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John H. Elliott  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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# The Historical Jesus, the Kerygmatic Christ, and the Eschatological Community

JOHN H. ELLIOTT

## INTRODUCTION

**W**e are about to discuss a subject that is quite difficult — if not impossible — to treat in completely detached or neutral fashion. For this is a subject which forces a man, every man, to take a position and to make a decision. The earnestness of this decision is to be found in the fact that this is not merely a subject for academic disputation. It is a question of theology and faith. The subject historically has been treated in terms of a question, or a "riddle," as one English scholar<sup>1</sup> has called it. The question or riddle is basically this: "What is the relation between the actual historical person and career of Jesus of Nazareth and the description of Him given by the Evangelists and authors of the New Testament?" Is the latter a historically accurate biographical account of the former? Or is the apostolic image of Jesus a distorted one? Did the authors of the New Testament misunderstand Jesus and the purpose of His ministry? Or are the New Testament writings, particularly the Gospels, theologically biased and colored? Instead of being neutral chron-

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Hoskyns and Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, 3d ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1949).

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*John H. Elliott is assistant professor of exegetical theology (New Testament) at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This article substantially reproduces an address delivered at the Fourth Annual Institute on Theology and Practice, held at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, June 8—9, 1965.*

icles, are they not rather passionate proclamations written by men of faith in order to arouse and strengthen faith in others, faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, Israel's Glory, and the world's Light? And if this is true, what possibility or even necessity is there for attempting to get beyond the apostolic witness to the real events themselves in order to construct from various historical details a picture or a "life" of Jesus?

The question is an extremely complex one, and the positions of scholars range from one extreme to the other. Some consider the recovery of the historical Jesus — that is, as He actually lived and breathed, spoke and acted — an impossible and even undesirable undertaking (Rudolf Bultmann); others hold this to be the most important task in all New Testament scholarship (Joachim Jeremias). Theological biases, philosophical presuppositions, methodological assumptions, not to mention human emotion, have all played their part in the research that, according to the English title of Albert Schweitzer's standard historical review of the subject, has come to be known as the "quest of the historical Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Interest in this subject is not restricted

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede. Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906), trans. W. Montgomery, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A. and C. Black, 1910; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964).

to the inner sanctum of theologians and academicians. From Hollywood's latest version of "The Greatest Story Ever Told" and Pasolini's sobering "The Gospel According to St. Matthew" to *Life* magazine's 1964 double Christmas issue on the greatest book ever written, the general public, including many a Christian, is being exposed to and stimulated by cinematic and literary as well as theological interest in the so-called "historical Jesus" and the quest to discover Him.

The purpose of this essay is to introduce the nonspecialist to some of the major theological issues and problems involved in and associated with this quest. This will be attempted through a historical survey of research concerning the "historical Jesus." It covers four main stages from the inception of the original quest to the present position of the so-called "new quest." This survey is by no means comprehensive, nor is it a study in depth. Rather it will focus on certain representative positions within a long and involved history of interpretation. If there is any contribution envisioned here, it is not in the proposal of a new solution to some old problems. Rather it would be in the demonstration that some old problems today have some new relevance and that these issues in exegesis bear important ramifications for pastoral theology and proclamation.

#### STAGE ONE: THE ORIGIN OF THE "OLD" QUEST (ca. 1778—1890)

The origin of the "old quest of the historical Jesus" and the period of the "Lives of Jesus," from 1778 to the end of the 19th century, might be said to constitute Stage One in the history of the "life of Jesus" research. Two sets of factors were

responsible for the commencement of this quest: atmospheric tinder and a literary spark.

The atmosphere at the end of the 18th century provided the theological and cultural tinder. The Age of Enlightenment had dawned and continued to nurture the appreciation of man's mental, physical, and rational capabilities. The development of the spirit of scientific inquiry and the experimental method made men dissatisfied with former conclusions and eager to explore new horizons of learning.

Within the church it was an era exulting in newly discovered freedom from dogmatic rigidity. Many had become disenchanted with an ecclesiastical institution understood to demand sacrifice of the intellect rather than intellectual integrity.

Culturally this was a period pervaded by a compelling spirit of humanism. This interest in the human side of things and in the magnificence of *homo sapiens* extended to a concern for the humanity of Jesus Christ. Both the piety and the theology of the church were marked by an obvious trend "from the dogmatic Christ to the human Jesus."

The spark which set this tinder ablaze and provided the basic impulse for the quest of the historical Jesus was the combined effort of a philologist and a man of letters, Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694 to 1768), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729—1781). The year of the fire was 1778.

Reimarus, a professor of Oriental languages at Hamburg University, had written extensively in favor of a rational religion over against the blind acceptance of the church's dogma. His writings, however, circulated only anonymously among

his close friends. From 1774 to 1778, almost a decade after the professor's death, Lessing had published the seven most important sections of his magnum opus. The last of the sections, entitled "The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples: a Further Installment of the Anonymous Wolfenbüttel Fragments,"<sup>3</sup> has been described by Schweitzer as "not only one of the greatest events in the history of criticism . . . [but] also a masterpiece of general literature."<sup>4</sup> Though Lessing did not share Reimarus' standpoint, his appreciation of the quality of this work, both as a literary and historical effort, led him to this move even over the objection of Reimarus' family and friends.

Reimarus made an absolute distinction between the teaching of the apostles in their writings and what Jesus Himself in His lifetime proclaimed and taught. Jesus' message was purely eschatological: "Repent and believe the Gospel; repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This gospel was a political message, and Jesus conceived Himself to be a political messiah. When He failed to rouse the people, He was arrested as an insurrectionist and died with words of frustration and disillusionment on His lips: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" His attempt to establish an earthly kingdom ended in utter failure.

Jesus' apostles, however, in order to account for this totally unexpected turn of

events proclaimed a second future coming of Jesus as the Messiah. They stole the dead body from the tomb and invented a story about Jesus' resurrection and proclaimed to the world that He would soon return.

Needless to say, this reconstruction of history, when finally published, caused an uproar of outraged protest. Even Lessing came under censure for publishing such "heresy." But the quest had begun!

As Schweitzer has shown, the subsequent course of the quest and its progress can be measured according to the degree with which scholars recognized and dealt with the problems posed by the originator of the quest, Reimarus. Out of the movement from the rationalism of the 18th century to the classical liberalism of the end of the 19th century, we shall single out certain scholars whose studies mark either milestones or new insights along the way.

The first is Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, professor of Oriental languages at the University of Jena and then professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg from 1811 to 1851. In "The Life of Jesus as the Basis of a Purely Historical Account of Early Christianity,"<sup>5</sup> Paulus presents the position of a fully developed rationalism: a denial of all supernatural elements in the New Testament, the Gospels and their presentation of Jesus. All miracles are examined for their natural causes. Jesus did not really die, but was roused from a deathlike coma by the wound from the lance, resuscitated by the coolness of the grave and the aroma from the unguents for embalming. "The truly miraculous thing

<sup>3</sup> [Hermann Samuel Reimarus], *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (Braunschweig, 1778), trans., *Fragments from Reimarus, Consisting of Brief Critical Remarks on the Object of Jesus and His Disciples as Seen in the New Testament*, ed. Charles Voysey (London: Williams and Northgate, 1879).

<sup>4</sup> Schweitzer, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, *Das Leben Jesu als Grundlage einer reinen Geschichte des Urchristentums* (Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1828).

about Jesus," said Paulus, "is Himself, the purity and serene holiness of His character, which is nevertheless genuinely human and adapted to the imitation and emulation of mankind."

The most significant departure in this period of rationalism was made by David Friedrich Strauss (1808—1874). While an assistant lecturer in philosophy at the University of Tübingen, he published his two-volume *Life of Jesus* in 1835—36<sup>6</sup> at the age of 27. Based on the principles of the Hegelian philosophy, with its search for the Absolute Spirit and the self-manifestations of the Spirit in history, Strauss' investigation and identification of "myths" in the New Testament and his application of mythological explanation to the Holy Scriptures raised a tremendous furor in Germany. In fact, this work eventually resulted in his dismissal from his teaching post, his ostracism from ecclesiastical and academic circles, and his lonely death. Nevertheless, it was the first time in 50 years that the problems posed by Reimarus were fully appreciated and confronted.

In Strauss' work, Reimarus' observation concerning the difference between the aims of Jesus and those of His disciples was seriously considered. The explanation given of these differences was that Jesus' message was totally determined by Jewish eschatology. Jesus, however, expected not an earthly kingdom, as Reimarus had said, but rather a heavenly one. He looked forward to the coming of the Son of Man.

<sup>6</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 1835—1836), trans. from the 4th German ed. [1840] by George Eliot [pseud. for Marian Evans, afterwards Cross], *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1846; 3d ed., 1898).

Jesus conceived His own messiahship, according to Strauss, as a removal from this world through death and then a return to usher in His kingdom. Those sections of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament which describe Jesus and His messiahship in Jewish apocalyptic or Greek Hellenistic terms are mythical. That is, they are religious ideas given concrete shape in historical sayings, events, and deeds. The infancy narratives, temptation stories, the miracles, the transfiguration, the resurrection — all are myths. They are stories not necessarily untrue, but certainly composed by the evangelists in order to describe the human Jesus of Nazareth as the person in whom God-manhood was realized. Upon his contemporaries Strauss' conclusions had only a negative effect. They saw in this position only a complete repudiation of the miraculous and a mythological explanation given free course. For many scholars in later generations, however, Strauss' work represents a high watermark that all scholars following him failed to attain until the arrival of Johannes Weiss some 60 years later and his development of the eschatological character of Jesus' thought world, person, and mission.

A third outstanding figure of this initial period was Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792 to 1860). A church historian at Tübingen and Strauss' former teacher, he wrote many works on the history of the church and early Christianity, including *Critical Investigations of the Canonical Gospels*.<sup>7</sup> Baur assumed the position of positivistic historicism, which professed absolute confidence in the ability of a historian to divest

<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien, ihr Verhältnis zu einander, ihren Charakter und Ursprung* (Tübingen: L. F. Fues, 1847).

himself of all presuppositions and approach his study with absolute objectivity. He was the founder of the "Tübingerschule," whose philosophy of history was based on the Hegelian dialectic of "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis."

A basic contribution that Baur made toward an accurate understanding of the gospels was his emphasis on the purpose and "tendential" character of each gospel. Only when the interpreter was aware of the total theological perspective of the author and the particular point which he was trying to make, said Baur, would his explanation of individual pericopes be accurate. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, for instance, each had something different, if not unique, to present. The interpreter must pay as much attention to the method and goal of the author as to the facts with which that author was working.

Though Baur's successors ignored his emphasis on *Tendenzkritik*, Wilhelm Wrede picked it up at the beginning of the present century. It is also emphasized by present-day "Redaction Critics," of whom we shall have something to say later on.

Finally, as an example of an extremely negative position, we might mention Bruno Bauer. This student of F. C. Baur carried his mentor's position to the extreme and concluded in his *Criticism of the Gospels and History of their Origin* that a figure known as Jesus of Nazareth never existed.<sup>8</sup> The evangelists made the whole thing up. This was the position of radical skepticism, a standpoint, needless to say, that was so

<sup>8</sup> Bruno Bauer, *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs* (Berlin: Hempel, 1850—1852).

extreme that it received little serious attention. The many other "lives of Jesus," the romantic, the imaginative, and the liberal lives of Jesus, we can pass over, for they contributed little if anything to the solution of the basic problems raised by Reimarus and Strauss.

#### STAGE TWO: THE DEMISE OF THE "OLD" QUEST (ca. 1890—1910)

During this period it was pointed out from various quarters that the assumptions underlying the original quest were invalid. At least four of these assumptions deserve mention.

First, those who attempted to write a "life of Jesus" on the basis of the gospels, or to find a life of Jesus recorded in one or more gospels, assumed that the gospels provided an accurate historical outline of the life of Jesus. Thus either a single gospel or a harmony either of the four or at least of the Synoptics was taken to represent a canonical biography of the Man from Nazareth.

Secondly, it was assumed that not only were the bare facts available but that they could also be interpreted in a purely objective and neutral manner. The exercise of a dogmatically unbiased and historically objective method of analysis was expected to yield an accurate and unbiased interpretation of the New Testament and a "pure" life of Jesus. The objectivity of the picture depended on the objectivity of the artist.

Thirdly, such a portrait of Jesus, it was expected, would offer to the contemporary church and world a Jesus who is relevant, a Lord with whom mankind could identify.

Finally, such a historically established and socially relevant Jesus would then serve

as the only reliable basis of Christian faith. Historical certainty was assumed to be the surest foundation for a modern faith.

It is an ironic fact that the end of the rationalistic and liberal lives of Jesus based on these assumptions was brought about not by the so-called "positive" or "conservative" theologians, but by the radical theologians of a new movement called the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, the history-of-religions school. The hands of the traditionalists were tied, for they shared extensively the assumptions of their liberal opponents. The only recourse open to them as conservatives was an appeal to dogma or to a stage of orthodoxy in a previous century—a recourse that most scholars found unpersuasive. Rather, it was the history-of-religions school which was mainly responsible for bringing to an end this old quest by uncovering the false assumptions on which the old quest was based and by revealing the large gap between the New Testament thought world of Jesus and that of modern time.

Scholars like Hermann Gunkel occupied themselves in comparing the literature of the Bible with the newly discovered literature turned up by archaeologists at the end of the 19th century. The material came from the world of the Old Testament particularly: Babylonia, Assyria, the Near East, and Egypt. These comparative studies revealed similarities in theology, cosmology, anthropology, and the general thought patterns. These patterns were often quite foreign to the modern man. Many scholars felt that such studies, when applied to the New Testament, demonstrated that the modern lives of Jesus had indeed "modernized" Him. The artists had assumed that they could paint a portrait of Jesus that would be relevant for the present, but they had

failed to recognize and treat the gulf separating their world from that of Jesus.

Johannes Weiss, one of the leading figures in German New Testament interpretation, was influenced by this new school of thought. He combined this insight into the totally different thought world of the New Testament with the previous emphases of Reimarus and Strauss in *The Preaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God*.<sup>9</sup> Weiss also stressed with renewed force the eschatological apocalyptic character of Jesus' preaching. He saw the future and yet imminent coming of the supramundane kingdom of God and the Son of Man concepts, so alien to the culture, thought, and theology of the modern age, as the very core of Jesus' mission. He maintained that Jesus of the gospels was a figure by no means immediately accessible or identifiable in modern terms. To attempt to "up-date" Him, Weiss claimed, was to exchange Him for an idol.

A further factor responsible for the end of the original quest involved the conclusions reached by criticism. As Weiss demonstrated that the portraiture of a "modern" Jesus was impossible because Jesus' concept of Himself and the coming kingdom of God was totally foreign to modern man, so another scholar of the literary-critical school, Wilhelm Wrede, helped to prove the inadequate nature of the sources for writing a life of Jesus. In his important study, *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels*,<sup>10</sup> Wrede revived the stress of Ferdi-

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892; 2d ed., 1900).

<sup>10</sup> Wilhelm Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markus Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

nand Christian Baur on the theological purpose of the gospels. He concluded that the outline of Jesus' career presented by Mark is not the reliable historical outline that previous generations had assumed it to be but rather a theological construction devised by the author of the Markan gospel in order to answer specific questions troubling the church at Mark's time. "Why had the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah?" "Why had none except demons and a Roman soldier recognized Jesus as the Son of God until after His resurrection?" In order to deal with such questions the author of the Markan gospel, according to Wrede, purposely arranged his material in the order we now have. This means that the outline of Jesus' life in Mark, and also in the other gospels by analogy, had been determined not by Jesus' actual *curriculum vitae* but by the interpretation of that *vita* given by the inspired author.

Thus, thirdly, the unavoidable conclusion of the historical critics was that the sources were too meager and the evidence too insufficient to permit any further attempts to compose a so-called "life of Jesus." The "tendential" character of the gospels eliminated any access to "bare facts."

The end of the original quest, which had been becoming increasingly futile, was signaled by Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*.<sup>11</sup> This work is a good analysis of the factors and forces that led to its end. For all practical purposes the death had already occurred. Schweitzer merely buried the remains and wrote its epitaph.

The conclusions of Schweitzer's historical overview are almost totally negative.

Each epoch of theology, he pointed out, had created a picture of Jesus in its own image and according to its own desires. The Rationalists depicted Jesus as a preacher of morals; the idealists, as the quintessence of humanity; the esthetes lauded Him as an ingenious artist of words; the socialists, as a friend of the poor and a social reformer; and innumerable pseudo-exegetes made of Him a subject of the literary novel. No Jesus whom any of them depicted had ever existed.

Schweitzer concluded that there is no possibility of knowing what He was really like. "We can find no designation which expresses what He is for us. He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the task which He has to fulfill for our time."<sup>12</sup> Only in the fellowship of suffering "they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."<sup>13</sup>

The inherent weakness of the original quest Schweitzer found in its inability to take seriously the insights of Reimarus, Strauss, and Weiss concerning the eschatological and totally foreign character of Jesus' self-understanding and conception of the kingdom of God. In Schweitzer's own opinion, a completely disillusioned Jesus died on the cross and in place of the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed came the church.

For subsequent scholarship Schweitzer posed this dilemma. Either Schweitzer was correct in asserting that the recovery of the Jesus of history is impossible and that therefore the eschatology of Jesus was re-

<sup>12</sup> Schweitzer, p. 401.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Supra*, n. 2.



placed by the church and her dogma, or Schweitzer's analysis of eschatology is incorrect; eschatology must be redefined and the relationship between the proclamation of Jesus Himself and the church's proclamation about Jesus must be reexamined.

STAGE THREE: KERYGMA THEOLOGY:  
FROM THE JESUS OF HISTORY  
TO THE CHRIST OF THE KERYGMA  
(ca. 1910—1953)

This third stage is the key link between the original quest and its demise and the inception of a "new" quest. On the one hand, it confirmed the conclusions of the second stage—that the original quest was an impossible task according to the assumptions on which it was based. On the other hand, the proponents of a "kerygma theology" postulated a thesis, which actually led to the emergence of a "new" quest. This thesis was that the quest of the historical Jesus was not only impossible but also illegitimate. Not only can we not discover the historical Jesus, but for the sake of faith we dare not even desire to do so.

The emergence of "form criticism," a new branch of the exegetical discipline in the second decade of this century confirmed literary critics and historians of religion in their view that historical precision was subordinated to theological concerns in the Gospel accounts. By analyzing small textual units that reveal distinct characteristics of form, such as parables, miracle stories, or epigrammatic words of Jesus, Martin Dibelius,<sup>14</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt,<sup>15</sup> and

Rudolf Bultmann<sup>16</sup> concluded that the first three synoptic gospels were not biographical compositions based on a single historical pattern of Jesus' ministry and life. Rather, in their view, each evangelist had composed his gospel by selecting and combining into an integrated whole according to a particular theme varied words and events in Jesus' life. The similarities among the Synoptics, they held, are due to the fact that both Matthew and Luke were dependent on the outline and the content of Mark's Gospel, which they knew and used. The dissimilarities they attributed to Matthew's and Luke's use of further sources (the so-called Q source and tradition employed only by Matthew [M material] and Luke [L material]) and to their revision of, addition to, and omission from the Markan gospel to suit their own specific purposes.<sup>17</sup> Further, Mark, the traditional author of the earliest gospel, was not one of the twelve apostles. Thus his gospel was not an eye-witness account. Though, according to an early 2d-century tradition,<sup>18</sup> his gospel did reflect the eye-witness account of the apostle Peter, this same tradition states that Mark did not compose his

*Geschichte Jesu: Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung* (Berlin: Troitzsch & Sohn, 1919).

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921; 3d ed., 1957), trans. John Marsh, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, c. 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Form critics assumed the correctness of the so-called two-source hypothesis (Mark and Q as the basis of Matthew and Luke) as a working hypothesis. Other form critics also reckoned with the sources of M and L and therefore operated with a four-source hypothesis.

<sup>18</sup> See the statement of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (ca. A.D. 150) preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 39, 14—15.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1919; 2d ed., 1933), trans. from the 2d ed. by Bertram Lee Wolf, *From Tradition to Gospel* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

<sup>15</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der*

material "in order," presumably chronological order. This the form critics saw substantiated by an examination of the contents, which reveals an arrangement according to topic (for instance, the collection of parables in Ch. 4 and of conflict stories between Jesus and the Jews in 2:1—3:6; 11:27—12:37) and according to theological theme. Likewise the numerous divergences between the Synoptics and John indicate that it is impossible to speak of a historical outline of Jesus' life in all but the most general sense of His birth, and then His childhood, ministry, death, and resurrection.<sup>19</sup>

Form critics therefore concluded that the gospels were compilations of various strands of tradition preserved in the memory of the earliest community. They saw as a key factor in the accurate understanding of these later compilations the emergence and stages of the transmission of this oral and partly written tradition within the believing community, the primitive church. They held that a careful analysis of the various forms by which the good news was transmitted yielded a good insight into the way that this good news was understood by the earliest community and then how it was later understood by the

<sup>19</sup> The most important divergences include, in addition to those of structure, language and style, historical situation, and theological emphasis: the length of Jesus' ministry (Synoptics: one year; John: from 2½—3 years); the geographical course of Jesus' ministry (Synoptics: one journey from Galilee to Jerusalem; John: a minimum of three journeys back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem); the occasion of Jesus' cleansing of the Jerusalem temple (Synoptics: during His last week in Jerusalem before His passion and death; John: at the commencement of His public ministry); and the date of Jesus' death (Synoptics: the 15th of Nisan; John: the 14th of Nisan).

evangelists and reinterpreted and reapplied by them to meet the problems of the church in their time and area.

Secondly, the form critics combined this observation concerning the *method* of the evangelists with an insight concerning the *purpose* of the apostolic witness. They held that the theological purpose of the evangelists, as of the other inspired writers of the New Testament, was not to offer a historical chronicle or biography of Jesus. There is little that is theological about a biography. Rather, they argued, all these Christian writers wrote with the purpose of proclaiming Jesus to be the Agent of God's reign over the world. Thus those who believed in Him declared Jesus to be the Christ, the promised Messianic Son of David and Abraham, the Redeemer of Israel, the Lord of the universe, and the Bringer of the Last Day of God's judgment and pardon. These documents were seen to be really sermons preached by men of faith in order to arouse or strengthen faith among those who hear. These gospels are the church's kerygma, that is, her proclamation, and are misunderstood completely when they are treated as mere historical or geographical outlines. Indeed, they are based on and contain historical matter, but their basic purpose is not simply to recount history but to call mankind to faith, to preach the Gospel.

In this period the emphasis in the "life of Jesus" research was gradually shifting from an interest in the Jesus of history to an interest in the witnessing church. Exegetes sought the historical Jesus but discovered that they were finding the *Sitz im Leben*, that is, the life situation of the proclaiming church. Instead of Jesus, the Proclaimer of the Kingdom, these scholars

felt that they were finding the Christ of the church's kerygma. In place of Jesus' proclamation, the kerygma of the church was found. In the kerygma of the believing, witnessing church the Jesus of history was proclaimed as the risen Christ. Some summarized their view in the comment that in the church's kerygma the Proclaimer Himself became the Proclaimed One.<sup>20</sup>

It was only a consistent and consequent step for Rudolf Bultmann to take, therefore, when he made a sharp differentiation between the concepts of *Historie* and *Geschichte*. Here he was following the lead of a conservative scholar of the previous century, Martin Kähler. Kähler had objected that the original quest of the historical Jesus and the picture drawn of Him concealed from the church the living Christ. In his study, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*,<sup>21</sup> Kähler differentiated between the words *historisch* and *geschichtlich*. *Historisch* (historical) designates a fact or an event of the past that is no more than a disconnected jot in an ancient chronicle and has no significance for the future. *Geschichtlich* (historic), on the other hand, designates an event of the past that has great significance for the future and is remembered by posterity as determinative in the continuous

life of people.<sup>22</sup> According to Kahler, therefore, the "so-called historical Jesus" is not the earthly Jesus as such, but rather Jesus insofar as He can be made the object of historical-critical research. He is the mere figment of an author's imagination or a historian's reconstruction. The "historic, Biblical Christ," on the other hand, refers to Jesus as He is the object of faith and the content of preaching, as He is confessed by the believing community as Lord, Messiah, and Redeemer.

Rudolf Bultmann adapted this differentiation of Kähler's, which had been ignored in Kähler's own time, and concluded that for the church it was not the historical figure of Jesus that was important or significant but rather Jesus' eschatological message, His challenge to decision and faithful obedience. This challenge, according to Bultmann, is known to us only in the primitive church's kerygma; that is, we know about Jesus only by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We know nothing about Jesus apart from this apostolic tradition of faith. It is impossible to get behind this kerygma to the very words or the actual life of Jesus Himself. We must be content with the witness of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Furthermore, not only is it impossible, it is unnecessary. In fact, it is even illegitimate to desire to do so. For the cause and basis of faith is the word of God that reaches man only in the kerygma, the early church's witness. Historical research, or the knowledge of the bare facts, in no wise alters this kerygma or substitutes for this kerygma another basis of faith. Faith, according to Bultmann, is not contingent

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c. 1951), 33: "He who formerly had been the *bearer* of the message was drawn into it and became its essential content. *The proclaimer became the proclaimed. . . .*"

<sup>21</sup> Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1894), ed. E. Wolf, 3d ed. (München: C. Kaiser, 1961), trans. and ed. Carl E. Braaten, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1964).

<sup>22</sup> For definitions of these terms, see Braaten's introduction, *ibid.*, pp. 20—22.

upon the conclusions of historical critics. Interestingly, it is for this very reason that Bultmann himself can engage in such thorough historical criticism because he is convinced that no matter what he turns up historically, it can have no bearing on his belief in Jesus as God's Christ. It is also for this reason that he has refused to try to seek the Jesus behind the primitive church's proclamation.

Bultmann was led to this conclusion by his understanding of the kerygma itself, of faith as response to the kerygma, and of eschatological existence as the mode of faith. The full clarification of these three factors obviously require far more space than is available here. So a brief attempt at explanation will have to suffice.

In post-World-War-I scholarship, the kerygma was considered to constitute not only the center of the gospels but of primitive Christianity itself. This action noun designates both the content of the Christian message and the act of proclaiming the message. According to Bultmann, this kerygma is essentially a call to the decision of faith. At the same time it is also the communication of a past history of God's action in redeeming His people, specifically God's gracious action in Jesus of Nazareth. The kerygma is a result of the Easter event when Jesus' earliest disciples believed that God had not permitted His Holy One to see corruption but had raised Him from death to life. With this conviction these Christian witnesses declared that Jesus' life, ministry, and death had eschatological significance for all men and that when men heard this kerygmatic proclamation, they were being confronted with the Word of deliverance and destruction itself. Through the kerygma the Word of God slays and makes alive. It calls to new life, new exist-

ence. In this last day, ushered in by Jesus' appearance as the Christ, this Word preached by His church calls men to new life and new eschatological existence. It is a call to faith in which God's action in the past is declared as determinative for all presents and all futures.

Jesus' life, ministry, and death is, of course, the presupposition of this kerygma. However, according to Bultmann, what the exact nature of that life was cannot be determined by any historical or literary analysis. For the kerygma is a confession of faith, and Jesus is presented in this kerygma according to the eyes and ears of faith. Whether He actually said or did what the evangelists claim or whether they constructed events and episodes to illustrate and clarify His words is most difficult if not impossible to determine, according to Bultmann. That which man is called to believe is not the "real" or "sure" words of a historical Jesus but rather Christological kerygma of the inspired witnesses. To doubt the claim of this kerygma to be the Word of God until its historical accuracy is demonstrated is to refuse to believe. For faith is only faith as a response to the kerygma, in which a man is challenged to believe without any kind of proof that God in Jesus the Christ claims him as His own. "Insofar as the word of proclamation is no mere report about historical incidents, it is no teaching about external matters which could simply be regarded as true without any transformation of the hearer's own existence. For the word is *kerygma*, personal address, demand, and promise; it is the very act of divine grace. Hence its acceptance — faith — is obedience, acknowledgment, confession."<sup>23</sup> Later Bultmann,

<sup>23</sup> Bultmann, *ibid.*, I, 318—19.

in response to his critics, again emphasized that "faith does not at all arise from the acceptance of historical facts. That would only lead to legitimizing, whereas the kerygma really calls for faith."<sup>24</sup>

The purpose underlying Bultmann's rejection of a quest after a historical Jesus as an illegitimate undertaking for men of faith is summarized clearly by James Robinson in his review of the old quest and introduction to the new quest:

Now it became increasingly clear that "the historical Jesus," the scholarly reconstruction of Jesus' biography by means of objective historical method, was just such an attempt to build one's existence upon that which is under man's control and invariably at his disposal. The historical Jesus as a proven divine fact is a worldly security with which the *homo religiosus* arms himself in his effort to become self-sufficient before God, just as did the Jew in Paul's day by appeal to the law. Whereas the *kerygma* calls for existential commitment to the meaning of Jesus, the original quest was an attempt to avoid the risk of faith by supplying objectively verified proof for its "faith." To require an objective legitimization of the saving event prior to faith is to take offence at the offence of Christianity and to perpetuate the unbelieving flight to security, i. e., the reverse of faith. For faith involves the rejection of worldly security as righteousness by works. Thus one has come to recognize the worldliness of the "historicism" and "psychologism" upon which the original quest was built. To this extent the original quest came to be regarded as theologically illegitimate.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon Press, ca. 1964), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the*

#### STAGE FOUR: THE NEW QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS (1953 to the Present)

As long as this understanding of faith and the apostolic kerygma held sway, the only persons writing "lives of Jesus" were those who took little account of Rudolf Bultmann, form criticism, and kerygma theology or those who never realized that the original quest had come to an end. If there was any validity or legitimacy in the question concerning the Jesus of history, then the theological position of the third stage as well as the problems noted by Schweitzer and others in the second stage would have to be revised, corrected, or answered. Again it is to be noted that such a response was not forthcoming from among the so-called "conservative" scholars. Again, as at previous stages, the men continued to affirm and reaffirm doctrines that failed to speak to the issues raised. It was the so-called radical school that attempted to counter the Bultmannian position. The scholars mainly responsible for undertaking a new quest were, surprisingly, none other than Bultmann's own students.

If there is one basic reason for the renewed interest in the Jesus of history, perhaps with Professor Ernst Käsemann we can identify it as that of *continuity* from the message of Jesus to the kerygma of the church. In his programmatic essay, which is recognized as the starting point of the new quest, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," delivered in 1953 to a group of friends and colleagues who were former students of Bultmann's, Käsemann, one of Bultmann's outstanding students and now professor of New Testament at the Univer-

*Historical Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 25 (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 44.

sity of Tübingen, maintained that something indeed can be known about the Jesus of history. The crucial issue he defined as "the question as to the continuity of the Gospel in the discontinuity of the times and the variation of the kerygma."<sup>26</sup> Is there an unbridgeable gap between that which our Lord Jesus Himself declared and that which the early church proclaimed about Him, or is there indication in the New Testament of a true identity between both?

Though Bultmann, for instance, would not disclaim the possibility of such continuity, he would deny the ability to demonstrate it on the basis of the New Testament sources. Can such continuity be demonstrated? This is the basic question to which the "new questers" answer with an affirmative "yes!" They offer four reasons to support this affirmation.

First of all, the "new questers" maintain that the nature of the sources makes a new quest *possible*. Since Schweitzer's study, the method of form criticism has been developed, making it now possible to get behind the written documents to the period of the oral tradition and thus that much closer to the words of Jesus. An analysis of the historical *Sitz im Leben* in several instances can determine with what they regard as a reasonable degree of certainty what is original and what is an accretion or revision of the later community. Accordingly, particularly such forms as parables

<sup>26</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 51 (1954), 125—153, reprinted in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, c. 1960), 187—214, trans. W. J. Montague, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 15—47; see p. 46.

and words spoken by Jesus can be regarded as genuine with much more confidence than heretofore. Thus the sources not only indicate that the origin of the kerygma is not the Easter event but the ministry of Jesus which preceded it; they also provide clues as to the nature of the continuity and identity between both.

Secondly, the nature of the kerygma makes a new quest legitimate and necessary. Not only *can* we ask about the person and message of Jesus, we *must*. For this is what the kerygma itself demands. This kerygma not only recalls historical facts, as C. H. Dodd, for instance, demonstrated in his *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*,<sup>27</sup> but it is itself grounded in a historical event, namely the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly Joachim Jeremias has maintained that "the Incarnation implies that the story of Jesus is not only a possible subject for historical research, study, and criticism, but demands all of these."<sup>28</sup> If the kerygma is not a product of the Easter faith alone but a reaction to the Jesus whose call to discipleship also preceded Easter and if the kerygma is indeed a confrontation of the present with the past, then that call of Jesus and that divine act of the past require closest attention.

<sup>27</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962; 1st ed., 1936).

<sup>28</sup> Joachim Jeremias, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus. Beiträge zum Christusverständnis in Forschung und Verkündigung*, ed. Helmut Ristow and Karl Matthiae (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1962), pp. 12—25, trans. Norman Perrin, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1964), pp. 14—15.

Thirdly, the nature of history makes a new quest desirable — on new terms. This does not mean that the new quest is capable or even desirous of carrying out its task according to the historical assumptions of the old quest. This is now recognized as impossible. Instead, through the influence of such scholars as Wilhelm Dilthey<sup>29</sup> and R. G. Collingwood,<sup>30</sup> who are concerned basically for history, theologians have come to recognize that history is not simply a conglomeration of bare facts. Rather, history itself is already an interpretation of events according to a certain set of presuppositions. There is no such thing as an objective historian. Every historian is in varying degree subjectively concerned about all the material which he investigates. Contrary, therefore, to the assumptions of the earlier rationalists, liberals, and historical positivists, there is no such thing as cold bare facts or a so-called "objective" historical method that allows one to determine with complete impartiality how something actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).

Bultmann already recognized this and agreed that honest historical investigation demands a commitment to the material. Only a subjective identification of the investigator with his object of investigation will enable the exegete to subject himself to the Word which he reads. "No exegesis is without presuppositions," he has emphasized, though, of course, exegesis "must

remain unprejudiced."<sup>31</sup> The responsibility of the exegete is not to deny his presuppositions and assumptions concerning the text but to define them and to submit them to the authority of the text.

However, whereas Bultmann has not envisioned this new view of history as the occasion of a new quest of the historical Jesus, at least one of the so-called post-Bultmannians has. James M. Robinson, for instance, considers that there are now two avenues for gaining information about the historical Jesus. The Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown has aptly labeled these the "via kerygmatica" and the "via historica."<sup>32</sup> Bultmann and Käsemann speak about confronting Jesus in the church's kerygma, but Robinson maintains that when historiography is understood with Collingwood, Dilthey, and Bultmann as an existential encounter with the past, then "the historical Jesus I encounter *via* historiography is just as really a possible understanding of my present existence as is the *kerygma* of the New Testament."<sup>33</sup> In other words, it is possible and desirable to compare the kerygmatic material in the New Testament with the nonkerygmatic material "whose historicity seems relatively assured"<sup>34</sup> in order to ascertain thereby that the understanding which the church

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik," *Die Geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens*, Vol. V in *Wilhelm Dilthey: Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, c. 1957), 317—338.

<sup>30</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).

<sup>31</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, selected, translated and introduced by Shubert M. Ogden (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 289 to 96, esp. p. 289.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "After Bultmann What? — An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXVI/1 (Jan. 1964), 1—30; p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, p. 104.

had of Jesus and His actions in fact did coincide with the understanding that Jesus had of Himself and His mission. If this is true, then, says Robinson, today I can be challenged to understand myself and my existence in the same way that Jesus understood Himself in His day.

Fourthly, the nature of faith makes a new quest natural. As long as it is impossible to talk about Christian faith apart from Jesus of Nazareth, concern for the Jesus of history is natural for the Christian. On the one hand it is true that faith is not directed toward a picture of Jesus which man constructs, such as those of the 19th century. In effect this is a type of idol-making. Nor does faith disregard the significance of the variations and divergences in the kerygmas of the New Testament and insist instead upon a uniform portrait. Nevertheless, it has been maintained, faith is not merely belief in the kerygma as Bultmann would have it. For the kerygma does not point the would-be believer to itself but to Jesus and challenges him to affirm this Jesus as God's Christ. "We . . . cannot do away with the identity between the exalted and earthly Lord," argues Käsemann, "without falling into docetism and depriving ourselves of the possibility of drawing a line between the Easter faith of the community and myth."<sup>35</sup>

These then are some of the fundamental reasons offered for a new and different quest of the Jesus of history. The nature of the sources, of the apostolic proclamation, of history, and of the Biblical concept of faith all suggest, indeed insist upon, the continuity between the church's preaching of Jesus as the Christ and what Jesus

proclaimed and inferred about Himself, as the Bringer of the Eschaton, that is, God's final age of ultimate destruction and deliverance.

#### *Some Proponents of the New Quest*

Characterizations are invariably arbitrary, often ambiguous, and always dangerous. When the points of view concern a subject so complex as that under discussion, the problem of accurate portrayal is compounded. The best alternative is that the reader investigate and evaluate for himself. For this reason an annotated bibliography is appended to this essay. Perhaps a brief mention of the positions of some of the more outstanding representatives of the "new" quest will provide a useful point of orientation.

One group of scholars comprises the so-called *Marburger Kreis*, a close circle of friends and colleagues, all of whom at one time had studied under Rudolf Bultmann. It includes Ernst Käsemann (Tübingen), Günther Bornkamm (Heidelberg), Erich Dinkler (Heidelberg), Hans Conzellmann (Göttingen), and Ernst Fuchs (Marburg). Their writings, which indicate a significant shift from and criticism of the Bultmann position, mark the period from Käsemann's essay in 1953 as the "post-Bultmannian era."

As with all the many scholars figuring in the historical Jesus renaissance, it is impossible to speak of unanimity of opinion even within this smaller circle. Though there is general agreement concerning the necessary employment of a careful historical-critical method, and the basic presuppositions informing such a method, different exegetical emphases and conclusions are nonetheless apparent. Perhaps the one thing that best characterizes these men as

<sup>35</sup> Käsemann, p. 34.



a group is their proximity to Bultmann, despite all differences, and yet their insistence that the Bultmann position is an incomplete definition of faith and an inadequate appraisal of the nature of the sources. Confidence in the continuity between the preaching of Jesus and that of the early church and an emphasis on an implicit messiahship of Jesus that became explicit in the kerygma is the regular undercurrent in their writings.

A second approach quite different from that of both Bultmann and his pupils is represented by such men as Joachim Jeremias (Göttingen) and Ethelbert Stauffer (Erlangen). Jeremias, well known in this country for his studies on the Eucharistic words<sup>36</sup> and the parables of Jesus,<sup>37</sup> is an expert in Rabbinic literature, Aramaic studies, and the history of Palestinian Judaism. By paying close attention to this material as it influenced the apostolic writings, Jeremias believes it possible to reconstruct from the New Testament sources the *ipsissima verba Jesu*. Once the very words that Jesus spoke have been determined, he maintains, they will provide the basic clue to the historical proclamation of Jesus. Thus, for example, Jesus' use of the Aramaic word *abba*, a term of intimacy used by a child toward his father (corresponding roughly to "daddy" in English), reveals the unique and intimate relationship that, Jesus was convinced, existed between Himself and God. Likewise, Jesus' use of the Aramaic term *amēn*, a word expressing the unlimited authority of the speaker, mani-

festes Jesus' realization that He is indeed God's Spokesman on earth and the One in whom divine authority is uniquely revealed. Through such analysis Jeremias concludes that the Christ proclaimed in the kerygma is not only implicitly but also explicitly identified by Jesus as He Himself and that this identification is to be found consistently as "the central message of the New Testament."<sup>38</sup>

Stauffer proposes that the new historical evidence from extra-Biblical Jewish, Rabbinic, Greek, and Roman sources enables the exegete-historian to construct a clear picture of the historical Jesus.<sup>39</sup> The Christian writers obviously had a theological ax to grind. The non-Christian sources offer a much more objective and unbiased account according to which the Christian documents can be seen in a more historically accurate perspective. The resultant image of Jesus, rather than the preaching of Paul or other Christian interpretations, is to be the only object of faith.

With this proposal Stauffer has incurred the ill will of not only the great majority of Biblical exegetes but also of his own colleagues at the conservative university of Erlangen. His position is unacceptable to conscientious historical critics because it represents nothing but a lapse into the false assumptions concerning objective his-

<sup>38</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

<sup>39</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus: Gestalt und Geschichte* (Bern: Francke Verlag, c. 1957), trans. Richard and Clara Winston, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, c. 1959); "Neue Wege der Jesusforschung," *Gottes ist der Orient: Festschrift für Prof. D. Dr. Otto Eissfeldt zu seinem 70. Geburtstag am 1. September 1957* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959, pp. 161-86).

<sup>36</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. A. Ehrhardt. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955).

<sup>37</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

torical analysis on which the original quest was based. It is equally unattractive to his Erlangen colleagues and other scholars outside of the exegetical discipline because it poses a false antithesis between the preaching of Jesus and the proclamation of Paul.<sup>40</sup> Instead of continuity between Jesus' announcement of the presence of the reign of God and Paul's theology of justification through faith, Stauffer requires a choice of either one or the other and personally prefers the former. Thereby the original concern of the resumed quest is neglected and vitiated.

A third position might be said to be presented by such men as Ernst Fuchs (Marburg), Gerhard Ebeling (Tübingen), and James M. Robinson (Claremont). Though Fuchs himself is one of the *Alte Marburger*, he, together with Ebeling and Robinson, has moved in a direction discernibly different from that of the other "new questers." Much more influenced by the later philosophical thought of Martin Heidegger, they have attempted to make Heidegger's conclusions concerning the nature of being, existence, word and understanding fruitful for Biblical interpretation.<sup>41</sup> Sev-

eral essays by Ebeling and Fuchs attempt to describe a "Christological understanding of language" in which the salvation-event of God in Jesus Christ is conceived as a "language event" that calls the hearer to the "authentic existence and selfhood," which Jesus Himself experienced.

Robinson has introduced English readers to this new and bold direction of thought under the title *The New Hermeneutic*.<sup>42</sup> In many respects this constitutes the furthest step among the "new questers" beyond Bultmann's position, and several of the *Alte Marburger* have expressed scepticism concerning its validity. Other exegetes, too, have shown scepticism toward a methodology so apparently dependent on a Heideggerian conception of language. Still others ask whether in the last analysis there is very much "new," in Lutheran circles at least, about a hermeneutic which regards "proclamation in the mode of witness as a kind of 'primal speech' which serves as the hermeneutics of the Word of God."<sup>43</sup>

*tische Untersuchungen zur Theologie*, II (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1962).

<sup>40</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus, Paulus und Wir. Antwort auf einen Offenen Brief von Paul Althaus, Walter Künneht und Wilfried Joest* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1961). The response to this *Antwort* is contained in the article by Wilfried Joest, "'Jesus, Paulus und wir,' Antwort auf E. Stauffer," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 86/9 (Sept. 1961), 641 to 50.

<sup>41</sup> Ernst Fuchs, *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, I (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960); idem, *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, II (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960).

Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963); idem, *Theologie und Verkündigung, Ein Gespräch mit Rudolf Bultmann, Hermeneu-*

<sup>42</sup> James M. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic. New Frontiers in Theology*, II, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). See further Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); and especially Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Doubleday, 1961); also James M. Robinson, "The German Discussion of the Later Heidegger," *The Later Heidegger and Theology, New Frontiers in Theology*, I, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 3-76.

<sup>43</sup> Carl E. Braaten, "How New is the New Hermeneutic?" *Theology Today* 22/2 (July 1955) 218-35. See also Richard R. Caemmerer, "The New Hermeneutic and Preaching," *Concordia Theological Monthly* XXXVII/2 (Feb. 1966) 99-110.

These three approaches do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities, but they suffice at least to demonstrate the variety of direction, motive, and purpose apparent in the new quest. The one point of agreement among those concerned with the Jesus of history is the conviction that a new quest is not only possible but necessary.

Has the new quest succeeded where the old quest failed? Is it possible to point to contributions more positive in nature than Schweitzer's negative conclusions concerning the original quest? Certainly the emphasis on the essential continuity between the earthly Jesus and the kerygma of the primitive church, between the Proclaimer and the Proclaimed One, is to be greeted as an expression of a faith which refuses to allow its object to dissolve from history into myth. Moreover, a proper balance has been sought between the inspired witness to past events and the events themselves. Thirdly, many representatives of the new quest have taken into account and made fruitful for Biblical interpretation the insights of historians such as Collingwood and Dilthey concerning the necessary personal existential involvement and encounter with the past in order for the past to have meaning for the present. Exegesis at the same time has been recalled from the subjectivism of a non-controlled existentialism to a more objective stance over against the Biblical evidence. More material is being recognized as genuine and historically reliable, and readers are being challenged with renewed emphasis to become "hearers of God's living Word."

On the other hand, many old questions remain and many new ones have been raised. Is the new quest really free from the false assumptions of the old quest? Or have men such as Ethelbert Stauffer and

Joachim Jeremias allowed their enthusiasm over the sources, both Biblical and extra-Biblical, to blind them to the 19th-century error of historical positivism? What is essentially different about Robinson's use of a "new" historiography to validate the kerygma from the desire of Stauffer and Jeremias to validate it via the sources? Furthermore, how does the language about "Jesus' realization of selfhood and authenticity" employed by Robinson, Fuchs, Ebeling, and others differ essentially from the 19th-century portrayals of Jesus that were descriptions of Jesus as the "social reformer," the great "ethical teacher," or any of the other hero images, all of which were the result of not a little psychological and philosophical projection and much fantasy? Though the new quest as initiated by Käsemann touches significant questions raised by the average believer, what contribution toward theological clarity and catholic piety is being made with such descriptions of the salvation event as a "word event"? In fact, what advance has the new quest been able to make beyond the individualistic character of Bultmannian existentialism? Why has the corporeality and communality of the church as the "new assembly of the Messiah" received so little attention? Could it be that the need to balance Bultmann's heavy emphasis on the church's kerygma has led the new questers to less than a sufficient concern for the community? Has the new quest not also led once again to a separation of the historical Jesus from the kerygma when Robinson affirms that the Jesus of history can be encountered through modern historiography as well as through the church's proclamation?

Finally, one of the most significant ques-

tions because it is one of the most fundamental is that put to the proponents of a new quest by Bultmann himself. In a recent response to his critics while granting the implicit indications of a continuity (Käsemann) and even Jesus' apparent "claim to authority" (Bornkamm, Fuchs, Ebeling, Jeremias) he counters with the penetrating question: "How far does all this take us? Actually it makes intelligible the historical continuity between the activity of Jesus and the kerygma; it explains how the Proclaimer became the One Proclaimed. Essentially, however, it does not take us beyond the first attempt to indicate the continuity by arguing that the kerygma presupposes not only the 'that,' but also the 'what' and the 'how' of Jesus' activity. The argument that the kerygma goes back to the claim of Jesus contained in his activity does not yet *demonstrate* [emphasis mine] the material unity between the activity and preaching of Jesus and the kerygma."<sup>44</sup> Thus the researcher is still in the area of inference and not demonstration. The continuity is still something to be believed, not proved.

And the questions could be multiplied. Obviously there is yet much to be done and much to be accounted for in the Biblical record. One conclusion, however, is certain. The questions can only be raised, entertained, and tentatively solved by those who are appreciative of the nature of the Biblical documents, the complexity of the riddle they contain, and the earnestness of the men seeking answers. In addition, those desirous of raising questions and seeking solutions must be prepared to work with as well as constructively criticize the exe-

getical historical-critical method which has led scholarship thus far along the quest. Mere negative criticism of the method is as futile and ineffective today as it was in the last century. In order to dig deeply a man sharpens his blunted shovel; he does not throw it away. The history of this quest is a history of methodological as well as theological problems. In exegesis the two problem areas are inseparable. As a remark in the introduction indicated, a review of the quest of the historical Jesus provides at the same time a review of the development of Biblical research and its methodology. This method has developed; it was never revealed or discovered. The development, moreover, has been tedious; and progress has been the result of trial and error. Through tedious development and progress by trial and error the method which has gradually emerged as that most capable for critically analyzing and appreciating the textual, philological, literary, historical, and theological nature of the Scriptures is known in short as the historical-critical method. Through analysis defined by such subdisciplines as textual criticism, philological criticism, literary and form criticism, historical criticism, and a criticism (that is, an activity which Webster defines as "the art of judging with knowledge and propriety") of the theological content and intent of these documents, the Biblical student is equipped to examine the various facets of the Biblical message and the riddle which it contains.<sup>45</sup> Then —

<sup>45</sup> For a more extensive discussion of these subdisciplines of exegesis see John H. Elliott, "The Preacher and the Proclamation," *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, essays in honor of Richard R. Caemmerer on completion of 25 years as professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ed. Robert W. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), Ch. 7, pp. 99—130.

<sup>44</sup> Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus" [supra, n. 24], p. 30.

and only then—will he be in a position not only to listen to the conclusions of others but to arrive at conclusions of his own, not only to view some furrowed turf but to dig himself with sharpened shovel.

The open questions and unresolved issues evident in the historical Jesus research present not only the academic theologian but also the parish pastor with a challenge that many find exciting. Whether the church is up to it or not will much depend not only on her enthusiasm for the question but also on her theological and methodological ability to come to grips with the basic issues.

#### THE RIDDLE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS CHALLENGE TO THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

The history of research concerning the historical Jesus is a long, colorful, sometimes tedious, and often disappointing one. As Albert Schweitzer commented over 50 years ago, in its first stage, at least, it was a history full of hate as well as love. "There is no historical task," he said, "which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a *Life of Jesus*."<sup>46</sup> But no theological research and confrontation with God's holy Word is without its benefits. Today the world, and I do not mean only the theological world, would be infinitely poorer had such research never taken place. For despite all false presuppositions, all faulty exegesis, all erroneous conclusions, here we have the story of men struggling earnestly with the question of truth. Indeed Schweitzer did not hesitate to describe even the first rather disappointing stage of the quest as a "unique phenomenon in the mental and spiritual life of our time" and "the

greatest achievement of German theology."<sup>47</sup> Were he before his death at the age of 90 to have written a second installment of that quest's history, it is difficult to imagine in the light of recent exegetical gains and more worldwide interest in the subject that his praise would be diminished any.

For pastors of the church and students of the Holy Word there is still more specific significance to be found in this particular subject of theology. In tracing the history of men wrestling with the truth we learn again to appreciate and to learn from history. Theological progress, as any other kind of progress, a more profound appreciation of the nature and content of God's Word, and a more accurate understanding of the unique message of the world's reconciliation by God through Jesus Christ—all this is gained only in the slow course of time and under the perpetual guidance and direction of God's Holy Spirit. Each generation of scholars, each school, each individual makes his or its own unique contribution. Our task is to recognize that fact, to see progress being made, and to be thankful for it. Only this will preserve us from repeating the mistakes of our fathers and forefathers.

This is not to suggest that all change is progress. Many conclusions have amounted to regress rather than progress. But as one surveys the theological scene today and particularly the Biblical scene, one finds an output of energy, an excitement, and a devotion to the Word of God that augurs well for a future unparalleled in the history of the church. For this we can only urge ourselves and our people to say: *Te Deum laudamus*.

<sup>46</sup> Schweitzer [supra, n. 2], p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

Finally, and this is the most important point of all, it seems to me, from all this research of past and present we can gain a clearer knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and our relationship to Him, namely the kerygma and the bond of faith. Again, let us not be blind to the mistakes of this quest, both old and new. But can we not hope for this: that in seeing more clearly the radical character of the grace and judgment He has brought to this world we can understand more accurately what it means to be the liberated and reconciled community of the Last Day and what the risk of faith really entails? This is a realization

that must, if it is taken seriously, effect appreciable changes in our understanding of ourselves as well as in the execution of our theology and the responsibilities with which God has charged us.

If this abundant harvest of Biblical scholarship is to be converted to edifying courses on the church's table, then the most important task yet confronting exegetical specialists and parish pastors alike is not merely common acquaintance with advances in research but mutual aid in feeding the hungry and celebrating the goodness of the Giver.

St. Louis, Mo.

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