

The Story of
JESUS
in History
and Faith



LEE MARTIN McDONALD

B
Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Lee Martin McDonald, *The Story of Jesus in History and Faith*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents



Preface ix

Introduction xiii

Part One History and the Historical Jesus

1. History, Historical Inquiry, and the Historical Jesus 3
 - The Conflict between History and Faith 4
 - History, Science, and Historical Inquiry 8
 - Quests for the “Historical Jesus” 21
 - Criteria of Authenticity 38
 - Faith and Evidence 45

Part Two Sources for Studying the Historical Jesus

2. The Gospels: Their Relationships and Reliability 49
 - Approaching History and Faith in the Gospels 50
 - What Are the Gospels? 53
 - Literary Relationships 58
 - The New Testament Gospels 77
 - Assessment of the Gospels as Historical Sources 121
3. Other Sources for Studying the Historical Jesus 127
 - Apocryphal Gospels 128
 - Greco-Roman Sources 135
 - Jewish Traditions about Jesus 146
 - Jesus, Archaeology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls 155

Part Three The Story of Jesus in History (Events and Teachings)

4. The Story of Jesus in History: From His Birth to His Scriptures 173
 - Events in the Life of Jesus 174
 - The Life of Jesus: From Birth to His Scriptures 178
 5. The Story of Jesus in History: From the Transfiguration to His Burial 227
 - The Transfiguration of Jesus 227
 - The Triumphal Entry 231
 - The Passion Predictions of Jesus 232
 - The Arrest and Trial of Jesus 233
 - Who Executed Jesus and Why? 242
 - The Death and Burial of Jesus 251
 6. Easter: The Story of Jesus within History and Faith 271
 - A Challenged but Central Affirmation 271
 - Origins of the Notion of Resurrection 276
 - The Empty-Tomb Tradition 279
 - The Appearance Stories 301
 - A Summary of the Events of Easter 328
 7. Conclusion: Jesus in History and Faith 333
 - What Can Historians *Reliably* Know about Jesus? 333
 - Historical and Theological Explanation 337
 - Conclusion: Jesus and the Church's Confession 344
- Select Bibliography 347
- Subject Index 367
- Index of Modern Authors 000
- Scripture Index 000

Preface



A colleague who is quite familiar with the history of historical Jesus research recently asked why I saw the need to write yet another book on this subject! He indicated to me that everything that can be known has already been said many times over. I mentioned to him that much is now known about Jesus that has only emerged in the last decade, some of which is the result of recent archaeological discoveries, and some the result of reassessments of some of the ancient data that has been circulating among scholars for more than a generation. Also, most of those who write on this subject more often than not write for scholars and ignore those in the church or students in college or seminary who are looking at the “historical Jesus” for the first time. While an emerging picture of Jesus is gaining favorable responses from many biblical scholars, this is still a story that needs to be told to students, pastors, and educated laypersons in churches. Much of the new and emerging picture of Jesus has formed as a result of a better understanding of the Jewish context in which Jesus lived than was possible to know in previous generations.

It is not inappropriate to ask, however, why after two thousand years of study we are still resolving problems in our understanding of the origins of the Christian faith and especially of its founder. This volume is not an arrogant attempt to correct all of the previous stories about Jesus, but rather an attempt to offer an introduction to nonspecialist readers who are not familiar with what is going on in life of Jesus biblical research today. I would suggest here that those who are exploring this subject for the first time may well want to ignore the many footnotes in this volume and simply try to get a “feel” for the subject. The footnotes are for those who are more advanced in their study of Jesus and who want to know and perhaps research some of the critical literature and arguments circulating among scholars. Also, while I have put

in several important Greek or Hebrew words, they are both transliterated and translated so readers without those language skills can be familiar with some important technical terms that help in our investigation of the story of Jesus.

I should also remind readers that because so many books have been written about Jesus, there is no way to give each of them serious consideration in a study this size, or for that matter even in multivolume works on Jesus. I have chosen instead to limit myself to some of the most recognized critical resources that have had the greatest influence on recent discussions about Jesus and his career. Readers will observe that I accept the New Testament Gospels as the primary and most reliable sources for knowing about Jesus. Some scholars have given greater priority to some of the so-called noncanonical or nonbiblical gospels than those in the New Testament. I will say here and below that those sources tend to offer nothing new or of much value; rather, they tend to be more sensational and reflect sectarian perspectives. The critical literature about the story of Jesus is commonly referred to as “secondary” literature, and ancient sources are regularly referred to as “primary” sources. The former literature aims at interpreting the latter.

My primary focus in telling the familiar story about Jesus is to provide something for serious students who are unfamiliar with the critical issues that surround this story and to do this *within the context of faith*. The reader will quickly see that I acknowledge the limitations of historical inquiry, but also the limitations of a faith perspective. Happily, as we will see, we are not obligated to choose between these two, but we can gain much from both perspectives. I will acknowledge here and elsewhere that, on the one hand, the Jesus discovered through strictly critical historical research, with all of its historical assumptions, cannot account for the emergence of the early church and its faith, let alone offer a coherent portrait of Jesus. On the other hand, seeing Jesus only through the eyes of faith and a simple reading of the Gospels, while satisfying to many people of faith, often means ignoring a better understanding of who Jesus was and seldom viewing him in the most appropriate Jewish historical context.

In the following chapters, we will first look carefully at the notion of history and historical inquiry and how historical methodology has been applied to the story of Jesus. This is a pivotally important step since it is here that we can best understand why competent scholars examine the same ancient sources about Jesus and yet disagree on their interpretations of his story. What are the best criteria to use in examining the ancient sources, and what assumptions are most appropriate in studying the story of Jesus? Before looking at the most important questions in the story of Jesus, we will also examine the primary sources from which scholars gather pieces of data that enable them to explore

various aspects of the life of Jesus. Besides the major events and teachings of Jesus as presented in the Gospels, there are many other areas on which reasonable scholars can agree, but they are not as important in constructing a picture of Jesus in his historical context as the ones we will discuss below. As we look at the story of Jesus, readers will observe that we spend more time on some areas than on others, and that is because they are generally considered to involve more important historical issues that also have a bearing on Christian faith about Jesus. For example, I spend considerably more time on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus than on the other areas.

I will from time to time refer to both historical and faith perspectives throughout this study, and I will be using the word “story” throughout to reflect on both historical and faith perspectives about Jesus. At the conclusion of our focus, I will emphasize the importance of both perspectives for understanding Jesus of Nazareth. At the end of this volume, I have also provided a very select bibliography of some of the most important resources that will aid students and pastors in their further study.

I want especially to thank James Ernest for his participation in this venture and the many good suggestions he has offered that will make this a more useful contribution. He and his Baker Academic colleagues have helped to make this a much better work than it would have been otherwise. Their careful evaluation of my manuscript reflects well on their commitment to excellence in their many notable publications. I have learned much from them in several publishing ventures that I have had with Baker Academic over the years. Any mistakes or errors in research and publication remain my own responsibility.

I have dedicated this volume to my many colleagues and friends in the Institute for Biblical Research. I have learned much from them over the years, and, as the readers will see, I have relied heavily on their many contributions to Jesus research. Many of our members are internationally known for their academic and publishing achievements. Some of them are *the* noted experts in their fields, and their work is regularly reflected in my own research and writing. They have honored me with their trust as president of the Institute from 2006 to 2012, and I count it a privilege to have been their colleague for the past thirty-eight years. It is therefore out of my sincere appreciation for them that I dedicate to them this volume.

Introduction



Without question, the most influential person in human history is Jesus of Nazareth. No other political or religious leader has gained more followers than Jesus, and no one else has influenced the origin of more religious communities (churches) and educational and humanitarian institutions, including hospitals, than Jesus. Likewise, no other person in human history has been written about or proclaimed more than Jesus. From the church's beginnings, biblical scholarship has tried to understand and explain this phenomenal person. Those books that have focused on him and the implications of following him are among the largest collection of religious artifacts in the world. The church owes its origin and development to its beliefs about him, so we must conclude that no other person in history can be more important for the church than Jesus of Nazareth.

But who was Jesus and what can we know about him? Christians are often puzzled by this question since they regularly read their Scriptures and believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, grew up in the region of Galilee, was baptized by John the Baptist, enlisted a group of twelve disciples to aid him in his ministry, preached the kingdom of God, healed many, was transfigured on a high mountain, was celebrated as the coming Messiah as he entered Jerusalem, "cleansed" the temple of money changers, was subsequently arrested, tried, crucified, and buried, rose from the dead, and, before he ascended to heaven, commissioned his disciples to make more disciples. He is regularly confessed as Lord, Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man. After some two thousand years, pastors around the world continue to teach and preach the story of Jesus and its implications for Christian living.

This abbreviated summary of Jesus' life, ministry, and fate is, of course, presented in the New Testament Gospels, so what is all of the fuss about?

Why are there so many confusing stories going on about him every year in the media, generally about a month or so before Christmas and about a month or so before Easter? Why are there so many questions about Jesus, and why do the critics not simply read their Bibles and recognize what Christians around the world already know? Such questions are easier posed than answered. Since the eighteenth century scholars have regularly debated the identity of Jesus. They do not approach the Bible in the same way that church members regularly do—namely, as a sacred and authoritative book—and admittedly they have seldom taken the time to explain why they conclude what they do about Jesus to those in the church. These scholars often come to the Bible pursuing a different agenda than the agenda that Christians around the world have, and they certainly have a different perspective on history and historical inquiry. Since the time of the Enlightenment,¹ which emphasized independence from the authority of the church in favor of critical inquiry, historians and philosophers began to develop perspectives about miracles and the supernatural that excluded their consideration, except to say that they emerged in the “pre-enlightened” world of the biblical times, and that such notions, though common then, must be rejected now.

Since those times many biblical scholars have bought into the common presuppositions of the Enlightenment and have tried to account for the phenomenon of Christian faith and the origin of the church in naturalistic ways. That is, they often see considerable amounts of myth and legend in the Bible and assume that it must be “demythologized” so that its many myths about the origin of the world and the miracles of God’s intervention in human history can be completely laid bare, explained, and reinterpreted. Only then can the message of the Bible be adequately understood. Once that step has taken place, they contend, the story of Jesus and the emergence of the church and the church’s Bible can be more adequately understood.

This view has many proponents who have produced a virtual plethora of books trying to account for the origin of the church without what they believe are the mythical trappings about the supernatural intervention of God in human affairs. As yet there is no consensus among biblical scholars on how to account for the biblical stories about Jesus and the emergence of early Christianity. I will say more about the variety of explanations of the biblical story about Jesus in the opening chapters of this book, but for now I will only mention that biblical scholars seem to be increasingly divided in terms of what

1. The Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that was influenced especially by the philosophers Descartes, Locke, Newton, Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith. Several theologians also joined this movement and began to apply their new methodologies of historical inquiry to the biblical literature.

they believe they can rationally affirm about Jesus. Biblical scholars today are often divided into two camps, namely “minimalists” and “maximalists.” The former scholars do not see much historical credibility in the Bible’s message about Jesus or early Christian beginnings. The latter scholars are known for arguing that the biblical message has far more historical credibility than the minimalists have considered possible. Since the early nineteenth century, there have been three major historical “quests” for understanding and interpreting the story of Jesus. The so-called “third quest” is now under way, and many contemporary scholars believe that there is much more in the biblical story that can be affirmed as historically credible than was considered possible a generation ago.

I will discuss later what the third-quest scholars’ assumptions and conclusions are as well as the value of their findings for the church today, and I will acknowledge here that those who have always approached the Bible as divinely inspired Scriptures may find this a challenging subject. There is much that we can learn about Jesus and early Christian faith from critical historical scholars; for example, they can affirm without objection the biblical reports that Jesus grew up in Nazareth, that he was baptized by John the Baptist, and that he died by crucifixion in the first century AD at the direction of Pontius Pilate. As we will see, there is even more than this that is widely acknowledged as historically credible. Historical scholars have provided considerable useful detail about the manner and commonality of crucifixions in the ancient world, as well as how persons were buried in the first century. That information cannot be unimportant for understanding Jesus and what he faced at the end of his life, but the church’s historic position that Jesus died for our sins is well beyond the scope of a historian’s inquiry. Similarly, while historians can affirm that many of Jesus’ followers accepted him as their anticipated Messiah and Son of God, they cannot state that Jesus was in fact the Messiah and Son of God. That is beyond their scope of inquiry.

Are Christians today at the mercy of historical inquiry? By no means, though results of careful historical inquiry will be shared in the rest of this volume that have considerable value for Christians and their understanding of their faith. Since Jesus is the central figure for all of Christianity, whatever we can learn about him cannot be considered unimportant. Nevertheless, Christian faith does not, in the final analysis, depend on the latest results of historical scholars. It ultimately depends on a strong belief that God has acted in the life, ministry, and fate of Jesus and that this activity has considerable value for faith.

In antiquity the big question about Jesus was whether he was God or a divine personality. Many in antiquity did not accept him as such or as having a special relationship with God, but many did. While some have argued that

acceptance of Jesus as Messiah was widespread by the end of the first century, the evidence does not support that assumption. By the end of the first century AD, it is estimated that there were somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred and twenty-five thousand Jews and Gentiles who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Considering that there were some sixty million residents in the greater Mediterranean world by then and between six and seven million Jews, the Christian population was quite small. By the fourth century those numbers had changed considerably, but the Jewish population still far outnumbered the Christians until approximately the seventh or eighth century. Nevertheless, by the early second century the Christian witness had grown considerably and was on its way to becoming a significant religious witness in the ancient world.

Today universities and theological seminaries focus for the most part on what we can know from a historical-critical perspective about Jesus, but less attention is given to the relevance of this for Christian faith. Since faith is an essential ingredient in all of Christianity, does *faith* have a role in this inquiry? Is there a way to bring history and faith perspectives together?

It is widely recognized that the Bible was written by and for believers in God who openly acknowledge God's activity in history. This was and continues to be an important presupposition for both Jewish and Christian faith, but, regardless of how much one is devoted to God or what the Bible has to say, this alone does not make one competent to understand the historical context of early Christianity or the various religious and political groups that are identified in that context. I will assume throughout this study that Christian faith is considerably enhanced by a better understanding of the historical context in which Jesus lived, ministered, and died and in which faith in him emerged. Our knowledge of Jesus' story is also greatly enriched by careful historical research and inquiry.

1

History, Historical Inquiry, and the Historical Jesus¹



Since the church's beginning, Christianity has anchored its faith in a God who acts in history, especially in remarkable events such as the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. However, since the time of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the consequent development of a new methodology for examining history, this belief has become the focal point of numerous debates. Does God work in phenomenal ways that can be observed, detected, or experienced through sensory perceptions? Does the God of the Bible who acts in history even exist? Did the miracles mentioned in the Bible actually occur, or were they simply the product of a primitive worldview that modern individuals can no longer accept? Again, does God intervene in the natural nexus by raising someone from the dead or in other ways by suspending or contravening the laws of nature? Are all such notions to be attributed to a primitive pre-enlightened age when mythological thinking was commonplace?

It is quite remarkable that many of the studies on the Jesus of history show a lack of awareness of how historians do history and the major assumptions of historical inquiry.² For that reason, before we begin a study of

1. Some of the following is a summary and updating of an earlier chapter written on this subject that appeared in Lee Martin McDonald and Stanley E. Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 1–22.

2. Several recent investigations of the story of Jesus do show some awareness of the notion and practice of history, as well as historical-critical methodology, such as Robert L. Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical*

the “historical” Jesus, our initial attention will focus on the nature of history and historical inquiry.

The Conflict between History and Faith

Since the Enlightenment, the notion of God’s activity in human affairs has been questioned and increasingly doubted. Since then a significant number of scholars have questioned whether miracles occur and whether the remarkable activity and fate of Jesus actually happened. At the same time biblical scholars presented a new methodology for understanding the Bible that raised questions about traditional notions regarding miracles and divine activity in human affairs. New criteria were employed that challenged the biblical worldview of a God who acts in history and in phenomenal ways. The new approach to biblical traditions was troublesome to many Jews and Christians. The goal in applying a new historical methodology to biblical traditions appears to have been to make biblical faith more credible and acceptable to modern society, but this had a significant impact on traditional biblical beliefs.

Church Responses to the Enlightenment

As one can readily imagine, many debates ensued within the church. Some theologians responded by claiming that the results of a historical inquiry that in principle or in practice ignores the activity of God in human affairs cannot be a valid tool of biblical inquiry, nor can the church trust its results. However, many theological scholars, including F. C. Baur, Ernest Rénan, Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Strauss, and others, looked for ways to wed biblical and religious thought to contemporary critical thinking. The results of their inquiry had a mixed and uneasy reception in churches. Some biblical scholars concluded that the biblical picture of divine activity in history was mythological; that is, it came from an earlier and more primitive worldview (German, *Weltanschauung*) that was no longer tenable in the modern age. They wanted

Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence (ed. D. L. Bock and R. L. Webb; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 247; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 9–94. See also the extensive and helpful discussion of the notion and practice of historical inquiry in Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 29–198; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), especially 90–121; Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 3–76; and Charles W. Hedrick, *When History and Faith Collide: Studying Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), especially 1–28.

to anchor Christian faith in a *historical* person, Jesus of Nazareth—not in one who was a miracle worker, who died for the sins of the world, and who was raised from the dead, but rather in one who was a great teacher of ethics and wisdom.

This “liberal” picture of Jesus drew converts within the church, but most Christians continued to reject it. How could Christians account for the transformation of the disciples after the death of Jesus and the birth of the Christian faith using the newly established historical methodology that denied, in principle at least, God’s miraculous activity in Jesus, especially his raising Jesus from the dead?

Rudolf Bultmann

In the twentieth century, no New Testament theologian challenged the traditional understanding of Christianity more than the German scholar Rudolf Bultmann. His application of the new strict historical-critical methodology to the biblical writings had the result of denigrating the prominent miracles of God recorded in Scripture. He argued that the true stumbling block of Christian faith was the cross (1 Cor. 1:23) and not its affirmation of the supernatural in history. For him, God acted in a hidden way in the death of Jesus that called his followers to give up all worldly security in order to find security in God alone. He questioned the relevance for modern society of talk about supernatural activity in history and attempted to translate the message of the New Testament into meaningful twentieth-century language. For Bultmann, God acts in “hidden ways” that are not discernible to the scrutiny of historians, but rather to the eyes of faith. The cause-and-effect events of the natural order are not interrupted by supernatural divine activity, but rather God has revealed himself to those who hear his call that comes through the preaching about Jesus who was crucified. A natural historian would have only seen an injustice done to a figure of history, but to those with faith, it was the place where the God who acts in hidden ways supremely acted in history. Bultmann’s goal, however well he achieved it, was aimed at identifying the true “stumbling block” of the Christian message and to present it with clarity to his generation. He did not believe that the true stumbling block of Christian faith could be its focus on miracles and the supernatural elements in the church’s traditional message, but rather on the message that God calls one to abandon all worldly security and, in radical obedience, surrender to the Christ who comes to us in the preaching of the cross and who reveals authentic Christian living.

Bultmann was without question a historian *par excellence* as well as a philosophical theologian and New Testament scholar. Rarely can anyone be

proficient in all three, but Bultmann was; and it is precisely at the point where Christian faith and history intersect that Bultmann brought all three of his interests together to engage modern thinkers in a careful understanding of the Christian message. Whether or not he adequately understood the church's Easter message or handled the New Testament traditions that confess the resurrection of Jesus will be explored later. As a historian, he challenged Christians of his generation to rethink the viability of their confession of God's activity in history and to rethink the kind of history in which God does act. He was especially helpful in clarifying some of the major challenges that the church faces in the growing secular society where Christians live.

For Bultmann, God's hidden acts, as in the case of the assurance of one's salvation that comes through hearing the preached Word of God, often come in the various circumstances of life when God speaks in ways that are hidden to others. Bultmann asked the church to speak honestly when it speaks historically about God's activity. While not denying the activity of God in history, he maintained that such activity is not verifiable through the historian's method of inquiry, nor does it involve a violation of the natural order of events such as we see in the Bible. All such talk, he said, is mythological and grows out of a pre-enlightened view of the world. On the other hand, rather than rejecting the so-called myth in the Bible, that is, the supernatural activity of God in history, Bultmann chose to reinterpret it in terms of human self-understanding. In other words, the belief in the supernatural interventions of God in history was the ancient person's way of concretizing the "otherworldly" activity of God in terms of "this worldly" experiences. Ancient persons encountered the activity of God in their personal experience of life, but they articulated it in mythological terms that were familiar to them. When properly interpreted ("demythologized"), the activity of God could be seen as a new and authentic self-understanding.

He believed that all events of history are open to the historian's craft, and, if there is no empirical historical way to affirm, say, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, then the church had to find an alternative way to confess its faith in the Christ who comes to us in the proclamation of the gospel. He concluded that the results of historical inquiry are the same for the Christian as for the non-Christian, and maintained that Christian faith can never be tied to the ever-changing results of historical inquiry. For him, the Christ according to the flesh, or the Jesus of historical inquiry, is largely irrelevant for Christian faith (2 Cor. 5:16).

The implications for traditional Christian faith that stem from the application of modern historical methodology to the study of the life of Jesus were of little concern to Bultmann. What the historian does with the traditional or biblical Jesus was of no consequence to him. He could say that he "let it [the traditional picture of Jesus in the Gospels] burn peacefully, for I see that that

which burns is all fantasy-pictures of the life-of-Jesus theology, that is, the Christ according to the flesh. But the Christ according to the flesh is irrelevant for us; I do not know and do not care to know the inner secrets of the heart of Jesus.”³ For Bultmann, the manner in which the Easter faith arose in the disciples “has been obscured in the tradition by legend and is not of basic importance.”⁴ In a highly publicized essay, he stated unequivocally that “an historical fact that involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable!”⁵ He concluded that the ancient worldview that made room for angels, demons, miracles, and resurrections was outdated and no longer tenable for Christians in the twentieth century, adding that “it is impossible to use the electric light and the wireless [radio] and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.”⁶ Referring to the similar conclusions of existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers, Bultmann argued emphatically that “he is as convinced as I am that a corpse cannot come back to life or rise from the grave.”⁷ For Bultmann, Christian faith in the resurrection meant that “death was not swallowed up into Nothing, but that the same God, who is always coming to us, also comes to us in our death. In this sense, faith in the resurrection is the criterion for whether someone is a Christian or a non-Christian.”⁸ In terms of Jesus’ resurrection, he could only conclude that Jesus was raised in the apostles’ faith.

After Bultmann

Although many modern theologians disagree with Bultmann’s conclusions, no one can doubt that he raised pivotal questions about our understanding of history that need to be answered *prior* to our investigation of the New Testament. More than any other biblical scholar of the twentieth century, Bultmann has shown that our worldview plays a significant role in the conclusions we draw from an investigation of the New Testament.

Others after Bultmann applied modern historical criticism to the Bible with equally radical consequences. Because of this, it is essential that we focus briefly on modern historical assumptions and how their application to the message

3. R. Bultmann, *Essays: Philosophical and Theological* (trans. J. C. G. Greig; London: SCM, 1966), 101.

4. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM, 1951), 1:44.

5. R. Bultmann, “The New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. H.-W. Bartsch; trans. R. H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1:39.

6. *Ibid.*, 5. See also 13–15.

7. R. Bultmann, “The Case for Demythologizing,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, 2:184. See also 1:8.

8. R. Bultmann, “Is Jesus Risen as Goethe?” in *Der Spiegel on the New Testament* (ed. W. Harenberg; trans. J. H. Burtness; London: Macmillan, 1970), 236.

of the New Testament can have an important impact on the results of our investigation. Is modern historical methodology adequate for evaluating or appropriating the fact and significance of God's work in history, especially the biblical testimony about divine intervention in history through the suspension or contravention of the laws of nature?

Before answering this question, we must first decide what history is and how historians operate today, and seek to understand the contemporary philosophies of history including the methodologies used in examinations of the past. These matters need clarification since the assumptions and methodologies historians bring to biblical inquiry largely determine what conclusions they will draw.

History, Science, and Historical Inquiry

In what follows we will briefly consider the commonly accepted principles and assumptions of contemporary historical inquiry and their impact on an understanding of God's activity in the story of Jesus and the foundational events for understanding Christian preaching. I will subsequently ask whether there is an approach to history that is credible and allows for the possibility of a faith in a God who acts in history.

The Meaning and Subject of History

The word "history" (derived from the Greek *historia*, *historeō*) originally referred to "learned" or "skilled" inquiry or visitation with the purpose of coming to know someone. It came to refer to an account of knowledge about someone or something. Today, the term is largely used in reference to a study of *human* activity in its social environment. Often "history" is used to distinguish reality from myth or legend, that is, whether something really happened.

In universities today, history departments are commonly located in the social science departments, and history is now inseparable from describing past actions of human beings. While nature can be a part of history if it affects human behavior, as in the case of earthquakes, diseases, or tornados, the primary concern of historians is human behavior. Natural events can affect the course of human history, but they are not the primary focus of historians. As R. G. Collingwood has argued, historical explanations are essentially attempts to account for human behavior—namely, things done in the past by human beings.⁹ For him, history is "(1) a science, or an answering of questions;

9. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 9.

(2) concerned with human actions in the past; (3) pursued by interpretation of evidence; and (4) for the sake of human self-knowledge.”¹⁰ Walsh limits the historian’s field even further by saying that the historian is concerned only with the *past* actions of humankind that are no longer open or available to direct inspection.¹¹ Natural scientists are interested in “what happens,” and this is one of the distinguishing marks between the scientist’s subject and that of the historian. Historians are not *primarily* interested in “what happens” or in establishing rules that govern the present and the future.

Historians are not naturally philosophers or “prophets” of history who enjoy the vantage point of surveying the entire historical process to find out what future possibilities might be. They do not naturally interpret current events and what the future will be like based on what they believe has happened in the past.¹² In a strict sense, history is limited to the study of humanity’s past, and predictions about the future or even the present do not properly lie within historians’ field of inquiry.¹³ Karl Jaspers agrees with this and claims that historical science is confined to the past and that “the course of history as a whole knows no necessity. ‘It had to come’ is not a scientific [historic] sentence.”¹⁴ It is largely the memory of past experience that has been preserved in written records and is most logically studied in chronological dimensions. Within chronological developments, one can subdivide history into geographical locations, political developments, cultural contexts, and other areas of human interest.¹⁵

In the nineteenth century, historical positivists ushered in an important development in historical inquiry, concluding that history was essentially the ascertaining of facts, sifting through them, and *then framing general laws from them*. Collingwood defined “historical positivism” as a *philosophy* acting in the service of natural science whose duties included the ascertaining of facts obtained by sensuous perception. Following historical analysis, laws are framed by the inductive method, and from this a positivistic historiography arises. The

10. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

11. W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 19.

12. P. Gardiner argues this point in *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), ix.

13. It is here that A. Toynbee has received his strongest criticism. He begins his ten-volume work *A Study of History* endeavoring to be a historian of preceding civilizations; but he gradually lapses into the role of a prophet of what will take place in subsequent civilizations. See criticisms of Toynbee on this point in Walsh, *Introduction*, 160–64.

14. K. Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* (trans. E. B. Ashton; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 186.

15. R. V. Daniels, “History: (1) Methodology,” in *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: Americana Corporation, 1971), 14:226.

rules the positivists used to ascertain these facts are basically twofold: first, there is an analysis of the sources in question to determine earlier and later elements in the material, thereby enabling historians to discriminate between more and less trustworthy portions; and, second, internal criticism is applied to determine how the author's point of view—or distortions—might have affected his or her statement of the facts.¹⁶ In their research, positivists never fully carried out their ambition beyond the ascertaining of facts. Their notion of history and historical research, however, has continued to this day only slightly varied. They defined historical knowledge as the reality of the past, whose reality is found in facts, whose essence is obtained through historical processes. Generally speaking, historians today regularly follow the broad outlines of the positivists and examine the past to understand better humanity's development and present condition *and to understand themselves in their social environment*.

History, from the perspective of the positivists, is also concerned only with events that happen within the space-time continuum. Events in the spiritual realm, whether real or imagined, are not proper subjects for historical inquiry. Historians *as historians* have no tools whereby they can measure such events, and their inquiry is scientific only insofar as it is a form of measurement. Historians assess the evidence for or against a given event and measure the credibility of the surviving evidence whether preserved in stone, parchment, paper, or even items of an archaeological nature as in the case of etchings on a wall, broken potsherds, or other items left behind by humans. Such things do not belong to the intangible sphere of spirit.¹⁷

But does the historian stop there? According to Gardiner, historians have the obligation to act as interpreters of history and to attempt to describe and assess past events *in light of their present understanding and experience of the laws of nature*, such as the uniformity of nature.¹⁸ Walsh agrees that historians answer questions about the meaning and purpose of historical events along with their description of them, but adds that a historian's value judgments only "slant" history; they do not determine its details.¹⁹ In regard to biblical events, however, this "slanting" often does significantly influence the details that are described related to the event. For instance, the denial of the reality of miraculous events does affect the outcome of a historian's conclusions about the past.

It is this philosophizing aspect of the historian's task that Stephen Neill understands as the cause of many debates among theologians on the subject of biblical history. He is opposed to the use of philosophical assumptions

16. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 126–30.

17. W. Wand, *Christianity: A Historical Religion?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), 23.

18. Gardiner, *Nature*, 70–112.

19. Walsh, *Introduction*, 180–84.

that function as criteria for discerning the reality and interpretation of past events.²⁰ Neill correctly claims that it is naive to think that historians function without assumptions, and he realizes that this is the place where differences and difficulties arise in biblical interpretation. Historians who are open to the activity of God in history will no doubt interpret the biblical narratives differently than those who in practice ignore divine activity in human affairs. The evidence examined can be the same, but their interpretation and assessment varies because of the assumptions they bring to their inquiry.²¹

After sifting through primary sources and prioritizing them in terms of which ones are more or less reliable, historians draw conclusions about their understanding, plausibility, and consistency.²² Determining the historical circumstances or context of ancient texts is often accomplished by comparing pieces of information with one another accompanied by other available external evidence on the same topic. Finally, historians offer a synthesis of the data obtained in which they form a reconstruction of how an examined event is believed to have occurred. Not infrequently the available evidence does not allow historians to draw firm conclusions, so at that point historians make informed and careful conjectures that involve their own personality, personal experience, moral values, and historical assumptions. Because they make arguments and statements that can be rationally assessed, they are at their best when they clarify their own historical framework and assumptions about what happens in history as they form their conclusions.

Historians differ in their conclusions not because they have their heads buried in the sand but because of what they bring to their inquiry. Ancient historians, for example, may have wondered whether Jesus himself was raised from the dead, but modern historians question whether anyone was raised from the dead. Can those who think historically and critically today accept any ancient belief in resurrection from the dead? Willi Marxsen, for instance, claims that modern individuals “simply must (in spite of the unequivocal belief of those narrators and early readers [of the Bible]) raise the question of historicity and then answer this question in accordance with *our own* historical judgment and knowledge.”²³ Marxsen, having answered in advance

20. S. Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 301–2.

21. That such disputes are not confined to biblical scholars is well illustrated in the recent work of R. S. Bagnall on the use of papyri in historical understanding. See his *Reading Papyrus, Writing Ancient History* (London: Routledge, 1995).

22. See Daniels, “History,” 229.

23. W. Marxsen, “The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem,” in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; trans. D. M. Barton and R. A. Wilson; London: SCM, 1968), 16–17.

the question of whether any person can be raised from the dead, rejects in advance the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event. Is it therefore reasonable to make a decision about past reported events before investigating them? Harvey says yes, and clarifies his view as follows:

When dealing with an event so initially improbable as the resurrection of a dead man, the two-thousand-year-old narratives of which are limited to the community dedicated to propagating the belief and admittedly full of “legendary features, contradictions, absurdities, and discrepancies,” how could a critical historian argue that since much can be said for it and no convincing evidence against it, it is probably historical?²⁴

Léon-Dufour asks, however, whether historians can approach historical evidence objectively for any event if they have already rejected its possibility in advance.²⁵ This “prior understanding” (German, *Vorverständnis*) is what Gardiner had in mind when speaking about the temptation of the historian to ask the big questions first, and having answered them, then to “deal with the subject along a course set by those answers.”²⁶

Historians have not yet developed a set of universally accepted criteria for judging the historicity of events, although many operate as if they have. What leads to disagreements among historians is what is at the heart of current debates about the biblical story of Jesus. What we bring with us to our work affects our conclusions. What we bring to our investigation is not found in the sources themselves, but in our own peculiar interests, philosophies, and worldviews. In this sense, there is always a subjective element in historical inquiry. This subjective element, says Walsh, is the limiting factor in any truly *scientific* investigation of the past.²⁷ All history, he claims, is always written from a particular point of view that includes a certain moral outlook.²⁸

Paul Tillich describes the historian’s “historic consciousness” as “one cause of the endless differences in historical presentations of the same factual material.” He says that because it is impossible to sever historical consciousness from the historian, and because there is no history without factual occurrences, there is no history without the reception and interpretation of factual occurrences by historical consciousness.²⁹ Tillich argues that all historical documents,

24. Harvey, *Historian*, 109.

25. X. Léon-Dufour, *The Gospels and the Jesus of History* (ed. and trans. J. McHugh; London: Collins, 1968), 254.

26. Gardiner, *Nature*, xi.

27. Walsh, *Introduction*, 169–87.

28. *Ibid.*, 182.

29. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Digswell Place: James Nisbet, 1968), 3:321–22.

whether legend, chronicle, or scholarly report, are interpreted through one's own philosophical framework, which includes

the selection of facts according to the criterion of importance, the valuation of causal dependences, the image of personal and communal structures, a theory of motivation in individuals, groups, and masses, a social and political philosophy, and underlying all of this, whether admitted or not, an understanding of the history in unity with the meaning of existence in general.³⁰

Walsh reminds us of the difficulty of justifying the moral outlook and judgment of one investigator over another.³¹ Assumptions and moral outlook do not alter the sources historians investigate, but conclusions about what the sources mean cannot always be independently verified through a careful examination of them. If historians refuse to accept the moral outlook or worldview of others, they may be unreasonable or naive but not necessarily ignorant of the facts. Worldviews are exceedingly difficult if not impossible to substantiate or support.

The practice of historical inquiry, in a strict sense, is not a science. Natural scientists observe phenomena that under observation *can be repeated* in order to discover certain laws that can be detected about the behavior of all such phenomena in the same given circumstances. Historians, on the other hand, cannot separate themselves from evaluating past events within their own worldview about the laws that govern the universe. They are primarily concerned with describing past events and their relevance for human self-understanding. Jaspers rightly observes that the role of a historian's subjectivity and framework or worldview in the scientific study of history is a limiting factor in modern historical research and the historians' choice of theme, period of investigation, and research. For him, the historian's craft is always something like a work of art on a scientific basis in the sense that the historian must accept the limitations that science imposes on the subject.³² In other words, the writing of history involves both personal subjectivity and also critical assessment of the limited artifacts of history. This leads to the major assumptions that have been developed and employed in modern historical inquiry.

Assumptions of Modern Historiography

What assumptions do modern historians use in their investigations of the past? Facts do not speak for themselves, but are interpreted in large measure

30. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:372.

31. Walsh, *Introduction*, 182–85.

32. Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith*, 187.

from assumptions drawn from personal experience and perceptions of scientific inquiry. The most common historical assumptions include the following:

1. *Autonomy*. One of the revolutions of thought prompted by the Enlightenment had to do with a division between authority and autonomy. Immanuel Kant saw the Enlightenment as autonomy from authority. It was humanity's release from all authority that gave historians and philosophers freedom to think without direction from another.³³ Reason overthrew the old shackles of religious or state authority. Prior to the Enlightenment, understanding of the past was largely accomplished by means of testimony. Historians knew the past often by accepting or rejecting their sources. Keener rightly observes, however, that ancient historians and philosophers did not automatically believe everything that was reported to them, and at times were quite discriminating in their assessments of ancient historical reports.³⁴ Nevertheless, the assessment is correct that much of history was written based on the acceptance or rejection of the sources ancient historians examined.

Collingwood has labeled the earlier form of knowledge essentially a “scissors and paste” history.³⁵ Insofar as one accepts the testimony of an authority and treats it as historical truth, that person, he claims, “obviously forfeits the name of historian; but we have no other name by which to call him.”³⁶ Before the Enlightenment, the function of the historian essentially was that of compiling and synthesizing testimonies of so-called authorities or eyewitnesses. Historians were primarily (though not exclusively) editors and harmonizers of their sources. Examples of this can be seen in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (early to mid-fourth century AD) and Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* (fifth century AD). In both cases it is obvious that their historical assumptions included a belief in God and their acceptance of the miraculous intervention of God in human affairs—assumptions that were also held by the authors of the sources that they used in writing their histories. Collingwood concludes that these kinds of works were useful, but not actually history, since there is little criticism, interpretation, or reliving of past experience in one's own mind in them.³⁷ Modern historians are not so loyal to their sources that they don't see when their sources failed to do justice to the subject matter. The principle of autonomy is an essential part of the historian's task in relation to biblical interpretation. Harvey explains that “one must, to be sure, listen to

33. See Harvey's *Historian*, 39, for a more detailed explanation of this principle.

34. Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1:87–96.

35. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 282.

36. *Ibid.*, 256.

37. *Ibid.*, 204.

and wrestle with Paul, but . . . one cannot assume that even Paul spoke only in the spirit of Christ, for other spirits also come to expression through him.”³⁸ Although historians cannot function apart from their sources, their sources do not dictate their conclusions. In this sense, autonomy is an accepted principle used by most modern historians and many contemporary biblical scholars.

2. *A Closed Causal Nexus.* Although seldom acknowledged, one of the most commonly accepted assumptions of historical inquiry is that history is a closed continuum of cause-and-effect events. This prevailing perspective on history arose in the Enlightenment era, and nineteenth-century positivists refined it. It is regularly assumed that history is a constant state of immanent interconnections of cause and effect. Each event emerges out of and is understood in relation to the natural historical context in which it appears. Macquarrie says this means that “although there may be distinctive events, and even highly distinctive events, all events are of the same order, and all are explicable in terms of what is immanent in history itself. Thus there can be no divine irruptions or interventions in history.”³⁹ He adds that the result of the application of this principle on the activity of God in history is that God reveals himself, but “his activity is immanent and continuous. It is not the special or sporadic intervention of a transcendent deity.”⁴⁰ Although an event may qualify and transform the future course of history in significant ways, it never appears within the historical process as an inexplicable bolt from the blue.

This view of history has obvious consequences for traditional notions about the activity of God in history and leads to a denial of the existence of God⁴¹ and supernatural interventions in history. This assumption of a closed universe logically concludes that *all* historical events are of the same order and have natural (intramundane) explanations, even if they cannot immediately be explained. They are an uninterrupted series of events that are continuous with one another, and cannot be explained apart from one another. The net result of the application of this principle to Christianity is that it becomes a relative religion. Macquarrie, following Ernst Troeltsch, said that this path would make Christianity reside “within the sphere of religious and human history as a whole, and no absolute claim can be made for it. The life and work of Jesus Christ himself may be a very distinctive event, but it cannot be absolute or final or of a different order from other historical events.”⁴²

38. Harvey, *Historian*, 40.

39. J. Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM, 1970), 143.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Gordon D. Kaufman, “On the Meaning of ‘Act of God,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968):175–201, here 187, draws this conclusion.

42. Macquarrie, *Religious Thought*, 143.

3. *The Principle of Analogy.* Modern historians investigate their subjects on the basis of analogy. Analogy essentially means that historical knowledge relies upon what is known in order to find out what is unknown. It assumes that history is repetitive, constant, and of the same order. What is absolutely unique either does not occur in history or is absolutely unknowable. Historians can discern past events only if they find some connection between them and modern-day events with which they are familiar.⁴³ Macquarrie claims that in historical analogy we assume all events of the past are analogous to events that we ourselves experience in the present. Historians regularly assume that events that are analogous to their own experience are more likely to be true than those events for which they can find no analogy.⁴⁴

What historians know about the repetition of nature, its constancy, and the general laws within which nature operates helps them understand the scope of history. Therefore, since knowledge can only proceed from the known to the unknown, an event cannot be considered historical in the technical sense if it is without analogy to other events in history. Gardiner acknowledges that historians cannot ignore certain laws that govern the field of historical inquiry.⁴⁵ Braaten, however, challenges this principle because it essentially says that history cannot reflect anything new—it can only discover what it already knows, and history therefore has little to say.⁴⁶ He contends that history must be open to the unique, but he does not adequately answer how that which is absolutely unique can be knowable. Christian theology has often responded that what is absolutely unique is knowable if it has been revealed to us by God, but that is a difficult concept for a historian *as a historian* to investigate. Christians regularly contend that God has uniquely revealed himself to us through his Son, Jesus Christ (John 10:30–38; 1 John 4:9). The notion of revelation may be the Christian’s best defense for the uniqueness of Jesus and of God’s activity in raising him from the dead, but historians as historians have no ability to treat or assess uniqueness in the same manner as Christian theologians.

4. *Probability.* It is difficult to find any discussion of the principle of probability among those who investigate the historian’s craft, but most historians appear to assume it to be true. This is what Gardiner calls a commonsense explanation.⁴⁷ When historians use common sense, they make use of their own experience and contemporary scientific information. There are many stories that we regularly conclude are myth or unfounded legends based on our own

43. Braaten, *History*, 44.

44. Macquarrie, *Religious Thought*, 142.

45. Gardiner, *Nature*, 45.

46. Braaten, *History*, 44–46.

47. Gardiner, *Nature*, 5–23.

experience and knowledge about what is probable. For instance, given what we know about probability, it is unlikely that a cow can jump over the moon, that an ax head can float on the water, or that a dead person who has been buried three days can rise to life. The bedrock of the principle of probability is one's sensory perception, personal experience, and reflection on historical investigations of the past. The implications of this principle for traditional Christian beliefs are obvious. Most of us have not experienced the phenomenal or the so-called unique miraculous activity, or a God who intervenes in natural history the way that we read about such activity in the Bible.

The biblical reports about healing or nature miracles appear implausible since generally they are not a part of modern human experience. Few scholars today doubt that Jesus was a miracle worker in the sense that he was able to perform various kinds of healings for individuals in need, but this has analogy in the history of human experience. There is much more skepticism about nature miracles, such as walking on the water and stilling a storm, or raising a person from the dead. Scholars today who examine healing phenomena often account for them by attributing them to some psychosomatic ability or something that is not completely clear but nevertheless still accountable within the natural sphere of activity and will one day be better understood. As we will see below, remarkable healing stories are quite common in antiquity but also in modern history, and they are generally understood as as-yet-unexplained natural phenomena.

Historical Assumptions and the Acts of God in History

When the above assumptions or principles are applied in biblical inquiry, major consequences emerge, especially in regard to passages that focus on divine intervention in history such as creation, parting the waters of the Red Sea, and resurrections from the dead. If the common assumptions of modern historians are applied to the chief tenets of biblical faith, the consequences are considerable. Biblical assertions about God's unique and supernatural events in history must either be discarded or understood in different ways—such as what they say about human existence. This, of course, affects Christian belief about the activity of God in this world and human affairs. The New Testament makes clear that the stumbling block of the cross was overcome on Easter morning when Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples. Such activity is beyond analogy and the historian's experience, and if the above historical assumptions are valid, many Christian beliefs about the activity and fate of Jesus appear invalid. If one accepts common historical assumptions as appropriate guides for interpreting the biblical story of Jesus,

the conclusions one draws about Christian faith will be remarkably different from those of modern historians. Did God raise Jesus from the dead or not?

If the subject of history is humanity in its social environment, and if there is no divine intervention in history, then, as Jürgen Moltmann rightly concludes, “on this presupposition the assertion of the raising of Jesus by God is a ‘historically’ impossible and therefore a ‘historically’ meaningless statement.”⁴⁸ The remarkable activity of God in the story of Jesus must be rejected since the biblical writers acknowledge an open continuum wherein God, who is separate from nature, performs redemptive deeds within nature in order to make his will known to humankind.

There are no analogies in the historians’ experience to the resurrection of Jesus that enable them to accept as historical such an event. Since historians proceed from the known to the unknown, and since there are no analogies to the resurrection of Jesus, then historians regularly conclude that it did not occur. There are other resurrections mentioned in the Bible, but they are resuscitations in which a person survives death and returns to physical life to die again; for example, Lazarus (John 11:38–44), Paul bringing back to life a child that had died (Acts 20:9–12), or Elisha raising a woman’s son to life (2 Kings 4:32–37). Early Christians always viewed Jesus’ resurrection as unique (1 Cor. 15:20). If the New Testament writers are correct, God’s participation in raising Jesus from the dead has no parallels. Historians, however, have no objective criteria that can enable them to assess unique events. What is without analogy is beyond *historical* inquiry.

There are no known *natural* or *rational* causes in the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus that could give rise to a resurrection. Jesus was arrested, beaten, crucified, and buried. His disciples abandoned him and fled, and were understandably filled with despair and gloom over the loss of one who they believed was Israel’s promised Messiah. In those circumstances, there is nothing in the experience of historians, or in known natural laws, that leads them to conclude that a resurrection would be forthcoming. Indeed, what historians know through experience and natural law leads them to conclude that Jesus’ life ended finally, tragically, and completely at the cross.

Finally, it is simply not probable under any known circumstances that dead persons will rise from the grave after three days. Traditional Christianity and even popular modern defenders of the faith often argue that Jesus was not simply just another man, but rather the unique Son of God, so it is improbable that death could contain such a person. Against this line of thinking is historians’ inability to establish Jesus’ uniqueness through historical methodology.

48. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (trans. J. W. Leitch; London: SCM, 1969), 174.

There are no known categories of thought available to them that enable them to affirm faith statements about Jesus as “Lord,” “Christ,” “Son of Man,” or “Son of God.” Interestingly, New Testament writers do not conclude that Jesus was raised from the dead because he was unique or had a special relation with God; rather, his uniqueness and special relationship with God are seen in his resurrection from the dead (e.g., Acts 2:32–36; Rom. 1:3–4; Phil. 2:5–11)! The contemporary apologetic arguments for the resurrection of Jesus based on his uniqueness, while clever, are not rooted in the New Testament message.

Modern historical assumptions present a significant challenge to biblical perspectives. Jürgen Moltmann agrees as he concludes: “In face of the positivistic and mechanistic definition of the nature of history as a self-contained system of cause and effect, the assertion of a raising of Jesus by God appears as a myth concerning a supernatural incursion which is contradicted by all our experience of the world.”⁴⁹ When viewed from the perspective of modern historical assumptions, miraculous events are regularly classified as myth or legend, but not reality.

Contemporary theologians must determine whether there are limitations in modern historical methodology and whether there are real events of the past that are simply not discernible through this methodology. Those who confess that Jesus has been raised from the dead, the quintessential affirmation of the Christian faith, must wrestle with the complexity of the relationship between history and faith. The Gospel writers, and indeed all New Testament writers, were interested in the story of Jesus, in what he did or said, and they also acknowledged that Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Easter faith that they proclaimed. The resurrection of Jesus is the presupposition for Jesus becoming the object of Christian preaching.⁵⁰ Long ago, George Ladd aptly addressed the problem:

The critical historian, as historian, cannot talk about God and his acts in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Parousia; for although such events occur within the history of our world, they have to do not merely with the history of men, but with God in history; and for the historian as historian, the subject matter of history . . . is man. Therefore the historical-critical method has self-imposed limitations which render it incompetent to interpret redemptive history.⁵¹

The New Testament writers affirm God’s activity in history and supremely in his activity in the story of Jesus’ life and fate. There is a theological as well as historical way to understand and appropriate that activity today, and

49. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 177.

50. W. Marxsen, *Anfangsprobleme der Christologie* (Kassel: Guttersloher Verlaghaus, 1960), 51.

51. G. E. Ladd, “The Problem of History in Contemporary New Testament Interpretation,” in *Studia Evangelica* (ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie, 1968), 5:99.

I will return to this topic at the end of this volume, but for now, we will ask about ways that biblical scholarship in modern times describes the distinction between “the historical Jesus” and “the Christ of faith.”⁵²

Historical Inquiry and the “Historical Jesus”

Is the “historical Jesus” of historical-critical scholarship opposed to the Christ of the church’s faith? To some extent, the answer is yes! There is no historical means by which we can acknowledge the church’s affirmation of Jesus as Lord or that he died for the sins of the whole world. On the other hand, the historical Jesus—that is, the Jesus that historians can reconstruct from historical sources based on their critical assumptions—likely never existed. The various pictures of the historical Jesus in contemporary research cannot adequately account for the origins of the Christian faith and the emergence of the early church. Scot McKnight is quite right when he concludes that “any method designed to help us ‘find Jesus’ has to be more than some scientific criterion. I think this because human intention, which is what historical Jesus studies are really all about, cannot be reduced to a science.”⁵³ Some other dimension besides scientific historical inquiry is also needed. Historical investigations of the Gospels and other literature of antiquity have often had many positive results that enable moderns to understand more clearly the dimensions of the Christian faith that were preached and handed on in the church, and even more about Jesus than was previously known, but is that alone enough to lead one to accept the church’s confessions about Jesus? There is much about the context of early Christianity that remains unclear when viewed only through the eyes of faith, and those who labor in historical research often clarify the historical context of early Christianity and do the church a great favor. However, there are still limitations in what the historian can recover.

The scholarly distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, as we will see below, continues to be an important issue for Christian faith today.⁵⁴ Is the Jesus of historical-critical research the object of the church’s faith? Of course not! That figure is more often than not the product of fanciful and

52. A recent and valuable contribution to an examination of the notion and practice of history and the problems that it poses for Christian faith is Webb’s “Historical Enterprise,” in Bock and Webb, *Key Events*, 9–94. He also offers a recent collection of sources that describe the scope of historical inquiry and historical-critical methodology.

53. McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 44. His discussion of the criteria that are used for determining the authentic sayings and deeds of Jesus on pp. 42–46 is convincing and germane to our discussion.

54. This topic is discussed at length in the amazingly comprehensive (3,330 pages) new set of volumes on the historical Jesus by Tom Homen and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

wishful thinking by scholars who have rejected the biblical Jesus in favor of one that best fits their own historical bias. Craig Evans has written a very telling volume that challenges many of these so-called historical portrayals of Jesus of Nazareth and their handling of the ancient sources, especially the Gospels.⁵⁵ Is the Christ of the church's confession a mythological fictional figure? Is he simply a charismatic Jewish wisdom teacher who lived in Palestine some two thousand years ago and attracted a large following as a result of his teaching, preaching, miraculous healings, exorcisms, and other deeds, who told of God's impending judgment and kingdom, and claimed to have a special relationship with God, but died tragically after a short period of ministry? Historians are challenged in deciding which portrait of Jesus to accept based on their own awareness of the past, experience of nature, scientific knowledge, and inquiry into the ancient sources that tell his story, but the church does have an answer.

Faith in Jesus as the Christ is faith in a historical phenomenon in the sense that Christian faith is centered in God's activity in a historical person who lived and died in Palestine in the first century. Because of this, Christians cannot avoid having a serious interest in historical questions. Their concern with history is an important strength of Christian faith, but faith in a God who acts in history also exposes Christianity to the risks and uncertainty of historical-critical research. Christianity cannot exist as a community of people who affirm timeless truths and have a disconnection from whatever happened or happens in history. Christian faith is directly related to historical events—namely, to a person who lived, ministered, and died in historical circumstances that are often as clear to the historian as to the believer. Historical inquiry can often sharpen our focus on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, which is relevant for Christian faith, but the self-imposed limitations of that approach are regularly at odds with the claims and beliefs of Christians. Faith, however, realizes that appropriation of God's activity in Jesus cannot be found in the historical-critical dimension, but through faith alone. This will become more obvious in our next section.

Quests for the “Historical Jesus”

Before focusing on the sources for the study of the story of Jesus and the primary aspects of his life, I will say something about the history and background of this “life of Jesus research” that has developed into an industry all its own.

55. See Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006). See also Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), where he makes similar comments about some of the strange ways the message of and about Jesus has been distorted in modern biblical scholarship.

Scholars regularly write and talk past one another when they discuss the story of Jesus, and it is here especially, as we saw above, where history and faith collide. Although laypersons in churches are often unaware of this field of research and the inbuilt conflicts connected with it, historical Jesus studies (or “life of Jesus research,” or *Leben Jesu Forschung*) nevertheless play a significant role in most centers of academic theological study today. Examinations of Jesus’ life and ministry from a modern (often positivistic) *historical* perspective are regularly at odds with traditional Christian perspectives, that is, the so-called “Christ of faith” of the church’s confession. Given the historical assumptions discussed above, how can one be historically credible without diminishing the value of the Christ who is experienced through faith? To answer that question, we need to understand what has been going on in life of Jesus research, including its strengths and limitations. As we have noted above, some events in Jesus’ life are not *historically* credible—that is, some are reported in the Gospels that do not match the experience of critical historians and are loaded with theological implications. This does not mean that they did not happen, but that they are beyond the scope of *historical* inquiry.

So, what are scholars talking about when they focus on the “historical Jesus”? Some scholars have concluded that the Jesus of the church’s confession is “unreal”—a product of legend and mythology—and they look for other ways to account for the story of Jesus in the Bible. The “real” Jesus for them is a human being who lived and died in antiquity, without all of the ecclesiological accretions added to him over the centuries that made him the object of the church’s worship and confessions. According to them, the real Jesus did not walk on water, did not believe that he was the Messiah, and certainly was not resurrected. Who then was this “historical Jesus”?⁵⁶ I will respond to that shortly, but I should not get too far ahead of the story. The answer will become clearer as we survey briefly the widely recognized four phases of scholarly quests to discover the identity of the Jesus of history.

The First Quest for the Historical Jesus

The term “historical Jesus” became common parlance among biblical scholars following Albert Schweitzer’s now famous book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*,⁵⁷ in which he described the results of the various historical

56. A good discussion of the problem is in C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1–46 and 170–202.

57. The English title of the translated 1906 German edition was *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1910); it was republished as *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (ed. John Bowden; London: SCM, 2000).

attempts from the mid-eighteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century to discover who Jesus was, what he said, and what he did from a historical-critical perspective. These so-called empirical approaches to the story of Jesus, later labeled a “quest,” reflected the positivistic understanding of history that developed out of the Enlightenment. In the early twentieth century, Albert Schweitzer described these attempts to recover the historical Jesus, as he “actually was,” as a dead-end street that did not capture the essence of Jesus. Schweitzer effectively ended the first quest for the “historical Jesus” when he observed that those who wrote lives of Jesus were in effect writing their own stories rather than the story of Jesus.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1695–1768) is commonly identified as the founder of the first historical quest, even though it was actually begun earlier by the English Deists, who denied divine intervention in human and worldly affairs after creation was complete. Reimarus was one of the most influential early contributors to this quest, but because he rightly feared the reaction to the publication of his conclusions that denied the supernatural origins of Christian faith and relativized the Christ of the church’s confession, his findings were not published until after his death by his student and friend, the German philosopher Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781).⁵⁸ Reimarus’s emphasis on a portrayal of Jesus that was influenced by modern historical methodologies that denied in principle the supernatural intervention of God in history strongly affected the later work of David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), who advanced Reimarus’s earlier positions. Strauss called for an investigation of the life of Jesus that assumed that the Gospels were filled with myth and could no longer be trusted as accurate reflections of what Jesus said, what he did, and who he was.⁵⁹ Another important and similar voice in early historical Jesus research was Joseph Ernest Rénan (1823–1892) whose *Life of Jesus*, like that of Strauss, created no small stir among traditional Christian theologians and church leaders by drawing similar conclusions.⁶⁰

Besides these highly influential scholars, others also pursued the ever-elusive historical Jesus, especially F. C. Baur (1792–1860), Heinrich Julius Holtzmann

The German title was *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte des Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1906).

58. H. S. Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments* (trans. R. S. Fraser; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). This work originally appeared as *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger: Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten; Fragment 7* (ed. G. E. Lessing; Braunschweig: n.p., 1778).

59. D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (trans. G. Eliot; 3 vols.; London: Chapman, 1835; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). The German title was *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Osiander, 1835, 1836).

60. E. Rénan, *The Life of Jesus* (trans. C. E. Wilbour; London: Trübner, 1864). The original title was *La Vie de Jésus* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863).

(1832–1910), Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), William Wrede (1859–1906), Martin Kähler (1835–1912), Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), and, finally, Schweitzer himself (1875–1965).⁶¹ It has been estimated that some one hundred thousand lives of Jesus were written during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, sixty thousand of which were published in the nineteenth century alone.⁶²

Most of these “lives of Jesus” were written from a historical perspective that was opposed to the church’s belief in the uniqueness of Jesus and was closed to the notion of the intervention of God into human affairs. The biblical narratives about Jesus’ actions were seen as myth and consequently dismissed. These scholars found ways to explain away or deny the miracles of the Bible, especially the activity of God in creation, the exodus, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Their biggest challenge was to explain how the Jesus they constructed gave rise to the transformation of the disciples, the conversions of James and the apostle Paul, and the emergence of the early church. Who would have crucified their Jesus and why? Their underlying assumption was that the Jesus “of history” was a more reliable foundation for the church’s faith than the traditional Christ of the church’s confession. The alternative to the historical Jesus, for these writers, became the “Christ of faith,” as Martin Kähler called him⁶³—in other words, the Jesus of the church’s confession, who the early disciples believed had performed miracles, who had a unique relationship with God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, who was raised from the dead, and who will come again to usher in the kingdom of God.

Kähler’s compelling work influenced subsequent historical Jesus studies by effectively calling into question the limitations of the newly formed historical-critical methodology and its negative assumptions that were applied to the study of the life of Jesus. He denied the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, arguing that the former, or the real Jesus, was known only through the proclaimed Christ who is presented in the church’s proclamation. Unfortunately, Kähler’s work was not translated into English until 1964, and it had little effect on English studies before its translation. For Kähler, the primary sources for this Jesus were the canonical Gospels, and he rejected the notion that Christian faith was dependent upon the ever-changing results of negative historical inquiry.

61. For a bibliography of early historical Jesus research, see C. A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography* (NTTS 13; Leiden: Brill, 1989).

62. These figures come from Hugh A. Anderson, *Jesus* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 16.

63. Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (trans. C. E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). The original title was *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1892).

The eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early-twentieth-century scholars who sought to identify the historical Jesus introduced modern historical and philosophical assumptions about history into their research. Their influence was enormous and significantly affected the emergence of what later was called “liberal theology.” For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) argued that faith’s foundation could no longer be located in the church’s dogma, or in a tenuous historical foundation, but rather in the realm of feeling and experience.⁶⁴ Scholars today appear more aware of their historical assumptions than were those in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many then believed that they were writing purely objective history without philosophical assumptions. The common assumption then was that if one could somehow reconstruct the historical Jesus separated from all of the actions attributed to him by those of pre-enlightened faith (miracles, resurrection from the dead, divine titles, and other “mythological” elements added by the early church), then it would be possible to recover the essence of Jesus, and that this “historical” Jesus would somehow have positive significance for the church. These scholars believed that church dogma throughout history tended to obscure the Jesus of antiquity and present mostly the Christ of the church’s faith. They tried to understand Jesus apart from the miracle stories in the Gospels and the accounts of his resurrection from the dead, and looked for explanations of how he came to be confessed as Lord by the church. Their Jesus was essentially viewed as a religious sage who gave new ethical teaching to his followers (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount).

The problem with this enterprise, again, was how to account for the large following of Jesus and why anyone would want to crucify him. In order to explain this, Schweitzer suggested that central to the life and teachings of Jesus was a radical, apocalyptic eschatology; namely, that Jesus fully expected the imminent advent of the kingdom of God. Schweitzer stated that Jesus was simply wrong at this point and concluded that the kingdom did not come as Jesus had hoped and proclaimed. For him, it was impossible to understand Jesus apart from this perspective. Subsequent studies of Jesus sought to minimize the role of apocalyptic eschatology in Jesus’ thinking and claimed instead that for Jesus the kingdom of God had manifested itself in his ministry (“realized eschatology”) without reference to a future coming kingdom. Even today, some scholars continue to deny the importance of this apocalyptic eschatological perspective⁶⁵ in Jesus.

64. See A. C. Thiselton’s discussion of Schleiermacher in his *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 204–36.

65. This view held that the end of the ages was soon to come with a violent overthrow of this world’s kingdoms by God and his messiah. The righteous would then be blessed, and the wicked would be judged by God.

Although Jesus certainly taught that in some sense the kingdom of God had been realized in his ministry (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:18–29; 11:20), still the fullness of that kingdom for Jesus was yet to come (Matt. 6:10; Mark 9:1; 14:25). Many scholars today recognize the tension in Jesus’ teaching between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God, but most acknowledge that the notion of a coming kingdom of God that would bring judgment and blessing was also an important part of Jesus’ teaching. John the Baptist was clearly an apocalyptic thinker who focused on preparation for the coming kingdom of God, and most scholars recognize that Jesus’ ministry was begun in conjunction as well as in sympathy with John’s ministry and teaching and had a similar focus on preparation for a coming kingdom of God (see Mark 1:14–15). If the most influential person in Jesus’ formative ministry, John the Baptist, was an apocalyptic thinker, and Jesus’ earliest followers also adopted this perspective (and no one seems to deny this), it is at least plausible that Jesus also held that same perspective. No one doubts that Jesus also believed that in some sense the coming kingdom had also been realized in his ministry. It is less plausible that Jesus’ followers misunderstood him at this point than that he was a Jew who was highly influenced by the apocalyptic thought current in his day.

The “No Quest” for the Historical Jesus

As a result of the work of Schweitzer and that of Rudolf Bultmann, the importance of the quest for the historical Jesus, especially in terms of biographies of Jesus, was significantly minimized and essentially abandoned for several decades by many leading Continental scholars following Bultmann. But were there other scholars who wrote about Jesus during and following Bultmann? Yes, of course, but liberal scholarship largely did not write definitive biographies on the life of Jesus at that time, though many substantial studies on Jesus did emerge, including Joachim Jeremias’s well-known *Parables of Jesus* (German, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1947) and his *Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (German, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu*, 1949), as well as the substantial work of the notable and still-read T. W. Manson (*The Sayings of Jesus*, 1949) and C. H. Dodd (*The Parables of the Kingdom*, 1961). When James M. Robinson wrote his *New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1959), this so-called “new quest” was essentially a continuation of the quest that other scholars had been carrying on without interruption before, during, and after the Bultmann era. But because Bultmann was such a dominant New Testament scholar in the twentieth century, his perspective significantly affected other scholars and his disinterest in the historical Jesus led others to speak

of a “no quest” period. Dale Allison, a leading historical Jesus scholar, is quite correct, however, when he argues that historical Jesus scholarship did not cease during or after the Bultmann era, despite the fact that the majority of Jesus scholars today continue to refer to a “no quest” period.⁶⁶ The most important scholars who championed this so-called “no quest” position included Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten—scholars who flourished between the 1920s and the 1950s and also developed a form-critical analysis of the Gospels. They concluded that the pursuit of the historical Jesus would not be profitable since the object of the church’s faith was never the Jesus of history, but rather the Christ of faith. Bultmann, for example, contended that the *fact* of Jesus (his “thatness”) was the presupposition for Christian faith, but he disregarded the importance of the historical details of Jesus’ ministry and life.⁶⁷ Shelter from the radical conclusions of the earlier historians was found in the Christ of the church’s proclamation. For Bultmann, God is always subject, and never the object of Christian theological inquiry. Consequently, any information gleaned by critical historical inquiry was largely irrelevant for Christian faith. Bultmann was strongly influenced by Martin Kähler, and agreed with him that Christian faith cannot depend upon the ever-changing uncertainties of historical research. He went further than Kähler, however, and maintained that any historical information about Jesus other than his “thatness” was irrelevant for Christian faith. Although Bultmann and others did not call the Jesus of the church’s faith the “unhistorical Jesus,” Jesus in essence became an unhistorical figure and was identified as the mythical Jesus (or Christ of faith) of the early church’s faith and hopes. Bultmann rightly rejected the idea that the “Jesus of history” (the historian’s Jesus) was the object of the church’s hope, but he did not conclude that the “real Jesus” was the Jesus of the church’s proclamation. For him, this Jesus (Christ) was a mythological figure who needed to be “demythologized,” that is, reinterpreted in appropriate modern existential categories that could be grasped by the current generation. For Bultmann, the activity of God comes in the preaching of the cross and the risen Christ. Easter faith, he claimed, was the disciples’ interpretation of the significance of the cross that was disclosed to them by

66. Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 4–9.

67. The classic statement is the opening line of Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:3 (italics added): “*The message of Jesus* is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself.” See also his *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner, 1934, 1958); *Jesus* (German; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926); and *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (German, 1958; English, 1960; repr., London: SCM, 2012).

God. The identity of Jesus in Bultmann's work is vague, and his "Christ" appears to be little more than a cipher or symbol that (not "who"), like in Karl Jaspers' thought, initiates faith.

The "New Quest," or Second Quest, for the Historical Jesus

The attempt to transfer interest from history to theology that was characteristic of Bultmann's approach, and indeed the interest in distinguishing early Christianity from Jesus himself, was one of the results, if not the aim, of the form-critical approach that had largely abandoned the original quest for the historical Jesus. But not all of Bultmann's students were as skeptical as he was about the value of historical inquiry for Christian faith or what could be known historically about the Jesus of history. In particular Ernst Käsemann,⁶⁸ along with Günther Bornkamm, Ernst Fuchs, and James M. Robinson, held that if historical information about Jesus was obtainable, it could not be irrelevant for Christian faith. Most scholars agreed that Christianity made historical claims about events that reportedly took place in history, and that they are inextricably connected with a person who lived and died in Palestine in the first century. Several of Bultmann's students believed that considerably more historical data about Jesus than his "thatness" is knowable, and they began the so-called "new quest" for the historical Jesus, which lasted roughly from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Several criteria in this new or "second" quest were employed to discover and identify historical aspects of Jesus' life. Central to this new quest was the criterion of dissimilarity; namely, that the stories that were more likely to be true about Jesus were those that isolated him from those elements that were common to Judaism of that day or those that were common in early Christianity that advanced the early church's agenda. In other words, this criterion aimed at eliminating early Jewish influences on Jesus as well as Christian beliefs about him, assuming that they were later additions, and arguing that the real Jesus was the one "stripped of dogmatic accretion."⁶⁹

According to Dunn, this liberal quest wanted to portray Jesus "as a teacher of timeless morality" who was a "good example," as "the first Christian [rather] than the Christ."⁷⁰ This goal was perhaps best articulated earlier by Norman Perrin, who concluded, "Liberal scholarship . . . accepted the

68. In 1953 Ernst Käsemann delivered a lecture contradicting his teacher, Bultmann. The essay is published in English as "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in his *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; SBT 41; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964), 15–47.

69. See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38–39.

70. *Ibid.*, 39.

full burden of historical-critical scholarship without hesitation and without reserve, believing that the historical core of the gospel narratives, when reached, would reveal Jesus as he actually was, and that he would then be revealed as worthy of honor, respect and imitation, revealed as the founder of a faith which consisted in following him and his teaching closely and purposefully.”⁷¹

There does not appear to have been the slightest thought in this second quest that the Jesus of history himself may have initiated the christological formulations that were circulating about him in the early church. In other words, these historical Jesus scholars refused to accept that the church’s views about Jesus may have come from Jesus himself! Those confessions were all deemed to be late additions to his story and could therefore be dismissed.

Another important criterion that followed from dissimilarity was “coherence,” that is, other data about Jesus in the ancient traditions that cohered with the criterion of dissimilarity was also likely to be authentic. That criterion was followed by “multiple attestation”; namely, material attested in multiple ancient sources is likely to be authentic. The Gospel of John, because of its openly high Christology, was generally excluded from any consideration as a reliable witness to the historical Jesus. We will assess these and other criteria below.

In this second quest, the emphasis on the differences between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the emerging church continued. These scholars, unlike their form-critical predecessors, recognized that although the material of the Gospels did not clearly disclose the life situation (*Sitz im Leben*) of those who transmitted the Gospels, nevertheless their quest showed that the Gospel traditions had been selected and modified to fit the interests of Jesus’ later followers. To the credit of some of those scholars, how could it have been otherwise? The story of Jesus was relevant not only to the needs of the community that first received it and to the communities of faith that passed it on, but they recognized that the evangelists (now regularly called redactors or editors) geared their message to meeting those varying needs by what they selected and edited or redacted. This new or “second” quest seemed more interested in the connection between *kerygma*, or Christian proclamation, and history, since biblical faith at least was in Jesus of Nazareth, a historical figure. The value of the historical information obtained by these “second questers” using the criteria noted above is contested within the scholarly community today.

71. Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 214.