

THE NEW QUEST AND CHRISTOLOGY

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Contemporary discussion of both biblical and constructive Christology is in turmoil. A primary cause for this turmoil is the modern sensitivity to the variety of theological voices that can be heard in Scripture. This variety raises several significant questions. What kind of harmony can one find among these voices regarding the nature and meaning of Jesus Christ? Are there ways of judging the relative validity of the various interpretations of Christ? Above all, what kind of precedent or guidance for contemporary Christological reflection does the presence of this diversity within Scripture present?

A contemporary school of thought that bears significant promise for dealing with this problem of the diversity of Christologies in Scripture is the "New Quest for the Historical Jesus."¹ The purpose of this essay is to assess the importance of this movement by surveying its essential characteristics and potential contributions. As part of this assessment, a critique of two significant problems of the New Quest will appear at the end of the essay.

¹The primary representatives of the "New Quest" on the Continent are Ernst Käsemann, Günther Bornkamm, Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, and Hans Conzelmann. In the United States one would add Norman Perrin, James M. Robinson, and J. P. Mackey. As representatives of what might be called the "left-wing" of the Quest one would add Schubert Ogden, Van Harvey, and Herbert Braun.

THE ORIGINAL QUEST
AS BACKGROUND TO THE NEW QUEST

To understand and appreciate the New Quest for the historical Jesus, it is necessary to see it in its relationship to the development and failure of the Original Quest. The title "Quest for the Historical Jesus" actually comes from the subtitle of the definitive overview of the Original Quest, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* by Albert Schweitzer.² As suggested by this title, the Original Quest is normally considered to have started with the posthumous publication by G. E. Lessing of some fragments of manuscripts by H. S. Reimarus,³ a professor of oriental languages at a *Gymnasium* in Hamburg. The importance of these fragments, especially the sixth and seventh, is that they pointed out in an unavoidable fashion some of the inconsistencies of the various Gospels, thereby opening the door to attempts at historical criticism and interpretation. When this was supplemented by the growing dominance of radical "naturalistic" explanations of the miracle narratives and a growing tide of anti-clericalism, there was an explosive growth of interest in the attempt to construct a "historical" picture of Jesus of Nazareth that could be set over against the "dogmatic" Christ. The majority of the representatives of the Original Quest were Enlightenment rationalists, who tended to produce a picture of Jesus as an Enlightenment gentleman, or Kantian moralists, who produced a Jesus who embodied the Categorical Imperative. There were some Romanticist interpreters as well who "found" the historical Jesus to be the original Rousseau.

There were three significant figures who rejected or helped discredit these early formulations of the Original Quest. First, David F. Strauss⁴ discounted both the traditional supernaturalist understanding of the Bible and the rationalistic interpretations of the gospel accounts by claiming that both these views missed the real nature of the gospel material. In their place he introduced the view that the majority of the gospel material—especially the miracles—were not historical accounts, but myth—by which he meant a narrative giving expression to religious concepts. While this understanding of the Gospels as myth is not without its problems, it does signal a growing awareness that there was a difference between the purpose and nature of the gospel narratives and the nature of nineteenth century historiography.

The second significant figure, usually credited with signaling the failure of the Original Quest, is Schweitzer himself. Schweitzer definitively pointed

²Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

³H. S. Reimarus, *Fragments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

⁴D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

out that the representatives of the Original Quest were “discovering” in Jesus what they were already predisposed to see.⁵ The primary solution proposed by Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss⁶ was to put Jesus back into what they considered to be his original context—Jewish Apocalypticism—and interpret him in accordance with that context. In essence, they agreed with the Original Quest about the need to get to the “Historical Jesus.” They simply called for more rigorous historical integrity in going about this task.

Whereas the first two critics of the Original Quest tended to endorse and radicalize the critique of the dogmatic understanding of Christ in Scripture and tradition, the third critic, Martin Kähler,⁷ sought to affirm central features of the dogmatic tradition. It was Kähler who drew the significant distinction between the “historical” Jesus and the “historic” biblical Christ. That is, he distinguished between the picture of Jesus accessible to scientific reconstruction and the preaching of the church that proclaimed the *significance* of Jesus. In light of this distinction Kähler rejected the main thesis of the Original Quest that one should strip the dogmatic interpretation from the historical Jesus so that the real impact of Jesus could be felt and that one should live the religion *of* Jesus instead of being led astray into the later accretions of the religion *about* Jesus. Kähler argues that revelation consisted supremely of the Christological picture that is ascribed to Jesus, and not just of those events of Jesus’ life that can be historically treated. The key point is that Kähler’s means of defending the core of traditional Christological claims was to seek refuge from the liberal life-of-Jesus research by fleeing to the kerygmatic Christ and affirming that as the main content of the Christian revelation.

THE IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND TO THE NEW QUEST

A “reversal” of Kähler’s position, exemplified in Bultmann,⁸ provided the immediate background for the New Quest. Essentially, this reversal consisted of the fact that whereas Kähler turned to the historic Christ to counteract the liberal usage of the historical Jesus, Bultmann used the affirmation that the real object of faith was the kerygmatic Christ to assert that any historical connections between this Christ and the historical Jesus were unimportant to

⁵Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 312.

⁶Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁷Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). N. B. Kähler actually wrote before Schweitzer, but gained influence after Schweitzer.

⁸Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964) 18.

Christian faith. Within this perspective, those who have desired to defend such a connection and its resulting affirmations expressed in traditional Christological claims have had to turn to a reconsideration of the nature and importance of the historical Jesus.

There were three influential streams of thought that coalesced in Bultmann and allowed him to make such a unique use of the position of Kähler. First, there was the work on form criticism,⁹ which continued and methodologically sharpened the insight of Strauss that the Gospels were not primarily historical records. The guiding principle of form criticism is that one can explain the alterations in the original tradition (evident in conflicting reports in the Gospels) by relating them to a situation in the early Church that would have been conducive to their formulation. The primary result of this analysis was to emphasize that much that appeared to be merely a record of the historical Jesus was really part of the kerygmatic proclamation concerning the Christ.

The second influence was the work of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.¹⁰ This movement represented a continuation of the emphasis of Schweitzer that Jesus (and the whole New Testament) should be seen within his original environment. The primary contribution of these scholars was to point out parallels between the New Testament and other Near Eastern and Hellenistic religions. One assumption of their method was that some of these parallels might reflect "foreign" accretions on the original life and teachings of Jesus. The result of this type of approach was to add doubt to any possibility of getting back to a historical Jesus at all.

The final influence was dialectical theology.¹¹ The primary principle at work here was a redefinition of faith that denied faith was anything like belief in a historical event—which could only exist in degrees of probability—and asserted instead that faith was a radical acceptance of the Word of God apart from anything that could be considered "support." Indeed, to look for support was considered contradictory to true faith. Thus, Bultmann could disparage those who felt they had to go back and prove that the historical Jesus really claimed to be the Son of God, or that the grave was really empty, as committing the sin of seeking to "justify" their faith, for "faith does not at all arise from the acceptance of historical facts."¹²

⁹Rudolf Bultmann, *Form Criticism* (New York: Willett Clark and Co, 1934).

¹⁰R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

¹¹See discussion on Bultmann's contribution to dialectical theology in Van Harvey, *The Historian and The Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 139-146.

¹²R. Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. C. Braaten and R. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964) 25.

Through his unique blend of these influences, Bultmann was able to use Kähler's distinction between the historical Jesus and the historic Christ in a manner quite different than Kähler had. In Bultmann's view the historical Jesus was a prophetic figure who viewed salvation as a promised future event to which he bore witness. By contrast, Paul and the rest of the early Church proclaimed the historic Christ as the divine Bringer of that salvation.¹³ While Jesus' actions may have implied a Christology like that of Paul,¹⁴ there is no *material* continuity between the message and character of Jesus and the proclaimed historic Christ. The most one can say is *that* the man Jesus came to function as the historic Christ for the Church, not *what* it was about the man Jesus that made this possible.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE NEW QUEST

The primary motivation for the New Quest was an uneasiness about Bultmann's position that the establishment of a material continuity between the historical Jesus and the historic Christ was neither possible nor necessary.¹⁵ In the essay generally regarded as the starting point of the New Quest, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus,"¹⁶ Ernst Käsemann emphatically pointed out the danger of the denial of any material continuity between the historical Jesus and the historic Christ: Docetism. As he phrased it later, one would be "superimposing the predication 'Christian' on an understanding of existence and of the world, in which Jesus acts merely as the occasioner and Christ merely as the mythological cipher."¹⁷ The key issue for Käsemann and the other representatives of the New Quest was to establish that the proclamation of the exalted Lord by the Church had a *material* continuity with the actions and teachings of the historical Jesus.

As Käsemann himself pointed out,¹⁸ the first prerequisite to this task was the establishment of a method for distinguishing with some degree of relia-

¹³Ibid., 16.

¹⁴Ibid., 28.

¹⁵For a discussion of Bultmann's similarities and possible contributions to the New Quest see relevant sections in J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1979) and Schubert Ogden, "How New is the New Quest," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*.

¹⁶Käsemann, "The Problem," 18. N. B. Nils Dahl's essay "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *The Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), was written before Käsemann, but was in Norwegian rather than German and thus its impact was delayed until after Käsemann.

¹⁷Käsemann, "Blind Alleys in the 'Jesus of History' Controversy," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 44.

¹⁸Ibid., 46.

bility between that in the gospel narratives which can be considered as going back to the historical Jesus and that which reflects the kerygma of the early Church. This was undertaken through a further refinement of the methods of form criticism and the establishment of adequate histories of the various synoptic traditions through redaction critical studies.

The best summary of the method used, in one form or another, by the various representatives of the New Quest is that of Norman Perrin in his book *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus*.¹⁹ As he shows, the first step in attempting to reconstruct any particular teaching of Jesus is to study its tradition history—tracing it through the various Gospels, etc.—to determine the earliest form of the saying or recorded event in the tradition.

Next, one must decide if that saying or recorded event is of such a nature that it should be attributed to the early Church or to the historical Jesus. Since the concern is to have the highest degree of certainty possible, Perrin notes, “the burden of proof will be upon the claim to authenticity.”²⁰ To make this decision one must utilize the now famous *criterion of dissimilarity*. This criterion mandates that only those aspects of the saying or recorded event that can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church can be considered authentic. This criterion is particularly effective where it can be shown that the original position was changed by the early Church in a manner that stressed distinctiveness from Judaism. The result of applying this criterion is that one can arrive at a core of sayings and activities that can be attributed with a relatively high degree of probability to the historical Jesus. Usually included in this core are Jesus’ critique of the Jewish law, his activity of eating and drinking with sinners, his message of the present activity of the Kingdom of God as an expression of a gracious yet demanding God, and his death as a logical culmination of his ministry.²¹

The criterion of dissimilarity thus is the key to isolating the “kernel” of historical knowledge we can have about Jesus. However, this in itself is not enough if the task is to show the continuity between the teachings and actions of Jesus and the teachings about Jesus. As Perrin summarizes in his “*criterion of coherence*,” having established the core material by the criterion of dissimilarity, one can return and accept the material from the earliest strata of the tradition that is coherent with that core. While not all representatives of the New Quest verbalize this criterion as part of their methodology,²² it is implicit

¹⁹Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 38-45.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 39.

²¹E.g., Käsemann, “Blind Alleys,” 64. See Dahl, *The Crucified Messiah*, 13, 72 for emphasis on the death as basis for historical reconstruction.

²²See Leander Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 32-33 for critique of the “tyranny of the negative” in some of the New Questers.

precisely at that point where they start pointing out the areas of continuity between the teachings and activities of Jesus and the proclamation of the church.

Perrin also mentions a "*criterion of multiple attestation*," although, as he himself admits, it is less widely accepted than the previous two and is less fruitful in the isolation of authentic sayings. At best, it can be helpful in analyzing the core material separated out by the previous two criteria in order to suggest the main motifs of Jesus' message.

One other methodological consideration about the New Quest that is of importance to our study regards the attempts to investigate the "self-consciousness" of Jesus. One of Bultmann's primary criticisms of the Original Quest was that its supporters were not scientifically rigorous enough and tended to engage in unwarranted speculation about the self-consciousness of Jesus; for example, chapters were often devoted to the question of Jesus' attitude toward his impending death, etc. According to Bultmann, such knowledge of Jesus' subjective states of mind is unavailable, and this is especially true in regard to Jesus' attitude toward his death.²³ The most Bultmann would allow is that one can determine Jesus' basic existential self-understanding from his message. When we turn to the New Quest, there is likewise a disdain for "biographical" interest in the subjective attitudes of Jesus.²⁴ And yet, as Bultmann correctly noticed,²⁵ the members of the New Quest are not content with a mere existential self-understanding. While there is no unanimity of opinion as to the details of method at this point, Gerhard Ebeling could be taken as being characteristic when he argues that no historian can completely banish psychological considerations from his or her reconstructive activities, for a person's message does imply something about the nature and self-understanding of the person under consideration.²⁶ While one must avoid obsession with idle details such as (for Ebeling) Jesus' attitude toward his death, one can at least assume that Jesus' proclamation of the nature of faith does carry implications as to his own faith. For our purposes, the main point is the willingness to engage in restrained inferences about the claims and self-understanding of Jesus from his message and actions.

RESULTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW QUEST

As we turn now from considerations of the methodology of the New Quest to an overview of the main results, it should be remembered that its main goal was to establish a continuity between the teachings and actions of the historical

²³Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma," 23.

²⁴For example, Käsemann, "The Problem," 22.

²⁵Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma," 31-32.

²⁶Gerhard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 124-130.

Jesus and the proclamation of the Church. As Käsemann points out, this continuity was not without variation and change. Rather, there is a dialectical relationship between continuity and discontinuity wherein a particular trend can nonetheless be seen to be working itself out among the various New Testament traditions.²⁷ Members of the New Quest have emphasized three focal points of such continuity.

The first focal point centers on the issue of eschatology. Bultmann had attributed the shift from futurist eschatology to realized eschatology to the early Church rather than to Jesus.²⁸ Such a view would obviously place a major break between the message of Jesus and that of the Church. Bornkamm sets the tone for the New Quest in maintaining that this shift of eschatologies took place not between Jesus and Paul, but between John the Baptist and Jesus.²⁹ Accordingly, Bornkamm devotes the last chapter of his life of Jesus to a study of the development in the Church's kerygma of this new position of Jesus. Similar points can be found in Käsemann.³⁰

Käsemann expresses the second focal point of continuity when he states that it is not enough to show Jesus was the First Cause of the Church's kerygma; there must be a *material* continuity between the message of Jesus and that of the Church's kerygma.³¹ In our discussion of the criterion of dissimilarity, we already noted the "core" of the teachings and actions ascribed to the historical Jesus by the New Quest. The main point of Käsemann's initial essay is to claim that these central emphases of the historical Jesus can be found in the kerygma of the Church as well.³² On a slightly different slant, Fuchs develops the claim that the message of Jesus is consistently interpreted against the background of his actions. Thus when Jesus' disciples interpreted his message in light of the definitive actions of the passion, they were engaging in a practice that was in keeping with Jesus' own practice.³³ In yet another approach, Ebeling devotes an extensive essay to explicating Jesus' understanding of faith and demonstrating a continuity with the explication of faith by the early Church, especially Paul.³⁴

²⁷Käsemann, "Blind Alleys," 39.

²⁸R. Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) 200-201, 316.

²⁹Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, Harper and Row, 1960) 51, 62-63.

³⁰Käsemann, "The Problem," 43.

³¹Käsemann, "Blind Alleys," 45.

³²Käsemann, "The Problem," 44-45.

³³Ernst Fuchs, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (Naperville IL: Alec Allenson, 1964) 11-31.

³⁴G. Ebeling, "Jesus and Faith," in *Worth and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1963) 201-246.

The third and most important area for establishing a continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ lies in the question of whether or not Jesus claimed the kind of ultimate authority ascribed to him by such titles as Son of God. The members of the New Quest did not engage in the questionable traditional attempts to establish the historical validity of Jesus' use of the various titles.³⁵ Rather they attempted to show that there was an implicit Christology in Jesus' authoritative teachings and actions which was then explicated by the early Church using the titles and adjectives available to them in their cultural setting—not without “stretching” the original meanings of many of these, however. Bornkamm is a classic example of this approach, which could be summarized in this way: According to the most reliable review of the New Testament sources, the picture of Jesus that emerges is of a man whose preaching and deeds constitute an extraordinary unity. He proclaimed the coming Kingdom of God; he taught with relevance, simplicity, and power concerning the will of God and the forgiveness of sins; and he associated with the outcasts of society, with tax gatherers and harlots. Infusing all of this is a remarkable directness and authority that set Jesus quite apart from anything which has preceded him or can be found in his Jewish contemporaries. The essence of this authority is the fact that Jesus was able to make the reality of God a present reality to his disciples. For Bornkamm, “This is the essential mystery of Jesus.”³⁶

A similar argument can be found in Conzelmann, who writes that Jesus' proclamation of salvation is so closely tied to his own person that his hearer's decision for or against Jesus is, in effect, a decision for or against the Kingdom of God.³⁷ Likewise, Ebeling argues that Jesus' uniqueness lies in a call to faith, which has been uniquely realized in Jesus' own person and obedience to the will of God. To share in Jesus' call is thus to share in his person.³⁸ Finally, Fuchs, having made Jesus' actions definitive for understanding his teachings, asserts that the demand of the kerygma is “simply the echo of the decision which Jesus himself made.”³⁹ In all of this, the main point is that the later Christological affirmations of the Church were explications of the unique authority implicit in Jesus' acts and teachings.

There is one other aspect of the work of the New Quest that is relevant to our considerations: its understanding of the relation of faith to historical in-

³⁵For example, Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

³⁶Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 62.

³⁷Conzelmann, “The Method of the ‘Life of Jesus Research’,” in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, 63-68.

³⁸G. Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 56.

³⁹Fuchs, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” 157.

vestigation. It will be remembered that Bultmann had held that any attempt to relate the historical Jesus and the Christ of the kerygma was doomed to failure and was an expression of an illegitimate desire to "validate" a faith decision. This position is explicitly denied by the New Quest. For example, Käsemann categorically denies that he is trying to verify the kerygma historically. Rather, his concern is to find out "whether the earthly Jesus is to be taken as the criterion of the kerygma and, if so, to what extent."⁴⁰ In essence, the purpose of the New Quest is to make sure that the kerygma to which we are called to respond in faith is the legitimate kerygma that is continuous with Jesus and not a falsification thereof. Such a determination does not render faith superfluous; it merely determines its true object.

There is one area, however, where the representatives of the New Quest endorse Bultmann's concern about illegitimate attempts to ground faith. This is in regard to the resurrection. Almost to a man they agree that prolonged consideration of the historical nature of the resurrection is an illegitimate attempt to seek a "basis" for faith in Jesus as the Christ. Also, they are afraid that too much emphasis on the resurrection will destroy the continuity between Jesus and the kerygma they are seeking to demonstrate.⁴¹ For them, "The faith of the days after Easter knows itself to be nothing else but the right understanding of the Jesus of the days before Easter."⁴² The real purpose of the resurrection is to express confidence that Jesus' understanding is one that has eternal significance.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE NEW QUEST TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY

We come now to the question of how the work of the New Quest just summarized can be of help in dealing with the problem of the diversity of theological voices in the New Testament and, thereby, provide some direction out of the present theological turmoil. As might be expected, the answer to this question will focus on the primary concern of the New Quest to demonstrate a continuity between the message of Jesus and the kerygma of the (biblical) Church.

There are several important assumptions that lie behind this concern. Among the more important is the frank acceptance of the diverse theological voices in the New Testament. This diversity is recognized at two levels. First,

⁴⁰Käsemann, "Blind Alleys," 30, 47.

⁴¹Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, 62.

⁴²Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 302.

there is the crucial distinction between Jesus' own understanding of his nature and mission and the Christological understandings proclaimed by the post-Easter Church. Second, there is the acceptance of a diversity of Christological understandings even within the early Church—for example, Spirit Christology, Divine Man Christology, etc. The members of the New Quest do not assume that the early Church merely repeated Jesus' teachings unchanged. Neither do they assume that the early Church spoke with a single voice. They accept the contemporary problem of diversity within the New Testament in its most pressing form.

The contribution they make within this context is to provide an answer to the pressing question of criteria. Given the diversity within the New Testament, how can one either evaluate the relative legitimacy of the various approaches or find standards for constructing a contemporary Christology? The members of the New Quest have provided a model that accepts the ultimacy of the revelation presented in life, teachings, and fate of Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time, they recognize that we only have this revelation in and through its theological appropriation by the early Church. Accordingly, they have developed a sophisticated method for interrogating the theologically motivated accounts of the New Testament to determine as reliably as possible the events and teachings of Jesus that spawned them. While one might want to refine the method at particular points or argue individual applications of it, its basic intent seems legitimate.

However, simply to establish a reasonably reliable picture of Jesus' life and teachings does not yet answer the crucial questions of Christology, unless these teachings include an explicit Christology themselves. According to the New Quest, they do not. Jesus did not so much proclaim a Christology as enact one. The theoretical explication of this lived Christology was a task that fell to the early Church. The diversity of expressions of Christology in the early Church was a result of the diversity of contexts within which the meaning of Christ was proclaimed.

This nuanced understanding of how New Testament Christologies were developed provides the method for evaluating and relating them. The individual kerygmatic Christologies must be judged in terms of their adequacy of expressing, within their context, the implicit Christology of Jesus' life, teachings, and fate. Contrastingly, the depth of the meaning of this implicit Christology will be found only by noting its various explications. The lessons learned from such investigations can then be guides for developing Christological formulations in the contemporary context.

In brief, within the method and findings of the New Quest we are presented with the possibility of treating the various formulations of Christology in the New Testament in a manner that can do justice to both their diversity and

their concurrences. We are also provided with the material and models for contemporary attempts at expressing the meaning and importance of Jesus Christ.

CRITIQUE OF THE NEW QUEST

The preceding discussion obviously betrays a basic sympathy for the thrust and impact of the New Quest. This group is not, however, without its problems. The first of these problems is its treatment of the resurrection.

Various representatives of the New Quest tended to downplay the historicity of the resurrection, or at least its importance. The first reason for this was that it might detract from the continuity between the significance of the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Christ. Also, they were opposed to any attempt to make the historically proven resurrection the basis of faith in the divinity of Jesus. As Mackey aptly points out, the resurrection can only function as such a ground if it does not require faith itself, as it obviously does.⁴³

How then do they handle the resurrection? They stress the present experience of the believers, not the past event of Jesus.⁴⁴ As Mackey summarizes it, they "understand by the resurrection of Jesus primarily the Christian experience of Jesus as Spirit or Lord in the lives of his followers."⁴⁵ In the most detailed presentation of this view, Perrin (following Hendrikus Boers) emphasizes the role of scriptural exegesis in leading the disciples to express their confidence in Jesus' continuing presence as the product of a resurrection.⁴⁶

While one does not wish to deny the importance of the believers' experience of the presence of Christ after Jesus' death, or the role of scriptural exegesis in framing their descriptions of the resurrection event and its significance, it seems doubtful that the advocates of the New Quest have done justice to the role of the resurrection in the New Testament materials. As Harvey argues, the biggest problem with the New Quest is that their impressive arguments about the authoritative nature of Jesus and his continuing influence on his disciples simply are not adequate to account for the ascriptions that are made to him of absolute quality.⁴⁷ Many before Jesus had spoken with similar degrees of authority and had led exemplary lives, etc. And yet, their followers seldom ascribed them to divinity (especially among the Jews). What makes the difference? As Pannenberg suggests, it would appear to be precisely the disciples' experience of the resurrected Lord. (One need not necessarily

⁴³J. P. Mackey, *Jesus: The Man and the Myth* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 91.

⁴⁴N. Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage in NT Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 46.

⁴⁵Mackey, *Jesus*, 91.

⁴⁶Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage*, 10-22.

⁴⁷Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, 193.

argue that description of the resurrection must be accepted as true in terms of every detail of the various accounts, only that the disciples were *certain* that what they were experiencing was not attributable to their imagination, etc.) As Pannenberg summarizes it, for people schooled in Old Testament thought, the resurrection event could only have meant that (1) the end (τέλος) of the world had begun, (2) God had given an absolute self-confirmation of the pre-Easter activity of Jesus, (3) Jesus was himself the Son of Man, and (4) God is most perfectly revealed in Jesus.⁴⁸

Our concern here is not to prove the resurrection and then use it as a basis for faith. Rather, the resurrection is seen as the capstone that helps to bring into focus both Jesus' pre-Easter life and teachings and his post-Easter presence in the community—all of which then become the object of faith. The resurrection is not the basis for faith but an important aspect of its object. To slough aside the resurrection is to call the "once-for-all" nature of the Christ Event radically into question. It would appear that the affirmation of this meaning of the resurrection is the only answer that can be given to Perrin's criticism of the members of the New Quest that they have made too easy a connection between the historical Jesus and the historic Christ.⁴⁹ In their efforts to affirm a continuity at this point, they have not dealt adequately with the jolting discontinuity of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The other major problem with the New Quest is that its ascription to primarily a functional Christology, while true as far as it goes, is not adequate. The emphasis on the primary importance of Christ as confronting us with a call for decision regarding our self-understanding can lead to the affirmation that Jesus functions as God *for us*. However, the representatives of the New Quest are unwilling to go beyond this to ask what must be true about Jesus in himself for him to fulfill this function. In light of the many abuses of such "metaphysical" speculation, one can understand their hesitancy. However, we have already noticed their assertion of the legitimacy of some inference from Jesus' message to his self-understanding. Could it be that this method of inference could be applied to the functional Christology as well? All in all, one must agree with the realization of Pannenberg, following his heroic attempt to do a Christology strictly "from below," that such an approach is ultimately inadequate.⁵⁰

⁴⁸W. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 66-69.

⁴⁹Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus*, 233.

⁵⁰Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 405-407.



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