

THE JESUS LEGEND

A CASE FOR THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY
OF THE SYNOPTIC JESUS TRADITION

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , part 2, The Principate, edited by W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974–)
<i>Antiquities</i>	Josephus, <i>The Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>Jewish War</i>	Josephus, <i>The Wars of the Jews</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSSR</i>	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>Legat.</i>	Philo, <i>Legatio ad Gaium (On the Embassy to Gaius)</i>
<i>Life</i>	Josephus, <i>The Life of Flavius Josephus</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	Philo, <i>De migratione Abrahami (On the Migration of Abraham)</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>Quaes. Gen.</i>	Philo, <i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesis (Questions and Answers on Genesis)</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

THE CASE FOR THE LEGENDARY JESUS

The primary objective of this book is to investigate the extent to which the portrait(s) of Jesus in the canonical Gospels—particularly the Synoptic Gospels—are generally to be judged as reliable history, on one hand, or as fictional legend, on the other. This latter option will be referred to throughout this book as the “legendary Jesus” thesis.¹ For reasons that will become clear as we proceed, our task will require us

1. The term “legend” has various meanings in different contexts. In some academic circles, i.e., certain sectors of folkloristics, the term has come to refer to a transmitted story set in the relatively recent, or at least the historical, past that, though believed to be true by the teller, may or may not be rooted in actual history. On the multiple uses and definitional complexities of the term “legend”—including its relationship to “history”—see L. Degh and A. Vazsonyi, “Legend and Belief,” in *Folklore Genre*, ed. D. Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 93–123; R. A. Georges, “The General Concept of Legend: Some Assumptions to Be Reexamined and Reassessed,” in *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, ed. W. D. Hand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 1–19; H. Jason, “Concerning the ‘Historical’ and the ‘Local’ Legends and Their Relatives,” in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, ed. A. Paredes and R. Bauman (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 134–44; E. Oring, “Legend, Truth, and News,” *Southern Folklore* 47 (1990): 163–77; T. Shibusani, “Legendary Accounts and Historiography,” in *Improvvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 155–61; Y. Zerubavel, “The Historic, the Legendary, and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 105–23. On the very similar category of the “memorate,” see L. Degh and A. Vazsonyi, “The Memoriate and the Proto-Memoriate,” *Journal of American Folklore* 87 (1974): 225–39. In this work, we will use “legend” in its more popular sense of a substantially nonhistorical/fictional story. From D. F. Strauss to Rudolf Bultmann to Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, the use of the term “legend” in New Testament studies generally appears to function as shorthand for an ostensive historical account that is, in fact, (at least largely) fictional. See D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, 4th ed., trans. M. Evans (New York: Blanchard, 1860), 2; R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 244–45; R. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 15–17.

to consider recent findings from a number of disciplines, including ethnography, folkloristics, and orality studies. The thesis we will be defending is this: If, with its reports of the supernatural, one is able to remain sincerely open to the *possibility* (not merely the “logical” possibility, but the genuine historical possibility; see chap. 1 below) that the portrait(s) of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is historically reliable, then, given an appropriate historical method and the evidence at hand,² one is justified (on purely historical grounds) in concluding that the Synoptic portrait(s) of Jesus is quite historically *plausible*—in fact, that it is the *most historically probable* representation of the actual Jesus of history.³ At the very least, we contend, the

At the start we should also note that our focus is primarily on the Synoptic Gospels. We have chosen largely to leave the Gospel of John aside in terms of detail and distinctives. We do so not because we think John’s work is inherently less reliable than the Synoptics, but because this Gospel is so different from the other canonical Gospels that it requires a significantly different line of consideration when assessing its historicity. This would have made an already sizable work significantly longer. Among recent studies that have concluded with a generally favorable assessment of the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel see C. L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003). For an impressive recent study that calls into question the all-too-common “de-historicization of John,” and the “de-Johannification of Jesus,” see P. N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (New York: Clark, 2006).

2. Throughout this work we will make reference to historical “evidence.” We do so, we trust, not from a naive evidentialist perspective that presumes that evidence speaks for itself in some preinterpreted, decontextualized fashion. Rather, as recent interdisciplinary studies on evidentiary matters suggest, evidence and evidentiary standards are always approached and evaluated from within a concrete sociocultural-linguistic context. This is the case for historical evidence no less than it is for legal and other forms of evidence. On the context-dependent variability of evidentiary standards even within a single society, see S. U. Philips, “Evidentiary Standards for American Trials: Just the Facts,” in *Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse*, ed. J. H. Hill and J. T. Irvine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248–59.

3. Some Christian readers may be disappointed that we are arguing only that it is *plausible/most probable* that the Synoptic portrait of Jesus is *substantially* rooted in history. They might rather have hoped we would argue it is *certain* that the Gospel portrait of Jesus is *completely rooted* in history. As shall become clear in the next chapter, however, given the constraints of historical method and the limitations of finite human knowledge, purely historical considerations alone can never get beyond probabilistic conclusions. We should also mention that, because we are approaching this topic from a critical historiographical standpoint, we will be treating the Synoptic Gospels as we would any other ancient document. Historiographically speaking, the fact that these works are recognized as canonical and “inspired” by the historic orthodox church is neither here nor there. This has important implications. The authors of this book are theologically trained evangelical Christians. However, although we certainly bring our own presuppositions to the task (see below), for the purposes of this particular study we have attempted to operate from a standpoint of critical historiographical inquiry. Given this methodological delimitation, our claims in this book will be much more modest than if we were writing a theological textbook on the nature of Scripture. For example, while it might be *theologically* problematic to countenance certain inaccuracies or fabricated elements in the Gospels, this does not trouble our more minimal *historiographical* thesis: namely that the Synoptic Gospels are—generally and substantially speaking—rooted in history. It is also important to note that the recognition that historical claims are always, at best, probabilistic in nature in no way creates a problem for Christian *faith*—at least when this faith is properly understood. In the biblical context, faith is primarily a covenant term that signals active trust in the character and promises of one’s covenant partner. For helpful statements on this matter of faith and history, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 93–96; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus*

cumulative case for the general reliability of the Synoptic presentation(s) of Jesus is such that the a posteriori burden of proof (on which see chap. 9) rests on those who contend that this portrait is generally unreliable.

One of the main purposes of this book is to draw together an array of interdisciplinary studies that in one way or another have bearing on the question of the historicity of the Synoptic Jesus tradition. In particular, a major impetus for this work is that the often relevant findings of contemporary interdisciplinary studies on orally oriented ancient cultures have generally not been integrated into historical-Jesus research as widely and thoroughly as one might hope. Much of the fuel for the legendary-Jesus thesis is drawn from anachronistic approaches to the early Jesus tradition, approaches that are tied to a modern, literary paradigm. Our contention is that when the early Jesus tradition is assessed from an orally oriented perspective—and in concert with an appropriate historical methodology—the legendary-Jesus thesis becomes difficult to maintain.

In this introduction we want to prepare the way for this endeavor. First, we will address a fundamental objection that could be raised against our thesis: that in our postmodern world it is naive to think we can attain, or should even attempt to attain, anything like an “objective” understanding of history. In the course of responding to this objection, we will offer a few cursory words about the method we will employ in this work (to be further fleshed out in chap. 1 and applied most systematically with respect to the Synoptics in chaps. 9 and 10). Following this we will clearly delineate the view(s) to be engaged in this study, namely, the “legendary-Jesus thesis.” We will provide an overview of eight major lines of argumentation that are typically proffered by defenders of the legendary-Jesus thesis. This outline will serve as a framework both for fleshing out the cumulative case that can be made for the legendary-Jesus perspective, and for constructing a cumulative critical case in response, one that supports the general reliability of the Synoptic portrait(s) of Jesus.

The Postmodern Challenge to Historiography

The “Linguistic Turn”

In our postmodern climate, there is significant skepticism toward the classic historiographical assumption that it is (at least in theory) possible to arrive at something like an objective understanding of the past. According to many today, the ideal of “objective history” is not only an impossible goal to attain, but even an

Remembered (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 102–5; A. G. Padgett, “Advice for Religious Historians: On the Myth of a Purely Historical Jesus,” in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O’Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 287–307. Finally, while we will often use the phrase “Synoptic portrait of Jesus” in this book, it should be assumed that “portrait(s)” is thereby intended. We in no way intend to downplay the distinctives of the three Synoptic Gospels’ presentations of Jesus.

unrealistic and unhelpful goal to aspire to. Since our thesis is that an assessment of all the relevant evidence favors the conclusion that the portrait of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition is rooted in history, we need to address this hyperskeptical postmodern view of historiography.

Since what has been called the “linguistic turn,” initiated by Saussure and developed in a radical, poststructuralist direction by Derrida, Foucault, and others, the postmodern critique of reason has threatened to turn historiography (and other fields) into a virtual subdiscipline of rhetoric and literary theory. According to these thinkers, it is language, and only language, “all the way down.” No ancient or modern text can be understood to have an external reference point beyond itself, regardless of what the author of the text intended. People may think they are talking about what actually happened in the past, but in fact they are merely using language in ways that fit social conventions and further present social and personal purposes.

Consequently, as Hayden White argues, we must accept that “historical narratives are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.”⁴ White is not talking about any *particular* historiography here. He is talking about historical writing as such: *any* history, *any* time, *anywhere*. Similarly, Keith Jenkins argues that, in light of the postmodern, linguistic turn, “history now appears to be just one more foundationless, positioned expression in a world of foundationless, positioned expressions.”⁵

Assessing the Radical Postmodern Perspective

It is important to acknowledge that the postmodern turn has made some important contributions to contemporary historiography (as well as to other fields).

4. H. White, “Historical Texts as Literary Artifact,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 82. See also his first famous salvo: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). Other strong postmodern critics of any sort of objectivity in historiography include: F. R. Ankersmit, *History and Topology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, “Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians,” *History and Theory* 37 (1998): 182–93; R. Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook* 3 (1981): 3–28; K. Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); H. Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); A. Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

5. K. Jenkins, “Introduction” to *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. K. Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1. For discussions from a variety of perspectives on the relationship of postmodernism and historiography, see D. Attridge, G. Bennington, and R. Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); G. G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); E. A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). In the last chapter of her book, Clark applies the insights of postmodern historiography to ancient Christian history.

While there is little in this movement that is, philosophically speaking, truly original, the movement as a whole has forced us to wrestle with the fact that truth-claims can sometimes (if not often) be about things other than the quest for accurately recovering the past (e.g., power politics, etc.). The postmodern sensibility has highlighted the significant role subjective and social factors play in all our cognitive disciplines. Consequently, the postmodern turn has, at the very least, served to sharpen our awareness that historical claims are never purely objective, are always probabilistic, and thus are open to further questioning.⁶ And this fact should serve to make us more humble and more self-critical when making and defending historiographical truth-claims.⁷

Despite this positive contribution, however, the hyperskeptical conclusions some have drawn from the postmodern turn are fraught with difficulties and have been subjected to heavy criticism.⁸ Two of these problems warrant our attention.

6. See R. E. Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) for an example of a scholar wrestling with this awareness in the context of the Christian faith.

7. In chap. 1, we will suggest that many within the guild of historical-critical biblical scholars have not taken certain implications of the postmodern turn seriously enough. It is worth noting that this postmodernist intuition about history is hardly new. As long ago as the late eighteenth century, Goethe's Faust expressed a similar sentiment to his assistant Wagner: "The times of the past are to us a book that is sealed with seven seals. What you call the spirit of the past—why that's your own spirit reflecting back at you"; Goethe's *Faust*, cited in E. D. Hirsch, "Back to History," in *Criticism in the University*, ed. G. Graff and R. Gibbons (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 191. In the early nineteenth century, James Bronterre O'Brien warned: "Have no faith in history, look upon it as a mass of fabrications, concocted, like modern newspapers, not with any regard to truth, or the interests of humanity, but to deceive the multitude, and thus to bolster up all the frauds and villainous institutions of the rich." O'Brien, *Poor Man's Guardian* (December 5, 1835), cited in T. Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (Torowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1987), 11. Likewise, in 1894 we find J. A. Froude remarking that history is like "a child's box of letters with which we can spell any word we please." *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1894), cited in E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 30. Later in that century, Marx would go on to flesh out and radicalize this intuition, while Nietzsche would set the tone for the future postmodern project vis-à-vis history in no uncertain terms. In its essence, then, the radical postmodern critique of history is hardly new, and many of the weaknesses of this trajectory of thought identified in times past remain characteristic of its more recent incarnations.

8. As E. Breisach (*On the Future of History: The Postmodern Challenge and Its Aftermath* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003]) argues, the field of history has largely weathered the "crisis" of the radical postmodern critique. While chastened in a healthy manner—i.e., being weaned from any lingering historical positivism and the naive goal of pure historical objectivity—nonetheless, as Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob have stated in their recent and acclaimed book, human beings retain the "capacity to discriminate between false and faithful representations of past reality and, beyond that, to articulate standards which help both practitioners and readers to make such discriminations" (*Telling the Truth about History* [New York: Norton, 1994], 261). These three scholars opt for an approach that they term "practical realism" (see esp. pp. 247–51). For a number of other penetrating critiques of the radical postmodern challenge to history and/or recent statements of an appropriately critical-realist (philosophy of) historiography, see M. Bunzl, *Real History: Reflections on Historical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997); A. Cook, *History/Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); G. R. Elton, *Return to Essentials* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); R. J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (London: Granta, 1997); J. Gorman, *Understanding History: An Introduction to Analytical Philosophy of History* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa

First, if we follow the radical fringe of the postmodern movement—especially those in the poststructuralist/deconstructionist camp—and thus jettison the possibility of arriving at, or even striving for, a more or less objective understanding of the past, we have to accept that we can no longer so much as speak about “good” versus “bad”—“legitimate” versus “illegitimate”—historiography.⁹ Or, if we insist on speaking in this manner, we have to concede that we mean by this distinction nothing more than that we merely prefer one form of historiography—or one set of historical conclusions—over another. If we abandon the concept of objective history, we must, for example, grant a neo-Nazi propaganda tract denying the Holocaust ever happened the same hearing and status as a scholarly historical work meticulously chronicling the horrors of Nazi Germany. Such a conclusion is obviously absurd (tellingly, an observation that even radical postmodernists seem reluctant to challenge), yet one the postmodernist seems unable to convincingly refute.¹⁰ As Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman note, “Ironically, it is with is-

Press, 1992); T. L. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); G. Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004); Hirsch, “Back to History”; C. B. McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (New York: Routledge, 1998); R. Martin, *The Past within Us: An Empirical Approach to Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); M. G. Murphy, *Philosophical Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY, 1994); L. Stone, “History and Post-Modernism,” *Past and Present* 135 (May 1992): 189–204; A. Tucker, “A Theory of Historiography as a Pre-Science,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 24 (1993): 633–67; K. Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York: Free Press, 1996); P. Zagorin, “History and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations,” *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 263–74; idem, “Rejoinder to a Postmodernist,” *History and Theory* 39 (2000): 201–9. For an enlightening series of interviews with various scholars along the spectrum on this issue, see E. Domanska, *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998). For an argument that poststructuralism has illegitimately wandered into the realm of the philosophy of historiography—in which it has no real business—see A. Tucker, “The Future of the Philosophy of Historiography,” *History and Theory* 40 (2001): 37–56.

9. On the possibility and importance of distinguishing “legitimate” from “illegitimate” historiography, see Tucker, “Theory of Historiography,” esp. 653–55.

10. It is noteworthy that, e.g., Hayden White adamantly argues against the Holocaust deniers, claiming that such a position is “as morally offensive as it is intellectually bewildering” (“The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,” in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983], 76). But, as Wulf Kansteiner has observed—given his theory—the epistemological grounds upon which he does so are problematic (“Hayden White’s Critique of the Writing of History,” *History and Theory* 32 [1993]: 273–95). For a perceptive and nuanced analysis of White’s work, including a clear demarcation between White’s thesis and that of the more radical, thoroughgoing postmodernist approach, see A. D. Moses, “Hayden White, Traumatic Nationalism, and the Public Role of History,” *History and Theory* 44 (2005): 311–32.

White’s notorious claim that doing history within a narrative framework always already distorts the subject matter has been countered by a number of thinkers. See, e.g., D. Carr, “Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity,” *History and Theory* 15 (1986): 117–31; idem, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); W. Dray, “Narrative and Historical Realism,” in *On History and Philosophers of History* (New York: Brill, 1989), 131–63; N. Carroll, “Interpretation, History and Narrative,” *Monist* 73 (1990): 134–66; L. Pompa, “Narrative Form, Significance and Historical Knowledge,” in *Philosophy of History and Contemporary Historiography*, ed. D. Carr et al. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 143–57. From the perspective of a New Testament scholar, see

sues such as the Holocaust denial that all discussion of historical relativism ends. Ask deconstructionists if they think that the belief the Holocaust happened is as valid as the belief that it did not happen, and the debate quickly screeches to a halt.¹¹ And yet the radically skeptical postmodern approach to historiography offers no convincing resources by which to challenge the legitimacy claims of the Holocaust deniers. Here, the radical postmodern view of history is open not only to a *historiographical* critique, but to a *moral* critique as well.

If all historical narratives are “verbal fictions,” if it is only “language all the way down,” and if, therefore, no text has any external reference point, then finding “inappropriate” biases, propaganda, errors, and fabrications in any work, ancient or modern, is as impossible as it is irrelevant. A historical perspective can be judged to be biased and/or misguided only if it can be measured against other sources and/or by other methods one deems *more reliable*. But this, again, presupposes there is some way for us to step outside our “verbal fictions” and to some extent assess objectively the reliability of historical sources. If this is not possible, we are utterly trapped in our purely subjective perspectives and preferences.

Second, if White, Jenkins, Foucault, and others are right in insisting that texts cannot refer beyond themselves, it is not at all clear what these authors are *referring to* when they make the claim that no text can refer beyond itself. If their analysis is “correct” (measured against what?), they themselves must be judged as simply spinning their own preferred forms of “verbal fiction”—in which case neither they nor anyone else can judge them to be “correct.” Again, to embrace their analysis is, at the same time, to subject it to its own critique, thus rendering it but one more “foundationless, positioned expression in a world of foundationless, positioned expressions”; thus their analysis cannot be said to be “correct” in any meaningful sense. Along these same lines, if all truth-claims are merely ideologically driven power plays, as radical postmodernists suggest, what are we to make of the truth-claim that “all truth-claims are merely ideologically driven power plays”? The claim itself must be taken to be nothing more than one more ideologically driven power play, in which case it constitutes no grounds for accepting the totalizing claim that all truth-claims are merely ideologically driven power plays. In short, the radical postmodern perspective is self-refuting. Consequently, and not surprisingly, their advocates are forced to trade in inconsistencies in the process of defending their claims. They must exempt themselves from their own critique in order to make their critique. One can claim that words cannot refer

G. R. Osborne, “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 673–88. To defend the use of narrative in historiography is not to imply that there are no potential problems in this realm. For an insightful discussion of the many ways in which scholars can fall into a number of logical fallacies when working with the narrative form, see D. H. Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 131–63.

11. M. Shermer and A. Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 29. On the issue of the Holocaust, see also the interviews with Georg Iggers and Jörn Rüsen in Domanska, ed., *Encounters*, 112, 186.

beyond themselves only by presupposing that the words involved in this claim at least *can* and *do* refer beyond themselves.¹²

Seeking Historical Truth in a Postmodern Context

In light of criticisms such as these, many scholars justifiably argue that the ideal of objectivity in historiography (and other fields) must not be abandoned. This is not to say that anyone is advocating a return to a naive, uncritical, “commonsense” view of the historical project such as was sometimes espoused in the past—namely, the view that historiography is simply a matter of “getting at the (uninterpreted) facts.” Along with many others, we contend that it is entirely possible to do critical historiography in a way that embraces the legitimate insights of the postmodern linguistic turn without abandoning historical realism and/or the ideal of objectivity. As J. H. Hexter argued several years before White proposed his history-as-verbal-fiction theory, one can embrace the truth that historiography (like other cognitive endeavors) is inextricably tied to rhetoric without conceding it is *nothing but* rhetoric—that is, without abandoning the commitment to understand “the past as it actually was.”¹³ Similarly, Keith Windschuttle argues that there is no problem with the claim that “history is a form of literature.” The problem arises only when one goes further and argues that “history is *nothing more* than a form of literature.”¹⁴

In our postmodern context, we suggest that contemporary historians can still learn an important balance from Thomas Carlyle. Wrestling with the awareness that historical research is strongly influenced by subjective and sociological factors, he concluded:

Such considerations truly were of small profit, did they, instead of teaching us vigilance and reverent humility in our inquiries into History, abate our esteem for them, or discourage us from unweariedly prosecuting them.¹⁵

12. Another interesting, ironic line of criticism should be noted. Some have suggested that the radical postmodern rejection of anything like objective “truth” may signal a last attempt of certain dominant forces in Western academia to have the final say on the matter. F. E. Mascia-Lees, P. Sharpe, and C. Ballerino Cohen have argued that “when Western white males—who traditionally have controlled the production of knowledge—can no longer define the truth . . . their response is to conclude that there is not a truth to be discovered” (“The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective,” *Signs* 15 [1989]: 15). In a similar vein see also H. Gengenbach, “Truth-Telling and the Politics of Women’s Life History Research in Africa: A Reply to Kirk Hoppe,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27 (1994): 619–27.

13. J. H. Hexter, *Doing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 75.

14. Windschuttle, *Killing of History*, 227. Similarly, F. Watson correctly observes: “Historical discourse’s assumption of a subordinate relationship to a prior historical reality precludes a purely literary or rhetorical analysis which abstracts from the intention to speak truthfully about the past” (*Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 42). For one example of a historian wrestling to find this middle ground, see Carr, “The Historian and His Facts,” in *What Is History?* 3–35. Tucker wisely proposes that, while philosophy of historiography has in recent times “given way to literary theory as the major meta-historiographic discipline,” the discipline would be far better served by taking its cue from recent lessons in the philosophy of science (“Theory of Historiography,” 634–35).

15. T. Carlyle, “On History” (1830); cited in Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality*, 1.

Considerations about the difficulty of striving for objective truth have value only if they serve to make us more vigilant and humble in striving for objective truth. Of course, the concept of “objective history” is an ideal, and as such, it can only be approached asymptotically. But it is this practically unattainable goal that alone renders intelligible our attempts to think and speak about the past as well as our most basic intuitions about this speaking and thinking (e.g., that not all historiographical perspectives are equally valid).¹⁶

N. T. Wright offers an insightful and balanced approach to this issue as it concerns historical-Jesus research when he writes: “The fact that somebody, standing somewhere, with a particular point of view, is knowing something does not mean that the knowledge is less valuable.” Rather, he argues, this is simply *what it means* to know something. There is no knowledge that is not from “a particular point of view.” He continues: “The fear that ‘actual events’ will disappear beneath a welter of particular people’s perceptions” if we grant that subjective considerations factor into all our assessments “is . . . to be rejected as groundless.” And he thus concludes:

It must be asserted most strongly that to discover that a particular writer has a “bias” tells us nothing whatever about the value of the information he or she presents. It merely bids us be aware of the bias (and of our own, for that matter), and to assess the material according to as many sources as possible.¹⁷

Presuppositions and Methodology

This is in essence the methodological stance we shall assume throughout this book. We readily confess that, like everyone else, we approach this topic with a set of presuppositions and a priori commitments that influence our work. But we do not grant that this necessarily entails that neither we nor anybody else can make progress in moving asymptotically toward the ideal of “objective history.” As Thomas Haskell has effectively argued, “objectivity is not neutrality.”¹⁸

That which empowers scholars in principle to transcend their personal and sociological biases and make claims about reality is a resolute and uncompromising commitment to apprehend truth. As deconstructionists in particular have forcefully argued, it cannot be denied that it is easy for all of us to convince ourselves that we are looking for truth when in fact we are merely seeking security and/or

16. For a helpful discussion of historical “objectivity” after the postmodern critique, see T. L. Haskell, “Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric versus Practice in Peter Novick’s *That Noble Dream*,” in *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality*, 145–73. In this book, Haskell argues for a “sober fallibilism,” and against the “presumptuousness on stilts” of radical postmodernism that argues “how things really are is that nothing but language or discourse is real” (p. 9).

17. Wright, *New Testament and People of God*, 89. We will discuss the biases of the Synoptic authors in chap. 9.

18. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality*.

power. For example, the most honest and insightful New Testament practitioners of the historical-critical method have always recognized that the method itself was never merely a tool for the doing of objective historiography. Rather, it was also—from the beginning—a “weapon of liberation” from ecclesial bondage.¹⁹ However, to say it is “easy” to allow the historiographical enterprise to be used primarily as a mask for hidden, oppressive agendas is not to say it is “inevitable.” The only way this self-serving subjectivism can be resisted, and thus the only way we can continue to claim with integrity that we are concerned with approaching, however asymptotically, objective truth, is by placing our commitment to pursue truth above everything else and then submitting our conclusions to the wider world for critical evaluation.

As we shall argue in chapter 1, this means that we must be willing to subject *everything*—including and especially our philosophical and religious presuppositions and a priori commitments—to the rigorous criticism of other truth-seekers. Everything must be considered fair game for conversation amid the community of critically minded scholars. Thus, while the historical-critical method has tended to operate with the unassailable naturalistic presupposition that miracles do not occur, we will argue that a *truly* critical historical method is one that allows this (and every other) foundational assumption to be subjected to criticism.²⁰ For example, a truly historical-critical method must, among other things, allow non-Western cultural perspectives that countenance the supernatural to challenge the Western naturalistic perspective.²¹

19. W. A. Meeks, “Why Study the New Testament,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 157. See also the very frank confession of Helmut Koester on this matter: “Epilogue: Current Issues in New Testament Scholarship,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 474.

20. Even to speak of “the” historical-critical method—as if there were a single agreed upon historical method within the New Testament guild—is, of course, problematic. As Meeks notes, the so-called historical-critical method “is not a *method* at all but a family of approaches and habits, a variable set of perspectives, in short a *practice*” (“Why Study,” 159). On this point see also P. S. Minear, *The Bible and the Historian: Breaking the Silence about God in Biblical Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 189.

21. For example, African New Testament scholar S. Oyinbye Abogunrin argues that the African worldview is a much more similar—and appropriate—conceptual context from which to engage the New Testament than is the Western secular worldview. See “The Synoptic Gospel Debate: A Re-Examination from an African Perspective,” in *The Interrelations of the Gospels*, ed. D. L. Dungan (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 386–87; see also idem, “The Modern Search of the Historical Jesus and Christianity in Africa,” *African Theological Journal* 9 (1980): 26. Here, New Testament scholars could learn from similar discussions/debates among contemporary historians of Africa. There is, for example, a growing awareness that secular Western (particularly certain ideologically driven social-scientific) presuppositions have largely controlled the doing of African history in the modern world—even for Africans themselves who may, in other realms of life, hold to vastly different perspectives. On this matter of “epistemological ethnocentrism,” see W. MacGaffey, “Epistemological Ethnocentrism in African Studies,” in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* ed. B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986), 42–48; idem, “African History, Anthropology, and the Rationality of Natives,” *History in Africa* 5 (1978): 101–20. The manner in which this sort of secular Western epistemological imperialism can invade one’s work even without notice is truly remarkable. For example, while the historian of Africa

As we shall see throughout this work, this particular example of a truly critical approach is especially important in that the naturalistic assumption that the portrait(s) of the miracle-working Jesus in the Gospels *cannot be* rooted in history is, to a large extent, what leads legendary-Jesus theorists to conclude that the Gospels' portrait of Jesus *is not* rooted in history. As noted above, our counterargument is that if one will allow the Western naturalistic assumptions to be called into question, and thus if one remains open to the *genuine historical possibility* that the Synoptic portrait(s) of Jesus is substantially rooted in history, one will find there are compelling grounds for concluding that this portrait is historically *plausible*—that it is more probable than not that this general portrait is rooted in history.

At the same time, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. The authors of this work obviously bring their own religious and philosophical presuppositions to the enterprise. We must equally be willing to make these presuppositions and prior commitments clear and open them up for criticism. In brief, we believe that a personal Creator God exists. We also are convinced that God occasionally acts in the world in ways that fall outside the regular patterns of the natural order. That is to say, we are convinced that a spiritual (i.e., supernatural) realm exists and that, at times, personal agents within this realm act in ways that are evident, if unexpected, in the physical realm—that is, “miracles” can and do occur. For a variety of reasons, most of which shall be spelled out in this present work, we have also been convinced that the Jesus story told in the Christian Scriptures is rooted in history. Stemming from this and a host of other reasons, we have concluded that the Jesus of history is the very revelation of the Creator God. We believe, in other words, that the Gospels are not only historically grounded but also that their central message is *theologically* true.

Not only this, but we conduct our present research as individuals who have experienced (what we interpret to be) the reality of the risen Jesus in our lives. Indeed, our worldview has been powerfully shaped by our “religious” experience and by the Christian story as a whole. On top of all this, we readily confess that we approach this particular task as academics who have already had a good deal of experience wrestling with philosophical and historical objections to the Christian faith and who have, to our own satisfaction at least, discovered plausible answers for most of these objections. Thus, while we strive to approach our present research with a commitment to apprehending truth in the sense that we are genuinely open to having our presuppositions and commitments, as well as our particular findings, subjected to criticism—namely, we hope our quest for truth trumps our concern for security and/or power—we obviously are, in fact, far from neutral in how we now evaluate the evidence. Like everybody else, we approach our research with a bias.

Bogumil Jewsiewicki rightly decries this intellectual imperialism within modern approaches to African historiography, he does so on the basis of an alternative postmodern approach that is no less indebted to a secular Western (in this case poststructuralist) ideology. See his “Introduction: One Historiography or Several? A Requiem for Africanism,” in *African Historiographies*, 9–17.

Yet, we do not believe the Christian faith bias we bring to our work jeopardizes our goal of asymptotically arriving at “objective history” any more than does the alternative bias of any other historian. The question is not whether we have biases: we all do. The question rather is, do we, as a matter of method and principle, strive to place our quest for truth ahead of our personal biases? Is our concern for truth in principle greater than, say, our concern for security and/or maintaining our current perspective at all costs? Do we allow our biases to predetermine our conclusions even in the face of clear and substantial counterevidence, or are we willing to allow evidence and alternative arguments to challenge our biases and possibly modify our conclusions? With our presuppositions and prior commitments on the table, we can only challenge ourselves with the always-asymptotic goal of arriving at as accurate a view of history as possible. The extent to which we are successful in following through on this challenge must be decided by the reader and the broader academic community.

What Constitutes the Legendary-Jesus Thesis?

The second thing we need to do before embarking on our investigation is to specify what constitutes the legendary-Jesus thesis we are engaging in this book. To accomplish this, it will prove helpful to break down the wide variety of views regarding the Jesus of history found in New Testament scholarship today into four broad (and admittedly overly simplistic) categories. This spectrum of viewpoints is, of course, ideal-typical in nature and is offered merely as a useful heuristic.

1. Scholars such as Bruno Bauer, Arthur Drews, and G. A. Wells have argued that the Jesus tradition is virtually—perhaps *entirely*—fictional in nature (i.e., “legendary” as we are using the term).²² Indeed, it might be more accurate to refer to this position as the mythic-Jesus thesis rather than the legendary-Jesus thesis inasmuch as in common parlance “myth” tends to connote a story that is without any historical foundation, while “legend” tends to connote a fictitious story that revolves around an ostensibly historical figure. In any event, this view holds that we have no good grounds for thinking any aspect of the Jesus narrative is rooted in history, including the very existence of an actual historical person named Jesus. Some scholars we could include in this category, such as Robert Price, would back off this thesis slightly and argue that we simply lack sufficient

22. B. Bauer, *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Wigand, 1841). Bauer’s work remains untranslated. On Bauer’s critique of the Gospels and its influence, see Z. Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx’s Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), 45–61. A. Drews, *The Christ Myth*, 3rd ed., trans. C. D. Burns (1810; repr., Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998). G. A. Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1982); idem, *The Jesus Legend* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1996); idem, *The Jesus Myth* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

information to decide whether a historical Jesus existed. Here, a sort of “Jesus agnosticism” emerges.²³

2. The work of scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann and Burton Mack suggests that we have enough evidence plausibly to conclude that an actual historical person named Jesus existed.²⁴ But, they insist, the reports we have of him are so unreliable and saturated with legend and “myth” that we can confidently ascertain very little historical information about him.

3. An increasingly common view among New Testament scholars today—especially scholars who stand in the post-Bultmannian tradition—is that historical research can indeed disclose a core of historical facts about Jesus. But, they argue, the Jesus we find at this historical core is significantly different from the legendary view presented in the New Testament. Most significantly, scholars in this group grant that the Gospels’ reports about the authoritative claims made by Jesus as well as the miracles he performed—those aspects of the Gospels’ portrait(s) of Jesus that shaped what came to be known as the orthodox Christian faith—are, by and large, part of the legendary, not the historical, Gospel material. Robert Funk and J. D. Crossan are well-known examples of scholars who espouse a version of this position.²⁵

4. A fourth and final group of scholars argue that positions 1–3 are overly skeptical toward the Gospel material.²⁶ As with position 3, these scholars maintain that historical research can indeed disclose a good deal of reliable information about the historical Jesus. But, in contrast to position 3, scholars such as John Meier and N. T. Wright argue that the Jesus who can be recovered through responsible historical investigation is, generally speaking, fairly reflected in the portrait(s) of the Synoptic Gospels.²⁷ One important factor that commonly seems to distinguish

23. R. M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000), 17. Price further works through his “Jesus agnosticism” in idem, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003).

24. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner, 1958), 8; idem, *Jesus: Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958); B. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); idem, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2003), esp. chaps. 1 and 2.

25. R. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); idem, “The Once and Future Jesus,” in the Jesus Seminar’s *The Once and Future Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2000), 5–25. J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); idem, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

26. There are, of course, even more “conservative” positions taken on these matters, but with these positions typically there comes a general disregard for serious historical Jesus research. We will, therefore, not be placing these perspectives on our ideal-typical map.

27. J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); idem, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); idem, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 3: *Companions and Competitors* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). N. T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); idem, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

scholars in this camp from those in the previous group is the significant degree to which they take seriously the *Jewishness* (religiously as well as ethnically) of both Jesus and his cultural context.

This fourth grouping, like the others, is quite broad in terms of representative perspectives. One point at which proponents within this camp differ involves the manner in which they treat the ostensive supernatural elements within the Gospels' portrait(s) of Jesus. Still, despite the differences, there is something of a broad-based agreement among the scholars we would place in this camp. On the one hand, they agree that, by definition, the discipline of historiography within which they work deals with probabilities (not certainties) and stops with the description of events that are empirically attested in the historical record. On the other hand, they agree that the modern Western secular worldview is but one of many and that extraordinary events can and do occur in history that cannot be explained in terms of any human agency or natural force. They agree that to attempt to identify and discuss the "supernatural" agency behind such events is to move from the realm of history to that of theology and/or philosophy and therefore is not a project for the historian *qua* historian. However, they likewise agree that such matters are ripe for investigation and that the historical evidence can lead one to the conclusion that events interpreted within the Jesus tradition as miraculous did, in fact, occur in history—and did so in ways that cannot be reduced to metaphor, psychosomatics, and so on.²⁸ In brief, they do not believe

28. For representative statements to this effect, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:511–21; Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 92–93. Some scholars, of course, are difficult to place in our schema. For example, E. P. Sanders sounds like a thoroughgoing naturalist when he states that "the 'miracles' that actually happen are things we cannot yet explain, because of ignorance of the range of natural causes." Yet, when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus—stating that he regards the resurrection appearances of the disciples as "a fact," and that what "the reality was that gave rise to the experiences I do not know"—he seems to operate with an epistemological humility that could leave open the possibility of a supernatural agency. See *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Lane/Penguin, 1993), 143, 280. Similarly, although Marcus Borg states that he rejects the "supernatural intervention" explanation of Jesus's miracles, he is equally convinced that a reductionist (i.e., psychosomatic) interpretation is unable to account for the historical phenomena. See "Jesus before and after Easter: Jewish Mystic and Christian Messiah," in M. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 66–67. Incidentally, Borg's two "problems" with the supernatural interventionist model (p. 259n35)—namely that it infers that God is "out there," thus "not normally here," and that it cannot explain why God intervenes sometimes and not others (i.e., the problem of evil)—have been cogently addressed by a number of scholars who find the supernatural model to be compelling. The first problem is easily solved by pointing out that the supernatural model does not require holding that to talk of God being "up in heaven" and "intervening on earth" necessarily implies a literal metaphysical statement of God's localization. Locating God "above" in this metaphorical manner offers a way to express his exalted status. Even the New Testament does not harden these categories—e.g., Acts 17:28 offers a different, more immanent image of God, in whom "we live and move and have our being." Borg's second problem has been carefully addressed by any number of theologians. Regarding the specific question of unanswered prayer, see, e.g., G. A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), chap. 7. Note: Boyd's articulation of the variables involved in the question of unanswered prayer does not depend on an "open" view of divine foreknowledge, as some have thought. Rather, this view can be entertained by any theology that allows

that critical historiography should be allowed to a priori *rule out* the possibility of an extraordinary occurrence, one that, in the specific sense just described, can legitimately be termed “supernatural.” At the same time, they strive to be clear when they are talking as critical historians and when they have moved to the doing of theology.²⁹

The goal of this book is to explore and defend the broad position of this last group of scholars over and against the various forms of what we are calling the “legendary-Jesus thesis.” Thus, by “legendary-Jesus thesis” we are referring particularly to the views advocated by groups 1–3 outlined above. Again, we do not thereby want in any way to minimize the enormous differences that exist between the positions of these three groups. Indeed, we will emphasize these differences when appropriate. Yet, despite these significant differences, these three groups share one conviction in common, and it is this conviction we will be assessing throughout this book: namely, the conviction that the Synoptic portrait(s) of Jesus is substantially, if not entirely, legendary—that is, for the most part, it is historically inaccurate.

The Case for the Legendary-Jesus Thesis

It is time to provide an overview of the cumulative case that can be made for the legendary-Jesus thesis, and thereby, at the same time, offer an outline for our critical assessment of this view. At least eight major lines of argument commonly are employed by legendary-Jesus theorists in defense of their various perspectives.

Naturalism

As Van Harvey notes, it was commonplace for “naïve and mythologically minded” people in ancient times to attribute “unusual events of nature and history . . . to supernatural beings of all kinds.” These people “lived in a mythological time . . . without any conception of natural order or law.”³⁰ But times have changed, Harvey and others argue. Our post-Enlightenment, Western worldview is incurably naturalistic. We modern Westerners thus understand

for a general—as opposed to a meticulous—understanding of the operations of divine sovereignty. The question of contemporary historiography and the supernatural will be further explored in chap. 1.

29. Many within this camp would argue that the historical evidence for the trustworthiness of the Gospels’ portrait of Jesus is an important part of the evidentiary basis by which one can confidently move beyond the historical evidence itself and embrace the theological claims of the Gospel authors—e.g., that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of God, that he was the Son of God and Savior of the world, etc. However, they would tend to make it clear that, in doing so, one has moved beyond the mere bounds of historiographical inquiry and is making use of resources that fall within the domains of theology and philosophy.

30. V. A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 10.