

**THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND AFRICAN  
CHRISTIANITY**

**Gideon Y. Tambiyi**

## The Historical Jesus and African Christianity

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To  
late Prof. J. Dogara Gwamna,  
former Dean of Arts, Nasarawa State University, Keffi  
for introducing and encouraging me in the Jesus Studies.



## ***PREFACE***

The historical Jesus research, which is an arm of historical criticism of the Bible is predominantly a Western issue, and it has had a wide spread attention among Western scholars. Many Africans have come in contact with these issues about the quest for the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Many scholars have generally written on this subject but it seems many people in Africa are not quite aware of the issues raised by these Western counterparts in the field of biblical studies, particularly New Testament studies. Also, many African scholars shy away from the critical studies of the Bible because they find these scholarships hazardous to their faith.

For me, it took years to underscore the ideas of the Jesus scholars in the entire historical Jesus studies. I remember taking a course with late Prof. J. D. Gwamna at the University of Jos during my MA programme and I discovered that there is a group of people called the Jesus Seminar, who are threatening the historical reliability of the Bible. I became interested in their research and activities and ‘vowed’ to write my M.A. Thesis on this area, which I eventually did.

However, within the year I was studying these critical scholars, there were moments in which the ideas conflicted my understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, which I grew up with in my quest for God and his Word. I belong to Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), a mainstream church, which holds a high view of Jesus, the Gospels and the Bible entirely. I was raised in such concentrated biblical-doctrinal realities. But I found myself in the midst of critical scholars interrogating them and getting strange answers, which are different from my initial beliefs and being interrogated by them and I am trying to proffer solutions, which does not seem convincing to them. What a frustration! Trying to correct someone and the person does not seem to flow with what you want him to understand. This was my experience in 2011 and 2012 with these critical scholars.

Most of the issues raised in this book, I can say, are Western issues, which are having great influence on the African continent. Jesus to the African people is considered Divine and sacred; and the Bible is highly regarded as the Word of God irrespective of issues from critical scholarship. When textual criticism and the study of ancient manuscripts

was introduced at the University of Jos to many Africans in 2013 led by Prof. Scott Carroll of the Manuscript Research Group, Michigan, USA and Prof. Danny McCain of the University of Jos and myself, some of them were not interested in such area of study because they felt it will raise questions to the authenticity of the Bible. Africa is considered a religious and a spiritual continent, although of recent, there are a lot of contaminations of the spiritual realities among Africans as many have access to Western ideologies and values through personal contact with Westerners, the movies, the televisions and the internet.

It is also obvious that not many texts have been written in Nigerian context and Africa as a whole. In Nigeria, the only available works in this field are the inaugural lecture of Samuel O. Abogunrin of the University of Ibadan entitled, "In Search of the Real Jesus" (2003), which deals with the first and partly no-quest period of the historical Jesus research, J. Dogara Gwamna's scanty chapter on the Jesus Seminar in *Perspectives in African Theology* (2009) and Matthew Michael's two pages on the Christ of faith and Jesus of History in his book entitled, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (2011). Apart from these works, there are virtually no comprehensive works on this question from a Nigerian context. Students and African scholars have access to these issues concerning Jesus on the internet but cannot understand the background from which most of these issues come from.

It becomes essential to bring out this book to help present a comprehensive work, which would become a textbook on critical issues surrounding the Jesus studies in Nigeria. It is meant to promote this field of study among Nigerian scholars and students. I have written articles, which are being published, "Jesus the Helpless Jew: A Forgotten Portrait of Jesus in the Third Quest" in *Sapientia Logos* 9 and "'The Jesus I Didn't Know': The Historical Jesus in an Unappreciated African Basket" under with the *Humanity: Journal of General Studies* of the University of Jos. This book will introduce the issues though some aspects of the book are well developed to meet up current positions of scholars. This book is to be a guide to students and teachers on the subject of the historical Jesus and related historical questions raised on Jesus, the Gospels and the Bible in Nigeria and of course, Africa and the world at large.

Thanks to late Prof. J. D. Gwamna, the former Dean of Arts, Nasarawa State University, Keffi for introducing me into this study and allowing me access to his resources when I started my journey in this

area of study. I would also thank the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos for allowing me write my MA thesis (2012) in this area, which has given birth to this book. Thanks to Dr. Robert Lillo, who supervised my M.A. Thesis and Prof. Danny McCain all fellows of the University of Jos. Thanks to Prof. W. O. Wotogbe-Weneka of University of Port-Harcourt for his helpful comments during my external defense of the MA programme. Also thanks to Prof. Scott Carroll of the Manuscript Research Group, USA; Prof. Zamani B. Kafang of Kaduna State University; Assoc. Prof. Momolu A. Massaquoi of Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary, Paynesville, Liberia; and Dr Dennis Shelly of ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro.

Apart from late Prof Gwamna, special appreciation to Prof. S. O. Abogunrin of the University of Ibadan, Assoc. Prof. Matthew Michael of Nasarawa State University, Keffi and all those who have written before me on this subject in Nigeria and around the world. I may not have represented you well here but I appreciate your ideas, which gave this book a clear direction.

Above all, thanks to the Trinity for commissioning me to join in the study and ministry of the Word, and enabling me to embark on this tedious research. Despite the stress, He has given me the strength and protection I needed to school and write amidst all religious conflicts that characterized the Plateau, Nigeria.

Gideon Y. Tambiyi  
January, 2019





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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. The Traditional Jesus**

Since the beginning of the Age of the Enlightenment, the Gospels and Jesus have been opened to serious scrutiny, particularly among the critical scholars in search for the dichotomy between the divinity and humanity of Jesus. The emergence of the Age of the Enlightenment ushered in critical thinking about the Gospels and Jesus of Nazareth. This makes the hypostatic perspective of Jesus as being God and human to be subjected to academic scrutiny. Modern critical scholars, predominantly in North America and Germany, have attempted to place Jesus on the scientific scale, viewing Jesus as being human rather than divine.

Despite that the Jesus of the Gospels has become a ‘light or darkness’ for many people, some critical scholars still turn Jesus to be the object of human propaganda in terms of his humanity, his Jewishness, and rather than his divinity. Howard Thurman’s interpretation of Jesus in *Jesus and the Disinherited* demonstrates and attests the mind-set particularly the explication breaks from traditional theological categories and positions Jesus as a “religious subject rather than a religious object.”<sup>1</sup> This radical transvaluation denotes Jesus to be a fellow participant and exemplar in community as opposed to a relic or icon over and above the community.<sup>2</sup>

In an attempt to understand the divinity, humanity and Jewishness of Jesus as conflicted by critical scholars, Ben Witherington III rightly observes that “Jesus continues to raise profound questions about what it means to be human, what it means to be a Jew, what it means to be a Christian. Jesus is still the stumbling block or the building block which defines how we construct our world views.”<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, Craig L.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Sean Neal, “Howard Thurman as Philosopher,” *The American Philosophical Association* 17 (2018), 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington III, “The Wright Quest for the Historical Jesus” [www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org) [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2011].

Blomberg observes that “there is no body of literature in the world that has been exposed to the stringent analytical study that the four Gospels have sustained for the past two hundred years.”<sup>4</sup> Also, within the same context particularly the understanding of Jesus’ words, which are predominantly documented in the Gospels, Albert Nolan notes, “His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing.”<sup>5</sup> It is obvious even today that the advent of Jesus to the world has become a light and darkness for human beings on earth depending on what he means to an individual. This affirms to why Jesus is celebrated as Lord while others detest him.

The first stage of Jesus studies is the traditional understanding of Jesus as depicted by the apostles, the early church fathers to the time of the reformation. A lot of Jesus discussions surfaced after his death and resurrection among his followers as recorded in the Gospels and other gospels. Many books were written about the life of Jesus during and after the first century. Of all those books, only four of those biographical materials later proved authentic, inspired by the Holy Spirit based upon the test of the Church fathers.<sup>6</sup> These four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were selected and included in the New Testament canon of scriptures as the Gospels. These four books have become the primary subjects of study for the life of the historical figure, Jesus, within orthodox-evangelical circle, in terms of understanding his words and activities on earth.

In the second century A.D., before the selection of the Gospels, the Church Fathers devoted their strength in search for the reliable and authentic words and deeds of Jesus. This laid the background for the traditional view, which holds Jesus as the Savior, eternal God-man and as a miracle worker, a position many conservative scholars and Christians still hold. Many African Christians tend to see Jesus within the framework of a deliverer from both sins and personal issues. Within

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<sup>4</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), ix.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (New York: St. Paul, 2001), 19.

<sup>6</sup> It is believed that there are about 57 books during the time of collection. Many of which are Gnostic. Many of which have been published by Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus: Sorting out the Story of the Life of Jesus* (Illinois: Tyndale, 2008). The church fathers have to select them based on certain criteria for authenticity see chapter four of this book.

the second century, the doctrine of the person of Christ was developed at least partly in response to heresies of different kinds. The influence of Docetism<sup>7</sup> and Cerinthianism<sup>8</sup> was quite evident in the teachings of the heretic Arius, whose ideas prompted the development of classical Christology by the early Church fathers.<sup>9</sup>

Dominant among the works of the early Church fathers was the work of Clement of Rome, which viewed Christ as God. Ignatius also emphasized the true deity and humanity of Christ. There was the Ebonite's threat, which saw Christ as only human. Melito of Sardis spoke of Christ as God and man. Irenaeus returned to a more biblical view of the person of Christ. Tertullian combated Gnosticism<sup>10</sup> and Monarchianism, and first taught that the Father and Son are of "one substance" and that there are three persons of the Godhead. Origen from the East taught the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. Later, the School of Alexandria stressed the unity of Christ as being a divine person of the Son of God, who became fully human.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This sprang from the philosophical belief that matter is evil and the soul is good. The word is derived from the Greek word, δοκεῖν -the cognate of the verb, δοκέω, which has the sense of "seem," "to seem to be or exist." This group taught a total denial of the incarnation of Christ and the union of the divinity and personality of Christ, for Christ only seemed to have incarnated.

<sup>8</sup> This was a teaching common among the followers of Cerinthus, a Jew from Egypt, who taught that knowledge supersedes Christian revelation, that Jesus was not an incarnated figure but born by Mary and Joseph and that the spirit indwelt him after baptism and left him before the crucifixion.

<sup>9</sup> Gene L. Bray, "Christology," *New Dictionary of Theology* (Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright eds., Leicester: IVP, 1988), 138. Arius believed Jesus Christ was a heavenly being, intermediate between God and man nevertheless a creature. If Jesus was not, he wouldn't have suffered and died. Arius was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325 but his views live somehow till today.

<sup>10</sup> This is very difficult to explain. But Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word γνῶσις (knowledge) and refers to a heresy, which became advanced in the second century. It teaches that one needs some special knowledge to attain salvation. The Gnostics were probably predominantly Gentiles sometimes Jews and the Greek's influence was evident on the belief that the body or matter is evil.

<sup>11</sup> Bray, "Christology," 138.

During the Medieval Ages, the authority of patristic Christology was fully accepted. In the fifth century, it was believed Christ had only one nature (divine), which had brought the genuineness of his humanity into question. Augustine stressed the real humanity of Christ in his atoning work. From A.D. 451 to A.D. 787, many people agreed that the human nature of Christ was hypostatized in the *logos*, the Son of God. The basic problem during this time was the witness of the Gospels to the miracles and other extraordinary deeds of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This problem is resolved when the person of Christ is seen to be in union with both the divine and human nature of Christ.

The Reformation also witnessed Christological discussions. Martin Luther's Christology was based on Christ as true God and true Man with inseparable unity. He spoke of the "wondrous exchange."<sup>13</sup> Calvin approved the traditional Christology of the church councils and taught that when the Word became incarnate Christ did not suspend nor alter his normal function of upholding the universe. Calvin found Lutheran Christology guilty of a tendency toward the heresy of Eutyches.<sup>14</sup> However, some Anabaptists rejected the teachings of the Chalcedonian definition and maintained that Jesus' body was composed of "celestial flesh" a unique product of the virgin's womb, substantially different from ordinary human flesh.<sup>15</sup> Luther and Calvin opposed such views because the Holy Spirit was guiding their studies of the Gospels into all truth as Jesus promised (John 14:16-17; 16:13).

However, after the Enlightenment and with the rise of liberalism in the eighteenth century, the Gospels, and Jesus in particular, have been subjected to higher historical and literary criticisms, which were based on anti-supernaturalism. This led to the critical views of Jesus and in the course of time, scholars were not sure whether "the methods of historical science could uncover the true Jesus of history."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bray, "Christology," 138.

<sup>13</sup> R. S. Wallace, and G. L. Green. "Christology" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 242.

<sup>14</sup> Eutyches was a Byzantine monk (ca. 380-455), who preached monophysitism, the belief that Christ had only a divine nature, a teaching condemned at Chalcedon in 451.

<sup>15</sup> Wallace and Green, "Christology," 242-3.

<sup>16</sup> Richard J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 43.



Despite that, research recently has discovered an interest in the critical and a historical Jesus rather than the understanding of Jesus, which has been held since the Early Church to the Reformation. This historical study of Jesus, after the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, emerged with its three stages; the First, Second and the Third Quests for the historical Jesus. Since the eighteenth century the historical Jesus research has used an anti-supernatural basis to study the life of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> This is a critical historical form of study, which views Jesus in history the same as any historical figure<sup>18</sup> and the Gospels as any other literary composition. The aims and presuppositions have attracted the attention of people (Christians and non-Christians, scholars and non-scholars, pastors and laymen) within the last centuries as Blomberg observes, “there is no body of literature in the world that has been exposed to the stringent analytical study that the four Gospels have sustained for the past two hundred years.”<sup>19</sup>

This book discusses the Jesus studies and follows John Dominic Crossan’s approach and classification to the entire Jesus research; the traditional Jesus, the historical Jesus and the fictional Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Crossan’s approach has been adopted in considering the entire matrix of Jesus studies with the view of presenting new insights into the studies, which have battled the minds of scholars for centuries.

This Historical Jesus period resulted in a critical and secular re-evaluation of the traditional view of the Gospels, which became known as the First, Second and the Third Quests for the historical Jesus with various proponents such as Reimarus, Strauss, Wrede, Schweitzer, Bultmann and Robinson. Recently, scholars like Crossan, Witherington III, Wright and Borg became well-known scholars in the historical Jesus research movement.

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<sup>17</sup> This effort has been the basis of forming international research groups such as the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and the Jesus Seminar (JS) in the study of Jesus.

<sup>18</sup> Many people have existed before Him and have done interesting things and contributed positively to history of the world but none of them have attracted the attention of people as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth. What made Jesus so special?

<sup>19</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), ix.

<sup>20</sup> John D. Crossan, “In Their Own Words” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 33 (2007), 22.

The First Quest started in 1776 and centred on a distorted view of the Gospels as anti-supernatural and as myths of the Early Church. The Second Quest laid emphasis on the renewal of interest in the historical relationship between Jesus' life and message and the view of the Early Church about Jesus. The Third Quest laid emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus, particularly the socio-historical setting of Jesus in Palestine.

There is also the fictional Jesus, which is somehow another arm of the Third Quest under the umbrella of the Jesus Seminar, which started in 1985 and holds to an anti-supernatural and fictional Jesus, who did no miracles and did not rise from the dead, a belief held by the First Quest. But the Jesus Seminar uses advanced means for the understanding of Jesus. The group aims at analyzing the words of Jesus (like the Second Quest) but uses different technical criteria. This view of Jesus by the group questions the Gospels' records of Jesus and emphasizes non-canonical Gnostic documents to portray an "alternative Jesus" that differs from the biblical Gospels. Most of the higher critical scholars are attempting to set Jesus in his socio-historical context and have considered the hypothetical *Q* and the Gnostic gospels, which were discovered in the twentieth century at Nag Hammadi, Egypt such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Phillip* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* which were dated around third and fourth centuries A.D. to be authentic and reliable at the expense of the canonical Gospels under the Jesus Seminar. This makes the historical Jesus scholarship extensive with innumerable contributions based on their criteria for authenticity, which will be evaluated in this book.

A similar view is held by *The Da Vinci Code*, which has become a popular blockbuster in the world. There are even those who are more on the extreme that deny even the existence of Jesus as in Robert M. Price's *Jesus is Dead* (2007). Jesus has been suggested to have got married, had children and lived a normal life like anyone else on this earth. His marriage with Mary Magdalene has just been debated in search for evidence. This has been 'confirmed' by the Harvard Divinity Professor, Karen King during the *International Association of Coptic Studies* in Rome on Tuesday, September 18, in a fourth century Coptic papyrus, which stated Jesus making reference to "my wife..." in September 2012 but scholars are sure that this Coptic fragment is not capable for defending marital relationship of Jesus (see chapter five).

The question is; why is Jesus under such scrutiny in the hands of critical historical Jesus research? The traditional view of Jesus has been

distorted by the modern understanding of Jesus. Jesus has been misused and misunderstood by the critical scholars, who use anti-supernatural bias against the Gospel records. Why do modern scholars have a negative view towards the canonical Gospels, which were selected under the leadership of the Holy Spirit? Members of the Jesus Seminar include Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* alongside the four canonical Gospels as equal sources of information about who Jesus was during his time on earth in their main text *The Five Gospels*. Why do they do this? The doctrine of inspiration is no longer credible and has been seriously distorted by the liberals, who claim to have offered a better understanding of Jesus and the Gospels through giving Q and some Gnostic writings preference over the Gospels.

These are causing much confusion and misleading suggestions concerning Jesus in the contemporary Christian church. The ignorance of this subject is harming the church among some students and lecturers of New Testament in Africa. In my conversation, particularly with some seminary students of New Testament studies, who are writing their theses,<sup>21</sup> I discovered that a good number of students are ignorant of these developments in New Testament scholarship,<sup>22</sup> though some seminary schools have the subject in their curriculum.<sup>23</sup> Is this a result of fear of the students and teachers becoming liberal and putting aside orthodoxy? Do Africans recognize that these students would compete with other

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<sup>21</sup> These are students that have finished their class works yet have not heard of the historical Jesus research.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the progress made in the historical Jesus research see S. Lamerson, "Evangelicals and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," *Currents in Biblical Research* 1 (2002) 61-87. Anthony Le Donne, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Revisionist History through the Lens of Jewish-Christian Relations," *JSHJ* 10 (2012), 63–86. T. Holmen, "A Theologically Disinterested Quest? On the Origins of the 'third quest' for the Historical Jesus," *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001), 175-97. Craig A. Evans, "Assessing Progress in the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus," *JSHJ* 4 (2006) 35-54. Verhoef, "Why did People choose for the Jesus-Movement?" *HTS: Theological Studies* 72:4 (2016), 1-7. J. H. Ellens, "The Jesus Quest," *Pastoral Psychology* 51:6 (2003), 437-40.

<sup>23</sup> ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro and ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos have the course "Historical Jesus" in the Master of Arts in Biblical Studies (New Testament)'s curriculum yet the subject is not being taught to students which makes them ignorant of the subject.

students of New Testament Studies from other schools in and out of Nigeria? Do such African institutions realize that this is twenty-first century, a century in which the study of the New Testament is growing more wings?

These have become a thing of concern within the continent, which forms the environment for this research. Despite the works that preceded this study, questions concerning Jesus still remain and are asked with passion far beyond the past understanding. With all these, it is reasonable to investigate thoroughly in order to fill in these gaps and to enlighten Africans on the necessity of getting acquainted with the studies on Jesus which have dominated the New Testament scholarship and have raised serious controversies about the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The purpose for writing this book is precise. This book is written to help supply the African church with materials on this critical subject for I surveyed the materials in New Testament studies and discovered that very little research has been done in the historical Jesus research in Africa.

Secondly, the book will be an eye-opener for students of New Testament studies within the Nigerian context, be it from the seminaries or the universities, and will enable them get acquainted with the controversies involved in historical Jesus research within the past centuries to the present.

Thirdly, the book affirms the validity and reliability of the Gospels records amidst other non-canonical gospels, which have come to be viewed as authentic within the Western scholarly terrain and have become the basis for the historical Jesus research on the critical side of some members of the Third Quest, the Jesus Seminar and among some in Western society (e.g. *The Da Vinci Code*) at the expense of the traditional understanding of Jesus.

Fourthly, this work will help biblical scholars in Africa reconstruct the crucial interpretive role employed in depicting Jesus within the modern historical biblical scholarship, which seems to 'bend its head' and 'close its eyes' to the intended audience of Jesus during the first century. The work reveals that Jesus should be viewed with the lenses of the first century Christians as revealed in the Gospels.

Finally, the book will enable African scholars to take a biblical stand in the midst of Western biblical research on the life of Jesus. Africans already have our research 'pattern' in Christological frameworks, which

seems to have been another dimension for the historical Jesus research, though hypothetically, Africans cannot deny the fact that there are members of the Jesus research today within the African community.<sup>24</sup> This book will take from the controversies of the West and will bring together the views and opinions, with a few new concepts to clarify to both naïve ‘small children’ and ‘wise elephants’ in African biblical scholarship who are interested in the study of history’s most-significant figure, Jesus of Nazareth.

Does knowing these critical methods for the understanding of Jesus matter to African Christians? Is there need to read their works? Will reading their works affect the African biblical scholar in regard to the knowledge of the Gospels? Do these critical scholars affect our understanding of Jesus within the African church? It is quite reasonable to state that knowing these ways of studying Jesus particularly within the historical-critical study of Jesus from the eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century (that are dominant in the West principally in Germany, England and North America) are necessary areas of study within the African continent so that we can evaluate and respond to them.

## **2. Method Employed**

The best method which fits an assessment of the historical Jesus research, to my own assessment, is the historical-theological method because I agree with the view that the Gospels are “theological-histories.” I have extensively used the historical method and investigated past evidences in order to clarify the critical issues associated with the critical view of Jesus that got rooted after the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. I believe that critical historical method alone is not adequate for the understanding of the Gospels and Jesus. As such, I have joined the historical method and the theological approach in search for the traditional view of Jesus and the Gospels for I believe there are historical proofs as well as theological proofs for the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

This book discusses the Jesus studies and follows John Dominic Crossan’s approach and classification to the entire Jesus research; the traditional Jesus, the historical Jesus and the fictional Jesus.<sup>25</sup> Crossan’s

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<sup>24</sup> There are many who have studied under the influence of these critical historical Jesus exponents in the West and are now in Africa.

<sup>25</sup> John D. Crossan, “In Their Own Words,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 33 (2007), 22.

approach has been adopted in considering the entire matrix of Jesus studies with the view of presenting new insights into the studies, which have battled the minds of scholars for centuries. An analysis of these Western and African portraits of Jesus was made and it is obvious that the Africans are left to hand-pick from the various options of Jesus in the African basket or context i.e. the Bible-centred, biblio-western and African biblio-cultural Jesuses. Although Crossan's approach has not been highly regarded, such a tripartite approach to the historical Jesus becomes relevant, comprehensive and recent in critical scholarship as we study in search for ways to remove the Jesus of the Gospels from the African basket, who is adorned with many alternatives. The book also argues for the Bible depictions of Jesus as reliable and authentic portraits of Jesus of all times, which are foundational for faith and spiritual growth in both scholarly and spiritual searches for Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

Apologetically, I have investigated the available documents of the historical Jesus research movement with much emphasis on their exegetical issues and theological opinions on the canonical Gospels, and particularly on the life of Jesus. I have given surplus evidences to prove the traditional view of Jesus and have applied it to the African context.

I have classified the periods within the historical Jesus into three; the First Quest, Second Quest and the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. The First Quest ranged from the 1776 to 1952. The end of this period is often called "No Quest" because there were so many different views of Jesus hence no one in the liberal side could argue on who Jesus was. This came to its head in Bultmann's book *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*,<sup>27</sup> in which he thought very little could be known about the historical or real Jesus. The Second Quest is generally thought to be from 1953 to 1969, and the Third Quest from the 1970s to the present.

Though some historical Jesus scholars such as Wright and Burer among many others put the Jesus Seminar with the Second Quest, I discovered that such classification lacks high evidence of agreement

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<sup>26</sup> Darrell L. Bock, "Faith and the Historical Jesus: Does a Confessional Position and Respect for the Jesus Tradition Preclude Serious Historical Engagement?" *JSHJ* 9 (2011), 3–25.

<sup>27</sup> The word *Kerygma* is a Greek word for preaching particularly apostolic preaching. It has been adopted in New Testament studies to mean the preaching of the early church. This concept was developed by C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper, 1936).

among majority of scholars. But after a thorough research of the works of some scholars (Witherington III, Crossan, Boring, Brown, Weren and Porter),<sup>28</sup> I now find it convincing to classify the Jesus Seminar under the Third Quest and somehow under the fictional Jesus because;

- a. Some members of the Third Quest and the Jesus Seminar share the same sources such as part of the Gospels (i.e. Q) and the non-canonical books for reconstructing the life of Jesus.
- b. All of them aim at the Jewishness of Jesus. Some Third Quest scholars consider his life setting in the first century while the Jesus Seminar centers on the sayings of Jesus as they were said during the time of Jesus ministry in the first century.
- c. All of them use the historical critical method though the Jesus Seminar has used a more technical method, “socio-scientific method and computer science.”
- d. Most of the main members of the Jesus Seminar are the main advocates of the Third Quest (cf. Crossan, Borg, Sanders and Mack among many others).
- e. Lastly, historical chronology supports that the Jesus Seminar which started in 1985 be part of the Third Quest of the 1970s to the present not the second quest.

Similarly, I have classified *The Da Vinci Code* under the fictional Jesus because his work rejects the divine aspects of Jesus and depends heavily on Gnostic gospels that aim at presenting the human aspect of Jesus like the Jesus Seminar and denying the divinity of Jesus. This Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code* is constructed from a careful harmonization of fictitious documents such as *Thomas, Judas, Philip* and *Magdalene* like the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar, who is based on these Gnostic documents and some parts of the Synoptic Gospels which formed Q. Also, the work follows the chronology of history as it came in 2003. As such, I find it convincing to discuss *The Da Vinci Code* under the fictional Jesus.

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<sup>28</sup> This view has been agreed among many scholars in the Jesus Studies. For example, Witherington III in *The Jesus Quest* places the Jesus Seminar within the Third Quest, Brown considers them to be part of the third quest in “Historical Jesus,” Weren places them under the Third Quest (p. 259) and Porter, who wrote in 2004, observed that “the Jesus Seminar is a part of the Third Quest...” Stanley E. Porter, “Reading the Gospels Today and the Historical Jesus,” *Reading the Gospels Today* (Stanley E. Porter ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, p. 35) among many others.

Some primary and secondary sources were used. Also, internet sources, journals and some books from personal libraries<sup>29</sup> were used to gather information on the historical Jesus research from both Western writers and few African documents, which were all put together to enable a proper address of the subject for the benefit of African biblical scholarship. I have evaluated some relevant movies about Jesus that present views that do not conform to the traditional view of Jesus and the Gospels. Also, I have interviewed some lecturers and students of New Testament studies within Jos and Kaduna metropolis, Nigeria in order to get a clear picture of the historical Jesus research and to expose its reality within the Nigerian context.

### **3. Scope and Limitation**

The book, about the historical Jesus, focuses on providing information for Africans and considering the implications for Africa but its major emphasis would be the Nigerian context. In Africa it is believed that “a wound for one is a wound for all,” which means anything that affects one person, affects the community. This is as a result of the communalistic way of life, which characterizes the African context. All that would be said would be applicable beyond the borders of the Nigerian context.

I highly confess that it is not possible to discuss the entire works and opinions of scholars within the historical Jesus research in this book. As such, I have only discussed some crucial aspects to the entire historical Jesus research. In particular, the limited scope of this book cannot evaluate, in detail, the massive and important works by N. T. Wright and others as evaluation of these materials would in itself require dozen of books. Instead, some of their earlier and more formative works have been used. I recommend that people who find this topic interesting should visit relevant books in the bibliography for more understanding of the subject.

### **4. Clarifications**

I have classified the book into six chapters. The first chapter is the general introduction, which has revealed the place of historical criticism of the Gospels, a summary of the traditional Jesus and historical Jesus research and has clarified some issues necessary for the understanding of

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<sup>29</sup> The most important of all are the books from the personal libraries of J. Dogara Gwamna, Elisha Magaji and my personal library, which are the basis of all the works within the Jesus studies.



the book. The second chapter emphasizes scholarly works on the entire Jesus studies. The third chapter discusses the weaving of the historical Jesus research from the time of Reimarus to the present with some of their presuppositions and conclusions. Chapter four discusses the Jesus Seminar in its entirety, which is a part of the Jesus Seminar. This would be seen to have started the fictional quest of Jesus as a third face for the understanding of Jesus besides the traditional and historical understanding of Jesus as disclosed by Crossan.

The fifth chapter is reveals the peak of the historical Jesus quest in *The Da Vinci Code*, the titanic and other discovery saga, which are witnessed in modern times. Chapter six, which is titled, "Jesus beyond Modern Historical Reconstructions," presents the basic historical proofs for the traditional view of Jesus and the Gospels' portraits of Jesus which are credibly better than the portraits of Jesus within the modern historical reconstructions of Jesus. The seventh chapter relates the historical Jesus research to the African biblical scholarship in search for implications for an adequate study of Jesus that would best fit the African biblical scholarship than depending on the critical methodologies, which are at the detriment of the facts in the Gospels that we have on Jesus Christ. The last chapter concludes the entire work and suggests research areas for the progress of African biblical scholarship.

It can be stated that controversy about the true identity of Jesus started soon after Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28) but the church developed and defended the view of Jesus as revealed in the four canonical Gospels until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Since then, the traditional view has been challenged by Western liberal scholarship with anti-supernatural and anti-revelatory bias resulting in three quests for the historical Jesus.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SCHOLARSHIPS ON JESUS STUDIES**

#### **1. The Traditional Jesus**

The first aspect of this chapter centers on literature for the traditional view of the Jesus and the Gospels. This section focuses on the belief that the Gospels are inspired and historical for the understanding of Jesus. This means adhering to the Gospel portraits of Jesus as the Christ, Savior and the Son of God among many others. Jesus has resurrected literally and he gives those who believe in him eternal life. This has been the belief of Jesus after his death until the Enlightenment though there were some heretical interventions during the Early Church, when some heretics denied the Sonship of Jesus (A.D. 100-450).

The critical emergence of the historical Jesus research in the eighteenth century by the critical scholars aimed at distorting this view of Jesus. However, works of conservative scholars still prevail. Besides the works of the Church Fathers to the Reformation, Howard C. Kee in *Jesus in History* (1970) argues for the place of the extrabiblical sources for the understanding of the Gospels. Kee asks, “Is it possible that Jesus never existed?”<sup>30</sup> To this, he surveys non-Christian historical writing and concluded that the “non-Christian historical writers, and by their audiences, believed Jesus to have existed, and that they considered his death and his continuing influence after death...”<sup>31</sup> Kee uses the Jewish sources as evidences and argues for the existence of Jesus. Generally, Kee concludes on the place of Jesus in extra-biblical sources that “Recognizing that as historical documents the Gospels are biased and incomplete, we must nevertheless turn to them and the traditions preserved in them for detailed knowledge of Jesus”.<sup>32</sup> Kee also argues for the place of the *Diatessaron*, which Titian has written as *Harmony of the Gospels*. This is a good source for the harmony of the tradition of the

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<sup>30</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Jesus in History: An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 61.

Gospels for a portion of the *Diatessaron* is published in this book.<sup>33</sup> Kee also discusses the place of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John for the understanding of the life of Jesus in chapter 4 through 7.

Another author who has written a good defense of the traditional view of Jesus is Edward Schweitzer, a professor of New Testament Theology and Exegesis at the University of Zurich. In his book, *Jesus* (1971),<sup>34</sup> Schweitzer argues for the sources for the understanding of the life of Jesus. He sees how the historians i.e. the Gospel writers, wrote correct and accurate history. Schweitzer states, “Whoever narrates a historical event must choose between what is important to him and what appears to be of secondary importance”,<sup>35</sup> particularly in respect to Jesus’ claims, coming, call of disciples and the miracles he performed. He considers Jesus’ return and the place of Jesus in the heavenly realm. Christians still see Jesus being the person crucified for the world. He states and argues for the place of Jesus on earth, which he tries to prove through the use of the stage of oral tradition and the four Gospels. He has even used the Epistles to argue the understanding of Jesus. Schweitzer concludes, “...what is authoritative has been brought together in the New Testament”.<sup>36</sup>

Robert G. Gromacki is the Chairman of the Department of Biblical Education at Cedarville College, Ohio. He is known to have published *New Testament Survey*,<sup>37</sup> which adds taste to the understanding of the Gospels as historical sources through his presentation of evangelical responses to the source criticism of the Gospels. To this, Gromacki presents good historical survey of the several views of liberals about the sources of the Gospels.<sup>38</sup> He insists on the place of the Holy Spirit during the writing. Gromacki concludes,

In the final analysis, it must be admitted that in all cases the writer consulted sources, both oral and written, scrutinized them, selected materials, and wrote under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>33</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 254-9.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Schweitzer, *Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1971).

<sup>35</sup> Schweitzer, *Jesus*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Schweitzer, *Jesus*, 191.

<sup>37</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1974)

<sup>38</sup> Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 55-7.

These were not mere compositions; they were the Word of God inscripturated through human penmen.<sup>39</sup>

Stephen Neill's *Jesus through Many Eyes* (1976)<sup>40</sup> aims at trying to merge and defend the place of the fourth Gospel in the life of Jesus. To this, Neill presents a fresh look of the view of Christ within the first century through the use of the fourth Gospel and the three letters of John<sup>41</sup> and argues that the Gospel of John has the same authenticity as the Synoptic Gospels for it was from an apostle John.

Birger Gerhardsson published *The Origins of the Gospel Tradition* (1979) which argues for the reliability of the Gospels.<sup>42</sup> He considers that eye-witnesses were alive when the Gospels were written.<sup>43</sup> To Gerhardsson, the Gospel writers adopted a Jewish methodology in terms of listening, memorizing, repeating, reciting what is taught. He concludes that "the early church was as zealous in guarding the Jesus tradition as the Jewish rabbis were in guarding the Torah tradition".<sup>44</sup>

James D. G. Dunn is Lightfoot's professor of Divinity at University of Durham, England. In *The Evidence for Jesus* (1985),<sup>45</sup> Dunn argues for the historical evidence available for the historical life of Jesus. He writes, "New Testament scholarship seeks to understand the Gospels *as* they are –to recognize *what* they are. It wants to find out the degree to which the Gospels themselves are concerned with *historical information* about Jesus, and the degree to which they present an *interpretation* of that information."<sup>46</sup> Dunn argues for the place of the Gospels, analyzes the claim of Jesus as the Son of God, and states the belief of the first Christians on resurrection. He concludes, "Since we walk by faith and not by sight, our confidence should be in the God and Father of our Lord

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<sup>39</sup> Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

<sup>41</sup> Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes*, 136ff.

<sup>42</sup> Birger Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>43</sup> Gerhardsson, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Gerhardsson, 59.

<sup>45</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985).

<sup>46</sup> Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 1.

Jesus Christ, rather than in what we can see and handle and control. ‘Let him who boast, boast of the Lord!’”<sup>47</sup>

Another good book, which proves the historical authenticity of the life of Jesus is the work of a conservative scholar R. T. France. France is vice principal and senior lecturer in New Testament Studies, London Bible College. In, *The Evidence for Jesus* (1986),<sup>48</sup> France argues for non-Christian evidence within the Gentile and Jewish sources. He writes, “The first thing to be said about non-Christian historical evidence for Jesus is that there is not much of it, at least from a period close enough to the events to be of any value as an independent witness to Jesus as seen through non-Christian eyes”.<sup>49</sup> France argues for Christian evidence outside the New Testament and laid much emphasis on the evidence in the New Testament and the place of archaeology for the understanding of Jesus. He states the aim of writing the book as “to try to sift through the claims and counter-claims of historians, apologists and skeptics, and to establish a responsible historical basis for our assessment of the man who, on any showing, has affected the course of history more than anyone else who ever lived”.<sup>50</sup> On the writers of the Gospels, France writes “They are Christian theologians, men with a message, writing to commend Jesus in their own distinctive ways to their own different readerships”.<sup>51</sup>

Another conservative scholar who has contributed for the understanding of Jesus from the traditional view is Alister E. McGrath in *Understanding Jesus* (1987).<sup>52</sup> McGrath is a research lecturer in Theology at the University of Oxford and research professor of Systematic Theology at Regent College, Vancouver and Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. In this book, McGrath presents several aspects of the study of the Gospels from the traditional point of view. He states that “indeed, if the existence of Jesus is denied, despite all the evidence we possess which points to the opposite conclusion, consistency would

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<sup>47</sup> Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 107.

<sup>48</sup> R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 19.

<sup>50</sup> France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 116.

<sup>52</sup> Alister E. McGrath in *Understanding Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

demand that we deny the existence of an alarming number of historical figures, the evidence for whose existence is considerably more slender than that of Jesus”.<sup>53</sup> McGrath then states good number of reasons why scholars should depend on the three Gospels for knowledge about Jesus.<sup>54</sup>

G. L. Bray is a lecturer in Christian Doctrine at Oak Hill College, London. His article “Christology” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988) has helpful information for the understanding of the life of Jesus in the traditional sense.<sup>55</sup> Bray presents a good survey of the traditional belief about Jesus from the early church fathers developed in response to the heresies of their days. He writes, “Post-apostolic Christology developed at least partly in response to heresies of different kinds. The influence of docetism and Cerintheism was quite evident”.<sup>56</sup> This understanding views Jesus as being God and man, a position that went through the Reformation. The Gospels were given preference. This is a good article, which is at the heart of the understanding of the traditional view of Jesus.

Donald Guthrie in *New Testament Introduction* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1990), has great impact on the studies of the Gospels from the traditional view.<sup>57</sup> I have extensively used this book for the Gospels’ understanding of Jesus. The book documents the literary form of the Gospels particularly the genre, structure, the motive for the production of the Gospels and the place of the Gospels in the New Testament. To Guthrie, the purposes for the writing of the Gospels are the oral apostolic testimony, the rapid spread of Christianity and the need for historical record for catechetical purposes.<sup>58</sup> On the acceptability of the Gospels, he states, “By the end of the second century it is clear from all the evidence available that our four Gospels were accepted, not only as authentic, but also as Scripture on a level with the Old Testament”.<sup>59</sup> Guthrie states the attestations of the early Church Fathers on the Gospels such as Iranaeus, Clement of

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<sup>53</sup> McGrath, *Understanding Jesus*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> McGrath, *Understanding Jesus*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> G. L. Bray, “Christology” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright eds., Leicester: IVP, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> Bray, “Christology”, 138.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 21-23.

<sup>59</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 24.

Alexandria, Titian, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Papias.<sup>60</sup>

A team of 10 serious conservative scholars (Michael J. Wilkins, J. P. Moreland, C. L. Blomberg, Scott McKnight, Darrell Bock, Craig Evans, Gary Habermas, William L. Craig, R. Douglas Geivett and Edwin M. Yamauchi) published *Jesus under Fire* (1995) as an evangelical response to the Jesus Seminar and some aspects of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. The book aims at restoring the traditional teaching about the words of Jesus, deeds of Jesus, resurrection and finding proofs for Jesus outside the New Testament.<sup>61</sup>

Arthur Patzia, who is a conservative professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary at California, has one of the most reliable texts on the traditional view of Jesus. In his book, *The Making of the New Testament* (1995), Patzia devotes a chapter on the Gospels, which he believed that “Nearly all of what we know about the life and message of Jesus comes from the canonical Gospels”.<sup>62</sup> Patzia discusses the place of oral tradition. He writes “After Pentecost, the early Christians in Jerusalem continued to pass on the stories and sayings of Jesus in their preaching and teaching”.<sup>63</sup> Patzia states that the Gospels were not written until 30-50 years after the resurrection of Jesus and that Jesus did many things which many are not recorded in the Gospels.<sup>64</sup> Patzia also gives the purpose for the composition of the Gospels as the expansion of the church, the passing away of the eye-witnesses and the response to new challenges such as Gnosticism of the first century and lastly the need for standard instruction materials for the church.<sup>65</sup> On the genre of the Gospels, he writes,

They could be described as “Theological handbook” or “theological biography.” Basically, this means that they focus on Jesus Christ as the one who God sent to be Israel’s Messiah and the church’s Lord, or, to quote Mark himself, they constitute a literary genre whose

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<sup>60</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 24-6.

<sup>61</sup> Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland eds. *Jesus under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament* (Illinois: IVP, 1995), 35.

<sup>63</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 46-8.



form and contents is “the good news [gospel] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”.<sup>66</sup>

Patzia also states in clear terms the factors, which led to the collection of the Gospels and discusses Church Fathers’ attestations on the Gospels as reliable document for the church about the life of Jesus.<sup>67</sup> To all these, Patzia considers the criteria used by the church fathers for the Gospels in part five of the book and concludes that “the primitive church regarded the words of the exalted Lord as possessing ultimate authority for their faith and practice”.<sup>68</sup>

Luke T. Johnson is Robert W. Woodruff’s Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology of Emory University. His book, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (1996), cannot be forgotten for it states the pictures of Jesus, which the historical Jesus research has missed through the centuries.<sup>69</sup> Johnson reveals how history challenge faith and discusses the limitation of history in the discussions of Jesus. He considers what the historical Jesus should look like and looks at the real Jesus from the Gospels and argues for the real identity of Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>70</sup> Finally, Johnson discusses the state of critical scholarship and the church today.

Also, N. T. Wright published *The Original Jesus* (1996). Wright was a chaplain and tutor of theology at Worcester College, Oxford. He is a New Testament Scholar with international standing and the author of many books on Jesus. In this book, Wright argues that the Gospels were meant to change lives instead of just being historical.<sup>71</sup> He states, “The Gospels were not just written to describe events in the past. They were written to show that those events were relevant, indeed earth-shattering, worldview-changing and life changing in the present”.<sup>72</sup> Although the

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<sup>66</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 59.

<sup>67</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 62-6.

<sup>68</sup> Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>69</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 143.

<sup>71</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Original Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

<sup>72</sup> Wright, *The Original Jesus*, 124.

Gospels were written nearly 2000 years ago, they are applied to every generation.

Donald Bridge, *Why Four Gospels?* (1996), answers the question whether the Gospels can be believed.<sup>73</sup> To this, Bridge states the significance of the four Gospels and gives several reasons why the Gospels can be trusted. To him, extra-biblical witness, archaeological evidence, eye witnesses' accounts are valid reasons.<sup>74</sup> He believes that "most people approach the Gospels with preconceived ideas. Christians read them in the light of their faith; Jews, primed with age-old suspicion; agnostics, ready to be scandalized; and professional New Testament experts, wearing the blinkers of their trade".<sup>75</sup> This is what he sees is happening to the understanding of Jesus in our modern age within the historical Jesus research.

In *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), Wright reveals the place of the traditional Jesus despite the attempt to figure a historical Jesus.<sup>76</sup> He writes, "Post-Reformation circles, both Catholic and Protestant, there has been a general use of the Gospels as sourcebooks for ethics and doctrine for edifying tales or smuggled in behind the back of the 'sensus literalist, allegory.'" <sup>77</sup> He believes the Gospels to be faith-documents not history-books.<sup>78</sup> But the problem is that he tries to segregate between history and faith when he writes that "history has nothing to do with faith"<sup>79</sup> which will square-back the minds of scholars to the works of Bultmann and other liberals. Despite this, Wright has a good presentation of the traditional belief about Jesus.

Habermas in the second section of his book *The Historical Jesus* (1996) provides a vital survey of evidence for the historicity of Jesus of the Gospels. He considers the primary sources for the life of Jesus which are the creeds and facts. He also considers archeological sources, non-Christian sources and some ancient Christian sources, which are not found in the New Testament. Habermas concludes that ancient extra-

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<sup>73</sup> Donald Bridge, *Why Four Gospels?* (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 1996).

<sup>74</sup> Bridge, *Why Four Gospels?*, 19-25.

<sup>75</sup> Bridge, *Why Four Gospels?*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 14-16.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 23.

biblical sources both provide a broad outline of the life of Jesus and indicate that he died due to the effects of crucifixion”.<sup>80</sup> He states,

We have examined a total of 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus, which include 19 early creedal, four archeological, 17 non-Christian, and five non-New Testament Christian sources. From this data we have enumerated 129 reported facts concerning the life, person, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus the disciples’ earliest message.<sup>81</sup>

The book has become a dominant book for the chapter on the historical evidence for the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

A similar work is Blomberg’s *Jesus and the Gospels* (1997). This book is a good document for the understanding of the life of Jesus. Blomberg proves that the Gospels are accurate in stating the life of Jesus as found in the Gospels from his birth to the crucifixion. He states the reliability of the Gospels based on evidence on archaeology, non-Christian writers, post-New Testament Christian writers and the testimony of the entire New Testament for the understanding of the historicity of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Blomberg concludes, “Whatever else one may or may not believe by faith, on sheer historical grounds alone there is substantial reasons to believe in the *general* trustworthiness of the Gospel tradition”.<sup>82</sup>

Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ* (1998) has vindicated Christ against the critical historical research by interviewing 12 scholars and passed his verdict on the case of Christ. He concludes that the “evidence is clear” for Jesus of the Gospels.<sup>83</sup>

Another work which contributes to the understanding of the traditional view of Jesus is that of R. S. Wallace and G. I. Green in “Christology” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2001). Wallace holds a PhD from University of Edinburgh while Green holds PhD from University of Aberdeen. They survey the Church Fathers to the Reformation and reveal the understanding of Jesus and the Gospels. They argue that in the Middle Ages, the understanding of Jesus was linked with Patristic Christology. They write that during the Middle Ages the people

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<sup>80</sup> Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 228.

<sup>81</sup> Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 250.

<sup>82</sup> Blomberg’s *Jesus and the Gospels*, 381.

<sup>83</sup> Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 259.

“accepted the authority of Patriarchal Christology.”<sup>84</sup> They reveal also that the understanding of Jesus as true God and man went through the Reformation with Luther and Calvin accepting traditional Christology.<sup>85</sup>

In 2002, Darrell L. Bock published *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*.<sup>86</sup> This book argues for the traditional view of Jesus and the Gospels. Bock defends the evangelists who wrote the Gospels. He writes, “The evangelists wrote about the Jesus they knew, the Jesus they preached and the Jesus others needed to know.”<sup>87</sup> He rejects the place, which modern scholars have given to *Thomas*. He states, since the 1980s much attention has been given to other sources for Jesus’ life and ministry such as the *Gospel of Thomas*. These works do have a role to play in the study of Jesus, but their role has been exaggerated in many popular circles.<sup>88</sup> Bock recognizes the value of extra-biblical sources and states some reasons why the study of Jesus got rooted in these sources. To him, the Gospels are the best sources for the life of Jesus. To this he concludes, “Sources relevant to the study of Jesus are largely Jewish in nature” but have become sources for “renewed study and interest” since the mid twentieth century, which gives way to the “fresh and potentially fruitful path for the study of Jesus.”<sup>89</sup> To him, understanding these sources is critical to the study of Jesus, which became the key element to his survey of Jesus in scriptures. To be understood and appreciated, Jesus’ story needs to be placed in its historical context.<sup>90</sup>

Bock in *Jesus according to the Scriptures* (2002) also argues for the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels. He states that there is no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is one of the most important historical and religious figures of all time.<sup>91</sup> He argues that just as a three-dimensional portrait gives depth to an image in a way that two dimensions cannot, so these four

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<sup>84</sup> R. S. Wallace and G. I. Green in “Christology” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 242.

<sup>85</sup> Wallace and Green, “Christology”, 243.

<sup>86</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 40.

<sup>90</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 63.

<sup>91</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 17.

Gospels reveal a many-sided Jesus whose fundamental claims still challenge us today. Thus, such a look about Jesus according to Scriptures gives us a glimpse of how unique a figure Jesus was.<sup>92</sup> Bock uses the Gospels to argue for the life and ministry of Jesus, death and resurrection. He argues, “As the revelation of God, Jesus according to Scriptures argues that knowing God means being related to him as well”.<sup>93</sup> Bock concludes, “The thrust of Jesus’ teaching was that he brought the promised new era of the rule of God. As prophet and as the one hoped for, Jesus both explained the divine program and embodied divine presence and authority. His mission began with and focused on Israel, but his ultimate goal was to bring the presence and promise of God to the world”.<sup>94</sup>

Richard A. Burridge is the Dean, Kings College, London. In his book, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (2005), he emphasizes the understanding of Jesus being the only Jesus and his life could be found in the reliable and authentic four Gospels. Burridge rejects the Jesus propounded by the historical research. He states, “From the four Gospels, we have moved towards many different Jesuses in theology and in culture, in faith and in art”.<sup>95</sup> He argues that we cannot place our modern understanding into the study of the Gospels. He writes, “We must not transfer these modern concepts to ancient texts without considering their understandings of truth and myths, lie and fiction”.<sup>96</sup> Burridge argues that even today with modern technology, there are still differences in the media about historical facts let alone in the days of Jesus when the people had no even a notebook.<sup>97</sup> He believes that the Gospel records are accurate and reliable.

Danny McCain is a conservative professor of Biblical Theology at the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos. He published, *Notes on New Testament Introduction* (rev. ed. 2005). On the section for the Gospels, McCain considers some critical issues which have prompted the study over the centuries. He considers the synoptic

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<sup>92</sup> Bock, *Jesus according to the Scriptures*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> Bock, *Jesus according to the Scriptures*, 648.

<sup>94</sup> Bock, *Jesus according to the Scriptures*, 646.

<sup>95</sup> Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (London: SCM, 2005), 176.

<sup>96</sup> Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, 169.

<sup>97</sup> Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, 169.

problem in order to solve such problems in the name of form, source and redaction criticisms. On form criticism, he states that form criticism fails to explain the forms of the Gospels. He concludes that “the traditional orthodox position is much easier to believe –that these Gospels were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the men whose names they bear”.<sup>98</sup> On source criticism, he concludes that,

...there is no real reason to reject the traditional belief that the individual writers wrote either out of their own personal experience (Matthew) or from the stories they personally heard the apostles repeat (Mark) or from personal research, which would have included interviews with apostles and other eye witnesses, and perhaps other short written accounts (Luke).<sup>99</sup>

He believes that the writers of the Gospels practiced some redaction, which reflects their interests and styles, but he rejects any redaction criticism, which questions the historicity of what the Gospel writers wrote.<sup>100</sup>

Another work, which is worthy of giving attention, is that of Richard Bauckham. Bauckham is a professor of New Testament Studies and Bishop Wardlaw Professor at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. In his book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (2006), Bauckham argues that the four Gospels are closely based on the eyewitnesses’ testimony of those who personally knew Jesus. He surveys the trend of the historical Jesus and lays good eyewitnesses testimony for the understanding of the Gospels. He considers Papias as an eyewitness, Palestinian Jewish names mentioned in the Gospels. Bauckham considers eyewitnesses from the beginning of Jesus ministry and the models of oral tradition. He also discusses the transmission of Jesus tradition and eyewitness memory. He equally considers John to be an eyewitness and lastly, discusses the testimony of Jesus.<sup>101</sup> He writes, “The eyewitnesses behind the Gospel accounts surely told what was prominent in their memories and did not need to attempt the laborious processes of retrieval and reconstruction

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<sup>98</sup> Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction* (rev. ed. Bukuru: ACTS, 2005), 110.

<sup>99</sup> McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, 115.

<sup>100</sup> McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, 119.

<sup>101</sup> Bauckham Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006), 505.

that make for false memories”.<sup>102</sup> This book is a most mention in this research as far eyewitnesses’ testimony forms the basis of the Gospels.

One of recent books is Craig S. Keener’s *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009), which redirects the understanding of scholars to the traditional Jesus through emphasizing the various facets of Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>103</sup> The character of the Gospels became the main concern. Keener considers the Gospels as biographies, Luke as history and the place of ancient histories in the understanding of the Gospels. He discusses the Gospels as written sources and oral sources. He discusses also the various facets of Jesus as the Galilean Jew, the teacher and preacher of the kingdom, the prophet, the messiah and the death and resurrection of Jesus. Keener documents the crucial aspect of the Jesus research, which has been given treatments and has been refined in the past centuries. Keener has not rushed the book but spent his time gathering materials to make it the most authoritative response to the historical Jesus research.

One can say that Jesus of the Bible is the ultimate Jesus, who is above every modern reconstruction, which used modern historical methodology and lacks the ingredient of the first century Jesus, which has been held after the death of Jesus.<sup>104</sup> This is the traditional view of Jesus of Nazareth.

## **2. The Historical Jesus**

The second phase of Jesus studies is the historical Jesus. This is the area of research, which started after the Age of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. This approach seeks to give, in its view, a more historical picture of Jesus than what we have in the Gospels, which reveals some forms of challenge to the traditional view of Jesus. The purpose for the historical depiction of Jesus was that the supernatural and divine statements of Jesus in the Gospels cannot be explained; hence, to

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<sup>102</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 356.

<sup>103</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>104</sup> A. J. Dewey, “The Memorable Invention of the Death of Jesus,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 72 (2016), 1-8. William Lane Craig, “Accounting for the Empty Tomb,” *America* (2013), 11-7. E. A. F. Segal, “How I Stopped worrying about Mel Gibson and Learned to Love the Quest for the Historical Jesus’: A Review of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*,” *JSHJ* 2 (2004), 190-208.

them, the Gospels are merely human documents rather than being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Influenced by the skepticism, agnosticism, deism, and rationalism of the Enlightenment, this approach defines a Jesus, which is not found in the Gospels. Basically, there have been three quests for the historical Jesus; the First Quest (from 1776 to 1952), the Second Quest (from 1953 to 1969) and the Third Quest (from 1970s to the present).

There are good works that chronicle the views of liberal scholars within the entire historical Jesus research. The book, which is worthy of mention, is that of Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*.<sup>105</sup> Schweitzer was a brilliant musician, a world-class philosopher, historian and theologian, and a medical missionary in what was called “the still darkest Africa.” Schweitzer surveys the views about Jesus during the First Quest for the historical Jesus from Reimarus to Schweitzer in the early 1900s. He believes the quest was started by Reimarus in 1776 with a strong anti-supernatural bias on the Gospels. This got developed in the works of Strauss, Renan, and Wrede among many others. This book will be used to discuss the positions and conclusions of critical scholars in the First Quest.

Another critical work is that of James M. Robinson. Robinson is professor of Religion and Director of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont Graduate School, California. Robinson’s book, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus*,<sup>106</sup> is crucial for the understanding of the New Quest for the historical Jesus. In the first part of the book, Robinson discusses the impossibility and illegibility of the Old Quest (1776-1952), the possibility of a New Quest, and the legitimacy and procedure of the New Quest. He also discusses the formal structure on the New Quest, and the recent debates. He reviews Schweitzer’s *Quest for the Historical Jesus* and discusses Jesus’ parables as God’s events in the life of the people at the time of Jesus. This is a good book, which bridges the First and the Second Quests of the historical Jesus and gives a better knowledge of the Second (New) Quest.

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<sup>105</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (1906, trans., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961).

<sup>106</sup> James M. Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).



Stephen Neill is a resident scholar at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and a fellow of the British Academy. In his book, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*,<sup>107</sup> Neill helps in the understanding of the history of New Testament research, particularly the Gospels. The book exposes the German challenge to orthodoxy and has chronicled the study of Jesus and the Gospels. This book helps to understand the positions of many critical scholars in the historical Jesus research such as Reimarus, Strauss, Renan, Schweitzer and Bultmann with his form criticism. Neill provides a master-full survey of the historical development of New Testament criticism, the movement of thought and contributions made by various schools with an assessment of the church's results of such scholarship.

Another conservative work, which is worthy of mention in regard to the understanding of the historical Jesus, is *I believe in the Historical Jesus* by I. Howard Marshall.<sup>108</sup> Marshall is a senior lecturer in New Testament Exegesis, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Marshall argues on the rediscovering of Jesus and clearly states the link between faith and the supernatural. Marshall also delves into the question of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith which many of the First Questers have propounded. He reveals the nature and forms of the Gospels and the history of the Gospel's tradition. At the end, Marshall believes in the historical Jesus. He writes, "I believe in the historical Jesus. I believe that historical study confirms that he lived and ministered and taught in a way that is substantially reproduced in the Gospels. I believe that this Jesus gave his life as a ransom for sinful mankind, and that he rose from the dead and is the living Lord."<sup>109</sup> This book will help in explaining the historical Jesus and the Gospels for the understanding of Jesus.

Another critical scholar, whose works have great impact on this research, is Marcus J. Borg, a Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University (USA). The book, *Conflict Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*,<sup>110</sup> will help the

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<sup>107</sup> Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>108</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *I believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>109</sup> Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, 246.

<sup>110</sup> Marcus Borg, *Conflict Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).

understanding of the Third Quest, particularly Borg's view of Jesus. The book is influenced by the twentieth century's understanding of the eschatological connotation of the kingdom of God in which Jesus was concerned about politics. This caused Borg to present an imminent eschatology.<sup>111</sup> But one wonders whether there is sufficient historical knowledge of Jesus in the book. To this, Borg has used the Gospels to argue that conflict is within a context for interpreting the teaching of Jesus and that once the context is established.<sup>112</sup>

Borg reveals Jewish resistance to Rome, which, to him, is in the context of conflict. He considers the social matrix and specific periods such as Herod's reign, the 6 C.E. and the Census, Pilate, Caligula, Cumanus, the priest and the resistance. This is seen among the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Zealots as Galilean militants.<sup>113</sup> All these revealed the resistance of the Jews to the Romans. Borg views Jesus in the context of this conflict about his reaction to the Sabbath, the Temple and the future. This book helps the understanding of the Borg's view of Jesus within the Third Quest because the Third Quest emphasizes Jesus' Jewish context.

Another scholar who cannot be forgotten in this review is N. T. Wright. In *Who Was Jesus?*,<sup>114</sup> Wright chronicles the positions of the scholars within the Quest from Reimarus to the Third Quest. Wright looks at the Third Quest which, to him, began from Vermes, Meyer, Harvey, Borg, and Sanders. The problem of the book centers on his classification of scholars within the entire quest. For example, he places Crossan and the Jesus Seminar within the Second Quest, a position Crossan rejects. This work has provoked research for years. Wright addresses some hits within New Testament scholarship, particularly the works of Barbara Thiering, A. N. Wilson, and John Spong which are direct threats to the traditional view of Jesus of Nazareth. Wright titles the last chapter "Jesus Revisited." He discusses Jesus within Judaism, in the Gospels and states his view about the kingdom of God (which was the root of the historical Jesus quest). Wright reveals the aim of Jesus was to summon Israel to repent and bring the tribulation, which was to come upon the earth. This book helps the understanding of this research,

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<sup>111</sup> Borg, *Conflict Holiness*, 35.

<sup>112</sup> Borg, *Conflict Holiness*, 41.

<sup>113</sup> Borg, *Conflict Holiness*, 64.

<sup>114</sup> N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

particularly the views of critical scholars within the entire quests for the historical Jesus.

In *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*,<sup>115</sup> Borg also reveals some facts about the historical Jesus. To him, the intent of this book is two facts about Jesus. First, Jesus is the subject of research by scholars working within the framework of the secular academy. Secondly, Jesus is also the central figure in a living religion. This work centers mostly on the scholarship within North America and from a North American perspective.<sup>116</sup> The book is divided into three parts. The first part centers on the state of the Jesus research since the 1980s. Within this part, Borg begins by considering the renaissance period in the past Jesus studies, which is rooted in North America. Borg gives a brief history of the historical quest of Jesus from Schweitzer to the time of James Robinson. This gave rise to the ‘Old Quest’ (1776-1952) ‘No Quest’ and the New Quest’ (1953-1969) of the historical Jesus. Borg considers the depiction of Jesus within contemporary North American Scholarship. This attempt was forwarded by the depiction of Jesus as an “eschatological prophet” and the understanding of Jesus social context of the first-century world.<sup>117</sup> Borg discusses the work of Sanders, which to him, is based on five sketches. Jesus was an eschatological prophet within the Jewish restoration theology, which was central to the self-understanding and mission. This is a good book for the understanding of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus.

Another scholar, who shapes our understanding in this research, is Robert B. Strimple in his book *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*.<sup>118</sup> Strimple schooled at Westminster Theological Seminary and University of Toronto. He was president emeritus and professor emeritus of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary, California. In this book, Strimple focuses on providing an introductory survey of the historical roots of Gospels’ criticism. Strimple examines the claims of critical scholarship, who questioned the reliability of the Gospels. He surveys the First Quest from Reimarus to Bultmann and beyond. This is a good

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<sup>115</sup> Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1994).

<sup>116</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, xi.

<sup>117</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 18-19.

<sup>118</sup> Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 1995).

book for the understanding of the First Quest from the eighteenth century to Bultmann with the emphasis on form criticism and existentialist theology. It also gives insight to the New Quest and redaction criticism. Strimple believes that the ongoing history of Gospels' criticism, therefore, can be seen as the ongoing history of attempts to bring the Gospels' witnesses into harmony with the prevailing philosophical and cultural moods of the age.<sup>119</sup> He concludes that,

The way commanded to us in the Bible itself, however, remains the same today as yesterday: to seek to bring our every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Not the Christ remade in our own image, shaped by our shifting contemporary standards of the true and the valuable, but the Christ presented to us in the 'God-breathed' scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16), God's written Word and our only ultimate authority for faith and life.<sup>120</sup>

Another author who has helped the understanding of the Third Quest is John Dominic Crossan. Crossan was a professor of New Testament at DePaul University and co-chaired the Jesus Seminar. One of the skeptical books against the traditional views of Jesus, which I have read is Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*.<sup>121</sup> This book is helpful in the understanding of Crossan's critical views of Jesus within the Third Quest. The book follows the pattern of Crossan's work and it centers on reconstructing the Gospel accounts on the resurrection whether the accounts are history or propaganda. This book states an analysis of what Crossan called, "History and prophecy" which, to him, is "history remembered and prophecy historicized".<sup>122</sup> Crossan brings the *Gospel of Peter* (which was rejected, to be part of the canon) together with the four to clarify his personal presuppositions. He uses *Thomas* to say that Jesus' companion "recorded in memory, passed it on in tradition, and recalled it when writing their accounts of the crucifixion".<sup>123</sup> "Prophecy historicized," to Crossan, means that no three-hour-long darkness at noon accompanied

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<sup>119</sup> Strimple, 154

<sup>120</sup> Strimple, 154.

<sup>121</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995).

<sup>122</sup> Crossan, *Who killed Jesus?* 1.

<sup>123</sup> Crossan, *Who killed Jesus?* 2.

the death of Jesus, but that learned Christians searching their scriptures found this ancient description of future divine punishment ...and so created that fictional story about darkness at noon to assert that Jesus died in fulfillment of prophecy. Crossan is typical of first Quest scholars since the eighteenth century.

Crossan reconsiders the arrest of Jesus and admits that “Judas was a historical follower of Jesus who betrayed him” but doesn’t think “he was a member of the Twelve, because that symbolic grouping of Twelve new Christian Patriarchs to replace the Twelve ancient Jewish patriarchs did not take place until Jesus’ death”.<sup>124</sup>

For the trial of Jesus, Crossan rejects that “there may well have been arrest and execution but no trial whatsoever in between”.<sup>125</sup> I do not know which arrest and execution Crossan seems to have left the impression that existed when he has rejected above. The work of Crossan is in the *midst of lack of what to say* and nothing but mixed information to prompt controversy within the resurrection discussions. Crossan is being skeptical about the detailed historical information about the crucifixion of Jesus, which to him, the accounts are mere “Christian propaganda”.<sup>126</sup> The resurrection is another area Crossan rejected and discussed last before the epilogue. This is a critical work for the understanding of Crossan’s view within the Third Quest.

Ben Witherington III is an American evangelical Biblical scholar, and professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. His book, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997),<sup>127</sup> describes the nature of the Third Quest. He begins by considering Jesus in his social setting, particularly in Galilee. Witherington III discusses the First and the Second Quests briefly as a background to the entire discussion. The work clearly states the positions of scholars within the Third Quest. I will use this book for the understanding of the quest of the historical Jesus, particularly the Third Quest.

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<sup>124</sup> Crossan, *Who killed Jesus?* 75.

<sup>125</sup> Crossan, *Who killed Jesus?* 117.

<sup>126</sup> Crossan, *Who killed Jesus?* 159.

<sup>127</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Illinois: IVP, 1997).

Another work for the understanding of the historical Jesus research is that of Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*.<sup>128</sup> Habermas had his PhD from Michigan State University and is Distinguished professor at the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. This book, in the first section, exposes the contemporary challenges to the historicity of Jesus with much emphasis on the three modern quests for the historical Jesus. Habermas states, “The subject of the historical Jesus is of primary interest today, both in scholarly and popular circles”.<sup>129</sup> He also discusses the existence of Jesus, the limitations of the historical Jesus and reinterpretations of the historical Jesus. He also gives attention to some binding issues between the Jesus Seminar and the historical Jesus research.

A similar work to that of Habermas is Craig L. Blomberg’s *Jesus and the Gospels* (1997).<sup>130</sup> Blomberg is a professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, California (USA). This book studies the historical background of the Gospels: political, religious and socio-economical. He considers the critical methods for the study of the Gospels particularly the place of historical criticism. On the historical Jesus, he presents the three quests for the historical Jesus. Blomberg classifies the ‘No Quest’ with the New Quest and states that the Third Quest died down in the 1980s. Blomberg could not tell us the founder of the Seminar but states that it was co-chaired by Crossan and Borg.<sup>131</sup> However, this is also another good book for the understanding of the historical Jesus research.

Another work I have used extensively, which helps the understanding of the historical Jesus research, is the inaugural lecture of S. O. Abogunrin, *In Search of the Original Jesus*.<sup>132</sup> Abogunrin is a conservative African New Testament scholar, who has been teaching at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan. Abogunrin discusses the rise of biblical criticism of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To him, “The main focus of

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<sup>128</sup> Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1996).

<sup>129</sup> Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 9

<sup>130</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997).

<sup>131</sup> Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 84.

<sup>132</sup> S. O. Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus” (An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Thursday July 16, 1998, Published, 2003).

historical criticism is not the relationship between the Bible and the church tradition, but between the Bible and Christ”<sup>133</sup> of the Gospels. Abogunrin also discusses the life of Jesus research dominantly called the historical Jesus research. To this he surveys the life of Jesus research, particularly the First Quest, and the rise of form criticism. Responding to the form critics, Abogunrin states that “Christ as a teacher was greater than the Christian community which he founded and it must be expected that he had his stamp on the form and content of the oral tradition which circulated about him”.<sup>134</sup> Abogunrin discusses the New Quest of the historical Jesus. He delves into history and faith in which he tried to find their relationship. To Abogunrin, “The task of modern historians is often described as aiming at an objective reconstruction of the past”,<sup>135</sup> and he affirms that “there is no need for the historian to deny the existence of God or God’s activity in the world. Faith affirmations and historical affirmations often differ in their content, but not all the time”.<sup>136</sup> He declares that Jesus Christ has remained the most remarkable phenomenon in human history and is different from everyone else.<sup>137</sup>

However, despite his academic rigor, Abogunrin has not been able to confidently discuss the Third Quest issues and the emergence of the Jesus Seminar in the 1980s. This is an area of study, which is about 13 years old at the time he wrote the lecture but he did not delve into it. Despite that, Abogunrin’s lecture has contributed tremendously for the understanding of the subject under discussion and to me, he first published on the historical Jesus in Nigeria and perhaps in Africa.

In the book, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*,<sup>138</sup> Crossan, a critical scholar, uses the word *birth* to mean the 30s and the 40s when Jesus and his companions lived in radical and nonviolent resistance to Herod Antipas and Rome, and by *Christianity* he meant Christian Judaism. Crossan classifies the Gospels into the saying gospels, the

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<sup>133</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus,” 8.

<sup>134</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus,” 20.

<sup>135</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus,” 31.

<sup>136</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus,” 36.

<sup>137</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search of the Original Jesus,” 36.

<sup>138</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

biographical gospels, discourse gospels and the biographical-discourse gospels, and he questions the validity of the canonical gospels.

Crossan argues about the gospels and their sources. He also considers the need for historical judgment on the gospels, the dependent and independent gospels,<sup>139</sup> and how they can be merged to get accurate facts on the life of Jesus. Crossan looks at the methodology and the anthropology, history and archeology, the kingdom and eschatology, healers and itinerants, teachers and householders, meals and community and the story and the tradition. Crossan summarizes the book with a story on the road to Emmaus of how Jesus did not invite them but they invited him and the emphasis on the invitation that leads to meal and to recognition. He rejects the scene of the resurrection. To him, “resurrection is not enough” we still need scripture and Eucharist, tradition and table, community and justice and so on.<sup>140</sup> This book will help for the understanding of the Third Quest, particularly Crossan’s view of Jesus.

Another work which has contributed to the understanding of Wright’s understanding of Jesus within the Third Quest is *The Challenge of Jesus*.<sup>141</sup> Wright raises some challenging thoughts on the Quest for Jesus. Wright begins with the challenge of studying Jesus, which to him has become controversial in the hands of non-devout Christians and that the historical quest is a non-negotiable aspect of Christian discipleship.<sup>142</sup> Modern Jesus research is a result of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and Wright believes that the question of Reimarus was necessary.<sup>143</sup> He discusses the kingdom of God and summarizes the history of the Jesus quest. He maintains his classification of the quest history as “the Old Quest,” “the New Quest,” and the “Third Quest,” which has been sharply criticized by people like Crossan. Wright believes that he is “justified in continuing to distinguish these movements in this way”.<sup>144</sup> To this, he reaffirmed his argument against the Jesus Seminar on the basis of their methods, arguments and conclusions on

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<sup>139</sup> By dependent gospels, Crossan refers to Matthew and Luke and by independent gospels, he means Mark, Q, *Thomas* and the *Gospel of Peter*.

<sup>140</sup> Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, xi.

<sup>141</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000).

<sup>142</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 1-2.

<sup>143</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 14.



theological grounds.<sup>145</sup> He reveals that the historical Jesus quest is necessary for the health of the church<sup>146</sup> because of the positive benefits he finds in the Third Quest.

Wright discusses the historical construction of the kingdom of God in the first chapter within Judaism of the first century and the theology of symbols, particularly those of Jesus and symbols within Judaism such as Sabbath, food, nation and land, temple, Jesus' symbols of the kingdom of God as land and people, family, torah and temple. Wright answers some challenging questions about Jesus, particularly of messiahship and crucifixion of the messiah,<sup>147</sup> the belief of Jesus about himself and God and the event of Easter, which served as the closing wall of the book.

Darrell L. Bock holds his PhD from University of Aberdeen and is a research professor in New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. In his book, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*,<sup>148</sup> particularly chapter five, Bock surveys the three quests for the historical Jesus and argues that the No-Quest is an overstatement.<sup>149</sup> Bock surveys various methods for the study of the Gospels such as historical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism and narrative criticism. He declares that his work is on the Third Quest, but he heavily focuses on the scriptures, "it is not a historical work in the technical, critical sense".<sup>150</sup> This book is helpful for the conservative understanding of the historical Jesus and different methods employed by scholars in the study of the Gospels.

Another scholar whose work has contributed to the understanding of this subject is Stanley E. Porter, "Reading the Gospels Today and the Historical Jesus" in *Reading the Gospels Today*.<sup>151</sup> Porter chronicles the three quests for the historical Jesus and argues for a better way to read

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<sup>145</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 14-15.

<sup>146</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 15.

<sup>147</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 67-9.

<sup>148</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

<sup>149</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 144.

<sup>150</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 152.

<sup>151</sup> Stanley E. Porter, "Reading the Gospels Today and the Historical Jesus" in *Reading the Gospels Today* (Stanley E. Porter ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

the Gospels and suggests the genre of the Gospels, the language of Jesus and the criteria for authenticity to be better ways for understanding the historical Jesus. This article provides a better insight for the understanding of the historical Jesus.

The most momentous and recent work I have read is Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*.<sup>152</sup> Keener is professor of New Testament at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University in Pennsylvania. Keener's book has 831 pages but the main book's contents and discussions are 349 pages with 209 pages of notes. The book has attached 109 pages of works cited, which means about 2,700 books were used. Keener argues that the earliest substantive sources available for historical Jesus research when interpreted in their early Jewish setting will prove their picture of Jesus as coherent and plausible. To this, Keener shows how many works on the historical Jesus research's emphasis just one aspect of the Jesus tradition against others, but a much wider range of material in the Jesus tradition makes sense in an ancient Jewish setting. The book is divided into three parts. The first is the disparate views about Jesus, the second is the character of the Gospels and the third is what we learn about Jesus from the best sources.

Keener presents a historical development of the Jesus scholarship, from the work of Reimarus, Strauss, and Schweitzer, etc. There is discussion on the civilized Jesus of Harnack, Apocalyptic Jesus of Wess and Schweitzer, mythical Jesus of Bultmann and he questions the existential Jesus, de-Judaizing Jesus, the revolutionary Jesus and other popular views of Jesus.<sup>153</sup> Keener considers the views of Jesus as a cynic sage with a thorough analysis of the works of Crossan, Mack and Meier, which have become bases for their aspects in the Jesus Seminar. Keener gives a big section of the book on Jesus and Judaism centering on the works of Vermes, Meier, Sanders, and Charlesworth. Here, Jesus is seen as a Jewish charismatic healer, a charismatic sage and an eschatological prophet. Keener also investigates Jesus as Cynic Sage and Jesus and Judaism. Since the Third Quest uses some wide range of non-canonical gospels, Keener devotes chapter 4 to argue the position of other gospels in Jesus scholarship. The first part comprises four chapters and is very helpful for understanding the positions held in the three quests of the

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<sup>152</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>153</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 12.

historical Jesus. This book is useful for it has given insight into the development of the Jesus scholarship.

### 3. The Fictional Jesus

The third phase of Jesus studies, according to Crossan, is the fictional Jesus. This period started with the Jesus Seminar. It is clear to state that the Jesus Seminar is a group of biblical scholars, which was founded by Robert W. Funk in 1985. This group started with 35 members, who have gathered to discuss and vote the words of Jesus in the Gospels, though under the influence of historical criticism but using an advanced method called “Socio-scientific method and computer science.”<sup>154</sup> This group aims at reconstructing the words of Jesus (a similar position held by the second quest) in search for a better and historical method for understanding Jesus.

Using a color system of balloting, the Seminar is producing a series of Red Letter Editions. The first book published in 1988 is *The Parables of Jesus* by Funk, Scott and Butts. This book somehow tells us of the early leaders of the group. Another work is *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (1988) by Burton L. Mack.<sup>155</sup> Mack rejects the view of Mark as a historical document for the life of Jesus and that Jesus’ themes, topics were much closer to those of the Cynics than to Jewish piety.

Before the main publication of the Jesus Seminar, Wright has published, *Who was Jesus?*,<sup>156</sup> which has a small section on the Jesus Seminar; hence, there were no available research materials. If Wright was wrong as we shall argue in the subsequent chapters, many of his followers will be wrong in the classification of the Jesus Seminar under the Second or New Quest. However, challenged by Wright, the most notable book for the understanding of the Jesus Seminar is their main text, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (1993) by Robert Funk, Roy W Hoover and the Jesus Seminar.<sup>157</sup> It was published as their version of the Bible called the *Scholar’s Version* of the New Testament.

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<sup>154</sup> Witherington III *Jesus Quest*, 43.

<sup>155</sup> Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>156</sup> N. T. Wright, *Who was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

<sup>157</sup> Robert Funk, Roy W Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (New York: HarperOne, 1993).

This work reveals their aims, methodology, members, presuppositions, and conclusions and gives the general views of the group. The publication and the media's blistering expose of the Seminar attracted attention from many other scholars and members of the group.

Dominant among the books on the Jesus Seminar is a chapter in *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* by Marcus J. Borg published in 1994 a year after *The Five Gospels*. Borg gives us the background for the Jesus Seminar being a Fellow or a member. He reveals that he is writing as a Christian as well as a Fellow of the Jesus Seminar in order to help the church benefit from all their views. This work presents the history of the group, the method, and the place of *The Five Gospels*, which features the *Gospel of Thomas* as the fifth gospel. The whole purpose of the group as revealed by Borg is to "assess the degree of scholarly consensus about the historical authenticity of each of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament and other early Christian documents written before the year 300."<sup>158</sup> Borg tells of the membership criteria and gives few samples of the voting in *The Five Gospels* on eschatology and the kingdom of God's passages, which were voted black. The Seminar voted the Lord's Prayer black except "Our Father who art in heaven" to have been said by Jesus. All parables and aphorism's passages are voted black by the Seminar.

The group believes that Jesus spoke only 18% of the words in the Gospels and the Gospel of John is totally erased, and so is Mark (following Mack's *A Myth of Innocence*), except "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." This shows that the Seminar did not agree with the earlier publication of Mack. Borg states reasons that the *Scholar's Version* should be used in the church. He states, "*The Five Gospels* is ideally suited as a vehicle for bringing a greater awareness of biblical scholarship to the church and for initiating serious conversation among Christians about what the Bible is."<sup>159</sup> This will become the main text under this discussion in chapter four.

It should be said that there are many books written, which challenge the findings and methodologies of the Jesus Seminar. One of such outstanding evangelical books is *Jesus under Fire* edited by Michael J.

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<sup>158</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 162.

<sup>159</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 178.

Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (1995)<sup>160</sup> two years after *The Five Gospels*. Wilkins is a professor of New Testament Languages and Literature, while Moreland is professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. This book is a teamwork of ten known scholars on the Jesus research (Blomberg, Mcknight, Bock, Evans, Craig, Habermas, Geivett, Yamauchi, Moreland and Wilkins). These scholars joined forces from seminaries and universities to combat ‘the furor surrounding Jesus’ in *The Five Gospels*.<sup>161</sup> It challenges Jesus Seminar’s methodologies and findings, which generally clashed with the biblical records. It examines the authenticity of the words, actions, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus, and presents compelling evidence for the traditional biblical teachings. It also gives solid evidence that Jesus is the only way to God and assesses extra-biblical materials besides the Gospels in search for the real portrait of the biblical Jesus.

The contributors believe that the work of the Jesus Seminar is not a search for the historical Jesus, but an attack on Jesus. Whereas the scholars of the Jesus Seminar have gone to the extreme of “denying the accuracy of the biblical portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament,” the editors say, “others have contended that the Jesus found in the Bible and declared in the creeds of the church is the true Jesus of history”,<sup>162</sup> the view shared, presumably, by all the contributors in *Jesus under Fire*. It is stated, “In our view, the claims of radical New Testament critics like the fellows of the Jesus Seminar are false and not reasonable to believe in light of the best evidence available”.<sup>163</sup> They conclude,

If we adopt the portrait of Jesus that is offered in some of their works, we have simply a wise teacher, a religious sage, a pious spinner of tales and proverbs, a revolutionary figure, a Jewish peasant and Cynic preacher, or a spirit-person. This is the kind of Jesus who cannot offer eternal salvation or the power to live life as we know we should. Fortunately, as we have seen, the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar do not stand up to careful scrutiny.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland eds., *Jesus under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>161</sup> Wilkins and Moreland eds., *Jesus under Fire*, 1.

<sup>162</sup> Wilkins and Moreland eds., *Jesus under Fire*, 5.

<sup>163</sup> Wilkins and Moreland eds., *Jesus under Fire*, 7.

<sup>164</sup> Wilkins and Moreland eds., *Jesus under Fire*, 231.

Another monumental work on the Jesus Seminar is Witherington III's chapter "Jesus of the Jesus Seminar" in *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997).<sup>165</sup> The chapter looks closely at the aims of the founders of the group, the make-up of the Jesus Seminar, its decision-making and its result. This work states that after the study for the Third Quest for the historical Jesus is over, the next area of study is the Jesus Seminar. This is the first book to my assessment that has clearly stated that the Jesus Seminar is separate from the Third Quest for the historical Jesus,<sup>166</sup> and reconstructed by Crossan. Witherington III questions their criteria for authenticity, the ascendancy of *Thomas* and Q to the same level with the Gospels and the demise of the Markan priority. These are methodological problems to the works of the Jesus Seminar. To Witherington III, the Jesus Seminar omits the theological and eschatological matrix in which the teachings of Jesus are based and that "the Jesus Seminar's approach to Jesus the sage yields a Jesus who was too self-effacing and modest to speak much about himself or about his mission and purpose in life".<sup>167</sup> To this, he predicts that the Jesus Seminar will not last, and that the Seminar tells us more about the members than about Jesus<sup>168</sup> and challenges the Jesus Seminar for being rooted only in North America though we could see them to have some social implications for the world as seen in *The Da Vinci Code* (book and movie).

After his contribution on the miracles of Jesus in *Jesus under Fire* (1995), in 1996, Habermas published, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus*.<sup>169</sup> Habermas, an apologetic scholar, reveals that the book is not meant to question the authority of the scriptures but to reveal the various areas of apologetics.<sup>170</sup> Habermas evaluates the historical Jesus, the challenge of the Gnostic texts and the works of the Jesus Seminar, which are based on the *Gospel of Thomas* and revealed their understanding of the miracles of Jesus, death, burial

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<sup>165</sup> Ben Witherinton III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Illinois: IVP, 1997).

<sup>166</sup> Witherinton III, *The Jesus Quest*, 42.

<sup>167</sup> Witherinton III, *The Jesus Quest*, 55.

<sup>168</sup> Witherinton III, *The Jesus Quest*, 57.

<sup>169</sup> Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1996).

<sup>170</sup> Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 11.

and resurrection of Jesus (which they have strongly rejected). This is clearly seen in the works of Crossan and Borg, who are key expositors of these modern quests. In the second part, Habermas gives us clear historical facts about the life of Jesus. But amidst all these evidences, why are the advocates of the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar still rejecting the historical reality of the existence of Jesus? Their anti-supernatural bias cannot be overlooked.

Another relevant work on the Jesus Seminar is *The Jesus Crisis* (1998) edited by two conservative New Testament scholars, Robert L. Thomas, professor of New Testament and F. David Farnell, Associate professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary in California.<sup>171</sup> This work argues how historical criticism has influenced evangelical scholarship. It has rightly accused evangelical scholarship for sometimes adopting a similar method i.e. historical criticism. It reveals some similarities between evangelical scholarship and the Jesus Seminar.<sup>172</sup> To the editors, "The Jesus Crisis should be a source of serious concern for the Christian church."<sup>173</sup>

Lee Strobel is a trained lawyer at Yale Law School and former legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune* who has an atheistic background. In 1998, Strobel published *The Case for Christ*,<sup>174</sup> which is an interview of about 13 scholars, who are authorities in the studies of Jesus in search for evidence.<sup>175</sup> These are scholars who *The Jesus Crisis* criticizes. At the end of his investigation, Strobel was convinced by the evidences he gathered about Jesus, which he used to pass his verdict for the case of Christ on the front door as not being guilty of the so-called critical claims. He concludes, "My investigation into Jesus was similar to what you've just read except that I primarily studied book and other historical research

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<sup>171</sup> Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell eds., *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

<sup>172</sup> Thomas and Farnell eds., *The Jesus Crisis*, 14-15.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas and Farnell eds., *The Jesus Crisis*, 383.

<sup>174</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>175</sup> These interviews are based on the area of specialization of the scholar and depending on which aspect of Jesus Strobel is inquiring. These are Craig S. Blomberg, Bruce Metzger, Edwin Yamauchi, John McRay, Gregory Boyd, Ben Witherington III, Gary Collins, D. A. Carson, Louis Lapides, Alexander Metherell, William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and J. P. Moreland.

instead of personally interacting with scholars ....Now I had reached critical mass. The evidence is clear”.<sup>176</sup>

Perhaps in Africa, to me, the most influential and extensive work we can find about the Jesus Seminar is the work of J. D. Gwamna. Gwamna was a professor of New Testament concentrating on Contextual Theology, former Head of Department of Religious Studies, University of Jos, and was a professor at the Religious Studies’ Department, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Gwamna discusses the Jesus Seminar although he could not tell us the method used by the Jesus Seminar as Witherington III did,<sup>177</sup> but he tells of how they have applied the method in the voting. His work presents an analysis of the Jesus Seminar for the betterment of African scholarship for even Abogunrin did not mention the Jesus Seminar in his inaugural lecture. Gwamna has published an article titled, “The Challenge of the Jesus Seminar to Biblical Scholarship in Africa” in *Perspectives in African Theology* (2008).<sup>178</sup> I first heard and read of the Jesus Seminar from this book. Its scholarship directed me to the evangelical responses given by some scholars about the Jesus Seminar in *Jesus under Fire* edited by Wilkins and Moreland (1995). Gwamna considers the origin, aims, presuppositions, application of their methods and presents a critical appraisal of the Seminar with application to African biblical scholars.<sup>179</sup> He reveals the intention of the chapter to be the over-stretched of scholarship, which “is from the so-called West that this critical and somewhat ‘dangerous’ scholarship is being born, nurtured and sustained, for the possible exportation to the Third World, including Africa”.<sup>180</sup> Their findings, views, methodologies and conclusions are the most controversial discussions in history in as much as the study of Jesus and the Gospels is concerned. To this, Gwamna states, the Jesus Seminar is “the most controversial of all arms of New Testament studies”<sup>181</sup> and that the Seminar offers us a new dimension to the study of the Jesus of history. To him, they employed the use of

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<sup>176</sup> Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 259.

<sup>177</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest* 43.

<sup>178</sup> J. D. Gwamna, “The Challenge of the Jesus Seminar to Biblical Scholarship in Africa,” *Perspectives in African Theology* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2008).

<sup>179</sup> Gwamna, “The Challenge”, 127-37.

<sup>180</sup> Gwamna, “The Challenge”, 128.

<sup>181</sup> Gwamna, “The Challenge”, 127.



scientific techniques in the study of Jesus, which exposes their drift and rehearses the questers of the Jesus research of the past centuries.

Another work of Witherington III, published in 2006, is meant to combat the strange theories and critical history, which have been raised about Jesus (*What Have They Done with Jesus?*).<sup>182</sup> This book aims at giving the reasons why the Bible should be trusted. He attacks the works of the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar on the so-called claims that Jesus married and had a royal bloodline. Witherington III reveals that women were active in the ministry of Jesus but nothing is said in the Gospels about Jesus being married to any of them let alone divorcing and remarrying! He refutes the sayings that Mary Magdalene is the “apostle of the apostles,” a problem, which has been arising within the Medieval Ages to the modern age when the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* are given prominence. To him, Jesus must be seen beyond the modern lenses, which are detrimental to the accounts that we have in the Gospels. The Bible can be trusted for its supreme evidences are far beyond the understanding of the critical scholars. Jesus must be seen beyond historical lenses. A good Christology is to go back to the first century to investigate his life as revealed in the Gospels, which have been reliable to this day.

In 2007, another conservative scholar, Craig A. Evans published *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*.<sup>183</sup> Evans speaks to a variety of readers and gives a clear dimension between the Jesus presented by others apart from the Gospels, which are meant to expose his birth, life, death and resurrection against the critical scholars. Against the Jesus Seminar, he discusses the question of authenticity, the questionable texts, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and the *Gospel of Peter*, which have come to be accepted by the Jesus Seminar and many members of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. Evans discusses the healing and miracles of Jesus and gives a better understanding to the works of Josephus, which have been misused and dubiously used.

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<sup>182</sup> Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

<sup>183</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007).

Although sections of this book *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009)<sup>184</sup> have been reviewed, it has better sections for the understanding of the Jesus Seminar. It reveals Jesus encountered some conflict with some teachers of the law and was a prophet, healer and exorcist against the denial from the Jesus Seminar and the left wing historical Jesus questers. Jesus proclaimed the end time and the messiah of the world which scholars like Bultmann rejected<sup>185</sup> and was a king.<sup>186</sup> At last, Keener reveals the overall effort of the book as establishing the “basic portrayal of Jesus in the first century Gospels, depending on eyewitnesses, is more plausible than the alternative hypothesis of its modern detractors”.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009).

<sup>185</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 256.

<sup>186</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 266.

<sup>187</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 349.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE WEAVING OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS**

This chapter discusses the entire weaving of the historical Jesus research. It focuses on the three divisions of the period; the First, Second (New) and Third Quests for the historical Jesus. The chapter discusses their views, presuppositions and conclusions on Jesus of Nazareth. A good number of the proponents have rejected the traditional understanding of Jesus, which has been surviving since the days of the Early Church's fathers. This historical critical analysis of Jesus and the Gospels has been using the historical critical method for the study of Jesus.

The study of Jesus, which started after the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, commonly called the Quest for the historical Jesus, is an attempt to use historical and literary rather than religious methods to reconstruct the life of Jesus. This is a scholarly approach to undermine the traditional view of Jesus, which has survived since the first century. The Quest began as an explicitly anti-theological, anti-Christian and anti-dogmatic movement with Reimarus as the founder. Its agenda was not to find a Jesus upon whom Christian faith might be based, but to show that the faith of the church could not, in fact, be based on the real Jesus of Nazareth. This was a study, which emphasizes courage in the discrepancies, which exist in the effort to harmonize the Gospels.<sup>188</sup>

As such, the historical study of the Gospels sought to give, in its view, a more historical picture of Jesus than what we have in the Gospels. We see the historical Jesus to have challenged the traditional Jesus. The purpose for the critical-historical depiction of Jesus was that the supernatural and divine statements of Jesus in the Gospels cannot be explained; hence, to them, the Gospels are merely human documents rather than being inspired by the Holy Spirit. This caused them to define a Jesus, which is not found in the Gospels. Affirming the state of such challenge from the critical scholars N. T. Wright elaborates, "Many Jesus scholars of the last two centuries have, of course, thrown scripture out of the window and reconstructed a Jesus quite different from what we find

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<sup>188</sup> Porter, "Reading," 29.

in the New Testament.”<sup>189</sup> Despite that, their Jesus cannot be found in the Gospels, as asserted by Wright, a position, which is necessitating a careful look at the portraits of Jesus from several sources.

To the higher critics, the problem with the Gospels was that they could not merge the critical-historical Jesus with the life of Jesus in the Gospels, which to them, is a product of the formulation by the Early Church. They developed anti-supernatural bias about the Gospels. This change of view raised a difficulty in theology, which is contrary to the Christ proclaimed in the New Testament texts and the critical historical Jesus lying behind a bias against the supernatural and the other gospel texts.<sup>190</sup> Such an understanding of Jesus is classified as the “Jesus of Evangelical Christology” and the “Jesus of Liberation Christology.”<sup>191</sup> To the critics, the historical Jesus has been theologized by the Early Church and to this, they criticize the birth, miracles, teaching kingdom, death and resurrection of Jesus as stated in the Gospels.<sup>192</sup>

Historical Jesus studies have been engaged by both Christians and non-Christians. As a result, the life of Jesus of Nazareth has attracted the attention of people and the critical scholars, who sought critical approaches for understanding him. New approaches came on board in order to depict the life of Jesus contrary to what has been revealed in the Gospels. Let’s consider, first, the classification of the Quests within the historical Jesus research.

### **1. Structural Clarifications**

It should be stated that the classification of the periods within this range of studies has never been agreed among scholars of the Jesus studies since the eighteenth century. Some believe the four classifications while others believe in three. Stanley E. Porter elaborates, “...there have been four periods in the quest for the historical Jesus, a first from the eighteenth century to 1906, a no-quest period from the 1906-1953, and a new or second quest from 1953 to say 1988, and a third quest from around 1988

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<sup>189</sup> Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 4.

<sup>190</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology: God and the Word in a Transitional Age* (Illinois: IVP, 1992), 87.

<sup>191</sup> Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 1995), 5.

<sup>192</sup> Porter, “Reading,” 29.

to the present.”<sup>193</sup> Taking the no-quest as a period, Porter believes that the classification is wrong for most of them and argues that the Quest has begun with some texts after the death of Jesus and that the church fathers engaged in some quest through their writings.<sup>194</sup>

Colin Marsh succeeds in giving new dimensions on the quest for the historical Jesus and argues that there were many periods in the quest. To him, there are “several positivist quests, a romantic quest, form-critical and traditio-historical quests, a non-Jewish quest, an existentialist quest, a Jewish-Christian quest and post-modern quest.”<sup>195</sup> Marxsen provided a most useful model for describing the history by his reference to the three separate *sitz im leben(s)*, or life situations, found in the Gospels: the ministry and teachings of the historical Jesus (the first *sitz im leben*); the situation of the early church during the “oral period” (the second *sitz im leben*); and the situation of the individual Evangelists (the third *sitz im leben*).<sup>196</sup>

Though many scholars hold to the four periods (cf. Wright, Blomberg, Burer and Bock), some scholars such as Bock and Habermas believe that the designation *No Quest* is probably an overstatement because they find the end of the First Quest to have been classified as the No Quest. A similar view is held by Porter that there is hardly a period of no-questing after the First Quest.<sup>197</sup>

In a view, which I have followed in this book, the First Quest ranged from the 1776 to 1952. The end of this period is often called “No Quest” because there were so many different discussions about the historical Jesus under Bultmann and the form critics. The Second Quest started from 1953 to 1969 and the Third Quest from 1970s to the present, with

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<sup>193</sup> Porter, “Reading” 31-32

<sup>194</sup> Porter, “Reading” 32.

<sup>195</sup> Cited in Porter, “Reading,” 36. The existential philosophy states that existence is always particular and individual. It states that Christ must be unknown since he is God and that we do not demand belief in our faith.

<sup>196</sup> Qtd in Stein *Problem*, 268. By *sitz im leben*, I mean the German words meaning “situation in life or life setting.” For example, the situation of the first century in which Matthew wrote.

<sup>197</sup> For more analysis see Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 141-52. Habermas classifies the No-quest as a period of “De-emphasizing the historical Jesus” in *The Historical Jesus* (18-24) and other works of scholars.

the Jesus Seminar and *The Da Vinci Code* as other arms of the Third Quest, which are classified as the fictional quest for Jesus by Crossan.

A related problem, which has dominated the minds of scholars is the placement of scholars within these periods. With this, for example, Porter stresses that the classifications have misrepresented most of the scholars within the periods and argues that the works of Farrar, Weiss, Edersheim, and Sanday<sup>198</sup> among others should not be dismissed for they believed that the Gospels sources could be reliably used to discuss the historical Jesus. The depiction of the end of the First Quest with the work of Schweitzer is wrong for many things, which Schweitzer said have already been said in some forms in the works of those before him which gave Schweitzer the basis for critique in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*.<sup>199</sup> Also, Crossan rejected the fact that Wright classified him and many contemporary scholars among the Second Quest and Crossan inquires that he is “part of the discarded past.”<sup>200</sup>

This book holds to the three Quests for the historical Jesus as outline above. I believe that the First Quest did not end with Schweitzer for during the so-called No Quest, discussions of Jesus went further and many scholars critiqued Schweitzer’s Jesus and introduced form criticism as a better way of understanding Jesus<sup>201</sup> and initiated the dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith in the works of Bultmann. As such, any scholar who falls within this category should be classified under the category he has fallen to in line with the outline above. Let’s consider the First Quest of the 1776 to around 1952.

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<sup>198</sup> On the works of these men see F. W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ 2 vols.* (London: Cassell, Peter and Galphin, 1874); B. Weiss, *The Life of Christ, 3 Vols.* Trans. J. W. Hope (Edinburgh: Clark, 1883-4); A. Edershim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 2 Vols.* (London: Longmans, Green, 1883); W. Sanday, “Jesus Christ” *A Dictionary of the Bible, 5 Vols.*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: Clark, 1898-1904), 603-53.

<sup>199</sup> Porter, “Reading” 32-3

<sup>200</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 44.

<sup>201</sup> Form Criticism is a study in New Testament of the early forms in which the oral material of the Gospels circulated before they were written down. These include sayings, miracles, and parables among many others.

## 2. The First Quest

Discussing the first quest would be of significance if we carefully consider the background for the historical Jesus. A lot of scholars have been involved in the studies but this book considers few names as guide to the studies and to buttress a point on their perspectives of Jesus. Let consider Hermann S. Reimarus.

### a. Reimarus

This post-modernist First Quest started with the German skeptic Hermann S. Reimarus (1694-1768)<sup>202</sup> when he declared that Christianity was based on a mistake and rejected the divine nature of Jesus and said he was a Jewish revolutionary and failure in his messianic dispositions. Influenced by the liberalism of his time, the purpose for all his views was to show that Jesus of Nazareth has no role to play in modern religious faith and thinking following the skepticism, rationalism and agnosticism before the Enlightenment.<sup>203</sup> To Reimarus, Jesus was a Jewish reformer, who became increasingly politicized and he failed. To him, Jesus conceived the kingdom on political terms, who thought that his mission was over two times, when he sent his disciples (Matt. 10:23) and during his triumphant entry to Jerusalem, which led him to cry on the cross. Reimarus denied the resurrection, saying that the disciples stole his body and then wrote stories about his life and his words, which were nothing but “tissue of lies.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Joachim Jeremias states that the Old Quest began in 1778 having the works of Reimarus in mind (*Problem 3*). After Reimarus, other scholars who have written on the life of Jesus are Johann Jakob Hess, Frans Volkmar Reinhard, E. A. Opitz, J. A. Jakobi, J. G. Herder, K. F. Bahrtdt, and K. H. Venturini. On these scholars see Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Chapters 3 and 4. Another well-known scholar on the life of Jesus is H. E. G. Paulus (1761-1851) who was a German professor at Heidelberg who viewed Jesus as coming to bring changes in the moral lives of his hearers and the rule of God for many people. He did not deny the miracles of Jesus and that Jesus did not die on the cross but did die after some forty days. For a critical analysis of the life and beliefs of Paulus see Strimple 21-24. An older work is that of Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, 48-57.

<sup>203</sup> See F. David Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism” *The Jesus Crisis* (Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell eds., Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 87-117.

<sup>204</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 2; Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 143.

Reimarus composed a treatise rejecting miracles and accusing Bible authors of fraud, but he didn't publish his findings. The ascension, to Reimarus, was a fraud and the disciples reconstructed the Second Coming passages in their preaching for they were disappointed in Jesus. Gotthold Lessing later published Reimarus' conclusions in the Wolfenbuettel *Fragments*. Though not popular, his work ushered in critical thinking and new forms of inquiry, which were brought into the studies of scriptures.<sup>205</sup> To Wright, his work appears to be the first in the modern period and "variations on well-worn themes."<sup>206</sup> However, a careful merge of the Gospels will historically prove Reimarus wanting in his view about Jesus.

#### **b. Strauss**

Before David F. Strauss (1808-74), there were the influences of H. E. G. Paulus (1761-1851), G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and the Hegelian reconstructions that presented rational ideas about Jesus and the Gospels.<sup>207</sup> Strauss was known to have been the famous figure, who disrupted the English from their traditional beliefs about the Bible when he published in 1835 a two-volume work on the *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Like Reimarus, Strauss took a liberal view against the Gospels and the life of Jesus. It could be said that his books exposed the mythic approach to the study of the Gospels, particularly on the miracles of Jesus though Strimple states that Strauss was not the originator of the theory of myth.<sup>208</sup>

Strauss advanced the mythic approach although he held that there had been a historical Jesus, a real man upon whose image the myth had been drafted.<sup>209</sup> However, influenced by the liberalism before him, like Reimarus, Strauss believed that it was impossible to write the life of Jesus because there are discrepancies in the Gospels and that there are no chronological presentations of materials in the Gospels. This led Strauss

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<sup>205</sup> Je'adayibe Dogara Gwamna, "“What do People say I am?”: Interrogating Current Trends in New Testament Studies." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. No. 2, Vol. 27, October 2009), 5.

<sup>206</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 3.

<sup>207</sup> See Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*, 20-27.

<sup>208</sup> Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*, 30. For works on the early theories on the mythic approaches see Strimple 30.

<sup>209</sup> Daniel Rops, *Jesus and His Times* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 271.



to place the Gospels against the Gospel of John and also to overlook the most obvious fact of all –the existence of the Christian church.<sup>210</sup> His major contribution is the book *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*. His works were considered threats by “many ordinary Christians”<sup>211</sup> and scholars of the Gospels. His level of liberalism could not be comprehended by fellow liberals and many of them disagreed with Strauss at various positions.

#### **c. Renan**

The liberalism of Strauss has led to many problems. In the 1860s, F. E. Renan (1823-92) published his portrait of Jesus, which saw Jesus more as a great moral teacher, who won the hearts of the Jewish masses. Renan wrote that the biography of Jesus ought to be open to historical investigation just as the biography of any other man as Reimarus inquired. Like Reimarus and Strauss, Jesus, to Renan, was a mere man than divine. Renan aims at presenting a Jesus in the proper geographical and technical setting involving the topography and customs of Palestine as a “fifth Gospel,”<sup>212</sup> a task reconstructed by the Jesus Seminar when they added the *Gospel of Thomas* as their fifth Gospel.

#### **d. Wrede**

William Wrede<sup>213</sup> was a professor of New Testament at Breslau. He held a more radical view of Jesus though a reconstruction of the view of Reimarus and Renan on the depiction of the life of Jesus as any other man on earth. To Wrede, Jesus was a Galilean teacher or prophet who did and said some striking things and was eventually executed. The attempt by Wrede was to deny Jesus’ divinity. To this, he believes Jesus did not claim to be the messiah (the Christ) and was certainly not hailed as the Messiah during his life on earth. To him, “if Jesus really knew himself to be the Messiah and designated himself as such, the genuine tradition is so closely interwoven with later accretions that it is not easy to recognize it.”<sup>214</sup> To him, the life of Jesus was not messianic for it was

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<sup>210</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*, 12-19.

<sup>211</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 3.

<sup>212</sup> Rop, 273.

<sup>213</sup> Most scholars prefer to address him using the German spelling Wilhelm Wrede than William Wrede. They all refer to one person.

<sup>214</sup> Quoted in Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, 339.

the resurrection that convinced the disciples of the Messiah and the disciples then realized that he had been Messiah all the time.<sup>215</sup>

Wrede's position was taken by John Hick in 1977 that Jesus did not thought of himself as God incarnate or the Messiah,<sup>216</sup> a position Witherington III, in an interview with Strobel, counteracts.<sup>217</sup> Such a belief by Wrede means that Mark's account of Peter's account was not historical. Wrede in his Markan theory as a basis for the studies of the Gospels, a more theological fiction, left us with the notion that Jesus is a first-century Jewish prophet, who was a teacher in Galilee, had disciples and taught them special things, a mere man, as Reimarus and Renan stated, than being divine.

#### e. Schweitzer

The work of Albert Schweitzer serves as a commentary to many of the works before his and gives a critique of their ideas as the quest for the historical Jesus developed yet we cannot tell why Schweitzer decided to exclude the work of Martin Kahler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*. Kahler has criticized the liberals of his time on the historical Jesus and the limits of historical inquiry stating background to what he called "The Real Christ of Faith and History" and has given a foundation for the faith in Jesus from the biblical point.<sup>218</sup>

Schweitzer was the man who instigated and gave the historical Jesus research direction when he published his book, which first used the phrase *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Schweitzer was a brilliant musician, a world class philosopher, historian and theologian and a medical missionary in what was then called "the still darkest Africa." He wrote the *Quest for the Historical Jesus*<sup>219</sup> in 1906 in his late 20s.

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<sup>215</sup> Neill, *Interpretation 1861-1961*, 249.

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 134; S. O. Abogunrin "In Search of the Original Jesus" (An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Thursday July 16, 1998, Published, 2003), 29-30.

<sup>217</sup> Strobel, 132-41.

<sup>218</sup> Martin Kahler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Trans. and introduction by Carl E. Braeten, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

<sup>219</sup> For more interactive works of the works of Albert Schweitzer see Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 5; Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 9-11 and Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 6.

Unlike Wrede, who denied that Jesus did not think of himself as the Messiah and that the people did not think of Jesus as the Messiah, Schweitzer believes Jesus was a failed Jewish messiah in the face of the people; hence, the people put their trust in him to rescue them from the Romans but later he announced that he will be killed which got fulfillment as recorded in the Gospels. Schweitzer believes the thoroughgoing eschatology of the kingdom of God against the view of Weiss and depicts Jesus' suffering and death as part of the kingdom of God's fulfillment.

To Schweitzer, the final tribulation will witness the culmination of the kingdom of God, which is more in the future. The preaching of Jesus about the kingdom followed the general lines of contemporary apocalyptic, though he believes that Jesus was convinced that he was the one through whom the purposes of God were to be brought to fulfillment. Schweitzer states that Jesus became convinced that he must die, and went to Jerusalem with that intention. Upon his death, the triumph will immediately follow –the kingdom will come and history will be brought to an end.

To Schweitzer, from start to finish, Jesus had been mistaken about himself, about his proclamation and about the purpose of God –and was great enough to face with unclouded consciousness the realization of his mistake.<sup>220</sup> Schweitzer rejects any historical attempt to use historical finding to search for Jesus Christ<sup>221</sup> and observes that “Jesus as a concrete historical personality remains a stranger to our time, but in His Spirit, which lies hidden in His words, is known in simplicity, and its influence is direct.”<sup>222</sup> Schweitzer depicts Jesus as prophetic-apocalyptic figure whose life and teaching were totally dominated by the expectation that the end of the world would dawn during his lifetime or soon afterwards; because the time still remaining was so short, Jesus taught a quite demanding interim ethic.<sup>223</sup> Schweitzer concludes,

...it is a good thing that the true historical Jesus should overthrow the modern Jesus, should rise up against the modern spirit and sent upon earth, not peace but a sword...it was because He was so in His inmost being that he could think of Himself as the Son of Man...The

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<sup>220</sup> Neill, *Interpretation 1861-1961*, 189.

<sup>221</sup> Schweitzer, *Quest*, 399.

<sup>222</sup> Schweitzer, *Quest*, 401.

<sup>223</sup> Weren, *Windows on Jesus*, 257.

name in which men expressed their recognition of Him as such, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, have become for us historical parables. We can find no designation which expressed what He is to us. He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not.<sup>224</sup>

But what does he mean by “We can find no designation, which expressed what He is for us. He came to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old”? Could that be the reason he depicted Jesus as a failed messiah? It is evident that Schweitzer believes in an unknown Jesus, which no designation can explain.

#### **f. Bultmann and Form Criticism**

Though many scholars of Jesus tend to call the end of the First Quest, the No Quest, thinking Jesus discussions got into silence after the work of Schweitzer, it has been argued in this book that such depiction of the period is invalid for most of the issues raised by Schweitzer have been observed by Reimarus, Strauss, Renan and Wrede and that Jesus discussions have superseded Schweitzer in the works of the form critics as we shall consider.

After Schweitzer, Jesus discussions continued through some different manner known as “form criticism,”<sup>225</sup> which according to C. Brown, was pioneered by K. L. Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>226</sup> This was the study of the forms of individual paragraph in the Gospels particularly the parables and miracle stories, and has questioned the nature of the Gospels.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Schweitzer, *Quest*, 403.

<sup>225</sup> See the works of some British scholars who have challenged the theories of the German scholars which Bock suggested have influenced scholars like C. H. Dodd, F. F. Bruce, C. F. D Moule, J. D. Dunn, I. H. Marshall and Graham Stanton.

<sup>226</sup> For more analysis see C. Brown, “Quest of Historical Jesus,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight and I. H. Marshall eds., Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1992).

<sup>227</sup> On form criticism see McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, 106-110.

There are many reasons for the rise of form criticism. Form criticism sprang as a result of the weaknesses of source criticism.<sup>228</sup> The inability to produce a documentary theory of Mark's origin led to form critics to suggest form criticism as a method. Source criticism has left a gap of 20 to 30 years after the death of Jesus before any written document had appeared. To Abogunrin, "Source criticism has proposed a four-document hypothesis as sources of the Synoptic documents but could not push the study beyond the written document, which form criticism attempts to fill the gap."<sup>229</sup>

The historicity of Mark was challenged, which made the historical Jesus research experienced a shift. There was the desire to modernize the Gospels through interest in the forms as means for reinterpreting the Gospels and the urge to place the literary materials of the Gospels in their historical *sitz im leben*. Though form studies have not been agreed among the scholars but its influence on the complexity of historical Jesus research could be evident. With this, Kee observes, "Form criticism has not found unanimous acceptance, but it has nevertheless affected a revolution in the study of the gospels."<sup>230</sup>

Form criticism has the following assumptions; that before the written Gospels there was a period of oral tradition.<sup>231</sup> That during this period, narrative and sayings (except the passion narrative) circulated as self-contained unit. That the Gospels must be regarded as folk literatures and can be classified according to literary forms. That the community productions and that the vital factors to these forms are found in the *sitz im leben*. That the traditions have no chronological or geographical value and that the original form of the traditions may be recovered by studying the laws of the tradition.<sup>232</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) was a New Testament scholar and a form critic who had a more skeptical view of the Gospels than those before him. Bultmann states that no portrait of Jesus could be found in

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<sup>228</sup> Source Criticism is a method of studying the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, which considers the literary sources that have been used by the writers of the Gospels.

<sup>229</sup> Abogunrin, "In Search," 16.

<sup>230</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 20.

<sup>231</sup> P. Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 10 (2012), 191-227.

<sup>232</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 230.

the work of Schweitzer,<sup>233</sup> which led to form criticism in the study of Jesus. Bultmann's views shaped liberalism on the Gospels and New Testament generally, predominantly in his book *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Unlike Dibelius, Bultmann's influence was both more radical and influential. Influenced by Heidegger, Bultmann maintained that the most important element in the Christian faith was an existential encounter with Christ, which a confrontation with Christ will decide whether to accept or reject.<sup>234</sup>

Bultmann's approach to the Gospel materials using form criticism was dominated by various influences, which disposed him to treat history as irrelevant. To him, the evangelists have written the Gospels from their standpoint of faith. This makes the Gospels, to him, to have become sources of early Christian theology rather than historical data for the life of Jesus. In *Jesus and the Word*, Bultmann concludes that "we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."<sup>235</sup> This led to his view of community creativeness, which he claims that the community created most of the materials<sup>236</sup> like Reimarus and Strauss. Like Dibelius, Bultmann classified the Gospels into various forms; apophthegms (Dibelius' paradigms), miracle stories (Dibelius' *novellen*), sayings, legends and myths.

Bultmann, like Dibelius and the liberals before him, rejected the miracle materials and the historicity of the miracle accounts.<sup>237</sup> Bultmann believed that all the miracle accounts in the Gospels are creations of the early church. As such, miracles in the Gospels are legendary and that all their elements are unintelligible today. Most of his ideas are developed in *Theology of the New Testament* (2 Vols.), *The Gospel of John* and *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. Although Bultmann believed that nothing could be known about Jesus in the Gospels historically, he accepts in

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<sup>233</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 7.

<sup>234</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 215.

<sup>235</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (Trans. Louise P. Smith and E. Huntress. New York: Scribner's, 1934), 8.

<sup>236</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 217.

<sup>237</sup> With the attempt of the liberals on the miracles of Jesus, I like to state that this anti-supernatural view has been in existence in some form in the Gospels when Jesus performed many deeds and the people did not believe he did those things (cf. the healing of the blind man and the resistance of the Pharisees, John 9:32).

*Theology of the New Testament* (Vol. 1, chapter 1) a number of historical facts concerning the life and message of Jesus.<sup>238</sup> In line with other scholars, Gwamna has made clear the error of Bultmann particularly when Bultmann concluded that we cannot transpose ourselves into the first century world of the New Testament, which Bultmann saw as “primitive” and “prescientific” and therefore was “unintelligible” and “unacceptable.”<sup>239</sup>

On the sayings of Jesus, Bultmann divides them into 7; wisdom words, “I” words, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, law words, rules and parables.<sup>240</sup> However, he finds some law sayings to be probably genuine and authentic. Bultmann accepts only about forty sayings as genuine and the mere event of the life and death of Jesus on the cross, which formed the background for his Christ of faith. To him, all the Gospel materials are either the creation or adaption of the community, a belief based on certain historical criteria as discussed in the Jesus Seminar below. Let me state beforehand that the voting of the Jesus Seminar on the sayings of Jesus is not new for it evolved with Bultmann. The Seminar accepts 18% of the Synoptic Gospels as authentic unlike Bultmann, who accepted only 40 sayings as credible.

For Bultmann, what is central to the Christian message is not Jesus’ meekness and mildness, nor indeed the historical Jesus at all, but the Risen Christ.<sup>241</sup> Although Bultmann rejected the Gospels as biography, Abogunrin observes that “the Gospels must be set against the backdrop of their [the liberals]<sup>242</sup> own times. When this is faithfully done, the Gospels will emerge both as the full-fledged biographies of Jesus....”<sup>243</sup>

The early attempt by Bultmann and other form critics to make historical decisions as to the authenticity or non-authenticity of various sayings or periscope in the Gospels on the basis of their forms alone were clearly in error.<sup>244</sup> The conclusions reached serve an apologetic function

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<sup>238</sup> Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 49.

<sup>239</sup> Gwamna, “Current Trends,” 6.

<sup>240</sup> Guthrie, 218.

<sup>241</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 17.

<sup>242</sup> These words are mine.

<sup>243</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 19.

<sup>244</sup> Robert H. Stein *The Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1987), 228-9.

in demonstrating continuity between the life and teachings of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, which Bultmann was the leading figure.

### 3. Jesus of History and Christ of Faith

The discussion on history and faith started with Reimarus, Strauss and other critical scholars. Kahler's influence could reveal him being the earlier exponent when he denied the historical Jesus in search for the Biblical Christ of the Gospels, which he believed that the liberals are searching when he asked, "What is the life-of-Jesus research really searching for?"<sup>245</sup> Kahler prefers the real Christ of faith and history as the historic Christ of the Bible.<sup>246</sup> Despite the effort of Kahler, Bultmann revisits the discussions and compounds the entire studies.

The Jesus of History and Christ of Faith discussion got rooted very largely from the basic assumption of most form criticism that the *sitz im leben* must be found in the post-Easter period and could not have existed in the pre-Easter period. Such an assumption led Bultmann to exclude any possibility of a continuation between inevitable concentration of attention on the Christ of faith rather than Jesus of history. Bultmann rejects the historical Jesus of the liberal school in favor of a more dynamic Christ of faith, which was the result of his disillusionment with the liberal Jesus. Bultmann recognized that if faith depended on the quest for the historical Jesus, it became dependent on historical research with all its uncertainties.<sup>247</sup> Bultmann maintained that those who had come to have an encounter with the Christ of faith could no longer look at the Jesus of history except in the light of their new experience. To him, the *kerygma* is evidence for the Christ of faith.

Despite that, discussions on the Christ of faith and Jesus of history continued. Of recent, Marcus J. Borg reveals that their (the Jesus Seminar) work *The Five Gospels* with its coding should not be used as a new authority but it should be used for the scholarly understanding of the Gospels. To this, Borg states that the phrases "the pre-Easter Jesus" and "post-Easter Jesus" should replace the phrases "Jesus of History" and "Christ of Faith." By "pre-Easter Jesus, Borg means the historical Jesus and by "post-Easter Jesus" he means the Jesus of Christian experience and tradition in the years and centuries after the death of the pre-Easter

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<sup>245</sup> Kahler, 57

<sup>246</sup> Kahler, 65.

<sup>247</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 215.



Jesus.”<sup>248</sup> Borg urges for dialogical and dialectical relationship of the two rather than as a binary choice between opposites. He adheres to all the fact of the historical Jesus research, for to him, “the historical scholarship about Jesus helps to ‘keep the dangerous and subversive memory of Jesus’ alive.”<sup>249</sup>

Abogunrin also is not left out in the discussion. Abogunrin states that interest in Jesus of faith to the almost total neglect of the Jesus of history almost naturally leads to historical skepticism and flight from history.<sup>250</sup> He believes that the past’s reconstruction must remain relevant to faith in order to be meaningful.<sup>251</sup>

Although Bultmann aimed at transforming the *Kerygma* by clearly stating a separation of “Jesus of history” from the “Christ of faith,”<sup>252</sup> which Reimarus and Strauss have started and have been supported by many liberals such as Borg though giving a new dimension, I. H. Marshall asserts, “They are the same,”<sup>253</sup> a view shared among conservative scholars of the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history discussion. Matthew Michael also is with the view that the “dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is actually a Western fad, which unfortunately sought to impose a Western 21<sup>st</sup> century academic agenda on ancient New Testament writings.”<sup>254</sup> Michael believes that such a characterization of Jesus is nothing but a “misunderstanding of the merger of historical and theological elements in the practice of ancient narration.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 195.

<sup>249</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 196.

<sup>250</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 35.

<sup>251</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 35.

<sup>252</sup> For critical works on the Jesus of History and Christ of Faith which was propounded by Bultmann see Gabriel Hebert, *The Christ of faith and the Jesus of History* (London: SCM Press, 1962). William Baird, *The Quest of the Christ of Faith* (Texas: Word Books, 1971).

<sup>253</sup> Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, 61.

<sup>254</sup> Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Kaduna: Yuty Graphics, 2011), 194.

<sup>255</sup> Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions*, 193-4.

#### 4. Thurman and the Disinherited

Following the perspectives laid by Bultmann, there were works, which surfaced to combat the various interpretation of Jesus for the society. One of such works is Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949).<sup>256</sup> Thurman was an African American theologian, a philosopher, and an educator, who also served as a civil rights leader. Thurman taught at Howard University in Washington, DC., and the encounter with Mahatma Gandhi in India shaped Thurman's life and theology.<sup>257</sup> When Thurman wrote *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949), the emphasis of the Jesus studies was on the message of Jesus but ignored the place of the poor. Thurman's interest, both personal and professional, became the place of the poor or the disinherited in the society and the inability for Christianity to deal with the questions of the displaced. Thurman's asked, "Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin?"<sup>258</sup>

Within this understanding, *Jesus and the Disinherited* presents a new interpretation of the message of Jesus, which concentrates on the various teaching of Jesus, a dominant aspect of the quests for the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar. The existing interpretations of the teachings of Jesus, according to Thurman, have little to say about the poor in the society<sup>259</sup> because the Christian message is muffled, confused and left vague.<sup>260</sup> Christianity seems to favour the strong against the weak in the society. Even though the Christian religion was born out of persecution and suffering,<sup>261</sup> it neglected its primal foundations and became "the cornerstone of civilization and of nations whose very position in modern life has too often been secured by a ruthless use of power applied to weak and defenceless peoples."<sup>262</sup> Also, the missionary appeal was "on the

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<sup>256</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* ((Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>257</sup> James L. McDonald, *Audemus*: San Francisco Theological Seminary September 2016.

<sup>258</sup> Thurman, 6.

<sup>259</sup> Thurman, 11.

<sup>260</sup> Thurman, 11.

<sup>261</sup> Thurman, 12.

<sup>262</sup> Thurman, 12.

basis of the Christian responsibility to the needy, the ignorant, and the so-called backward peoples of the earth.”<sup>263</sup>

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman presented a socio-spiritual Christological view of Jesus within the context of oppression, injustice, and inequality. Although, Thurman’s work is not fully appreciated and publicized in the Jesus studies today, it has greatly influenced many people and brought radical change in the society. Thurman reacted to the racial difference, discrimination and the unjust treatment of the blacks by the whites in the society. Thurman equated such inhumane treatment with the situation of the Jews under the Roman empire. He writes,

The Jewish community has long been acquainted with segregation and the persecution growing out of it. Jews have been all the more easily trapped by it because of the deep historical conviction that they are a chosen people....Anti-Semitism is a confession of a deep sense of inferiority and moral insecurity. It is the fear of the socially or politically strong in the presence of the threat of moral judgment implicit in the role of the Jewish community throughout human history. Jesus was intimately acquainted with this problem from the inside.<sup>264</sup>

These attitudes made the blacks to become unsecured and vulnerable; hence, they were conquered by their fear and inferiority complex.

To understand the message and the place of Jesus, Thurman considers the neglected roots of the Christian faith and that Christ changed history with the emergence of Christianity. Thurman states, “The Christian Church has tended to overlook its Judaic origins, but the fact is that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew of Palestine when he went about his Father’s business, announcing the acceptable year of the Lord.”<sup>265</sup> Thurman compares the social descent and backgrounds of Jesus and Paul, and states that Paul had privileges of the Roman and Jewish rights compared to Jesus. Comparing Paul with Jesus, Thurman sees Jesus as a typical example of the poor, which made him understand the context of poor and the disinherited in the society.<sup>266</sup> Travis Harris re-echoes this that the church has failed in its development of relevant theology for

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<sup>263</sup> Thurman, 12.

<sup>264</sup> Thurman, 44.

<sup>265</sup> Thurman, 16. This became the emphasis of the third quest for the historical Jesus. See Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*.

<sup>266</sup> Thurman, 17.

disinherited in the days of Thurman, a theology, which interprets the needs of the people and provides adequate solutions. The quest for relevance led to the development of Hip hop music, and Travis Harris sees Thurman to have contended for an adequate theology that would reach the marginalized of the American society.<sup>267</sup>

Thurman sees Jesus as a poor Jew and that Jesus identified with the poor and engaged in a radical consideration of the destiny of the poor.<sup>268</sup> Jesus belonged to the minority group in Palestine<sup>269</sup> with his teachings directed “to the House of Israel, a minority within the Greco-Roman world, smarting under the loss of status, freedom, and autonomy, haunted by the dream of the restoration of a lost glory and a former greatness.”<sup>270</sup> The quest for freedom in Palestine in the days of Jesus was severe that they needed a deliverer similar to the days of Thurman and the Korean girl.<sup>271</sup> Such a struggle is witnessed among the Indigenous South Africans, where a picture of a white Santa during Christmas asked what

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<sup>267</sup> Travis Harris, “Refocusing and Redefining Hip Hop: An Analysis of Lecrae’s Contribution to Hip Hop” *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 1 (2014), 24.

<sup>268</sup> Thurman, 17. Jesus has been viewed by Jesus scholars within his socio-economic and religio-cultural context of Palestine as a sage, cynic Jewish peasant, eschatological prophet, and a spirit-filled person, who worked so hard to renew religious beliefs in Israel community. In Africa, Jesus is seen as an ancestor, elder brother and mediator, king, a revolutionary leader and rural dweller. See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990). J. Dogara Gwamna, “‘What do People Say that I Am?’: Interrogating Current Trends in New Testament Studies,” *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 27 (2009). J. Dogara Gwamna, *Perspectives in African Theology* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2008). Charles Nyamiti, “The Trinity: An African Ancestral Perspective,” *Theology Digest* 45 (1998), 21-22. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000). Charles N. Nyamiti, *Christ Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984). Godwin N. Toryough, “Jesus Christ as a Revolutionary in an African Perspective: An Exegesis of John 2:12-17,” In S. O. Abogunrin, J. O. Akao and D. O. Akintunde and G. N. Toryough, eds., *Christology in African Context* Biblical Studies Series-Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies 2, 2003.

<sup>269</sup> Mary J. Wade, “In the Light of the Moment: Reverence, Imagination, and Justice,” In Jennifer Castro ed., *I’ve Got the Power!: Naming and Reclaiming Power as a Force for Good* (Indiana: Women in Leadership Project, 2018), 130.

<sup>270</sup> Thurman, 21.

<sup>271</sup> Thurman, 22.

would a little South African girl want for Christmas, and the little girl replied, land. Nigeria is becoming socially unstable particularly in the middle belt, where armed people come to wipe an entire community in the name of communal clash, inherit their lands and rule the owners of the lands.

Some of these Jewish and Nigerian situations are comparable to what happened in the days of Thurman and Jesus. Herod was not a Jew. This is certain and parallel to the Africans during the Colonial period, when the French and the British were controlling African countries, the quest was for freedom. Having a born king in Jerusalem to Herod was a biological and political dethronement. That is why Herod and all of Jerusalem were troubled at the prophetic question of the Magi (Matt. 2:2).<sup>272</sup>

It was about the enemy of the Jews. Thurman writes, “Rome was the enemy; Rome symbolized total frustration; Rome was the great barrier to peace of mind. And Rome was everywhere. No Jewish person of the period could deal with the question of his practical life, his vocation, his place in society”<sup>273</sup> without settling this concern. Such affected the Negro in America and the freedom-quest communities in Africa. But deeds and message of Jesus became the “word and the work of redemption for all the cast-down people in every generation and in every age.”<sup>274</sup> Christianity then became a technique of survival for the oppressed. Christianity, with its emphases on forgiveness and heaven, become the ‘last bus-stop’ for the poor in the days of Thurman. Thurman sees Jesus being human, who was born; he has a name; <sup>275</sup> he has forebears; he is the product of a particular culture; he has a mother tongue; he belongs to a nation; he is born into some kind of faith.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> See J. P. Meier, “The Historical Jesus and the Historical Law: Some Problems within the Problem,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003), 52-79. J. P. Meier, “The Historical Jesus and the Historical Herodians,” *JBL* 119:4 (2000), 740-46. J. D. Thomas, “Mapping the Word, Reading the World: Biocartography and the “Historical” Jesus,” *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014), 447-97.

<sup>273</sup> Thurman, 22-3.

<sup>274</sup> Thurman, 28-9.

<sup>275</sup> Contrary to Thurman, Albert Schweitzer concluded that Jesus came to us as one without a name, the name men expressed him have become historical parables. See *The Quest*, 403.

<sup>276</sup> Thurman, 110.

The Christian gospel as deduced from the religion of Jesus became central in the thoughts of Thurman. Thurman's re-interpretation of the message of Jesus gave a sense of consolation to the poor. Thurman felt that the religion of Jesus should be examined within the background of Jesus' age and people, and to inquire into the content of the teaching with reference to the disinherited and the underprivileged.<sup>277</sup> The religion of Jesus has been of interest to Thurman and how such thought can affect the entire Christian society and balance the message of the gospel as exposed in the Christian Bible and emphasized by Geza Vermes in *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*.<sup>278</sup>

In an examination of the religion of Jesus, Karen D. Crozier has it that, "Thurman's re-interpretation of the religion of Jesus is presented that provides Christian spiritual and religious resources to engage contemporary manifestations of racism and white supremacy."<sup>279</sup> Crozier adds that "Thurman's interpretation of the phrase within the religion of Jesus carried the meaning of the presence and power of God abiding within a person that contributed to the development of one's interior structures to engage the world as subject."<sup>280</sup> In such an interpretation of the religion of Jesus in Thurman's thought, according to Crozier, "one sees the integration of spiritual matters with pressing social, existential issues."<sup>281</sup>

It is necessary that such an integration of spiritual and social matters should be a thing of concern to Christians in Africa and the world at large as Anthony C. Siracusa stated, "The religion of Jesus, not Christianity, should thus be understood in its political context as a method of responding to oppressive and violent state force."<sup>282</sup> This makes Sandra R. Mayo to argue that Thurman's work, from a theological perspective, should be part of the curriculum for social justice and reconciliation

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<sup>277</sup> Thurman, 15.

<sup>278</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>279</sup> Karen D. Crozier, "Appropriating the Prophetic Visions of Du Bois and Thurman: Considerations for the Academy," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 4 (2013), 3.

<sup>280</sup> Crozier, 12.

<sup>281</sup> Crozier, 13.

<sup>282</sup> Anthony C. Siracusa, "Disrupting the Calculation of Violence: James M. Lawson, Jr. and the Politics of Nonviolence" (Master's Thesis at Vanderbilt University, May, 2015), 10.

theories as it will inform our understanding of anti-oppressive frameworks.<sup>283</sup>

Thurman sees Jesus to have confronted fear that is engulfing the poor people in our homes, institutions, prisons, churches.<sup>284</sup> Also, the weak, according to Thurman, have used deception as an oldest technique to protect themselves against the strong.<sup>285</sup> Thurman elaborates that “The question of deception is not academic, but profoundly ethical and spiritual, going to the very heart of all human relations.”<sup>286</sup> The religion of Jesus should encourage the confrontation and defeat of social inferiority and inequality to provide a healthy society for the both the poor and the rich.

Thurman believes that hatred cannot be defined and that it is applied only to the attitude of the strong towards the weak and that the Negroes are mostly the victims.<sup>287</sup> Jesus rejected hatred because it meant death to the mind, the spirit and communion with the father.<sup>288</sup> Instead of hate, Thurman argues that the religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central. It spoke to the real enemy of Israel in the days of Jesus, Rome.<sup>289</sup> Jesus identified with Israel and demonstrated that “Love of the enemy means that a fundamental attack must first be made on the enemy status.”<sup>290</sup> Thurman summarizes that “The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: “Love your enemy.”<sup>291</sup>

As part of the integration of social and spiritual messages stated by Crozier, Thurman sees Jesus as identifying with the poor and radically provided their needs<sup>292</sup> because Jesus also belonged to the minority group in Palestine. Jesus’ teachings were directed to a minority group within the Greco-Roman world, smarting under the loss of status, freedom, and

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<sup>283</sup> Sandra Richards Mayo, “Chasing the ‘Hounds of Hell’: Howard Thurman’s Jesus and the Disinherited as a Curriculum for Racial Justice and Reconciliation,” *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal* 10 (2015), 7.

<sup>284</sup> Thurman, 36.

<sup>285</sup> Thurman, 58.

<sup>286</sup> Thurman, 62.

<sup>287</sup> Thurman, 75-6.

<sup>288</sup> Thurman, 88.

<sup>289</sup> Thurman, 91.

<sup>290</sup> Thurman, 97.

<sup>291</sup> Thurman, 100.

<sup>292</sup> Thurman, 18.

autonomy, haunted by the dream of the restoration of a lost glory and a former greatness. His message focused on the urgency of a radical change in the inner attitude of the people.<sup>293</sup>

The struggle in America was similar to that of the society of Jesus of Nazareth but Jesus confronted those challenges. Thurman continually reminds us that we cannot understand Jesus if we simply view him as a religious object disconnected from his time and place. Thurman insists Jesus must be seen as a religious subject not an object, as a living and breathing human being who was impacted by and responded to the world and the society in which he lived, a world of brutal oppression, exploitation, and violence. Jesus was part of a society and a people whose backs were truly against the wall.<sup>294</sup>

Jesus' sermons were on the meaning of religion and Christianity to those who stand with their backs against the walls (the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed).<sup>295</sup> Thurman's concern has been; what does our religion say to those people?<sup>296</sup> Surprisingly, it was people with the Christian religion that brought Africans as slaves and many ministers endorsed it.<sup>297</sup> Thurman called on those "who stand, at a moment in human history, with their backs against the wall" to maintain courage, integrity, and dignity in the face of atrocities rather than resorting to fear, deception, and hatred.<sup>298</sup>

Thurman insists "the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed" must be confronted not as objects for compassion or sympathy, but rather in a reflexive manner that forces people to rethink the possibility of the meaning of religion in the modern world. Such existential condition of

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<sup>293</sup> Donyelle Charlotte McCray, "Mothering Souls: A Vocation of Intercession," *ATR* 98 (n.d.), pp. 285-301.

<sup>294</sup> Temerson, 3-4.

<sup>295</sup> Randall K. Bush, "Mark 1:40-45 –I Do Choose," A Sermon at East Liberty Presbyterian Church on February 12, 2012. [http://cathedralofhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/120212\\_Bush\\_IDoChoose.pdf](http://cathedralofhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/120212_Bush_IDoChoose.pdf) [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2019].

<sup>296</sup> Thurman, 13.

<sup>297</sup> Thurman, 14.

<sup>298</sup> Sandra Richards Mayo, "Chasing the 'Hounds of Hell': Howard Thurman's Jesus and the Disinherited as a Curriculum for Racial Justice and Reconciliation," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal* 10 (2015), 1-12.



“the masses of men who live with their backs constantly against the wall” should make people rethink the meaning of religion and also think anew the preserve of possibility for a knowledge of religion that extends the prospects for a more humane society.<sup>299</sup>

There is a high sense of humour for being a child of God. Even in the midst of oppression, there is a high hope when one understands that he is a child of God. Thurman explicitly explains and applies it to the marginalized and the poor who are oppressed in the society. Thurman states, “The awareness of being a child of God tends to stabilize the ego and results in a new courage, fearlessness, and power.”<sup>300</sup> This understanding brings consolation and self-worth with powers, gifts, talents, and abilities and a note of integrity to what a poor person does.<sup>301</sup> This, according to Victor Anderson, makes the poor to adopt the “rich vocabularies of the Christian community and construct them in such a way that they pushed beyond narrow meanings peculiar to the inner life of the community. They functioned for him as languages of social criticism.”<sup>302</sup>

Despite the work of Thurman for the disinherited in the American society, which presents a socio-Christological view of Jesus from a radical position of the poor, we see Bultmann to have taken insufficient account of the presence of responsible eye-witnesses who might at least be expected to have exerted some restraining influence on the creative ingenuity of the Christian community as a whole. Bultmann and his followers could not explain how Jesus became so colored or adapted to their own point of view by the later Christian community, which became a statement of problem for the Second Quest. Jesus is the Lord of history and the faith.

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<sup>299</sup> Corey D. B. Walker, “That Shape Am I”: Pragmatism, Religion, and the Politics of Life” *Religion and Culture Web Forum, The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago Divinity School* <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/102009/That%20Shape%20Am%20I.pdf> [Accessed 6th January, 2019], 3-4.

<sup>300</sup> Thurman, 50.

<sup>301</sup> Thurman, 53.

<sup>302</sup> Victor Anderson, “Contour of an American Public Theology,” <http://www.livedtheology.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/20010200PPR.02-Victor-Anderson-Contour-of-an-American-Public-Theology.pdf> [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2019].

## 5. The Second (New) Quest

The designation New Quest or Second Quest was given after the work, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1959) by James M. Robinson, though Robinson did not start the movement. The movement i.e. the Second Quest represents a period after the First Quest for the historical Jesus although Crossan argues against Wright that there is no such thing as the New Quest.<sup>303</sup> This movement got started in the 1950s. Unlike the First Quest with exception of Bultmann, the Second Quest was willing to accept that some historical information about Jesus survived in the Gospels or in the *kerygma* like Bultmann and the Jesus Seminar during the first century.

The Second Quest does not admit the possibility of ever regaining complete knowledge of the historical Jesus in the sense of biographical and psychological details, but attempted to fill out the content of the *kerygma* with some knowledge of Jesus. It is an attempt to get away from complete skepticism without returning to the older view that Mark presents a reliable account of the history of Jesus. Several of Bultmann's supporters have turned away from his skepticism and have maintained the need for some connection between the message of Jesus and the proclamation of the church.

Although many scholars tend to classify the Jesus Seminar of the 1980s under this period for they use the same criteria for the sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, I disagree with such classification of the Jesus Seminar under the Second Quest. Because:

1. Although the Jesus Seminar is similar with the Second Quest in the use of criteria for the sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar uses a high technical criteria and method (socio-scientific and computer science), which is foreign to the Second Quest.
2. Also, presently many of the members of the Jesus Seminar are reacting to such characterization of the group for they criticize the Second Quest not to have centered on the sayings of Jesus as them but on the *message* of Jesus using Bornkamm as an example.<sup>304</sup> Crossan has criticized Wright

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<sup>303</sup> Crossan, *Birth*, 44.

<sup>304</sup> M. Eugene Boring, "The Historical-Critical Method's 'Criteria of Authenticity': The Beatitudes in Q and Thomas as a Test Case." *Semeia* 44 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988), 2.

in *The Birth of Christianity* that the classification of some of the scholars by Wright is wrong.<sup>305</sup>

3. Also, the Jesus Seminar uses non-canonical gospels to reconstruct their understanding of Jesus, which are foreign to the Second Quest.
4. The Second Quest was based on Bultmann's influence and those before him, which rejected totally the Gospels but the Jesus Seminar has accepted 18% of the Gospels.
5. The use of computer science to vote for the sayings of Jesus has no place in the Second Quest.
6. Lastly, historical chronology has not support that the Jesus Seminar be part of the Second Quest. How can the Jesus Seminar which started in 1985 be part of the Second Quest for the historical Jesus, which has been agreed in documents to have ended in the 1960s?

Despite the academic rigor of the Second Quest, nonetheless, it should be said that there is no agreement regarding the historical contents among the advocates.

#### **a. Käsemann**

The Second or New Quest was launched by the great student of Bultmann, who clearly disagreed with the works of Barth/Bultmann that a life of Jesus could not be written. Also, Ernst Käsemann of Tübingen criticized Bultmann's total disconnection of history and faith. Unlike Bultmann, Käsemann insisted that we cannot separate the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, a view shared among many conservative scholars today, nor do away with the identity between the exalted Lord Jesus and the earthly Jesus without falling into Docetism.<sup>306</sup> This fear of falling to Docetism led Käsemann to insist that if Jesus was not earthed in history then he might be pulled in any direction and might be a hero of any theological or political programme.

Unlike Bultmann, who insisted on the *kerygma* of the apostles, Käsemann found his cue in the preaching of Jesus. Käsemann writes, "Our investigation has led the conclusion that we must look for the distinctive element in the earthly Jesus in the preaching and interpret both

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<sup>305</sup> Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 44.

<sup>306</sup> Abogunrin, "In Search," 27.

his other activities and his destiny in the light of his preaching.”<sup>307</sup> To prevent this, Käsemann insisted on the need of criteria for studying Jesus. This period began to question the authenticity of the *sayings* than the *deeds* of the Gospels and the proliferation of the criteria of authenticity. One of the characteristics of the New Quest is its focus on the present relevance of Jesus’ teaching.<sup>308</sup> Let me say that Käsemann could not put a close to the historical Jesus discussions despite his academic rigor.

#### **b. Fuchs**

Another scholar within this period is Ernst Fuchs, who was a successor of Bultmann at Marburg. In the book, *Studies in the Historical Jesus*<sup>309</sup>, Fuchs draws attention to the conduct of Jesus and also introduced a psychological element by suggesting motives behind Jesus’ action. Fuchs aims at establishing a connection between the church’s proclamation and the historical events. He concentrates on the social concern and attitude of Jesus towards the wayward and social outcast, a position Thurman elaborated above. To Fuchs, the death of John the Baptist had some significance for Jesus as he approached his own death, which led to historical-psychological interpretation, which has been regarded by Bultmann as a relapse.

#### **c. Bornkamm**

Günther Bornkamm took a further step for the Second Quest when he wrote, *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1956. His contribution to the Second Quest centers on the acts of Jesus rather than the works of Käsemann. Bornkamm insisted that Jesus is the only reality of God who confronts men and calls them to a decision.<sup>310</sup> He shows more concern for Jesus dealing with people and even with his attitude towards them. He stresses the place of authority in the teaching of Jesus and reveals that the new age was already breaking in through Jesus’ words and actions. Bornkamm writes,

Quite clearly what the Gospels report concerning the message, the deeds and the history of Jesus is still distinguished by an authenticity, a freshness, and a distinctiveness not in any way

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<sup>307</sup> Quoted in Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 224.

<sup>308</sup> Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest*, 11.

<sup>309</sup> Ernst Fuchs, *Studies in the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1964).

<sup>310</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 27.

effaced by the Church's Easter faith. These features point us directly to the earthly figure of Jesus.<sup>311</sup>

To Bornkamm,

How is it possible for faith to be content with mere tradition, although that tradition be set down in the Gospels? Faith must break through, and ask the questions that lie behind the tradition. It is impossible seriously to suggest that the Gospels and the traditions contained in them forbid us to ask the question regarding the historic Jesus.<sup>312</sup>

He believes that we can before our minds see a picture of Jesus of Nazareth as he was. Understood in this way, he says, "the primitive tradition of Jesus is blimful of history."<sup>313</sup> Bornkamm states that the historical Jesus never used the title "Son of Man" for himself. Jesus used it many often not to refer to himself but the phrase has never been used by anyone else either as a form of address to Jesus, or in referring to Jesus. After the Resurrection, the title is no longer used, what follows the resurrection is testimony *about* Jesus nor the testimony *of* Jesus. To him, the title is for the old Palestinian church, to which we owe the transmission of the words of the Lord, an expression of the essence of their faith and was to be invested with the authority of Jesus himself.<sup>314</sup> Bornkamm then bridges the Easter with sayings of Jesus not by narrative about his actions. Not all sayings go back to Jesus, so we must reconstruct the earliest form of *logia* contained in the Gospels.

#### **d. Robinson**

James M. Robinson represented the English world on the Second Quest. Robinson was the person, whose work birthed the phrase, "New Quest" (Second Quest). He was a disciple outside Germany, who maintained the need for some historical quest and has concentrated his appeal on what he, at first, called the understanding of self-hood by Jesus, but what he has believed since, changed to the understanding of existence, because his former position was criticized for being indistinguishable from the quest of the liberal schools in the First Quest. With Robinson's approach like Käsemann, Fuchs and Bornkamm, the Second Quest is in reaction

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<sup>311</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 1960), 24.

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Neill, *Interpretation 1861-1961*, 271.

<sup>313</sup> Qtd in Neill, *Interpretation 1861-1961*, 278.

<sup>314</sup> Neill, *Interpretation 1861-1961*, 282-3.

against Bultmann's conclusions, but nevertheless still strongly tied to Bultmann's presuppositions.

To Robinson, we need to replace the historical view of Jesus, which the original quest held with the existential historiography. He underlined the illegitimacy of trying to work back to pure history since what we have in the Gospels are interpreted stories and sayings. Robinson too believed that not very much could be traced back to the life of Jesus. According to him, the task of the historian is to recognize the intention behind past historical records, since history is a matter of interpretation in which the interpreter may find himself being interpreted. Robinson concludes that the Gospels are therefore an interpretation of facts and it is illegitimate to go behind them since the historical Christ remains inaccessible.<sup>315</sup>

However, the Second Quest remained in the same vein as its predecessors in many ways. As Bultmann did, those within the Second Quest relied heavily upon the sayings of Jesus as primary materials, generally ignoring the events surrounding his life as worthy material for discerning the historical Jesus. The Second Quest makes full use of critical tools such as source and form criticisms, which have caused considerable difficulty when it comes to serious historical reconstruction. The Second Quest generally holds to an extreme view of apocalyptic and rejects it in contrast to Schweitzer, who accepted it. The Second Quest generally views scripture in a manner similar to Wrede in that the majority of the framework and contents can be traced to the early church and is useless in establishing any type of historical truth.<sup>316</sup>

We can then say that the Second Quest has not superseded beyond Dibelius and Bultmann for it is difficult to underscore the initial *kerygma*, which did not present a Jesus, who had lived and taught in specific ways. Also, the Jesus of the New Quest was more of an existential philosopher, whose presence in history was barely discernible behind the *kerygma*. This period ended and fell into the error of Bultmann on existentialist philosophy as the only norm to judge the Gospel materials.

During this period the understanding of Jesus neglected the world of the New Testament as evidence from the works of Josephus, the Dead

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<sup>315</sup> James M. Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 39ff; Marshall, *Historical Jesus* 128ff; Abogunrin, "In Search," 25.

<sup>316</sup> Michael H. Burer, "A Survey of the Historical Jesus Studies: From Reimarus to Wright." [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) [Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2011].

Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic literatures. The advocates could not manage and avoid the danger of Docetism and the period could not tell us why Jesus was crucified and died or his resurrection. The advocates of this period have not been able to escape the skepticism of Bultmann. The authenticity of material is made to depend too much on the opinion of the New Questers. As such, the assumption that every saying that met the needs of the community must be the product of the community is methodologically open to challenge, for it ignores that many sayings of Jesus had a dual purpose.

Generally, on the two periods discussed, a critical evaluation of the two periods for the historical Jesus would reveal “what Jesus actually did, said and was two thousand years ago and what has the historical-critical method can discover and conclude about it.”<sup>317</sup>

## 6. The Third Quest

The Third Quest for the historical Jesus, as commonly called, is the period after the Second Quest. With the inability of the Second Quest for the historical Jesus, the Third Quest has witnessed a more intense study of Jesus than the First and Second Quests in the entire historical Jesus research. The major problem facing scholars is the classification of scholars within this period. Also, to my amazement, most scholars that state that the Third Quest has ended, and that the launch of the Jesus Seminar is the peak of the discussion yet they categorize many member of the Jesus Seminar under the Second Quest. For example, Wright classifies the Jesus Seminar under the New Quest and views Crossan and some of his contemporaries to be within this period,<sup>318</sup> a depiction Crossan rejects in his book *The Birth of Christianity*.<sup>319</sup> Is Crossan and some members of the Jesus Seminar part of the Second and Third Quests, a notion created by Wright?

I can therefore state that the historical Jesus research has reached its peak under the Third Quest with the emergence of the Jesus Seminar and *The Da Vinci Code*, a fictional quest for Jesus. This research rejects the classification of such people under the Second Quest for the historical Jesus in line with Crossan and others; hence, Crossan is a chief figure.

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<sup>317</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 11-12.

<sup>318</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 10.

<sup>319</sup> Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 44.

The Third Quest<sup>320</sup> for the historical Jesus has been on the scene of providing somewhat higher positive answers to the study of Jesus. It stands among the liberal-conservative lines<sup>321</sup> although scholars have not agreed totally on what place Jesus should be given. The study of Jesus within the Third Quest takes to cognizance the Jewishness of Jesus. This period is influenced by archaeological findings, which are shedding light and provoking the understanding of Jesus.

#### **a. Some Third Quest Scholars**

The Third Quest as stated above insists on the Jewishness of Jesus. Examples of some views within this period are the works of Geza Vermes, which insisted Jesus being a Jew, a popular Jewish rabbi and Galilean holy man, and emphasizes the religion of Jesus,<sup>322</sup> a position developed by Thurman. Ben Meyer portrayed Jesus as preaching to Israel, God's chosen people, with a renewed offer of community.<sup>323</sup> Richard Horsley sees Jesus as favoring nonviolent social dissent<sup>324</sup> and there are other movies such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*<sup>325</sup> and the

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<sup>320</sup> Gary Habermas suggests that the designation Third Quest was probably given by Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1961-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Also see Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest*.

<sup>321</sup> For more analysis on the radical tradition and the conservative traditions within this period see Brown, "Quest of Historical Jesus."

<sup>322</sup> See Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>323</sup> See Ben Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London SCM, 1979).

<sup>324</sup> See Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

<sup>325</sup> The movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* was a production of a Martin Scorsese picture based on the book, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1960; see Smith, "Portrait of Jesus," 24) by Nikos Kazantzakis and produced by Harry Ufland on September 15, 1988 (see Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*, 1). The Movie was banned by the French government for it revealed Jesus having sex with a woman (see Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 332). This Jesus of *The Last Temptation of Christ* was a carpenter and a traitor. The entire attempt of the book and movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, is to reveal the picture of a Jesus different from the Jesus of the Gospels. This Jesus could not withstand the temptation of the Devil and rejected the cross. It reveals Jesus having sex with Mary Magdalene and gave birth to children. Their picture of



*Color of the Cross*<sup>326</sup> among many others. I will draw attention to some Third Quest scholars within this period.

#### **b. Sanders**

E. P. Sanders is a member of the Jesus Seminar and a liberal, who has strong views about Jesus. He has published extensively on the Jesus research. In *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), Sanders focuses on the account of Jesus' actions within the context of Judaism. He discusses Jesus actions in the temple and it's significant as a better way of understanding contemporary eschatology, which needs to be restored. To Sanders, Jesus offended Judaism. To him, Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah in any way. He rejects the scene of the death of Jesus as accurate in the Synoptic Gospels. To Sanders, the writers of the Gospels (Matthew and Mark) did not know why Jesus was executed from the point of view of the Jewish leaders.<sup>327</sup> Although Sanders preferred John's account,<sup>328</sup> which has been rejected by many critical scholars.

#### **c. Crossan**

John Dominic Crossan is known for co-chairing the Jesus Seminar and even at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Seminar*, he was the Chairman of the occasion. Crossan is also a member of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). He is a key figure in the controversy around the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. He is a retired professor of DePaul University and now active in research, writing, and teaching seminars.

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Jesus is a social and human Jesus rather than a divine Jesus, who has divine relationship with the Father. The book and Movie are all menace to the Christian faith for they all present teachings which the Gospels have not. Christians must always watch carefully at the movies that they watch. This is a kind of movie or book that pastors and scholars should always go for and use the materials to teach the church members and students.

<sup>326</sup> The movie *The Colour of the Cross* is a production of the [blackChristianmovies.com](http://blackChristianmovies.com) in collaboration with Nu-Lite entertainment, which presents a Jean Claude Lamarre film. This movie features Arimathea AD 33 and depicts Jesus being a black man with some black disciples. This movie at the end does not really rally with the facts that we have about Jesus in the Gospels; Mary Magdalene was never a girlfriend of the Gospels Jesus.

<sup>327</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 299; cf. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 178.

<sup>328</sup> Sanders, 318.

Most of Crossan's works are mostly on the extra-facts about Jesus, which have become the basis for the ideas of the Jesus Seminar.<sup>329</sup> Wright says of Crossan that he is "one of the most brilliant, engaging, learned and quick-witted New Testament scholars alive today."<sup>330</sup>

Crossan believes Jesus to be a Jewish Cynic philosopher, who was a peasant, a view followed by Burton Mack and F. Gerald Downing. To Crossan, Jesus was a follower of John the Baptist. He classifies the Gospels into; the saying gospels, the biographical gospels (a view denied by Reimarus and Bultmann), discourse gospels and the biographical-discourse gospels and he questions the validity of the Gospels. Crossan refers to the Synoptic Gospels as dependent upon the independent gospels such as Q, Cross gospel and *Thomas*, which he dates around 50s CE and he believes that when they are merged altogether we can get the actual life of Christ. Crossan denies the nature miracles, virgin birth, and the raising of Lazarus. To him, Jesus was a magician and like Reimarus, Strauss, Bultmann and Robinson, he holds that the Gospels were not meant to be taken literally; hence to him, they are filled with propagandas added by the early church. Crossan believes that Jesus was not tortured and did not die.<sup>331</sup> He denies the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (2001); *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand up?: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (1999); *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict* (Rockwell Lecture Series) (1999); *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991); *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images* (1994); *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994); *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (1995); *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (1996); *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (1983); *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (1976), and *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (1992). In all these works Crossan has devoted his mind in search for the real Jesus. The most radical works of Crossan are *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images* and *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand up?: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*.

<sup>330</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 44.

<sup>331</sup> Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 117; 159.

<sup>332</sup> Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 210.

All records about Jesus in the Gospels have been scrutinized by Crossan and to him, Jesus did not claim being the Lord and Messiah, it is the first century that made him Lord and Messiah, a view shared by Reimarus, Wrede, Schweitzer, Bultmann and Sanders. Crossan denies the apocalyptic eschatology to Jesus as well as the coming Son of man sayings. Jesus, to him, did not understand the Kingdom of God as an apocalyptic event in the near future, but as a mode of life in the immediate present. To Crossan, the kingdom, which Jesus spoke was a sapiential kingdom, not an apocalyptic kingdom.<sup>333</sup> He concludes that the “empty tomb and the risen body” “were dramatic ways of expressing that faith” and “were dramatic ways of organizing and managing that faith.”<sup>334</sup> Crossan is a liberal scholar and an agnostic when it comes to the Gospels because he has troubled with the entire Bible’s inspiration which he revealed “is now not innocent.”<sup>335</sup>

#### **d. Borg**

Marcus J. Borg was Hunderer Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University and he has authored many books among them are; *Jesus: A New Vision*, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. Borg was the chair of the historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature, a position he held through 1992 and a few years later he received an invitation from Robert W. Funk to join and become a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, which became the basis of his ideas in the Jesus research.

Borg believes that the popular image of Jesus is not accurate and indeed seriously misleading.<sup>336</sup> Borg views Jesus to be an eschatological prophet.<sup>337</sup> But he argues for a non-eschatological understanding of Jesus. He writes, on the coming Son of man sayings, “there is very little exegetical basis for affirming that Jesus had an imminent eschatology”<sup>338</sup> and that “Jesus was much more concern about Israel’s historical direction and shape than about a kingdom beyond the *eschaton*.”<sup>339</sup> He also sees

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<sup>333</sup> Borg, *Jesus*, 36.

<sup>334</sup> Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 210.

<sup>335</sup> Crossan, “In Their Own Words”, 22.

<sup>336</sup> Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, 4.

<sup>337</sup> Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, 10-14.

<sup>338</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 27.

<sup>339</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 27.

Jesus as the Spirit-filled person in the understanding of the historical Jesus. Borg sees Jesus to have not merely believed in God, but experienced God and had what we would call visionary or mystical experience through whom, the power of God flowed into the world and into human lives.<sup>340</sup> He argues that Jesus should be seen as a “transformative sage” and a prophet.<sup>341</sup> He sees the miracles as part of the history and story of Jesus yet he denies that the “healing and exorcisms reported of him were not unique.”<sup>342</sup> However, Borg like Crossan has not historically underlined the place of the eschatological acts of Jesus, particularly the second coming of Jesus texts.

**e. Wright**

N. T. Wright was the chaplain and a tutor of theology at Worcester College, Oxford. He is a New Testament Scholar with international standing and an author of many books and among them are; *Who Was Jesus?* (1992), *The Original Jesus* (1996), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), *The New Testament and the People of God*, *The Challenge of Jesus* (2000), and *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus* (2006).

Wright is one of the major writers of the Third Quest who every student of historical criticism on the Gospels would enjoy reading. He believes the Third Quest centers on the relationship of Jesus with the Judaism of his day, the aims of Jesus, the deeds of Jesus, the carving of the early church, and the nature of the Gospels. To this, Wright suggested that “these are questions that ought now to be addressed in serious historical study of Jesus” and are “starting-point for serious *theological* study of Jesus.”<sup>343</sup>

Wright believes Jesus was a good first century Jew, believed that Israel functioned to the rest of the world as a hinge to the door, what he had done for Israel he has done for the whole world. To this, Wright sees Jesus as the light of the world. He discusses Jesus within Judaism, in the Gospels and stated his view about the kingdom of God (which became the root of the historical Jesus Quest). Wright reveals the aim of Jesus as to summon Israel to repent and the tribulation, which would come upon

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<sup>340</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest* 236-7.

<sup>341</sup> Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, 115; Borg, *Conflict Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, 247-256.

<sup>342</sup> Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, 70.

<sup>343</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 18.

the earth. To him, Jesus is a Jewish messiah and that Jesus saw himself as Israel or the new temple or both.

Like Borg, Wright did not foresee the near end of the world, but rather thinks Jesus expected that when God intervened he would bring to an end a certain world order. He also believes Jesus saw himself as the new temple, the new focus of true religion.<sup>344</sup> By this, we see Wright rejected the *parousia* of the Son of Man's texts (Mk 14:62; 13:26) like Borg and argues that they are about the vindication by God after his death at which he will be taken to heaven. On the resurrection of Jesus, Wright believes that the resurrection of Jesus was physical and transphysical and that the accounts of the resurrection are quite clear. He states, "We had better learn to take seriously the witness of the entire church, that Jesus of Nazareth was raised bodily to a new sort of life, three days after his execution."<sup>345</sup>

Wright has given the crucial ingredients that we need to stand against these controversial writings of Jesus within the contemporary scholarship, which is characterized by extreme liberalism. To him, the truth is needed to stand for the truth, although Wright rejects the *parousia* texts that they are just God's plan to vindicate man after Jesus' death than futuristic events.<sup>346</sup> Christians must be careful in studying the works of Wright like Borg for he is more positive though get mix up along the way as in the case of his denial of the *parousia* texts about the Son of man in which the Christian hope is based.

#### **f. Witherington III**

A most scholarly work that fits the Third Quest is the work of Ben Witherington III even though his work lacks systematic reassessment of the data. Witherington III is an American evangelical Biblical scholar, and professor of New Testament Studies at Asbury Theological

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<sup>344</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 246.

<sup>345</sup> Wright, *Challenge of Jesus*, 112.

<sup>346</sup> For an elaborative critique of the views of Wright on Jesus see Steve James, "Questioning a 'key Explanatory Riddle' in N. T. Wright's Understanding of Jesus' Ministry" (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary); "Has Yahweh Come to Zion? A Critique of N. T. Wright's Interpretation of the Parable of the Talents," (Th.M Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Witherington has written extensively on the New Testament.<sup>347</sup>

Since our emphasis is on the Third Quest for the historical Jesus, his book, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, is most crucial to have been an immediate evangelical response to the historical Jesus, particularly the Third Quest. He believes Jesus as the Sage. He believes that a sapiential approach by Jesus would explain how he healed and exorcized, spoke in aphorisms and parables, why he gathered disciples and how he spoke as one having independent authority.<sup>348</sup> To Witherington III, Jesus saw himself as the very Wisdom of God, who came in the flesh.<sup>349</sup> He has believed in the Jesus of the Gospels with many historical facts that prove the existence of Jesus.

Analytically, one sees the Third Quest scholars attempting to focus on the early textual layers of the New Testament for data to reconstruct a biography for the historical Jesus. Many of the Third Quest scholars rely on a redactive critique of the hypothetical Q gospel<sup>350</sup> and on a

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<sup>347</sup> Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006). Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006). Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004). Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus. The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus & His Family* (With Hershel Shanks. Updated and expanded edition. San Francisco: Harper Publishing Company, 2003). Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer, The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999). Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ, The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998). Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest, The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998). Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest, The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995). Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World, A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press/Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1992). Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>348</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 185.

<sup>349</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 187.

<sup>350</sup> Q Gospel is from the German *Quelle* meaning source which has been adopted in New Testament studies to refer to materials not found in Mark but common to both Matthew and Luke. Many critical scholars held that Q also

Greco-Roman “Mediterranean” milieu as opposed to a Jewish milieu and tend to view Jesus as a radical philosopher of Wisdom literature, who strives to destabilize the economic *status quo*. Some scholars also rely on a critique of non-canonical texts for early textual layers that possibly give evidences for the historicity of Jesus. They use the archaeology of Israel and the analysis of formative Jewish literature, including the Mishna, Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament (as a Jewish text) and Josephus, to reconstruct the ancient worldviews of Jews in the first century Roman provinces of Judea and Galilee - and only afterward investigate how Jesus fits in. They tend to view Jesus as a proto-rabbi, who announced the Kingdom of Heaven.

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exists in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Scholars believe that this gospel was lost though the first to be composed while many deny its existence.





## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE FICTIONAL JESUS: THE JESUS SEMINAR**

Recently in 2007, Crossan has revealed that the Jesus Seminar is part of the fictional vision of Jesus. To Crossan, the first vision is the traditional Jesus and the second is the Historical Jesus. After the vision of the Historical Jesus, he states, “the third vision of Jesus started to appear to the *left wind*” of some like himself and “other members of the Jesus Seminar of a fictional Jesus a figure which is married in a novel, crucified in a film, and buried in a documentary.” By “a figure married in a novel,” he probably refers to the novel, *The Da Vinci Code* and by “crucified in a film,” he perhaps means the movie, *The Last temptation of Christ* or *The Da Vinci Code* among many others that have given other aspects or portraits of Jesus. I presume by a figure of Jesus “buried in a documentary” refers to the works of the members of the Jesus Seminar, which are exposed by the Discovery Channel.<sup>351</sup>

But a careful study would reveal that Crossan is not the first to refer to this aspect of Jesus as being different from the historical Jesus quest. His ideas are reconstructions of what were said by Ronald G. Smith that “the time of the historical approach to the life of Jesus is past”<sup>352</sup> although despite the monumental reviews and reconstruction of ideas in the study of Jesus, Smith could not tell us the recent reconstruction and its frontiers. In line with Smith, there came the words of Bernard Branton at the SBL in Chicago, December 1984, stated that “the historical quest for the historical Jesus has ended; the interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus had just begun.”<sup>353</sup> Jürgen Moltmann on this writes, “The second aspect of Christianity was the enlightenment which was centered on Jesus.”<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>351</sup>Crossan, “In Their Own Words,” 22.

<sup>352</sup> Ronald Gregor Smith, *Secular Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1966), 80.

<sup>353</sup> See Borg, *Jesus*, 15 footnote 10.

<sup>354</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 14.

A more recent work besides the work of Crossan is that of Ben Witherington III which states that “long after the Third Quest for the historical Jesus is over, the one enduring image that will be left in the minds of many will be a group of biblical scholars using colored beads to cast votes on the sayings of Jesus....”<sup>355</sup> Also, Habermas views the Jesus Seminar to be within the tradition of Strauss and Bultmann in the quest for a mythical approach to the Gospels contrary to the Third Quest showing that the Quest has taken a new dimension.<sup>356</sup> I am with the view that the classification of Crossan is a reconstruction of the previous assertions on the Jesus Seminar being a separate from the quests for the historical Jesus, but its credibility cannot be ascertained; hence, this group has not come in clear terms to reveal the place and boundaries of this new view of Jesus within the entire works about Jesus.

It can be said that the place of the Jesus Seminar in the entire historical Jesus research has never been agreed among scholars. Some Jesus scholars have find it simple to place the Jesus Seminar under the Second Quest; hence, they all deal with the sayings of Jesus and the use of criteria for the tradition of Jesus.<sup>357</sup> I can state without hesitation as far as I have investigated that Wright is the first to classify the Jesus Seminar under the Second Quest for a survey of works before and after him reveals the reliability of this assertion. The influence of Wright’s classification has led to lack of consensus among scholars.

In this book, because of the weaknesses for the classification of the Jesus Seminar under the Second Quest, I now find it convincing to place the Jesus Seminar after the Third Quest because of the following reasons;

1. The weaknesses of the classification within the Second Quest discussed under the Second Quest.
2. Some members of the Third Quest and the Jesus Seminar share the same sources such as part of the Gospels and the non-canonical books for reconstructing the life of Jesus.
3. All of them aim at the Jewishness of Jesus for some Third Quest scholars consider his life setting in the first century while the Jesus Seminar centers on the sayings of Jesus as

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<sup>355</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest* 42.

<sup>356</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 25.

<sup>357</sup> cf. Wright, *Who was Jesus?* 10; Burer, “Historical Jesus,” 4, among many others.

they were said during the time of Jesus ministry in the first century.

4. All of them use the historical critical method though the Jesus Seminar has used a more technical method, socio-scientific method and computer science.
5. Most of the main members of the Jesus Seminar are the main advocates of the Third Quest (cf. Crossan, Borg, Sanders and Mack among many others).
6. Lastly, historical chronology supports that the Jesus Seminar which started in the 1985 be part of the fictional Jesus.

But this view i.e. placing the Jesus Seminar shortly after the Third Quest has been agreed among many scholars in the Jesus studies though some scholars could not draw the dichotomy for the quests. For example, Witherington III in *The Jesus Quest* places the Jesus Seminar within the Third Quest, Brown “Historical Jesus,” Weren places them under the Third Quest<sup>358</sup> and Porter, who wrote in 2004, observes that “the Jesus Seminar is a part of the Third Quest...”<sup>359</sup>

With this, it has come to our understanding that the Jesus Seminar uses a different methodology, which is modern to that of the Third Quest i.e. “socio-scientific method and computer science.” This led the method to be applied in the use of color beads for voting the words of Jesus in the Gospels. But unlike the Third Quest, the Jesus Seminar aims at presenting a non-eschatological Jesus. Many scholars of the Third Quest agree on some good depictions of Jesus such as Jesus as a Spirit-filled person and the Messiah yet the Jesus Seminar disrupts the materials in the Gospels by adding a distorted life of Jesus in the non-canonical gospels such as *Thomas, Magdalene* and *Philip*. By this, one sees the Jesus Seminar accepting 18% of the Jesus of the Gospels mixed with a Gnostic Jesus of the Gnostic gospels.

There are quite many writings by the members of the Jesus Seminar and most of these books are hard to find. In order to present a better understanding of the Seminar, I have used the works of Marcus J. Borg, Witherington III, J. Dogara Gwamna, Wilkins and Moreland’s *Jesus Under Fire* and other writings to analyze the Jesus Seminar. However the key work used is Borg’s *Jesus in Contemporary scholarship* (1994).

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<sup>358</sup> Weren, 259.

<sup>359</sup> Porter, “Reading,” 35.

The reason simply is because Borg is a member and has documented comprehensively on the Jesus Seminar than any other available sources.

Borg was the chair of the historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature, a position he held through 1992 and a few years later he received an invitation from Robert W. Funk to join and become a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, which became the basis of his ideas in the Jesus research. Borg gives us the background for the Jesus Seminar being a fellow or a member. He reveals that he is writing as a Christian as well as a fellow of the Jesus Seminar in order to help the church benefit from all the views of the Jesus Seminar.<sup>360</sup>

### **1. History of the Jesus Seminar**

Borg reveals that the Jesus Seminar was started by a prominent New Testament scholar of North America Robert W. Funk with its first meeting in March 1985 at Pacific School of Religion, a protestant interdenominational Seminary in Berkeley, California.<sup>361</sup> But Borg could not tell us of the earlier work published in 1988, *The Parables of Jesus*,<sup>362</sup> which somehow reveals the earlier leader of the Seminar and also that the Seminar started with 35 scholars, who responded to the invitation of Funk to form a forum of biblical scholars for the study of the Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>363</sup>

Borg states that at the first meeting Funk described the intention of the group as;

We are about to embark on a momentous enterprise. We are going to inquire simply, rigorously, after the *voice* of Jesus, after what he really said. In this process, we will be asking a question that borders the sacred, that even abuts blasphemy, for many in our society....Our basic plan is simple. We intend to examine every fragment of the traditions attached to the name of Jesus in order to determine what he really said –not his literally words, perhaps, but the substance and style of his utterances. We are in quest of his *voice*, insofar as it can

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<sup>360</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 161.

<sup>361</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 161.

<sup>362</sup> This reveals the leaders of the Jesus Seminar.

<sup>363</sup> It is believed that this group is being sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) or the Webster Institute by Funk Venture with its branch, Polebridge Press. See Richard B. Hays, “The Corrected Jesus” *The First Things* 43 (May 1994), 44.

be distinguished from many other voices also preserved in the tradition.<sup>364</sup>

The whole purpose of the group as revealed by Borg is to “assess the degree of scholarly consensus about the historical authenticity of each of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament and other early Christian documents written before the year 300.”<sup>365</sup>

## **2. Aims and Presuppositions of the Jesus Seminar**

Even when the Seminar is said “to assess the degree of scholarly consensus about the historical authenticity of each of the sayings of Jesus” it is meant to find out the “real facts” about Jesus, that is, its own version of the so-called “quest of the historical Jesus.” It is intended to consider the identity of Jesus and the authenticity of the Gospels records. It is meant to replace the church’s picture of Jesus with a reconstruction it deemed more historically adequate and more serviceable to life in the world today, and as says Funk of the Jesus Seminar on the first meeting that “... what we need is a new fiction that takes as its starting point the central event in the Judeo-Christian drama and reconciles that middle with a new story that reaches beyond old beginnings and endings.”<sup>366</sup> By this, he means that “we need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the epic gospel.”<sup>367</sup> This group aimed at demoting Jesus making him not divine as the First Quest. On another day Funk said,

We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus’ divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God. The plot early Christians invented for a divine redeemer figure is as archaic as the mythology in which it is framed. A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in cosmic

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<sup>364</sup> Borg, *Jesus*, 161.

<sup>365</sup> Borg, *Jesus*, 162.

<sup>366</sup> Mark D. Roberts, “Unmasking the Jesus Seminar.” <http://www.markdroberts.com> [accessed 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2011].

<sup>367</sup> Je’adayibe Dogara Gwamna, *Perspectives in African Theology* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2008), 129.

judgment is equally incredible. We must find a new plot for a more credible Jesus.<sup>368</sup>

### 3. Membership of the Seminar

Borg has not given us much about the membership but Witherington III reveals that the formal membership to the Seminar was typically to have a PhD in relevant areas of Gospels' research. Most of the members, to Witherington III, were professors in universities, colleges and seminaries, and that almost all were from North America. Witherington III questions this fact and states that only Benno Schroeder was from West Germany in the 1988 listing and none from England and the Third World.<sup>369</sup> To him, "...the pre-selection of the scholars, exclusion of many scholars, disregard for the *vox populi* and that of the opinions of scholars from previous generations reveals an elitist not a democratic approach."<sup>370</sup> Borg reveals to us that a good number of scholars who attended the meeting are listed in the "Roster for Fellows."<sup>371</sup>

A survey of related works revealed that members of the Seminar include John Dominic Crossan, a professor of New Testament at DePaul University, Robert M. Price, Bruce D. Clinton, Barbara Thiering, Robert W. Funk, Burton Mack, E. P. Sanders, J. R. Butts, Bernard Brandon Scott, Elizabeth Fiorenza, Richard Horsley, Robert Tannehill, Robert Joseph Miller, Stephen L. Harris, Roy W. Hoover, Fred Francis, Marcus J. Borg of Oregon State University, Marvin Mayer of Chapman University and Karen King of Harvard.<sup>372</sup> Their web reveals that 8 members are late and Pamela Eisenbaum was the new member of the group in 2010 as at December 2011. Today, the members of the Jesus

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<sup>368</sup> Roberts, "Unmasking."

<sup>369</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 43.

<sup>370</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 45.

<sup>371</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 179.

<sup>372</sup> For a list of the members of the Jesus Seminar see [www.westarinstitute.org/fellows/](http://www.westarinstitute.org/fellows/) [accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2011].

Seminar are more than 200 according to their website<sup>373</sup> and there are 24 members, who are deceased according to their website.<sup>374</sup>

These people are trained in the field of New Testament studies and even had their projects and some recent works on the various traditions available about Jesus. Blomberg identifies about fourteen of them are well known people in the historical quest of the Jesus today and another twenty names of the members are also identified with New Testament studies and many of them have had their PhD dissertations on the themes in the Gospels. Thirty-six of the members have had their degrees from and teach at Harvard, Claremont, and Vanderbilt.<sup>375</sup>

The Jesus Seminar is a movement, which began to gain publicity as Crossan revealed in his chair speech on October 13-16, 2010 during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, “We wanted people to know what we were doing. That was the whole purpose of the voting with colored beads and all the rest of that paraphernalia. It was designed for cameras.”<sup>376</sup> This states a position, which Funk did not state at first and reveals, to me, the focus of the Seminar to have not being clear probably many scholars wouldn’t have joined. The motive is different with what the original founder exposed though we could say that they did not want to reveal it at first.

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<sup>373</sup> It seems the exact number of the members of the Jesus Seminar is unknown. Some scholars say 74, see Craig L. Blomberg, “Where do We Start Studying Jesus?” *Jesus under Fire*, 18. Some 150, Jimmy Wales, “Jesus Seminar” [www.wikipedia.freeencyclopaedia.com/jesusseminar.htm](http://www.wikipedia.freeencyclopaedia.com/jesusseminar.htm) [Accessed 4th February, 2012]. Some believe 200, Ahmed Barcelon, “Jesus Seminar --A 200-Member Group of Biblical Scholars” <http://www.westarinstitute.org/Seminars/seminars.html> [August 20, 2009]. Some hold to 30 scholars. I presume that the members keep increasing and there are indirect *members* of the Jesus Seminar in Nigeria and even Africa at large.

<sup>374</sup> “Meet the Westar Fellows,” [www.westarinstitute.org/membership/westar-fellows/fellows-directory](http://www.westarinstitute.org/membership/westar-fellows/fellows-directory) [4th April, 2019].

<sup>375</sup> Craig Blomberg, “Where do we Start Studying Jesus” *Jesus Under Fire* (Wilkins, Michael J. and J. P. Moreland eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 19-20.

<sup>376</sup> G. Jeffrey McDonald, “Jesus Seminar Celebrates 25 Years of Searching for the Historical Jesus” <http://www.religionnewsservice/Jesusseminarcelebrates25yearsofthehistoricaljesus.htm> Updated: 10-31-10 05:12 AM. [Accessed 6th January, 2011].

Borg tries to balance the whole thing in order not to be accused of sexism states that the whole thing was male dominated for “there are relatively few women working in the discipline”<sup>377</sup> and reveals that the Fellows consisted of “Mainline denominations” even though it was connected to any church body or church membership but he suggests that “there were about equal numbers of Catholics, Protestants and non-religious” and that most of them were ordained ministers.

It could be said that the whole thing was a community of ministers, who probably left the ministry and/or are still in the ministry.<sup>378</sup> Borg states that few of the members were Jews and that the fundamentalists were invited but they refused to show perhaps “because of their understanding of scriptures as ‘divine product.’” This also reveals Borg’s position. Few fundamentalists were participating but were forced to withdraw and that 30 to 40 Fellows are always present at the twice-yearly meeting. Each meeting focused on a particular saying of Jesus and the conference papers are circulated to members. This caused the meetings to be dominated with discussions of the sayings one-by-one as Borg reveals.<sup>379</sup>

#### **4. Publications and Methodology**

The first publication of the Jesus Seminar is the *Parables of Jesus* (1988). Because of the pressure from scholars on published materials, which will tell of the Group, they published their main textbook, *The Five Gospel: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (1993). This book reveals that the Seminar embraced the modern method, which is “socio-scientific method and computer science,”<sup>380</sup> which is intended to “present a critical portrait of Jesus that must necessarily be distinguished from the fundamentalists or traditional portraits.”<sup>381</sup>

Witherington III cites Hays to have revealed that the publication like *The Five Gospels* must be seen for what they are –imaginative and creative books produced by a self-selected body of scholars, who hold a

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<sup>377</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 162.

<sup>378</sup> For example, Robert M. Price went to pastor First Baptist Church of Montclair, the first pastorate and later resigned his pastorate in 1994. See Evans, 25.

<sup>379</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 162.

<sup>380</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 43.

<sup>381</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 44.



set of unconventional views about Jesus and the Gospels and that “their attempt to present these views as the assured results of critical scholarship is –one must say it –reprehension deception”<sup>382</sup> and it reveals that majority can be wrong on significant matters of Truth.” By using the “socio-scientific method and the computer science,” the Jesus Seminar engaged in voting for the words of Jesus, particularly the parables, the kingdom of God passages and the Sermon on the Mount among many others in the Gospels and in the other gospels. The vote is taken by secret ballot, which everyone was expected to go and vote. Habermas states that the Seminar voted 1500 sayings of Jesus.<sup>383</sup>

Borg, like other scholars on the Jesus Seminar, reveals the voting system, which is found in *The Five Gospels* to be; Red= “That’s Jesus!” Pink= “Sure sounds like him.” Gray= “Well, may be.” Black= “There’s been some mistake.”<sup>384</sup> This is an enterprise, which has never been undertaken by any person or period of the Jesus studies. The purpose of the voting was not known at first until when Crossan at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 13-16, 2010 revealed “That was the whole purpose of the voting with colored beads.... It was designed for cameras.”<sup>385</sup> The whole idea is captured by Borg when he states that the Seminar is aware that “voting cannot settle historical questions, and majorities (even consensus majorities) are sometimes wrong”<sup>386</sup> yet they went ahead to revealed their methods. Borg reveals that voting is to “measure the current scholarly opinion” a degree of consensus within the group. Some voted red and pink, which point to a quite solid positive consensus and is applicable to the modern Jesus scholarship. Many voted black and gray, which is a quite strong negative consensus. All these, the Seminar reported that “Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels were not actually spoken by him....”<sup>387</sup> The entirety of

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<sup>382</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 47.

<sup>383</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 121.

<sup>384</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 162. Besides the words of Jesus in the Gospels another aspect is the illiteracy of Jesus in the first century, he had no scripture, no interest in eschatology and he did not think of himself as the Messiah or in any sense Divine. For discussions on these see Evans, 35-46.

<sup>385</sup> McDonald, “Jesus Seminar Celebrates.”

<sup>386</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 163.

<sup>387</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 122.

Mark being the first Gospel and John were rejected and only one saying of Jesus has been voted red by the members of the Seminar.

*The Five Gospels* known as the *Scholar's Version* (SV) of the New Testament included the *Gospel of Thomas* as a fifth gospel<sup>388</sup> for the understanding of Jesus. This version uses gender-inclusive language, except when God is referred to as Father or to male human being. The effort to make it modern resulted in shallow translation. For example, they translate “woe to you” as “damn you” because it sounds like something a modern person would really say. Jimmy Wales reveals that the authentic sayings, as determined by the seminar for the red sayings (with % indicating the weighted average of those in agreement), given in the Seminar’s own *Scholar's Version* translation. For example, Turn the other cheek (92%): Matt. 5:39, Lk 6:29a and love your enemies: Lk. 6:27b (84%), Matt. 5:44b (77%), Lk 6:32,35a (56%). For the probable authentic sayings, as determined by the Seminar for the pink sayings are: two masters: Lk. 16:13a, Matt. 6:24a (72%) and the dinner party, the wedding celebration: Lk. 14:16-23 (56%), Matt. 22:2-13 (26%).<sup>389</sup>

Let me state that disputing the words of Jesus by the Jesus Seminar does not mean the words of Jesus in the Gospels are inauthentic. If they deny the words of Jesus in the Gospels, how about the words of other people (apostles, disciples and others) at the course of his ministry, which prompted his words that are recorded in the Gospels by the evangelists? We quite know that Jesus’ words were prompted by other people’s words in the form of enquiry or statements. Jesus in most cases responded to the needs of the people in conversational form. If Jesus’ words are degraded, such words of people should be given less preference as we attempt to study the Gospels.

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<sup>388</sup> Even though the Jesus Seminar used the *Gospel of Thomas* as their “fifth gospel,” Renan invoked the topography and customs of Palestine as a “fifth Gospel.” See Rops, 273.

<sup>389</sup> Jimmy Wales, “Jesus Seminar.” [www.wikipedia.freeencyclopaedia.com/jesusseminarhtm](http://www.wikipedia.freeencyclopaedia.com/jesusseminarhtm) [Accessed 4th February, 2012].

## 5. Their Sources

### a. The Place of Q

Another thing which source criticism has generated is the Q hypothesis,<sup>390</sup> which is derived from the German word for source, “Quelle.”<sup>391</sup> This is an attempt to state the source of the Gospels.<sup>392</sup> Many members of the Jesus Seminar have used Q as a source for the sayings of Jesus. Q document cannot in anyway be found. This document renders void the validity of Luke 1:1-4. Understanding of Q is relevant to this book for Q has been used tremendously by the Jesus Seminar and the Third Quest. Scholars believe there was some sort of eyewitness materials to have been written much earlier than Mark, which have existed and were common to Matthew and Luke and unknown to Mark. This is suggested to be earlier than A.D. 80 before A.D. 70 probably around A.D. 50, which makes Q older than Mark.<sup>393</sup> These scholars have dated Q to have been the oldest source for the sayings of Jesus, a task undergone by Crossan.

Witherington III in his book *The New Testament Story* and *The Jesus Quest* has written so well about Q. He writes, “There are some forty-nine or fifty passages or 230 or so sayings that Matthew and Luke share and that are not found in Mark.”<sup>394</sup> He listed the contents of the Q which to him are group into two kinds; Jesus the sage and a focus on discipleship.<sup>395</sup> Witherington III believes that “the original form of a Q

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<sup>390</sup> There is another hypothesis which is the four-document hypothesis which was developed by B. S. Streeter. This revealed that there are other documents which Matthew used as “M” and Luke as “L” which are not common to the other writers than Mark and Q making a four-source document for the Gospels. See McCain 113. Patzia 52-53.

<sup>391</sup> On the origin of the term “Quelle” see C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 84.

<sup>392</sup> J. S. Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q and the Quest of the Historical Jesus,” *HTR* 89 (1996), 307-44. W. H. Kelber, “Sayings Collection and Sayings Gospel: A Study in the Clustering Management of Knowledge,” *Language & Communication* 9 (1989), 213-224. J. D. Turner, “The Gnostic Sethians and Middle Platonism: Interpretations of the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006), 9-64.

<sup>393</sup> Kee, 70.

<sup>394</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 29.

<sup>395</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The New Testament Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 33-36. An older work which reveals the content of Q is Kee

story as saying must be judged on a case-by-case basis. The genre of Q needs to be determined on the basis of analogy with *Thomas* or some other documents.”<sup>396</sup> G. N. Stanton has the belief that “Q material answers the questions ‘Who was Jesus?’ ‘With what authority did he act and speak?’”<sup>397</sup>

Another good book, which argues for the place of Q is *The Shape of Q* (1994) edited by James M. Robinson, John S. Kloppenborg, and Paul Hoffmann. The contributors believe “Evidence of design and deliberate structure serves not only to expose the distinctive theology of Q; it turns out to be relevant to a yet more basic issue, that of the very existence of the document.”<sup>398</sup> They believe that to ask about the ‘narrative world’ or ‘mental map’ of Q is to inquire into the way in which the document attempts to promote a perception of reality in the imagination of the hearer or reader.<sup>399</sup>

Before even the Jesus Seminar laid much emphasis on Q, in 1970, Kee’s *Jesus in History*, had great contribution to the study of Q, for Kee devotes a complete chapter for the understanding of Q. He writes,

The tradition embodied in Q is more concerned with presenting Jesus as bearer of the eschatological messages than as someone whose primary function is to perform deeds that affect salvation...while Jesus is pictured in the Q source as historical and as a person rather than a faceless spokesman for God, there is not sufficient narrative in Q to reconstruct anything like a biographical sequence or even the course of his public career...But the main thrust of the Jesus tradition in Q is to point forward to the future Kingdom of God rather than to depict the historical life of Jesus.<sup>400</sup>

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66-70. For an extensive discussion on the thematic interest of Q, Q as narrative material and its parenetic and eschatological material and the value of Q see Kee 71-103. On Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* in English and Greek see James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg eds., *The Sayings Gospel Q and Thomas* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

<sup>396</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 33.

<sup>397</sup> G. N. Stanton, “On the Christology of Q” *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Dig* (Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 41.

<sup>398</sup> James M. Robinson, John S. Kloppenborg, and Paul Hoffmann eds., *The Shape of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>399</sup> Robinson, Kloppenborg, and Hoffmann eds., *The Shape of Q*, 2.

<sup>400</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 102.

Kee concludes on Q that, "...there is not sufficient narrative in Q to reconstruct anything like a biographical sequence or even the course of his public career..."<sup>401</sup>

Guthrie discusses Q as a hypothesis in collaboration with Mark for finding answers to the sources of the Gospels. He states, Mark-Q theory may be regarded as the basic element in modern source criticism of the synoptic Gospels."<sup>402</sup> He discusses Q as a source and states the reasons for the alleging of its existence, contents, the problem of Q, purpose and value, date and place of origin and the authorship of Q. Guthrie concludes, "The symbol Q may still be used as a convenient description of the common material, while each investigator must be left to make clear whether he is thinking of written or oral material or a mixture of both."<sup>403</sup>

Keener in *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009) cannot be forgotten in the discussion of Q. Keener questions the place of Q as a lost gospel. He states,

I am among those who think the Q hypothesis is quite likely (a number of respected scholars today do not even grant this point), but acknowledging and working from the hypothesis of Q is not the same as building a speculative hypothesis on a speculative reconstruction of a hypothetical document.<sup>404</sup>

But on a scholarly ground, I do not believe that such a document has existed, which Matthew and Luke have depended on apart from Mark. I believe the Markan priority, which sees Mark being the first narrative Gospel, and then Matthew, who was an eyewitness wrote before Luke, which means Matthew added some materials, which Mark would not have remembered. Luke should be seen as an all-rounder getting the materials from different sources; hence, he conducted research (Luke 1:1-4).<sup>405</sup> For the historical Jesus research to make us believe in Q means

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<sup>401</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 102.

<sup>402</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 147.

<sup>403</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 179.

<sup>404</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 61.

<sup>405</sup> Luke reveals that "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things...." Was the reference to "many" about Mark and Matthew; hence we consider them to have come before his Gospel? I believe that the reference to "many" refers to the eye-witnesses and ministers of the word and that many

disproving the eyewitness and apostolic authority of Matthew and downgrading the authenticity of the research of Luke for the Gospels writers got their materials through eye-witness testimony and that the materials were true (cf. Lk 1:1-4; 2 Pet.1:16-20; 1 John 1:1-5 and Heb. 2:3).

**b. The Gospel of Thomas and other Gnostic Gospels**

The *Gospel of Thomas* has been one of the Gnostic gospels, which the Third Quest under the umbrella of the Jesus Seminar have been made to be of equal authority alongside the Gospels in their main text, *The Five Gospels* (1993). Robinson, Hoffmann, and Kloppenborg who edited, *The Sayings Gospel Q and Thomas* (2002) state the parallel of the Q and Thomas that have become the basis for the Jesus Seminar. This book helps the understanding of the parallel nature of Q with *Thomas*. Another work that shapes the understanding of *Thomas* is *Windows on Jesus: Methods in Gospel Exegesis* (1999) by Wilhelmus J. C. Weren, translated by John Bowden. This work provides a good summary background on the usage of *Thomas* in the discussions of the sayings of Jesus from a liberal point of view. Weren believes that “We cannot distinguish between earlier and later layers of tradition in non-canonical texts, too, and it cannot be excluded a priori that these older layers bring us nearer to the historical Jesus.”<sup>406</sup>

Witherington III reveals the discovery of *Thomas* at Nag Hammadi, Egypt and that the dating is no earlier than about A.D. 200.<sup>407</sup> The Jesus Seminar takes to consideration the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 in Upper Egypt among a collection of Gnostic writings. This gospel has about 114 sayings attributed to Jesus. The opening words read, “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.”<sup>408</sup> The Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* date to around A.D. 200.<sup>409</sup>

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people were writing at that time in view of the discovered manuscripts today. Some might have been lost and probably some preserved but not yet discovered.

<sup>406</sup> Weren, 262.

<sup>407</sup> Witherington III, *The New Testament Story*, 49.

<sup>408</sup> Blomberg, “Where do we Start...,” 23.

<sup>409</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus*, 310.

Nicholas Perrin argues that *Thomas* was originally written in Syriac and that *Thomas*' most likely source is the *Diatessaron* of Titian which is dated in the mid-second century.<sup>410</sup> As such, Perrin rejected the first century dating of *Thomas* by scholars of the Jesus Seminar such as Crossan,<sup>411</sup> although Charles L. Quarles of Louisiana College, Pineville LA, has stated that the major problem with *Thomas* is in the aspect of dating.<sup>412</sup> Quarles concludes on Perrin about *Thomas* that "Perrin's explanation of the origin and background of the Gospel of Thomas is the most sensible hypothesis that has been proposed to date...Perrin's ground breaking work is essential reading for those engaged in Gospel study and historical Jesus research".<sup>413</sup>

This Coptic document, which is dated to no early date than AD 400, has been dated back to the middle of second century A.D. This gospel and Q document are considered by Crossan to be independent gospels written around A.D. 50s in order to fit in their Jesus Seminar discussions. This is what Witherington III called, "The Ascendancy of Thomas and Q,"<sup>414</sup> which he sees as a major problem with the Jesus Seminar. But Craig Evans, in *Fabricating Jesus*, believes the gospel was written around A. D. 350-380 and states some verses from the gospel, reconsidered the date, which reveals that *Thomas* knew many New Testament writings and contains late Gospel materials; it reflects later editing in the Gospels<sup>415</sup> which makes it to be familiar with late tradition distinctive to Eastern, Syrian Christianity, a view Nicholas Perrin held much earlier.

This gospel comprises of strange and odd sayings, which are attributed to Jesus, which are published by Comfort and Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus* (2008). Comfort is an editor for Tyndale House Publishers and has taught English and Greek at several Colleges. Driesbach has studied at Cedarville University and Dallas Theological

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<sup>410</sup> Perrin, 159.

<sup>411</sup> Quoted in Charles L. Quarles, "*Thomas: The Other Gospel* by Nicholas Perrin. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:1 (March 2008), 159.

<sup>412</sup> Quarles, 158.

<sup>413</sup> Quarles, 160.

<sup>414</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 48.

<sup>415</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 68-73.

Seminary and he is editor of the Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series.

This book publishes the various gospels that did not make it to the canon of the New Testament. Comfort and Driesbach argue that “inspiration for writing the Gospels didn’t begin when the authors set pen to papyrus; the inspiration began when the disciples Matthew, Peter (for whom Mark wrote) and John were enlightened by their encounters with Jesus Christ the Son of God.”<sup>416</sup> The problem with their assertion is the exclusion of Paul from the above for whom Luke wrote. On *Thomas* and other gospels, they believe that the fragments *Thomas* and other have some inspirational sense. They state, “...fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, one of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, one of the *Gospel of Mary*, and three Unknown Gospels (which, as far as can be told from fragments, are orthodox).”<sup>417</sup> Keener documents the *Secret Gospel of Mark* as being a forgery of the twentieth century.<sup>418</sup>

Below are some of the sayings in the gospel. Matthew responded to Jesus’ question as “You are like a Wise Philosopher” (Th. 13) which became the background for Crossan’s view of Jesus as a Cynic Philosopher. Saying 14 states that Jesus said to them, “If you fast, you will give in to sin. If you pray, you will be condemned. If you do charitable deeds, you will hurt your spirits” even when Jesus encouraged those things in the Gospels. On the kingdom of God, he said “If you do not fast from the world, you will not find the kingdom. And if you do not keep the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the Father” (Th. 27).

Jesus is reported to have observed about the statement of Peter about segregating Mary that “I myself will lead her so as to make her male, so that she may become a living spirit resembling you males. Every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of God” (Th. 114). Jesus reveals that “A prophet is not accepted in his homeland. A physician does not perform healings for those who know him” (Th. 31). We see Jesus encouraging the people that “... Neither worry about your food, what you will eat, [nor] for [your] clothes, what you will wear....” (Th. 36). About John the Baptist, Jesus said, “Among those born from women, from Adam until John the Baptist, there is no superior to John the Baptist –that person’s face should not be lowered before him....” (Th. 46). Jesus

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<sup>416</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, 6.

<sup>417</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, 59.

<sup>418</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 60.



pronounced blessings on many people. It is stated, “Blessings on you when you are persecuted. Wherever you have been persecuted, that place will be no more” (Th. 68) and that “He who knows the father and the mother will be called a harlot’s son” (Th. 105). Now do these assertions have some sense of being orthodox?

Despite the oddness of these sayings, the members of the Jesus Seminar consider *Thomas* to be an important historical document even better than the Gospels. Comfort and Driesbach states about *Thomas*, “...fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, one of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, one of the *Gospel of Mary*, and three Unknown Gospels (which, as far as can be told from fragments, are orthodox).”<sup>419</sup> Quite a number of works have evaluated *Thomas*.<sup>420</sup> Blomberg has denounced it that it is “for Gnosticism, not for Christianity.”<sup>421</sup> The Jesus of the Gnostic gospels is not a miracle worker and a healer. He is not a Jesus who died, buried and resurrected on the third day as the Jesus of the Gospels. *Thomas* is a good historical document for Gnosticism than Christianity for, according to Evans, “The Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* is different from the Jesus of the New Testament Gospels.”<sup>422</sup> Perrin states that *Thomas* was written in the second century when the four-fold Gospels collection was widely accepted.<sup>423</sup> Witherington III concludes, “Thus it is right to be skeptical of using *Thomas* as a major source for reconstructing the teaching of the historical Jesus, not least because of the document’s theological tendencies.”<sup>424</sup> Evans concludes that “Reliance on this writing can only lead to a distorted portrait of the historical Jesus.”<sup>425</sup>

Similar gospels that have had the same treatment by Crossan and the Jesus Seminar like *Thomas* are the *Gospel of Peter*, *Egerton Gospel*, the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Secret Gospel of Mark* to which Evans has also

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<sup>419</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, 59.

<sup>420</sup> Norman Perrin, “Recent Trends in Gospel of Thomas Research (1991-2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2007), 184-206. S. J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (n.d.), 111-19.

<sup>421</sup> Blomberg, “Where do we Start Studying Jesus?” 25.

<sup>422</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 64.

<sup>423</sup> qtd in Quarles, 159.

<sup>424</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 50.

<sup>425</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 77.

given attention. *Thomas* knew the New Testament writings but it is Gnostic and should not be used for the church.<sup>426</sup>

## 6. Criteria of authenticity for the Jesus Tradition

The word “criterion” (pl. Criteria) means judgment or the basis of passing judgment.<sup>427</sup> The Jesus Seminar usage of *Thomas* alongside the inspired Gospels and Q depends on quite a number of criteria, which they have been using for the original sayings of Jesus. The Jesus Seminar and other members of the Third Quest have employed the extensive usage of such criteria and have neglected the traditional criteria used for Gospels by the early church fathers. The usage of these criteria could be traced back to the Second Quest in the works of Käsemann and Bornkamm when form criticism could not solve the problems of Jesus studies, particularly his words. Affirming this Evans asserts, “Over the years, biblical scholars have developed historical and literary criteria for assessing biblical literature” even though “Some of these criteria seem unnecessarily complex” and “Some criteria are questionable. But a few of the criteria are consistently invoked.”<sup>428</sup>

A better insight to the criteria has been given by R. S. Barbour *Tradition-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (1972). Barbour divides the criteria into formal and material. By the formal, Barbour refers to

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<sup>426</sup> There are other Gnostic gospels such as *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Phlegon*, *The Acts of Pontius Pilate*, *The Birth of Mary*, *Book of John the Evangelist*, *Dialogue with the Savior*, *Gospel of Bartholomew*, *Gospel of Basilides*, *Gospel of the Ebionites*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Gospel of Eve*, *Goapel according to the Hebrews*, *Gospel of Judas*, *Gospel of Truth*, *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, *Infancy Gospels*, *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy*, *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, *History of Joseph the Carpenter in Arabic*, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *Protoevangelium of James*, *Passion and Resurrection of Jesus*, *Apocryphon of James*, *Bartholomew’s Book of the Resurrection of Christ*, *Book of the Cock*, *Letter of Peter and Philip and Pistis Sophia*. For more on these Gnostic gospels see Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus: Sorting Out the Story of the Life of Jesus* (Illinois: Tyndale, 2008), 267-338. They are with the opinion that there are fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, one of the *Sophia* of Jesus Christ, one of the *Gospel of Mary*, and three Unknown Gospels (which, as far as can be told from the fragments, are orthodox) (59).

<sup>427</sup> Evans, 47.

<sup>428</sup> Evans, 48.

multiple attestation, Aramaisms, poetic form, and parallelism. By the material, Barbour refers to dissimilarity and coherence.<sup>429</sup> Unlike those before them, the Jesus Seminar and other members of the Third Quest have employed the extensive usage of the criteria, a task embarked by the use of historical critical method, though the Jesus Seminar uses more advance methods depending on the criteria for authenticity, which they are using.

Good numbers of scholars have documented the criteria for authenticity including some members of the Jesus Seminar. One of them is M. Eugene Boring of Texas Christian University in an article he considers “as an assignment for the Jesus Seminar.”<sup>430</sup> Boring writes, “Methods appropriate to these approaches will be dealt with by other member of the Jesus Seminar.”<sup>431</sup> These reveal that Boring is a member of the Jesus Seminar. Boring clearly states that historical criticism has considered various aspects of Jesus life but all that remain are the sayings of Jesus, a task which the Second Quest started. He criticizes the Second Quest that,

Even the results of the New Quest –one hesitates to use the term ‘life of Jesus’ here –which attempted a comprehensive presentation of who Jesus was and what we know about him –tended to be mainly a presentation of the message of Jesus. Bornkamm is perhaps the best example.<sup>432</sup>

To these, Boring discusses their usage of the criteria they thought of being misinterpreted by many scholars, who have written before the assignment was given to him. Boring presents the criteria for the authenticity of Jesus’ words, which have become the criteria used by historical critics in the assessment of Jesus tradition in the Gospels. These criteria have come to be in favor of some of the Gnostic gospels and Q. Boring uses the beatitudes in Q and *Thomas* as a case study for his research. To him, the essay was “written as an assignment for the Jesus Seminar....”<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> R. S. Barbour, *Traditio-Historical criticism of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1972), 3.

<sup>430</sup> Boring, 2.

<sup>431</sup> Boring, 2.

<sup>432</sup> Boring, 2.

<sup>433</sup> Boring, 2.

The Jesus Seminar has dismissed 82% of the words of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and accepted 18% to be authentic through their voting. This is based on the criteria, which they have used to assess the Gospels. We shall attempt to document and evaluate them.

**a. Attestation in Multiple Sources**

This criterion has been at the centre of the discussion, which argues for the independent presence of a saying in more than one places in the tradition could best explain its authenticity. This criterion, advocated by F. C. Burkitt, aims at sorting for a starting point for the consideration of Jesus' doctrine, which will help us assure the saying in the gospels to really come from the Lord, which could be based on Mark and Q. These became a problem and led to the four sources such as Mark, Q, M, and L. Matthew and Luke was hypothesized by Griesbach. For this, some have brought the non-canonical gospels, particularly the *Gospel of Thomas*, into place and have suggested that this gospel has same preference that the Gospels have which expanded the frontier of this criterion. Multiple sources seem to be an objective criterion yet it must consider the place that multiple texts could be wrong depending on the source of the information and it denies one biblical saying to be authentic. It has failed to consider the place where one remembers what others do not.

**b. Attestation in Multiple Forms**

This was first suggested by C. H. Dodd.<sup>434</sup> This criterion centers on the presupposition that the appearance of elements of the tradition in more than one literary form such as miracle story, parables and story among many others. This indicates that the elements are frontal to all the forms in the Gospels. This can be used as an argument for their authenticity. It could be argued that a saying in one place is capable of giving sufficient and reliable word of Jesus, which the Holy Spirit might have reminded the author (cf. John 14:25).

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<sup>434</sup> F. David Farnell, "Form Criticism and Tradition Criticism" *The Jesus Crisis* (Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell eds. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 205.

### **c. The Linguistic Criterion**

Since Jesus spoke Aramaic but the tradition was later handed over in Greek and other languages, this criterion considers the closeness of a passage in the Gospels to the style and idiom of contemporary Aramaic to be authentic. Jeremias helps in the understanding that ways of speaking preferred by Jesus include; the divine passage, antithetic parallelism, rhythm of four kinds, alliteration, assonance and paronomasia; characteristics of the *ipsissima vox*, which include parable, riddles, the reign of God, amen, and abba;<sup>435</sup> the variations in translation in the gospel tradition provide sound and reliable information on the vocabulary of Aramaic language.<sup>436</sup> Jeremias is perhaps the leading exponent of this method, but a recent study of Vernon K. Robbins (1985) gives a new criterion, which was not used by the classical historical critics but a refinement of their linguistic criterion. The presence of Araminism does not mean that the saying is authentic. Farnell argues against that this principle is hermeneutically misguided.<sup>437</sup>

### **d. The Environmental Criterion**

This criterion is centered on sayings, which are couched in terms of Jesus' own environment and cannot be the creation of the later Hellenistic church are likely to be from Jesus. Such an environment would concentrate on the domestic, social, political, economic, agricultural, and religious context of the early first century. A recent approach to this criterion is Mack, who is a member of the Jesus Seminar, in his essay, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark," which challenges the apocalyptic thought of the Galilee of Jesus' day and reveals that the "the language of the kingdom of God is better understood within the larger cultural frame of Hellenistic wisdom than if derived from Jewish apocalyptic." It could be argued that is it not all that Jesus taught that are Palestinianian, for he was much under the influence of Greece culture and the environment he lived in.

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<sup>435</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* (Trans. Norman Perrin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 29-37.

<sup>436</sup> Jeremias, 25.

<sup>437</sup> Farnell, "Form Criticism and Tradition Criticism", 205.

#### **e. Tendencies of the Developing Tradition**

The idea of speaking of “laws” on the developing tradition was Bultmann’s idea. It was argued that generally the tradition, which was handed on became longer and more detailed that it tended to reduce the incidence of Semitism, to shift from indirect to direct discourse and to conflate variant versions. Sanders explains that the tradition has been made longer and shorter, more and less detailed and Semitic. There was a tendency to use indirect to direct discourse. We cannot in anyway assume that the writers of the Gospels used indirect for direct statements while writing the tradition of Jesus. They reported what they saw and some heard from the good sources.

#### **f. Dissimilarity**

This reflects that Jesus sayings, which stand out both from its Jewish historical background and from its early church foreground are likely to be authentic.<sup>438</sup> This has been shaped by James Robinson and Bultmann. Some scholars have understood the criterion to mean that those elements of purported Jesus tradition which cannot be considered authentic are those which can be attributed to Judaism or the church. Others see it to have excluded only those elements, which must but attributed to Judaism or the church. Vernon Robbins is reported to have pointed out in the fall meeting (1987) of the Jesus Seminar that the criterion of dissimilarity is often used in a narrow or even simplistic sense which presupposes that we know how the pragmatic system of Jewish Christianity is functioning. What we should be looking for is not just dissimilarity on points but distinctiveness as a coherent system over against its background.

Though this criterion aims at recovering the authentic voice of Jesus, several critiques of this criterion have been presented by scholars such as Calvert and France. The critical scholars, who use this criterion envisage the overlapping of Jesus in Judaism and the church. This would reveal sayings of Jesus in the tradition, which are similar both to conventional Jewish sayings placed in Jesus’ mouth by the church and those created by the church in Jesus’ name. This will only leave us with a Jesus to share neither Jewish nor Christian beliefs.<sup>439</sup> Farnell considers many flaws of the criterion; that it blatantly assumes inauthenticity of traditions, it eliminates the great materials of the Gospels which do not conflict

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<sup>438</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus Quest*, 46.

<sup>439</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 23.

Judaism and the early church, its basis is an argument from silence, there is no agreement in the application of the criterion, the principles erroneously presupposes no connection between Jesus and contemporary Judaism to which He belonged and between Jesus and the Old Testament and it conflicts the criteria of Palestinian environment and Aramaic linguistic phenomena.<sup>440</sup>

#### **g. Modification**

This perceives that the tradition has been modified, which led to variant forms of a tradition, the more radical form is usually the earlier form. To Boring, this is more general version than that of Käsemann that we can be fairly sure that we are dealing with authentic Jesus material when it is clear that Jewish Christianity has mitigated or modified the received tradition, as having found it too bold for its taste.<sup>441</sup> This, according to Boring, is more helpful in determining earlier and later elements in the tradition than Jesus and non-Jesus elements. Let me say that the variant forms in the Gospels explain the place of independency at the time of writing, rather being modifications.

#### **h. Coherence**

This has been considered a criterion for authenticity, which is useful in the identification of further elements, which may be from Jesus. To Boring, this is a helpful criterion when combined through the extracanonical sayings tradition in search of authentic sayings. This has been used by Schmiedel, Dahl, Jeremias, and Bultmann to the present. However, deciding a coherent material and an incoherent material is a subjective factor. Since coherence depends on dissimilarity, it inherits its problems and there is acute subjectivity in its formulation.

#### **i. Plausible Traditionsgeschichte**

This criterion centers on determining the sayings of Jesus, which are authentic, by writing the history of the tradition and the earliest form of the saying would have a claim of authenticity. It attempts to arrange the various version and elements of a saying into a plausible historical progression in which one may see how later versions and increments grew out of earlier ones. There is need for a genealogy of the various

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<sup>440</sup> Farnell, "Form Criticism" 207.

<sup>441</sup> Boring, 7.

forms of the sayings and the forms, which some are reconstructed are likely to be from Jesus. It could be argued that words are easily created in speeches. Jesus might have used a word or a saying for the first time rather than having some historical progression. This is incapable for the determination of authenticity when it comes to the sayings of Jesus.

#### **j. Hermeneutical Potential**

This criterion centers on the parallel accounts at the variety of the forms generated by the original form and asks what this original must have been in order to generate such variety. This is a matter of hermeneutics than genealogy. The challenge for *Plausible Traditionsgeschichte* is applicable here for Jesus might have used a saying, which does not need to ask another saying to generate its variety.

In summation, the entire historical-critical study of Jesus, since the eighteenth century to the present, has been operating under the above discussed criteria for the authenticity of the words of Jesus in the Gospels. This could be seen to be the purpose behind the dislike of the Gospels and the preference of some Gnostic gospels such as *Thomas* in the Third Quest, predominantly used by the Jesus Seminar. Boring affirms in conclusive terms that “These criteria...represent the primary means by which historical critics have attempted to separate out authentic sayings of Jesus from their accretions and reinterpretations.”<sup>442</sup> On the other side, these have been viewed as being incapable by quite a number of evangelical scholars from the *right* wind. For example, Guthrie concludes on the need for sound criteria, which were used by the church fathers at the expense of those employed by the historical Jesus critical scholars that,

When these tests are applied with the suggested cautions, they may establish a considerable probability of veracity for the gospel accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. When properly applied they would certainly refute the position of almost complete skepticism suggested by radical form and redaction criticism, and shift the burden of proof to those who would challenge authenticity rather than the reverse.<sup>443</sup>

Evans has a section on the criteria used by the historical Jesus scholars in his book, *Fabricating Jesus* and he concludes that,

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<sup>442</sup> Boring, 9.

<sup>443</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 247.



The portrait of Jesus can be distorted badly through misapplication of the authenticity criteria to the New Testament Gospels. When the extracanonical Gospels and sources are thrown into the mix and treated as though they were as ancient and as reliable as the canonical Gospels, then the problem of distortion is taken to new levels.<sup>444</sup>

Similarly, Farnell considers the criteria with their applications in the historical criticism particularly the Jesus Seminar and concludes, “It is reasoning in its most malignant form betraying a philosophically preconceived agenda without any hope of objectivity.”<sup>445</sup>

I like to state that these criteria are all incapable for assessing the words of Jesus in the Gospels for most of them are based on subjective rather than objective grounds for the words of Jesus. The criteria are not spiritual enough to assess spiritual materials such as the Gospels. The classical criteria, which were used by the church fathers, are viable and outstanding for the understanding and authenticity of the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

## **7. Teachings of the Jesus Seminar**

The main book of the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar (1993), takes to consideration the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 in Upper Egypt among a collection of Gnostic writings which has about 114 sayings attributed to Jesus.

The main concerns of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar are to find the “real sayings” about Jesus, which fits the epic record than the Jesus identity and authenticity in the New Testament Gospels. This is best put by Funk that “we need a new narration of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the epic story.”<sup>446</sup>

- **Supernatural Deeds and Miracles:** These people deny the supernatural and the historic Christian faith and the records about Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>447</sup> Many of the members have written extensively on the fictional quest for the historical Jesus.

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<sup>444</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 51.

<sup>445</sup> Farnell, “Form Criticism,” 207

<sup>446</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Jesus Seminar.” *Theology News and Notes* (Vol. 46, no. 2, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 1999), 16.

<sup>447</sup> Gwamna, *Perspectives*, 129-130.

- Eschatology: All the words of Jesus about the end of the world, the last judgment, and the second coming of the Son of Man are voted black, which to them are all the product of the early community after the death of Jesus. They do not believe the Last Days' sayings.

- The Kingdom of God: The voting of the *eschaton* and the last judgment could be seen to have reflected in the kingdom of God texts, which were totally rejected and voted black by the Jesus Seminar's members.

- The Lord's Prayer: The Seminar concluded that Jesus did not teach the Lord's Prayer and that parts of the sayings in the prayer that goes back to him are "Our Father." This caused the media to be interested in them.

- Parables and Aphorisms: Most of the parables and aphorisms will be red or pink and some will be gray or black. Most of them are the bedrock of Jesus tradition, which suggested Jesus being a "wisdom teacher."<sup>448</sup>

- The Five Gospels and the church: Borg considers the book to be useful for the church. Its value is that it helps us hear familiar texts in a fresh way, catches the vividness of narration created by the style of the evangelists exemplified especially in Mark's Gospel, preserves Mark's alternations between present and imperfect and preserves the features of the Greek text. To this, Borg recommends it for being a useful "complement to other versions of the gospels, especially for study purposes."<sup>449</sup>

- The Use of the Color Coding: Borg reveals that their work should not be used as a new authority but it should be used for the scholarly understanding of the Gospels.

- Virgin Birth, Death, Burial, resurrection and ascension: The scholars of the Jesus Seminar do not believe in the incarnation of Jesus, deity of Christ, the atonement death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ.<sup>450</sup> This is simply because *Thomas* does not have accounts on the miracles and the passion of Jesus.

- Inspiration of the Gospels: Perhaps most significantly, they deny that the Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17),

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<sup>448</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 168.

<sup>449</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 168.

<sup>450</sup> For more analysis see Crossan's *Who Killed Jesus?*.

having moved the minds and hands of all the writers (2 Peter 1:20-21). Crossan writes, “For Christians the New Testament texts and the Gospel accounts are inspired by God.” He denied the inspiration of the Gospels.<sup>451</sup> Crossan seems to be denying himself being a Christian through the use of isolative words such as “for Christians the NT texts and the gospel accounts are inspired by God.” He has trouble with the Bible and its inspiration. Since the Jesus Seminar does not believe these Christian doctrines, they relegate anything that Jesus says in support of them by voting them “black.” Essentially, the agenda of the Jesus Seminar is, “I do not believe Jesus is God, so I am going to remove anything that records Jesus saying or teaching that He is God from the Gospels” which is the same as the motive of the First Quest for the historical Jesus as discussed above.

Despite the flaws, the Jesus Seminar has some impacts on the historical Jesus research and New Testament scholarship generally. It gives meaning to Christianity, creates opportunity for believers to ask questions that they never before thought they could ask in the church. It fastens New Testament scholarship. The Seminar provides a wake-up call for conservative scholars to popularize their own writings. After more than three decades of examining the Gospels, the Jesus Seminar is moving on.

## **8. The Original Words of Paul**

The fellows of the Jesus Seminar continue to meet, but they now focus on the biblical book of Acts and the letters of Paul.<sup>452</sup> The Westar Institute, an umbrella group for the Jesus Seminar, moves beyond the Gospels, critics say the initiative has ceased to compel public interest. The understanding of Jesus as the founder of Christianity has been

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<sup>451</sup> Wright, *Who was Jesus?* xi.

<sup>452</sup> The major problem here is who is to be regarded as the founder of the Christian faith which is the new perspective on Paul. On this see George Bernard Shaw, “The Monstrous Imposition upon Jesus” *The Writings of St. Paul* (Wayne A. Meeks ed., New York: Norton, 1972), 296-302. Craig L. Bloomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). On the influence of Jesus in the life of Paul see James D. Smart, *The Quiet Revolution: The radical Impact of Jesus on Men of His Time* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), 136-149. No wonder Paul B. Bidoli sees him as the first theologian (63).

affirmed by many conservative scholars of Jesus. Recently, another wing of research came up to study Paul and they conclude that Paul had founded the Christian faith.

Thurman has this to say about Paul;

The apostle Paul was a Jew. He was the first great creative interpreter of Christianity. His letters are older than the Gospels themselves. It seems that because he was not one of the original disciples, he was never quite accepted by them as one able to speak with authority concerning the Master. This fact hung very heavily upon the soul of the apostle. He did not ever belong, quite. One of the disciples could always say, "But of course you do not quite understand, because, you see, you were not there when ..." <sup>453</sup>

Thurman compares the social descent and backgrounds of Jesus and Paul, and states that Paul had privileges of the Roman and Jewish rights compared to Jesus. Comparing Paul with Jesus, Thurman sees Jesus as a typical example of the poor, which made him understand the context of poor and the disinherited in the society. <sup>454</sup>

The Jesus Seminar having voted for the words of Jesus have turned to Paul in "The Authentic Letters of Paul" a book by Arthur J. Dewey, Roy W. Hoover, Lane C. McGaughey and Daryl D. Schmidt. This book distinguishes Paul's letters from others letters attributed to him in the canon, disentangles components pieces of correspondence from the composite letters, places the authentic letters in their chronological order and historical context and restores Paul's voice in a fresh translation from the original Greek. African biblical scholars need to study the founder of Christianity and tell us, who he is from an African point of view. There is need for some studies on the Jesus Seminar's depiction of Paul by African students and scholars of New Testament.

Generally on the Jesus Seminar, quite a number of works have been written against the Jesus Seminar. <sup>455</sup> To me, the true purpose of the Jesus

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<sup>453</sup> Thurman, 31.

<sup>454</sup> Thurman, 17.

<sup>455</sup> Among them are Alister McGrath's *Understanding Jesus*, Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*; *Jesus and the Gospels*; and *Making Sense of the New Testament*; *Jesus Under Fire* edited by Wilkins and Moreland, Wright's *The Challenge of Jesus*; *New Testament and the People of God*; *Who was Jesus?* and *Jesus and the Victory of God*; Witherington III "Jesus of the Jesus Seminar" in *The Jesus Quest: The Third Quest for the*

Seminar could be seen to be promoting a Jesus that the Jesus Seminar believes instead of the Jesus of the Bible. Borg's effort is to try and merge Jesus scholarship and the Christian faith<sup>456</sup> which he claimed to be the purpose of his book but we see complications and favouritism to the Jesus Seminar as stated below.

We should not forget that Borg is a full-fleshed and 'baptized' member of the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar and cannot totally immune himself from the critical studies of Jesus. He guards Docetism and Gnosticism.<sup>457</sup> Borg suggests that "the Christian doctrine of incarnation implies that the historical Jesus is important" and that the product of the historical quest is not the epiphany but it provides a glimpse of Jesus, the epiphany of God that he was.<sup>458</sup>

Borg seems to be evangelical as well as critical on Jesus studies. He seems to be fair as Crossan attested about him but many of his sayings are evidences that he is at the heart of the historical studies and the Jesus Seminar. His effort of trying not to offend these groups by what he would say is affirmative in the entire writing. Borg is completely liberal in regards to the study of Jesus. Do you think if Borg had been *that fair*, would Crossan have called the work a "superb analysis"? By this, I like to say that the work is still to their advantage and subject to critical scrutiny from a conservative point of view. One must be careful whenever books as this are on his or her table for reading. We must be careful for the assertions in the book. We must not be carried away by any good thing that is said but we must take time to investigate well to get the central idea of the author.

To me, Borg does not show any difference to what his initial belief is for his assertion having quoted the Creed in the beginning of the final chapter of the books affirms his beliefs. Affirming this Borg writes,

We are quite certain that Jesus did not think of himself as divine or as "Son of God" in any unique sense, if at all. If one of the disciples

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*Historical Jesus; New Testament History and What Have They Done with Jesus?*, Habermas's *The Historical Jesus*, Strobel's *The Case for Christ*, Evans's *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*, Thomas and Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis*, Gwamna's "Challenge" in *Perspectives in African Theology* among many others.

<sup>456</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 183.

<sup>457</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 193, 196.

<sup>458</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 196.

had responded to the question reportedly asked by Jesus in Mark's gospel, "Who do people say that I am?" with words like those used in the Nicene Creed, we can well imagine that Jesus would have said, "What???" Moreover, most Jesus scholars do not think Jesus was born of a virgin, or that he ascended into heaven in a visible way, or that there will be a literal second coming, indeed, perhaps the only line from the Creed that would be seen as historical is the reference to his death; "he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffering death, and was buried."<sup>459</sup>

In Borg's note above, the death of Christ has been questioned as he used Crossan to support his point. Note Borg's usage of "We are quite certain that Jesus did not think of himself as divine or as 'Son of God' in any sense, if at all," the three question marks on the "What???" and "...most Jesus scholars do not think Jesus was born of a virgin, or that he ascended into heaven in a visible or that there would be a literal second coming." Both the "we," "most" and "many" in the writing include Borg; hence, a member of the historical Jesus studies and the Jesus Seminar. It is foundational to say that Borg himself is one of those people, who reject the traditional understanding of Jesus, which means not having a proper view of Jesus. So whatever Borg has suggested should be judged from the assertions cited above among many others, which would make him a liberal scholar such as Reimarus and Strauss among many others.

With this, one wonders whether these fellows were present at that time when they are able to assume the *Gospel of Thomas* and Q to be reliable as Matthew and Luke. I say that early church history began and progressed with the church fathers and they had the immediate memories of the Jesus scenario and confirmed the reliability of the four Gospels. Some of them were eyewitnesses to the events and deeds of Jesus. Borg later states that the historical study of Jesus does not in any way put the truth of Christianity at stake, "...Christianity is seems obviously to be a viable religion."<sup>460</sup> He uses faith within the simple sense to be independent upon the historical knowledge of Jesus but argues that should one sees faith in a broader sense then the historical knowledge of Jesus will be relevant.<sup>461</sup> Borg states that the images of Jesus *in fact* very much affect images of the Christian life and to say *yes* to the relevant of

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<sup>459</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 183.

<sup>460</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 193.

<sup>461</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 193.

the significance is to risk authentic Christianity and to say *no* is to risk Docetism, Gnosticism and other illnesses. Borg stands in between the two,<sup>462</sup> which caused Crossan to have recommended that he has done justice to the entire Jesus Research.

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<sup>462</sup> Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 193-4.





## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE FICTIONAL JESUS CONTINUED**

#### **1. The Da Vinci Code**

*The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, to me, fits the fictional Jesus quest, for like the Jesus Seminar, it aims at presenting a Jesus who did not exist in the actual world of the New Testament Gospels through its dependence on the Gnostic gospels. Brown's work is classified here for it rejects the divine aspects of Jesus and aims at presenting the human aspect of Jesus like the Jesus Seminar and denying the divinity of Jesus, a view shared among the members of the First Quest.

The Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code* is constructed from a careful harmonization of fictitious documents, *Thomas, Judas, Philip* and *Magdalene* like the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar, who is based on *Thomas, Magdalene, Philip, Judas* and some parts of the Synoptic Gospels called Q. Also, the work follows the chronology of history as it came in 2003. These are some of the reasons I classified *The Da Vinci Code* under the Third Quest for the historical Jesus research in line with Crossan's assertion of a fictional Jesus, "a figure married in a novel."<sup>463</sup>

Dan Brown is a bestselling author and a graduate of Amherst College and Phillips Exeter Academy, where he has taught English and creative writing. Brown is the author of *The Da Vinci Code, Digital Fortress, Angels and Demons, The Lost Symbols, Inferno* and *Deceptive Point*. Brown has claimed to be a Christian and that Christian theologians have played key roles in his life.<sup>464</sup> To Brown, "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."<sup>465</sup> The book or movie (directed by Ron Howard) was a play by an American Professor Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks), a professor of Religious Symbolology and Agent Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tautou) from DCPJ's

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<sup>463</sup> Crossan, "In Their Own Words, 22.

<sup>464</sup> John Buckeridge, "The Da Vinci Opportunity," *Christianity: Real Life, Real Faith in the Real World* (May 2006), 20.

<sup>465</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi Books, 2003), 15.

Cryptology Department. The book claims to have revealed several things about the Bible, particularly Jesus and the Gospels.<sup>466</sup>

*The Da Vinci Code* is based on many non-canonical gospels such as *Thomas, Magdalene, Judas, and Philip* among many others (see discussion above). It should be said that these documents are incredible and inauthentic for the life of Jesus of the Gospels but a Jesus who was known by Gnosticism of the early church. They were written much later than the Gospels as document to defend Gnostic ideas, which were against the church.

Brown in his novel reveals that the Bible is a product of a man not of God, a position believed by Crossan and many members of the Jesus Seminar. He states, “Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book”<sup>467</sup> and that “...the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda –to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base”<sup>468</sup> which disproof the authenticity of the words of Jesus in the Gospels, a position the Jesus Seminar tries to affirm by voting and editing the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

To Brown, “Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen.” He identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah who toppled kings, inspired millions and founded new philosophies. “As a descendant of the line of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews. Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land.”<sup>469</sup> Brown attacks the divinity of Jesus, which to him, was as a result of a vote. Affirming this, he writes; “Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the council of Nicaea,” which Constantine

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<sup>466</sup> A similar and most recent work is that of James Tabor which claims that Jesus married and had descendants, the brothers of Jesus were part of the twelve, the resurrection was spiritual rather than physical, and Jesus was a disciple of John. See James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

<sup>467</sup> Brown, 312-3.

<sup>468</sup> Brown, 317.

<sup>469</sup> Brown, 313.

turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchangeable.”<sup>470</sup> To him, “until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal.”<sup>471</sup> By this we see him rejecting Jesus being the Son of God.<sup>472</sup>

Brown reveals in this novel that Jesus had a companion and she was nobody than Mary Magdalene. This is supported by the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*, which states,

And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’<sup>473</sup>

This, to him, was a romantic relationship, which the Savior had for Mary Magdalene. This is also revealed using the non-canonical *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, which states,

An Peter said, ‘When the Savior was questioned, did he really speak privately with a woman and not openly that we might all hear? Did he prefer her to us?...Levi said to Peter, ‘Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against this woman as if she was an enemy. If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Knowing her very well, he fully loved her....’<sup>474</sup>

According to the novel, the church was to be carried out by a woman, Mary Magdalene, after the Savior is gone. It reveals Peter being jealous of a woman because Jesus preferred her to all the apostles and particularly Peter. The *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* reveals Jesus had spoken to her in private, which Peter begged her to reveal it to the apostles. To Brown, Jesus gave her the instruction to carry the church forward. With this they backed it up with *The Last Supper*, which they revealed to have Mary Magdalene at the right hand of Jesus.<sup>475</sup> To

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<sup>470</sup> Brown, 315.

<sup>471</sup> Brown, 315.

<sup>472</sup> Brown, 315.

<sup>473</sup> Brown, 331; Comfort and Driesbach, 300.

<sup>474</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, 293.

<sup>475</sup> Brown, 334.

Brown, from those gospels, Jesus had given instructions to carry on the church to Mary Magdalene and not Peter.<sup>476</sup>

Brown makes it plain that Jesus had a royal bloodline, a daughter called Sarah through Mary Magdalene. To him, Mary Magdalene was pregnant for the Savior before his death and she gave birth to a daughter and ran to France when persecution broke against women in Jerusalem.<sup>477</sup>

The *Holy Grail* is Mary Magdalene, carrying the *Sangreal*. Brown states that in the Grail, Jesus was at the middle and breaking bread and drinking wine with his disciples. But the surprising thing is the fact that they had 13 cups contrary to what we have in the *Jesus film* and the Bible (Matt. 26:27, “Drink from it, all of you.”). To Brown, the Grail is even a living being. “It is, in fact,...a person”<sup>478</sup> and “A woman, in fact.”<sup>479</sup> This woman has “carried with her a secret so powerful that, if revealed, it threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity.”<sup>480</sup> The novel rejects Mary Magdalene being the prostitute, “Mary was no such thing.”<sup>481</sup> And that the church needed to defame her in order to cover up her dangerous secret –her role as the Holy Grail and “her marriage to Jesus Christ.” The *Gospel of Philip* reads, *And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene...*<sup>482</sup> According to Brown, the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is a matter of historical record,<sup>483</sup> a common view shared among some members of the Jesus Seminar such as Barbara Thierring in her book *Jesus the Man*, which viewed Jesus as getting married and fathering children then divorced and remarry. This view is held in the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988, which revealed Jesus having sex with a woman Mary Magdalene and fathered children among many others.

Brown, like the Jesus Seminar, prefers the Gnostics over the Synoptic Gospels and John. He rejects the orthodox view of heretic and heresy and reveals that “the Latin word *haereticus* means ‘choice’ and people who

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<sup>476</sup> Brown, 333-4.

<sup>477</sup> Brown, 342.

<sup>478</sup> Brown, 319.

<sup>479</sup> Brown, 320, 326.

<sup>480</sup> Brown, 322.

<sup>481</sup> Brown, 328.

<sup>482</sup> Brown, 331.

<sup>483</sup> Brown, 330.

preferred the original history of Christ were the world's first heretics."<sup>484</sup> To him, it was Constantine who rejected many gospels though they managed to survive (see discussion under the Jesus Seminar). These, to Brown, are the Coptic scrolls discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945. The documents, to him, speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms and the church tried to suppress the documents. In general, Brown disbelieves the reliability of the Gospels and believes the Gnostics such as the *Gospels Thomas*, the *Gospel of Phillip*, and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* among others that became the basis of his ideas in the book as the Jesus Seminar in its inclusion of *Thomas* to the canon in *The Five Gospels*. It should be stated that the Gnostic gospels used by Brown for the construction of *The Da Vinci Code* are not credible source for the life of Jesus. Any life of Jesus, which does not center on the Gospels, will be wanted for historical fraud, for the many eye-witnesses bore testimony to the credibility of the Gospels.

The entire aim of the novel is to reveal that Sophie is a descendant of the royal bloodline of Jesus, Sarah, who was born in France where Sophie was born which will be a proof to the descendants of Jesus ignored for political reasons by the Roman Catholic Church. Mary Magdalene was the central focus. It is stated that the "quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A Journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one."<sup>485</sup>

## **2. Works against Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*<sup>486</sup>**

Lots of works could be seen to be against this blockbuster novel and lots of comments have been aired for and against the works of Brown. Mark Green in *Christianity* (2004) wrote that the book is a "confident presentation of bogus scholarship with enough truth mixed in to create a convincing alternative account".<sup>487</sup> Though Brown insists that the novel is not anti-Christian but meant to be an entertaining story to promote

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<sup>484</sup> Brown, 317.

<sup>485</sup> Brown, 592.

<sup>486</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/TheDaVinciCode>, [www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk), [www.thedavincicode.org.uk](http://www.thedavincicode.org.uk), <http://altreligion.about.com/library/bldavincicode.htm> and [www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/weirdworlds/davincicode/index.htm](http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/weirdworlds/davincicode/index.htm) [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2013].

<sup>487</sup> Qtd in Buckeridge, 20.

discussion and debate and that the novel promotes and seeks to restore ‘the sacred feminine’ to religion in general and Christianity in particular.<sup>488</sup>

Buckeridge in his article, “The Da Vinci Opportunity” reveals “how to engage, enable your Christian beliefs to get a positive response and not be seen as part of a conspiracy to silence the truth” and observes that the novel is “a major opportunity to talk to friends, family and acquaintances about the heart of the gospel”.<sup>489</sup> Steve Hollinghurst has written the *Coded Messages: Evangelism and the Da Vinci Code*. In this work, Hollinghurst has exhorted Christians to be prepared for genuine debate<sup>490</sup> and use the book for evangelism, and to seek for means of addressing some of the key issues he has raised such as;

Would it have been wrong for Jesus to be married? Has the church excluded women? What should be the place of women in the church? Is sex evil? Can we continue with God through sex or nature? Is God male or best seen as a goddess? Are there descendants of Jesus alive today? Do the Gnostic Gospels represent the true original Christian message? Did the church deliberately suppress these books? Did the church suppress Pagan beliefs? How do you think we should view Mary Magdalene? With this he revealed some insightful response towards these questions from an evangelical viewpoint.<sup>491</sup>

Another work is that of Brian H. Edward, *Da Vinci: The Broken Code*.<sup>492</sup> Edward has rejected the conceptual frameworks of Dan Brown and his works. There is the work of Garry Williams, *The Da Vinci Code: From Dan Brown’s Fiction to Mary Magdalene’s Faith*, which answers seven key claims raised by Dan Brown’s book and directs the reader

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<sup>488</sup> Buckeridge, 20.

<sup>489</sup> Hollinghurst, 20.

<sup>490</sup> These issues are originally discussed in his book *Coded Messages: Evangelism and The Da Vinci Code* (Cambridge: Grove Books), see [www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk). Steve Hollinghurst is a researcher in Evangelism to Post-Christian Culture at the Church Army, Sheffield Centre. He helps run a Christian spirituality venue at the Glastonbury festival and has an MA on the New Age and Paganism in Britain today.

<sup>491</sup> Hollinghurst, 23-5.

<sup>492</sup> Edwards was a pastor of the Hook Evangelical Church, Surbiton for 29 years and now the president of the FIEC.

towards an intriguing story based on fact in the Bible.<sup>493</sup> Other works include; James L. Garlow and Peter Jones' *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, Ben Witherington, III's *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci*, Darrell Bock's *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (2004) and many others.

Works against Brown are not written only by conservatives or evangelicals, who see Brown's *slap* on the Christian faith but are also written by liberals. Even Robert M. Price, who is a liberal Jesus scholar and fellow of the Jesus Seminar, concluded against the work of Brown that,

So, in the end, all the intrigue and espionage surrounding the "secret of the ages" is much ado about nothing. It stems from the abysmal theological ignorance of Dan Brown and most of his readers. Insofar as Christians protest *The Da Vinci Code* as a gross campaign of misinformation, we ought to join them. Insofar as they claim that the alternative is the safe and secure myth of Christian origins spoon-fed by the church, we ought to protest their misinformation just as loudly.<sup>494</sup>

The novel slanders the *Opus Dei*,<sup>495</sup> Christian faith and Jesus. Brown is seen to be against this lay Christian organization, which is meant for offering its members the spirituality they need for living amidst this world that various discoveries are coming up about Jesus.

After the novel of Brown, which became the "handbook" of many people (Christians and non-Christians) lots of books and interactions on

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<sup>493</sup> See Mike Humphrey, "The Da Vinci Code and Opus Dei," [www.AskACatholic.com](http://www.AskACatholic.com), [www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk), [www.thedavincicode.org.uk](http://www.thedavincicode.org.uk), <http://altreligion.about.com/library/bldavincicode.htm> and [www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/weirdworlds/davincicode/index.htm](http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/weirdworlds/davincicode/index.htm) [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2013].

<sup>494</sup> Robert M. Price, "The Da Vinci Debate." [www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art\\_davinci\\_debate.htm](http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art_davinci_debate.htm) [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2011].

<sup>495</sup> For more on the *Opus Dei* see Mike Humphrey, "The Da Vinci Code and Opus Dei" [www.AskACatholic.com](http://www.AskACatholic.com). In this work, he has considered that the movie is nothing but a fiction and has argued that only four groups of people would approve Brown's movie that is; the "uncatechized Catholics, uncatechized Christians, people that claim to be Christian but are not really anti-Catholic, atheist and agnostics." But for the real Catholic, these are all fatal to salvation.

the claims of the novel have been in the air. We quite know that religious discussions are the top of learning by various categories of people. Scholars begin to react to the works of Brown despite that the views he holds have been held by many people in the history of Jesus studies.

Analytically, it should be said that *The Da Vinci Code* has become “a monster bestseller with over 40 million book sales worldwide.”<sup>496</sup> Many Christians are disturbed by the claims that Jesus got married to Mary Magdalene, have children and that the Christian faith under the Roman Catholic Church suppressed the documents at the expense of women identity.

The work of Brown lacks sound proofs and evidences in history though he claimed that everything revealed in the novel is *fact*.<sup>497</sup> The novel claims to have the Gnostic gospels such as the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*, and other documents that were neglected to be the basis for the ideas. These gospels aimed at revealing the superior role attached to Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was the central focus. Brown, in the book, reveals that the “quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A Journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one.”<sup>498</sup>

Let me say that the original title for the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* is the *Gospel of Mary*. Is it possible for the *gospel* to be written by another Mary in history during or after the time of Jesus? We should not forget that *Thomas* is a document that was discovered in 1945 in Egypt to have a Coptic translation of the *gospel*, which is dated in the fourth or early fifth century. Is there possibility that someone had written this so-called gospel even though the text is dated to the first century by Crossan and others? Similarly, we should note that the Gnostic gospels do see Mary Magdalene to have some pre-eminence in the history of Christianity but they do not say anything as to Jesus getting married to Mary Magdalene. After all, there were many celibates during the time of Jesus particularly the Essences, who shared the same belief systems. The documents for the *Priori of Sion* at the Paris library were said to be forged by Plantard during a trial in 1993, which he made to instigate a genealogy of Jesus, which does not really exist to have existed and become the basis for the wrong imposition, which he has prepared to impose on the history of the

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<sup>496</sup> Buckeridge, 20.

<sup>497</sup> Brown, 15.

<sup>498</sup> Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 592.



world. These documents have become the basis for other popular movies such as *The Da Vinci Code*.

All the findings of Brown could be seen to have rejected all traditional facts about Jesus and the church. It is surprising that even the Dead Sea Scrolls are given a new dimension in the works of Brown.<sup>499</sup> We could say that the entire Dead Sea Scrolls are documents that were written before Christianity so do not say anything about Jesus and Mary Magdalene as evidently claimed by Brown to have been one of his sources. Brown rejected the inspired Gospels and tried to reframe ideas that are alien to the entire history of the whole. Another thing is Brown's interpretations of *facts* which led to his imprinted ideas that characterized his writings.

We cannot deny the fact that we all live in the world of interpretation. Everyone is an interpreter. This is absolute that when there is improper interpretation of data it leads to wrong understanding of the data. The works of Brown is seen to be filled with misinterpretation of data. People misinterpret writers, pastors, scholars, and historians and many others. We hear things and go ahead given them other definitions that this is what is said instead of another. We could clearly see Brown given Leonardo Da Vinci an interpretation that Da Vinci never intended to have revealed for history in his painting.

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<sup>499</sup> A similar argument is raised by Josep O'Callaghan in 1972 also announced another piece from the remaining published fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls and discovered that the small piece is a New Testament text of Mark 6:52-53 about AD 67 or 68 [John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bakers, 1991), 359] but his work portrays a weak state of identification. Further studies revealed that such pieces made reference to the Greek version of the Book of Enoch. See E. A. Muro, "The Greek Fragments of Enoch from Qumran Cave 7" *Revue de Qumran* 18.2, 70 (1997): 307-312. In 1984, Carsten P. Thiede continued the work of O'Callaghan and dated three tiny pieces of a papyrus of Matthew to the middle of the first century. Thiede states that "fairness therefore demands that we admit Josep O'Callaghan was right as early as 1972. 7Q5 is Mark 6:52-53". C. P. Thiede, *The Earliest Gospel Manuscript? The Qumran Fragments 7Q5 and Its Significance for New Testament Studies*. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992), 41.

### 3. The Titanic

*The Titanic* is a recent development of the Jesus research in this twenty-first century. Many scholars do not know much about this recent discovery, which has become a threat to the Christian faith. It is basic to state that the Christian faith is an area of faith that accommodates documents from every aspect of the human endeavours; hence, the Bible is at the finger-tips of every Christian but only a few are professional within that terrain. The Christian faith seems not to emphasize professionalism because it is the faith that many people in the world claim to practice. This is the product of the past three hundred years, which broke with the Jesus research after the age of enlightenment when the whole quest for history and knowledge shifted into the Christian faith. People want to make *name*. They want to be known in the history of the world to have deciphered this or that.

The document for *The Titanic* was said to be discovered by the Filmmaker James Cameron and his colleagues, who displayed the Ossuary and they are believed to belong to Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene in a press conference in New York, February 26, 2007, in connection with a documentary which Cameron has produced. We cannot know the source of this document but the existence of the document has been claimed to be *fact* by Cameron.

In the article, "Titanic Claim: Jesus still Dead," Tim Mcgirk from Jerusalem observes and urges the reader to brace himself or herself, for James Cameron, the man who brought Titanic is back with another blockbuster, which has followed the train of the Jesus studies. According to Mcgirk, this time, the ship is sinking in Christianity. He revealed that in a new documentary, Producer Cameron and his director, Simcha Jacobovici, make the startling claim that Jesus didn't resurrect –the cornerstone of Christian faith –and that his burial cave was discovered near Jerusalem. And, get this; Jesus sired a son with Mary Magdalene. This claim is that Jesus' remain is still in the grave unlike the historical Jesus scholars who even denied the historical record of the death and resurrection of Jesus. A similar view is held by Robert M. Price when he wrote *Jesus is Dead* (2007).<sup>500</sup> Christ's resurrection, after all, is the main foundation of the Christian faith, proof that a boy born to a carpenter's

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<sup>500</sup> Robert M. Price, *Jesus is Dead* (2007).

wife in a manger is the Son of God.<sup>501</sup> But film-makers Cameron and Jacobovici claim to have amassed evidence through DNA tests, archaeological evidence and Biblical studies that the 10 coffins belong to Jesus and his family. It took 20 years for experts to decipher the names on the ten tombs. They were: Jesua, son of Joseph, Mary, Mary, Mathew, Jofa and Judah, son of Jesua.

There is a sober claim that Jesus had a son not a daughter (named Sarah) as in the case of Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*, Barbara Thiering in her *Codes* and the movie *The Last Temptation of Jesus* produced by Harry Ufland (which was based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis *The Last Temptation of Jesus*) among many others. Asked in a Press Conference whether the *Titanic* is another version of *The Da Vinci Code*, Cameron said “No, it's not a re-make of *The Da Vinci Code*. It's supposed to be true.”

But unfortunately for Cameron, the Israel's prominent archeologist Professor Amos Kloner didn't associate the crypt with the New Testament Jesus. His father, after all, was a humble carpenter who couldn't afford a luxury crypt for his family.

Well I like to encourage Christians to follow up and never allow topic of such nature go like that for the sceptics and agnostics would always be at the forefront of discussion of this nature. We must follow up to correct all intentional ideas within the Christian faith.

#### **4. The Ascendancy of Mary Magdalene**

The discovery of many gospels in the twentieth century has led to the primal view of Mary Magdalene, which has survived among the early centuries of church history. Many of these gospels were rejected because they do not concur with the teachings of Jesus, which are best revealed in the Gospels. The most famous of these documents has been undertaken by the Jesus Seminar and the works of many of its fellows. This got dominated in the works of Crossan. One could see Witherington, *New Testament Story* for a broader discussion on Mary Magdalene.

This idea was exposed in Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* in 2003 as discussed above. In 2007, the *Titanic* came on board trying to reveal the highest position Mary Magdalene had in the history of the church, which they all claimed was abandoned by the early church fathers. The

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<sup>501</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, “Resurrection-Faith and the ‘Historical’ Jesus,” *JSHJ* 11 (2013) 35-52.

document for the *Titanic* reveals Jesus family tombs, which included that of Mary Magdalene (see *Titanic* above). These people have been trying to retrieve the words of Mary Magdalene as research is putting effort to advance and publicize the place Magdalene had in the history of Christianity, which to some extent has been equated with the place of Jesus.

The effort to prove the ascendancy of Mary Magdalene has continued within scholarly works. A more recently published work is Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text that Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary the Magdalene*.<sup>502</sup> It is evident that modern scholarship is searching for a wife for Jesus. This attitude of searching for a wife for someone is foreign to Western culture but fits the African context where parents or relatives search for a wife for a mature African man.<sup>503</sup>

But the problem has been the place of proofs. Recently, the fields of archaeology and Textual Criticism have devoted efforts in search for evidence. In September 2012, Karen King, a Divinity professor at Harvard University has claimed to have discovered a Coptic fragment of the fourth century in which Jesus made reference to his wife. King presented a paper at the *International Association of Coptic Studies* in Rome on Tuesday, September 18, 2012 making public a fragment of papyrus that explicitly claimed Jesus had a wife while on earth. She titled the fragment, *The Gospel of Jesus' Wife*.

Since then responses have come on board by various and erudite scholar of the early church. One of such outstanding scholars is Daniel B. Wallace who allegedly argued that the fragment has just some lines on the verso and expressed its incapability to become a *gospel*. To this Wallace suggests that it should have been titled, *The Fragment about Jesus' Relations*. Wallace confirms that in the fragment “Jesus definitely says ‘my wife’ in the fragment. He also says “My mother gave life to

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<sup>502</sup> Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text that Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary the Magdalene* (HarperCollins, 2014).

<sup>503</sup> For a reaction and counteracting such thoughts from an African perspective see Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, “Mrs Messiah?: Modern Scholarship Searching for a Wife for Jesus” <https://gideonyohanna.wordpress.com/2014/11/13/mrs-messiah-modern-scholarship-searching-for-a-wife-for-jesus/> Accessed 26th November, 2014.

me” and “she will be able to be my disciple.” However, the biggest problem is the antecedent of “she” in the fragment is not clear, but presumably it’s his wife. Wallace argues that the *gospel* does not say anything about Jesus getting married. He reveals the similarity of the fragment with the *Gospel of Thomas* particularly in the statement “my mother gave me life” with a reference to the second century *Thomas* in saying 101. Despite that Mary is mentioned in line 3 and Jesus made reference to his wife in line 4, it does not in anyway speak in actual terms that it was Mary that was in view.<sup>504</sup> Similar reactions came from Acharya S. and the Got Question website, who disputed the Jesus marriage claim to Mary Magdalene.

The reliability of the fragment has been judged to be fake by quite a number of scholars who have done recent studies on the fragment. It is reported by Wallace from a mail, Dr. Craig Evans, the Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia University and Divinity College sent that,

*Harvard Theological Review* has decided not to publish Karen King’s paper on the Coptic papyrus fragment on the grounds that the fragment is probably a fake. Helmut Koester (Harvard University), Bentley Layton (Yale University), Stephen Emmel (University of Münster), and Gesine Robinson (Claremont Graduate School)—all first-rate scholars in Coptic studies—have weighed in and have found the fragment wanting. No doubt Francis Watson’s comprehensive work showing the fragment’s dependence on the *Gospel of Thomas* was a contributing factor for this judgment, as well as the rather odd look of the Coptic that already raised several questions as to its authenticity.<sup>505</sup>

## **5. Points about the Historical Jesus Research**

Generally, I would like to say that all these approaches that have been paraded within the Jesus studies have failed miserably for as one reads

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<sup>504</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, “Reality Check: The “Jesus’ Wife” Coptic Fragment” [www.danielbwallace.com](http://www.danielbwallace.com) 21 September 2012.

<sup>505</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, “Jesus’ Wife Fragment judged a fake” [www.danielbwallace.com](http://www.danielbwallace.com) posted 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

about them,<sup>506</sup> one finds them wanting in some aspects of their enquiries. I disbelieve the historical Jesus research on the basis of the following;

- a. The arguments of the modern critical scholars have been raised by people throughout Church History e.g. the denial of the incarnation and the Gospels by Marcion and his canon. All the argument of Schweitzer, who is known to be the dominant figure, who has given shape to the First Quest for the historical Jesus in the early twentieth century, has been raised by many before him. Käsemann, who is a dominant scholar of the Second Quest whose work has been considered to be standard employed form criticism, has been raised by many of the form critics of the so-called No-Quest period. The Third Quest scholars seemed to roots their questions on the Jewishness of Jesus yet we see Jeremias to have written on during the No-Quest period for his influence has been through the Second Quest. As such the historical Jesus research in its stage classifications is not modern but just a play on the ideas of several scholars, who have lived already.
- b. The consideration of the Gospels as myths is unhealthy for the Christian faith.
- c. Anti-supernatural Jesus, who did not do any miracles and did not rise from the dead. The historical Jesus fails for “it usually rejects the possibility of miracles in an *a priori* manner, and also because it frequently rejects any investigation of miracle-claims at all.”<sup>507</sup>
- d. The attempt to include the non-canonical gospels to the New Testament Gospels’ canon. Adding any book to the Gospels such as *Thomas* would mean trespassing the criteria for authenticity which the Early Church used during the canonicity of the Bible. This was an attempt by Marcion, which was historically rejected in the Early Church.
- e. The voting for the words of Jesus is not modern in such sense (18% said and 82% not said by Jesus). The attempt to vote and edit the Gospels was already embarked by Marcion of the second century.

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<sup>506</sup> F. B. Rubio, “The Fiction of the ‘Three Quests’: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Historiographical Paradigm,” *JSHJ* 7 (2009), 211–253.

<sup>507</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 64.

Marcion picked Luke and edited quotations from the Old Testament.<sup>508</sup>

- f. The rejection of the Gospel of John as historical and an interpretation of the life of Jesus.<sup>509</sup> John was an eyewitness of all those events.
- g. The rejection of the supernatural deeds of Jesus particularly the resurrection. Rejecting the supernatural means rejecting God who is the father of all humans and the world around us.
- h. The Q hypothesis cannot be proven with certainty historically.
- i. The use of historical critical method in understanding spiritual documents as the Gospels is unhealthy for the method is not the only method for the understanding of the Gospels. The Gospels are theological-histories.
- j. The modern reconstructed portraits of Jesus cannot explain their crucifixion, resurrection, following and the development of the Christian church throughout the centuries to the twenty-first century. The Jesus of the Gnostic gospels is not a miracle worker or healer; he is sedentary teacher and sage, and speaks of topics linked with philosophies and Platonism.
- k. The drawing of a distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history is grossly a misunderstanding. They are one, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God.
- l. The approaches to the study of the Gospels are mostly the putting aside of the Holy Spirit, which means questioning the authority of the canonical Gospels. The quests for the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar approaches have taken the place of the Holy Spirit away and they are thinking within the human historical arena and from the fictitious lenses.

Whether we like it or not, the Bible and the Gospels in particular must remain the sources of authority, which are basics to the understanding of the life of Jesus. The Bible is the good source for the fact of Jesus as he came and lived in this world. This is true for even extra-biblical materials confirmed that Jesus has lived and did many

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<sup>508</sup> Jerry MacGregor and Marie Prys, *1001 Surprising Things You Should Know about Christianity* (Benin City: Praise God Christian Publications, 2002), 187.

<sup>509</sup> John H. Charlesworth, "The Historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: A Paradigm Shift?" *JSHJ* 8 (2010), 3–46.

things in the world. We have convincing evidences for the life of Jesus while on earth in the Gospels. We cannot deny the fact that John asserts that there are many things that Jesus did that are not recorded in the Gospels (Jn. 20:31). But with what evidence can we assume that the “many things” refer to the works that have been exposed by the modern historical Jesus researchers? We can be sure that any fact that is being taken outside the scriptures and does not really stand the test of evidence and not authentic for the Gospels’ inspiration was highly confirmed by the writers, the church fathers and even God in the extra-biblical books as history revealed. The Bible is still the ultimate source of authority for all generations, which the Holy Spirit has made available for us for spiritual exhortations. The understanding of Jesus must fall back to the traditional view of Jesus, which was known during the Church Fathers and many of the conservatives today than relying on the Jesus supplied by critical scholars within the historical Jesus research.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **JESUS BEYOND MODERN HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTIONS**

This chapter is designed to reaffirm the historicity of Jesus and reliability of the Gospels. It seeks evidence from various sources in support of the traditional understanding of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. It will state the Gospel records of Jesus and their sources, historical reliability, canonicity and inspiration of the Gospels. It will survey the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels and reveal their uniqueness as compared to the modern portraits of Jesus in the historical Jesus research.

#### **1. Survey of the Traditional View of Jesus**

The traditional view of Jesus came during the early church era in the second century A.D. when the Early Church's fathers devoted their strength in search for the authentic words of Jesus. This view of Jesus has survived until the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. It views the Gospels as reliable sources for the understanding of Jesus. This understanding views Jesus as the Savior and eternal God-man. It sees Jesus as a miracle worker. There was total scrutiny of the teachings about Christ in the Early Church's fathers; hence, they had a better view of the Gospels as being reliable sources for understanding the life and deeds of Jesus. Birger Gerhardsson states that "the early church was as zealous in guarding the Jesus tradition as the Jewish rabbis were in guarding the Torah tradition."<sup>510</sup> This made them to see Jesus as expressed in the Gospels. We could assert that the quoting of works when writing was a common practice during their time. People cited other writings to make their works credible and of course citing other people adds *flavor* to the materials under construction. II Clement, around 150 A.D. is known to have quoted from Matthew, and Luke. Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* quotes from Matthew.

The *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which came in the second century identified with Matthew and Mark as good sources for the life of

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<sup>510</sup> Birger Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 59.

Jesus. Another church father, Athenagorus in his “Plea” around A.D. 177, is known to have interacted with Matthew 5:28 and Matthew 19:9 or Mark 10:11. We still have documentary about Theophilus, who was a Bishop of Antioch in his treatise to Autolycus to have quoted the fourth Gospel and asserted that John was inspired by the Spirit.<sup>511</sup>

Within the study of the Gospels, the doctrine of the person of Christ during the early church was developed at least partly in response to heresies of different kinds. Ryrie observes that “The uniqueness of Christianity is the person, Jesus Christ, and the distinctiveness of Christ is the fact that He is the God-man.”<sup>512</sup> Despite such a construction of the life of Jesus, the influence of Docetism and Cerinthianism in the apostolic age was quite evident in the teachings of the heretic Arius whose ideas prompted the development of classical Christology. Arius believed Jesus Christ was a heavenly being, intermediate between God and man, but nevertheless a creature. If he was not, he wouldn’t have suffered and died. Arius was condemned at the Nicea in A.D. 325 but his views continue to the modern era among the Unitarianism and Jehovah’s witnesses.

Dominant among the works of the Early Church’s fathers is the work of Clement of Rome, which viewed Christ as God who will judge the dead and the living. Ignatius emphasized the true deity and humanity of Christ which can be referred to as the “blood of God.” There was the Ebonitism threat, which sees Christ as naturally human. Melito of Sardis spoke of Christ as God and man. Iranaeus returned to a more biblical view of a person of Christ. Tertullian combated Gnosticism and monarchianism. He was the first to teach that the Father and Son are of “one substance” and the three persons of the Godhead. Origen from the East taught the eternal generation of the Son from the Father and used the term *homoousios*. Later the school of Alexandria stressed the unity of Christ. He was the divine person, the Son of God, who incarnated.<sup>513</sup> It is important to note that the Church Fathers mainly based their view of

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<sup>511</sup> Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 102-104.

<sup>512</sup> C. C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 51.

<sup>513</sup> Gene. L. Bray, “Christology” *New Dictionary of Theology* (Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright eds., Leicester: IVP, 1988), 138.

the Gospels on the evidence of eye-witness testimony of the earliest Fathers such as Papias and Polycarp.

The Medieval Ages accepted the authority of patriarchal Christology. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed Christ had only one nature which had brought the genuineness of his humanity into question. Augustine stressed the real humanity of Christ in his atoning. From A.D. 451- A.D. 787, many people agreed that the human nature of Christ was hypostatized in the *logos*, the Son of God. The basic problem during this time was the witness of the Gospels to the miracles and other extraordinary deeds of Jesus.<sup>514</sup> But the problem was resolved when the person of Christ was seen as the agent of the incarnation in a way when made the divine nature dependent on the person.<sup>515</sup>

The Reformation witnessed Christological discussions. Martin Luther's Christology was based on Christ as true God and true Man with inseparable unity. He spoke of the "wondrous exchange." Calvin approved the orthodox or traditional Christology of the church councils. He taught that when the Word became incarnate he did not suspend nor alter his normal function of upholding the universe. Calvin found Lutheran Christology guilty of Eutyches' error. However, some Anabaptists rejected the teachings of the Chalcedonian council and maintained that Jesus' body was composed of "celestial flesh," a unique product of the virgin's womb, substantially different from ordinary human flesh.<sup>516</sup> Wright states that in the "Post-reformation circles, both Catholic and Protestant, there has been a general use of the Gospels as sourcebooks for ethics and doctrine for edifying tales or, smuggled in behind the back of the 'sensus literalist, allegory.'<sup>517</sup>

The traditional Jesus is seen as presented in the Gospels. Christ has existed before his appearance in the Gospels (Jn 1:1-5; 8:58; 17:5, 24). Jesus was involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). Jesus' appearance as theophany in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord and the Angel of God (Gen. 16:7; Judges 6:11, 14)<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Bray, 138.

<sup>515</sup> Bray, 139.

<sup>516</sup> R. S. Wallace and G. L. Green, "Christology" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 242-3.

<sup>517</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 15.

<sup>518</sup> There are views on the theophany. One is God appearing to judge (Jos. 5:12-15; Na. 1:1-9; Gen. 18:1-15). The second and most evangelical is that it is

supports this. Jesus incarnated (Jn 1:14; Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:3), hence prophets prophesied of his incarnation (Isa. 7:4; 9:6-7; Mic. 5:2). In the New Testament Gospels, many people were told of his incarnation (Lk 1:31, 35; Matt. 1:20-21; 2:1-2; Lk 1:42; 2:10-12, 25, 32, 38). Jesus was born by a virgin (Lk 1:26-35; Matt. 1:18-25). Jesus was fully God and Man. He was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet.2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5). The incarnated Jesus had equal deity with God. Even on earth, he was eternal, mighty, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotent, unchanging and is God. No wonder he could forgive sins, give eternal life and he will judge the living and the dead. He died and resurrected for the sins of the world. This is the traditional view of Jesus in the canonical Gospels that has been attacked by the historical Jesus research.

From the post-apostolic time to the Reformation, the studies of Jesus have been under the traditional Jesus, a portrait which is constructed from the harmony of the Gospels and epistles. It should be said that the Holy Spirit was behind their studies of the Gospels at that time; hence, they adhere to the inspiration of the Gospels as reliable documents for the life of Jesus. This understanding has been behind the conservatives in the study of the life of Jesus. Jesus is the source of our salvation.<sup>519</sup> He is God and Savior of the world from sin though he came as a sinless human being.<sup>520</sup> The Gospels are faith and history documents for the understanding of the life of Jesus.

## **2. The Gospel Records**

The term “Gospels” is a name that has been given to the four New Testament canonical books about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.<sup>521</sup> These are books that outlined and elaborated the birth, life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Eye witness testimonies in the early

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a reference to the second person of the Trinity. The incarnation of Jesus made theophany less necessary and accounts for their diminished importance in the New Testament.

<sup>519</sup> Wilbur O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 98ff.

<sup>520</sup> For more on Christology particularly the incarnation from a conservative view see Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God the Father, God the Son* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 255-265.

<sup>521</sup> On the meaning of the name “gospels” particularly as used by the Gospel writers see Kee, *Jesus in History*, 116-119.

church records affirm that these books were written by those who they bore their names, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.<sup>522</sup> Scholars still question the Gospel traditions.<sup>523</sup>

Matthew was the author of the Gospel. The most historical fact is from Papias that Matthew had collected sayings of Jesus in Hebrew dialect. This Gospel was accepted by many of the early church fathers. Mark was said to have been written by Mark, an interpreter of Peter by Papias. Such a view is believed by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria. Luke is known to have been written by Luke the doctor. Many church fathers and the Muratorian Fragment attributed the Gospel to Luke, a companion of Paul. Also, John is identified by the church fathers as being written by the apostle John such as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

The writers of the Gospels wrote parts of Jesus' life based on the available eye-witness testimony. The first three books are called Synoptic Gospels.<sup>524</sup> The word "Synoptic" means a "seeing together," which is used in comparing the three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke

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<sup>522</sup> Many hold that the first to be written is Mark by John Mark, who was an interpreter of Peter in the late AD 60s and that Matthew who was an apostle of Jesus and Luke who was the only Gentile writer of the New Testament book. John the beloved wrote lately around AD 97-98. There are still debates on the dating of these Gospels which the *Jesus Seminar* and some members of the "Third Quest" are holding just to put *The Gospel of Thomas* and Q to be much even earlier than the Gospels.

<sup>523</sup> For example, Frank Colquhoun argues that the term 'Gospels' is a misnomer. He argues that as far as the New Testament is concerned there is only one Gospel: the good news of the saving acts of God accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ. Colquhoun cites R. W. Dale to have said that 'Christ came not so much to preach the Gospel as that there might be a Gospel to be preached'" and argues that "the Gospels were not biographies but portraits of Jesus hence their accounts are incomplete." (1, 3-4). Do we judge them for not being biographies on the basis of not being complete? All the biographies of people that we have, are they complete? Is it possible to have a "complete biographical account" of a person's life? It should be stated that even auto-biographies are not mostly complete.

<sup>524</sup> We can observe that the "Synoptic Problems" as scholars would call, center on the differences of the three gospels, and it is dated back to J. J. Griesbach (1745-1812). With this, Donald Bridge observes that "the plurality of four Gospels, four lives of Jesus, and hence four Christologies was clearly a problem" (Bridge, 166).

for they present a synopsis of the life of Jesus than the Gospel of John which is more theological in approach; hence, written late of the first century when the Christian concepts were more understood and developed.

We can be sure that the Gospel writers wrote from different geographical terrain, using different vocabulary, and from different context to different audiences. We should expect them to have copied from each other directly or indirectly; hence, they were all documenting using documents and oral traditions that were common to write.

Debates still continue in our days despite our technological exploration compared to their time. Richard A. Burrige has added light when he observes,

...even today, with all our technology of cameras and recorders and verbatim in transcripts, there is still debate among academics about the meaning of historical truth, and differences, in the media between docu-drama and documentary, fiction and faction.”<sup>525</sup>

We cannot expect their works to be the same; hence, each of them had his concern. But we can be sure that the contents portrayed their unity as revealed in Tatian’s *Diatessaron* (harmony of the four Gospels). An excerpt of the *Diatessaron* is published in Kee’s *Jesus in History* from the English translation of the Arabic version. For example,

Matt. 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Luke 3:23 And Jesus was about thirty years of age, and was supposed to be the son of Joseph.

John 1:29-30 Now John saw Jesus coming unto him, and saith, This is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me shall come a man, which is preferred before me, for he is.<sup>526</sup>

The Gospels presented the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem by Mary and her husband Joseph who was a carpenter in Nazareth (Matt. 1:18-2:23; Luke 2:1-40). This family went to Egypt and came back to their land where Jesus grew as a young Jewish boy. He learnt his father’s trade and studied the Torah. Jesus participated in social event and pilgrimages to

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<sup>525</sup> Richard A. Burrige, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (London: SCM, 2005), 169.

<sup>526</sup> Kee, *Jesus in History*, 255.

Jerusalem. Jesus was twelve when he went to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51) and the Gospels have not told us what happened to him until he was thirty when he began his ministry. This has been called the “silent years” of Jesus, which many scholars tried to fill the gap.<sup>527</sup>

Jesus prophesied that he will die and we see the fulfillment according to the Gospels. Quite a number of reasons could be historical events that led to his death. He was accused of not keeping the oral law and destroying the Temple. To them, Jesus claimed to have a unique relationship with God and was forgiving people's sins. Pilate was convinced of Jesus innocent but was afraid of riot from the people. But even after his death, miraculous things happened on that day. The Gospels report that darkness covered the entire city, the veil of the Temple was torn into two and the tombs in Jerusalem were opened (Matt. 27:52), a position Crossan rejected. He was buried, resurrected on the third day as he has stated (Matt. 16:21; Lk 9:22). The resurrection had witness and impact on the apostles and others. Jesus was seen by many people (Mk. 16:9-11; Jn. 20:11-18; Matt. 28:9-10; Mk. 16:12-13; Lk 24:13-32; Mk.

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<sup>527</sup> Scholars have sought for means to fill these gaps in biblical scholarship. For example, Robert M. Price has devoted his attention to write on the silent years of Jesus. See Robert M. Price, “Jesus in Smallville: The Myths of Jesus’ Childhood” on his original website. [www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com](http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com) Copyright 2009. Also see P. Perry, *Jesus in Egypt: Discovering the Secrets of Christ’s Childhood Years* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003). G. Gabra, ed., *Be Thou There: The Holy Family’s Journey in Egypt* (Cairo-New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001). I. H. el-Masri, *Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt* (Merry Spring: St Anmny Monastery) [http://www.saint-mary.net/coptic\\_faith/TheStoryoftheCoptstheTrueStoryofChristianityinEgy.pdf](http://www.saint-mary.net/coptic_faith/TheStoryoftheCoptstheTrueStoryofChristianityinEgy.pdf) [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2015]. A. Koschorke, *The Holy Family and Its Legacy: Religious Imagination from the Gospels to Star Wars* (trans. Thomas Dunlop. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Alin Suciu, ““Me, This Wretched Sinner”: A Coptic Fragment from the Vision of Theophilus Concerning the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013), 436-450. N. S. Atalla, *The Escape to Egypt according to Coptic Tradition* (Cairo: Lehnert and Landrock, 1993). O. F. A. Meinardus, *The Holy Family in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1986). Y. N. Youssef, “Notes on the Traditions Concerning the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt,” *Coptic Church Review* 20 (1999), 45-55.

16:14; Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 19:25; Jn. 20:26-3; 1Jn. 21:1-25; 1 Cor. 15:7; 1 Cor. 15:6; Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:3-8). The Gospels revealed Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament passages about the messiah who will come for the salvation of the people of Israel and later the world entirely.

### **3. Sources of the Gospels**

It has been observed that the Gospels are unanimous early Christian documents. However scholars have associated them with the first century. The sources for the Gospels have been under serious search. Source criticism centers on determining the sources, which the Gospel writers used to compose their Gospels.<sup>528</sup> Evangelically, there are basically some sources for the Gospels that we have today. These are written documents, which one expects to have been under the some sources; hence, they agree with the ancient and modern means of documenting. The section addresses how did we get our Gospels?

#### **a. Eyewitnesses and Oral Tradition**

The Gospels today can be seen to be the product of oral words which the Gospels writers have gathered hence there were no computers or copiers and recorders as we have in our time. The Christians stored the words of Jesus through memorization and passing it to children and relatives. Manuscripts were very costly to produce. When Jesus communicated, he did this orally to the disciples. No wonder he used parables and parallelism which were common to their understanding and practical to daily life. The first century did not have professional memorizers as in the case of the Jewish Bible and none of his listeners had a jotter, notebook, computer or a recorder to record his words. According to Keener, “Although a sufficient number of persons could read and write, the majority of people were illiterate and would know the stories about Jesus from hearing them repeatedly.”<sup>529</sup> Matthew was literate and was a tax collector.

The apostles passed down orally through preaching during the Early Church hence the Gospels were not written immediately until after 30

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<sup>528</sup> On source criticism on the Gospels see McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, 111-115; Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 51-55.

<sup>529</sup> Keener, 141.



years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.<sup>530</sup> Luke 1:1-4 and Papias from Asia Minor bears witness to the existence of oral tradition about Jesus. It would be wrong to conclude that all the words that Jesus spoke are recorded in the Gospels (Jn. 21). Papias' preference for oral materials belonged only to the period during which he was collecting the materials. He wrote them down as he heard them because the value of orally transmitted traditions would soon decline considerably once there were no longer any living eyewitnesses.

Luke 1:1-4 has great significance for the understanding of the historical facts about Jesus. Luke is establishing the validity of the information both he and his predecessor included in their narratives. The concept of witness is "integral to Luke's historical and theological purpose."<sup>531</sup> We can say that Luke can tell and retell the stories from the beginning for he is familiar with the traditions of those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning. It seems the principle of eyewitnesses' testimony from the beginning was remarkably important for the way that the traditions as about Jesus were transmitted and understood in early Christianity.<sup>532</sup> Testimony is a unique valuable means of access to historical reliability. It enables us to read the Gospels as precisely the kind of text we read in order to recognize the disclosure of God in the history of Jesus. Understanding the Gospels as testimony, we can recognize the meaning of the history. It is what enables us to read the Gospels in a properly historical way and a properly theological way. It is where history and theology meet. Eye-witness testimony offers us insider knowledge from involved participants. We can then say that the Gospels were written within living memory of the events they recount. Mark's Gospel was written well within the lifetime of many of the eye-witnesses while the others were in the period when living eye-witnesses were becoming scarce.

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<sup>530</sup> Despite that form criticism has helped affirm the stories in the Gospels are closed to folk literatures and revealed that these sayings circulated and were transmitted orally. See Patzia 42-43. Luke 1:1-3 and Papias from Asia Minor bears witness to the existence of oral tradition about Jesus.

<sup>531</sup> Walter L. Liefield, "Luke" *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 8* (Frank E. Gaebel ed., Grand Rapids: Regency, 1984), 822.

<sup>532</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006), 124

After Pentecost, the early Christians continued to pass on the stories and sayings of Jesus in their preaching and teaching. We still see Paul to have made a reference to the words of the Lord in many of his writings (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23-26; 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). Peter has used language which fits sayings which could be traced in the Synoptics (1 Pet. 2:12, 4:14; 2 Pet. 1:16-18) and so do James in James 1:5; 2:5; 4:2-3, 9, 10; 5:1, 2-3 and 12.

After the Apostolic Age, people wrote and attested to phrases such as “he said to them,” “let us recall the words of the Lord,” “remembering what the Lord said,” among many others (cf. the works of Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp). The *Didache*, composed for early Christian as a teaching manual urges the believers to “pray...as the Lord bid us in his gospel” (8:2) and to remember what “the Lord said” (9:5).<sup>533</sup> The apostles and the disciples kept a long-term memory. “Studies of long-term memory also show the sorts of influence apt to be preserved by eye-witnesses”.<sup>534</sup> There was the idea of communal memory. To Keener, “Communal memory is relevant where a group of hearers could remind one another of various points, with those whose memory was not most exceptional taking the lead”.<sup>535</sup> This was practiced during the Early Church. We can say that the eye-witnesses behind the Gospels account surely told what was prominent in their memories.

#### **b. The Apostles**

The basic understanding of the sources of the Gospels is the apostles. It is argued that Matthew was an eye-witness, Peter was Mark’s primary source and Luke 1:1-4 and 2 Peter 1:16-18 affirm direct eye-witness transmission and authorial authority. Also, the position of Chrysostom of the independence of the Gospel writers without literary collaboration, which was a view shared by the church fathers<sup>536</sup> though it could be argued that the independent theory cannot explain Luke 1:1-4, which shows Luke has conducted research from the many works and the quotations from the Old Testament show that quoting was common at that time. This is also a valid position for the source of the Gospels.

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<sup>533</sup> qtd in Patzia, 61.

<sup>534</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 145.

<sup>535</sup> Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 146.

<sup>536</sup> For more analysis see Thomas and Farnell, 72-73.

### **c. Why the Gospels were written?**

The Gospels were composed thirty years after the ascension of Jesus. According to Wright, “The Gospels were not just written to describe events in the past. They were written to show that those events were relevant, indeed earth-shaking, worldview-challenging, and life challenging in the present.”<sup>537</sup> Scholars have attempted to state some reasons:

- a) The expansion of the church. The church was expanding into many regions of the Greco-Roman world, which means that documents were needed more than oral tradition, which were largely limited to Palestine.
- b) The passing away of the eyewitnesses. By the middle of the first century, many apostles and disciples were going to be with the Lord which meant the church was losing the oral words of Jesus. It was necessary for the sayings to be compiled for future generation. There were still many of the eye-witnesses at the time of writing for they played a significant role in the composition of the Gospels.
- c) Writing was a response to new challenges. Another thing was the fact that Christianity was being exposed to many threats as a result of its expansion to many Gentile areas. There were threats within the emerging church in the form of false teachings. No wonder the New Testament is filled with issues of false teachings and how to combat them. The church needed a unified document for instruction as a standard document for all the churches everywhere, for which Matthew was well qualified more so to Mark. Believers needed help during the time of persecution, which would be for apologetic and pastoral concerns for persecuted Christians.
- d) The need for standard instruction. Instructing and strengthening of the church were necessary as the church grew rapidly. There were new converts, who had not heard of the oral words of Jesus.

Despite this, we cannot state categorically that the oral words of Jesus were all composed by the Gospel writers. John the apostle recorded that Jesus did many things, which are not documented, for even the world could not contain the sayings and deeds of Jesus (Jn 21:31). Paul also cited the words of Jesus as “it is more blessed to give than to receive”

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<sup>537</sup> Wright, *Original Jesus*, 124

(Acts 20:35). Oral transmission, of course, still continues in the Mediterranean world, as written by W. J. Ong, that “oral and written cultures existed side by side in the ancient world, particularly since writing tended to be used as a help to memory rather than as an autonomous and independent mode of communication” (40).

#### **d. Nature and Genre of the Gospels**

Many hold that the first Gospel written was Mark, whose name was John Mark. He had access to Peter recollections about Jesus. Eusebius referred to Peter as the informant of Mark; hence, Mark was Peter’s interpreter. Mark wrote everything with carefulness, though not in an orderly manner.<sup>538</sup> Mark wrote being an eyewitness’ interpreter and companion, and Luke “carefully investigated,” while Matthew and John wrote as apostles and eyewitnesses of the events Jesus said and did during his stay on earth.

Not everybody could read at that time and afford a document. Many people had the same concern and interest as Luke. However, many did not care about writing at that time. The reasons are simple. They thought Jesus would come back immediately during their lifetime and those with the gift of prophecy understood the risen Lord to be speaking to them with important messages for their churches.<sup>539</sup>

Another thing, which has attracted attention among scholars, is the genre of the Gospels. Some believe they are history while others inquire for a theological view of the Gospels. Some see the Synoptic Gospels as history while John as theological. However, I concur with Blomberg on the view of the Gospels as being “theological history,”<sup>540</sup> which would be better terms for classifying the genre of the Gospels. This is why I have used the historical-theological method in this books and have used the word, “Gospels” to refer to the four Gospels as expressed under the clarification of terms in the introduction.

#### **e. Historical Reliability of the Gospels**

The point whether the Gospels can be trusted has been the concern to many scholars. The question is, can we trust the four gospels? Bridge has given reasons, which centered on extra-biblical witnesses, external

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<sup>538</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15.

<sup>539</sup> Blomberg, “Where do we Start Studying Jesus?” 30.

<sup>540</sup> Blomberg, “Where do we Start Studying Jesus?” 36.

evidence, archaeology, eye-witnesses, and the ring of truth.<sup>541</sup> Are they reliable and historical records for the life of Jesus? The truth is that the early Christians were able to preserve reliable history for all generations. Blomberg, arguing for the historical reliability of the Gospels, observes six supporting arguments to have confirmed that the Gospels are historically reliable, revealing convincing evidences for the reliability of the Gospels. According to Blomberg,

First, it is likely that written accounts of various portions of the Gospel record predate the appearance of the final form of the three Synoptic Gospels in the 60s and of the Gospel of John in the 90s...Second, although they disapproved of the public use of written notes, rabbis and their followers often used a kind of shorthand to record in private important information they wish to preserve...Third, the existence of a center of apostolic leadership in Jerusalem, from at least A.D. 30-60, which periodically “checked up” on the spread of the Gospels (Acts 8:14; 11:1-3; 15:1-2; 21:17-25), means that the analogy of the child’s game of telephone is inappropriate...Fourth is the argument based on the “hard sayings” of Jesus...Fifth, Paul later takes pains to preserve distinctions between what the earthly Jesus said and what he believed God was telling him to write to his congregations (1 Cor. 7)...Sixth, distinctions can be discerned within the pages of the Gospels themselves, when one compares the thrust of Jesus’ teaching before his death and his words to his followers after the resurrection.<sup>542</sup>

All we see is that the early Christians accurately preserved reliable history through the Gospels. The eye-witnesses were still alive when the Gospels were written. If the materials were not sound and credible, why didn’t the eye-witnesses at that time disagree with the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels? No wonder the church fathers during the making of the canon received the Gospels in contrast to the Gnostic gospels like the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary* which today’s researchers have given the same preeminence as the Gospels. But did they present the entire life of Jesus? The picture of Jesus that we have in the Gospels, is it the real picture of Jesus? Did Jesus say all that was attributed to him? Did he really do all the miracles that

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<sup>541</sup> Bridge, 12-25.

<sup>542</sup> Blomberg, “Where do we start Studying Jesus” 32-34.

are said he did? Did he really rise from the dead? These are some of the questions that scholars are raising about the authenticity of the Gospels. Are there other documents besides the four Gospels? Why were they not regarded to have narrated the life of Jesus by the Early Church's fathers in the second century and during the councils? But was John right when he asserted that there are many things that Jesus did that are not recorded in the Gospels (Jn. 21:25)? The truth is many people wrote gospels in the second century and later, which did not pass the test for authenticity. For example, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and some *Secret Sayings of Jesus*, which have been the basis of the present quest for the historical Jesus, the Jesus Seminar, and *The Da Vinci Code*.

#### **f. Canonicity of the Gospels**

In order to discuss the criteria used by the church fathers for the canonicity of the Gospels, it is appropriate for one to bear the following in mind:

- (1) the trustworthiness of a document depends on its witness to the apostolic faith.
- (2) the document should concur with other documents.
- (3) and that some church fathers gave priority to certain books, which caused some books to have stayed long before they were included in the canon.

There were also several factors that led to the composition of the canon. First is the rapid spread of the Gospel in the churches. Second is the proliferation of the other gospels, which are the Gnostic gospels such as *Thomas*, *Philip*, *Peter*, *Egyptians* and *Truth* that claimed to have recorded the sayings of Jesus but were of late origin and not in the first century. The third was Marcion's canon, which attempted to edit the Gospel of Luke and the ten letters of Paul. Fourth is the existence of the four Gospels themselves.<sup>543</sup>

- The first criterion used by the church fathers for the canon is the authority of Jesus. Jesus is the authority of the church as such for a book to be included it must have the stamp of Jesus on it i.e. it must correlate to the teachings of Jesus. Many followers of Jesus remembered the words of the Lord as he had promised them that the comforter will remind them (Jn 14:15-

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<sup>543</sup> Patzia, 61-62.

31; 16:5-15). Many of them gave their lives as Martyrs for the truth. The question is, would so many people, as it was the case with the early disciples give their lives for a lie or a half truth? The answer is on the negative. They believed that all was true and reliable. The Gospels were written down and accepted as general books for the universal church for their authority as truly representing Jesus. This means that the authority of “the words of Jesus was primary, that of the books was secondary and derivative.”<sup>544</sup>

- The second criterion is apostolicity, which centered on the document having been written by apostles and therefore within the apostolic age (around A.D. 30-95).<sup>545</sup> This dismisses certain gospels, which some liberals like Crossan claimed to have been within this period such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, which modern historical research has given some preference as an early gospel (and other gospels such as *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *The teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and *Letter of Barnabas*). These were not included because nature of their doctrine does not fit the teaching of Jesus and the apostles and their contemporaries knew who had really written them. However, Mark and Luke were included because they have apostolic links, such as Peter and Paul respectively.
- Another criterion was the usage in the church. Even though this criterion depends on the geographical terrain in which the church is located, the Gospels were widely accepted and were the documents that revealed the life of Jesus and his teachings. The Syrian church accepted Titian’s *Diatessaron* (the harmony of the four Gospels), which is an early testimony to the four canonical Gospels.
- Another criterion was the orthodoxy of the book. The church was experiencing some threat externally and internally. This is evident in most of the New Testament epistles, particularly the works of Paul and John. The Gospels were judged and they

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<sup>544</sup> Patzia, 103.

<sup>545</sup> Patzia suggests that this is applicable to Matthew, John, Pauline letters, Peter and James (p. 103). But we see John to be a latter document that came during that age.

were all credible and containing truthful accounts of the life of Jesus, more than the other gospels. To this, the Gospels were accepted as authentic documents of the Christian faith and purely apostolic in origin or approval.

#### **g. Inspiration of the Gospels**

The inspiration of the Gospels rendered their canonicity; hence, they were considered to be authoritative and reliable documents of the sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that all scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), which was a reference primarily to the Old Testament. I can state with no hesitation that if 2 Timothy was written in the mid to late 60s before the destruction of the Temple, it is likely that the Gospels (with the exception of John) were composed before that time and Paul was referring also to the words of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. The Gospels were inspired by the Holy Spirit and they are the only reliable documents for understanding the life and deeds of Jesus<sup>546</sup> and they are first in the New Testament canon because they state the words and deeds of the living Jesus. “The inspiration for writing the Gospels didn’t begin when the authors set pen to papyrus, the inspiration began when the disciples Matthew, Peter (for whom Mark wrote) and John were enlightened by their encounters with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>547</sup> The doctrine of inspiration means that the Holy Spirit guided the minds and hands that wrote the biblical documents to ensure that they wrote the truth as God intended (2 Tim. 3:14-16; 2 Pet. 1:21).

#### **4. The Place of Archaeology**

Biblical archaeology is a “fascinating science which unravels the past and authenticates the history of the written records.” It fills the gap in biblical history and helps us understand difficult passages and confirm the truth of the Bible. Archaeology has helped eradicate false theories and assumptions. In relation to the Old Testament, it has confirm the ability to write in ancient times, worshipped and cultures, which helps

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<sup>546</sup> The inspiration and canonicity of some New Testament books continued. Luther rejected James as a “Straw,” Calvin accepted them and the Roman Catholic added the Apocrypha at the council of Trent in 1546. See Patzia 106-107.

<sup>547</sup> Comfort and Driesbach, 6.



confirm the events mention about the patriarchal period, Egypt, Joshua's conquest, the period of the kings.<sup>548</sup>

In relation to the New Testament, the discovery of manuscript and versions of documents became a boost to textual studies. During the time of Jesus, it has confirmed the value of the things and personalities mentioned in the Gospels.<sup>549</sup> It establishes the biblical record to be genuine, dismissing all sorts of criticisms and foolish arguments with factual evidence.<sup>550</sup> Luke's Census revealed Caesar's decree<sup>551</sup> and that Quirinius was the governor of Syria which William Ramsay affirmed.<sup>552</sup>

In June 1968, a discovery revealed the nature of the crucifixion that was common to the time of Jesus at Palestine. Ancient Jewish burial ground was discovered one mile north of the old Damascus gate and about 35 Jews were being buried there. Vasilius Tzaferis discovered that these Jews might have died about AD 70 of which the skeleton revealed some died violent death and a person being killed with an arrow.<sup>553</sup> The discovery of Yohanan Ben Ha'galgol, whose name was written on the stone of ossuary in Aramaic has parallels with the events recorded in the Gospels (Jn. 19:31-32) though some scholars had criticized the entire findings.<sup>554</sup> Archaeology has helped affirm the Gospels.

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<sup>548</sup> On Old Testament archaeology, see Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954).

<sup>549</sup> For an analysis of New Testament archaeology, see John Murray, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1991).

<sup>550</sup> For more on Archaeology shedding light on the entire Bible see Colin Peckham, *The Authority of the Bible* (Kaduna: Evangel Publication, n.d.), 89-109. Published under permission.

<sup>551</sup> The *Titulus Venetus* revealed a census took place in Judea and Syria in AD 5-6 which was within the time of Augustus (23 BC-AD 14).

<sup>552</sup> For more study see Robert Boyd, *Tells, Tombs, and Treasure* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 175.

<sup>553</sup> For a critical analysis see Vasilius Tzaferis, "Jewish Tombs at and Near Givat ha-Mivtar" *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), 38-59.

<sup>554</sup> On this see J. Zias and E Sekeles, "The Crucified Man from Givat ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal" *Israel Exploration Journal* 35 (1985), 22-27. For further analysis of the discovery see Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 174-175.

## 5. Non-Christian Attestations

There are non-Christian literatures, which have helped attest and proof the historicity of the life of Jesus.<sup>555</sup>

### a. Historians

There are historians like Tacitus who had lived around A.D. 55-120, who was a Roman historian who had worked in the reign of many Roman emperors and was awarded the “greatest historian” of ancient Rome. Scholars acknowledge his “integrity and essential goodness”.<sup>556</sup> Tacitus states a record about Christ and early Christianity in the *Annals* in about AD 115; “Christus, from whom the name [Christians] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our prosecutors, Pontius Pilatus...”<sup>557</sup> The work of Tacitus reveals Christ has lived in history and was put to death by Pontius Pilate as the Gospels affirmed.<sup>558</sup>

Another historian, Gaius Suetonius, who was the chief secretary of Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138),<sup>559</sup> was a Roman historian who has given us proofs for Jesus. He made a reference to the disturbance of the Jews in Rome about Chrestus, which led to them being expelled from the city of Rome. The word “Chrestus” is a variant of Christ.<sup>560</sup>

Thallus’ main work is lost but Africanus referred to the work of Thallus, which speaks of the crucifixion of Jesus and the darkness which covered the entire land (*Extant Writings XVIII*). We cannot be certain

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<sup>555</sup> See R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986). Markus Bock-Muetil, *This Jesus* (Downers Grove, Illinois: 1994), argues that “God has made this Jesus both Lord and Messiah” (p. 167).

<sup>556</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 187.

<sup>557</sup> Tacitus 15.14; Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 188.

<sup>558</sup> J. N. D. Anderson sees the implications of the words of Tacitus to have some bearing on the resurrection of Jesus. See J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 19. Habermas cautions and suggests the possibility that Tacitus was referring to the Christians belief in Jesus resurrection since his teachings “again broke out” after his death (*Historical Jesus*, 190).

<sup>559</sup> See Robert Graves, “Introduction” to Suetonius’ *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by Robert Graves (Baltimore: Penguin, 1957), 7, cited in Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 190.

<sup>560</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 191.

about the reference to Jesus in the original document but if it is then the record as reported by the Gospel writers is credible.

#### **b. Government Officials**

Besides the historians, there were government officials like Pliny the Younger, who was a Roman author and governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In his tenth book, we see a reference to Christianity and some facts about Jesus. He writes

They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery....<sup>561</sup>

Pliny revealed Christ being worshipped as deity on a particular day and all they were doing was a reflection of the life and teachings of Christ as found in the Gospels and Acts about the early Christians. This is a position, which many scholars of the Quest for historical Jesus would accept but their problem is that the Early Church put in their views on Jesus through the Gospel records. However, the Gospels still remains accurate and valid historical documents for the life of Jesus.

Another evidence for the existence of Jesus and his deeds are revealed in the reply Pliny received from Emperor Trajan, which supported that the Christians were to be punished on the rebellion to the following restrictions; they should not be sought out or tracked down, repentance coupled with worship of the gods sufficed to clear a person and Pliny was never to honor any lists of Christians, which were given to him if the accuser did not name himself.<sup>562</sup> This revealed the attitude of the Roman leadership on Christianity, which led to the death of many early Christians because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

#### **6. Jewish Sources**

There are quite Jewish sources, which affirmed Jesus. The Talmud is the Jewish oral tradition, which was organized by Rabbi Akiba before he died in AD 135 and was revised by his student Rabbi Meir but was completed by Rabbi Judah around AD 200, which has come to be known as the Mishnah. In the *Sanhedrin 43a*, it is stated the Jesus was hung on

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<sup>561</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Letters*.

<sup>562</sup> Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 201.

the eve of the Passover “on the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged.” The thing is, in the New Testament Gospels, it is stated that Jesus died through crucifixion but Galatians 3:13 talks of Jesus being hanged (the Greek *kremamenos*), which is a variant of the nature of the death. The Talmud revealed Jesus being convicted to be guilty of sorcery and spiritual apostasy in leading the Jews astray by his teaching and none of the people defended him as the case in the Gospels. Also, in *Sanhedrin 106b* another reference is revealed a different treatment for he was linked with loyalty,<sup>563</sup> being born of the lineage of David and was either 33 or 34 years old before he died. There is also the mention of the virgin birth and Mary being the mother of Jesus.

There is also the works of Flavius Josephus, Jewish historian and a Pharisee, who was born in a priestly family in AD 37 or 38 and died in AD 97. In the *Antiquities*, Josephus speaks of early century events with two references to Jesus. The first is that about James, “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ” (20:9). This revealed Jesus being the Messiah and a brother of James. In *Antiquities 18:3*, he wrote,

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats... He was [the] Christ...he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him.<sup>564</sup>

In 1972, Habermas states about Professor Schomo Pines of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to have revealed different words about the passage, which still view Jesus as wise man, good virtuous, who had disciples worldwide during that time. Pilate condemned him to be crucified but his disciples did not abandon him and reported he had appeared to them in three days and that he is alive. He is perhaps the

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<sup>563</sup> Habermas reveals that these references somehow lack historical value and it is appropriate to take the older references for we cannot be sure of the latter assertions (*Historical Jesus*, 204-205).

<sup>564</sup> This passage has been under constant debate among scholars. The major problem is the phrase “if it be lawful to call him a man.” Habermas reveals some good things could make the passage genuine. To him there is no textual evidence against it, it has good information about Jesus and scholars in the works of Josephus support that the style of Jewish historians (*Historical Jesus*, 193).

promised Messiah.<sup>565</sup> The work of Josephus cannot be ignored for it has given us fact about Jesus, his conduct and crucifixion under Pilate and the messianic status of Jesus, which one could see as the summary of the Gospels for it states the existence of Jesus, his life and death.

## **7. Other Gentile Sources**

The work of Lucian, a second century Greek satirist, equally spoke of Jesus and the early Christian faith. He revealed Jesus being worshiped by Christians and that Jesus had introduced new teaching in Palestine which led him to be crucified and depicted Jesus as the sage, which could be seen to be the basis for Crossan, Borg and Witherington III among many others in the Third Quest's depiction of Jesus. From the words of Lucian, we discover that Jesus had existed and had done many things when he was on earth. This is a proof for the life of Jesus.

There is also Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian and a prisoner, who wrote to encourage his son to emulate the wise teachers of the past.<sup>566</sup> This letter makes reference to Jesus, who was killed by the Jew who was their King that led to their Diaspora till date. To him, Jesus was wise man, King of the Jews and unjustly executed and his teachings persevered generations to generations.

## **8. Non-New Testament Writings**

### **a. Papias**

Papias was the bishop of Hierapolis and lived around A.D. 70-140/160. His words are preserved in *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius. He writes,

But if I met with anyone who had been a follower of the elders anywhere, I made it a point to inquire, what were the declarations of the elders. What was said by Andrew, Peter or Philip. What by Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any of the other of the disciples of the Lord. What was said by Aristion, and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord; for I do not think that I derived so much benefit from books as from the living voice of those that are still surviving i.e. eye-witnesses still alive when he lived.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> This is paraphrased from Habermas (*Historical Jesus*, 193-194) and the original quote is from Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*, 95.

<sup>566</sup> F. F. Bruce *Christian Origins*, 30.

<sup>567</sup> Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39.4.

Papias bears sound witness that these written documents are linked with apostles or an associate. He wrote that Mark wrote carefully being the interpreter and companion of Peter and not orderly and did not give a history of the Lord. To him, Mark has erred in anything for he was careful not to document any false in these accounts. About Matthew, he wrote Matthew wrote in the Hebrew dialect and everyone interpreted the work of Matthew as they wished.

Papias reveals that in the towns at that time, there were many who saw the incidents of Jesus and were good eye-witnesses to the things Jesus did. We can say that the Gospels were composed to preserve the words of Jesus though that does not mean that oral tradition stopped at that time.

#### **b. Clement of Rome**

The great church father Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians is a good extra-biblical document<sup>568</sup> and is considered to be earliest. Clement wrote Corinthians about AD 95, which was meant to settle a misunderstanding among church members and elders in the church of Corinth. This letter has some historical facts about Jesus. In *Corinthians 42*, he revealed the gospel of the kingdom was giving to the apostles by the Lord Jesus as it came from God and that Jesus' resurrection confirmed the truthfulness of these teachings.

The whole scene of the event revealed God giving message to Jesus, then Jesus passed it to the apostles and to the elders of the churches, which the apostles founded anytime they preach the gospel of the kingdom. Clement of Rome affirmed the great historical miracles of ages, which have been denied by many higher critical scholars of our age.

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<sup>568</sup> Bock recognizes the value of these documents which would help give us a cultural script at work at the time of Jesus, the reaction to Jesus and his ministry and also deepen our own perception of Jesus claim. He stated three reasons which make the attention of scholars on Jesus. To him, there was no records from numerous major figures of the ancient world, few potential sources from the first century Judea and its environs and to the Romans Jesus was a minor figure and argued that Jesus story need to be placed in its historical context (*Historical Jesus*, 63).

### c. Ignatius

Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch and an early church father who was condemned to be put to death in the city of Rome. This great church father before he died wrote seven letters to six churches and Polycarp, which were around AD 110-115. In these letters, lots of historical evidence to Jesus could be derived. He wrote,

Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him.<sup>569</sup>

Also in the epistle to the *Smyrneans*, he made a reference to the historical Jesus. Ignatius affirmed Jesus being of the seed of David, the Son of God, baptized by John, crucified on the cross and latter rose from the dead.<sup>570</sup> In another instance, he affirmed Jesus being raised in the flesh who latter appeared to the apostles and urged them to touch him. He ate and drank with them after the resurrection, which caused many of his followers to die for him. In the *Magnesians 11*, he affirmed Jesus death and resurrection when Pontius Pilate was the governor.

The records about Jesus in the Gospels and the attestations of the Fathers show great significance as to what are not obtainable in the Gnostic gospels. The Gnostic gospels do not have information about the later part of the life of Jesus and the miracle accounts, which the Gospels laid much emphasis.

However, all we see in the works of Ignatius is the basic historical facts to the historicity of Jesus, which are basic to the combating of the false teachings of their age and the age to come, which is our time. In the theological reconstructions of our time, Ignatius because of the nature of his materials, caused his name to have witnessed debate among New Testament scholars over a decade.<sup>571</sup> Jesus is still the Lord, Savior of the world and the Son of God.

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<sup>569</sup> Ignatius *Trallians*, 9.

<sup>570</sup> Ignatius *Smyrneans*, 1.

<sup>571</sup> On Ignatius being a dominant figure among the church fathers see Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London:

#### **d. Justin Martyr**

The apologetic works of Justin Martyr has helped to reveal historical facts about Jesus. In his *First Apology* which was written after AD 150 to Emperor Antoninus Pius, Martyr referred to the virgin birth of Jesus which came through the seed of Judah and the line of Jesse (XLVII). Justin Martyr revealed Jesus being born in Bethlehem, performed miracles and healed many diseases and raised the dead. He affirmed Jesus' death by crucifixion and latter Jesus was raised and he appeared to his disciples. He ascended to heaven and his disciples went about preaching in his name.<sup>572</sup> In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, he writes of the visit of the Magi who came from Arabia and worshipped Jesus having stopped to see Herod the Great (LXXVII, XCVII and CVIII). It should be said that Justin got his information from the testimonies made about the Gospels, which he has heard from the repeated telling of the Gospels' stories. Justin Martyr is one of the dominant fathers of the early church, who have documented the life and deeds of the historical Jesus, which has been denied by many people today.

#### **e. Titian**

Titian had lived around A.D. 110-180 and was a Syrian Christian who was educated at Rome with Justin. He was the person who translated the four Gospels into Syriac called the *Diatessaron* around A.D. 150-160. He arranged the materials to fit the single life of Christ. The *Diatessaron* was greatly used in the churches within the Syrian region to the fourth century. A fragment of this text was discovered and it bears proof for the movement of the Gospels in the middle of second century.

#### **f. Iranaeus**

Iranaeus lived around A.D. 130-202 and has helped in giving the evidence for the Gospels. He was a bishop of Lyon in Gaul. In his work *Against Heresies*, he wrote that the Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are and that the pillar and foundation of the church is the gospel which is fourfold. To him, the Gospels are like

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Oxford University Press, 1975 third impression), 41-50. But finally Ignatius was vindicated from the "torment" of scholars.

<sup>572</sup> See Justin Martyr, *First Apology* XLVIII, XXX, XXXII, XXXIV, and L.



four faces of the cherubim (3:11.8).<sup>573</sup> Iranaeus has given credible information about the Gospels.

#### **g. Muratorian Fragment**

The muratorian fragment is another witness to the Gospels though several lines are missing at the beginning. This was discovered by L. A. Muratori and named after him, a Latin fragment dated to the late second century though the author is unknown. This document states that Luke is the third and John the fourth Gospel. This means that that the author of this fragment might have made a reference to Matthew and Mark. The Muratorian fragment proves that the four Gospels were accepted by the early church to be credible historical information about the life of Jesus.

#### **h. Agrapha**

The word “agrapha” literally means unwritten and refers to the sayings of Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels. In 1896, Yamauchi cites, B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt a papyrus with eight unknown sayings of Jesus and much later *The Gospel of Thomas* was known to be the Greek version of this Gospel which contains 114 sayings of Jesus.<sup>574</sup>

Let me conclude this section on evidences for Jesus outside the New Testament with the words of Edwin M. Yamauchi,

In spite of what some modern scholars claim, the extrabiblical evidence will not sustain their eccentric pictures of Jesus that attract such widespread media attention because of their novelty. In contrast to these ephemeral revisions, the orthodox view of Jesus still stands as the most credible portrait when all of the evidence is considered, including the corroboration offered by ancient sources outside the New Testament.<sup>575</sup>

### **9. The Gospels' Portraits of Jesus**

The most controversial aspect of the life of Jesus during the past three hundred years, since the rise of modern biblical scholarship, is whether

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<sup>573</sup> qtd in Patzia, 64-5.

<sup>574</sup> For a critical analysis of the Agrapha see Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?” *Jesus under Fire* (Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland eds., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 217-219.

<sup>575</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, 222.

or not the New Testament's portraits of Jesus of Nazareth can be trusted. Do we trust them because the Church Fathers trusted them? The Gospels are truth revealed about Jesus. Much of the accounts in the Gospels reveal Jesus to be much more than a great teacher, a Jewish rabbi and a controversial first century prophet. This has caused scholars to proffer different views of Jesus in the quests for the historical Jesus, *Jesus Seminar* and *The Da Vinci Code*, which have dismissed the authority of the traditional view of Jesus. Burrige explains it so clearly that "from the four Gospels, we have moved forward to many different Jesuses in theology and in culture, in faith and in art."<sup>576</sup> A thorough appraisal of the different views of Jesus presented by the critical scholars would reveal portraits of a Jesus, who is incapable of suffering and dying on the cross for all humanity. The documents lean on by these critical scholars are quite weak and unreliable for an understanding which fits the claims of the traditional Jesus.

The Gospels still maintain their superiority as reliable sources for the life of Jesus. Because of that, any view of Jesus presented by the four Gospels, is capable of becoming the Jesus of history who came and died for the sins of the entire world.<sup>577</sup> I have used the biblical theology approach in search for the portraits of Jesus, which are in the Gospels. It should be noted that there are many portraits of Jesus in the Gospels which the limit of pages in this work would not warrant discussing them all. I will discuss a few of those portraits as examples for the Gospels' depictions of Jesus, which are beyond the modern historical reconstructions of Jesus.

#### **a. Jesus the Messiah (Christ)**

Contrary to the position of Wrede, Sanders and others that Jesus did not view himself as the Messiah, the Gospels have dozen of evidences for Jesus as the Messiah. In the Old Testament, God promised the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15-16). This got emphasized in the time of Abraham and Moses. This began to be fulfilled in the time of David and re-

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<sup>576</sup> Burrige, 176.

<sup>577</sup> Stephen Neill has presented a fresh look of the view of Christ within the first century through the use of the four Gospels and the three letters of John. See Stephen Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 136ff.

emphasized by the prophets.<sup>578</sup> The prophets have spoken about the Christ which the Jews have long been waiting (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:6; 33:15-26; Zech. 13:7; Mal. 3:2). The prophet Isaiah (10:5ff) used the Hebrew word “mashiah” to refer to King Coresh (Cyrus) meaning “God’s anointed” to punish the Babylonian and permit the Jews to go back to their home in Jerusalem in line with God’s promise.<sup>579</sup> Isaiah wrote about the birth of Jesus (7:14; 9:6 cf. Matt. 1:18-25); Christ’s anointing by the Spirit (61:1-2); the nation’s rejection of the Messiah (6:9-11); Christ, the stone of stumbling (8:14; 28:16); Christ’s ministry to the Gentiles (49:6); the suffering of Christ and death (55:3) and his return to reign (69:7; 11:1ff; 59:20-21). Zechariah makes clear the first coming of the Messiah (3:8; 6:13; 9:9-10; 13:7-9) and second coming of the Messiah (14:2, 3-4, 9, 14-16, 20-21). All these got fulfilment in the life of Jesus in the New Testament. Malachi 3:1-2 and 4:2 provide a link between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The phrase “The Christ” is used 50 times and the word without the definite article “Christ” is used 530 times in the NIV New Testament.<sup>580</sup> The words “the Christ” which is literally the messiah has been used in reference to Jesus 54 times in the Gospels predominantly used by John in line with the Old Testament usage. The purpose of his writing attests to why he used it more than any other Gospel writer. Bonhoeffer elaborates that the notion of Christ as Christ is the center of human existence, the center of history and the mediator between God and nature.<sup>581</sup> To Pascal, “Jesus Christ is the goal of everything and the center to which everything trends. He who knows him knows the reason of all things”.<sup>582</sup> Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He is the shocking, sorrowing, smitten, silent, and

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<sup>578</sup> For a trace of this messianic prophecies see T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portraits of the Messiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1998).

<sup>579</sup> Kafang, *An Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*, 34.

<sup>580</sup> For a critical analysis of the messianic nature in the Old and New Testaments see Stanley E. Porter ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>581</sup> qtd in Macquarrie, 103.

<sup>582</sup> Pascal, 48.

satisfying messiah<sup>583</sup> prophesied in the prophets, which got fulfilled in the Gospels.

#### **b. Jesus as Son of God**

The idea of the son of God is an Old Testament concept which implies not having a human father. Adam was called the son of God (Lk. 3:38). The angels in the Old Testament were called the sons of God (Gen. 6:1-4; Job 1:6; 2:1). These were all shadows of Sonship of Jesus. The phrase “Son of God” has appeared about 40 times in the entire NIV New Testament. It is used definitely about 23 times in the Gospels. All the references are for Jesus except in Luke 3:38 when Adam is called the son of God within human constrain. The Gospels view Jesus as the Son of God, a depiction in fulfillment of the Old Testament concepts. They reveal his divinity in contrast to the historical Jesus research and the *Da Vinci Code*, which deny the divinity of Jesus. At birth, the angel announced that he will be the Son of God when he was giving the aspect of Jesus to Mary (LK 1:35). In many instances, he was called the Son of God in the Gospels;<sup>584</sup> hence, he had no human father. This can be seen to be in line with the epistles. Such understanding of Jesus went through the Middle Ages. Many people doubted the Son of God theology in reference to Jesus. It should be noted that the Jews at the times of Jesus understood the phrase “Son of God” as Jesus used it to be a reference to equality with God. Such an idea went further in the early church period when heretics like Arius denied the phrase “Son of God.”

Despite that, the understanding of Jesus as the Son of God remained valid until the rise of the Enlightenment in the 18 the century. Stuart cites that the Athanasius Creed says, “The Son is from the Father alone, neither made, nor created, but begotten.” He expressed that “He is God as the Father is God. Both are God; both are God equally; both are God

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<sup>583</sup> For more analysis see Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted* (Colorado: Cook International, 1992), 132-142.

<sup>584</sup> Nathaniel called him the Son of God (Jn. 1:49). Demons addressed him as the Son of God (Matt. 8:29; Mk 3:11; Lk 4:41). In the boat, the disciples called him Son of God having seen the miracles he displayed (Matt. 14:33). A healed person believed him to be the Son of God (Jn 11:27). Jesus himself revealed his self-identification as the Son of God (Matt. 27:43; Lk 22:70). After the Death, Jesus was called the Son of God by the centurion (Matt. 27:54; Mk 15:39). John the apostle testified that he is the Son of God (Jn 1:34).

in the same sense” and that “God the Father does not make God the Son to be God... he is God in his own right”.<sup>585</sup> This understanding went through the Reformation and through the hands of many conservatives till date. The Gospels did not teach of his divinity only but also his humanity as the Son of man.<sup>586</sup> Jesus has taught of the second coming of the Son of Man, a teaching which dominated the Epistles and Revelation.<sup>587</sup> It can be said that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament idea of the son of God, whose fulfillment reveals a direct relationship with God and being God who worked in the Old Testament.

### c. Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

The idea of the resurrection got started in the Old Testament (Ps 16: 9-11; 110:1-2). In the prophets, the resurrection has been stated (Isa. 53:10-13; 54:3). Jesus made an affirmative statement in a conversation with Martha the sister of Lazarus at the peak of his greatest miracle of raising the dead. He said “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25). He revealed himself as the person, who has power over the dead and the living and that anyone who believes in him will live and never die. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The influence to the resurrection of Lazarus caused many people particularly Herod when Jesus was exceeding in his ministry many people thought John the Baptist might have come back to life (Mk. 6:14; Lk. 9:7).

Jesus taught that he will raise from the dead in the third day having suffered from the hands of the Jews and religious leaders, which will be a fulfillment of the prophecies made by the prophets (Matt. 17:9). We see the fulfillment of the words of Jesus in the resurrection.<sup>588</sup> Olyott believes that “The post-resurrection appearances of Christ were intended to convince his disciples that he had conquered death and to endorse his

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<sup>585</sup> Stuart Olyott, *Son of Mary, Son of God* (Herts: Evangelical Press, 1984), 22.

<sup>586</sup> On Jesus as a normal man see John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 212ff.

<sup>587</sup> Such a comparison has been given by James R. Edwards as a means of affirming the Gospels. (*Is Jesus the Only Saviour?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 62-63.

<sup>588</sup> On the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the search for the tomb of Jesus see Strobel, *The Case for Jesus*, 191-244. William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Tomb of Jesus* (California: Acclaimed Books, 1981 Abridged).

claim to deity”.<sup>589</sup> E. Schweitzer adds that “Easter was the sign by which God said ‘yes’ to this path taken by Jesus”.<sup>590</sup> Jesus has broken the chains of death and we believers will no longer be controlled by dead. Schweitzer believes “Christian faith in God is faith in the resurrection”.<sup>591</sup> Such a faith to John Macquarrie, “should characterize Christian’s knowledge of Christ”<sup>592</sup> and enable us abide by the post-resurrection command.<sup>593</sup> The resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old Testament concept.

#### **d. Jesus the Miracle Worker**

Because of the idea of demons in the Jewish setting, miracles and exorcisms got evident in the Old Testament. The messiah was prophesied will come and perform miracles (Isa. 53:4; 61:1-2). The miracles performed by prophet Elijah and Elisha are all shadows of the miraculous deeds, which the messiah was to perform. When Jesus came, being a fulfillment of the Old Testament’s messiah, he did exactly what was said he will do. Unlike the position of the liberals on the miracles of Jesus and the disbelief on the supernatural by Strauss, Bultmann and the Jesus Seminar, the Gospels affirm Jesus to have done many extraordinary things. The word *dunamis* with its inflections is used for “miracle” and is used 3 times in the Gospels and the plural “miracles” appeared 27 times in the NIV New Testament. In the Gospels, it is used 17 times referring to the acts and signs of Jesus in his ministry. Various words such as miraculous signs, wonders and miracles are attributed to the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. The word ‘miracle’ means to A. M. Hunter “the interference with nature by supernatural power but in the New Testament, miracles are regarded not as ‘interference’ but as tokens of a new order of life inaugurated by the coming Christ”.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Olyott, 43.

<sup>590</sup> E. Schweitzer, 45.

<sup>591</sup> E. Schweitzer, 71.

<sup>592</sup> Macquarrie, 91.

<sup>593</sup> On the post-resurrection command see Gideon Yohanna, “A Biblical Understanding of the Jesus’ Commission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20” (A Bachelor of Arts [B.A] in Theology’s Thesis at ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, 2009).

<sup>594</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Work*, 54.

To this, Jarl Fossum writes, “That Jesus was a miracle worker is central to the Christology of the New Testament Gospels and Acts”.<sup>595</sup> Gary R. Habermas considers the Gospels to be historical reliable sources for the miracles of Jesus. He writes, “The Gospel miracles are a crucial ingredient in the historical examination of the life of Jesus”.<sup>596</sup> He divides the miracles into three; healings, exorcisms and nature miracles.<sup>597</sup> About those who reject the miracle accounts in the Gospels, Habermas states that it is a matter of worldview influence, which exhorted that for us to appreciate the Gospels in terms of the miracles, we should be opened to the worldview he taught.<sup>598</sup> Besides those recorded in the Gospels, it is said that Jesus did many miracles which were not even written down for the world will not contain the books that would be written about those miraculous acts (Jn. 21:25). This made people to be astonished and surprised (Mk 6:2; Jn. 2:11; 4:54; Lk 19:37; Matt. 12:38, 39; 16:1; Lk 11:16; Jn 12:18). We see many were following Jesus because of the food they were benefiting from him (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:29) and the fact that he said he is the bread of life (Jn. 6:35).

Contemporary historical researches deny the miraculous deeds of Jesus. For example, Matthew Arnold opines that miracles are legendary accretions to the story which arouse a similar saying one finds in the works of Strauss and Bultmann. Hunter believes that “they are meant to prove the heavenly origin of Jesus, to accredit him as the divine Son of God yet this traditional theory does violence to the connection between miracles and faith”<sup>599</sup> and that the emphasis is on a preconditioned faith and power of prayer.<sup>600</sup> However, despite that he went to many places and performed miracles but the people did not accept his message (Matt. 11:20, 21, 23; Lk 10:13), which is a clear indication of many miracle workers with thorough following in the African church. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s concept of miracles. Joseph Rhymer concludes that,

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<sup>595</sup> Jarl Fossum, 17.

<sup>596</sup> Habermas, “Did Jesus Performed Miracles?”, 118.

<sup>597</sup> Habermas, “Did Jesus Performed Miracles?”, 124.

<sup>598</sup> Habermas, “Did Jesus Performed Miracles?”, 134.

<sup>599</sup> Hunter, *Work*, 54.

<sup>600</sup> On the miracles and healing of Jesus see E. Schweitzer, 58-9. Evans 141ff.

Jesus was not a mere miracle-worker, not even the most spectacular miracle-worker ever known. For Christians, he was the Son of God incarnate, the redeemer of the world and the eternal hope of all who believe in Him. The miracles are not the only evidence of these beliefs about Jesus, but they are powerful signs of what such beliefs actually mean.<sup>601</sup>

#### **e. Jesus as the Son of Man**

The idea of the Son of Man happened to be an Old Testament phenomenon. There are 100 occurrences of the phrase in the entire Old Testament. About 93 occurrences of the phrase are found in the book of Ezekiel. Prophet Ezekiel referred to himself as the son of man. This referred to the humility of the prophet as a servant of the Most High.

In the New Testament, the phrase “the Son of Man” is used 81 times in the Gospels. The Gospels reveal the deeds of the Son of Man. It is known that he eats and drinks as a normal being when he was on earth (Matt. 11:19; Lk 7:34). Jesus took the form of the prophet referred in Ezekiel. Jesus states that he did not come to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:18; Mk 10:45) and the Son of Man has no place to stay (Matt. 8:20; Lk 9:58). The fulfillment of the Old Testament concept of the son of man is evident in the life of Jesus.

#### **f. Jesus as the Prophet**

The Old Testament is familiar with the theme of a prophet. This is common word for many people in Israel who told of the future events. God prophesied through Moses of a greater prophet who is to come from amidst the people (Deut. 18:18). The prophetic office of the Old Testament entirely is a shadow of what Jesus was to do in the Gospels. The trend of Deuteronomy 18:18 got its fulfillment with the coming of Jesus. The Jews through history have been waiting for the fulfillment of this prophecy.

When Jesus came he revealed himself as the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:18. Jesus himself was a prophet hence he prophesied and it came to pass. He was seldom called a prophet by the people (cf. Lk 7:16; 24:19; Matt. 21:11, 46; Mk 6:15; 8:28; Jn 9:17). His knowledge was compared to that of a prophet and to the biblical prophets (Matt. 16:14; Lk 9:8). He uttered promises, threats (Lk 6:20ff), he saw visions

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<sup>601</sup> Joseph Rhymer, *The Miracles of Jesus* (London: St. Paul, 1991), 144.



(Mk 1:10-11; Lk 10:18), and scanned human thoughts (Mk 2:5; Lk 5:22) and knew of future events (Mk 11:2; 8:31; Jn 14:29; Lk 13:33). Jesus focused on an Old Testament phenomenon as a fulfillment of the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18 though no such usage for Jesus in the other books of the New Testament for they considered Jesus to have fulfilled the law and the prophets as he himself has stated (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17; 4:14; 12:17).

#### **g. Jesus as the Savior**

The idea of the Savior is rooted in Old Testament teachings on salvation, which began in Genesis 3:16. In the Old Testament, God has mostly been seen as the Savior of mankind from dangers and destruction, which are parallel to the understanding in the African community. The word 'savior' is used 24 times in the NIV New Testament. The Gospel writers used it 3 times by Luke and John, which revealed the position of Jesus as being the Savior of the world from the hands of the Devil. Jesus initiated the spiritual sense of the word to be applied to the saving he accomplished on the cross of Calvary for our sins.

In the Gospels, during the birth of Jesus, the angel announced Jesus to be the Savior of the world (Lk 2:11). Luke used it to refer to the song of Mary having heard the angels' words and praised God as her Savior (1:47). After his birth in the course of his ministry the people at the time of Jesus adopted in John 4:42 used the angels' designation of Jesus and believed that Jesus "really is the Savior of the world." Jesus accomplished this Old Testament concept through his death and resurrection.

Generally on the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels, it is right to state that these portraits are fulfillments of the Old Testament idea of the Messiah, which Israel has been waiting for. "The New Testament portrayal of Jesus is still sound and offers the basis for an intellectually satisfying faith".<sup>602</sup> Raymond urges that when one takes into account the alternative—the utter confusion in modern Christological research in both the exegetical and dogmatic fields the proof is abundant that something has gone dreadfully awry.<sup>603</sup> To all these, W. M. Horton urges that theologians must base their teaching about Jesus the Christ (at least

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<sup>602</sup> Robert L. Raymond, *Jesus Divine Messiah* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1990), 43.

<sup>603</sup> Horton Cited in Raymond, 43.

primarily) upon the most faithful portrait of our Lord that objective biblical scholarship can paint; and if they do not like the looks of that portrait, they must not retouch it, lest they be found guilty of trying to correct the Wisdom of God by the wisdom of man.<sup>604</sup> The understandings of Jesus as presented by the Gospels are accurate and inspired. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Miracle Worker, the Savior, and the Resurrection and the Life.

#### **10. The Epistles Attest to the Gospels**

The Epistles also attest to Jesus of the Gospels. Going the epistles would reveal the purpose of affirming the understanding of Jesus in the Gospels. We quite know that the Epistles have explained the “fact of Christ” (Hunter *Introducing*) which the Gospels have affirmed. Paul and the writers of the epistles reinterpreted Christianity introduced by the Gospels. A careful study would reveal that the epistles have contributed to the understanding of Jesus in the Gospels or they have affirmed the understanding of Jesus. I believe the pattern of C. H. Dodd on the *Kerygma* from the Acts of the Apostles needs to be followed to see if we can reveal some facts that better explain Jesus of the Gospels as a response to the modern historical Jesus research.

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<sup>604</sup> Hunter, *Work*, 8.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH**

#### **1. The State of Biblical Scholarship in Africa**

The word “scholasticism” appears as early as the Medieval Ages. This is a form or system of philosophy and theology developed by scholars who came to be called schoolmen in the universities though the whole concept centered on religious principles.<sup>605</sup> “The scholastics particularly tried to prove the truth of the Christ doctrine and to reconcile contradictory viewpoints in Christian theology.”<sup>606</sup> This became the origin of Christian commentaries on the biblical text in order to clarify spiritual things but also to give the understanding of man and the world. The oldest form of doctrinal analysis is found in Boethiu’s *On the Trinity*,<sup>607</sup> which caused the word to be applied to anyone teaching philosophy or theology in the universities. By the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, medieval scholasticism was in rapid decline, very largely because of the numerous second-rate thinkers who held themselves a loop from the great scientific discoveries of the age.<sup>608</sup>

The sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries are experiencing a new look of scholarship. This modern critical study has been developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since then most European countries and the United States have made important contributions, with the result that there is now a considerable literature on the subject. Even with this today the teachings of some Roman Catholic theologians still reflect this

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<sup>605</sup> For more study see W. N. C., “Scholasticism,” *Frank and Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopaedia* (Joseph Laffan Morse ed., New York: Standard Reference, 1966), 1852.

<sup>606</sup> For an interactive study see Eugene Teselle, “Scholasticism,” *The World Book Encyclopaedia Vol. 17* (Chicago: World Book-Childcraft, 1981), 151.

<sup>607</sup> For a better understanding see A. Vos, “Scholasticism” *New Dictionary of Theology* (Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright eds., Leicester: IVP, 1988), 621-622.

<sup>608</sup> A good insight is given by S. J. C., “Scholarship,” *Encyclopaedia Britannia Vol. 19* (Chicago: William Benton, 1969), 1177.

influence.<sup>609</sup> Our present scholarship is an extensive movement in Catholic circles which started in early nineteenth century and followed after Leo XIII's *Encyclical Aeterni Patris* (1879) in which it is called the restoration of Christian philosophy. Institutes were established and journals founded in both Europe and America.

The rapid exploration of scholarship, which means the sober study of an academic subject and involves familiarity of the knowledge and the methods,<sup>610</sup> made the influence to be felt on the African soil and today when we say some are scholars, we are not far from the truth; hence, their familiarity of biblical subjects is encouraging. This made Africa to experience some forms of literatures, Christian arts and interactive materials. Today, the level of African scholarship particularly in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe is concerning the Western world for theological constructions are fast developing with passion for the betterment of the African continent. For examples, the *Africa Bible Commentary*, *African Christian Ethics* by Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *The Psalms* by Kafang.

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<sup>609</sup> Teselle, 151.

<sup>610</sup> I believe the act of scholarship is as older as the creation of the world. God scholarly created the world and the ancients employed scholarly methods and invented writing and arithmetic for business transactions. Noah employed logics, which railed the successful rounding of the great task for the ark. Moses is also another scholar in his time who was trained in the wisdom and knowledge of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). This made Moses the author of the Pentateuch, see Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 51-58; Lois K. Fuller, *The Pentateuch* (Bukuru: ACTS, 1996), 6-7. The prophets and Ezra the great scribe and the founder of modern Judaism are good examples. It takes a scholarly mind to be able to write for educational and spiritual advancements. In the New Testament the Gospel writers are good figures in as much as scholarship is concern. Paul the apostle, Luke, Peter, James, John the Beloved and Jude were all scholars hence they employed all scholarship methodologies in their writing skills. They quoted from the Old Testament text, interacted and gave suggestions for practical spirituality. For example, Matthew used Jeremiah 31:15 in chapter 2:18 revealing the fulfilment of the prophecy. For an extensive study see Gideon Yohanna, "The Need for Intense Biblical Scholarship among African Evangelical Ministers: An Enquiry into Other Related Movements in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (A Theological Paper Presented to the Faculty, Staff and Students during the Senior Students Day 2009 at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, March 26, 2009), 2-3.

In Africa, beside the works of the Patriarchs such as Tertullian, Origen, St. Augustine and Clement of Alexandria among many others, the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries are experiencing some sense of scholarship. Africa now has few capable and efficient hands that can stand and defend the continent as far as theological and biblical discussions are concerned. African scholarship has destroyed the view that theology is foreign to this continent, and this has a high relevance.<sup>611</sup> Today there are thousands of journals and books, commentaries such as the *Africa Bible Commentary* (1<sup>st</sup> edition), and articles on theological constructions.<sup>612</sup>

For us to analyze African biblical scholarship we shall consider one of the leading conferences of biblical scholars in Nigeria, the *Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies* which was founded in 1985. It was meant to focus on scholarly biblical research using the African perspectives and have a meeting once a year. It has organized annual conferences within the African *sitz im leben*. This association has been putting biblical scholars in Nigeria forward and the best so far in the twenty-first century particularly *Christology in African Context* (2003), which addresses and

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<sup>611</sup> See Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos: Challenge Publication, n.d.), 32-39. Kwame Bediako, "Whose Religion is Christianity? Reflections on Opportunities and Challenges in Christian Theological Scholarship –The African Dimension" *Journal of African Christian Thoughts* (Vol. 9, 2, 2006), 43-48. Musa A. B. Gaiya, *Christianity in Africa* (Jos: Ade Printing Press, 2002), 5-52. Gideon Yohanna, "A Theological Analysis of the Image of God: A Prolegomena to Anthropology" (A Theological Paper Presented to the Faculty, Staff and Students during the Senior Students' Day 2008 at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, Sept., 8, 2008).

<sup>612</sup> Scholars such as Kato, Mbiti, Idowu wrote in order to stand on the shoulders of the Western theological giants. We have big names in Africa such as Prof. Yusufu Turaki, Prof. Danfulani Kore, Prof. Danny McCain, Prof. Samuel W. Kunhiyop, Dr. Yohanna Byo, Prof. S. O. Abogunrin, Prof. Pandam Yamsat, Prof. G. O. Abe, Prof. Zamani B. Kafang, Prof. Kwesi Dickson, Prof. Joseph Omoregbe, Prof. Dapo Asaju, Prof. Samuel Ngewa, Dr. G. O. Folarin, Prof. J. O. Akao, Prof. Chris Manus Chukwu, Assoc. Prof. Jotham Kangdim and Dr. Matthew Michael, among many others.

re-addresses Christological questions from both Old Testament and New Testament within the African context.<sup>613</sup>

Despite the effort put by the NABIS, is the association capable of representing Nigeria in the world in terms of biblical ideas? Are the members of this association efficiently vibrant enough to compete with other scholars in other parts of the world? Are these members aware of the current trends in New Testament studies? Are they aware of the historical Jesus research, which characterized the West? Even if they can answer on the affirmative, we still see the association allowing incapable hands to be creeping in and contaminating its integrity. These fellows participate not with the aim of promoting scholarship in Africa but for promotions in their working places. How many scholars today, having become professors, are still publishing books and articles?

Despite this, scholarship in Africa is very weak as compared to what is obtainable in the Western world. Bolaji Idowu once stated that "...one can describe the situation with regard to theological thinking and biblical scholarship as almost tragic".<sup>614</sup> In an interview, Danny McCain attests to the fact that scholarship in Africa is very weak; hence, the church is young with many expectations. To McCain, it is part of the growing level of the church. He urges that there is need for a serious scholarship though not advanced like what is obtainable in the American society. We need a

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<sup>613</sup> Its scholarly journal the *African Journal of Biblical Studies* (AJBS) has also published articles within African perspectives and has been sustained over the years. The *African Journal of Biblical Studies* has published many indigenous articles formerly with Ven. Dr. J. O. Akao as the editor now with Prof. J. D. Gwamna as the general editor. This journal is published twice a year in April and October. The aims of this journal have been; Promoting Biblical research in Africa and disseminating the result of the research. Providing a forum for discussion and exchange of information and ideas on current issues on biblical research. Promoting the study of biblical research. Relating the interpretation of the Bible to the life situation in Africa and African societal problems. Encouraging Biblical scholars to look afresh at the Bible with an African insight, relating their interpretation to the past and the prevailing situation of the church in Africa. Providing useful source material for research and teaching Biblical studies in Africa. Providing up-to-date information on new developments in biblical research, both in Africa and elsewhere (*African Journal of Biblical Studies* Vol. XV, 2, October 2000).

<sup>614</sup> Idowu, 51.

scholarship that will enable us to minister for the glory of God.<sup>615</sup> The poor biblical scholarship in Africa is as result of several factors.<sup>616</sup> Good biblical scholarship centers on the knowledge of the biblical languages and the ability to transform the understanding of the scriptures into the lives of the African people. We have big names in Africa such as Prof. Yusufu Turaki, Prof. Danfulani Kore, Prof. Danny McCain, Prof. Samuel W. Kunhiyop, Prof. S. O. Abogunrin, Prof. Pandam Yamsat, Prof. G. O. Abe, Prof. Kwesi Dickson, Prof. Dapo Asaju, Prof. Samuel Ngewa, Dr. G. O. Folarin, Prof. Zamani B. Kafang, Prof. J. O. Akao, Prof. Chris Manus Chukwu, Prof. Jotham Kandim and Assoc. Prof. Matthew Michael, among many others who are contributing for the development of African scholarship. Good research sources are needed for the progress of scholarship in Africa. In view of the state of African biblical scholarship, can the continent comprehend the problems of the historical Jesus research which has characterized the West? We shall draw some implications of the historical Jesus research to the African biblical scholarship.

## **2. Implications of the Study to African Christianity**

In view of the state of African biblical scholarship and the complicated nature of the studies of Jesus in the West which have been discussed above, is African biblical scholarship capable of assimilating such controversies, which characterized the study of Jesus within New Testament studies in the West? The only accessible documents which have significant impacts to the African situation are the inaugural lecture of S. O. Abogunrin of the University of Ibadan (1998, published 2003), the article of J. D. Gwamna on the Jesus Seminar (2002, published 2008) and few pages of Matthew Michael (2011).

Abogunrin has asked relevant questions for the African society;

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<sup>615</sup> Interview with Prof. Danny McCain on the historical Jesus research on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>616</sup> Lack of quality students, lack of commitment, low concern for the students and members, laxity in presentations, lack of literatures, low academic attainment, poor research funding, low apologetic consciousness and lack of social amenities. These factors characterized the poor state of African Biblical Scholarship, which would make it incapable of becoming intense as found in the west in the Historical Jesus Research.

Of what value is the current debate on the historicity of the Gospels, as well as the question of the historical Jesus? What can African Christianity benefit from the critical study of the Gospels, which has dominated the West for more than two centuries? Is it possible to pursue the question of the sequential order and the literature of the Gospels purely from the academic point of view, quite unrelated to the attested primitive traditions of the immediate generations after the apostolic age? Can African biblical scholars brush aside the age-long accepted traditions and convictions of the church from the beginning before we can explain the phenomena of the Gospels? In the light of the African experience is the multiplication of hypothetical sources the solution to the problem of the sources of the Evangelists? Can we completely remove the Gospels from their cultural milieu and the conditions obtaining in first-century Palestine and impose Western cultural understanding of the twentieth century upon their texts as if the Gospels actually originated from the West in the twentieth century? What effects has the imposition of modern understanding of the nature of history on the cherished brush aside the age-long accepted traditions and convictions of both Judaism and the church because Western culture no longer has room for the supernatural? In the light of African experience, can the current Western approach be the best for African Christianity?<sup>617</sup>

These questions, as Abogunrin asks, are basic for the understanding and application of the problem to the African setting of life and culture. African Christianity has been in the *hands* of Western Christianity. They have been asking questions for us in biblical scholarship. We have been influenced in many ways. Many Africans went to the West to study, the internet is here, books and journals, which are written from the West and the media are available for promoting wrong ideas to the African scholarship. We are quite sure that these influences will be more in the future. But we cannot continue to conform to these influences. There is need for an “African John Stott,” said McCain, a person who is “pious, godly and thoughtful.” If Africa gives such man to the world, McCain believes “Africa will influence the West and the world.”

While the West does not conform to the cultural and supernatural beliefs of the Jews in the first century, many Africans “still live in the

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<sup>617</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 37-38.



world of the New Testament, where belief in demons and a host of unseen supernatural powers is still potent and real. A Jesus emptied of all such supernaturalism as is contained in the Gospels would therefore be meaningless in the African setting.”<sup>618</sup> Africans are still conscious of the fact that demons are in our societies. This makes the message and exorcisms of Jesus in the Gospels more relevant to their situations. They still believe Jesus of the Gospels still exorcises for them and has removed the fear of demons in their lives. When the West rejects such, is it doing good for the Africans or ruining their faith which the Bible says do not cause anyone to stumble (1 Cor. 10:32)? Africans need to know that “Christology is not, for instance, in competition with a disinterested historical investigation of the life of Jesus...”<sup>619</sup>

In Africa, we still live in the world of oral tradition as in the time of writing the Gospels. We better understand the words of Jesus as orally transmitted to what we have as the Gospels; hence, African ancient traditions are still cherished in the form of songs, family eulogies and genealogies. These were classified by Mbiti as symbolic theology, which is expressed through art, scriptures, drama, symbolic rituals, dance, etc. when he observes that African theology has three main aspects; written theology, oral theology and symbolic theology. However, he concludes that visible theology must and should have a biblical basis.<sup>620</sup> This is a similar fact we have about the early church 20 to 30 years before the Gospels were written.

- a. The Gospels are inspired and historical documents that enable us to study the life of Jesus, which the modern historical Jesus research has rejected. They present to us the reliable accounts of the life of Jesus that are not found in other documents when evaluated on biblical bases. The belief that the Gospels are myth and legend are skeptical means used to discredit the Bible. We should note that God is always behind any valid historical gathering (cf. the councils for the Creed and the canon). So also the historical Jesus and the Jesus Seminar are being controlled by God to sharpen the understanding of Jesus in the West and reaffirm

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<sup>618</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 39.

<sup>619</sup> Macquerrie, 103.

<sup>620</sup> John S. Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis for the Present Trends in African Theology” *African Theology En Route* (K. Appiah, Kubi and S. Torress eds., New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 83-90.

the traditional teaching in the African continent. We received the Gospels as credible sources for spirituality. Now we need to define their integrity against the anti-supernatural bias and unhealthy methods of the liberal Jesus Quest movement popularized by the Jesus Seminar and falsely propped up by the Gnostic gospels. These gospels do not in any way conform to the teaching of Jesus as evident in the Gospels and the Church Fathers' documents. We need to know that the Gospel of John was written later than the others but it also has equal historicity and the same authenticity as the Synoptic Gospels.

- b.** The methods of the Jesus Seminar are grossly modern and cast spells on the historicity of the words of Jesus. The modern methods for the study of Jesus cannot prove to us historically the words Jesus spoke. This is because none of the modern historical critical scholars was in existence during the Early Church to ascertain for us the real words of Jesus. African Christians have always believed the words to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. They can be harmonized with other sayings of Jesus in Acts of the Apostles and the teaching of the apostles during the Early Church.
- c.** The New Testament has attested to the supernatural deeds of Jesus on the aspect of miracles, exorcism and great powers in the teaching and the resurrection. The modern historical Jesus research has rejected that such things cannot be explained. The African continent has no problem with the belief in the supernatural, a belief which best explains the Jewish context that is emphasized by the Third Quest. We believe in demons, spirits and exorcisms. The miracles and exorcist deeds of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels are accurate and explainable in the African context. More importantly, these aspects of the biblical Gospels are self-consistent with the Old Testament fulfillment of the Messiah in Jesus. They were also testified by eye-witnesses in their own historical context even at the threat of death among the early Christians.

Another critical supernatural issue is the resurrection of Jesus which many of the critical Jesus scholars have rejected. For the resurrection, the historical Jesus research and the Jesus Seminar have denied it for the Jesus Seminar rests on *Thomas* and other Gnostics, which do not have sayings on the death and resurrection of Jesus (1Cor. 15).

All we need as Africans is faith because that is what our traditional Christianity taught us and we believe our ancestors do come back in the form of spirits. I am not bringing this to justify the traditional beliefs of the Africans on the ancestors but to buttress the point that the concept of biblical presentation of the resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels and the epistles can be easily explained because of such background in African society than in the West. Our aim is to make African Christianity to maintain its integrity rather than compromising to the African traditional beliefs. The attestations to the resurrection by the apostles in the preachings and their writings form the basis, for the resurrection gives hope to African Christians.

d. Despite the values of the historical critical method, Africans should note that the modern historical critical method alone for the study of the Gospels is inadequate for the understanding of spiritual documents as the Gospels. Many scholars do not agree with the historical critical method of interpreting the scriptures. “They could not see how the critical approach can be compatible with the reverence which the biblical text demands.”<sup>621</sup> For example, Robert L. Thomas in *The Jesus Crisis* has criticized the evangelicals for using the same method with the critical scholar, which now many of the evangelicals are guilty of influence. He writes,

Evangelical New Testament scholars have conceded much ground to critical methodologies that question the accuracy of the Synoptic Gospels –Matthew, Mark, and Luke. By adopting the methodology of those who are less friendly to a high view of scripture, most evangelical specialists have surrendered traditional, orthodox understanding of historicity in various parts of the first three Gospels.<sup>622</sup>

To this, Thomas states similarities between the evangelicals and the Jesus Seminar.<sup>623</sup> It was the fear of this that I adopted the historical-theological method for understanding the entire book. The Gospels must be viewed as the early Christians viewed them and as the Early Church’s fathers saw them. Whatever teaching

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<sup>621</sup> Abogunrin, “In Search,” 35.

<sup>622</sup> Thomas and Farnell, 13.

<sup>623</sup> Thomas and Farnell, 14-15.

they have been affirmed to have taught during those periods should be accepted in African Christianity. There is a need for a comprehensive model for the apprehension of the New Testament writings, not the critical historical model, which provides no compelling reasons for the historical account of earliest Christianity. Scholars in Africa must interpret the Gospels having spiritual minds, which are linked with Christ or else we end up having methods within African biblical scholarship that are alien to the understanding of Jesus in the Gospels. African biblical scholarship needs to realize the limitations of the critical reconstructed portraits of Jesus, for such portraits of Jesus cannot explain the crucifixion, resurrection, and the development of the Christian church throughout the centuries to the twenty-first century as the Jesus of the Gospels.

- e. African scholars should affirm that there is no distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history in the Gospels. All refer to one person, the Jesus Christ who was crucified, died and resurrected to life, and that death does not have power over him again. African Christians who believe in this Jesus will resurrect with him someday and live forever. This is the hope we have in the Jesus of the Gospels. We should see Jesus religiously, theologically, morally and historically as the same person.
- f. African scholars should be able to design their research methodologies to biblical studies and should evaluate the critical approaches of the West. We know that most of the materials for doing biblical studies are mainly from the West. We must sieve, as Gwamna asserts, the “wheat” from the “chaff.”<sup>624</sup> Unless we begin to see and appreciate African perspective, doing authentic biblical studies will be difficult. Our questions cannot be the same with the West because of the different worldviews. These will be done through a better understanding of biblical languages and cultures.
- g. African scholars deserve to be informed that God allowed the higher criticisms on the Gospels for the purpose of expanding the knowledge of the Gospels. The higher criticism with its historical critical method has helped establish an overall attitude toward the historicity of the Gospel materials and expanded the understanding of Jesus. Affirming this, Daniel Rops observes, “The use of

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<sup>624</sup> Gwamna, *Perspectives*, 135.

historical method, in conjunction with the remarkable discoveries of archaeological research, of comparative semantics and textual criticism has, for more than half a century now, greatly enlarged the scope of the study of Jesus.”<sup>625</sup> The *slap* on the Gospels by the higher critical scholars in the West has caused many people in the West to fall back and check the Gospels to see the reality of the things they believe. This, to me, led to a revival on the study of the Gospels for better spiritual developments.

**h.** Africans should be prepared to embark on the historical Jesus discussions within biblical Christianity. Our biblical scholars should get acquainted with all these issues that crave our discipline and be ready to contribute tremendously for the construction and reconstruction of ideas. We cannot claim to have Master Degrees or PhDs in Biblical Studies in Africa without getting acquainted with these Western methods or we will lack world-class credibility. A degree is a degree everywhere. This should be noted by any institution that awards such a degree in Africa and mostly professors, who teach the life of Jesus in such institutions.

Beside the historical Jesus research another thing is textual criticism. Historical critical Jesus research (historical criticism) is often called higher criticism while textual criticism is known as lower criticism.<sup>626</sup> Textual criticism is the science of sorting and collating existing manuscripts of very ancient documents by means of reconstructing them in search for the accurate version.<sup>627</sup> Bruce Metzger centers the whole art of textual criticism on recension i.e. the selection of the most trustworthy evidence on which to base a text and emendation i.e. the elimination of errors in the best manuscripts.<sup>628</sup> Textual criticism is very important for it helps us

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<sup>625</sup> Rops, 275.

<sup>626</sup> A. van Aarde, “Methods and Models in the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Historical Criticism and/or Social Scientific Criticism,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 58 (2002), 419-36.

<sup>627</sup> For a better understanding see Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 73-75. There are many textual variants of the Gospels and the two major ones are the longer reading of Mark’s ending (16:9-20) and John 7:53-8:11 cannot be found in the most ancient manuscripts of the Gospels.

<sup>628</sup> Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 156.

to go back to the original manuscripts of the Gospels, although with absolute carefulness. It should be stated that many of the critical scholars derailed and began to question the Gospels as having some mistakes as a result of these areas of studies in biblical scholarship. For example, Bart Ehrman who was educated in Wheaton College and Princeton Theological Seminary derailed as a result of textual criticism and variant readings in the Gospels which he found to be errors in scriptures (cf. Mark 2:25:26 with 1 Sam. 21:16). Ehrman no longer views the Bible as God's word and regards himself as an agnostic.<sup>629</sup> The teachers should make sure good sets of information are passed at the right time to the students or else many Africans will end up becoming converts to Western historical Jesus research.

- i. The historical Jesus scholars have revealed to the African scholars that they have not understood the biblical Jesus as the apostles and the Jews of the days of Jesus did. The emergence of the false teachers during the early church is as a result of misunderstanding of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Just as the Early Church's fathers answered the heretics of the second and third centuries, the African church must answer the false claims of the historical Jesus research today as many conservative Western scholars are doing, such as Bock and Blomberg among many others. The Early Church and the church fathers employed preaching and writing as methodologies for responding to the heretics of their days as evident in the New Testament epistles and the writings of the Early Church Fathers (cf. Iranaeus's *Against Heresies*). Our task, as African scholars, is to uphold the scriptures by exposing the wrong notions within biblical scholarship in the West. Jesus still remains the Savior and Messiah of the Africans and the *faithful ones* in the West.
- j. There is need for African biblical scholars to judge the positions of the historical Jesus scholars carefully. The biggest mistake would be the usage of liberal scholars to defend sound teachings in our scholarship. African scholars should know who the liberal critical scholars are so that they do not recommend books by men like Borg, Crossan, Mack, Thierring, and Price. Others like Wright should be evaluated to know where they are helpful (as in exposing

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<sup>629</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 26.

problem with the Jesus Seminar) and where they are not (issues of inerrancy and soteriology). Liberal, agnostic, atheist and a Gnostic should not be used to defend biblical constructions.

- k.** We must uphold the Bible and be ready to stand for the task of theologizing for the African continent. We should understand that the Bible was written in a historical and theological context and that theology is done in context. Contextualization should be at the top of all our discussions. We must aim at making the discussions of the Bible relevant to our own African setting (*sitz im leben*).
- l.** Liberalism has affected evangelicalism in the aspect of the use of words and ideas, which Thomas and Farnell (eds.) in *The Jesus Crisis* have exposed. In this book, some contributors share the view that some evangelicals use the same methods as the historical Jesus research and the Jesus Seminar.<sup>630</sup> Influence has been seen in the similar use of historical critical method for the understanding of Jesus and the Gospels. Of course, Africans must note this criticism as viable between the positions of the use of historical critical method in the West. Better methods such as biblical and systematic theological methods should be used in Africa for the understanding of the Gospels and Jesus. Africans must be careful of the influence of terms in writings as used by the critical historical Jesus scholars in the West as we read their works.
- m.** African scholars must be able to distinguish the similarity and dissimilarity between the Gospels and *Thomas*. The most dominant gospel used by the Third Quest, Jesus Seminar, and *The Da Vinci Code* is the *Gospel of Thomas*. This gospel claims to have 114 authentic sayings of Jesus. However, the missing part of the gospel is the account of the miracles, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which the Gospels all presented. This made some Third Quest scholars, the Jesus Seminar and *The Da Vinci Code* to have discarded the belief on the supernatural, particularly the miraculous deeds and resurrection of Jesus. Most of the sayings are dissimilar with the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels. Can *Thomas* account that Jesus said only 114 sayings in his ministry? *Thomas* was composed by one of the Gnostics of the late second and third centuries. The Gospels were written when many of the eye-witnesses were much available and alive. Africans must know that

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<sup>630</sup> Thomas and Farnell (eds), *The Jesus Crisis*, 13-15, 207.

*Thomas* is a good document for Gnosticism and the liberalism of our age rather than for Christianity

- n. The criteria for authenticity for the Jesus Tradition. As we have considered the historical Jesus research has been using some sorts of incapable criteria for the authenticity of the words of Jesus. This is behind the entire ideas in the historical Jesus research. For example, the Jesus Seminar has voted for only 18% of the words of Jesus as authentic and has dismissed 82% of the Gospel materials. They have included *Thomas* to their canon in *The Five Gospels* on the basis of these criteria. Africans must recognize the incapableness of these historical studies' criteria to judge spiritual documents as the Gospels as compared to the classical criteria used by the Early Church's fathers to determine the authenticity of the Gospels. The understanding of Jesus must be based on these criteria which formed the Gospels. Jesus' materials must be endorsed by his apostle and disciples than having second-hand endorsement like in the case of the historical scholars.
- o. African scholars need to understand that the influence of the work of Brown (*The Da Vinci Code*) on African Christianity has not gotten proper treatment. This has been counteracted by Rev. Dr. Musa Asake, the former ECWA General Secretary and now the pastor of ECWA Goodnews Tudun Wada, Jos. Asake has enlightened a few congregations in Jos and ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro in 2006, for I was studying for my first degree then. But has the influence of *The Da Vinci Code* been wiped out totally in the minds of African Christians? The answer is on the negative. I can say that the influence is still in circulation because, the book (or the movie), published in 2003, is still in circulation in Jos and other parts of the African continent. Since 2006, after the presentation of Asake at Kagoro Seminary, I have been looking for the novel to purchase but couldn't get it until in October, 2010 at the gate of the main Campus of the University of Jos though I got the movie in 2007. Also, I got the electronic copy of the book from a final year student of the then Department of Religious Studies now Religion and Philosophy. In addition, I have heard of the works of Brown being discussed by students at the University of Jos' café and expressing 'I like the movie,' which has become some students' favorite movie (and novel). Hardly have I heard of such discussions at the Theological Seminaries. What am I trying to



stress? University of Jos both Christians (and non-Christians) would not think clearly about the works of Brown, as evident above.<sup>631</sup> The seminary students would be thoughtful at this level but they are ignorant of the works of Brown.

The concern generally is, do these Christian students at the University of Jos (or from other universities) know that the claims of *The Da Vinci Code* are based on false grounds? Can they prove its falsity using the biblical Gospels? Of course, the majority of them cannot because they are not grounded in the Christian faith and some hardly read the Bible. As such, many of them are still in constant struggle with the claims of *The Da Vinci Code* that the Bible (including the Gospels) is the product of man's reconstruction and thought, that Jesus was a mere man, not a divine being who incarnated. They do not realize this is a view shared among the heretics during the Early Church, and many of those doing historical Jesus research.<sup>632</sup> Many of them do not know that the materials used in this novel (or movie) by Brown are based on fictional and Gnostic gospels such as *Thomas, Philip, Judas* and *Magdalene*, which are also used by the Jesus Seminar and some Third Quest scholars, which the Church Fathers rejected as being uninspired by the Holy Spirit. Many of them do not know that Brown did not use any material from the Gospels. Because of this, I call for a resurgence of defense against the views of *The Da Vinci Code*. It is the task of biblical scholars in Africa to engage in the defense of the truth using true historical research against *The Da Vinci Code* and to enlighten the African Christians on the falsity of all the claims of *The Da Vinci Code*.

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<sup>631</sup> Similar could be said of other well-known Universities in Nigeria.

<sup>632</sup> Brown asserts Jesus got married to Magdalene and fathered Sarah. Barbara Thierring, a member of the Jesus Seminar in *Jesus the Man* suggests Jesus got married to Mary Magdalene and had three children, then divorced her and married again (qtd in Wright, *Who was Jesus?*, 23). A similar view in the document for the *Titanic* discovered by Don Cameron which suggests Jesus got married to Magdalene and fathered a son. See Mcgirk. It should be stated that these documents because of their false claims are not consistent among themselves on the issue.

### 3. Jesus in African Context

Within the African theological discussions, one appreciates the efforts put by most of the founding *fathers* of the theology, which led to the development of the Jesus discussions in Africa.<sup>633</sup> This, to me, is the influence of the Western expositions after the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century of higher criticisms on the Gospels, particularly the life of Jesus, which was rooted in Germany, London and recently in North America. However, a discussion of Jesus within this range on the African continent, which started in the 1960s must begin with the questions of John V. Taylor about how the Africans would respond to the question Jesus asked his disciples. Affirming this Taylor observed,

Christ has been presented as to answer to questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, saviour of the world of European worldview, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the question that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and petitions of her total, inhabited humanity would they be acceptable?<sup>634</sup>

The effort to render solution to the questions of Taylor on the need of African Christological contents raised the understanding of Christ from the cultural milieu through the comparative, systematic, liberation and grassroots methodology, which involved the interaction of the Bible

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<sup>633</sup> This includes great African scholars like John Samuel Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu and Byang Haruna Kato among many others.

<sup>634</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 16. There are quite works from Africans that still figure the question of Jesus to his disciples which are seen to be directly to the African man see Kurewa J. W. Zvomunondita, "Who Do You Say that I am?" *International Review of Mission* 69, no. 274, 1980; Ernst Wendland, "'Who Do You Say that I Am?' Contextualizing Christologies in Africa" *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 10, no. 2, 1991; Akintunde E. Akinade, "'Who Do You Say that I Am?' An Assessment of Some Christological Constructs in Africa" *Asia Journal of Theology* 9, no.1, 199; Je'adayibe Dogara Gwamna, "'What do People Say that I Am?': Interrogating Current Trends in New Testament Studies" *African Journal of Biblical Studies* vol. 27, 2, 2009 which has great application to the Africans.

with the African worldview. These works delve into portraits of Jesus which are within these Christological methodologies.<sup>635</sup>

**a. Jesus Our Ancestor and Elder Brother**

Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian theologian, has been one of the African theologians who has a heart for the contextualization of theology within the African context. He has been at the forefront in trying to analyze the Gospels from the African lenses. He has contributed so much to study of the Gospels particularly the life of Jesus from an African perspective. Bediako has devoted interest into the study of the Gospels in search for the Jesus in the African context which of course he employed the traditional concept to the understanding of Jesus in Africa.

Dominant among his contributions are the traditional depiction of Jesus Christ as our ancestor,<sup>636</sup> Elder Brother and Sole-Mediator<sup>637</sup> within the Akan people of Ghana. He has considered the epistle to the Hebrews as our epistle with its sacrifice, priestly mediation, ancestral

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<sup>635</sup> On these Christological methodologies see James Okoye, "African Theology" *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (Karl Muller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen B. Bevans and Richard H. Bliese eds., Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 9-17. Also see [www.insect-africacatholictheology.htm](http://www.insect-africacatholictheology.htm) [10 November 2005]. Matthew Michael, "African Christological Discourse: A Prolegomena to the Emerging Christological Methodologies" (A Paper Presented During the Faculty Lectures of Kagoro ECWA Theological Seminary, March 8, 2007).

<sup>636</sup> On the works of Bediako see his *Christianity and Identity*, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions" *Sharing Jesus in the Two Third World* (Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden eds., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 81-121, *Jesus in African Culture* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990); *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), *Jesus in Africa* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000). On the discussions in Africa one problem which is associated with the ancestors is their salvation. On this see Richard J. Gehman, "Will the African Ancestors Be Saved?" *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* Vol. 14, no. 2 (1995), 85-97.

<sup>637</sup> To this he observed, "Our Lord is our Elder Brother who shared in our African experience in every respect, except in our sin and the alienation from God...Being our Elder Brother now ...he displaced the mediatorial function of our natural 'spirit-fathers..." Kwame Bediako, "Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective" *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology* ed. William A. Dryness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 102.

function and he has enquired that we need to hear the word from our own language. He has answered the African pluralistic ideas that “all roads lead to one direction,” which is believed that every man whether he or she believes in God or not will make heaven; hence, there are many roads to heaven. This of course he asked “How is Jesus Christ Lord?” He answers on the affirmative for Christ is unique for our salvation.

#### **b. God an Ancestor to the Son**

Another scholar one finds interesting within African Christological discourse is Charles Nyamiti of Tanzania. His work has sought to answer the allegations of the Christ our ancestor theology, which caused him to systematize doctrine of the Trinity to fit into the category of ancestorship. He observed that, “With an understanding of ancestral relationship it is possible to examine the inner life of God (trinity) and discover that there is an ancestral kingship among the divine persons: the Father is ancestor to the Son, the Son is the descendant to the Father.”<sup>638</sup> This Christological framework was challenged by Michael Matthew particularly the fact that the Father is ancestor to the Son that, at “what point has the Father died to attain such a status of ancestor?”<sup>639</sup> Death should not only be considered when raising questions to such divine ancestral depiction. I am with the view that biological children should be considered since we do not have any evidence of the Father having a wife.

#### **c. Biblio-incarnational Christology**

Another work by Abogunrin is the “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa,” which is an evangelical attempt to deal with the present discourse of Christology within the African continent. Abogunrin counteracts the contemporary Christological framework such the Bediako’s Christ our ancestor, Harry Sawyer’s Jesus as the Elder Brother, Jesus as Chief or King, blackness of Jesus, and the comparative analysis of Jesus with African Divinities and presented a biblical response to all those Christological frameworks in Africa, which are basically from the traditional view point. He urged for a Bible-centered

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<sup>638</sup> Charles Nyamiti, “The Trinity: An African Ancestral Perspective” *Theology Digest* (45, no.1, 1998), 21-22. On some of his Christological works see Charles Nyamiti, *Christ Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 9-11.

<sup>639</sup> Michael, “African Christological Discourse,” 11.

Christology and an incarnational-centered Christology, Christology in context and concluded in search for a living Christology in Africa and that “Christology in Africa context is the road to a truly incarnational faith and relevant Christianity in Africa”.<sup>640</sup> Another problem in his work is the assertion that “Jesus was born in Africa and grew up in the Hebrew context”.<sup>641</sup> Abogunrin has failed to recognize the fact that Jesus did not spend all his life within the Jewish context as he had observed. Part of his life was spent in Africa Egypt to be more specific (Matt. 2:13-15).

#### **d. Jesus a Contextualist Par Excellence**

We cannot study the Gospels within the African context without a careful analysis of the works of J. Dogara Gwamna for their high level of contextualization affirmed this truth. The aim of African theological discourse is to bring the Bible to the African *sitz im leben*. This has been illustrated in his book *Perspectives in African Theology*'s cover page with the scroll on the African continent. Various books have been written on African theological research but Gwamna's *Perspectives in African Theology* is exceptional for it focuses on contextualizing the contents of the scriptures to the African existential situation.

Gwamna uses the phrase “African Theology” but the aim and content is African Christian theology. He does not focus on supplying all answers to African theology but answering questions in the developing stage of African Christianity such as;

What are the theological nexus and direction? What are the African theologians saying? How do we fit Christianity into their *sitz im leben* (life context) without necessarily betraying the universal biblical *kerygma* (message)? Does global Christianity have anything to hear and learn from Africa in order to enrich it?”<sup>642</sup>

Gwamna also discussed the Jesus' metaphor of salt and light as impetus for socio-religious transformation in Nigeria. His exposure expressed in this work is intriguing for his exposition of the concept of Salt and light and his contextual challenges are unbelievable. This means

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<sup>640</sup> S. O. Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa” *Christology in African Context*. S. O. Abogunrin, J. O. Akao, D. O. Akintunde and Godwin M. Toryough eds., NABIS, Biblical Studies Series, no. 2, 2003), 22.

<sup>641</sup> Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa”, 21.

<sup>642</sup> Gwamna, *Perspectives in African Theology*, 11.

we have capable hands in African, who could visit the New Testament without betraying its contents. Gwamna depicted Jesus to be a “‘contextualist’ par excellence” and reveals that Jesus used these metaphors since they were common and popular for the Jewish people.

In all of these issues and quests for a better Africa, he has done great justice to the topics when it comes to interpreting the scriptures and applying the discourse to the African existential setting. The contents of his materials are New Testament based for we find about 95 percent of his works to be on the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament. He is static on positions and does not compromise the positions of the scriptures. His versatility is intriguing, interesting, precise, definite, educative and encouraging. His knowledge of the New Testament particularly the Gospels is shocking to every serious theologian in Africa and the West per se. He is capable of scholarly representation even beyond the African continent. These are good documentaries for the New Testament Studies and African theological studies within the continent and beyond. All his materials are easy to read and to understand but scholarly and to the taste of the average Nigerian Christian. Everyone appreciates his methodology of picking from the Bible and making it relevant to the African *sitz im leben*. Gwamna has expressed a sense of devotion, audacity, composure, orthodoxy, creativity, sincerity, academic maturity and passion for the African church.

#### **e. Jesus as a Revolutionary**

Godwin N. Toryough, an New Testament specialist at Benue State University, has depicted Christ as a revolutionary man in the African context, particularly in his event of cleansing the temple in the book of John 2:12-17. He defined revolution to be “a sudden and far-reaching major break in the continuity of development.” This, to him, is because the definition fits in the political, industrial and otherwise. Having looked at the life of Jesus he states Christ employed some level of violence to achieve his purpose though he did not commit any sin.<sup>643</sup>

#### **f. Jesus a Rural Dweller**

In his study of Jesus, Jesse N. K. Mugambi has depicted Jesus to be a rural dweller. In his work *Jesus and Rural Society*, he has considered the African context to be a context that best fits the life of Jesus. To him,

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<sup>643</sup> Toryough, 349.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem about five miles to the South of Jerusalem and he grew in Nazareth a small town with his parents who were predominantly poor dwellers. He spent most of his youth life in the rural province of Galilee, which influenced most of his ministry while on earth. We can be sure that the life of Jesus has been within the poor context.

We could see the depiction of Mugambi to be challenging for it really delves into the poor context of an African man, a position Thurman re-echoes. Of course for one to have a clear picture of an idea, he must have experienced it. Most of the white people cannot speak to the Africans because of lack of experience of the real Africanness within the African continent, which is poor socio-economic context. The work of Mugambi is a quest “par excellence” for fitting Jesus within the African context.

#### **g. The Blackness of Jesus**

Jesus being a black man follows the works of scholars from the liberation theology within the South African context, Congo and the United States. This grew out of the unjust inhumane treatment of the blacks in such areas. Jesus is being classified to be for the poor. For a white man to be saved by this black Jesus he or she must come into the black community to receive the black gospel which is by black faith. There are quite a number of works that have reacted to the black Jesus quest.<sup>644</sup>

#### **h. Girl Jesus of Zimbabwe<sup>645</sup>**

Recently, in a small city Guruve in Zimbabwe came the pronouncement of the incarnate form of Jesus in a form of a girl which formed an African Christian religion dominated by a woman. This girl came and has been

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<sup>644</sup> J. S. Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the ‘Black Christ,’ the ‘Mestizo Christ,’ and White Critique,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007), 26-53. W. J. Lyons, “The Hermeneutics of Fictional Black and *Factual Red*: The Markan Simon of Cyrene and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” *JSHJ* 4 (2006), 139-54. F. Harley, “The Narration of Christ’s Passion in Early Christian Art,” in J Burke et al. eds., *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Virginia, Queensland: Melbourne 2006) 221-58.

<sup>645</sup> Tahona Shoko, “Third Voice of Jesus: The Rise and Fall of ‘Girl Jesus Mudzimu Unoyera Church of Guruve, Zimbabwe” *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 96, 1 (2008).

performing miraculous and mighty things which got the nick-name “Girl Jesus.” She has been involved in rallying disciples and followers as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth. This girl formed the church named *Mudzimu Unoyera* church in Zimbabwe. This girl, 11 years old Tepsy Nyanhete also known as 'Girl Jesus', claims to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. People have been attracted from Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Zambia, South Africa and even the USA. It also involves racial and religious division which has been involved by blacks, coloureds, whites, Muslims and born-again Christians who are on record to have been “help” by this ‘Girl Jesus.’

It has said that over 160 children aged between 4 and 16 years were made captives and have been under the influence of this religion and exposed to occult practices of this Girl Jesus. These children live in the shrine, are forbidden from attending conventional schools, are not allowed to visit hospitals when ill and are also forced to learn a strange language which members call *Tritnoi*.

The historical background of the Girl Jesus church in Jakarasi, Guruve district in Zimbabwe is shrouded in the mysterious and extraordinary powers of the mother of ‘Girl Jesus,’ Entrance Munyoro. She is a cousin of the founder of the *Jesu we Chiweshe* (Jesus of Chiweshe) sect, Emmanuel Mudyiwa Dzangara, who founded the group around 1966 in the Mazowe district in Mashakara farm. Emmanuel claimed to be the black Jesus mandated by God to save the black people of Chiweshe. He saw himself as the man of God who could perform extraordinary miracles like healing, exorcism, removing goblins etc with divine authority. To this he was called *Jesus of Chiweshe*. He made disciples and followers in Mvurwi, Banket, Centenary, Chiweshe, Bindura and Guruve. In this regard he was greatly received by *Africans* as the reincarnation of Jesus in Africa continent. His followers strongly believe that the birth of Emmanuel Mudyiwa Dzangare is a fulfilment of the *Parousia*, Jesus Christ’s second coming which this time had occurred in Africa thereby providing an African Messiah. He died on May 19, 1989, laid to rest on May 21 and was known to have predicted that Jesus was going to come back in a dark cloud.

After the death of Emanuel, a young girl by the name of Tepsy arose in 1988 as new church leader. Her father was father Nyanhete and her mother Entrance Munyoro. The mother was a prophetess within the ‘Jesus of Chiweshe’ church and had powers to exorcise spirits. The birth



of Tepsy was thought to be a result of intercourse between Mary (human) and the Holy Spirit (divine).

Prophecy was known to be on the lip of Tepsy at the age of eight. It is believed girl Jesus was long prophesied by Emmanuel which the spirit of Emmanuel descended upon the girl. They people put on khaki shirts and trousers as a uniform that represents *Pheresi mutumwa* (God's messenger). They also put on red and white garments that respectively represent Moses and Mercy. Those that have acquired the Holy Spirit use a cross. As a result the church has come to be known by various names such as *Chechi y ekwa Manuwere* (Church of Emmanuel); *Chechi yekwaMudyiwa* (Church of Mudyiwa); *Chechi yezvikanda* ' (Church of leather armbands).

In this church, the parents of the Girl Jesus are treated with reverence in the church. While the mother Entrance Munyoro is called Amai Maria (Mother Mary), the father Nyanhete is referred to as Baba Josefa, (Father Joseph) which are all derived from Christianity. Almost all members of the church, both male and female, act as the “police board” that enforces peace, order and security. They keep dogs and sjamboks in the church. One of the youths said, “The police strongly guard against all the enemies and opponents from within and without the church in all sectors be it social, political, economic etc.”

The church leadership is solely vested in Entrance, the mother of ‘Girl Jesus,’ who is the strong force behind the scenes. ‘Girl Jesus’ is only used as a pawn to advance her mother’s selfish means. So the members only stand to benefit through the exploits of the other. They are being brainwashed through use *oímushonga* (medicines) so that they fail to see the evil behind the church. Its leadership is handpicked and administration skewed. The business of the church is clandestine and its operations are suspicious. Other critics say the church’s evangelization lacks transparency. This is because it is viewed as threatening cultural values, beliefs and norms of the local people.

The main teaching of Emmanuel Mudyiwa is that Jesus’ second coming had already taken place. So there was no need to for such strenuous practices of fasting because Jesus was among the people, so they are now free to do whatever they wish and thus ‘liberalism’ in resurrection. *Mudzimu Unoyera* uses a unique language called *Pirid*. They teach new converts especially young children this new language. The language is used in different contexts of life such as religious observances.

‘Girl Jesus’ teaches followers Tritnoi at the shrine while her mother Mai Maria does the translation. Neither the ‘Queen mother’ nor the girl either will confirm or deny whether the language of their religion is Tritnoi. It is taught, worshipped and sung in the church. For believers, Tritnoi is God’s kingdom on earth. A visit at the shrine in Guruve South explains it all.

The church believes in an incarnation of Jesus called ‘Girl Jesus.’ As the incarnation of Jesus she sometimes displays *moronda mashanu* (five wounds) that were shown to Thomas as proof of Jesus’ resurrection. Physically, ‘Girl Jesus’ has no breast and does not develop them until she dies. For members nothing is impossible within the church. The ‘Girl Jesus’ has immense healing powers and gifts of prophecy that are similar to her Biblical predecessors such Moses, Amos, Jeremiah.

*Mudzimu Unoyera* church members believe that ‘Jesus is their God.’ They offer their prayers and petitions directly to her. ‘Girl Jesus’ will answer them directly, there and then. She is ‘Jesus in action...the Jesus prayed in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus who is healing, and praying for the sick, poor, needy, disabled, deaf and dumb.’

Members worship either at the luxurious house belonging to ‘Girl Jesus’ or in a secluded open space in the yard. Sessions start on Friday and end on Sunday. Every member is expected to ‘respect’ ‘Jesus’ as she is the only ‘God’ with supernatural powers that enable her to move in air. Her followers spread blankets for her to step on when they move in a procession on their way to the place of worship. This is a sign of respect for their ‘God.’

Prayer is also central in the church. Members observe special prayer times and these are 3.00am, 9.00am, 12.00 noon, 3.00pm, and 12.00pm. Three is a significant number which is demonstrated and observed in funerary rites. Members pray intensively to boost their spirituality. ‘Girl Jesus’ also uses the cross during prayer sessions, which members face while they pray. They believe that the cross is a symbol of Jesus’ crucifixion by sinners at Golgotha.

In its theology, the church believes in the existence of three heavens. The first heaven is the world, the second heaven is the mother’s womb and the third heaven is the abode of God. And on the third day the spirit is delivered to God who dwells in the heavens.

The church also believes in an afterlife. They confer the departed souls to the world of the dead by calling the mediation spirits to help ‘cleanse’ the souls before they enter paradise. As such they have burial

rites that are similar to the Roman Catholic Church. Anyone who opposes or acts or violates church norms is beaten or stoned to death by the 'police.' One villager said, 'Girl Jesus' is a church of witches who use *zvikwambo* (spirits) to amass wealth and suck people's blood.

The church experiences great opposition from several groups of people in Guruve and Zimbabwe. Many are sceptical about the nature and operations of 'Girl Jesus.' Our findings showed that most local people are opposed to the church. Politically their relationship with the Zimbabwe government is unsound. At one time the President of Republic of Zimbabwe, R. G. Mugabe, sent the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) team to investigate the 'Girl Jesus' 'cult.' The investigating team also had the task of inquiring into alleged cases of child kidnapping at the shrine.

According to the Herald some 160 children were reported missing from conventional schools. Allegedly the children had been forced to attend 'Girl Jesus' classes and disappeared while visiting the 'cult'.<sup>646</sup> So the CIO went disguised as University of Zimbabwe students doing academic research. When church members discovered the investigation they were furious and 'Girl Jesus' retreated into hiding. As a result the church snubs all research activities by universities and colleges. In doing this the *Mudzimu Unoyera* church has antagonized the police and government. The mother of 'Girl Jesus' has since been arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to nine months imprisonment. The aim was to stamp out the suspicious 'cult.'

The local people have also expressed sentiments against the church. They complained that some of the less privileged children whom the church keep at the shrine and claimed to offer help ended up disappearing. The children also suffered food shortages. The church claims healing powers but deprived the children proper medication by prohibiting them from visiting local hospitals. The locals called this 'child abuse' and strongly called upon the Social Welfare Department to intervene and inspect the living conditions of the children.

Despite the problems that the church encounters, it has also scored some considerable success. Some villagers in Guruve said the 'Girl Jesus' family had previously lived a life of misery and poverty in round huts but now their misfortunes had been overturned. They said 'Girl Jesus' now owns a 'mansion' of 12 rooms, whilst her father and mother

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<sup>646</sup> Herald, 2006.

own another large multi-room house. Despite their rural set up, their standard of living had drastically changed to an affluent 'urban' type of life. They claim to derive their wealth by blessings from 'Girls Jesus.'

Villagers also said that Jesus greatly benefited from the gifts that she procured from the donors. In 1997 after complaining of painful feet due to walking long distances, she was given a horse by members of the church to ride on her sacred errands. Then in 2000 she was given a car after complaining of scorching sun while riding the horse. The sacred girl also received many other gifts such as cattle, money and clothes.

Furthermore the villagers also confirmed that the church members were now prosperous though using unscrupulous means through medicines and goblins. They also felt that despite the negative reports of child abuse, the church was making efforts to take care of children mostly orphaned by HIV/AIDS scourge.

Missiologists have observed that African Independent Churches are African Instituted Churches or African Indigenous Churches founded by Africans without reference to mission churches. They combine African traditional religious worldviews with Christianity. It is therefore important for us to explore this phenomenon in the Mudzimu Unoyera church.

Members of the church believe that their faith system is similar to the Roman Catholic Church. They claim to follow the beliefs and practices of the Catholics. In fact they regard Catholics as 'brothers' and 'sisters' in 'Girl Jesus.' In this respect they also believe in the idea of resurrection, claiming that 'Girl Jesus' is the same resurrected Christ of the Christian church who is both human and divine.

But a close scrutiny of the church shows that the church has no clear defined rituals, beliefs or moral teachings that are identical to the Catholic Church. They seem to draw their source of inspiration from the mystical powers. As a result some people criticise them as deriving power from *zvkwambo zvavana vadiki vavanouraya* (children spirits whom they kill). They use innocent children's blood and souls to appease goblins.

The *Mudzimu Unoyera* church and ATR both believe in the existence of the 'living dead,' the ancestors. The *Mudzimu Unoyera* church, like ATR, does not have written sacred scripture. The church does not take the Bible as authoritative since for them it is a mere narrative of the Jewish people and their historical dealings with God in their own religious and cultural context.

As typical of African cultural life that is punctuated with ritual practice, the *Mudzimu Unoyera* church has an elaborate system of rituals in its religious beliefs and practices. The *Mudzimu Unoyera* church has adopted the following rituals: life cycle, crisis rituals and rituals of afflictions. Circumcision marks transition from childhood to adulthood.

The *Mudzimu Unoyera* church believes in the salvation of humanity 'here and now.' The Biblical founding trio of Christianity, Father 'Joseph,' Mother 'Mary,' and Son 'Jesus' has its equivalence in the 'royal' family of, Father Nyanhete, Mother Entrance Munyoro and 'Jesus' Tepsy Nyanhete 'Girl Jesus.' Emmanuel's birth is also considered as replica of birth narratives in Jewish and Christian traditions.

Generally, we can be sure that the product of the quest for the historical Jesus is the several discussions of Jesus even in the African context particularly the emergence of traditional understanding of Jesus in search for the methodology that best fits the Christ of the African context in the quest for Jesus as our ancestor, elder brother, king, ruler, healer and liberator et cetera.<sup>647</sup> But do all the African exposition of the Gospels particularly the African Christological constructions valid for the understanding of Jesus from the Gospels? The Bible depictions of Jesus are the only reliable and authentic portraits of Jesus for all times. Despite that because of the inquisitiveness to fill the human empty tank as far knowledge is concerned, questions about Jesus are still come to mind with passion as efforts have been put in search for the understanding of Jesus in the African context.

#### **4. Jesus a Helpless Jew**

Because of the gap I found at the course of this research particularly within the works of the Western scholars who seemed to have ignored the contribution of Africans within the Jesus Quest, I have developed an understanding of Jesus as helpless Galilean Jew. A thorough study of Jesus must begin or not omit the contribution of Africans to the life of Jesus. This is an aspect of the Jesus Quest, which is basic to the

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<sup>647</sup> On a critical analysis of these African Christological frameworks see Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004). Robert J. Schreiter ed., *The Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002 eight printing).

understanding of the historical Jesus from both the backdoor and the front door.

I see Jesus as a helpless Jew, who was helped tremendously by the Africans. This understanding got its root in the life of Jesus towards and after his death as revealed in the Gospels. During the birth of Jesus, the helplessness of Jesus is made plain by the writer of the texts. The political and religious unrest during that time has caused him helpless until when he was taken to Africa. His helplessness begins with the status of his parent who had nothing of their own within the social strata. Their poor economic situation caused some people to have agitated for the humility of Jesus hence God has caused him to be born into such a family.

The situation at the time of his birth was growing so worst and was above the capacity of his parent; hence, it involved the Roman soldiers and the Roman government. Could Jesus have faced Herod at that time being the King of the Jews? Could he have revealed his divine power at that time? When Jesus was taken to Africa, what do you think he might have done? How old was he? Has he displayed some supernatural entities to the African children at that time? Should we see Jesus having friends in Africa in his childhood at that time? Was it possible for Mary the mother of Jesus to be holding him all the time without having compassionate and caring African women helping her? Jesus was very helpless that his Father had to command Joseph and Mary to take him to Africa. Was Africa the only place in existence during that time? Why not another place but Africa? Africa then became a place of refuge for the refugee, Jesus of Nazareth. He was accommodated and shielded. He was fed and giving water to bath. He was giving clothes to wear. Africans have contributed to the life of Jesus. Africans are known to be hospitable and communal.

The helplessness of Jesus has been throughout his life during his ministry when people contributed to his work. Women gave their possessions for the good of his ministry. People invited him for dinner and gave him things at the course of his ministry. Africa has not finished rendering her help to Jesus. During his death, beside his birth, an African Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry the cross which he could not carry in his state of helplessness. Though some said Simon was asked yet Simon had the will to reject the urge. After all, why must it be an African?

I like to say that a doctrine should not be based on one verse of the scripture unless it has reoccurrences being unfold in other texts. God himself agrees with the “scripture interprets scripture” when he helped

reveal another proof for the helplessness of Jesus, which was taken care of by the Africans. We should not forget that Jesus (God) was at the control of history. Africa has helped Jesus during his birth but it seems the effort was not popular and was being devalued. Jesus looked for a way to re-echo the help of Africa in his life. If Jesus had not wanted the Africans to be recognized why did he pick Africa and Africans to help him at the beginning of his life and at the end of his life?

Quite some works are written on the contribution of Africa and Africans in the New Testament<sup>648</sup> though these works have not exposed the heart of our quest. Tuesday Adamo is one of the prominent scholars in Nigeria and Africa, who are advocating for the place of the Africans in the Bible. Adamo has questioned the DeAfricanization of the scriptures. See David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (Benin: Justice Jeco Press and Publishers Ltd., 2005 edition). The interpretation of the Bible devouring the name Africa has being questioned by African scholars such as Prof. Adamo. He went ahead that words like *Kush, pun, nehesi, magan, mehuhha, and Ethiopia* are not properly translated. To him, the Cushite wife of Moses (Num. 12:1), the Cushite military man in David's royal army (2 Sam. 18:21, 31), Ebed-Melech, the Cushite who delivered the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 38:7-13), Africa as place of refuge for the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:13-19), Simon of Cyrene, the compassionate African (Mk. 15:21; Lk. 23:26), the Ethiopian Eunuch, the African minister of finance (Acts 8:26-40) and the African prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1) are De-Africanized. While the true sense of the words depicting the name Africa is expressed at the footnotes, Adamo argues that "there is a difference between the footnotes and the real biblical text."<sup>649</sup> Well, I like to say that it is evident that the Westerners employed their individualistic thinking to the Bible text and the Africans are thinking communally i.e. when one person did something the African community generally should be applauded. In Africa, it is believed that "a wound for one is a wound for all" and Mbiti's "I am because we are" is quite illustrative. This means that it is not only applicable to good times or when things are going fine with us but also

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<sup>648</sup> See Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*.

<sup>649</sup> Tuesday Adamo, "The Search for Africanness in the Bible," *African Journal of Biblical Studies* (Vol. 15, No. 2, October 2000), 20-30, 40.

to terrible times.<sup>650</sup> A thorough search for the historical Jesus must recognize Jesus being a helpless Jew who was helped by the Africans in history as revealed in the Gospels.

### **5. The Quest for Jesus at Night**

I equally think another thing that should have attracted the attention of scholars is what I called the “The Quest for Jesus at Night.” By this I mean the life of Jesus at night, which began in Israel and Africa during his birth, back to the land of Nazareth of Galilee and the land of Israel entirely. A good historical Jesus Quest must answer questions that surrounded his life in these geographical locations. When we say the “life of Jesus” it does not only mean during the day time. The life in the night time is part of his existence. Then, why should the historical quest for Jesus concentrate only on his life at the daytime? To me this is a limitation of the historical quest for the life of Jesus and the fictional quest. We need a new look from the known to the unknown.

This understanding agrees with the traditional understanding of Jesus spending 33 and half years on this earth and the fact that not all that he did has been recorded in the scriptures for even the world could not contain the things he did (John 20:30) when he incarnated which are the bases for this enquiry.<sup>651</sup> This, mathematically, means he spent about 12,045 nights throughout his life on earth. The Bible seems to be positive about the life of Jesus in the daytime but has not taken time to tell us what he did within the nights he spent on earth. The enquiry is what was Jesus doing during this number of nights? I know the answer is always that he was praying (Matt. 4:1-2; 14:23-25; 26:20, 31). But we all know what people do whether married and singles as we live day in and day

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<sup>650</sup> On the effort made to reconcile this problem in the American society see Michael G. Cartwright, “Wrestling with Scriptures: Can Euro-American Christians and African-American Christians Learn to Read Scriptures Together?” *The Gospel in Black and White* (Dennis L. Okholm ed., Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 71-116.

<sup>651</sup> The incarnation of Jesus has become a subject of hot debate among scholars. On the views on the incarnation see Murray A. Rae, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Norman Anderson, *The Mystery of the Incarnation* (London: Houghton and Stoughton, 1978). Clarence P. E. Burns, *Divine Becoming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).



out. If Jesus has always been human when he was on earth,<sup>652</sup> could he have done what most people do at night? Or what made him different and why?

It is clear that Jesus spent probably a day in the land of Israel then flew to Egypt after the Magi have gone (Matt. 2:12-14). He stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod (Matt. 2:15). This caused the scriptures to be fulfilled and led to the misery of many mothers and death of innocent children (v. 16). His pains caused the pain of many mothers and families during that time as Herod assassinated those children.

The word 'night' appears 19 times and the plural 'nights' about 3 times in the NIV New Testament Synoptic Gospels. Jesus is revealed to have prayed (Matt. 26:31; Lk 6:12 when he chose his disciples), walked on the water (Matt. 14:25), and fed the five and four thousands (Matt. 14:15; 15:35ff). At one usage of the night he was tempted (Matt. 4:1-2) and he ate the Last Super with his disciples (Matt. 26:20). The question is what happened to the rest of the nights he spent on earth?

Being a young man did he have some night thoughts for women? Should we see him playing and spending some time outside during the moon time as in the case of the Africans during the white moon? Was he hunting as the culture of our traditional fathers? Was he reading his books at night? Or was he busy with his carpentry work using a light source? This gap needs to be revisited in the field of historical Jesus research.

## **6. Towards Sound Historical Jesus Scholarship in Africa**

In view of the problems in biblical scholarship, generally the questions to be asked are; should the revealed Christian faith be sacrificed on the altar of the critical scholars? What are the stances of those who call themselves evangelicals regarding these constructed problems? How can we have a sound biblical scholarship in Africa? Peter writes, "Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1 Pet. 3:14-15). The task of the African scholars based

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<sup>652</sup> Luke 2:52 reveals that Jesus grew like any normal child after he was presented in the Temple intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. On the biological, psychological and spiritual identities of Jesus see Thomas H. West, *Jesus and the Quest for Meaning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 53-59.

on this verse is to respond to critical questions in New Testament studies. I believe there are other ways that could be discovered. However, conformity to these suggested principles would structurally energize African biblical scholarship for the better in terms of the historical Jesus research and properly expose the Jesus of the Gospels.

**a. Warm Religious Affiliation**

For us to have a sound biblical scholarship on the life of Jesus, Africans must use our true nature of our religious affiliation. By this, it means having the true and unique salvation, which links the African scholars with biblical inspiration. The African scholar must have a warm-heart and a personal relationship with Christ. The church in Africa needs not only members, but sound members, not only pastors and teachers, but genuine pastors and teachers who are Christians, not only scholars, but biblical scholars who depend upon the Holy Spirit for their understanding and exposition of biblical truths. Since Jesus is the center of the Christian faith and the Bible, of which the scholars claim to be expositors, then Jesus must be central to our studies. African scholars are expected to genuinely possess the Holy Spirit in their lives to enable sound biblical scholarship in Africa, which does not pay homage to critical Jesus research found in the West. By this, we can write about the Jesus experienced in Africa through the Gospels.

**b. Jesus Oriented Curricula in our Institutions**

With the influence of the historical Jesus research and its ignorance among some theological schools and universities among students of New Testament in particular, there is need for a better curriculum that will expose the students on the Jesus research, then expose good thoughts and emphasize the Jesus of the Gospels. Most of the curriculums in our schools are deficient on this count. For example, the University of Jos at the MA level, has a course “Current Trends in New Testament studies,” which addresses the historical Jesus research and “New Testament Theology,” which somehow talks about the understanding of Jesus from a theological point of view. ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, has “OT/NT Theologies,” which could mention Jesus as a theme like the University courses. The course “NT Background” could also mention some aspects of the critical issues in the study of the Gospels. ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, has “New Testament Theologies,”

“Historical Jesus,” “Ancient Pre-Chalcedonian Christologies” and “Studies in Synoptic Gospels”<sup>653</sup> in its curricula.

Most students of the seminaries are ignorant of the subject of the historical Jesus because there are no capable hands and materials that could help delved into such studies. The University of Jos is fortunate to have the topic discussed because of the concern I have had on “Current Trends in New Testament studies.” Besides, most of the courses are not taught in those schools such as Kagoro Seminary, despite having courses like the “Historical Jesus” and “Ancient Pre-Chalcedonian Christologies” in their curricula. These are evident in the ignorance of the subject among the seminaries. There is high need for a reconstruction of the curriculum, which will expose the historical Jesus research and emphasize the Jesus of the Gospels.

- I would like to suggest that our schools that are awarding such a degree in Africa, should inculcate introductory contents of the historical Jesus research and high contents for Jesus of the Gospels in their curriculum to enable the students get acquainted with the current discussions available in the area of New Testament. I recommend that the course “Historical Jesus” since the eighteenth century should be inculcated into schools’ curricula and a separate course, which will expose and defend the “Traditional Jesus” and “Advanced Christology,” which will root the students into the proper knowledge of Jesus of the Gospels in Africa.
- In terms of method for studying these courses, I will recommend also that historical-theological method should be used in exposing these materials in the classes; hence, the Gospels are not just historical materials but are theological-histories in terms of genre.
- For the lecturers for these courses, I recommend Prof. S. O. Abogunrin of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan because of his works on the subject and Dr. Robert Lillo of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos who has supervised this work in its thesis form and I believed he has been exposed too on the subject. These authorities can be *hired* to teach such courses in any interested school which wants

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<sup>653</sup> All these information are gotten from the schools’ curriculum for the programme, Master of Art in Biblical Studies (New Testament).

its students to be current in the field of New Testament. I could also be contacted.

- In terms of books, I recommend for the course for exposing the historical Jesus, the work of Robert Strimple's *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (1995), N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), Ben Witherington III's *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997) and Darrell Bock's *Studying the Historical Jesus* (2002). For works about the Jesus of the Gospels, I recommend all Christological works available by sound conservatives, Craig L. Blomberg's *Jesus and the Gospels* (1997) and *The Reliability of the Gospels* (1987), and Craig S. Keener's *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009). This book stands a better chance to defend this study within the African context.

#### **c. A Book to be Evaluated**

The most important and terrible book written by a liberal on the historical Jesus which I have read that needs to be evaluated by the African scholars and students is *Who Killed Jesus?: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (1995) by John Dominic Crossan. Copies of this book are available at Harry Boer's Library, TCNN, Bukuru, Jos. This book has presented the worse doubts and has denied the accounts of the Gospel writers on the death of Jesus than any other book I have read. Crossan, who based his ideas on Q and *Thomas*, which we have stated lacks portions on the miracles of Jesus and his death and resurrection and *The Gospel of Peter* to be foundational for his understanding of Jesus. All the accounts for the trials, execution, burial and resurrection of Jesus are classified under what he called "Christian propagandas" rather than history, a view shared by Reimarus, Strauss and Bultmann in his theory of "community creativeness." Crossan's book and this book must be evaluated in its entirety by African scholars.

#### **d. Right Environment**

Quite a number of books have shaped the understanding of Jesus and have given right environment for the study of Jesus. Such knowledge cannot be undermined within the African context. The work of Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009), Witherington III, *New Testament Story* (2002), and Wilkins and Moreland (eds.), *Jesus under Fire* (1995) have all shaped the face of evangelical discussions in the

West among many others. This is what Africa needs as we move into the Jesus research trying to understand its arguments and counteract them. Also, Africans must rededicate themselves for knowledge of the biblical languages particularly Greek, which has high influence on the understanding of the New Testament especially the Gospels. Although biblical languages have been considered as dead languages<sup>654</sup> and have been argued that students hardly use them after graduation from our universities, their values still remain in the thorough understanding of the Bible from its original context. This is still of high significance in biblical studies particularly New Testament and play high role for a better environment in doing Jesus studies in the African context and New Testament studies generally.

**e. Right Apologetic Attitude**

Despite the nature of the historical Jesus research, some positive values can be deduced particularly in the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. Jesus has been viewed as a Messiah and Spirit-filled person and of course its general usage of the Jewish context for the study of Jesus. There is need for the understanding of the Jewish cultures, which have similarities with the African cultures for some apologetics in the African contexts. For example, oral transmission and the belief about mysticism, which are both shared by the two cultures. This is a task Africans need for standing against historical Jesus research.

Generally, for sound biblical historical Jesus studies in Africa, which will move the continent forward, African scholars must adhere to these suggested areas in order to safeguard the Jesus scholarship on our continent. Jesus and the Gospels must be viewed as the early church and the church fathers viewed them, a view which emphasizes the acceptance of the Gospels without dividing the life of the historical Jesus from the faith of the early church.

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<sup>654</sup> Musa A. B. Gaiya, “Religion after 9/11: Implications for the Study of Religion in Nigerian Universities” (Inaugural Lecture at the University of Jos, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011), 17.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this research work, we have considered the place of the historical Jesus research in New Testament scholarship and have considered the traditional view of Jesus which has survived without objection till the Enlightenment. We have also tried to draw some implications for the study of Jesus in Africa.

Although some conclusions are drawn throughout the pages of the book, it should be stated that since the Early Church to the Enlightenment, the understanding of Jesus had been based on the traditional knowledge passed down since the Apostolic Period. However, with the emergence of liberalism in the eighteenth century, the need for a historical quest for Jesus came on board. This approach to the study of Jesus has challenged the traditional understanding of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. With the use of the historical critical method and influenced by the Enlightenment, Reimarus started the historical Jesus research. Many historical scholars joined in the liberal quest of Reimarus.

Today, the historical study has grown wings under what has been classified as the First, Second and Third Quests for the historical Jesus. Despite the positive values of the Third Quest, which is the most recent, the Quest has witnessed advanced liberal and fictional studies of Jesus under a group called the Jesus Seminar and has resulted in such popular projects as *The Da Vinci Code*. The historical Jesus research has used some historical criteria for the authenticity of the Jesus tradition, which formed the basis for all their ideas and has been within the framework of an anti-supernatural bias against the Gospels. It is right to state generally on the historical Jesus research that the portraits of Jesus given by the critical historical Jesus scholars are deficient portraits of the Jesus who came and lived, died, resurrected and ascended to be with the Father.

I conclude that the Gospels cannot be edited like human literatures. They are theological-histories that deal with the life, deeds and death of Jesus and his resurrection. The Gospels were written about 30 years after the death of Jesus. Within this period, Jesus tradition kept circulating in oral form among the eyewitnesses during the first century. I believe quite

good evidences prove that the canonical Gospels are good and reliable historical documents for the life of Jesus for the Gospels were inspired by the Holy Spirit with eye-witness information about the life of Jesus. Any portrait of Jesus revealed in the Gospels is the true Christ of history, faith, and of course, the Savior of those who believe.

I also recommend that African scholars should give considerable attention to the current issues in the historical Jesus research. Instead of researching simple and “straight jacket” topics in biblical scholarship, they must be prepared and capable to handle complex subjects in New Testament studies in Africa. As such, I will suggest below areas to serious and efficient *small children* and *elephants* in African biblical scholarship to research for better understanding of the historical Jesus research aiming at vindicating the Jesus of the Gospels from the accusations of critical modern historical scholars in the West. This would mean adding to the works of Abogunrin, Gwamna and this work from the Nigerian context. Apart from the quest for Jesus at night and Jesus the helpless Jew which are recommended above as means of introducing a new look on the study of Jesus and the Gospels, the followings are also recommended.

**a.** The Genre of the Gospels has not gotten proper treatment in the entire historical Jesus research. The question of the genre has been misunderstood and misguided which makes to have less influence on the historical Jesus research. Africans must see the need of affirming the genre of the Gospels.

**b.** A study of the Epistles needs to be done with the purpose of affirming the understanding of Jesus in the Gospels. We quite know that the Epistles have explained the “fact of Christ” (Hunter *Introducing*) which the Gospels have affirmed. We must aim at analyzing to see whether the Epistles have contributed to the understanding of Jesus in the Gospels or they have affirmed the understanding of Jesus from an African context. I believe the pattern of C. H. Dodd on the *Kerygma* from the Acts of the Apostles needs to be followed to see if we can reveal some facts that better explain Jesus of the Gospels as a response to the modern historical Jesus research. This should be researched on!

**c.** The relation of the Third Quest Jewish culture to the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies in the historical life of Jesus. There is need for us to know how relevant the Old Testament is for the understanding of the life and claims of Jesus in the Gospels. This should be researched for better understanding.



**d.** The understanding of Jesus as the founder of Christianity has been affirmed by many conservative scholars of Jesus. Recently, another wing of research came up to study Paul and conclude that Paul had founded the Christian faith. The Jesus Seminar having voted for the words of Jesus have turned to Paul in “The Authentic Letters of Paul” a book by Dewey, Hoover, McGaugy and Schmidt. This book distinguishes Paul’s letters from others attributed to him in the canon, disentangles components pieces of correspondence from the composite letters, places the authentic letters in their chronological order and historical context and restores Paul’s voice in a fresh translation from the original Greek ([www.westarinstitute.org/fellow](http://www.westarinstitute.org/fellow)). African biblical scholars need to study the founder of Christianity and tell us who he is from an African point of view. Study should be done on the Jesus Seminar depiction of Paul by the African students and scholars of New Testament.

I recommend these to students and scholars of New Testament to research for the better understanding which would shed great light on Jesus and the Gospels than relying on the West on these documents.



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