

JESUS CHRIST, REVELATION OF GOD

1. INTRODUCTION

When asked by the Greg to outline this seminar I wrote:

TST216 JESUS CHRIST, REVELATION OF GOD

In this seminar we will look closely at the person of Jesus. We will begin from the biblical accounts, and then go on to explore the development of the understanding of Jesus through the ages. This will lead to a discussion of the ways in which Jesus reveals the Trinity to us, in particular through the Paschal Mystery, and how this is foundational for our understanding of and relationship to God.

Having reflected further on what I plan to do I have come up with the following general aim for the seminar:

The students having studied the main lines of Catholic Christology already, this seminar seeks to deepen their understanding, to connect it to various aspects of contemporary discussion, to help them analyse various cultural expressions of the person and role of Jesus Christ, and to help them situate Christology within the wider field of theology, in particular focusing on the Paschal Mystery and the Trinity.

1.1. General Outline

Introduction

1. General introduction, methodology, bibliography, tasks. Brief intro to Historical Jesus studies for the following week (15/2)

Part 1: Jesus Studies

2. Contemporary Jesus studies: the 'liberals' (e.g. Lüdemann, Borg, Crossan) v. the 'conservatives' (e.g. Meier, Wright, Witherington, Dunn) (22/2)
3. More 'theological' presentations (e.g. O'Collins, Kasper, Benedict XVI) (1/3)

Part 2 – Jesus and Culture

4. The image of Christ: Jesus in art(8/3)
5. A film (possibly Jesus of Montreal) (15/3)
6. Jesus in film & popular culture (22/3)
7. Jesus in music and musicals (12/4)

Part 3. – Contemporary Theological Questions

8. The God of Jesus Christ: Christology and Trinity (19/4)
9. Christ Died for our Sins – the Paschal Mystery and the Doctrine of Atonement (26/4)
10. Jesus the Liberator: The challenges and insights of liberation, feminist & post colonial interpretations of Jesus. (3/5)
11. Christ and the faiths: Christology and Interreligious Dialogue (10/5)
12. Final concluding reflections (17/5)

The preparation work for each session will depend somewhat on the particular subject. However in general some reading material will be given the preceding week. You will be expected to read that which has been given and make some personal notes in order to facilitate discussion. I would also ask you choose one book from the bibliography that both interests you and takes you into territory you have not explored before, and

read that throughout the semester. Where relevant you should bring the insights of that book to bear on our discussion.

1.2. Elaboratum

“Describe and comment upon one ‘image’ of Jesus Christ”

The ‘image’ can come from any one source. It could be the image of Jesus in any ancient or modern writer (e.g. St. Anselm, St Thomas Aquinas, one of the 19th century ‘lives of Christ’, Karl Rahner). It could be the presentation of Christ by a particular contemporary ‘school of thought’ (e.g. Liberation theology, feminist theology, the ‘Jesus Seminar’). It could be a show or film that deals with Jesus (e.g. Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar, Jesus of Montreal). You might even want to try looking at how Jesus is presented in a particular school of art (e.g. eastern iconography, renaissance art), painting, or piece of music (e.g. Handel’s ‘Messiah’, Stainer’s ‘Crucifixion’)

In commenting on your chosen ‘image’ you may wish to address the following questions.

- What are the particular insights of the image?
- How ‘complete’ an image does it give – are there any important aspects of the Christian understanding of Jesus missing from the image?
- How faithful is it to the ‘mainstream’ Christian understanding of Jesus? Are there any aspects of it which genuinely go against the Christian tradition?¹
- Why did you choose this particular image? What is its particular appeal?
- How effective is this image in communicating who Jesus is to a contemporary audience?²

The essay shall be ten to fifteen pages long, and conform to the style norms below.

¹ Some approaches attempt to re-interpret the ancient language for a more contemporary audience. If this is the case, does the re-interpretation involve significant distortion?

² There are two questions here – how effective is the presentation in doing what it sets out to do, and how useful might it be to us in our presentation of Jesus?

The essay is to be handed in before the start of the summer exam session (i.e. by Tuesday 2nd June) if you wish to have it marked as part of that exam session.

1.2.1 Style

Essays should conform to Fr. Meynet's *Norme Tipografiche*. A rough summary of this is given below.³

Paragraphs should have the first line indented by 0.5cm. There should not normally be gaps between paragraphs except when you wish to indicate a separation between sections in a chapter without adding a new heading.

Font: Times New Roman

Size: Main text 14pt.

Block quotes and bibliography: 13pt

Footnotes: 12pt.

Margins – Top & bottom 40mm, left & right 30mm

Each page apart from the title page should have a header (13pt) with your name, the essay title (abbreviated if necessary) and the page number.

As this is only an essay, and not a thesis, all headings (if you wish to use them) should conform to Meynet's 'internal chapter divisions'⁴ – ie for first level divisions bold text with a 6 pt. gap afterwards, second level division in Italics, third division just plain text. Sections should be numbered 1,1.2., 2.3.1. etc.

Meynet requires double sided printing for theses. However this is not necessary for your essay – in fact I prefer single sided.

References should be clear, precise and unambiguous and should stick to a recognised convention. Meynet's modified Chicago system is a good convention to follow.

A bibliography of all books, articles and resources used in the writing of the essay should be provided. Each item should begin at the left hand edge (i.e. no indent), but if it extends beyond one line subsequent lines should be indented by 20mm. The list should be in alphabetical order, with each author identified by Surname in small caps, followed by initials separated by full stops (but not spaces)

³ MEYNET, *Norme Tipografiche per la compisizione dei testi con il computer* Roma 2007. These notes conform to Fr. Meynet's norms, and so can be used as a guide.

⁴ MEYNET, *Norme* 16-17

Attention will be paid to spelling and grammar, especially when these make the script difficult to comprehend.

1.2.2 Submission

Essays may be submitted in printed form either directly to me or addressed to me at

The Venerable English College,
Via di Monserrato 45,
00186 Roma.

They may be submitted electronically to tony.milner@dabnet.org. Ideally electronic submissions should be in PDF format as this ensures all fonts print correctly. If you submit in Word or RTF, make sure you embed fonts when saving, especially if you have used any fonts that are non standard. This includes Biblical fonts. I will always acknowledge receipt of electronic submissions, so if you do not get an acknowledgement it means something has gone wrong somewhere!

1.3. General Bibliography

This is a slightly eclectic mixture of key texts and my own library with some slightly random annotations. I don't expect you to read them all (I haven't read half of them myself!) but it gives you a good basis for research and future reference.

ALISON, J. *Knowing Jesus*. London: SPCK, 1993

Focuses principally on knowing Jesus as saviour, but from a Catholic perspective & using the insights of Rene Girard

BAINGENT, M. *The Jesus Papers: Exposing the Greatest Cover Up in History* London: Harper Collins, 2006.

"What if everything we have been told about the origins of Christianity is a lie? What if a small group had always known the truth and had kept it hidden... until now? What if there was incontrovertible truth that Jesus Christ survived the crucifixion?" You get the picture. The most recent in the Holy Blood Holy Grail/Da Vinci Code fantasy masquerading as scholarship. I picked up a second-hand copy if anyone wants a look...

BAKER, P. *Jesus of Nazareth: A New Look*. London: Janus ²2004

Always be wary of books subtitled "A New Look" and published by little known publishing houses, especially if the author send free copies to large numbers of people (in this case the members of General Synod). Just shows how a little knowledge is a dangerous thing...

VON BATLTHASAR, H.U. *Mysterium Paschale* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990

BARKER, M. *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith*. Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1996

A distinctly different approach – in some ways very radical, in others very conservative.

BAUCKHAM, R. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006

Gets very high praise from Gerry O'Collins

BAUGH, L. *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997

Baugh teaches at the Greg. This is based on his doctoral work and is well written and very interesting.

BENEDICT XVI *Jesus of Nazareth* New York: Doubleday, 2007

BORG, M. J. *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Surprising Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*. HarperCollins, 2008

An interesting and thought provoking volume by one of the foremost 'liberals'

- BOCKMUEHL, M. *This Jesus : Martyr, Lord, Messiah*. London: T&T Clark, 1994
"This book seeks to show that the Christ who emerges in the faith of the New Testament churches stands in a causal and organic continuity with Jesus of Nazareth."
- BROOKE, G. J. *The Birth of Jesus: Biblical and Theological Reflections* Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000
- BONHOEFFER, D. *Christology* HarperCollins, 1978
- BROWN, R.E. *The Birth of the Messiah* New York: Doubleday ²1993
The Death of the Messiah (2 vols.) New York: Doubleday 1994
- BURRIDGE, R. A., *Four Gospels one Jesus*, London: SPCK, 1994
A highly readable and yet scholarly book from the former dean of King's College which approaches the four gospels as 'portraits' of Jesus, using the traditional images of the evangelists as an interpretative key.
- BURGESS, A. *Man of Nazareth* London: Magnum, 1980
"The novel from which the acclaimed television production Jesus of Nazareth was drawn" I remember reading this not long after it was published and finding it quite moving. It is a sympathetic portrayal and well written, even if it takes some artistic license.
- BURNS, P.C. (ed.) *Jesus in Twentieth Century Literature, Art and Movies*, London: Continuum, 2007
An interesting collection of essays.
- CAMERON, R. (ed.) *The Apocryphal Jesus and Christian Origins* Semeia 49(1990)
- CHARLESWORTH, J.H., *The Historical Jesus: A Essential Guide*. Abingdon, Nashville, 2008.
While 'Essential' may be overstating it a bit (this is actually one in a series of so-called 'Essential Guides' so I don't blame Charlesworth), this is a first rate overview of the history, methods, purpose and results of recent Jesus studies
- CROSSAN, J. D. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* HarperSanFrancisco 1992
Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, HarperSanFrancisco 1995
Crossan is the de facto spokesperson for the somewhat controversial Jesus Seminar and these are two of his seminal works. Probably best

to start with the second one as it is both slightly more recent and a lot shorter!

- DOUGLAS, K. B., *The Black Christ* New York: Orbis, 1994
A scholarly study of the image of Christ in Black Theology
- DUNN, J. D. G. *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*. London: SCM³2003
Christianity in the making Volume 1: Jesus Remembered. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003
A substantial tome which is part of a larger project; the second volume Beginning from Jerusalem has now also been published.
- FINALDI, G. et. al. *The Image of Christ: The Catalogue of the Exhibition SEEING SALVATION*. London: National Gallery, 2000
- FITZMYER, J. *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers* Paulist Press 1991
- FREYNE, S. *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean : A new reading of the Jesus story*. London; New York: T&T Clark., 2004
- GREEN, J.B et. al. (eds.) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* Downers Grove: IVP, 1992
- GUNTON, C. *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*. Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988.
- HEDRICK, C.W. (ed), *The Historical Jesus and the Rejected Gospels* Semeia 44(1988)
- HENGEL, M. *Crucifixion* London: SCM, 1977
The Atonement London: SCM, 1981
The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ London: SCM, 2000
Martin Hengel produces meticulous, detailed yet succinct and relatively conservative analyses of historical questions around Christian origins.
- HICK, J. (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate* London: SCM, 1977
A collection of essays which cause an uproar at the time.
- ISHERWOOD, L *Introducing Feminist Chrsitologies* TPI, 2002
- JEREMIAS,, J. *New Testament Theology* London: SCM 1971
Originally intended as volume one of a larger project which was interrupted by his untimely death, it had the German subtitle The Proclamation of Jesus
The Parables of Jesus New York, Scribners, 1972

- JOHNSON, L.T., *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*. HarperCollins, New York, 1996
Not quite as negative as it sounds, at least when it comes to the more 'cautious' approaches and a very good essay on methodology.
- KASPER, W. *Jesus the Christ.*: Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1976
The God of Jesus Christ. London: SCM, 1983
- KLOPPENBORG, J. S. et al. (eds.) *Early Christianity, Q and Jesus* Semeia 55(1992)
- LEVINE, A. J. *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* New York: HarperCollins, 2007
Amy Jill Levine is a respected Jewish, feminist New Testament Scholar- quite a combination and quite a challenging book.
- LEWIS, A. E. *Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
Published after his death from cancer and partly written while he was suffering from it, this work has been very highly praised.
- MEIER, J. P. "Jesus" in Brown, et. al. (eds.) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990 pp. 1316-1328.
A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Yale University Press
Vol. I: The Roots of the Problem and the Person (1991)
Vol. II: Mentor, Message & Miracles (1994)
Vol. III: Companions & Competitors (2001)
Vol. IV :Law & Love (2009)
- MOLTMANN, J. *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, London, SCM, 1990
Jesus Christ for Today's World. London: SCM, 1994
- O'COLLINS, G., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*. Oxford: OUP, 1995
Jesus: A Portrait. London: DLT, 2008
A couple of Fr. O'Collins' many books on our subject. The former is perhaps his most 'textbook' like of recent offerings. The latter, his 50th book (!) is a more synthetic approach.
- O'DONNELL J., *The Mystery of the Triune God*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1988
John O'Donnell taught Trinity at the Greg when I was a student

- PORTER, S. E. *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*. London T&T Clark 2000
- PORTER, S. E. et al (eds.) *Images of Christ: Ancient and Modern* Sheffield Academic Press, 1997
Papers from a 1996 conference
Resurrection JSNTS 186, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999
Papers from a conference in Feb 1998
- RICE, A. *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana*.
A novelised telling of the early life of Christ by the former vampire novel writer who re-discovered her Catholicism.
- ROSS, S. *Marked*, Seabury, New York, 2005
This is a graphic novel based on the Gospel of Mark – a very unusual and thought provoking presentation.
- SCHILLEBEECKX, E. *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* London, Sheed & Ward, 1963
Jesus: An Experiment in Christology Seabury, 1979
Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord. Herder & Herder, 1983
- SCHMAUS, M. *Dogma 3: God and his Christ* London: Sheed & Ward, 1971
- SCHWEIZER, E. *Jesus* London: SCM, 1971
One of the earlier 'contemporary' serious attempts at looking at the relationship of the 'Jesus of history' to the 'Christ of faith' and its significance for theology. NB not Albert!!
- SOBRINO, J. *Jesus in Latin America* New York: Orbis, 1987
Sobrinio is one of the 'founding fathers' of Liberation Theology. He got into a bit of trouble with the CDF a couple of years ago for a couple of his later books which are more theologically radical.⁵
- WILSON, I: *Jesus: The Evidence: The latest Research and Discoveries investigated* New York: Harper Collins, 1996
A populist coffee-table style book, but a sincere and committed piece of work which veers a little towards the 'liberal' agenda but in fact largely leaves the reader to make up their own mind. Lots of pictures, maps & diagrams!

⁵ Cf. CDF *Notificazione Sulle Opere Del P. Jon Sobrino, S.I.: "Jesucristo Liberador. Lectura Histórico-Teológica De Jesús De Nazaret (Madrid, 1991) E "La Fe En Jesucristo. Ensayo Desde Las Víctimas" (San Salvador, 1999)* , 14.03.2007 and the accompanying explanatory note which says roughly: "we applaud Fr. Sobrinio's commitment to the poor and liberation, but his Christology is still dodgy and we have to point that out"

- WINTER, M. *The Atonement* Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1995
- WITHERINGTON, B. III, *What Have They Done with Jesus? Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History – Why We Can Trust the Bible.* HarperCollins 2006
- WRIGHT, N. T. *Jesus & The Victory of God* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997
The Resurrection of the Son of God, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003
These are Volumes II & III of his monumental Christian Origins and the Question of God project. (Vol I is entitled The New Testament and the People of God)
- WRIGHT, N. T – M. Borg *The Meaning of Jesus.* London, SPCK, 1999
A ‘conservative’ and a ‘liberal’ slug it out (in a friendly manner)

2. THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS⁶

2.1. Jesus of History/Christ of Faith

In a letter in the catholic newspapers a correspondent was upset by a BBC programme about the Christmas events which cast doubt on certain historical details in the Gospels - notably the correspondence of the birth of Jesus with the Census as recorded by St Luke. Whenever such questions come up many Christians and the media alike enter into 'Shock! Horror!' mode and yet these are not new ideas and have their origins in people examining the biblical texts from the point of view of the historian.⁷ This approach to the texts has its modern roots in the 18th century. The use of the historical sciences to examine the evidence about Jesus is often referred to as the 'quest for the historical Jesus'.

Historically this quest has been divided into three phases, and although there are problems with this we will follow this basic outline.

2.2. The 'Old Quest'

This period covers the 18th and 19th centuries, from H.S. Reimarus (1694–1768) to Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). It is characterised by a basically 'liberal' agenda and although it raised many questions that arguably still have not been answered, nevertheless it had significant weaknesses. Schweitzer in fact put his finger on the problem in his somewhat scathing overview of earlier approaches:

it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in Jesus, each individual created Him in accordance with his own character⁸

George Tyrrell (1861-1909), writing specifically about Harnack's efforts, puts the dangers inherent in the quest in more biting terms.

the Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.⁹

⁶ A more comprehensive guide can be found in CHARLESWORTH *The Historical Jesus*

⁷ Quirinius was governor of Syria in AD 6-7, some 10 years after the birth of Jesus, and there is no external evidence for a world-wide census anyway. For more details see J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke, 1-IX* New York: Doubleday, 1981 p.393

⁸ *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. London: A & C Black, ²1936, p. 4, quoted in O'Collins *Christology* p. 221.

⁹ *Christianity at the Crossroads* London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909. p. 44

2.3. The 'New Quest'

One consequence of the 'failure' of the first quest was a certain scepticism and a retreat into either fundamentalism, or, as with Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1986) and others, A kind of liberal fideism. Both see the quest as illegitimate - the former because it was not permissible to challenge the infallible word of God found in the scriptures, and the latter because to ask such questions is to try to base faith in Jesus on a rational quest.

Some scholars rejected both these lines of argument, and this led to the 'new quest'. The 'new quest' bears some of the hallmarks of the old quest - for example a tendency to rule out the miraculous, but its objective is less the undermining and more the supporting of Christian faith. Most famous, although not necessarily most typical, is J. Jeremias, whose basic methodology focussed on what Jesus said and sought, by painstaking linguistic analysis and form critical reconstruction, to get at the 'true words' of Jesus. Although - and perhaps because - he does not give a complete picture, many of his results are still regarded as valid by many today. The 'new quest' continues to survive today, and arguably the Jesus Seminar stands in this tradition.

2.4. The 'Third Quest'

The revival of 'Jesus Studies' in the 80s is generally referred to as the 'third quest', although in fact it consists of a number of different approaches. The following three examples illustrate the diversity.

2.4.1 *The Jesus Seminar*

Most famously among these is the Jesus Seminar – from which key figures are Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg and the founder Robert Funk. The Jesus seminar is characterised by a number of features. (i) a scepticism about the historical accuracy of the canonical gospels (ii) a belief that from the gospels and from many extra-canonical sources a picture of the 'real Jesus' can be constructed and (iii) this picture challenges traditional Christian doctrine and therefore that Doctrine is going to have to change. Luke Timothy Johnson doe a fairly comprehensive demolition job on this in *The Real Jesus*. Another figure not from the Jesus Seminar but with similar presuppositions is Gerd Lüdemann (see below).

2.4.2 *A Marginal Jew*

Also standing within this ‘third quest’ is the Catholic priest and biblical scholar John Meier. Meier is still working on his monumental work on the subject entitled *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, of which Four volumes have been now published and he still has not finished! In his article in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* Meier makes an important point concerning the nature of the quest. He points out that the ‘historical Jesus’ - “that Jesus who is knowable or recoverable by the means of modern historical-critical research”- and the ‘Real Jesus’ - the Jesus who actually lived in the 1st century AD - are not the same thing. The ‘historical Jesus’ is only “a fragmentary, tentative portrait painted by modern scholars”.¹⁰ Is the ‘quest for the historical Jesus’ not then a rather pointless task? Meier has given a number of reasons why this is not the case.

In his lectures to the clergy of Arundel and Brighton in October 1997, Meier made the point that down the ages Christ has always been the one Christ but Christology – the language used to explain who Christ is and what he does – changes depending on the culture in which it is expressed.

Our own age and culture is marked by a critical historical consciousness, where questions of ‘what really happened’ are regarded as not only important questions, but as foundational for other levels of truth. One could possibly contest this opinion, or at least remark that it is primarily a ‘western’ preoccupation. But it is at least true of a part of our culture, and if we believe that Christ is relevant to all cultures then we must presume that the desire to apply this set of criteria to our understanding of Christ is not in itself illegitimate.

Meier, in fact, asserted that a sober historical approach is not a threat to our understanding of Christ but rather a great aid. He gave five reasons.

(I) On occasions, the defence of the divinity of Christ can overshadow his humanity, which can be disastrous for our understanding of salvation “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed”.¹¹ An historical approach tends to draw attention to the humanity of Jesus.

¹⁰ “Jesus” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* p. 1317

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzen *Letter To Cledonius*

(II) It reminds us that the eternal word assumed a particular individual humanity – specifically a first century Jew. Jesus full humanity also implies full Jewishness – something which is not merely incidental. In the words of St John, he ‘pitched his tent among us’. This gives full weight to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

(III) The specific, time bound Jewish concreteness of Jesus prevents us turning Jesus into a myth. Faith in Christ is a confrontation with the real.

(IV) The historical approach prevents us from ‘domesticating’ Christ – for it presents us with an embarrassing, non-conformist Jesus who associated with outsiders.

(V) The historical Jesus is not easily co-opted to political ideologies

Meier concludes that the historical Jesus is not ‘relevant’ – in the sense that he does not fit easily into our ideas of relevance. He is always ‘other’ – does not fit our agenda and hence calls our agenda into question.¹²

Meier also makes the point that the reconstructed ‘historical Jesus’ is not a replacement for the Christ of Faith, nor a complete presentation of the real Jesus.

The historical Jesus is not the real Jesus, but only a fragmentary hypothetical reconstruction of him by modern means of research¹³

The results of the search are not Christology or Theology but rather part of the prolegomena to these.

2.4.3 *Jesus Remembered*

The first volume of James Dunn’s project *Christianity in the Making* is entitled *Jesus Remembered*. This is a very deliberate choice of title. Dunn takes a small but deliberate step back from the attempt to construct a ‘historical Jesus’ and rather argues that what we can reconstruct from the narratives and other material of the NT is the memory of Jesus and its development, arguing that this memory is a reflection of the impact of the ‘Real Jesus’ – both as experienced by his followers and as experienced as

¹² These details are extracted from my notes on MEIER’S lecture on 28 October 1997.

¹³ *A Marginal Jew* I p. 31

the risen Lord by the early Church. In doing so Dunn is more methodologically aware than the vast majority of the other practitioners in this field. Indeed Dunn invokes Lonergan as a guide.¹⁴

2.5. Concluding Remarks

There are two different sets of questions behind all this work. The first is what can historical study of Jesus tell us? The diversity of results so far would seem to call for a little caution in this area. The second – and less appreciated – question is what is the theological significance of the project? What is the relationship between history, theology and faith? Some response to this question are given below.

3. THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

3.1 Rudolph Bultmann: Christ before Jesus

The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself. For New Testament theology consists in the unfolding of those ideas by means of which Christian faith makes sure of its own object, basis, and consequences. But Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma; i.e., a kerygma proclaiming Jesus Christ-specifically Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen One--to be God's eschatological act of salvation. He was first so proclaimed in the kerygma of the earliest Church, not in the message of the historical Jesus, even though that Church frequently introduced into its account of Jesus' message, motifs of its own proclamation. Thus, theological thinking--the theology of the New Testament--begins with the *kerygma* of the earliest Church and not before. But the fact that Jesus had appeared and the message which he had proclaimed were, of course, among its historical presuppositions; and for this reason Jesus' message cannot be omitted from the delineation of New Testament theology.¹⁵

At first sight this does not seem so dissimilar to the statement of Meier, but Bultmann's two volume *Theology of the New Testament* contains a mere 30 pages on the message of Jesus compared to Meier's two volumes (about 1500) pages. Clearly the two are attempting different tasks, but Bultmann would have denied the legitimacy – or at least the usefulness – of Meier's approach.

Paul proclaims the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord; that is, his kerygma requires only the 'that' of the life of Jesus and the fact of his crucifixion. He does not hold before his hearer's eyes a portrait of Jesus the human person, apart from

¹⁴ *Jesus Remembered* 100-101

¹⁵ R. BULTMANN *New Testament Theology* Vol. 1 (SCM, London, 1952) p. 3

the cross (Gal. 3: I), and the cross is not regarded from a biographical standpoint but as saving event. The obedience and self-emptying of Christ of which he speaks (Phil. 2: 6-9; Rom. 15: 3; z Cor. 8: g) are attitudes of the pre-existent and not of the historical Jesus ... the decisive thing is simply the 'that'.¹⁶

For Bultmann it is only important for the Christian proclamation *that* Jesus lived and was crucified. The *what* of his life is not in itself important. It only becomes important in as much as it is picked up by the early Christian community and made part of the proclamation. Fergusson sums up Bultmann's position as follows

The knowledge we have of the historical Jesus tends to be confined to his characteristic utterances, and these do not belong to the essence of Christianity¹⁷

O'Collins comments

But what would a simple 'that' mean apart from the 'what'! Jesus would be reduced to mere cipher. Why should we find the saving event in the crucifixion of someone about whom we refuse as believers and theologians to 'know' anything further? If no historical detail of Jesus' story matters other than his sheer existence and crucifixion, why should we not look for the saving event in one of the thousands of others who died at the hands of the Romans by this sadistic form of execution?

Bultmann's approach of discounting the relevance of 'historical Jesus' is a consequence in part of his background, which is a mix of liberal Protestantism and existentialism. In that model, faith is a personal, immediate response to a message (the kerygma), an existential leap of faith which the human being can only make with the help of God. Thus any attempt to 'prove' the content of that faith actually undermines faith.

The tension between the Jesus of History and the Christ of faith has also been resolved in the opposite direction.

3.2 Gerd Lüdemann: Jesus before Christ

I pick Lüdemann because he represents an extreme in a common line of thought which sees the faith expressions about Jesus in the New Testament

¹⁶ R. BULTMANN "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus" in C. BRAATEN & R. HARRISVILLE (eds.) *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* Abingdon Press 1964 p. 20 Quoted from G. O'COLLINS *Christology* p. 6. The identical quotation is found in J. MACQUARRIE *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (SCM, London, 1991) pp. 349 ff.

¹⁷ D. FERGUSSON *Bultmann* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1992) p. 79

and beyond as accretions which need to be stripped away so that we can gain access to the ‘real’ Jesus who is the object of our faith.

So the fact remains that there are thousands of Christs, i.e. human pictures of a super-earthly Son of God, but only one Jesus. What has largely governed the preaching of the church in the last two thousand years has not been what this Jesus thought, wanted and did, but what was thought about him after his death and done in his name. But the divinised Christ has little to do with Jesus. Many Christians increasingly suspect that today, and many church functionaries have meanwhile become aware of it again. Therefore the statement that ‘the skeleton in the closet of the church is the risen Jesus’ holds without qualification. We must turn away from this illusion in order to encounter Jesus in honest historical reconstruction and thus be given an opportunity for meaningful life in the third millennium as well.¹⁸

The question is, why should we bother if Jesus was nothing more than a man? Even if he was a man in whom “an I shines out which claims an unconditional authority”.¹⁹ And can we build faith on a hypothetical reconstruction? Is Lüdemann not rather optimistic about what can be achieved by historical reconstruction? He himself states that about 85% of the reported sayings of Jesus are later additions.²⁰

Lüdemann’s approach is somewhat extreme, but it serves to illustrate a certain trend in some studies of Christ. And it has already been noted that reconstructions of the historical Jesus have a tendency to make Christ in their own image. It does, however, also present us of a reminder that the figure of Jesus should remain a challenge to the Church.

3.3 John Hick: Myth or Reality?

In fairness to Hick I use his name here as a bit of a banner. Hick is (in)famous for being the editor of a book entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate*²¹ the basic thesis of which is that while the language of incarnation – God becoming man – has a function in religious language it is

¹⁸ *The Unholy in Holy Scripture* (SCM, London, 1996) p. 131f. The quotation is from C. TÜRCKE “Die Leiche im Keller. Christentum und ethischer Minmalkonsens heute” in *Das Christentum am Ende der Moderne* (1996)

¹⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 130. The irony here is his use of a particularly Johannine image after he has singled out John as one who particularly badly distorts Jesus message by making it anti-Judaic.

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 131

²¹ (London, SCM, 1977)

no longer possible to understand this in a 'metaphysical' way. So Hick states in his preface

The writers of this book are convinced that another major theological development is called for in this last part of the twentieth century. The need arises from growing knowledge of Christian origins, and involves a recognition that Jesus was (as he is presented in Acts 2.21) 'a man approved by God' for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us. This recognition is called for in the interests of truth; but it also has increasingly important practical implications for our relationship to the peoples of the other great world religions.²²

The question which one might raise here is if we abandon any notion of 'reality' in our understanding of incarnation, are we left with anything more than ideology? Sure, it solves the problems associated with the claims of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, but at what cost?

²² *Op. cit.* p. ix