

Recent developments in South African Jesus research: From Andrie du Toit to Willem Vorster

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Abstract

Besides the introductory remarks this area report consists of five sections, published in two articles: 'From Andrie du Toit to Willem Vorster' and 'From Willem Vorster to Andries van Aarde'. As part of the introductory remarks the titles of various articles that recently appeared on the South African scene are brought together in the first article. With respect to Du Toit, the overview focuses inter alia on an evaluation of his pre-view of historical Jesus research in the light of the results of recent North American and South African studies. Vorster's contribution is discussed according to two themes: the epistemology of 'post-critical' historical research and the presuppositions regarding the 'Jewishness' of Jesus.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In 1990 the New Testament Society of South Africa (NTSSA) set up a subgroup on historical Jesus research. At the beginning it was chaired by Professor Willem S

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Vorster, Head of the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa

Professor Vorster, one of my *Doctorvatern* and a very close friend, suddenly died on January 10, 1993. At this occasion it is appropriate for me to express my high regard for his pioneering work.

The establishment of the subgroup on the historical Jesus inaugurates the first serious *historical* Jesus research that will be done in South Africa. According to the working procedure of the NTSSA the different subgroups are respectively responsible for the arrangement and overall theme of the annual congress of the society. The subgroup on historical Jesus research will do the honors in 1995. Prior to the formation of the subgroup in 1990 only a few publications (mainly articles in scholarly journals or essays in books) had appeared in South Africa on the historical Jesus.

Besides the introductory remarks (section 1) this overview comprises five sections. Three of these sections focus on individuals, namely Andrie du Toit (section 2), Willem Vorster (section 3) and myself, Andries van Aarde (section 4). As part of the introductory remarks the titles of various articles that recently appeared on the South African scene are brought together. These are works that shed some light on trends in South African theological thinking¹. The final section is a conclusion in which the kind of influence that South African Jesus research is subjected to or stimulated by is shown by means of a few statements.

But what about specific indigenous South African Jesus images and constructs? Isn't there a typical Third World theological construct of Jesus which has arisen from the socio-political realities in South Africa? The reasons for the lack of such a typical Third World construct of the *Jesus of history* are aspects that Willem Vorster and I recently reflected upon. Aspects of the relevance of Jesus research for the present-day South African context will therefore again be taken up in section 3 and 4 of my essay².

It is, however, not the intention of this overview to be exhaustive. For example, it is also possible to structure this paper in another way by focusing rather on the individual contributions of scholars like Dirkie Smit (1987), Pieter Botha (1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1993) or Chris Schnell (1987, 1989). Smit reflected at length on the notion of the historical Jesus in Third World theologies in an article entitled, 'Christology from a Third World perspective: A literary analysis' ['Christologie uit 'n derde wêreld-perspektief: 'n Literatuur-ondersoek']. Botha's work focuses on three issues: the epistemology of historical research, Ernst Troeltsch's influence on the quest for the historical Jesus, and the transmission of the Jesus tradition'. Botha's (1991, 1993) studies on ancient orality also have profound

implications for historical Jesus research. Schnell, in turn, focuses on the nature of the Synoptic Gospels as *stories* about Jesus, a method of 'extracting the historical core from historically unreliable data', and a reconstruction of 'Jesus' preaching' based on the canonical gospels and a sociological model (of Talcott Parsons) in terms of which first-century Palestinian society is understood (cf Schnell 1987:154-206). My decision to concentrate in this area report on the work of Andrie du Toit, Willem Vorster and myself is only because of a better grip of the subject. The aim of my presentation is largely to be inventory in nature. Thus, only contours are being shaped for further reflection.

2. ANDRIE DU TOIT: THE 'ORIGINAL' JESUS

As I have said, my overview begins with the very first article published in South Africa on the quest for the historical Jesus. It is Andrie du Toit's 'The historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ of the Gospels' ['Die historiese Jesus en die verkondigde Christus van die evangelies']. This work forms the seventh chapter of *Guide to the New Testament, Volume 4 – The Synoptic Gospels and Acts: Introduction and theology* [*Handleiding by die Nuwe Testament, Band IV – Die Sinoptiese Evangelies en Hande-linge: Inleiding en teologie*], edited by Andrie du Toit himself and published in 1980 and reprinted in 1988. This *Guide to the New Testament* series aims to provide textbooks for graduate theological students. Their main purpose is to provide background material on the New Testament documents, specifically in terms of introductory [*einleitungswissenschaftliche*] and theological issues (for example, the overall message of a particular book but also aspects of the scholarly debate regarding aspects of the 'theologies' found in the New Testament, like the *theologia crucis* and the so-called 'messianic secret' in Mark's gospel). The very fact that the particular volume on the Synoptic Gospels (including Acts) ends with a treatise on the historical Jesus explicitly expresses the viewpoint of the editor of the series (who is also the writer of the specific treatise) that Jesus is indeed part and parcel of the 'theologies' of the New Testament and not only its presupposition (cf Du Toit 1988:267).

We will focus on Du Toit's outline of the history of the historical Jesus quest (covering the so-called 'Old Quest', the 'No Quest', and the 'New Quest') and on his arguments as to why he prefers to use Joachim Jeremias' (1964) notion of the 'original Jesus' rather than the 'historical Jesus'. Subsequently, Du Toit's discussion of the criteria for indentifying 'authentic' Jesus material will be summarized. And, finally, we will evaluate his preview in the light of some of the results of the Jesus research that has recently been done in North America, as well as that by members of the above-mentioned subgroup of the NTSSA.

In his *Forschungsbericht* Du Toit seems to find his point of departure in the pattern of Albert Schweitzer's *The quest of the historical Jesus: A critical study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (English translation published in 1910 from the German original, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*), originally written in 1906. Three distinctive periods are classified: The pre-critical phase (150-1778 CE), the first period of the 'critical quest' for Jesus (1778-1953), and finally the second phase of the 'critical quest' for Jesus. The process of harmonization of the Jesus tradition found in the canonical gospels constitutes the first period. Du Toit (1988:268) referred to more than forty such harmonizations that appeared in the sixteenth century within both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. The second period is characterized by its radical historical scepticism and rationalism. The third period was introduced by the students of Rudolf Bultmann. Du Toit (1988:271) in this regard recalls Ernst Käsemann, Günther Bornkamm and Ernst Fuchs, but in the same vein also refers to the work of Ethelbert Stauffer, James Robinson and Norman Perrin. To the students of Bultmann the names of Hans Conzelmann and Walter Schmithals³ should be added. As is known, the students of Bultmann pretended to deliver the goods that their mentor had not been prepared to do.

Andrie du Toit appraised the representatives of the 'New Quest' positively. Within the contour of Käsemann's (1954) reconsideration of Bultmann's stance, Du Toit (1988:272-274) regarded the quest for the 'original' Jesus as not only desirable but essential. The need for the quest rests, according to Du Toit (and Käsemann), upon what one can call a theological accountability toward intra-ecclesiastical as well as extra-ecclesiastical 'truth' claims. Concerning the first, an 'authentic continuity' between the 'life and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth' and the 'kerygmatic Christ' proclaimed in the early church is essential, otherwise one can argue that the 'message of the gospel about the Jesus of history' rests on 'myths and ideas'. More specifically, Du Toit continued to argue that the shocks Bultmann's influence had caused for many believers in terms of the reliability of the gospel should be thwarted. Du Toit emphasized the challenge to overcome the '*skándalon* of the New Testament', namely to 'accept God's singular revelation that was granted once and for all' (my translation) in the Jesus of history. This 'accountability toward extra-ecclesiastical truth claims' does have relevance for inter-religious dialogue and the demonstration of the rational basis of theology and the gospel embedded in the New Testament. But the quest for the 'original' Jesus is also desirable because of its expository power in guiding an analysis and an understanding of the varied 'theological developments' within the New Testament and the early church. In this regard Du Toit (1988:275-279) elaborated especially (but not exclusively) on Ferdinand Hahn's (1974) 'Methodologische Überlegungen zur Rückfrage nach Jesus'. Hahn demon-

strated in this essay that the Jesus tradition had been 'reduced' not only because of the editing process of the gospel writers themselves, but also because of the shift from orality to literacy, the process of translation from Aramaic into Greek and, especially, by means of the selecting, transforming and remaking of the pre-paschal Jesus tradition in the light of post-paschal beliefs. This very process of 'reduction' underlines the futility of a quest for a so-called 'objective' Jesus without and before any interpretation.

Therefore, according to Du Toit (1988:279), one can ultimately seek to establish the 'original' Jesus' understanding of himself and the relation of this understanding to the understanding of Jesus by the early church. One of Du Toit's assumptions is that the Jesus tradition, as reflected in the canonical gospels, can be regarded as authentic until one proves the opposite. The burden of proof lies with those scholars who argue for non-authenticity (cf Du Toit 1988:280). Methodologically, however, it can be helpful to argue for authenticity in a complementary fashion: authenticity is only accepted when it is really proved. Therefore, 'criteria for authenticity are needed', like the criterion of dissimilarity or the criterion of coherence (Du Toit 1988:282-286). However, by using an expression from the title of Morna Hooker's (1972) famous article, 'On using the wrong tool', Du Toit (1988: 286-287) remained sceptical about the appropriateness of the different criteria because they cover *inter alia* only Jesus' *words* and not his *deeds* as well. The latter refer in particular to Jesus' miracles.

In his preview of the future of historical Jesus research Du Toit enhanced Leander Keck's (1971) dictum: 'historical Jesus research *does have* a future'. He made a plea for a reconsideration of the dispositions of the research in terms of where the burden of proof should lie, the so-called dissimilarity between Jesus and late-Judaism, the Gospel of John as source for the historical Jesus, and of the historical critical and anti-metaphysical principle of 'analogy', which in the past has ruled out the possibility that the resurrection narratives and those about Jesus' miracles would be seen as part of the historical Jesus tradition (cf Du Toit 1988:288).

In the South African context this very first attempt to explain the dynamics of historical Jesus research was a breakthrough in many ways. Willem Vorster (1993: 9) was correct when he agreed with Andrie du Toit that it was the presence of fundamentalism in South African theology that for many years inhibited biblical scholars from operating freely within the historical critical paradigm (sometimes to a greater and sometimes to a lesser extent). However, it seems that Vorster had a bone to pick with Du Toit because the latter gave the impression in an interview in 1990 (cf Van der Linde 1990:12-13) that he did not take all the theories in historical Jesus research too seriously and thereby, according to Vorster, 'dismissed' the study

of the historical Jesus. In all fairness, Du Toit (1988:280) explicitly rejected a fundamentalistic and a 'pre-critical' presumption that all aspects of the Jesus tradition were to be simply identified with the *ipssisima facta et verba* of Jesus' life. Hence, in the same vein as the hermeneutics of Peter Stuhlmacher (1975:14ff), Du Toit (1988:289) tried to break through the 'anti-metaphysical' historical research. In accordance with what Ernst Troeltsch called the principle of analogy in historiography, the historian sees his own modern experience of reality as the norm by which to judge what could be historically authentic in the past and what not. Du Toit aimed at creating an atmosphere in which scholars, as members of the believing community, would regard aspects of the Jesus tradition in the canonical gospels as authentic that do not have other analogies in a historiographical sense. In particular, he had the resurrection narratives and the miracles of Jesus in mind.

On the South African scene, however, Du Toit has apparently not totally succeeded in both instances. But this does not mean that the dilemma he raised does not remain. One might articulate it in a different manner, taking the issues at stake in the present-day debate into consideration. With regard to the miracle stories, we are now aware of the fact that they have indeed become part of the quest for the historical Jesus. However, they have not been studied exactly according to what Du Toit previewed. As in North America, for example in the Jesus Seminar of the Westar Institute, and in a particular sense in the work of Gerd Theissen (1974:38-41) in Germany, the miracles of Jesus have begun to be investigated in South Africa along sociological and cultural-anthropological lines; at the same time, the canon does not constitute the boundaries within which independent attestations are critically scrutinized for possible analogies. Johan Engelbrecht's (1993) article 'The historical Jesus as miracle worker' ['Die historiese Jesus as wonderwerker'] shows to what extent reflection in South Africa is influenced by such work as that done by the Westar Institute's Jesus Seminar. In a particular sense Du Toit's concern boils down to the kind of dilemma Robert Funk discussed when the Jesus Seminar of the Westar Institute in the fall of 1991, in Alberta, Canada, started to compile a database of authentic 'deeds' of the historical Jesus after completing the study of the Jesus sayings. Funk made use of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967:174-180) treatise on the sociology of knowledge. In their study, *Social construction of reality*, Berger and Luckmann stated: 'Theories about identity are always embedded in a more general interpretation of reality; they are "built into" the symbolic universe and its theoretical legitimations'. Against the theoretical backdrop of this 'psychology of identity' Funk (1992:15a) commented:

The overarching issue for Fellows of the Seminar is thus whether to interpret stories of exorcism from late antiquity in terms of the then

prevailing cosmology, or whether to put them to the test of the modern scientific worldview. The answer to the question whether such stories are historically plausible would depend on the universe [being] invoked as the test of plausibility. This issue goes together but is not identical with the question of whether biblical scholars belong to the community of faith or to the scientific community....If the issue in this form is transposed back into the New Testament, it has to be asked: Did people really suffer from demon possession? Did Jesus then really heal them? This question can be stated in different terms: Were demons real because people believed in them? The Fellows of the Seminar will have to face this dilemma.

To me, however, it is a false dilemma to require an either or case regarding the cosmology of people believing within the framework of a mythological symbolic world and modern scientific historiography based on the principle of analogy. To decide whether something is historically plausible demands, according to our insights today, independent multiple attestation (according to a chronological stratification of relevant documents) which makes coherent sense within a social stratification of the period involved (cf John Dominic Crossan's *The historical Jesus: The life of a Mediterranean Jewish peasant*, 1991; in the next essay I will come back to Crossan's chronological stratification).

Attestation, however, does not imply only to the very *words* of Jesus. As in the case of his *deeds* which are attested only by reference to them, we do have access to Jesus' *words*, also solely by means of reference to them. Furthermore, these 'references' came to us in many modes. Myths and metaphors are also such modes. Thus, metaphoricity and mythological language are part of our assessment of the 'beliefs' of Jesus' contemporaries about his 'identity', either as an acclamation or as defamatory, like any other of their references to his sayings or deeds. From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge these 'beliefs', expressed in language of analogy through myths and other metaphors, are built upon or arose from the social world in which Jesus and his contemporaries lived. In other words, myths and metaphors represent an interpreted reflection on the 'identity' of Jesus, just as any other attestation to his words and deeds. Therefore, myths and other metaphors in relevant documents relating to Jesus in one way or another, should also be submitted to a 'chronological stratification' by means of which their 'historical reliability' in terms of their closeness to the historical Jesus can be judged. Closeness, however, does not mean mere chronological nearness, but also accuracy in terms of nearness in cosmology and ideology. If an attestation in this regard does not have any analogy elsewhere, it should also be regarded with circumspection, like any similar attes-

tation. But it still does not mean that such a singular attestation is self-evidently 'untrue' in the historical sense. A single attestation which is chronologically not too far removed from the beginning of our Common Era can still be considered as useful if it has explanatory power in terms of an intelligible and internally coherent context. We will later come back to my use of Max Weber's notion of an 'ideal type' in this regard (see the next essay). In short, such a context in which references to Jesus' identity makes coherent sense should correspond with the social stratification of first-century Herodian Palestine.

This social stratification is a construct in terms of the social reality of first-century Palestine (consisting of the contemporary social world dialectically built upon or arising from a mythological symbolic universe). The chronological stratification of textual evidence is a construct on the basis of modern painstaking historical and literary research. Where such attestation is lacking, as in the case of the empty tomb, historical research is still possible but then the relevant witnesses will be subjected to the question: why and with which results did the particular tradition develop or was it enhanced at that particular point in time (cf Van Aarde 1989:220)? I myself, during a conference of the New Testament Society of South Africa on the theme of the resurrection narratives in 1989, tried to construe a 'social context', against the background of formative Judaism, in which I believe the phrase ἡγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν ['he has been raised from death'] in Matthew 28:7 makes sense (Van Aarde 1989). The older criterion of coherence has thus been adapted so that sociological and cultural-anthropological models (e.g. Gerhard Lenski, Jean Lenski & Patrick Nolan's [1991:195-196] model of the social stratification of an advanced agrarian society) are used in a heuristical and expository fashion to 'contextualize' the historical Jesus within the Herodian Palestine of his day (cf Van Aarde 1993a).

Both the other aspects Du Toit raised in his preview of historical Jesus research (viz the criterion of dissimilarity and John's gospel as source for the historical Jesus) have also begun to receive attention. With regard to the first Robert Funk (1990: 10) put it as follows:

Scholars now by and large reject the older criterion of dissimilarity, by which Rudolf Bultmann meant: different from his Jewish context and different from the alleged hellenistic context of the early church. Scholars are now inclined to the view that Judea and Galilee were under powerful hellenistic influence, and that the early church retained more of its Jewish heritage than earlier interpreters allowed. Accordingly, the quest for the distinctive, or the peculiar, is understood as something different from the old criterion of dissimilarity.

Within the Westar Institute's Jesus Seminar the following five criteria were distilled by the Fellows of the Seminar for determining those *logia* that possibly go back to Jesus: Jesus said things that were short, pithy and memorable; Jesus spoke in aphorisms (short, pithy, memorable sayings) and in parables (short, short stories about some unspecified subject matter); Jesus' language was distinct from the language characteristically used in the proclamation of the primitive church, and from that characteristic of the common lore and clichés of the time; Jesus' sayings and parables have an edge and were subversive in terms of the mainstream of social life; Jesus' sayings and parables characteristically call for a reversal of roles or frustrate ordinary everyday expectations: they surprise and shock! (cf Funk 1990:8-10).

However, in South Africa, the building on 'complete sayings' as such to determine authentic Jesus tradition, rather than on what Ferdinand Hahn (1974:28-29) referred to as 'einselne Überlieferungsstücke' was challenged by me in 1989:

It is futile to try to identify *logia* which, as *logia*, could be the *ipsissima verba Jesu*, or which could rather be related to the Palestinian and the Hellenistic churches or which could be ascribed to the Evangelists themselves....On the contrary, the historiography of any one of the periods mentioned [those of the historical Jesus, the primitive church or the gospel writers] depends on the identification of the *conditions* which are more authentically portrayed by *individual features* [in Jesus' sayings or references to his deeds] than by the order of [narrated] episodes or even *logia* [and any other narrated event concerning Jesus].

(Van Aarde 1989:222)

I illustrated this emphasis on 'individual features', which have to make sense within a particular social context, in the introduction to an article entitled 'Jesus and the social outcasts' ['Jesus en die sosiaal-veragtes'] which was published in 1988. The well-known saying of Jesus in Matthew 16:17-19⁴ was used in an exemplary fashion. As it is known this saying lacks multiple attestation. But individual features embedded in this particular saying, like the name 'Simon son of John' and the 'fatherhood of God' in relationship to the notion of the 'kingdom [of God = heaven]', demonstrate how singular attestation can be used as 'evidence' for determining pre-paschal Jesus tradition.

Significant developments have recently taken place – also with relation to John's gospel as a source for determining the historical Jesus. For example, in an Appendix to his book on the historical Jesus, Crossan (1991a:429, 430) includes the Fourth Gospel in his 'Inventory of the historical Jesus tradition by chronological stratification and independent attestation'. The first stratum covers the earliest Christian texts which originated in the period 30-60 CE. Among these texts Crossan

considers a hypothetical document, a Miracles Collection, which is embedded within the Gospels of Mark and John. Among the documents that were seen as belonging to the second stratum (originating in the period 60-80 CE) Crossan includes another hypothetical document that Fortna (1988) and Von Whalde (1989), independently of each other, identified with a high degree of probability. It contains a combination of miracles and discourse wherein the earlier 'Miracles Collection' of the first stratum is integrated with an independent collection of the sayings of Jesus, and it is probably independent of the Synoptic Gospels (Crossan 1991:431a). The relationship between the Gospel of Signs, the Sayings Gospel Q and the Gospel of Thomas seems to require future investigation, so that more clarity can be gained with regard to the use of the Fourth Gospel as source for the historical Jesus. In South Africa Willem Oliver has started work on a doctoral dissertation focusing on this aspect. Oliver and Van Aarde's (1991) article on the kingdom of God in John's gospel as a 'household for the believing community' might provide a relevant case study in this regard.

The notion that has been bracketed so far is the concern for the so-called rational base of historical Jesus research. As we have shown, the issue that Andrie du Toit had in mind was the question of where the burden of proof should lie: with those who argue for non-authenticity or with those who argue for authenticity? This epistemological inquiry has not, as far as I can see, become a main issue in present-day historical Jesus research. This does not, however, mean that epistemological reflection is not important in historical Jesus research. To me, and it seems also to scholars like Thomas Wright (1992a:10, 11, 18, 27, 32-46, 60, 61-64, 88-98, 101-102, 468; 1992b:13) and Ben Meyer (1979, 1992), the quest for the historical Jesus definitely needs more reflection in this regard. In South Africa steps have already been taken in this field. A discussion of these developments leads me to section four and five of this essay in which the contribution of Willem Vorster (Andrie du Toit was his *Doctorvater*) and that of myself (Willem Vorster was one of my *Doctorvater*) will be considered respectively.

3. WILLEM VORSTER: THE JEWISHNESS OF JESUS

3.1 Introduction

Marcus Borg (1988:281) convincingly showed that the students of Rudolf Bultmann did not really change the scene with their 'New Quest'. As known, labelling historical Jesus research as the 'New Quest' in distinction to the 'Old Quest', was triggered by James Robinson in 1959. The term 'Old Quest' refers to the constructs of

Jesus, which are commonly reckoned to have been brought to an end by Albert Schweitzer in 1906. However, the South African scholar, Willem Vorster (in Vorster & Botha 1992:22), was correct when he said that it was not 'the book of Schweitzer which ended the Old Quest, but the status of the problem which became apparent by its publication'. Not only had a set of positivistic presuppositions about the nature of history formed the basis of the 'Old Quest', but also 'assumptions about the sources for the life of Jesus which could hardly stand the test of critical scrutiny'. Nevertheless, the central elements of the 'Old Quest' not only survived through Schweitzer's own work, but also remained important in the 'New Quest' (cf Wright 1992b:6). As we already said, proponents of the 'New Quest'⁶ became the pioneers who moved beyond Rudolf Bultmann's so-called 'No Quest'. However, questions and methods (that is, criteria for authenticity) remained more or less the same during the periods of the 'No Quest' and the 'New Quest'. What was 'new' is that historical scepticism was replaced by a gradual scale of 'continuity'/'discontinuity' between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. What was common to the 'Old Quest', the 'No Quest' as well as the 'New Quest' is twofold: (a) a consensus about a minimal knowledge of Jesus as an 'eschatological prophet/teacher', (b) stripped of all *dogmatic* drapery.

Since the eighties scholars have increasingly become occupied with a kind of historical Jesus research that has been described by James Robinson as a 'paradigm shift' (cited by Borg 1991:2) and what I myself sometimes called 'the postmodern quest of the historical Jesus' (cf inter alia Van Aarde 1993b:3-4; Breech 1989; De Villiers 1991). According to Marcus Borg, Jesus is now regarded as a 'teacher of a world-subverting wisdom' (Borg 1991:15) and no longer as an 'eschatological prophet' who 'proclaimed the imminent end of the world' (Borg 1988:285). In other words, Borg construes a Jesus within a context of a cross-cultural conventional wisdom and 'subverting holy men' with revitalizing aims (see esp. Borg 1984, 1987). Bernard Brandon Scott (cited by Borg 1988:284), a Fellow of the Jesus Seminar of the Westar Institute, referred in 1984 to this development as follows: 'the historical quest for the historical Jesus has ended; the interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus has just begun'. The interdisciplinary aspect in this new development relates to the above-mentioned sociological and cultural-anthropological studies. But it does not mean that *historical* research as such is now dismissed. According to Thomas Wright (1992b:13) it only gives a 'less artificial, historical flavour to the whole enterprise'. Wright (in Wright & Neill 1988:379-403) labelled this undertaking the 'Third Quest'. In his 1992 book, *Who was Jesus?*, he referred again to this label:

Schweitzer brought down the curtain on the 'Old Quest'. The 'New Quest' has rumbled on for nearly thirty years without producing much in the way of solid results. Now, in the last twenty years or so, we have had a quite different movement, which has emerged without anyone co-ordinating it and without any particular theological agenda, but with a definite shape none the less. I have called this the 'Third Quest'.

(Wright 1992b:12)

Wright also has his ideas about the appearance of this 'shape'. He describes its main features this way:

One of the most obvious features of this 'Third Quest' has been the bold attempt to set Jesus firmly into his *Jewish context*. Another feature has been that unlike the 'New Quest', the [proponents] have largely ignored the artificial pseudo-historical 'criteria' for different sayings in the gospels. Instead, they have offered complete hypotheses about *Jesus' whole life and work*, including not only sayings but also deeds. This has made for a more complete, and less artificial, historical flavour to the whole enterprise.

(Wright 1992b:13; my emphasis)

According to Wright, S G F Brandon (1967) and G Vermes (1973) were the two early pioneers⁷. Ben F Meyer (1979), Anthony E Harvey (1982), Marcus Borg (1984, 1987) and perhaps Ed P Sanders (1985) are regarded 'as most significant within the "Third Quest"'. However, his opinion that the work of the Westar Institute's Jesus Seminar (cf Funk 1992^{8b}) and those of Burton Mack (1988) and John Dominic Crossan (1991a, b) should be seen as part of the 'New Quest' is, to me, a misjudgement⁹. However that it may be, three aspects mentioned independently and also not in any specific thematic order by Borg and Wright as features of the so-called 'Third Quest' received attention in the work of Willem Vorster. These are the epistemology of 'post-critical' historical research, the presuppositions regarding the 'Jewishness' of Jesus, and the issue of whether the historical Jesus should be seen as either an eschatological prophet or a wisdom teacher (cf Vorster 1991a, 1991b). Two other aspects were also part of Vorster's reflection: the use of metaphors for understanding Jesus' identity (Vorster 1990b, 1993) and the relevance of historical Jesus research for the 'new' South Africa. I will concentrate on the first two issues.

3.2 Post-critical historical research

In 1987 Vorster wrote an article entitled 'Towards post-critical New Testament studies' ['Op weg na 'n post-kritiese Nuwe-Testamentiese wetenskap'], which was published in a reworked version under the title, 'Towards a post-critical paradigm: Progress in New Testament scholarship' as part of a South African collection, *Paradigms and progress in theology*. In this essay he argued that the modern 'sociological' approach in biblical scholarship does not mean an abandonment of historical studies, in spite of its emphasis on the *pragmatic* meaning of texts. Vorster explained how historical criticism differs from social history by means of the word *reconstruction* as opposed to *construction*. He complained that scholars, like Dominic Crossan, realizing the pitfalls of positivistic historical description, are nevertheless ignorant of this important semantic distinction. According to Vorster, historical-critical students of the Bible want to *reconstruct* the social context (*Sitz im Leben*) in which a text genetically originated. Social scientific studies 'replaced'/'complemented'¹⁰ historical criticism in order to *construct* the social context in which the intended communication of a specific text or textual unit made sense. He referred to this 'new' mode of historical research as being 'post-critical' in nature. In his work on *The Jewishness of Jesus: Presuppositions and the historical study of the New Testament*¹¹, Vorster (in Vorster & Botha 1992:2-3) put it as follows:

In one's encounter with antiquity, it is soon realised that there is a lack of sources, and that it is difficult to construct ancient views on reality, concepts and experience. There is no way in which it is possible to make a reconstruction of Palestine in the times of Jesus – as with any other historical phenomenon. The data is clouded by a lack of sources and a history of interpretation. It is very difficult, if not impossible – on theoretical grounds – to re-enact the past, let alone the life, deeds and words of a religious figure who lived two thousand years ago. It is therefore imperative to study the subject matter from the perspective of accepted concepts in the study of history, as well as from the perspective of historiography.

Vorster (1992:5) argued that the 'relationship between a subject (historian) and the object of investigation in the past (past phenomena such as persons, actions and people's words)' represents a 'dynamic interaction'. He said that it is

therefore no longer possible to think that the task of the historian is to *reconstruct* the past objectively in terms of causes and effects. No historical interpretation can claim to be a reflection of what really happened in the past. Historians make constructions of the past accor-

ding to their theories and hypotheses. These constructions are guided by the criteria of probability and plausibility. By their very nature historical judgements are not objective descriptions of what really happened. They are socially conditioned constructions of the past....They are products of the mind, built on a great variety of presuppositions and perceptions.

(Vorster 1992:5)

Hence, according to Vorster, the search for the historical Jesus 'concerns the identity of the man of flesh and blood, Jesus the Galilean, as *historians* understand' it. Subsequently, Vorster demonstrated how the variety of portrayals of Jesus the Jew (by John Riches, E P Sanders and Dominic Crossan¹² respectively) are related to 'presuppositions'. These presuppositions are 'related to domain, data, history, philosophy of history, historiography, methods and models, epistemology, and the contexts of research(ers)' (Vorster 1992:60-61). He made use of a list of assumptions inferred from the New Quest and compared it with a similar list of assumptions that can be inferred from the 'Third Quest'. The core of these lists is taken from *Gospel of Mark: Red letter edition*, edited by Robert Funk and Mahlon Smith (1991). Although he added to the lists, neither the compilation nor the completion of the lists was Vorster's intention. The purpose of the lists is to 'compile a profile of presuppositions which determined the outcome of the historical study of Jesus' (Vorster 1992:29-30).

3.3 Assumptions in historical Jesus research

The following assumptions describe, according to Vorster (1992:30-32), the position of the New Quest¹³:

1. The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the gospel portraits of him.
2. Jesus taught his disciples orally.
3. Traditions about Jesus were circulated by word of mouth for many years after Jesus' death.
4. Oral tradition is fluid.
5. Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic; the Gospels were written in Greek.
6. Oral tradition exhibits little interest in biographical data about Jesus. [This obviously also applies to the canonical Gospels – WSV].
7. Forty years elapsed after the death of Jesus before the first canonical Gospel was composed.
8. Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels to be written.
9. Mark was not an eyewitness to the events he reports.

10. Between them, Matthew and Luke incorporate nearly all of Mark into their Gospels, often almost word for word.
11. Matthew and Luke each make use of a sayings Gospel, known as Q, often almost word for word.
12. Matthew and Luke each make use of additional material unknown to Mark, Q and each other.
13. Mark has arranged the order of events in the story of Jesus arbitrarily.
14. Q is a collection of sayings without a narrative framework.
15. The portrait of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel differs markedly from that drawn by the synoptics.
16. John is a less reliable source than the other Gospels for the sayings of Jesus.
17. The Gospels are made up of layers or strata of tradition.
18. The original manuscripts of the Gospels have disappeared.
19. The earliest small surviving fragments of any Gospels date from about 125 CE.
20. The earliest major surviving fragments of the Gospels date from about 200 CE.
21. The earliest complete copy of the Gospels dates from about 300 CE.
22. No two surviving copies of the same Gospel, prior to 1454 CE, are exactly alike.
23. In the copying process, copies of the Gospels were both 'improved' and 'corrupted'.
24. Scholars cannot assume that the Greek text they have in modern critical editions is exactly the text penned by the evangelists.
25. Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew.
26. The same methods of study that are used in the study of other ancient texts should be applied to the Bible.
27. The Bible should be studied without being bound to theological claims made by the church.
28. Copies of the Bible suffered from textual corruption, loss of leaves, and devastation by insects and moisture.
29. Jesus should be studied like other historical persons.
30. Historians can approach but never achieve certainty in historical judgements on the probability principle.
31. Historians measure the unknown by the known on the principle of analogy.
32. Historians assume that biblical events occur within a continuum of historical happenings but that each event or person is historically unique.
33. The canonical Gospels are more reliable than the extracanonical Gospels, with regard to Jesus.
34. Sources other than those found in the New Testament are not of any help in the historical study of Jesus.

35. Jesus was a unique person and differed considerably from his contemporaries.
36. The kingdom of God was a central theme in the teaching of Jesus.
37. The teaching of Jesus is embedded in eschatology.
38. There is a historical and material continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the kerygmatic Christ.
39. The quest for the historical Jesus entails a historical as well as a theological problem.

After discussing the assumptions that can be inferred from the work done since the eighties, Vorster (1992:52) demonstrated that the first thirty-two 'presuppositions' in the list above are still shared by most scholars today. However, he commented that the 'following group of [twenty-six] presuppositions¹⁴ makes the current...study of the historical Jesus...totally different from any other stage in the history of historical Jesus research' (Vorster 1992:52-55):

1. The canonical Gospels are not necessarily more reliable than the extracanonical Gospels with regard to the historical Jesus.
2. Sources other than those found in the New Testament are important for the historical study of Jesus.
3. The Gospel of Thomas has provided a new and important source for the Jesus tradition.
4. Thomas represents an earlier stage of tradition than that in the canonical Gospels.
5. Thomas represents an independent witness to the Jesus tradition.
6. Jesus was not a totally unique person. He was a first-century Jew from Galilee.
7. The kingdom of God was (according to some, but not to all) probably a central theme in the teaching of Jesus. If it was, it was not necessarily an eschatological concept.
8. The teaching of Jesus is (according to some, but not to all) embedded in eschatology.
9. There need not be a historical and material continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the kerygmatic Christ.
10. The quest for the historical Jesus first of all entails a historical problem. The results have consequences for the theological interpretation of Jesus the Christ.
11. The difference between modern societies and first-century Judaism in Palestine should be studied by applying social-scientific methods to the socio-historical phenomena of Palestine in that period.
12. Historical research entails more than the application of the traditional historico-critical methods to the Jesus tradition. It also implies the study of the social world with the help of social-scientific methods and models.

13. The social world of Jesus is not studied for the sake of supplying background material, but in order to supply contexts of interpretation of texts of a different nature.
14. Judaism has to be studied from the perspective of a social system and not only from the perspective of ideas, persons and events.
15. Palestine was fully Hellenised in the first century and it is necessary to work out the implication of this for the study of Jesus of Nazareth.
16. The so-called criterion of dissimilarity should be used with circumspection with regard to Jesus material.
17. Jesus, like many other Jews of his time, was probably bilingual and spoke Greek as a second language.
18. The stratification of the layers in the Jesus tradition is of great importance for the construction of the historical Jesus.
19. The hypothetical Q-source and the Gospel of Thomas make it possible to conceive of Jesus as a wisdom teacher/prophet and not as an eschatological prophet.
20. Most written sources about first-century Palestine have been written from above – that is, from the perspective of the authorities and important people. In order to understand Jesus and his intentions it is necessary to construct views from below and from the side.
21. In judging the historical value of Jesus material with regard to separate witnesses, it is necessary to take into account genetic relationships and attestation.
22. It is impossible to reconstruct past events, persons, contexts and so on. These phenomena are constructed by scholars, using whatever material is available and by applicable methods and models.
23. Only a few of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels were actually spoken by him.
24. A larger portion of the parables goes back to Jesus because the parables were harder to imitate than other material.
25. The greater part of the sayings tradition was created or borrowed from common lore by the transmitters of the oral tradition and the authors of the Gospels.
26. Modern critical scholarship is based on cooperation among specialists.

A comparison between the similarities and differences between the assumptions listed above underlines a shift between the New Quest and the Third Quest, with regard to the 'current socio-scientific study of the historical Jesus' that has been 'totally different from any other stage in the history of historical Jesus research', the 'prejudices and biases about the value of extracanonical material' that have been put aside to a great extent by the proponents of the Third Quest (cf Vorster 1992:52),

the conception that Mark was responsible for the apocalyptic interpretation of the notion of the 'kingdom of God' and the apocalyptic framework of the teaching of Jesus (the future Son of Man sayings, in other words) are seen as later developments in the Jesus tradition, the complete rejection of the 'divinisation of Jesus' by some proponents of the Third Quest (cf Vorster 1992:53), and finally the conviction shared by many scholars that the eschatological aspect of Jesus' teaching should be seen as a later development (cf Vorster 1992:54).

The following assumptions are identified with regard to works by Jewish scholars on the historical Jesus (Vorster 1992:57, 59):

1. The Gospels are products of Christian faith about Christ and not historical descriptions of Jesus the Jew.
2. The historical study of Jesus concerns Jesus the Jew and not Jesus the Christ.
3. It is possible to derive historical information about Jesus from the Gospels.
4. Jesus the Jew has to be understood within first-century Judaism because he was a Jew and not the Christ Christians claimed him to be.
5. As Jews, Jewish scholars are better equipped to say what is Jewish and what is Christian in the Gospels.
6. Jewish scholars have an advantage over others with regard to knowledge of first-century Judaism.
7. The social world of Jesus is known to Jewish scholars from their study of Jewish sources, including Rabbinic literature.

From these assumptions Vorster (1992:57) draws the conclusion that Jewish scholars clearly 'do not study Jesus of Nazareth from the same perspective' as non-Jewish scholars, and they are also 'more optimistic about the possibility of saying who Jesus was'. Christian scholars (especially from the perspective of the New Quest) tend to emphasize the theological continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the kerygmatic Christ by means of historical-critical procedure. The emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus is seen from the perspective of what Jewish scholars regard as obvious, namely that Jesus was a Jew (Vorster 1992:59). However, Christian and Jewish scholars share in many respects the 'same views on history, models and methods and come up with results similar to those of other researchers with the same research interests'. Vorster (1992:60) argued that there is much more at stake here in terms of historical construction and the use of presuppositions. Current Jewish scholarship on Jesus should therefore 'be welcomed as part of the ongoing search'. However, a 'prerequisite for such intergroup study would be honesty about biases and prejudices'.

Vorster (1992:121) concluded his study with a challenge to New Testament scholars who are also theologians. He rightly mentioned the 'need for historical

research about Jesus the Jew and the question of the implications of the historical study of Jesus for Christian theology'. But this applies not only to New Testament scholars, but to theologians in general: '(T)here is also a need for theologians who relate their theology to the teaching of Jesus and to the portrayals of Jesus in the New Testament to take seriously the results obtained by historians in order to come to grips with the nature of their own theology'. More specifically, it seems that Vorster, with an eye on the recent socio-political developments in South Africa, had black liberation theologians in mind. He said: 'The mistake of traditional theology is being unaware of the importance and influence of the modern theologian's context in theological reflection. The mistake of [liberation] theology is that the importance of the historical context of Jesus and the distance between then and now [is] disregarded' (Vorster 1993:15). In an article entitled 'The relevance of Jesus research for the "new" South Africa' (1993), he referred to the lack of interest in the *Jesus of history* shown by liberation theologians like Frank Chikane (1985).

Vorster showed that Christians (not only from the Third World) believe that the tradition within which they live originated with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is seen as the 'answer' (cf Breech 1989:13) to the problems faced by Christians. Another South African scholar, Dirkie Smit (1987:6-9), demonstrated in an article entitled 'Christology from a third world perspective', that the term 'historical Jesus' is used by liberation theologians with four different – although related – meanings: (a) in the sense of Jesus as he is described in the Gospels, (b) especially with relation to his humanity (c) as he appears in his actions towards the poor and the oppressed, and (d) who still suffers with the suffering people of God in the present. In other words, it seems that one of the so-called salvation elements in the 'life' of Jesus is usually taken as the 'answer' or 'solution' to socio-political problems: incarnation, death and crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost and the second coming. Liberation theologians usually emphasize either the incarnation or the crucifixion¹⁵ of Jesus, because they are interested in a Jesus who suffers with the oppressed (cf Chikane 1985:46). Vorster argued, however, that historical inquiry has shown that most of the patterns of life and social and religious structures adopted by Christians as rooted in one or more of these salvation events, were not invented by Jesus himself (cf Breech 1989:13). Jesus, according to Vorster (1993:12), is simply taken at 'face value from the New Testament'. A discussion of the problem of misplaced concreteness, however, leads me in the final instance to an overview of my own work on the historical Jesus.

ENDNOTES

1. See in the list of works cited the publications of Dirkie Smit, Pieter Botha, Jonathan Draper, Johan Engelbrecht, Chris Schnell, Stephan Joubert, Johan Strijdom, Piet Boshoff, Isak du Plessis, Danie Veldsman, Pieter de Villiers and Danie Malan.
2. Because of the difference between indigenous inculturation and black liberation theology, I could also pay attention to the work of liberation theologians like Frank Chikane, Itumeleng Mosala, Engelbert Mveng, and Zablon Nthamburi. See list of works cited. In this regard the books of Albert Nolan (*Jesus before Christianity: The gospel of liberation*) and Ronald Nicolson (*A Black future? Jesus and salvation in South Africa*) deserve some consideration.
3. Du Toit's (1988:267, 288) remarks about Schmithals, however, need to be corrected. According to Du Toit, Schmithals is of the opinion that Jesus, in principle, could be replaced by any 'other figure' and that there is no continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ. See, however, Schmithals (1972) and Boshoff (1993).
4. Mt 16:17-19 – "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven" (TEV).
5. The works discussed by Schweitzer in his treatise of 1906 are those of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (d. 1768 – G E Lessing published his work posthumously between 1774 and 1778); David Friedrich Strauss (1835); Ernest Renan (1863); and William Wrede (1901).
6. Ernst Käsemann (1954); Günther Bornkamm (1956); Hans Conzelmann (1959); Ernst Fuchs (1960); and also Walter Schmithals (1972).
7. Thomas Wright focuses his discussion in his book, *Who was Jesus?*, on the publications (not necessarily scholarly works) of three persons that recently evoked a commotion among the public: B Thiering [1992] (especially *Jesus the man: A new interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls* [1993]), A N Wilson (*Jesus* [1992]), and J S Spong (*Born of a woman: A bishop rethinks the birth of Jesus* [1992]).
8. See Robert Funk's article, entitled 'The Jesus that was'. It is a reworked version of a public lecture presented at the Jesus Seminar, Rutgers University, 22 Octo-

ber 1992. It contains a preliminary sketch of Jesus' 'whole life' within Jewish setting, and it is based on the Westar Institute's Jesus Seminar's red/pink database (as established so far) in terms of 95 parables, sayings and dialogues of Jesus (cf also Jan Botha 1990).

9. Although Mack's 'Cynic-Jesus' is not 'involved in the issues of the *Jewish* social world', it contains a social critique (cf discussion by Borg 1991:5-9). With regard to Crossan's *The historical Jesus*, compare the respective unpublished reviews by Neyrey (1992) and Wright (1992c).
10. Vorster (1987, 1988) argued that social history should be seen as a 'replacement' of traditional historical criticism and not as a 'restoration' thereof. In a response to Vorster's work I personally challenged him on this point. To me, social history or 'sociological exegesis' represents an 'adaptation' of traditional historical-critical concerns to postmodern issues which are nowadays at stake in historical research (Van Aarde 1988a). Recently, Vorster's reflection on this point in question was put this way:

New methods were needed to enable scholars to place texts within the appropriate contexts of communication, because new questions had to be addressed. This implies a completely new assessment of the social aspects within which texts are embedded, a reassessment of what texts are, what language is what people do with language, how ancient social systems operated, and so on....The application of social-scientific models allows scholars to ask different questions from different perspectives and that is why other results are yielded....The application of these models is totally different from traditional *zeitgeschichtliche* constructions based on historical and socio-historical *reconstructions* of the past. The interest in ideas, concepts and beliefs that is typical of the traditional historico-critical approach, is replaced by investigation into the interrelatedness of what is said and done within the applicable social contexts....

(Vorster 1992:42-43)

However, in his articulation of the same issue in the form of one of the 'assumptions' in historical Jesus research since the eighties, Vorster (1992:53) seemed to be more subtle: 'Historical research entails *more than the application of the traditional historico-critical methods* to the Jesus tradition. It also implies the study of the social world with the help of social-scientific methods and models' (my emphasis).

11. This study, with P J J Botha as co-author, served as a research report forming part of the Human Sciences Research Council's project 'Investigation into Research Methodology'. Vorster was responsible for the Introduction (Chapter 1), The Jewishness of Jesus: The state of the question (Chapter 3), The Jewishness of Jesus: Presuppositions in use (Chapter 4.1 – Introduction; Chapter 4.2 – Presuppositions in use: J Riches; E P Sanders; J D Crossan), and Conclusion (Chapter 6). When references are made to Vorster with regard to this particular research project, he himself is the responsible author.
12. Pieter Botha as co-author focused on the work of Ben Meyer and Geza Vermes respectively.
13. The first thirty-two assumptions are selected from Funk & Smith's (1991) list of premises. Vorster added the last seven. My formulation differs slightly in some instances.
14. Again, numbers 3-5 and 23-26 are taken from Funk & Smith. Vorster added the others to the list.
15. Vorster mentioned only the incarnation. However, several examples exist in which either the crucifixion or the resurrection of Jesus is taken as point of departure. For example, Zablon Nthamburi, a Methodist minister from Kenya, offers in his article, 'African theology as a theology of liberation' (1980) – cited by Justin Ukpong (1988:75), 'Theological literature from Africa', in Boff & Elizondo (1988:67-75) – the resurrection of Jesus as the 'radical symbol of Christian liberation'. Nthamburi focuses on 'poverty and racism in South Africa, economic domination by transnational corporations, neo-colonialism and imperialism in the Church and in theology'.

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