ABSTRACT
Willem Vorster did not construe a life of the historical Jesus. He, however, opened pathways in studying some features of what is nowadays referred to as the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. The following aspects received attention in his work: the epistemology of ‘post-critical’ historical research, the presuppositions regarding the ‘Jewishness’ of Jesus, the issue of whether the historical Jesus should be seen as either an eschatological prophet or a wisdom teacher, the use of metaphors for understanding Jesus’ identity, and the relevance of historical Jesus research for the ‘new’ South Africa. This essay aims at tracking some pathways opened by Vorster in the above-mentioned studies for future historical Jesus research. Three directions have been identified as issues that can be considered: the role of the canon as the boundary for investigation, the methodology and criteria regarding the process of the divinization of Jesus and the dynamics behind this process, and the relevance of the Jesus of history for Native Africans, studied from a cross-cultural perspective.

1 INTRODUCTION
In 1990 the New Testament Society of South Africa set up a subgroup on historical Jesus research. It was chaired by Professor Willem S Vorster up to the time of his death in 1992. The establishment of the subgroup was intended to be the first serious historical Jesus research that will be done in South Africa. Prior to the formation of the subgroup only a few publications (mainly articles in scholarly journals or essays in books) had appeared on the historical Jesus (cf Van Aarde 1993a). Among them and among those that have been published in other countries (cf the collection of essays reflecting the state of current research, edited by Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans 1994), Willem Vorster’s contribution is noticeable because it is exceptional. The tracks that he left
behind witness a movement beyond what is called the New Quest for the historical Jesus. Although he did not construe a life of the historical Jesus himself, Vorster opened pathways in studying the features of what is now referred to as the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. This article aims at tracking these pathways.

2 APPROACHING THE THIRD QUEST

Outlines of the history of the quest for the historical Jesus, like those of Keck (1971), Hahn (1974), Borg (1987, 1991, 1994b), Du Toit (1980), Thompson (1985), Wright & Neill (1988) and Telford (1994), seem to find their 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. Four distinctive periods are classified: the Old Quest, the No Quest, the New Quest and the Third 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.

Willem Vorster (1992:22) was correct when he stated 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 1992:6). The proponents of the New Quest became the pioneers who moved beyond Rudolf Bultmann’s so-called No Quest. They were mainly the students of Rudolf Bultmann who pretended to deliver the goods that their mentor had not been prepared to do. However, Marcus Borg (1988:281) convincingly showed that the students of Rudolf Bultmann did not really change the scene with their New Quest. Questions and

1 The material in §§2, 3 and 4 of this article is reprinted from Van Aarde 1993a:407-415 and §5 is a reprint from Van Aarde 1993b:955-956.

2 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).

3 Ernst Käsemann (1954); Günther Bornkamm (1956); Hans Conzelmann (1959); Ernst Fuchs (1960); and also Walter Schmithals (1972).
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). According to Borg, Jesus is now regarded as a ‘teacher of a world-subverting wisdom’ (Borg 1991:15; see also Borg 1994a) 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, 1994a). 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 ‘new’ historical 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 1992:12).

Wright also expressed his ideas about the appearance of this ‘shape’. He describes its main features in the following manner:

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; italics mine).
According to Wright, S G F Brandon (1967) and G Vermes (1973; see also Vermes 1993) were the two early pioneers. Ben F Meyer (1979), Anthony E Harvey (1982), Marcus Borg (1984, 1987; see also Borg 1994a) 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;^4 Funk & Hoover 1993) and those of Burton Mack (1988; see also Mack 1993) and John Dominic Crossan (1991) should be seen as part of the New Quest is, to me, a misjudgement.\(^5\) Whatever the case 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, 1994) and the relevance of historical Jesus research for the 'new' South Africa (Vorster 1994).

3 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 the collection, Paradigms and progress in theology (edited by Mouton, Van Aarde & Vorster 1988). 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 Vor-

4 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 October 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.

5 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). His most recent book (Mack 1993) on the book of Q and christian origins also emphasises the social locations of the very first Jesus movements.
ster, 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’ 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*, Vorster (1992:2-3) puts 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

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6 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 1988). 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).

7 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.
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 according 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 Crossan 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).

4 ASSUMPTIONS IN HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH

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

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8 Pieter Botha as co-author focused on the work of Ben Meyer and Geza Vermes respectively.
9 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. For example, regarding the Third Quest, the word ‘apocalyptical’ is added by myself to assumption 7.
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 figures.
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] presuppositions 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/apocalyptical 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 Again, numbers 3-5 and 23-26 are taken from Funk & Smith. Vorster added the others to the list.
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(s).
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 emphasise 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: 'There 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 stated: '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 Black theology is that the importance of the historical context of Jesus and the distance between then and now are disregarded' (Vorster 1994:630-631). In an article entitled 'The relevance of Jesus research for the "new" South Africa' (1994), 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) the one who still suffers with the suffering people of God in the present. In other words, it seems that one of the so-called salvific elements in the 'life' of Jesus, namely incarnation, suffering and death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost and the second coming, are usually taken as the 'answer' or 'solution' to socio-political problems. Liberation theologians usually emphasise either the incarnation or the crucifixion11 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 and rooted in one or more of these

11 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 Boof & 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'.
salvific events, were not invented by Jesus himself (cf also Breech 1989:13). Jesus, according to Vorster, is simply taken at face value from the New Testament. In my opinion Engelbert Mveng's (1988:19) unreflective use of the term 'historical Christ' is an example of the neglect of the importance of the historical context of Jesus and the distance between then and now, between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

5 CONCLUSION
In his reflection on historical Jesus research Willem Vorster moved beyond the New Quest. However, in his work it also becomes clear that so-called 'post-critical' historical research cannot be understood without considering the assumptions of the historical-critical phase. In other words, the Third Quest for the historical Jesus represents only a selective departure from aspects of the New Quest. The dispositions of the Third Quest are dialectically dependent on those of the New Quest. The term 'paradigm shift' is therefore perhaps premature. Whatever the case may be, certain assumptions should now be seen as really something of the past. These assumptions boil down to three issues: the reliance exclusively on the canonical tradition should be left behind and the important role of the 'intracanonical' tradition (to use a term of Dominic Crossan) should be acknowledged; Jesus as a first-century Jew from Galilee should be studied like other historical figures and should not be regarded as unique; it is impossible to reconstruct the historical Jesus, his words, deeds and context—these are constructed by scholars, using whatever material and applicable methods and models are available.

The contribution of Vorster rests especially on the compilation of what he referred to as a 'profile of presuppositions' behind the work of Jewish scholars as well as those of non-Jewish scholars on the historical Jesus. Although he did not bring this comparison into direct relation with an inter-religious dialogue, he inaugurated with this profile a helpful starting point. Dilemmas within the inter-religious dialogue, like the issue of the particularity of Jesus the Jew, can be addressed in a sensible way by taking into consideration the assumptions in present-day historical Jesus research regarding the 'uniqueness'/'commonality' of the Jesus of history. Such an issue has relevance not only for the relationship between the Synagogue and the Church, but also for the dialogue between Christians and members of other world religions (cf Samartha 1974; Dupuis 1991; Pope-Levison & Levison 1992; Song 1993).

6 TRACKING THE PATHWAYS
As we have seen, epistemological issues deeply concerned Willem Vorster. The presuppositions which underlie the investigation into the Jewishness of Jesus constituted the main point of epistemological reflection in his work. As a
matter of course, epistemology has become the particular characteristic of recent South African historical Jesus research (cf Van Aarde 1993a, 1993b).

Tracking the pathways opened by Willem Vorster, within the South African theological framework, at least three directions can be identified. The one pertains to traditional confessional propositions concerning the role of the canon as the boundary for investigation (cf Van Aarde 1994a). The other point in question relates to the Rückfrage (including methodology and criteria) regarding the process of the divinization of Jesus—and the social dynamics behind this process—from the time of the earliest Jesus movements up to the time of formative Christianity and the formation of the classical creeds. The third is of a cross-cultural nature and is concerned with the relevance of the Jesus of history for Native Africans. At least some of the influential theologians among them consider Jesus to be an ‘elder brother’ in the light of ‘ancestral kinship’ (cf Van Aarde 1994b).

What is at stake concerning the third issue, is ‘transymbolization’. Vorster’s (1990b) emphasis on the ‘function of metaphorical language about the unobservable in the teaching of Jesus’ seems to be relevant in this regard. In his article, ‘The relevance of Jesus research for the “new” South Africa’, he stated: ‘To my mind Jesus created a framework of understanding by the use of metaphorical stories regarding the kingdom of God. By using open-ended stories he created a reality which enabled his hearers to see the world in which they lived as a place where God ruled and where life was worth-while’ (Vorster 1994:625). In other words, although God’s rule is ‘unobservable’, Jesus (like anyone of us) used metaphorical language to articulate God’s presence among people. The christological ‘title’ Son of God is an example. As John Macquarrie (1992:42) rightly puts it: ‘To speak of Jesus as “Son of God” is to use a metaphor’. Likewise, according to Vorster (1994:620), ‘christological sentences can best be explained as metaphorical expressions of theological reflection and of faith’. He is of the opinion, referring to the ‘christological sentence’: Jesus is the Son of God, that one of the major problems of christology is the ‘status of “is” sentences used with reference to Jesus’. He stated: ‘In the sentence: “Jesus is the Son of God”, “is” is often understood in an ontological, and not a metaphorical sense’ (Vorster 1994:620). Vorster apparently presumed that the connotative meaning of the relational preposition of in the phrase “Son of God” is that of identification. Consequently Jesus’ Godlike equality is inferred. However, to my mind, contrary to Western ontological thinking, the African image of Jesus as ‘elder brother’ (cf Nyamiti 1984; Nthamburi 1991:67), is also a metaphorical expression of ‘theological reflection and of faith’, to use the words of Vorster. He correctly stated: ‘The search for the historical Jesus has to do with “is” sentences of a historical nature, while many of the christological statements have bearing on the sig-
nificance of Jesus for believers’ (Vorster 1994:620). This does, however, not mean that the ‘sentences of a historical nature’ cannot be metaphorical as well. The use of a metaphor in a different time and cultural context to express the same connotative meaning as that of a metaphor used in another time and cultural context has to do with the process I referred to as transymbolization. The validity of the use of such new metaphors as ‘metaphorical expressions of theological reflections and of faith’ must be tested by comparing it with metaphors of a ‘historical nature’, that is comparing it with the root metaphors.

In my opinion the thrust of the historical Jesus’ life and work was that he trusted God as his Abba, and by doing so he metaphorically redefined the unobservable kingdom of God in terms of a ‘Son of God’ relationship. Such a belief, although ‘historical of nature’ as far as the faith of Jesus is concerned, is as metaphorical as any other comparable christological statement by later generations of believers. Therefore, indeed, the search for the historical Jesus can help us to evaluate whether the creation of new metaphors, either by the New Testament communities or later generations of believers, is in correspondence with the connotative meaning of the ‘metaphorical language about the unobservable in the teaching of Jesus’ himself.

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