Is There Really a 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Evangelicals and the quest for the historical Jesus have not always had a close acquaintance or even a cordial relationship. One can understand the suspicion evangelicals have towards the quest since it has so often been dominated by mainline critical scholars who seemed bent on destroying the picture of Jesus enshrined in orthodox Christianity. Leander E. Keck writes, '"the historical Jesus" often has an anti-dogmatic, anti-theological, even anti-Christian ring'.[1] As a result historical Jesus research has been a 'no-go' zone for evangelicals since it has often been perceived to be out to destroy orthodox beliefs about Jesus.[2] When evangelicals have made brief incursions into historical Jesus research it has usually been with a strongly apologetic motive.[3] That of itself is entirely legitimate, but I would insist that more can be gleaned from this area of research than the construction of apologetic arguments, and perhaps there is even a place for evangelicals to make genuine contributions to this field of New Testament study. My own

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1 Leander E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 18.

2 The book by Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995) explains many of the apprehensions that evangelicals have about historical Jesus research. See also Frank Thielman, 'Evangelicals and The Jesus Quest: Some Problems of Historical and Theological Method', *Churchman* 115 (2001): 61-73.

3 See for example, I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); F. F. Bruce, *The Real Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985); James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: SCM, 1985); R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986); William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (rev. ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 233-41; Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995); Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin: College Press, 1996); Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (NSBT 3; Leicester: Apollos, 1997).

view is that the quest for the historical Jesus is both necessary and possible. For such reasons evangelicals should be earnestly engaged in the quest.[4]

In my judgement, the best vehicle for launching into historical Jesus research is through what has become known as the 'Third Quest' for the historical Jesus. Craig Blomberg offers accolades for the Third Quest when he states that 'one of the better-kept secrets from the twenty-first-century public is the so-called Third Quest for the historical Jesus'.[5] The Third Quest is certainly a vogue term in Gospel scholarship, but is it an accurate one? Some have questioned the usefulness of the term 'Third Quest' for describing trends in contemporary scholarship. For instance, is the Third Quest merely a fashionable but vacuous title in a needless taxonomy of Jesus research? Is there really anything distinctive about the Third Quest that sets it apart from other quests? Who is in the Third Quest? What has the Third Quest taught us? These are the questions I would like to address in this study in the hope that it might go some way towards vindicating the categorization of a Third Quest and also encourage evangelicals to investigate this domain of discourse in greater depth.

II. IS WRIGHT'S TAXONOMY A VALID ONE?

The 1980s saw an avalanche of studies on the historical Jesus. This resurgence of scholarship has been varyingly called 'Jesus research',[6] a 'renaissance of Jesus studies',[7] and N. T. Wright has labeled a certain

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4 Michael Bird, 'Should Evangelicals Participate in the "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus"?', *Themelios* 29 (2004): 5-14; *idem*, 'The Purpose and Preservation of the Jesus Tradition: Moderate Evidence for a Conserving Force in its Transmission', *BBR* 15 (2005): 161-85; *idem*, 'The Formation of the Gospels in the Setting of Early Christianity: The Jesus Tradition as Corporate Memory', *WTJ* 67 (2005): 113-34.

5 Craig L. Blomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 19. See also the positive appraisal of the Third Quest for evangelicals by Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?*, 50.

6 James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 9-29; *idem*, 'Jesus Research: A Paradigm Shift for New Testament Scholars', *AusBR* 38 (1990): 17-32; *idem*, 'From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings: the Emergence of Jesus Research', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 7 (1986): 221-30.

7 Marcus J. Borg, 'A Renaissance in Jesus Studies', *TToday* 55 (1988): 280-92; *idem*, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987), 14;

element of it the 'Third Quest for the historical Jesus'.[8] Wright breaks down modern Jesus scholarship into four phases: Old or First Quest (Reimarus to Schweitzer), No Quest (Bultmann and Barth), New or Second Quest (Käsemann to Jesus Seminar) and the Third Quest. Brian Rosner notes the irony that 'the twentieth century will be remembered for two world wars, but in New Testament studies for no less than three quests of the historical Jesus'.[9] Several authors have followed Wright in advancing this taxonomy[10] to the point that the Third Quest has become a well-

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idem, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1994), 3-17.

8 Stephen Neil and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (rev. ed.; Oxford: OUP, 1988), 379-403; N. T. Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus' in *ABD* (ed. David Noel Freedman; 6 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:800-1; *idem*, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (COQG 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 83-124.

9 Brian S. Rosner, 'Looking Back on the 20th Century: 1. New Testament Studies', *ExpTim* 110 (2000): 317.

10 Cf. e.g. Craig A. Evans, 'The Historical Jesus and Christian Faith: A Critical Assessment of a Scholarly Problem', *CSR* 18 (1988): 48-63; John Riches, *A Century of New Testament Study* (London: Lutterworth, 1993), 121-4; Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, ix; Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?*, 20-45; Craig A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3; Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 179-85; Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997); Craig A. Evans, 'The Third Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Bibliographical Essay', *CSR* 28 (1999): 532-43; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 10-12; Herbert Leroy, *Jesus. Überlieferung und Deutung* (3rd ed.; eds Michael Lattke and Ann Dawson; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 136-49; Mark Allan Powell, *The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ* (Oxford: Lion, 1999); Donald A. Hagner, 'An Analysis of Recent "Historical Jesus" Studies' in *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World* (eds Dan Cohn-Sherbok and John M. Court; BS 79; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 84-95; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 141-52; Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge, CUP: 2002), 245-7; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 85-92; Grant R. Osborne, 'History and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels', *TrinJ* 24 (2003): 5-22; David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New*

known entity in New Testament scholarship.[11] However, is Wright's periodizing of the epochs of scholarship completely accurate? Walter P. Weaver writes:

> The impression that remains with me after completing this work is that our usual views of the "Quests" of the historical Jesus do not do justice to the actual history. We have grown accustomed to appealing to the "Old Quest-No Quest-New Quest-Third Quest", but we may have to reconsider, for the common language represents a distinctively German perspective for the most part.[12]

Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 181-2.

[11] H. Alan Brehm, 'Will the Real Jesus Please Stand?: Evaluating the "Third Quest of the Historical Jesus"', *SWJT* 38 (1996): 4-18; Halvor Moxnes, 'The Theological Importance of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus' in *Whose historical Jesus?* (eds William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins; Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 132-42; M. Eugene Boring, 'The "Third Quest" and the Apostolic Faith' in *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative Critical and Social-Scientific Approach* (ed. Jack Dean Kingsbury; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998), 237-52; John P. Meier, 'The Present State of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain', *Bib* 80 (1999): 459-87; James D. G. Dunn, 'Can the Third Quest Hope to Succeed?' in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (eds Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NTTS 28.2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 31-48; Bruce Chilton, 'Assessing Progress in the Third Quest' in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, 15-25; Evans, 'The Third Quest', 532-43; Sean P. Kealy, 'Reflections on the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus' in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (eds Terrence Merrigan and Jacques Haers; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 45-60; Bird, 'Should Evangelicals Participate', 5-14; Tom Holmén, 'A Theologically Disinterested Quest? On The Origins of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus', *ST* 55 (2001): 175-97.

[12] Walter P. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1950* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1999), xi-xii. Cf. Dale C. Allison ('The Secularizing of the Historical Jesus', *PRS* 27 [2000]: 137) who thinks that there has been a tendency to view Jesus research through 'Bultmannian eyes'; James Carleton Paget ('Quests for the Historical Jesus' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* [ed. Markus Bockmuehl; Cambridge: CUP, 2001], 149): 'New Testament scholars have never quite escaped the tendency to create a Germano-centric portrait whose patterns are perhaps more in the eye of the beholder than self-evidently real.'

More recently, Dale C. Allison has attacked the idea of a 'Third Quest' on the grounds that it is ignorant of prior scholarship and attempts to assert the (over-) importance of its own significance.

> I am no antagonist of innovation, but I do not wish to trumpet it where it does not exist. The assertion that we have recently embarked upon a third quest [for the historical Jesus] may be partly due, one suspects, to chronological snobbery, to the ever-present temptation, instinctive in a technologically driven world, where new is always improved, to flatter ourselves and bestow upon our own age exaggerated significance, to imagine the contemporary to be of more moment than it is.[13]

Several other scholars have also criticized Wright's panoramic vision of twentieth-century Jesus research as skewed and inaccurate.[14] Colin Brown is representative of the view of many when he states:

> It is open to question whether the term Third Quest will succeed in establishing itself to describe post-Bultmannian developments in Jesus research. There is certainly no common methodology or sense of unity of purpose beyond the conviction that more may be known about Jesus than was known or admitted in the earlier quests. If the term Third Quest is taken to embrace all scholarly investigation of the relationship between the texts

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[13] Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 14.

[14] Colin Brown, 'Historical Jesus, Quest of' in *DJG* (eds Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 337-41; William R. Telford, 'Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus' in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (eds Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 33-74; Dale C. Allison, 'The Contemporary Quest for the Historical Jesus', *IBS* 18 (1996): 174-93; *idem*, 'The Secularizing of the Historical Jesus', *PRS* 27 (2000): 135-51; Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 6; Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 13; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussions and New Proposals* (JSNTSup 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 28-62; *idem*, 'Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus' in *Reading the Gospels Today* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 32-7; Clive Marsh, 'Quests of the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective', *Bib Interp* 5 (1997): 403-37; Maurice Casey, 'Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*', *JSNT* 69 (1998): 96; Paget, 'Quests', 148-9.

> of the NT and the historical figure of Jesus in the light of current knowledge of the first-century world, we are at once confronted with a variety of conflicting views and methods. At first sight it may appear to be a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. For connections between current research and what has gone before appear to continue without interruption. If there is a common theme, it lies in the belief that Jesus was not the Jesus of liberal Protestantism or of the New Quest, but a historical figure whose life and actions were rooted in first-century Judaism with particular religious, social, economic and political conditions.[15]

Brown raises four particular issues with the term Third Quest. (1) Whether it is a legitimate description of 'post-Bultmannian developments in Jesus research' and 'all scholarly investigation of the relationship between the texts of the NT and the historical figure of Jesus'. (2) The lack of any 'common methodology'. (3) The Third Quest seems to be part of a train of Jesus research which has continued 'without interruption'. (4) He surmises that its only possible distinctive is the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus.[16]

Several things can be said by way of response. First, it is indeed the case that there was never a moratorium on Jesus questing.[17] What ended with Schweitzer were the romantic, rationalistic, and liberal lives of Jesus, not Jesus questing *per se*.[18] In fact, Jesus research continued in earnest in many quarters, with significant works in between the wars coming out of continental Europe, Britain and the USA.[19] There were, however, several

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[15] Brown, 'Historical Jesus', 337.

[16] Brown, 'Historical Jesus', 337; cf. *idem*, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus' in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, eds Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 74-8.

[17] Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', 798; *idem*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 21-5. The idea of a 'no-quest' predates Wright and can be found in earlier authors such as Fred H. Klooster, *Quests for the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 47-63, and W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus: A Guide Book* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 71-4.

[18] A point already acknowledged by some, e.g. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 144-5.

[19] Porter ('Reading the Gospels', 33) states: 'it simply is not true that this became a period in which there was no questing after the historical Jesus'. Marsh ('Quests for the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective', 414) writes that 'labeling this period that of "No Quest" is at best misleading, and at worst a sinister abdication of moral responsibility ... there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a period of the No Quest, only a

factors that contributed to a general decline in the amount of historical Jesus study being done. (1) Bultmann's idea of Jesus as 'a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament'[20] left little room for Jesus in biblical theology. Likewise his comments that, 'I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus' and 'Whoever wishes to put "Jesus" in quotations marks as an abbreviation for the historical phenomenon with which we are concerned is free to do so' were unlikely to promote wide-scale confidence in the prospect of finding a historical Jesus.[21] Additionally, Bultmann's exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:16 made interest in Jesus' historical person an existentially illegitimate attempt at justification by works.[22] In response to criticism, Bultmann wrote many years later that 'from the discrepancy which I emphasize between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the kerygma it does not at all follow that I destroy continuity between the historical Jesus and the primitive Christian proclamation'.[23] But the damage had already been done! (2) Most exponents of form criticism proceeded on the assumption that the Gospels inform us about the life setting of the early church with only the 'whisper' of the voice of the historical Jesus embedded within them.[24]

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period in which the nature of the available sources was radically questioned and the creativity of the earliest Christian communities emphasized'. Allison ('Contemporary Quest', 177): 'No quest? Maybe reduced quest, but certainly not no quest. The time between Schweitzer and Käsemann was also when so many divinity students throughout Britain and North America were learning about Jesus from the first edition of A. M. Hunter's *The Work and Words of Jesus* (1950), a popular digest of the allegedly non-existent quest.' Paget ('Quests', 149): 'the account of a period of "no quest" fails to take into consideration the situation in the English-speaking world'.

20 Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament Theology* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols; London: SCM, 1952), 1:3.

21 Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 8, 14.

22 Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul' in *Faith and Understanding* (London: SCM, 1969), 241-4

23 Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus' in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (eds Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville; Nashville: Abingon, 1964), 18.

24 R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 225. Note also the skepticism towards trying to write a biography of Jesus in some strands of English scholarship: Edwyn

(3) Barth's theological program had no room to accommodate historical Jesus research resulting in the *de facto* relativisation of historical study of Jesus. Thus 'moratorium' is certainly too strong a word and I prefer to speak of a general decline in historical Jesus study facilitated by the perception in some quarters of the quest as either theologically illegitimate or methodologically impossible. Thus James Robinson's *New Quest*[25] is only really *new* from the perspective of the Bultmannians until the rebellion led by Käsemann who argued that the early church never lost interest in the historical Jesus as being properly basic to faith.[26]

Second, there is undoubtedly a degree of subjectivism involved in the postulation of three distinct quests. Why not have four or six?[27] Yet the best hypotheses are usually the simplest. The delineation of First, Second and Third Quest is a fair overview of major trends in research and is a simple and apt designation. Of course you can have endless variations on a theme (note Wright's comments about intersections between the Wredebahn and Schweitzerbahn),[28] but as an overview the framework that Wright proposes is a reasonable description of a relatively complex morass of debate and ongoing discussion. In the words of H. Alan Brehm: 'While any division of this branch of New Testament research into discreet segments is questionable, it nevertheless remains valuable as an organizing principle.'[29]

Hoskyns and Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), 171.

25 James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959).

26 Ernst Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus' in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; London: SCM, 1964), 15-47. Cf. Dieter Lührmann ('Jesus: History and Remembrance' in *Jesus Christ and Human Freedom* [eds E. Schillebeeckx and B. van Iersel; New York: Herder & Herder, 1974], 46) writes, 'if the kerygma was in fact an historical given of this kind, and its substance was Jesus of Nazareth, an historical individual, surely one then must ask what support that kerygma had in that individual and his activity'.

27 Marsh, 'Quests for the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective', 415-16.

28 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 21.

29 Brehm, 'Will the Real Jesus Please Stand?', 5, n. 9. Cf. Donald L. Denton (*Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies* [JSNTSup 262; London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004], 7): 'If one cannot exactly adopt Wright's specific use of the New Quest/Third Quest distinction, one can appreciate his effort to identify root methodological issues that must be addressed if

Third, Bockmuehl argues that it is 'premature' to speak of a Third Quest since it must compete with advocates of the Q-Thomas scholarship (i.e. Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack, etc.).[30] Bockmuehl's unstated assumption appears to be that for a strand of scholarship to be recognized as a Quest it must be either unanimously accepted or else be dominant in scholarly circles. But this seems like an odd criterion to use in determining what counts as a Quest. Does the 'New Perspective on Paul' have to be unanimously accepted or dominant in Pauline scholarship before we recognize that the label describes a legitimate trend in Pauline studies? I think not.

Fourth, several scholars think that Wright coined the Third Quest as a catch phrase designating all recent Jesus scholarship. For instance, Porter complains that under Wright's taxonomy Eduard Schweizer can write one book on Jesus during the Second Quest and another book on Jesus during the Third Quest with essentially the same criteria of authenticity.[31] The implication is that Schweizer is paradoxically a participant in both the Second Quest and the Third Quest with the same basic methodology. Porter assumes, however, that the Second Quest is over, therefore placing Schweizer in the constituency of the Third Quest. But Wright never suggests that the Second Quest has terminated.[32] The three quests are not strictly divided chronologically but are pursued concurrently in each generation accounting for the continued existence of similar

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discussion among competing portraits of the historical Jesus is to advance.'

30 Markus Bockmuehl, 'Jesus of Nazareth in Recent Debate', *Epworth Review* 21 (1994): 20; *idem*, *This Jesus: Martyr, Messiah, Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 6.

31 Eduard Schweizer, *Jesus* (trans. David E. Green; London: SCM, 1971); *idem*, *Jesus: The Parable of God* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1994); Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 55.

32 Allison ('The Contemporary Quest', 175, n. 7): 'Obviously Wright's taxonomy is not chronological.' Allison ('Secularizing of the Historical Jesus', 135, n. 5): 'For Wright himself, however, the new quest continues beside the third quest.' DeSilva (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, 182, n. 2): 'An important insight developed by Wright is that the "three quests" are not strictly divided chronologically but that each quest has continued in some sense, to be pursued in each generation.' Denton (*Historiography and Hermeneutics*, 6): 'Both quests in fact continue to the present, running concurrently.' Contrast this with Robert W. Funk (*Honest to Jesus* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996], 63): 'the new quest came to a close around 1975'; and Stephen J. Patterson (*The God of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998], 42): 'the new quest lasted about ten years'.

methodologies. Wright thinks of the Second Quest as continuing in some circles (it was given a shot in the arm by the Jesus Seminar).[33]

One can grant that there has been a steady stream of Jesus research in the twentieth century,[34] but the question remains as to how one classifies it. When the 'Second Quest' came on the scene, there were critics who stated that it wasn't all that new and not all that different from the old quest.[35] Yet the term 'Second Quest' is a useful label for the Bultmannian

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[33] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 28-82.

[34] James I. H. McDonald ('New Quest – Dead End? So What about the Historical Jesus?', *Stud Bib* [1988] II: 151) refers to Jesus research as 'rather like Hinduism from the Upanishads onwards – an overarching unity, a unity that comprehends rich diversity. Thus the most recent new quest is not to be taken in isolation from what has gone before – nor does it claim to do otherwise.' Robert J. Banks ('Setting "The Quest for the Historical Jesus" in a Broader Framework' in *Gospel Perspectives II: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* [eds R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981], 61) declares: 'Despite Schweitzer's strictures, there has been an unbroken interest in the "quest for the historical Jesus" in Anglo-Saxon circles'; Marsh ('Quests for the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective', 425) views the Quest not as 'a single scholarly enterprise but as a series, or collection, of local skirmishes surrounding the interest shown in the historical figure of Jesus'. In the words of Porter ('Reading the Gospels', 37): 'I believe that we can see a single yet multi-faced quest, certainly since the eighteenth century, but perhaps even since the earliest reflection upon Jesus.' Allison ('Secularizing of the Historical Jesus', 136) remarks 'that questing for Jesus was alive and well in the decades after Schweitzer, is more than confirmed by the hundreds upon hundreds of articles then written on the historical Jesus as well as by the surveys of research that come from that time'. John Reumann ('Jesus and Christology' in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* [eds Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989], 504) states about post-Schweitzer research: 'by and large it was "The Quest of the Historical Jesus – Continued"'. Paget ('Quests', 148): 'the term "Third Quest" can give a false sense of uniformity to present-day Jesus scholarship'. Thielman ('Evangelicals', 64): 'the three quests can be viewed as one quest to reconstruct a Jesus different from the Jesus of the gospels'.

[35] McDonald, 'New Quest – Dead End?' 151; W. O. Walker, 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology', *ATR* 51 (1969): 51-2; Banks, 'Setting', 61-2; Stephen E. Fowl, 'Reconstructing and Deconstructing the Quest of the Historical Jesus', *SJT* 42 (1989): 319-33; Leander E. Keck, 'The Second Coming of the Liberal Jesus?', *Christian Century* 111 (1994): 784-7; Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics*, 4.

school and its reinvigoration of *Jesu-Forschung*. Likewise, the Third Quest is a helpful tag to distinguish some streams of scholarship from this Second Quest[36] with its appeals to *Religionsgeschichte* and Hellenistic background, and from the First Quest with its anti-dogmatic proclivities. That seems reasonable all the more considering that the Third Quest also stands over and against the Jesus Seminar/Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus approach (spawned out of the Second Quest) in terms of method and conclusions,[37] a fact which many scholars have strangely failed to notice by mistaking the Jesus Seminar as part of the Third Quest.[38] Robert Funk, the convener of the Jesus Seminar, is crystal clear on this issue. He distinguishes between the work of the Seminar and that of the Third Quest, and seems to regard the latter as a feat of pseudo-scholarship.[39] Hence the criticism that the term 'Third Quest' does not adequately encompass 'all scholarly investigation of the relationship between the texts of the NT and the historical figure of Jesus' (Brown) misses the target completely since the term 'Third Quest' does not claim to represent all Jesus scholarship across the board. In fact, the Third Quest is easily distinguished from the Second Quest and their Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus progeny.

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36 Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics*, 5.

37 Cf. Dunn ('Can the Third Quest Hope to Succeed?', 33): 'the second quest has enjoyed a recent flowering in the portrayal of Jesus draped in Cynic clothes'. Boyd (*Cynic Sage or Son of God?*, 59) characterizes the Jesus Seminar as the 'Post-Bultmannian Quest'. Bockmuehl ('Jesus of Nazareth in Recent Debate', 19) calls the Jesus Seminar 'The "New Quest" Resurrected'. Moxnes ('Theological Importance', 133, n. 5): 'I think the Seminar's votes on the authentic words of Jesus is an exercise more typical of the interests of the second quest.'

38 Those that erroneously regard the Jesus Seminar as part of the Third Quest: Arland J. Hultgren, 'The Jesus Seminar and the Third Quest', *Pro-Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 266-70; Brown, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus', 75; Leroy, *Jesus*, 139-40; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 4; Porter, 'Reading the Gospels', 35; Boring, 'The "Third Quest" and the Apostolic Faith', 238-41; David S. du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus: Current Trends in Jesus Research', in *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teaching of Jesus and its Earliest Records* (eds Michael Labahn and Andreas Schmidt; JSNTSup 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 110-11; Meier, 'Present State', 459; Thielman, 'Evangelicals', 64.

39 Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 65.

Fifth, there is no denying that there are genuine points of contact between the Third Quest and the previous quests.[40] Yet simply because there are continuities between the Third and Second Quest, that is no reason to regard the Third Quest as part of an uninterrupted stream of scholarship. The very fact that both Quests examine the same subject matter of the 'historical Jesus' means as a matter of course that they are bound to say similar things on some occasion. Additionally, all scholarly enterprises stand on the shoulders of those who go before them. One should not have to reinvent the historical Jesus wheel before recognition of the newness and innovation of the Third Quest is acknowledged. The question then is, what are the discontinuities between the Second and Third Quest and do they constitute a distinct delineation between the two? To that question we now turn.

III. DISTINCTIVES OF THE THIRD QUEST

If there is nothing distinctive about the Third Quest (in conclusions or methodology),[41] then it might denote nothing more than 'a new burst of

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[40] Brown, 'Historical Jesus', 337; Helmut Koester, 'Jesus the Victim', *JBL* 111 (1992): 5; Telford, 'Major Trends', 60-1; Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 52-3; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 98-9.

[41] Several scholars have advocated that a distinguishing feature of the Third Quest is the lack of theological agenda (Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', 800; *idem*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 84, 87; Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: A Comparative Approach* [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 10-11, 46; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 109-10; Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?*, 49; James H. Charlesworth, 'The Historical Jesus: Sources and a Sketch' in *Jesus Two Thousand Years Later* [eds James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 2000], 115-16; *idem*, *Jesus within Judaism*, 16-17, 22; Boring, 'The "Third Quest" and the Apostolic Faith', 241; Birger Pearson, 'The Gospel According to the Jesus Seminar', *Religion* 25 (1990): 320; Walter P. Weaver, 'Reflections on the Continuing Quest for Jesus' in *Images of Jesus Today* [eds James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver; Valley Forge: TPI, 1994], xiv), but this seems very unlikely. The fact is that we all have agendas and biases and they are exhibited to varying degrees by authors. Crossan and Funk write with a view to reform (or deconstruct) American Christianity, and others like Boyd (*Cynic Sage or Son of God?*) possess a clear apologetic purpose in their agenda. On theological agendas and their influence on the quest see William Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox, 2005). For this reason I do not think that lack of an agenda is a distinctive of the Third

activity' in Jesus research.[42] According to Wright, the unique elements of the Third Quest include rethinking 'what might be involved in understanding Jesus within this [Second Temple Jewish] background'.[43] The Third Quest also signifies that dimension of scholarship which regards Jesus as an eschatological prophet announcing the long-awaited kingdom, and which undertakes serious historiography around that point.[44] Thus, minimally speaking, the constituent elements are attention to Jesus' Jewishness and eschatology.[45] There are several other features which I regard as being characteristic (though not necessarily unique) to the Third Quest.

First, the criterion of dissimilarity is used more cautiously, modified or even abandoned in the Third Quest. Commonly it was held that material is authentic if and only if it is distinctive of Jesus, that is, dissimilar from the tendency of Judaism and of early Christianity.[46] The purpose of this criterion was to establish 'a critically assured minimum' of information upon which one could begin to say things about the historical Jesus (after which it could be used in conjunction with coherence and multiple-attestation, etc.).[47] The problems with this criterion are manifold.[48]

Quest, though one could say that there is so much diversity in the Third Quest that there is no *uniform* theological agenda. See further, Telford, 'Major Trends', 58-9; Holmén, 'A Theologically Disinterested Quest?', 175-97; Hagner, 'An Analysis', 88-9.

42 Marsh, 'Quests for the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective', 403.

43 Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', 3:800.

44 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 85-6.

45 On how Jesus' Jewish background effects his eschatology see Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21–25* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

46 For definitions see Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; 2nd ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963 [1921]), 205; Ernst Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; London: SCM, 1964), 37; Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 39-43; *idem*, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (London: SPCK, 1970), 71. For a history of the criterion note the work by Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (trans. M. Eugene Boring; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002 [1997]).

47 N. A. Dahl, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (ed. Donald H. Juel; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991 [1953]), 97; Harvey K. McArthur, 'Basic Issues: A Survey of Recent Gospel Research', in *In Search of the Historical*

(1) What is 'distinctive' could be understood as either 'unique' or else 'characteristic', which are not the same thing. That which most characterized Jesus may not have been what was unique to him. (2) This criterion presupposes a confident knowledge of both Judaism and early Christianity, both of which were highly complex and diverse, and our sources about them are scant. (3) This criterion only permits material to be deemed authentic if all traces of Judaism or Christianity are removed. But we are then left with a historical figure that bears no resemblance to his cultural environment and has no continuity with the beliefs of the early church. Raymond Brown suggested that such a criterion is a 'monstrosity: a Jesus who never, said, thought, or did anything that other Jews said, thought, or did, and a Jesus who had no connection or relationship to what his followers said, thought, or did in reference to him after he died'.[49] A similar point is made by Richard B. Hays where dissimilarity produces a Jesus who 'is necessarily a free-floating iconoclast, artificially isolated

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Jesus (ed. Harvey K. McArthur; London: SPCK, 1970), 143; Walker, 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus', 48-9; David L. Mealand, 'The Dissimilarity Test', *SJT* 31 (1978): 47; Gerd Theissen, 'Historical Scepticism and the Criteria of Jesus Research *or* My Attempt to Leap Across Lessing's Yawning Gulf', *SJT* 49 (1996): 152; Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. James E. Crouch; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 14; Tom Holmén, 'Doubts about Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the Main Criterion of Jesus-of-history Research' in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, eds Craig A. Evans and Bruce D. Chilton (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 54-6; Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 135-6.

[48] See criticisms in Morna D. Hooker, 'Christology and Methodology', *NTS* 17 (1971): 480-7; *idem*, 'On Using the Wrong Tool', *Theology* 75 (1972): 570-81; D. G. A. Calvert, 'An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus', *NTS* 18 (1972): 207-19; Neil J. McEleney, 'Authenticating Criteria and Mark 7:1-23', *CBQ* 34 (1972): 440-2; Mealand, 'The Dissimilarity Test', 41-50; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 17; W. G. Kümmel, 'Nachwort' in *Dreissig Jahre Jesusforschung (1950-1980)* (BBB 60; Bonn: Beltz Athenäum, 1985), 535-41; Holmén, 'Doubts about Double Dissimilarity', 47-80; Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity*, 70-6; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 104-7.

[49] Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 827.

from his people and their Scripture, and artificially isolated from the movement that he founded'.[50]

Consequently there have been several modifications to how the criterion is applied. (1) Some have suggested that the criterion of dissimilarity should be limited to a positive examination of the historical traditions underlying a pericope, instead of being applied to disprove authenticity.[51] (2) Others have abandoned dissimilarity from Judaism in order to keep Jesus Jewish.[52] (3) Wright and Theissen have significantly revamped the criterion so as to allow for continuities and discontinuities between Jesus, Judaism and the early church. Wright uses a criterion he terms 'double dissimilarity and double similarity'. The idea is to find a saying or deed that makes sense within Judaism and also represents a starting point for the early church.[53] Similarly, Theissen has put forward a case for 'historical plausibility' where we try to identify whether a saying or action makes sense within the life setting of Jesus. Specifically, does it exhibit a *plausible context* in Palestinian Judaism and does it account for the *plausible consequence* within early Christianity?[54]

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50 Richard B. Hays, 'The Corrected Jesus', *First Things* 43 (1994): 45; cf. Joel B. Green, 'In Quest of the Historical: Jesus, the Gospels, and Historicisms Old and New', *CSR* 28 (1999): 547.

51 Hooker, 'Christology and Methodology', 486; Calvert, Examination of the Criteria', 209-18; McEleney, 'Authenticating Criteria', 442; Mealand, 'Dissimilarity Test', 47; Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 64; Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 21; Holmén, 'Doubts about Double Dissimilarity', 49-50; Craig A. Evans, 'Authenticity Criteria in Life of Jesus Research', *CSR* 19 (1989): 25; *idem*, 'Life of Jesus' in *Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 445.

52 Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 86; Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*, 6; Evans, 'Authenticity Criteria', 25; *idem*, *Jesus and his Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 21; Holmén, 'Doubts about Double Dissimilarity', 51, 59-62, 74-5; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 16-17; Bruce D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (GNS 8; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 86-7; Theissen, 'Historical Scepticism', 163; Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 169.

53 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 131-3.

54 Theissen 'Historical Scepticism', 152-70; Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 116-18; Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 175. See also: Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (trans. Herbert Danby; London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), 127; Evans, *Jesus and his Contemporaries*, 19-21; Craig L. Blomberg, *The*

What about the future of the dissimilarity criterion? I envisage that we will observe the demise of the criterion of dissimilarity in the next twenty years. Dissimilarity in relation to Judaism has been practically abolished already; in relation to the early church it still persists.[55] Generally speaking, the criterion is employed in relation to the church in 'a controlled manner' in the Third Quest.[56] I submit that there are two considerations which will mark the end of its use as posing a discontinuity between Jesus and the early church. (1) Continuity between Jesus and the early church is becoming more widely recognized, particularly in the Third Quest.[57] Steven Bryan states, 'It may be anachronistic to think of Jesus as the "founder" of Christianity', but Christianity must in some sense be seen as part of his effective history.'[58] Markus Bockmuehl is similar, 'it can be historically legitimate to see Jesus of Nazareth in organic, causal, continuity with the faith of the early Church'.[59] Dunn comments, 'If protest needs to be lodged against the attempt, implicit or explicit, to begin by distancing Jesus from his ancestral religion, protest needs equally to be lodged against the equivalent attempt to distance Jesus from the churches which grew up from his work.'[60] (2) A radical discontinuity between Jesus and the early church is reduced when it is realized that the early church may have selected and maintained genuine sayings of Jesus in accordance with their own theological tendencies so as to emphasize what was important to them.[61] Theissen and Winter state, 'Fitting well into the

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Historical Reliability of John's Gospel (Leicester, England: IVP, 2001), 63-4; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 106-7; Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTS 117; Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 8-11.

55 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 76; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 107, n. 103.

56 Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 169; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 104-6.

57 Cf. Marinius De Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 21; Bockmuehl, 'Jesus of Nazareth in Contemporary Debate', 28; Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 17-18, 418; R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (London: SCM, 1963), 41; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 107.

58 Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 9.

59 Bockmuehl, *This Jesus*, 8.

60 Dunn, 'Can the Third Quest Hope to Succeed?', 36.

61 Oscar Cullman, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM, 1967), 189; Evans, 'Life of Jesus', 444-5.

context of post-Easter Christianity does not exclude the possibility that it also fits well into the context of Jesus' ministry.'[62]

Second, a further methodological peculiarity of several studies in the Third Quest consists of forming hypotheses in response to questions posed by our sources or a more holistic approach.[63] For instance A. E. Harvey analyzes Jesus from the perspective of the 'constraints' imposed by the crucifixion, monotheism, and Law.[64] E. P. Sanders commences his study with several 'almost indisputable facts' about Jesus' life and sets his starting point for his study as Jesus' controversy surrounding the temple and working onwards from there.[65] N. T. Wright proceeds in the attempt to answer several macro-questions: How does Jesus fit into Judaism? What were Jesus' aims? Why did Jesus die? How and why did the early church begin? Why are the gospels what they are?[66] Paula Fredriksen establishes a beachhead in historical Jesus research with the observation that Jesus was executed as a political insurrectionist but his followers were not, and then goes on to ask why.[67] Dale C. Allison proposes an approach that commences with a particular 'paradigm' or an 'initial hypothesis'. The paradigm that Allison follows is that of Jesus as an eschatological prophet.[68] This stands in contrast to previous strategies that seemingly sift the Gospels for residue of the historical Jesus and then try to make broad blanket pronouncements about Jesus. The problem of this latter approach is that it misses the forest for the trees. Thus in contradistinction to the Second Quest, with its strong emphasis on *Traditionsgeschichte* and its atomistic study of individual units, is the process evident in the Third Quest, with a concern for a holistic presentation of the evidence, the formulation of paradigms, development of narratives, and proposals of hypotheses and verification.[69] In other words, the Third Quest paints with a thick brush and on a large canvass.[70]

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62 Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 207.

63 Brown, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus', 76; Telford, 'Major Trends', 50-1; Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics*, 6-7.

64 A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History: The Bampton Lectures, 1980* (London: Duckworth, 1982).

65 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11-12.

66 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 89-113.

67 Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 8-9.

68 Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 33-44.

69 Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics*, 155-67.

70 I owe this image to Dr Robert L. Webb.

Third, Wright characterizes the Second Quest as following the 'thoroughgoing skepticism' of William Wrede whilst the Third Quest follows the 'thoroughgoing eschatology' of Schweitzer in pursuing the apocalyptic portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptics.[71] The apocalyptic approaches of Allison, Ehrman and Knight give credence to resurgence in the Schweitzerean approach.[72] Concurrently, there is more optimism in the Third Quest concerning what can be known of Jesus *from the canonical Gospels*. Contrast the following statements:

> No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus.[73]

> The dominant view today seems to be that we can know pretty well what Jesus was out to accomplish, that we can know a lot about what he said and that those two things make sense within the world of first-century Judaism.[74]

The problem with consistent skepticism is that it fosters a rather convenient vacuum upon which one can effectively give fantasy free rein in the portrait of Jesus drawn up. However, as Fowl argues, if one author's perspective contradicts that of the Gospel writer, then the onus is surely on the author to demonstrate how the Gospel writer's view came to be so thoroughly misguided.[75] A penetrating criticism of such an approach was uttered by Cadbury over half a century ago:

> When I read a life of Christ that in the most careful approved fashion describes at length the unhistorical character of the gospels and the aspects

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71 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 28-9.

72 Allison, Jesus of Nazareth; Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: OUP, 1999); Jonathan Knight, *Jesus: An Historical and Theological Investigation* (UBW; London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004).

73 Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. I. Mcluskey, F. Mcluskey & J. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 13.

74 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 2. On recent optimism for using the Gospels to study the historical Jesus, see Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 24; Brehm, 'Will the Real Jesus Please Stand?', 8; Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 8-12, 46; Charlesworth, 'Historical Jesus', 101; Howard Clark Kee, *What Can We Know About Jesus?* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 111-14; Brown, 'Historical Jesus', 337; Telford, 'Major Trends', 34; Holmén, 'A Theologically Disinterested Quest?', 179.

75 Fowl, 'Reconstructing and Deconstructing', 327.

> of their viewpoint which are to be rejected as late and secondary, but then proceeds to construct a portrait of the Master shot through with modern standards of value, I feel like saying, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"[76]

Fourth, an additional characteristic of Third Quest is the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus and studying him in light of a Jewish environment.[77] Thus the Jewishness of Jesus is the starting point for the Third Quest and is pursued in light of the discovery of new source materials emerging from archaeological discoveries in the last fifty years (e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls). It must be granted, as Holmén notes, 'recognition of the fact that Jesus was a Jew is ... not an innovation of the "Third Quest"'.[78] Wellhausen's dictum that 'Jesus was not a Christian but a Jew'[79] has been often quoted, and Klausner opined long ago that, '"Jesus was not a Christian," but he *became* a Christian.'[80] One need only cite works by Dalman, Jeremias, Klausner, Montefiore to know that recognition of Jesus' Jewishness precedes Vermes' *Jesus the Jew* and Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism.*

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[76] Henry J. Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1962 [1937]), 46-7.

[77] As noted by several commentators, e.g. Neil and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament*, 397-9; Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', 800; Evans, 'The Third Quest', 538, 543; Charlesworth, 'Jesus Research', 22; Brown, 'Historical Jesus', 337; Telford, 'Major Trends', 47-9, 52, 57-8; Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?*, 49; Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 10-11; Bockmuehl, 'Jesus of Nazareth in Recent Debate', 20; Meier, 'The Present State', 484-6; Dunn, 'Can the Third Quest Hope to Succeed?' 33; *idem*, *Jesus Remembered*, 85-6; Bird, 'Should Evangelicals Participate', 7; Brehm, 'Will the Real Jesus Please Stand?, 11; Allison, 'The Secularizing of the Historical Jesus', 142; Boring, 'The "Third Quest" and the Apostolic Faith', 238-9; du Toit, 'Redefining Jesus', 100, 107-8; Burkett, *Introduction*, 247; Holmén, 'A Theologically Disinterested Quest', 177; Tom Holmén, 'The Jewishness of Jesus in the "Third Quest"', in *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teaching of Jesus and its Earliest Records* (eds Michael Labahn and Andreas Schmidt; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 149-50; Leander E. Keck, *Who is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2000), 23-47.

[78] Holmén, 'The Jewishness of Jesus', 146; cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 88.

[79] Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Reimer, 1905), 113 (*Jesus war kein Christ, sondern Jude*).

[80] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 413.

It must be asked, though, does the Third Quest need to be entirely unprecedented in all of its approaches and conclusions before it is regarded as a distinctive scholarly movement in own right? The Jewishness of Jesus was indeed tagged by earlier authors as the methodological context for studying Jesus. However, these insights into the importance of Jesus' Jewish environment and character were either rejected or marginalized by the Second Quest and Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus adherents. This was due to either the use of the criterion of dissimilarity in relation to Judaism (Second Quest) or due to the intention to de-Judaize Jesus by adding a Hellenistic overlay upon him (Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus). In contrast, the Third Quest has brought the Jewishness of Jesus from the periphery of scholarship back to the forefront. It is, furthermore, this rigorous examination of a Jewish Jesus that sets the Third Quest apart from the Second Quest and from the Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus approach prevalent in North America.

Even so, one is still faced with the question of what kind of Jew Jesus was.[81] For instance, Vermes' important 1973 publication *Jesus the Jew* brought Jesus' Jewishness back into the limelight; however, Vermes ends the book in such a way as to make Jesus a quasi-Jewish existential. Consequently, commentators are far from united and disagree as to how Jesus expressed his Jewishness, be it as a Galilean holy man (Geza Vermes, Marcus Borg), a rabbi (Günther Bornkamm, Bruce Chilton), sage (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ben Witherington), eschatological prophet (N. T. Wright, E. P. Sanders, Scot McKnight), social prophet (R. David Kaylor, Richard Horsley) or apocalyptic seer (Dale Allison, Bart Ehrman), or perhaps even better, a combination of the above. What is significant is that locating Jesus in a Jewish framework and trying to interpret his

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[81] Cf. Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); H. D. Betz, 'Wellhausen's Dictum "Jesus was not a Christian, but a Jew" in Light of Present Scholarship', *ST* 45 (1991): 83-110; James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus in Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad, 1996); Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Jewishness of Jesus: Facing Some Problems' in *Jesus' Jewishness,* (ed. Charlesworth), 123-36; Bruce D. Chilton, 'Jesus within Judaism' in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* (eds Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans; AGJU 39; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 179-201; Holmén, 'The Jewishness of Jesus', 143-62; Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 58-9; Halvor Moxnes, 'Jesus the Jew: Dilemmas of Interpretation' in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity* (eds I. Dunderberg et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 83-103.

sayings and actions in a Jewish context is essentially what the Third Quest is all about.

IV. WHAT ARE THE GAINS OF THE THIRD QUEST?

In setting out the gains of the Third Quest I can only follow and add comment to those points suggested by Meier.[82]

(1) *The interfaith and international dimension of scholarship.* The Third Quest brings a rich cast of authors who pursue their studies from a variety of different frameworks including Jewish, evangelical, liberal protestant, neo-liberal and moderate conservatives. Such an assorted range of scholars is a welcomed diversification to a quest that was ordinarily dominated by continental Lutherans and English Anglicans.

(2) *There is a greater use of the canonical Gospels as sources for studying the historical Jesus.* The reliance on the canonical Gospels is particularly discernible in Sanders and Meier and stands over and against the neo-New Questers that frequently rely on hypothetical documents such as editions of Q, a purported Cross-Gospel embedded beneath the Gospel of Peter, and the Secret Gospel of Mark[83] – documents we do not actually possess nor even know for sure existed. An approach such as this that prioritizes the canonical sources is highly attractive to evangelicals because it allows them to take the Gospels seriously as a representation of the historical Jesus and ensures some element of continuity between the Matthean, Marcan, Lucan, Johannine Jesus and the historical Jesus.[84]

(3) *A more accurate picture of second-temple Judaism.* The publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and further studies on the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and the Apocrypha have yielded a more balanced appreciation of the character and complexities of second-temple Judaism as the context for Jesus and early Christianity. These findings compensate for the loss of rabbinic sources (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, etc.) for reconstructing first-century Jewish beliefs since it has become widely recognized that the rabbinic writings postdate AD 135 and only a small number of traditions contained in them actually go back to before AD 70. Consequently, rabbinic materials are only of secondary value for studying

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[82] Meier, 'Present State', 459-87.

[83] John Dominic Crossan, *Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 427-34.

[84] See further: Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen?* 52-65; Joel Willitts, 'Presuppositions and Procedures in the Study of the "Historical Jesus": Or, Why I Decided Not to be a "Historical Jesus" Scholar', *JSHJ* 3 (2005): 61-108.

Jesus and second-temple Judaism. In fact, Jewish scholars are recognizing the value of the Gospels themselves for understanding first century Judaism (or Judaisms!).[85] Once more, this stands over against the Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus advocates who construct a Jesus who, though not stripped of all remnants of Jewishness, is blanketed with a Hellenistic overlay to the effect that he would be more familiar with Cynic epistles than with the Old Testament.

(4) *Insights from archaeology and sociology.* Another recent feature is that the Third Quest is making better use of archaeological findings rather than relying totally on literary studies.[86] Sociological models have been utilized in the Third Quest as well, though its application is by no means widespread.[87]

(5) *Refinements concerning the criteria of authenticity.* The skepticism of the Second Quest has given way to a more moderate application of the various criteria in the Third Quest. As already noted, the dissimilarity criterion is no longer being used in the same way it was employed by Perrin or Käsemann. This is because Third Quest scholars are not seeking hard facts about Jesus or searching to uncover the real Jesus encrusted beneath tectonic plates of ecclesiastical dogma, rather, they construct hypotheses and evaluate probabilities. The search for 'facts' required the use of a rigorous criterion (e.g. double dissimilarity), whereas the search for 'probabilities' lengthens the methodological rope to permit a more restrained employment of the various criteria in order to arrive at a less certain conclusion. Thus the recognition that all knowledge (especially

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[85] Cf. Geza Vermes (*Jesus and the World of Judaism* [London: SCM, 1983], 85-8); and Alan F. Segal ('Conversion and Messianism: Outline for a New Approach', *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* [eds James H. Charlesworth; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 299): 'The New Testament is ... much better evidence for the history of Judaism [in the first century] than is rabbinic Judaism for the origins of Christianity.'

[86] Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*; *idem*, 'Historical Jesus', 92-100; John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg: TPI, 2000); John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001).

[87] Cf. e.g. Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Bruce J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

historical knowledge) is conditional and fallible has fuelled historical Jesus study rather than stifled it.

(6) *The miracle tradition receives a more adequate treatment.* No longer are the miracle stories relegated to being entirely Gospel Myths, but are considered as part of the pattern of Jesus' ministry.[88] Morton Smith wrote, 'the gospels represent Jesus as attracting attention primarily as a miracle worker, and winning his followers by miracles. The gospels do so because he did so.'[89]

(7) *Taking the Jewishness of Jesus seriously.* As already stated, the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus and studying him in the light of a diverse Jewish background is the most distinctive feature of the Third Quest (though not unique to the Third Quest). This Jewish approach stands in contradistinction to the Old Quest that was explicitly anti-semitic at points, the Second Quest that tried to set Jesus against 'legalistic' Judaism, and the Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus adherents who de-Judaize Jesus. If Christian art had painted Jesus on the cross as he really was, naked and circumcised, rather than cover his genitals conveniently with a garment, one can only wonder if the history of Jewish-Christian relations would have been different.

V. CONCLUSION

By way of summary, (1) Wright's taxonomy is essentially correct if one concedes that there never was a 'moratorium' on Jesus questing (better to speak of a diminishing interest in some circles). Furthermore, it should be recognized that the Third Quest does not refer to all ongoing Jesus research, and trends in Jesus research remain complex and defy any rigid imposition of organization other than the most general description. (2) The distinctives of the Third Quest include modification or rejection of double-dissimilarity, the development of frameworks or hypotheses as the context for Jesus studies, a more optimistic use of canonical sources, and pursuing the significance of the Jewishness of Jesus. Again, the qualification is that 'distinctive' does not mean 'unique' but 'characteristic' of the Third Quest. (3) There have been various gains made by the Third Quest that are worth taking notice of.

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[88] Cf. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999).

[89] Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 10; see the endorsement in Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 173.

In terms of the implication of the Third Quest for evangelicalism, Mark Allan Powell writes of a recent trend in Jesus scholarship: 'I discern what I can only describe as a *resurgence of orthodoxy*. Conservatives, traditionalists, evangelicals – call them what you will – have entered the field in droves and, in many cases, have seized the offensive.'[90] Powell is correct in that there are many scholars of broad evangelical persuasion like Darrell Bock, Robert L. Webb, Steven M. Bryan, Scot McKnight, Stanley E. Porter, Graham Twelftree, N. T. Wright, Ben Witherington, Craig A. Evans and others who are engaging in fruitful contributions to historical Jesus studies. But I believe that this 'offensive' to date is little more than a vanguard for what potentially lies in store. I like to think that a *coup de main* might be the next offensive action in a conflict of cultural forces each claiming Jesus for themselves. To this end I urge other evangelical students and scholars to engage in this offensive. We stand at the Rhine and the Rubicon of evangelical participation in Jesus scholarship. We can enjoy the scholarly view so far and call for a truce, or we may seize the initiative and advance on Berlin and Rome. Now lest my military imagery gives the wrong impression, I am not advocating *ad hominem* attacks on liberal scholarship or creating a Jesus in our twenty-first century evangelical image. Instead, we must force a lethargic church and a pluralistic world to be confronted by the transforming power of the man and the message: Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. That will mean seriously engaging and listening to advocates of the Q-Thomas/Cynic-Jesus approach so as to acknowledge their genuine contribution to the field of research, but also to show (despite some recent and impassioned apologies to the contrary)[91] that they are not offering a historically plausible Jesus, but a Jesus all too conducive to modern culture. Lest we be accused of the same scholarly transgression, we should engage in introspective and self-critical reflection of our motives, methods and agendas, display an openness to the evidence, and a willingness to learn from others of different theological persuasion. Ultimately our task is not to peddle our evangelical assumptions, but to carry out the sort of open and comprehensive study that will either vindicate them or at least raise provocative questions about Jesus and the Gospels.

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[90] Mark Allan Powell, '"Things That Matter": Historical Jesus Studies in the New Millennium', *SBL Forum* (Dec. 2004).

[91] Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus*; John Kloppenborg and John Marshall, eds, *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism, and the Historical Jesus: Subtexts in Criticism* (JSNTSup 275; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004).

The historical Jesus is not exclusively the domain of liberal scholarship, as the quest for the historical Jesus probably began soon after Jesus' death and is reflected in the writings of the early church.[92] Perhaps it is even the case that historical study of Jesus is a necessary task of discipleship, as we must all grapple with the life-changing question 'Who is Jesus?'[93] If my ambition for evangelical participation in Jesus studies is to be realized then it requires that evangelicals familiarize themselves with this entity known as the Third Quest. I believe, furthermore, that insights gained from this quest can enrich our relationship with Jesus, improve our preaching of the Gospels, and strengthen our resources for ministry.

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[92] Porter, 'Reading the Gospels', 32. Going further, it might have even begun during Jesus' life, see Kealy ('Reflections on the Third Quest', 59) and Stanton (*Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, 171): 'Interest in the life and character of Jesus was already present *in nuce* in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' proclamation drew critical questioning: Who is this Jesus? Why does he behave in this way?'

[93] N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 14-15.