. Looking for the voice of the marginalized, overlooked and silenced sacrificial victim, Varsam engages with the politics of sacrifice and hence with the ideological implications of a key-concept in the study of religious rituals.

In Chapter 11, *Ideological 'Destructuring' in Myth, History and Memory*, Seth Kunin discusses the relationship between myth and history through a re-examination of a set of questions, first addressed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, concerning the effects of geographical diffusion/historical transformation on myths (including their eventual 'death'). Based on his continuing and critical engagement with structuralist theory, Kunin presents a detailed analysis of the Hebrew Book of Judges and a discussion of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico. This chapter thus establishes a meaningful dialogue between two frequently contrasted schools of intellectual thought: a structuralist preoccupation with the cultural logic underlying key-categories and their inter-relations that define a particular social/historical context is thus integrated with a post-structuralist concern with questions of power and ideology. The death of myths, Kunin argues, is the result of their being appropriated by ideologically motivated social actors for political purposes.

In Chapter 12, *Writing Hindutva History, Constructing Nationalist Religion*, Christian Karner applies some of the approaches associated with postmodernism to the study contemporary Hindu nationalism. This includes: a discussion of the discursive construction of a particular type of Hindu identity; an analysis of histori-

ography in Hindu nationalism as an example of the ideological nature of the practice of writing and using history, focusing on the above-mentioned Ayodhya controversy; the remembrance of violence and the ethical implications concerning how this is done; and understandings of 'religion' in Hindu nationalism and how this relates to debates about 'identity'. Karner ends with an endorsement of 'affirmative post-modern politics' to provide a challenge to the essentialist and static constructions of identity and history associated with Hindu nationalism.

In keeping with the academic spirit of our times, this volume aims to be both interdisciplinary and self-reflexive. It brings historians, sociologists and anthropologists of religion into dialogue with biblical scholars, critical theorists and philosophers. Our very diverse empirical, historical and textual foci and theoretical preferences notwithstanding, we share a concern with religious discourses and discourses about religion, with the effects of power and ideology on those who speak in texts and about them, about their co-religionists and others; we share a concern with the discursive construction of authoritative versions of the past and those excluded, marginalized and silenced therein; there is a recurring pre-occupation with the construction (and social-, institutional-, historical embeddedness) of explanatory frameworks and theoretical paradigms and our own positioning within them. Among other things, this volume is an attempted (and internally as well as deliberately heterogeneous) contribution to debates about the (im)possibility of truth. From our particular historical and institutional vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century and to the backdrop of a range of issues to do with power, ideology and representation that surfaced as the arguably dominant intellectual concerns in the final third of the preceding century, we reflect on issues related to the writing of history and the constructing of religion in a number of contexts that span millennia and continents. Our choice of case studies reflects, as already mentioned, our respective areas of research and therefore inevitably excludes many others that would have been equally relevant. However, we hope to draw those currently excluded (or absent) from our own (meta-) discourse into an ongoing dialogue about the challenges of studying religions in (any) historical, empirical and political context, and of historicizing religious studies, its concepts, theories, methods and assumptions.

Note

- 1 For a general introduction to myth and history in the study of religions see Holm with Bowker (1994).

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Chapter 8

Who's Afraid of Jesus Christ? Some Comments on Attempts to Write a Life of Jesus

Maurice Casey

Some of the most extraordinary intellectual debates in recent years have been between historians and people who may or may not be thought of as philosophers of history. The latter mostly belong to an overtly postmodernist mode of being, and have between them managed to claim *inter alia* that there are no historical facts. The initial response from historians who thought it worth replying to such claims was to lay out how they thought history was being done, without any satisfactory *defence* of their ways of doing things. In the last few years, a more reasonable response has been mounted by scholars such as Evans, *In Defence of History* (1997), and McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (1998). Such scholars have recognized that all historical theories are human constructs. They have also pointed out that all theories in such fields as physics and computer science are human constructs too. No one claims that in consequence none of our television sets or word-processors really works. Similarly, we ought to defend accurate historical research over against inaccurate historical work, whether the latter be controlled by large social groups, or done by maverick individuals. Accurate historical research should be thought of as providing genuine insight into the past, including among its achievements the recovery of genuine historical facts.

Equally ferocious debates about Jesus of Nazareth have been conducted separately from this, though most students of his life and teaching have noticed that he was an important historical figure. This is because of the supposedly academic fact that he belongs in a different field of study. This is certainly a fact, and it is a fact about university departments and about groups of academics such as *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, more than a thousand academics who make up the international academic society for the study of the New Testament. This field of study is, however, largely inhabited and controlled by Protestant Christians. This is a rather amorphous group of people with different agendas, some of them sufficiently unrecognized to have made the expression 'hidden agenda' a byword. Moreover, many institutions, such as major British universities and *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* itself, genuinely operate academic criteria in decisions about appointments and membership. But when some 90 per cent or more of applicants are Protestant Christians, a vast majority of Christian academics is a natural result. Moreover, the figure of Jesus is of central importance in colleges and universities which are overtly Protestant or Catholic, and which produce a mass of books and articles of sufficient

technical proficiency to be taken seriously. The overall result of such bias is to make the description of New Testament Studies as an academic field a dubious one.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the resulting trends. I begin in Nazi Germany, because this provides exceptionally clear examples of people controlled by their own social subgroups, examples which enable us to shed light on the scholarship of the preceding and succeeding periods as well. I then consider examples of the best critical scholarship of recent years, where some of us who read our doctorates in the 1970s imagined the scholarly world was bound to go. I turn next to the American Jesus seminar, which boldly goes where no one ever should have gone, and to the conservative Christian reaction against the American Jesus seminar. Finally, I offer some reflections on the most dangerous life of Jesus ever written, the gospel attributed to John.

Nazi Germany

I begin in Nazi Germany, where attempts to show that Jesus was not Jewish became more and more widespread.¹ Such attempts were not new. Many Germans had already argued that Jesus was Aryan, not Jewish, but such Germans had not previously been New Testament scholars. In the nineteenth century, one of the most famous was the composer Richard Wagner. Perhaps the most influential single book was the 1899 work of H. S. Chamberlain, which was translated into English in 1910, as *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, and which reached its 29th German edition in 1944. Chamberlain's argument that Jesus was not Jewish was based in the first place on racist principles. He considered the racial settlement of Galilee centuries previously, when it might be thought that Galilee was resettled with Gentiles after the deportation of Israelites to Assyria. It was in this way that, despite confessing that Jesus was Jewish in religion and education, he could state that: 'The probability that Christ was no Jew, that he had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins, is so great that it is almost equivalent to a certainty' (Chamberlain, 1910, pp. 211–212: ET from Chamberlain, 1899, pp. 218–219). With that main point made, and an Aryan Jesus apparently established, Chamberlain could go on to picture Judaism very negatively, in contrast to the religion of Christ. This enabled him to see Christ as totally opposed to Judaism: 'His advent is not the perfecting of the Jewish religion but its negation' (Chamberlain, 1910, p. 221: ET from Chamberlain, 1899, p. 227).

This book was popular because it satisfied the needs of German people who were conditioned by centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. No one imagined that Chamberlain was a New Testament scholar. In due course, however, scholars were profoundly affected by this anti-Jewish environment. I turn next to an outstanding example, Walter Grundmann (cf. Siegele-Wenschkewitz, 1982, pp. 182–189; Heschel, 1994; Head, 2004, pp. 70–89). Grundmann joined the Nazi party in 1930, and became active in the Deutsche Christen movement. The term *Deutsche Christen* is difficult to translate into English. A literal translation would be 'German Christian', but the *Deutsche Christen* movement was much more specific than this (Bergen, 1996). It was a deliberate attempt to produce a form of Christianity which maintained a Nazi ideology as well. Though it was internally motivated by people whose German and Christian identities were intertwined, one of the tasks of the movement was to

produce a form of Christianity to which most Nazis would not object. Consequently, it was abhorrent to those German Christians who formed the 'Confessing Church' (Bekennende Kirche) in opposition to it. Members of the 'Confessing Church' included three of the most important theologians of the twentieth century, Barth, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann.

Grundmann also served as assistant to the notoriously anti-Semitic Gerhard Kittel from 1930 to 1932, preparing the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, still the standard *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* found in theological libraries and used by students all over the world as if it were nothing but a standard work of reference, though its early volumes are seriously biased by the culture of its founders (Casey, 1999; Head, 2004, pp. 70–74). On 1 April 1934, Grundmann became a supporting member of the SS. In 1936, he became a professor at Jena. He had not written a *Habilitationschrift*, the standard German qualification for promotion to professor, but Hitler signed the papers for his appointment following a recommendation in which the Nazi rector of the university said that the Faculty wanted to become a stronghold of National Socialism, so that Grundmann's scholarship could be path-breaking for a National Socialist perspective in the realm of theology. In 1939, the Deutsche Christen movement opened the *Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* (Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life), with Grundmann as its academic director. His address at the opening, on 6 May 1939, was programmatic: 'Die Entjüdung des religiösen Lebens als Aufgabe deutscher Theologie und Kirche (The Dejudatization of the Religious Life as the Task of German Theology and Church)'. This declared that the elimination of Jewish influence on German life was an urgent task.

There should therefore be no doubt about Grundmann's central life-stance. He was not a frightened rabbit, nor someone doing his best in more difficult circumstances than we have to live through: he was a committed anti-Semitic Nazi. His contributions to falsehood reached a climax with his 1940 book, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum*. There is no English translation, but the title means *Jesus the Galilean and Judaism*. Like Chamberlain, Grundmann argued that not only was Jesus completely opposed to the Judaism of his time, he was also racially Aryan, so not Jewish in any sense at all. Like Chamberlain, Grundmann did this by going back into the history of Galilee centuries previously and by using a racist theory of identity. In this way, the possibility that Galileans might have been descended ultimately from Gentiles overrode the fact that many Galileans at the time of Jesus, including Jesus and all his first disciples, were culturally Jewish. Thus Grundmann avoided a major aspect of the Jesus of history, replacing him with a quite specific version of the Christ of faith. Moreover, this was done by a professional scholar deeply involved in the study of texts which can be regarded as primary sources.

Radical Form Criticism

In this light, we may look back from the 1930s to the social function of a major scholarly movement in the preceding years, that of Form Criticism, or *Formgeschichte*, as it was originally known. This movement began in Germany. It has

flourished there ever since, and has spread to other countries too. Its major 'result' was to suppose that most of the material in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke was created by the early church, leaving us with very little information about the historical Jesus. Conservative Christian scholars have often been puzzled as to why Christian men should ever have produced such radical criticism, not least because of the intellectually arbitrary way in which it was carried through.

For example, in his classic 1921 work on the history of the synoptic tradition, Bultmann discussed the narrative of Mark 2:23–28. This is a story about some of Jesus' disciples going through the fields plucking grain on the sabbath (for detailed discussion, Casey, 1998, pp. 138–173). Some Pharisees objected to them doing this, assuming that plucking grain should be regarded as work, which everyone agreed was prohibited on the sabbath (see the fourth of the ten commandments at Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15). Jesus defended his disciples with two arguments, which presuppose that poor and hungry people are not to be regarded as working if they pluck grain left for them at the edges of fields. His first argument was by analogy from the behaviour of David, who obtained and ate the shewbread in the Temple and gave it to his companions when they were hungry, an incident which was assumed to have taken place on the sabbath. Jesus' second argument was more fundamental, deriving his decision from the intention of God when he created the sabbath for the benefit of people. Underlying Jesus' arguments is the natural assumption that work is ploughing, carpentry and the like. Underlying the question from his opponents is the practice of expanding the biblical regulations as they are applied to the whole of life. This practice was widespread in the Judaism of the time. These points were thus natural in the life of the historical Jesus, and do not meet the needs of the early church.

Bultmann argued that this story was entirely the product of the early church, and gives us no information about the historical Jesus at all (Bultmann, 1921, p. 14; ET, 1963, p. 16). Bultmann's first point is that Jesus is questioned about his disciples' behaviour rather than his own. Bultmann does not, however, discuss why the disciples might be going through fields plucking grain, so no reason for the difference between the behaviour of Jesus and that of his disciples could possibly emerge. Bultmann next declares that the church ascribes the justification of her sabbath customs to Jesus, but he does not discuss the absence of all such disputes from Acts and the epistles, which makes the notion that the early Christians kept going through fields plucking grain on the sabbath rather strange. Nor does Bultmann discuss whether this kind of legal dispute is typical of early Judaism, which it is, to the point that the historicity of such stories is very probable. Bultmann declares that the scriptural proof, the use made by Jesus of the story of David, was used apart from its present context in the controversies of the early church, but he does not discuss the absence of any evidence that the early church had such controversies, nor the appropriateness of such an argument in Jesus' Jewish culture. He declares the final argument from man as Lord of the sabbath an originally isolated saying on the grounds of the typical connecting formula 'and he said to them': he does not, however, anywhere show that this expression usually does indicate the addition of secondary material, nor does he discuss how natural this expression is as part of a continuous narrative in Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke and in which the earliest traditions were transmitted. At no stage does he make any attempt to uncover a coherent argument in the passage.

Moreover, Bultmann's treatment of this passage is typical. Again and again he and other form critics used absolutely arbitrary declarations that material uncharacteristic of the early church was really created by the early church: again and again they refused to read texts as consecutive wholes: again and again they refused to even examine Gospel passages as if they might derive from Jesus within the environment of Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, this process was carried through by scholars who spent their whole lives in detailed study of the texts which they so drastically failed to understand. It is no wonder that more conservative scholars coined the phrase 'form-critical circle', to denote the repeated assumption that a narrative has been created by the early church, when the passage itself is the only evidence that the early church was interested in the matter. What went wrong?

It is at this point that the work of Grundmann and others is so illuminating, because it enables us to home in on the *social function* of the work of Bultmann and others. The *effect* of their radical criticism was to ensure that out from under the synoptic Gospels there could never crawl a Jewish man. If, moreover, we can become convinced that we do not know anything much about the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith can continue unhindered. We can see this in Bultmann's 1926 book *Jesus*, translated into English as *Jesus and the Word*. This contains not one single episode in which Jesus is immersed in detailed discussion of the practice of the Law. This is supposed to be for critical reasons. In fact, however, it is the effect of Bultmann's removal of an indelibly Jewish aspect of Jesus because Jewishness was so unwelcome to German culture. This was, moreover, done by means of a process of detailed scholarship, in which Bultmann engaged existentially with the biblical texts throughout his life.

This is well indicated by his vigorous presentation of the Matthean antitheses (Matthew 5:21–48), the nearest Bultmann gets to detailed discussion of the practice of the Law. In each case, the Matthean version of Jesus' teaching begins with something on the lines of 'you heard that it was said', followed by some aspect of Jewish Law, to which Jesus responds with authoritative teaching beginning 'but I say to you'. It is, however, notorious that most of the content of the Matthean antitheses is found also in the Gospel of Luke, but the actual form of the antithesis, with the authoritative response 'but I say to you', is unique to Matthew. For example, Matthew 5:31–32 presents Jesus' remarkable prohibition of divorce as follows:

Now it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate' [cf. Deuteronomy 24:1]. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of her having sex with another man, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

The version at Luke 16:18 is simpler and typically lacks the Matthean rhetoric:

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and he who marries a divorcee commits adultery.

It is therefore most unlikely that the Matthean antithesis form is original and it is certainly much less well attested than some of the disputes between Jesus and his opponents over details of the Law. Bultmann concludes that 'Jesus ... opposes the view that the fulfilment of the law is the fulfilling of the will of God' (Bultmann, 1934, p. 70). That conclusion is clean contrary to the teaching of Jesus. It was,

however, just what German Christians needed from the Christ of their faith, for it bluntly contradicts the centre of Judaism. It was, moreover, produced by means of detailed exegesis of selected texts. It also illustrates the centrality of anti-Judaism in the work of a distinguished member of the Confessing Church, the opposite wing of the German churches from the Deutsche Christen movement. Bultmann's general cultural environment led him to write Judaism out of the teaching of Jesus, using spurious intellectual arguments which wrote most of Jesus of Nazareth out of history altogether. He was left with the Christ of his faith in the guise of an historical figure about whom little can be known.

Slow Progress

Throughout this period, conventional lives of Jesus, not seriously different from liberal lives in the nineteenth century, continued to be written. Such included, for example, those of the Anglican Bishop A. C. Headlam in 1923, and the French scholar Guignebert in 1933. A few years after the Second World War, some attempts were made to restart the quest of the historical Jesus, what is sometimes known as the second quest. It is generally dated from a lecture delivered by Käsemann in 1953 and published in 1954. This was genuinely a new start after the Nazi period, though not the first thing to have happened since Albert Schweitzer. I must draw attention to one book, the 1959 work of J. M. Robinson, published under the title *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The title of this book recognizes the new start made by Käsemann. In this light, the whole book is entirely devoted to justifying the basic idea of having a quest for the historical Jesus. It moves entirely within a Christian frame of reference, especially one which reflects German concerns. Robinson correctly believed that the French and Anglo-Saxon quests were an untroubled continuation of the nineteenth century quest. He noted, for example, Guignebert's *Jésus*, published in 1933 and Vincent Taylor's 1954 book, *The Life and Ministry of Jesus*. Robinson accepted, however, German concerns that a Jesus of history might become a result of man's striving before God, and therefore illegitimate. Robinson himself argued that the Incarnation, the Gospels and the kerygma demanded that the historical Jesus be taken note of, and that the historical-critical method would be necessary to fulfil this task. What is interesting is that this argument should have been necessary. The profound irony of the standard German concern is that it is so remote from the *social function* of not having an historical quest for the historical Jesus, which remained what it had been for Bultmann, Grundmann and others, avoiding a Jewish man.

By 1987, enough new work had been done for some scholars to feel that another genuine new start to the quest of the historical Jesus had been made, and this was clearly articulated by Tom Wright in a paper read to a meeting of British New Testament scholars that year. He made three points which seemed plausible to many of us at the time.²

- 1 Standards of proof have risen. Of particular importance at the time was Morna Hooker's demolition of the Criterion of Dissimilarity in her 1971 paper. This criterion had been in use for many years, but it was not properly labelled and described until the 1960s. When clearly described, it states that anything in the

Gospel accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus which is paralleled in Judaism or the early church must be attributed to the church, rather than to Jesus. This produces a quite unique Jesus, who cannot be connected with the Judaism of his time, and who is so remote from the early church as to make it impossible to see how Christianity started. Hooker was therefore entirely right to argue that we should stop using this criterion. The criterion of multiple attestation was of major positive importance. As used at the time, it asserted that anything independently attested more than once in our oldest sources was likely to be true. For example, there is clear evidence that the controversy over Jesus casting out demons by the power of the devil was featured in both Mark (3:20–30) and in Q, scholars' name for other material found in both Matthew and Luke (Matthew 12:22–32; Luke 11:14–23; 12:10, and for detailed discussion, Casey, 2002, pp. 146–182). This was taken to be strong evidence that the controversy really took place. Again, multiple attestation by form was important: so when we find exorcisms in narratives, summaries, parabolic sayings and controversy, that was very strong evidence that Jesus performed exorcisms.

- 2 Wright's second point was that the quest is being carried out by people who have different perspectives. The impetus to renew the quest of the historical Jesus after the Second World War began in entirely Christian circles, justified and disputed by entirely Christian arguments. In the subsequent period, we had the very important work by the Jewish scholar Geza Vermes (Vermes, 1973, 1983), and I had been seeking to make some technical contributions from a non-religious perspective (e.g. Casey, 1980). In 1987 we seemed to be part of a welcome trend.
- 3 Wright's third point was that increased attention has been paid to Jesus' cultural background. This again seemed obvious in many people's work at the time. Two scholars, Geza Vermes and E. P. Sanders, had been conspicuously successful in portraying Jesus as belonging to first century Judaism, and they have continued to do so in subsequent years (Sanders, 1985, 1993; Vermes, 1973, 1983, 1993). I therefore consider briefly the main points of their work, to illustrate how scholarship could move forward towards a more accurate historical view of Jesus' life and teaching. I also illustrate what goes wrong when something does.

Vermes and Sanders

Vermes came in from an overtly Jewish perspective. The great strengths of his work are his complete knowledge and profound understanding of the Jewish primary source material, and the sober and judicious manner in which he locates Jesus within the Judaism of first century Galilee. Noteworthy achievements include an illuminating comparison between Jesus and other Galilean holy men, or *hasa'idim*, devout Jews of a generally unconventional kind about whom miracle stories were told. Vermes discussed particularly Honi the Circle-Drawer, who successfully prayed for rain during a drought, and Hanina ben Dosa, who was said to have cured Gamaliel's son at a distance (Vermes, 1973, pp. 69–78). In discussing them and Jesus, Vermes also made fruitful use of the modern category of 'charismatic'. At a different level, Vermes wrote a seminal paper on the son of man problem (Vermes, 1967), which is from a technical point of view one of the most difficult problems in New Testament

studies. He was able to bring new evidence to bear on this problem because of his thorough knowledge of rabbinical literature and his careful analytical technique. In general Vermes always handles rabbinic literature in a careful and critical way, never taking it for granted that late material must represent Judaism at the time of Jesus. His work on the Dead Sea Scrolls also enabled him to contribute with great methodological skill to discussions of the relative importance of the Scrolls and of rabbinical literature for our understanding of Jesus. He also made significant contributions to particular aspects of the teaching of Jesus, notably the Fatherhood of God. It is only regrettable that Vermes has not written a complete life of Jesus. In spite of this, his contributions have been so extensive and wide-ranging that every scholar trying to contribute to our knowledge of the historical Jesus should benefit from Vermes' work.

Nonetheless, Vermes' work is not without fault, and it is instructive to see what goes wrong when something does. The major difficulty is that Vermes has not been able to give a convincing explanation of why Jesus was crucified. Vermes of course knows the relevant texts very well, having spent his whole life in detailed study of both Jewish and Gospel texts, and he has seen the importance of the Cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18). But he belongs to the Jewish community, whose members were persecuted for centuries partly on the grounds of deicide, a charge which held them responsible for crucifying Jesus and thereby killing God. This appears to be what has prevented Vermes from understanding the fundamental nature of Jewish opposition to Jesus, and its importance as a cause of the crucifixion. Thus Vermes' own life, and especially his membership of the Jewish community, has caused the same kind of distortion familiar to us from the work of Christian scholars.

A second problem lies in instances where Vermes uses conventional scholarship to discount the historicity of parts of our oldest sources. Like so many other scholars, he got into difficulties over Mark 9:1: 'Amen I say to you that there are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power'. This saying predicts the coming of the kingdom of God within a very short time, an event which did not take place. Unable to fit this into the teaching of Jesus, Vermes turned to Bultmann for the view that it is a Christian 'community formula of consolation in view of the delay of the Parousia' (Vermes, 1993, p. 141, quoting Bultmann, ET, 1963, p. 121). This shifts the responsibility for the mistake to the early church, which wrongly expected the second coming of Jesus, the Parousia, in the very near future. Yet the term 'kingdom of God', which is central to this saying, was central to the teaching of Jesus, and this saying does not mention the Parousia. Accordingly, the saying fits perfectly into the teaching of Jesus, and is not expressed in terms appropriate for Bultmann's 'formula of consolation'. Given Bultmann's lack of understanding of Judaism, it is deeply ironical that Vermes should resort to him on such occasions. This illustrates the massive bureaucratization of New Testament scholarship, which has now got to such a stage that a distinguished dead professor can be cited in support of almost anything.

As a result of his profound knowledge of ancient Judaism, as well as his own Jewish identity, Vermes' picture of the Jesus of history is more Jewish than that generally produced by Christian scholars. This led Vermes to launch an entirely proper challenge to orthodox Christian belief. Correctly using the traditional distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, Vermes pointed out that the historical Jesus the Jew is not consistent with the deified second person of the Christian Trinity (Vermes,

1973, pp. 15–17, 223–5; 1993, pp. 208–215). Christian scholarship has completely failed to meet this challenge, though it is but a scholarly version of a complaint made by persecuted Jews for centuries. This illustrates again the drastic domination of a supposedly academic ‘field’ of ‘study’ by members of a single religion, who usually set the agenda and determine what is to be commented on.

The other most important contributor to our knowledge of the historical Jesus in recent years has been E. P. Sanders. His most significant contribution in scholarly terms was his 1985 book *Jesus and Judaism*, perhaps the most brilliant book on Jesus written so far. In 1993, he also contributed what is arguably the best single volume Life of Jesus so far written, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. One of the major reasons that Sanders was able to make such an important and wide-ranging contribution to our knowledge of Jesus was his profound understanding of Second Temple Judaism, an understanding expounded at greater length in other books and articles (Sanders, 1977, pp. 1–428; 1990; 1992). Christian control of otherwise respectable scholarship in this field has been so gross that one of Sanders’ first tasks was to demolish Christian prejudices about Judaism, a task which he achieved with intellectual brilliance and incisiveness. For example, in his excellent introduction to *Jesus and Judaism* (Sanders, 1985), he repeatedly shows how twentieth-century scholars put forward a view of Judaism which was dependent on their need to regard Judaism as inferior to Christianity, rather than on their understanding of Jewish source material. In particular, Judaism was held to be legalistic, nationalistic and with a remote God, so that Jesus could be portrayed as bringing love, universalism and nearness to God. Among numerous advances at a detailed level, Sanders showed that the common scholarly discussion of Matthew 12:28//Luke 11:20 was distorted by ideological motivation: ‘the kingship of God has come upon you’ is an important comment on Jesus’ exorcisms, but customary Christian moves to ‘the uniqueness of Jesus’ self-consciousness or claim’ are not justified by the primary source material (Sanders, 1985, p. 137). Sanders’ extensive demolition of contemporary prejudice is doubly remarkable because Sanders himself comes in from a perspective of Christian commitment. In addition to purely scholarly brilliance, therefore, this is also one of the most remarkable examples of a critical scholar transcending his ideological background in order to produce, by means of evidence and argument, correct new results. His work shows that careful historical research can lead to progress when it is properly done.

Sanders’ first positive achievement was to direct attention away from sayings of Jesus to the prime importance of facts which can be established beyond reasonable doubt. At the beginning of his excellent outline of Jesus’ life for general readers, he listed the following:

- Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great;
- he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village;
- he was baptized by John the Baptist;
- he called disciples;
- he taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not the cities);
- he preached ‘the kingdom of God’;
- about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover;
- he created a disturbance in the Temple area;
- he had a final meal with the disciples;

he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest; he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate. (Sanders, 1993, pp. 10–11; cf. Sanders, 1985, p. 11)

In retrospect, this may look both obvious and not much. Its importance in 1993, and of the earlier version already in 1985, was the certainty with which these points can be established. Sanders showed that the main points of Jesus' ministry ought not to be in doubt.

Into this outline Sanders fitted a considerable amount of material in a logically ordered and culturally appropriate manner. Among many good points was his treatment of miracles. Chapter 10 of *The Historical Figure of Jesus* begins with an excellent treatment of the ancient perspective on miracles, which has so often been ignored in modern treatments of them. In particular, Sanders noted that ancient people 'saw miracles as striking and significant, but not as indicating that the miracle-worker was anything other than fully human' (Sanders, 1993, p. 132). One of the reasons for this was the occurrence of healings which were not understood, to the point that they were taken to be the action of a healer or of the God prayed to. Sanders notes particularly the healings reported by devotees of Asclepius, reports in which possible and impossible healings stand side by side. Accordingly, stories also include 'nature miracles': for example, Honi the Circle-Drawer, already known to us from Vermes, was held to have successfully prayed for rain, while a prophet called Theudas was followed into the wilderness by many people who evidently believed that the waters of the Jordan would part before him (Sanders, 1993, pp. 135–140). Finally, Sanders notes that exorcisms and other healings lay within the culture of Second Temple Judaism.

All this enables Sanders to take a more informed perspective on Jesus' exorcisms and other healings than is usually found. He does not follow rationalist attempts to explain them away, nor credulous attempts to treat them as otherwise impossible events which only Jesus by divine power could do. He situates them within Jesus' ministry, as mostly events which were very important to him but which were not events of such power and uniqueness that they persuaded most Jews to follow him. This is much the most sane treatment of these stories that I have seen. The good sense which informs Sanders' treatment of miracles pervades all his work. It is reasonable to consider his combination of learning and sanity as a reasonable summary of what has made his work better than that of anyone else so far.

Nonetheless, with Sanders as with everyone else, we have to see what goes wrong when something does. Like Vermes, Sanders cannot quite cope with the conflicts between Jesus and his opponents. When he gets to disputes including that between Jesus and the Pharisees over the disciples plucking grain on the sabbath (Mark 2:23–28), he too invokes Bultmann, for Bultmann argued that such disputes are so unrealistic that they could not have taken place (Sanders, 1993, p. 265, invoking Bultmann, ET, 1963, p. 39). We have, however, already seen that Bultmann's discussion of this passage is completely unsatisfactory because of its arbitrary and dogmatic nature. Moreover, its social function in the work of Bultmann was to remove Jesus from a Jewish environment. This is profoundly ironical, because Sanders is coming in from a liberal Christian perspective which is disturbed by the evidence of Jesus' ferocious conflicts with some of his fellow Jews. The reasons why

Sanders cannot cope with the evidence of these severe conflicts are accordingly almost the opposite of those which affected Bultmann. As a liberal Christian, he needs Jesus not to appear too much opposed to Jews. This moderately overt agenda has led him to appropriate some of Bultmann's work, the social function of which was to remove the Jewishness of Jesus. This illustrates quite how hidden an agenda can get.

Jesus' opponents also objected to him associating with 'sinners'. Sanders imagines that these people were really 'the wicked', because he supposes that behind the Greek word *hamartōloi*, which means 'sinners', there lay the Hebrew *resha'im*, which means 'the wicked', or its Aramaic equivalent (Sanders, 1985, p. 177). This is a standard mistake. The texts about the sinners are difficult. Instead of trying to reconstruct possible Aramaic sources, Sanders has altered the meaning of these Greek texts by substituting one different word in Hebrew. In his more learned book, he should have offered complete Aramaic reconstructions, and proper philological discussion of the semantic areas of the relevant Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic words for 'sinner', and perhaps also 'wicked' and the like.

It would be wrong to end this discussion of Sanders on such a note. His great learning and good sense have enabled him to make the most important contribution of all to our understanding of the historical Jesus. If most scholars had worked like Vermes and Sanders, there would be no doubt that the quest of the historical Jesus is a quest to find him, and it would have been a great deal more successful than it has generally been.

Crossan and the American Jesus Seminar

When Wright read his 1987 paper, the pre-eminent work of Vermes and Sanders was complemented by that of several scholars who had made smaller advances without writing anything like a complete life of Jesus. The outlook for historical research into the life and teaching of Jesus was therefore extremely hopeful. Since 1987, however, a lot of very unfortunate work has been done. Much of this is connected with the American Jesus seminar, so I begin with the enormous 1991 book of one of its most distinguished members, J. D. Crossan: *The Historical Jesus*, with a subtitle *The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. Crossan presents Jesus as 'a peasant Jewish Cynic'. Like all recent suggestions that cynic philosophers help us to understand Jesus, this is inconsistent with the fact that the Gospels do not mention philosophy, cynics, major cynic philosophers such as Diogenes, nor cynic peculiarities such as living in a barrel. Moreover, there is not sufficient evidence that cynic philosophy had penetrated into Judaism in Israel. Our primary sources accordingly present Jesus as a prophet and teacher in a Jewish environment, using terms such as 'Son of man' and 'Son of God': they do not present him as a cynic philosopher.

Most of the time Crossan works with five primary sources: Mark, 'Q', the rest of Matthew or Luke, John and the Gospel of Thomas. He will not admit the authenticity of material unless it is independently attested twice. This may look at first sight like a reasonable development of the criterion of multiple attestation, but its effects are quite destructive. If anything is attested by our oldest Gospel, Mark, Crossan will accept it only if it is independently attested. So out goes the whole of Mark 1:16–38,

with the call of the first disciples and an early exorcism on the sabbath, as 'a Markan creation' (Crossan, 1991, pp. 346–347). Yet this passage has many features of very old tradition. One of the most notable is that people wait until the end of the sabbath before bringing other people to Jesus to be healed (Mark 1:33). This is because they obeyed their natural interpretation of the Law prohibiting the carrying of burdens on the sabbath (Jeremiah 17:20–21). If Mark had created this after a successful Gentile mission, he would surely have had to explain it, though he would have had no rationale for making it up in the first place.

Equally, the difficulty of a rich person entering the kingdom of God (Mark 10:23f.) is accepted only because it turns up also in the Shepherd of Hermas (*Sim.* 9,20:2b–3) (Crossan, 1991, pp. 274–275). Yet the repetition of only one aspect of the Markan passage in a second century Christian source is quite irrelevant to whether Jesus said it. It is more important that it fits into Jesus' teaching, that the disciples' reaction was that of more conventional Jews, and it is not the kind of thing that the early church was interested in. We may therefore be quite sure that the incident really took place. In practice, therefore, good early tradition with a perfectly good setting in the life and teaching of Jesus is excluded unless later Christian tradition repeats it. Later Christian tradition may, however, be acceptable, if it is independently repeated. Hence the high proportion of parables and wisdom material accepted by Crossan. They are independently repeated, parables because they can be retold and reinterpreted, wisdom material because so much of it is generally acceptable.

There is also serious distortion of one of the central concepts of the teaching of Jesus, the kingdom of God. On pp. 284–287, Crossan discusses the *apocalyptic* kingdom of God. Appropriate quotations are given from the *Psalms of Solomon*, the *Testament of Moses* and the *Similitudes of Enoch*, all documents written in Israel at about the right time. Such documents provide the cultural background against which Jesus preached the coming of the kingdom. On the following pages, however, Crossan discusses the *sapiential* kingdom of God. His evidence is taken from Philo, the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Sentences of Sextus*. All these sources were written outside Israel, and resulted from far too much Greek influence to be helpful in understanding the ministry of Jesus. Under the general notion that hellenization had penetrated Israel, however, these documents are taken to provide a serious cultural framework. Once this has been done, Crossan declares that he will locate Jesus' kingdom as sapiential and peasant. There is no proper discussion of sayings such as Mark 9:1: 'Amen I say to you that there are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power'. From Crossan's point of view, a saying like this is attested only once, since Matthew 16:28 and Luke 9:27 both result from editing and copying Mark 9:1. Such sayings are therefore not acceptable, not even if they have an excellent setting in the ministry of Jesus, a doubtful one in the early church and none at all in later documents such as the Gospels of John and of Thomas.

The overall result of this process has the same social function as most scholarship on the Jesus of history: it reduces his Jewishness. Moreover, the depiction of Jesus as a cynic enables him to be fitted into Crossan's intellectual environment. I turn therefore to the American Jesus seminar as a whole. The seminar was set up by R. W. Funk with the best possible intentions. Funk was impressed and distressed by the significant role played in American life by Christian evangelists, especially on tele-

vision. These evangelists were putting forward a verifiably false version of the Christian faith, coming in from a fundamentalist perspective. Funk also knew some ordinary ministers who were preaching a fundamentalist version of Christianity. Funk set up the Jesus seminar to tell the truth about Jesus, and to do so with people who had the authority of critical scholarship behind them. In 1996 a book by him was published under the title *Honest to Jesus*, which correctly reflects his intentions.

What better aim could a scholar have? Unfortunately, the methods adopted by the seminar prevented these aims from being achieved. In the first place, some of the best scholars in the USA were not members of it. They did not, for example, have E. P. Sanders. Second, a number of fellows of the seminar had only recently completed doctorates at American institutions, and the seminar decided the authenticity of material about Jesus by majority vote, averaged out as the fellows did not agree with each other. In practice, this meant an averaged majority vote by people, some of whom were only just qualified, in the absence of several leading authorities.

In a published version of some of their results, one version of the coloured beads with which they voted was given like this:

Red: Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.

Pink: Jesus probably said something like this.

Gray: Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.

Black: Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition.

This is from the introduction to a 1993 book appropriately entitled *The Five Gospels* (Funk *et al.*, 1993, p. 36). This is because of the exaggerated importance which they have attributed to the Gospel of Thomas, their addition to the canonical four. Their voting was so bizarre that they ended up with more red in that Gospel than in our oldest genuine source, the Gospel of Mark. The result of their voting is a figure they are happy with. In particular, he is much like a cynic philosopher, which suits their intellectual ambience, and has nothing to do with the apocalyptic and eschatological concerns which characterize American fundamentalism.

What is even worse is the effect of the Jesus seminar on conservative American Christians. Some of them write books as if to demonstrate that the Jesus seminar is wrong is to demonstrate the absolute truth of Protestant fundamentalism or Catholic orthodoxy, whichever the perspective from which the author is writing. For example, in 1995 Wilkins and Moreland edited a collection of essays devoted to refuting radical scholarship, under the title *Jesus Under Fire*. The vast majority of its criticisms are fired back at the American Jesus seminar, and its own life-stance wobbles between Conservative and Fundamentalist, including feeble defences of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel in general and the Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–45) in particular (Wilkins and Moreland, 1995, esp. pp. 38–39, 131). It follows that the effect of the American Jesus seminar has been the opposite of its intentions. On the one hand, it has grievously misled anyone who believes what it says. Equally, it has not corrected the views of most Christians who look at the world from inside extreme dogmatic blinkers. It has rather encouraged them to imagine that all their dogmatism is right, because they can see with perfect clarity that the Gospel of Thomas is not a major source for the historical Jesus, and Jesus was not some sort of cynic philosopher.

The Gospel Attributed to John

It would, however, be quite wrong to suppose that the writing of inaccurate accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus is a modern phenomenon. One of the major resources of conservative Christians is the Gospel attributed to John. Scholars have known for more than a hundred years that it is quite inaccurate as an account of Jesus' life and teaching, but many people in the churches are not aware of this. All I can do here is to isolate a small number of main points (for a thorough discussion, Casey, 1996).

The kingdom of God was a major facet of the teaching of the historical Jesus. We have already seen trouble caused by one of his important predictions: 'Amen I say to you that there are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come in power' (Mark 9:1). By the end of the first century, the kingdom had obviously not come into power. Moreover, Jesus was crucified as 'king of the Jews', so someone like the high priest Joseph Caiaphas must have impressed upon Pontius Pilate that when God did establish his kingdom, there would be no room for the Romans in it. The kingdom of God is mentioned in no more than two passages in the Fourth Gospel, one to deal with each of these problems. At John 3:3, seeing the kingdom of God is dependent on being born again and/or from above, an event which was perceived to take place at Christian baptism. This is further clarified at John 3:5, where 'entering' the kingdom of God is dependent on being born of water and the Spirit. There are synoptic Son of man sayings in which 'entering' the kingdom of God is presented as a future event, and at least some of them can readily be interpreted eschatologically, just like Mark 9:1. One of the closest to John 3:5 is Matthew 18:3, 'Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become as children, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'. There is also a very similar saying at Mark 10:15//Luke 18:17. Both sayings have the concept of becoming like a child, which could be rewritten as rebirth. Both have a clear negative with 'to enter', used of not entering the kingdom if a condition of entry is not fulfilled. Both begin 'Amen I say to you', for which 'Amen, amen I say to you' at both John 3:3 and 3:5 is the normal Johannine rewrite. Taking into account other detailed parallels, we must conclude that such sayings provide us with the tradition which the Johannine community have rewritten. From their own perspective, they have solved the problems posed by the perception that Jesus' predictions about the coming of the kingdom had not been fulfilled. They have removed the unwelcome time element in the concepts of 'seeing' and 'entering' the kingdom of God, and made both of them dependent on Christian baptism interpreted as being born again from above, a purely Greek concept unknown from the Judaism of Jesus' time.

The second passage has Jesus in solitary personal debate with Pilate himself. The debate opens with Pilate's question 'Are you the king of the Jews?' (John 18:33), taken from Pilate's public question at Matthew 27:11//Mark 15:2//Luke 23:3. The synoptic Jesus answers no more than 'you say'. The Johannine Jesus, however, before he gets to 'you say that I am a/the king' (John 18:37), makes the crucial statement, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my attendants would have fought for me so that I might not be handed over to the Jews. Now my kingdom is not from here' (John 18:36). Jesus goes on to explain that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, Johannine terms which imply his pre-existence and deity. Pilate then goes out to the Jews and tells them 'I find no fault in this man' (John

19:38). This is a further development of the other evangelists' attempts to show that the Roman *praefectus*, the governor of Judaea responsible for Jesus' execution for *maiestas* (treason), did not really believe in his guilt. The completed story is meant to show that Pilate was fully aware of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom, and did not regard him as guilty on that account.

Thus this Gospel has almost removed the kingdom of God from the teaching of Jesus, leaving only two inaccurate passages which wrongly imply that Jesus solved the two serious problems which really did arise from the ministry of the historical Jesus. In so doing, the authors have used or implied several positive aspects of their own lives which had no connection with the historical Jesus. These include the hellenistic concept of rebirth on the surface of Chapter 3 and Christian baptism not far beneath it, and Jesus' descent from heaven on the surface of his conversation with Pilate with his pre-existence and deity implied. There is also the remarkable description of Jesus' opponents as 'the Jews', even though he and all his first disciples were Jewish.

Other passages carry this much further, reflecting the situation of the Johannine community in late first century Ephesus. Throughout this Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as conscious of his position as the incarnate Son of God who is co-equal with the Father. One important statement is 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30), a statement so provocative that 'the Jews' immediately take up stones to throw at Jesus. At 10:33, they give their reasons – 'for blasphemy, and because, although you're a man, you make yourself God'. In response, Jesus does not deny the charge but justifies his position, asserting as he does so 'I am the Son of God', and 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father'. An equally serious dispute is narrated in Chapter 5, where we are told that '... the Jews sought all the more to kill Jesus, because he not only abrogated the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God' (John 5:18). Here too Jesus does not attempt to answer the charge that he called God his own Father, or made himself equal with God, for the Johannine community believed that he was the only-begotten Son of God (for example, John 3:16), and as such genuinely equal with God the Father.

This highly developed Christology is absent from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke because it was a late development. It is closely associated with the description of Jesus' opponents as 'the Jews' because it was intertwined with a major split between the Jewish and Christian communities. At times, the polemic is even more serious, with 'the Jews' defined as children of the devil (John 8:44) and told that they do not believe in the writings of Moses (John 5:46–47). This is why this document was central to Martin Luther's construction of a scripturally based theological argument for measures against the Jewish community. Luther's recommendations included burning down the synagogues or schools of 'the Jews', destroying their houses, confiscating all copies of their prayer books and Talmud, and forbidding their rabbis to teach on pain of death (Luther, 1543, ET, 1971, pp. 170–171, 141, 278, 281–284, 289–291, 268–270). As the German people were subjected to anti-Semitic propaganda in the 1930s, they could read calumny against 'the Jews' in their sacred text, and recommendations for persecution in their most prestigious theologian, before Grundmann and others ever got going. Hence my description of this document as the most dangerous life of Jesus ever written. It is not merely inaccurate: it is inaccurate in such a way as to fuel the grossest of Christian prejudices.

Community Control and Independent Scholarship

So, then, who's afraid of Jesus Christ? Most people who write serious scholarly works about Jesus are controlled by the communities to which they belong. Most of these communities are vigorously avoiding either the Jesus of history, or the Christ of faith, or both. I began in Nazi Germany, where Grundmann and others were avoiding one of the outstanding characteristics of the Jesus of history, his Jewishness. They continued with the Christ of their faith. I looked then at the formcritical movement, and found that it too was avoiding unwelcome aspects of the Jesus of history, leaving the Christ of faith untouched. I noted that the so-called 'second' or 'new' quest had to face the question of whether there should be a quest of the historical Jesus at all. This was in danger of repeating previous faults, and cannot reasonably be said to have made much progress. I looked at J. D. Crossan and the American Jesus seminar. They were overtly avoiding the Christ of fundamentalist Christian faith, and in practice they have largely avoided the Jesus of history too, replacing both figures with a cynical being who suits them. I took a brief look at one of the sources of the Christ of faith, the Gospel attributed to John, and found that it too was replacing inconvenient aspects of the Jesus of history, and presenting the Christ of the Johannine community's faith.

As representatives of outstandingly good critical scholarship, I looked at the work of Vermes and Sanders. Here I found helpful attempts to present the Jesus of history, by scholars both of whom have succeeded in advancing knowledge in this field. Neither of them is free of mistakes, which are generally caused by the same factors as those of the more faulty work to which most of this chapter has been devoted. It does seem to me to be possible to make further progress. There are of course problems with the primary source material. I have noted that one of the canonical Gospels is horrendously unreliable, and as we can see in James Crossley's second chapter in this volume, even our oldest and best sources contain fiction and distortion as well as fact. For reasons which I have looked at briefly, I remain nonetheless convinced that further progress is possible, and that this could enable us to establish the main points of Jesus' ministry, as well as a detailed account of many significant events in it. As I have argued in two recent books (Casey, 1998; 2002), I particularly believe that careful attention to sources originally written in Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke, can help us to recover an increasingly accurate account of what Jesus said and did. This is part of the process of recovering a more Jewish Jesus, a figure who is liable to cause severe problems for the Christ of faith, if only Christians can be persuaded to encounter him.

What prevents us from doing as much as this is not that facts cannot be established, nor the inherently distorting effects of constructing a narrative containing them. It is that most people belong to communities which control their view of Jesus. It is accordingly the responsibility of those of us who have the good fortune to work in decent independent universities to carry this work forward. If we do not do so, nobody will, for everyone else is too fond of their own group's stories, whether these are born of acceptance or rejection of the Christian faith. It is therefore of central importance that we proceed vigorously, with all the evidence and techniques at our disposal.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Dr P. Head for discussing these issues with me, and for giving me a copy of the paper which he read to the Jesus seminar of the British Society for New Testament Studies in September 1999. See Head, 2004.
- 2 The following account is based on notes which I made at and shortly after the lecture. Cf. Neill and Wright, 1988, pp. 379–403.

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