Historical Jesus research and systematic theology: From alienation to a common vision

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ABSTRACT
The alienation between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology concerning the historical Jesus is discussed. How the category 'historical Jesus' functions in systematic theologies is discussed and several emerging trends in christology are pointed out. The paper pleads for more meaningful interaction between New Testament scholarship and systematic christology. This may be achieved by (a) identifying the fundamental differences between systematic christology and the Third Quest, (b) searching for a common vision based on a common social location which reveals the inter-dependence of the two disciplines, and (c) accepting the critical challenges to historical Jesus research and to systematic theology.

1 INTRODUCTION
The publication and proliferation in recent years of exciting work on the historical Jesus is not only an event which should be taken note of in a sensationalist way by reporters for popular consumption, but it is also a development of major significance which deserves in-depth discussion, evaluation and eventual appropriation by theological disciplines other than only New Testament scholarship. This paper is a modest attempt by a systematic theologian to participate in this conversation.

The ramifications of historical Jesus research could be addressed in diverse ways by systematic theology. To question the theological or christological significance of the research is probably the most self-evident. This question is often found as a theme in dogmatological literature. Another option would be to problematise it as the relation between faith and history, which is also encountered in systematic theology. I would like to opt for a third possibility: to focus on the interface between two theological disciplines regarding the historical Jesus—New Testament scholarship and systematic theology. Our social location and the specific time in which we conduct our intellectual conversation not only justify, but more importantly, require such an approach. Epochal social shifts in Southern Africa have rendered established orientations of scientific disciplines invalid and demand creative reconceptions of their functions. Theology in its diverse manifestations—for exam-
ple New Testament scholarship and systematic theology—cannot escape this imperative of unsettling but liberating soul-searching.

Approaching the problem in this way allows me to juggle several issues simultaneously: to lament the tragic tale of fragmentation and alienation between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology; to describe the predicament of contemporary systematic theologies; and to discuss the diverse and changing attitudes of systematic theology towards the historical Jesus. Above all, it enables me to argue constructively for a common vision for both New Testament scholarship and systematic theology to respond to the situational imperative facing intellectual endeavours in Southern Africa. The historical Jesus research epitomises not only the embarrassment of exclusion among theological disciplines, but also the challenge of an ethically accountable representation by the theologian as an intellectual. A return to the historical Jesus could be a source of renewal for individual faith, ecclesial life, society and for interdisciplinary inclusion and co-operation.

Needless to say, a comprehensive treatment of such an interface cannot be undertaken in a paper of this nature; demarcation is obviously necessary. I will limit myself to work done in the past twenty five years in systematic theology in order to examine how the historical Jesus has been valued in total christological projects. That systematic theology must respond to the findings, methodology and implications of the present Third Quest is obvious. To this I will restrict myself.

2 A RELATIONSHIP OF ALIENATION AND FRAGMENTATION

The proper locus for treatment of the historical Jesus is the problematic relationship between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology. The perennial emergence of this thematics is indicative of the unresolved tensions within theology and the unsatisfying fragmentation within the theological encyclopaedia. The relationship between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology has, however, not always been problematic. It has become so only since the rise of the historical-critical method (Berger 1994:83). Without an account of the ‘internal myth’ of this method that biblical scholarship ‘was a struggle outward from dogma into the freedom of history, and upward to the higher truth’ (Johnson 1995:108), the historical Jesus research can obviously not be appreciated. The words of Koester (1991:474) in this regard are quite instructive:

1 Edward Farley’s name has become synonymous with the problem of fragmentation and unity in theological education. See Farley 1983.
Those who fear that the historical-critical method threatens their control over the religious orientation and theological judgment of their constituencies are absolutely correct.

That the effect of the historical-critical method has eventually become alienating (see Vorster 1987:380—'vervreemdingseffek') is understandable. Even with the steady erosion of the historical paradigm and the realisation of its limitations (see Vorster 1984), the fragmentation and alienation of New Testament scholarship and systematic theology have become a permanent feature of the theological landscape. Recently Borg (1994a:188) wrote the following alarming words:

The last few decades have seen an increasing separation between historical Jesus scholarship and systematic theology (including christology) as intellectual disciplines, and a corresponding separation of historical Jesus scholarship from an explicitly Christian theological agenda.

The tragic tale of fragmentation and alienation is fundamentally a manifestation of the crisis of representation which is experienced also on the wider intellectual horizon. It is clearly not just a question of representing by one coherent conceptual (dogmatological) system the textual horizon of the New Testament in its distinctiveness (i.e. different symbolic and social world, variety of text-types and types of language, diversity of early Christian communities), but rather and especially it is a question of representing the New Testament as mediated and represented by New Testament scholarship. This constitutes the crisis and the problematic. To put this in other terms: to represent the Jesus of the canonical Gospels is already difficult and problematic; the Jesus mediated and represented or 'constructed' by New Testament scholarship and offered to systematic theology is not only different in some instances but it is also much more problematic to assimilate. Instead of facilitating representation, New Testament scholarship has actually complicated it.2

The consequences of such fragmentation and alienation are known to all: mutual disappointment and demonising rhetoric. New Testament scholars have assumed the role of systematic theologians,3 and dogmaticians have started to do their own interpretation. In private discourse, uninhibited by

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1 Botha's (1993) discussion of König is a case in point: after being impressed by Botha's lucid identification of the various dimensions of the problematic, one despondently wonders: is the conversation he proposes really possible? Is the distancing between the biblical text and systematic theology rendered by New Testament scholarship necessarily so final that no prospect of fusion remains?

2 Why are some historical Jesus researchers, e.g. Borg, so anxious to explicate the significance of their work for the church?
the constraints of public civility, one often encounters disparagements of New Testament scholars as being post-ecclesial and dogmaticians as being pre-modern.

This tension is the natural habitus of the historical Jesus. The question is whether this crisis of representation in an explicit post-modern horizon does not also hold the potential for transcending alienation, aversion, and demonisation. This, I believe, is possible, and this I would argue. A common vision integrating both disciplines and representing the historical Jesus as a source of renewal could be established.

Before attempting to do that, it is necessary to call attention to the fragmentation within systematic theology itself and to the attitude towards the historical Jesus in systematic theology.

3 THE PREDICAMENT OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The impression must not be given that systematic theology is a house in order, a discipline at peace with itself. A meaningful conversation with New Testament scholarship is not possible without a basic awareness of the turbulent nature of contemporary systematic theology. Plurality has also entered this domain and caused the expected disorientation. The predicament of systematic theology is exactly this: the loss of a clear profile and the absence of an unambiguous sense of direction. It would be more appropriate to refer to systematic theologies and enquire which one enters into dialogue with New Testament scholarship.

Within the purview of this paper to suggest a taxonomy would not be pertinent. Suffice it to say that the configuration of various constituent elements (e.g., norms, sources, methods, publics, aims, task conceptions, situational analyses, truth conceptions, etc.) profiles the identity of present systematic theological epistemes. Three are especially relevant and worth mentioning. (a) How the present is being named (see Tracy 1990) or the situation interpreted (see F. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:66-70) fundamentally determines task-conceptions and the aims of the discipline. Depending on whether the contemporary horizon is read in terms of oppression or secularism, antimodernism or post-modernism, the results will obviously be totally different systematic theologies. (b) How the nature of the dogmatic activity is conceptualised (e.g., demonstratively or rhetorically) equally effects the nature of systematic theology. At the root of this lies either a positivistic naivety or an acceptance of the historical and ideological nature of all knowledge with manifest effects. (c) How the exclusion or inclusion of traditionally repressed voices, as normative and authoritative, is valued radically defines systematic theologies.
Especially since the late sixties, systematic theology has been experiencing drastic changes—what could conveniently be called a paradigm-shift. The reign of individual continental giants has been steadily replaced by the collective voices of the marginalised ‘Others’: other races, other cultures, other gender, other class, non-Christian religions and nature. The recent history of systematic theology is nothing but a story of the loss of innocence and a struggle to include forgotten conversational partners. Hitherto, it has been a power-discourse promoting the concerns, interests and values of the global minority. The predicament of recent systematic theology is exactly this: the discrediting of this integrating centre and the relentless persistence of the exclusivist syndrome in the dominant discourse. The challenge is to supersede the growing fragmentation with an inclusive systematic theology which could assimilate into the dominant discourse of the centre the perspectives and truth of all the marginalised Others. The prospects for this, however, are bleak. For the present, New Testament scholarship must be content with this Janus-face of systematic theology during the conversation.

4 THE CATEGORY ‘HISTORICAL JESUS’ IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIES

This predicament, however, should not deter us from enquiring after the way in which systematic theologies have taken note of historical Jesus research. This must now be attempted in this section.

The major problem facing any researcher is the voluminous amount of work produced on christology in the last quarter of a century. Apart from the impossibility of mastering all the literature, one is compelled to make selections which must be both representative and inclusive of all perspectives. This forces some kind of classification which is usually artificial and unsatisfying. Broadly speaking, christologies (not necessarily the use of the historical Jesus in the total christological construal) can be divided formally into three categories:

* Traditional christologies of the dominant centre. Most denominational and confessional works belong here.
* Progressive christologies of the First Enlightenment. Most of the works of the continental giants are to be found here.

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5 Sobrino (1978:19) has made the illuminating distinction between two different attitudes towards the Enlightenment: the one underscores the autonomy of reason vis-à-vis any imposition from outside (the movement started with Kant) and the other, the autonomy of the whole person vis-à-vis alienating structures (the movement started
Christologies from the marginalised Others. This includes works from the Third World. Differences, however, are so prevalent that it is untenable to employ this scheme for my purpose here.

A general shift is to be detected from the Chalcedonian emphasis on the full humanity of Christ to the historical Jesus (see Galvin 1994 and Hellwig 1989). This correlates and intensifies also with the shift from traditional to progressive to marginalised christologies. Within this continuum at least five basic positions are discernible. They will also form the map of my exposition on how the historical Jesus functions within systematic theologies:

(a) Emphasis on the true humanity of Christ, with no reference to the historical Jesus.
(b) Kählerian scepticism about the relevance and validity of the historical Jesus.
(c) Appreciation of the historical Jesus within the problematic of faith and history.
(d) Appropriation of the historical Jesus within a holistic soterio-centric scheme.
(e) Deliberate return to the historical Jesus for a liberative praxis amidst suffering.

The following questions can guide the investigation: Is there any reference to the historical Jesus in the total christological project? How is the category 'historical Jesus' understood? What significance is attached to the historical Jesus? What function does the historical Jesus play in each christology?

4.1 Absence of the historical Jesus

I have selected as a representative case the bulky volume, Beknopte Gereformeerde dogmatiek, by Van Genderen and Velema. This I have done for several reasons: it is not only a recent publication (1992) and exceptionally comprehensive (the modest title is deceptive!), but it also embodies both a widely influential christological position and the chasm between the preoccupation of contemporary New Testament scholarship and some christological trajectories.

The mould used is consistently traditional. Notwithstanding the caution that person and work are inseparable, these remain the major organisational categories: first a treatment of the person of Christ, stressing his two natures—deity and humanity—in one person, then his work in the two states of humiliation and exaltation, and finally a synthesis of his work in terms of...
reconciliation and victory. This schema is well-known.

There is no reference to the problem of the historical Jesus, only two brief asides which might give an indication that the authors are aware of it but do not regard it as important enough to discuss: a short quotation from Kähler that warns that portrayals of Jesus might reflect the spirit of the time (:403), and a rejection of the objection that the Gospels are not sources of knowledge of Christ because of their nature as faith-testimonies (:404-405).

Where the earthly Jesus is discussed, the stress is not only on his true humanity contra docetism but also on how to portray it as distinct from ours—as righteous and sinless (:417-421). The explication of Christ’s work in his state of humiliation displays the traditional lacuna: the jump from his virginal birth to his suffering and death.

When this christology is viewed from the perspective of the authors’ own explicit dogmatological episteme, something tragic comes to the fore: the ambiguous way the New Testament canon functions in the christological project. Velema wrote pretentiously elsewhere (1992:49): ‘Dit boek zoekt zijn kracht in de fundering in de Schrift.’ The introduction to the dogmatics courageously recognises that ways part precisely because of attitudes towards the authority of Scripture (:20), and that dogmatics should supersede confessions and bring old and new treasures from the Bible (:21). Formal principles like these should be materialised, otherwise systematic theology remains under the spell of repristination. Why neglect a significant segment of the New Testament canon? Why the absence of the earthly Jesus, let alone the historical Jesus as scientific construct? Should a biblical systematic theology not specifically rectify this traditional imbalance?

### 4.2 Rejection of the historical Jesus

The work of Tracy represents another attitude towards the historical Jesus. The theological concerns of this erudite theologian are well-known: theological method, hermeneutics, pluralism within theology, cultures and religious traditions, theology as public discourse, and theology’s accountability to the church, academy, and society. ‘Most would agree that Tracy exemplifies the ideal of civilized conversation on the most important issues in contemporary theology’ (Sanks 1993:719). Albeit he has not produced a full-length christology, his The analogical imagination (1981) contains trenchant insights into the problem of the historical Jesus which deserve serious attention.

Christianity, according to Tracy, is not strictly a religion of the book, but of an event and a person. The classic event is the religious event of God’s self-manifestation in the person of Jesus Christ. Systematic theology is an interpretation of the religious classic of the Christian tradition. It expands through
interpretation of that event to understand God and humanity, the church and the world (:242). This event is an event from the whole and by the power of the whole, that is, from God and by God: 'to speak religiously and theologically of the Christ event is ultimately to speak of an event from God' (:234).

The event of Jesus Christ is mediated through the tradition, community and church which together remember Jesus and keep alive his dangerous memory. 'The tradition is the major constitutive mediating reality of the event of Jesus Christ' (:237). Only through this mediation are we able to know Jesus as he was and is. Tracy emphasises a 'fundamental trust' in the classic expressions of the tradition (:236). The Scriptures are a relatively adequate witness to and memory of this event.

The historical Jesus controversy is an example of a confusion between criteria of appropriateness and intelligibility according to Tracy (:238f). The question of intelligibility (i.e. to enquire about Jesus on strictly historical grounds) could be asked, but this could never provide the norm or standard for the tradition. The appropriate norm, that is, on the tradition's internal grounds, could only be the apostolic witness to Jesus—the actual Jesus remembered by the community and proclaimed as the Christ. The crux for Tracy is how the actual Jesus who lived is affirmed: through the memory of the tradition or through historical-critical reconstruction (:245). The 'relevant Jesus' (:239) or the 'Jesus of Christianity' (:243) is the actual Jesus remembered by the church in the Scriptures. The historical Jesus, 'definable as the actual Jesus who lived insofar as he is known or knowable today by way of empirical-historical methods,' is theologically not necessary to the Christian affirmation of Jesus Christ (:245) because it does not 'ground' Christian faith. The tradition grounds that faith. The quest is theologically 'inappropriate' because of the authoritative role of the apostolic-biblical witnesses to the Christ event (:295). Tracy views his position as fundamentally in line with Kähler's and Bultmann's positions (:245, 300). The Jesus we know in the Christ event is the Jesus remembered and confessed by the original community of witnesses, not the Jesus adjudicated by historical-critical inquiry. The crucial category for Tracy is 'the Jesus-kerygma of the earliest apostolic witness' as the primary witness within the whole tradition of witnesses (:290, 301). Recovery of this Jesus-kerygma through various methods could allow it to function as a corrective to all later experiences of the Christ event (:259). The retrieval of this Jesus-kerygma, and not any theological claims about the role of the historical Jesus, makes the dangerous memory of Jesus alive today for church and society (:334, 444).

The question could be raised as to whether Tracy has not compromised his own fundamental distinction between event and text, the importance of which he stresses can never be exaggerated (1991b:116). The Jesus-kerygma is
an interpretation and textually mediated. This interpretation must also be construed before it can function as a corrective. A further question can be raised: despite Tracy’s fundamental trust, could one interpretation ever be a norm for other interpretations? Should not the historical event as such, before any mediation/interpretation, be the norm? The problem is that ‘event’ is already a heavily interpreted category in Tracy’s work.

4.3 Appreciation of the historical Jesus within the faith-history problematic

The acceptance of historical consciousness as the dominant contour of the modern intellectual horizon and the readiness to enter into critical dialogue with historical disciplines must be appreciated as true progress in contemporary christology. Several major works of the last twenty five years manifest this new attitude and contain a major shift towards incorporating the historical Jesus into their total projects (see, e.g., Rahner 1978, Küng 1978, O’Collins 1983).

Most of these progressive christologies of the continent are to be situated within the faith-history problematic as incisively formulated by Lessing as the ‘ugly ditch’ between accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason, that is, the illicit movement from a premise that is only contingently true to a conclusion that is necessarily true. The problem is comprehensive and far-reaching. Michalson (1985) has persuasively indicated that at least three ditches constitute the shape of the problem: a temporal ditch (the epistological question whether or not certain historical events actually occurred), a metaphysical ditch (the problem of relating events to truth), and an existential ditch (the issue of appropriation). The first two are nothing but manifestations of the appropriation dilemma. Repudiating appeal to unquestioned authority in the settlement of a religious question was the chief concern for Lessing, who advocated a clear shift that the autonomous self be the criterion for what can be considered truly revelatory, and not something in the outer message. Michalson warns correctly that the faith-history problem should not be reduced to the temporal issue.

I would like to introduce three systematic theologians here who, each in his own way, struggles christologically within this intellectual climate: McGrath, Kasper, and Pannenberg.

Alister McGrath I have chosen not only because he is a highly esteemed and influential evangelical theologian whose recently published dogmatics—Christian theology: An introduction (1994)—is widely used as a textbook, but especially because he exemplifies a somewhat idiosyncratic position (see also Spykman 1992:382-395). He announces, two hundred years after Lessing, the ‘new christological agenda:’ faith and history! He describes the problem (following Michalson), and then narrates the history of the his-
torical Jesus research up to the New Quest (he mentions Vermes and Sanders in conclusion). What is unsettling is that this happens after he has already treated the doctrine of the person of Christ in a previous chapter. What is at stake here must not escape the reader: the encyclopaedic option is non-committal, avoids serious discussion and allows no appropriation at all. One reviewer (Williams 1994:32) correctly perceived this: a purely descriptive approach tends 'to create the idea that doing theology is like visiting a mall and purchasing whatever your fancy.'

Walter Kasper's work, *Jesus the Christ* (originally 1974), is one of the truly significant christologies of our time. Labouring consciously within the parameters of the Tübingen tradition (1989:5)—theology must belong within the context of the church; it must be scholarly or scientific; and it must be open to the questions of the time—Kasper displays a fruitful combination of exegesis, dogmatics and philosophy. His reading of his situation is clear: secularistic—'The cleft between faith and modern culture is in fact the real drama of our time' (1989:14, see also 2-3).

The two main trends of contemporary christology according to Kasper are the attempt to reinterpret Chalcedon with the aid of modern philosophical categories and to rethink christology from the perspective of the historical Jesus. This identification probably also unlocks the structure of Kasper's own work: he, at length and with considerable skill, first treats the earthly Jesus (kingdom, miracles, Jesus' hidden claim and titles and death) and only afterwards, the mystery of Jesus (deity, humanity and his person). The hinge of this bipartite structure is formed by an extensive discussion of the resurrection. When compared with older christologies, Kasper's accents are quite innovative.

A renewed christology does not consist only of the re-interpretation of traditional dogmatic formulas but also of a return to the historical Jesus. Kasper warns, however, against a concentration on the 'Jesus cause;' such a 'flat-footed theology can justify neither the uniqueness nor the universality of the Christian faith' (1976:19). He champions a 'christology of complementarity' or 'reciprocity' which correlates the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ (1976:19, 35). Both elements must be taken with equal seriousness. The primary criterion of christology is the earthly Jesus and the risen, exalted Christ; the historical Jesus can never be the entire and only valid content of faith.

Kasper also cautions that the question of the theological relevance of the historical Jesus is still to be resolved (1976:33). According to him the historical aspect expels any trace of myth, that is, faith as an idea, and any docetism. Above all it means that the church is only the secondary criterion
of christology; the primacy of Jesus Christ before and over the church must be maintained. He warns, however, that despite the gains of historical thinking, the historical method stands for an entire world-view which might obscure, with its insistence on the general correlation of all events, the real novum which took place in Jesus Christ (1976:34-35).

Notwithstanding Kasper's reflections within the orbit of the New Quest and the dominant centre, his work remains a model of serious engagement with the wider intellectual horizon. In a time of local histories and concrete liberations, his advocating of a 'universally responsible Christology' (1976:20) and his notion of an idealistically defined freedom (1976:54f) sound somewhat dated.

Pannenberg is a theologian who takes the challenges raised by the Enlightenment seriously. Hence truth can never be presupposed by dogmatics, but must be its goal (1991:35). The situation he consciously addresses is similar to Kasper's; it is especially clear when he says that theology must face the contesting of the reality and revelation of God in the world (1991:50). The systematic argumentation and presentation of the truth of Christian doctrine is the task of dogmatics (1991:48ff). 'The force of argumentation alone is what counts' (1991:51).

Consequently theology can never ignore the question of the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. Christology is thus concerned with the grounding of the community's confession of Christ (1977:28). Methodologically the option for Pannenberg is obvious: from below to above. A method from above to below presupposes the divinity, whereas the demand is to furnish reasons for any christological claim (1977:34). Christology must get behind confessions and titles to reach the foundation which underlies faith in Jesus. Christology must ask how far the history of Jesus is the basis of faith (1994:282).

Pannenberg is especially interested in the 'inner systematic consistency' (1994:282) of christological statements: the inner necessity or correspondence between the apostolic message and Jesus himself. This link may be established only if the resurrection is considered part of the historical basis of a christology from below (1994:283f). The raising of Jesus would then legitimise Jesus' pre-Easter work and render the primitive Christian witness an explication of implicit meaning.

Scrutinising Pannenberg's total project, one inevitably wonders: where is this historical Jesus? The governing perspective consists of two questions: what constitutes Jesus' unique humanity and what constitutes his unity with God? Especially the latter is the focus of his christology. The distinctiveness of a christological way of speaking about Jesus resides in its theological character; thus Pannenberg can declare: 'while Christology must begin with the man Jesus, its first question has to be his unity with God' (1977:36).
From the perspective of the historical Jesus, Pannenberg’s christology is a disappointment. The convincing argument for an approach from below remains an unexploited principle which has yielded no new avenues. Perhaps his choice of an argumentative theology without a full-blown rhetorical model as support is the Achilles heel of his total project. A rhetorically informed christology would have been more sensitive to the potential of the historical Jesus for a concrete situation, for the ideological interests underlying all christological decisions and reflection, and for alternative argumentative strategies (see the excellent work of Cunningham 1991 in this regard).

4.4 Appropriation of the historical Jesus within a holistic soterio-centric scheme

The culmination of Moltmann’s christological reflection in the mature work, *The way of Jesus Christ* (1990), is especially notable for two reasons. It not only surmounts the tensions inherent in a structure like Kasper’s (to combine a focus on the historical Jesus with one on—albeit reinterpreted—Chalcedon), but also sets an example of how serious engagement with underlying ideological interests and a thorough analysis of the situation and the intellectual horizon could be productive for christological reflection. What distinguishes this work from those of the previous section is both the effects of a different reading of the present on an appropriation of the historical Jesus and the comprehensive explication of a corresponding soteriology. Moltmann’s thoughts are too richly textured to be treated fairly in a brief synopsis; the book itself must be read.

Moltmann makes the instructive observation that the change of christological paradigms occurs when changes in the human question about salvation shift the focus of the soteriological relevance of christology (1990:39). His work is a conscious and deliberate therapeutic christology, one that aims to offer holistic salvation as healing (44-45).

Moltmann’s proposal—a christology in the contradictions of scientific and technological civilisation—is radically informed by his social analysis of three crises (63ff): the growing North-South inequality (including the ‘new poor’), the nuclear threat and the ecological catastrophe.

The metaphor of the ‘way’ is determinant for Moltmann. It assists him to grasp Jesus dynamically in the forward movement of God’s history with the

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6 Bauckham (1991:519) regards this as probably the most important work on christology for a decade at least.

7 The christology of Schillebeeckx belongs in this section with Moltmann. He has also incorporated the tenets of critical theory and developed holistic soteriological views.
world. His is a narrative christology in the eschatological history of God. It allows the person of Jesus Christ to change and expand (1990:xv, 70-71). The book is then organised accordingly: five chapters on the five stages of Jesus’ way: his earthly mission, his cross, his resurrection, his present cosmic role and his parousia.

The chapter on Jesus’ earthly ministry is extensive. It highlights Jesus as the bearer of the Spirit who mediates his unique Sonship. Jesus’ personal identity is not treated in isolation; he is primarily who he is in relationships. His healings of the sick and acceptance of the outcasts are all signs of holistic salvation. The unusual element is the detailed attention given to Jesus’ ethical teaching. This accords also with the ‘way’ as an ethical category: to know Jesus means learning to know him in the praxis of discipleship; christology must be related to christopraxis (1990:43).

Situating Jesus within Jewish messianology also enables Moltmann to enter into an inter-religious dialogue with Judaism. Jesus as Messiah must be understood in a way that is not anti-Jewish, and the Jewish objection that the world is still unredeemed must be taken seriously.

Moltmann believes that a christology cannot be restricted to the earthly person of Jesus of Nazareth. Any truncation of the eschatological person of Christ to the private person of Jesus, or of his cosmic presence to his time on earth, ‘must not be surprised to discover that christology is no longer a subject that has any relevance at all’ (1990:41).

The work of Moltmann is a crucial contribution to recovering the essential historical character of the Christian faith. Historical categories have replaced substantialist metaphysical ones. His theological imagination is at times however so forceful, so trenchant (e.g. ‘Jesus as Messianic Human Being,’ ‘Childlike Human Being,’ ‘Brotherly and Sisterly Human Being’) that theological interpretation eclipsed the gains of stressing the earthly mission of Jesus. Reference to the historical Jesus should not just create an opportunity to further preconceived views.

4.5 Deliberate return to the historical Jesus for a liberating praxis amidst suffering

The best-articulated definite return to the historical Jesus occurs in Latin American liberation theology to which an excellent brief introduction is available in Boff and Boff (1987) and a comprehensive exposition of various aspects and themes in Ellacuría and Sobrino (1993). It manifests a trend widely found in theologies of the marginalised Others (e.g., Grant 1989). I have selected Sobrino as the leading christologist of Latin American liberation theology to represent this major emphasis in recent christology (see also Boff 1980, Segundo 1985, Bussmann 1985). The space assigned to this position
in comparison to the previous ones is misleading: it is disproportionate to its real importance and belies its significance.

The distinctiveness of this theology is methodological: critical reflection on historical praxis. Thus, the status of the situation and the actual Christian involvement as the starting-point of this theology make it innovative. Sobrino (1994:5) views the Latin American continent as being 'crucified.' The identification of the ecclesial and social setting as the 'substantial situation in which christology offers itself, allows itself to be affected, questioned and enlightened,' is of paramount importance (1994:28). This is the church of the poor and the world of the poor. The world of the poor as unjust, cruel and overwhelming poverty is a summons to thought which shapes christology.

Sobrino underscores the reality of 'harmful christologies,' 'alienating images' of Christ: 'the highest christological affirmations about Christ may subtly become an alibi for not recognizing—and following—Jesus' (1994:40). The challenge in Latin America is to think about Christ from the perspective of the fact of real life and death, to relate him to the basic needs of the poor. This requires a new image of Christ: Jesus the Liberator.

A liberation christology is a deliberate option for the historical Jesus. In a world of poverty, the poor and Jesus of Nazareth converge and point to each other. Sobrino understands 'historical Jesus' as 'the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his words and actions, his activity and his praxis, his attitudes and his spirit, his fate on the cross (and his resurrection)' (1994:50, see also 36). There are several reasons for this return: Jesus is not only logically and chronologically the way to Christ, but he is also the safeguard for Christ: 'we can confess a Christ who does not resemble Jesus, even a Christ who is at odds with Jesus' (1994:39). The 'depacification' of Christ—the greatest task for faith—is also achieved in this way (1994:50).

The meaning of this return to the historical Jesus is the retrieval of 'the most historical aspect of the historical Jesus:' his practice and the spirit with which he carried it out. By 'practice' Sobrino means 'the whole range of activities Jesus used to act on social reality and transform it in the specific direction of the Kingdom of God;' by 'spirit' he means the 'honesty toward the real world, partiality for the "little ones," deep-seated mercy, faithfulness to the mystery of God' (1994:51f).

Liberation christology does not speak only out of pain, but it also speaks out of the joy which Christ produces. Speaking about the historical Jesus is essentially speaking about the historical liberation He mediates. This soteriological dimension must not be missed.

The fundamental goal of this christology is to reevaluate Jesus' own faith: to let him become not only the primary content of our faith, but also a struct-
tural model for that faith (1980:192). A christopraxis is not only the maximal expression of faith in Jesus, but also the continuation of his deed and intent. Following Jesus means the fundamental building-up of the reign of God with the practice and spirit of Jesus (1993:447-452).

Sobrino points out that a return to the historical Jesus is not a reduction of christology to a pure jesuology (1993:440). A christology presupposes the 'whole reality of Jesus Christ' (1994:36). Attention to the historical Jesus must proceed to the total Christ. A christology must assert the ultimacy (fullness of the human occurring in Jesus) of Christ (1993:440, 442). This Sobrino develops by relating Jesus as mediator to the reign of God (1993:440-443). Sobrino organises his recent work (1994) around three fundamental points: Jesus' relationship to the kingdom, his relationship to the Father and his death on the cross.

4.6 Concluding comments

In this overview I have tried, on the one hand, to avoid generalisation by tending to individual theologians; on the other hand, I deliberately refrained from giving an account of views on specific elements in Jesus' life. What is at stake is to get an impression of the general attitude towards the problem of the historical Jesus. Another research paper could examine how these five groups understand specific questions like Jesus' relation to John the Baptist, his conception of the kingdom, the role of miracles, Jesus' self-understanding, conflict with his contemporaries, reasons for his death, et cetera. From the brief overview several conclusions can be drawn:

(a) I cannot escape from the impression that 'historical Jesus' is a muddled category when used by systematic theologians. There is no terminological clarity. What exactly do they mean when referring to the historical Jesus? In all but a few exceptions (e.g. Tracy), the historical Jesus is not explicitly understood as a theoretical construct reached by way of a specific method. Is the category, 'historical Jesus,' in the majority of the work not a mere distilled Synoptic hybrid? Crossan (1994b:159) aptly calls this the 'condensed diatessaron of the canonical Jesus.' Meier (1990) has discussed the terminological confusion at length and decisively. He rejects the distinction between historical (historisch) and historic (geschichtlich), and proposes a tripartite one: real Jesus, historical Jesus and earthly Jesus. The 'real Jesus' is not the historical Jesus because what really occurs in history is much broader than the history recoverable by a historian (:14-18). The 'historical Jesus' is a modern abstraction and construct; the quest 'can reconstruct only a fragment of a mosaic, the faint outline of a faded fresco that allows of many interpretations' (:18-19). The 'earthly Jesus' is the Gospel picture of Jesus—partial and
theologically coloured—during his life on earth (:21). According to these distinctions of Meier, most of the systematians employ the category ‘earthly Jesus’ when talking about the ‘historical Jesus.’

(b) A shift in contemporary systematic christology is, without doubt, taking place. The felt need to return to the ‘historical Jesus’ is closely related to a heightened sense of the underlying (and determining) epistemological issues and the imperative to operate with a consciously articulated conception of the intellectual and social horizon.

(c) The contribution of the Third Quest is virtually totally absent from recent systematic christologies. It is a pity that a person like Schillebeeckx can write in 1989 that since the original publication of his Jesus: An experiment in Christology in 1974 ‘geen echt nieuwe gezichtspunten (zijn) naar voren gekomen’ (1989:123). The conversation—orientation, evaluation, appropriation—with the Third Quest has yet to start. This is the challenge to contemporary christology.

(d) Certain christological constants persistently surface in the work reviewed: the relationship between Jesus and God, Jesus and salvation, Jesus and the continuing witness of the church, and the question of the uniqueness of Jesus. The different christologies address these in diverse ways, but despite this, these function as categorical provisos which cannot be ignored in the debate with New Testament scholarship on the historical Jesus.

(e) There is a growing sense of an ethic of doing christology. Two options are obviously no longer acceptable in the light of the challenges posed by historical Jesus research: a repristinational one (ignoring the problem and uncritically repeating formulated doctrines) and an encyclopaedic one (mentioning the problem without really integrating it). The mere fact of a shift towards the ‘historical Jesus’ is no reason for being complacent. The real challenge is to take note, as widely as possible, of what is being done, especially in the Third Quest, and to be engaged in a critical conversation. This is ultimately an ethical choice.

5 TOWARDS MEANINGFUL INTERACTION

How meaningful interaction—especially concerning the historical Jesus—could be established is the express concern of this paper. This I believe could happen in three steps: the fundamental differences should be spelled out; the grounds for a common vision should be investigated; and the critical challenges to both disciplines should be stated.

5.1 Fundamental differences

What are the most prominent differences between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology concerning the historical Jesus? What is in focus here is the research being done and labelled the 'Third Quest' for the historical Jesus. Several scholars have attempted to chart the landscape of recent investigations into the historical Jesus (for comprehensive descriptions see: Evans 1993:34-35; Neill & Wright 1988:379-403; Borg 1994a, 1994b; Telford 1994). Certain formal trends are discernible. The previous scepticism about whether anything historically could be known about Jesus has made room for greater confidence that a reasonably comprehensive historical account can be given of Jesus' ministry. That the scholars approach their research as historians and not as theologians is probably the major distinguishing mark of all the Third Quest authors. Jesus is placed firmly in continuity with his Jewish and social world and his Jewishness is emphasised. There is an interdisciplinary openness in the methodology. Crossan (1994:160) has succinctly described this formal essence of the Third Quest; he states it programmatically on three fronts: its materials include intra- and extra-canonical documents; its methods integrate social-scientific, historical and literary vectors; and its philosophical bases are more post-modern than positivistic or existential. What fundamental differences are there between this Third Quest and systematic theology?

I believe there are two major and fundamental problem areas: (a) The attitude towards and the use of the canonical texts; and (b) the controlling optic—historical or theological.

(a) Are the canonical texts reliable and valid? Do the Gospels constitute historically correct and theologically legitimate witness to the historical event of Jesus? This question about historical reliability and interpretative validity is answered in different ways. The whole quest for the historical Jesus is based on a no answer; it seems as if the spell of Reimarus's fraud hypothesis has never disappeared. An attitude of suspicion towards the texts permeates the

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8 Telford (1994:60-61) prefers to refer to the 'revitalization movement' in Jesus studies instead of 'Third Quest.' This he argues because of a lack of uniformity in methodologies and the diversity of the results.
whole quest. The existence of alternative re/constructions substantiates my claim. The Gospels as historical and theological constructs are not adequate; either their historical quality or their theological interpretative perspective is suspect. Hence the need for corrective constructs. Systematic theology has always operated from a different premise: trust. The insistence on continuity between Jesus and the Gospels and between Jesus and canonical christologies is a reflection of this. A reliability and a validity have always been assumed.

A consequence of this fundamental attitude is the different ways the canonical text functions in each discipline, archaeologically or constitutionally. Mack (1988:xi)—for whom the goal of New Testament scholarship is to give an account of the origins of Christianity—has described his task as New Testament scholar accordingly ‘as shifting through the layers of accumulated constructions upon a certain site.’ He continues and describes the quest for the historical Jesus specifically in archaeological terms: the quest for the historical Jesus—as an attempt to work ‘back through the gospel accounts to retrieve some picture of the man as he appeared in Galilee’—is one of the results ‘of the archaeological efforts of two hundred years of scholarship’ (1980:5). Sanders (1993:280) views his work similarly: ‘...it takes patient spadework to dig through the layers of Christian devotion and to recover the historical core.’ This archaeological use of the text finally relativises its status; other non-canonical sources—for example, Q and the Gospel of Thomas—acquire matching weight. The whole trend of recent New Testament scholarship could be visualised as a struggle against parochialism, a ‘destruction of borders’—one of which is the border between the New Testament and the history of ancient Christianity (see Koester 1991:472). Crossan’s method of ‘layering’ the Jesus tradition exemplifies both this archaeological use and the relativising of the canonical text (see Borg 1994a:33).9

The way the canonical text functions in systematic theology differs from this technocratic view: it has an authority which renders it the primary partner in the conversation. The constitutional role of the New Testament is acknowledged. Gunton (1990:248, 257) has pointedly formulated this: ‘How are systematic theologians to be used by the Bible?’ and continues: ‘Being constituted by Scripture is a necessary condition of systematic theology’s status as Christian theology.’ This breathes a totally different interaction with the canonical text. The text is not just an object to be explored and used. The New Testament as text not only constitutes systematic theology, but it is also constitutive for the identity and the continuation of the

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9 Scott (1994:23) is convinced that Crossan’s methodology is essentially synchronic and not archaeological. Crossan himself (1994b:146) views his own work as a refusal to allow either diachrony or synchrony to dominate. He places them in juxtaposition.
Christian community (F Schüessler Fiorenza 1990:363). This constitutional model of authority accepts the adequacy, reliability and validity of the New Testament text and regards it as foundational for reflection and ecclesial life. It functions not only as one of several historical sources, but also—and mainly—as a norm for academic activity and spirituality.

(b) The Third Quest's fundamental controlling optic is historical; it deliberately brackets or excludes theological concerns. Sanders (1985:333-334) is expressly vocal on this: 'I have been engaged for some years in the effort to free history and exegesis from the control of theology....I am only a historian and an exegete.' What are the eventual ramifications of this programmatically formulated self-understanding? Of what is the animus towards the criterion of dissimilarity symptomatic? The historical paradigm is notoriously known for the principle of analogy which eschews the reality of God and of salvation as something new. The historical paradigm in itself cannot be questioned. However, when it assumes the status of a controlling view on reality that eclipses any other view concerning Jesus, our relationship with God, and salvation, it erects a barrier to any meaningful interaction with systematic theology. This effect of method on theology is real; Scott (1994:30) has clearly perceived this connection: 'Crossan's method profoundly drives his theology;' Crossan's image of God is one 'in favour of a pure aniconicity of egalitarian commensality;' Keck (1994:787), who is also aware of this danger, refers to the 'inert deity' of Borg and Crossan. If the reality of God is compromised, and thus concomitantly the reality of salvation, Jesus becomes a mere model to be followed, rather than the Saviour.

Nothing else etches the estrangement and breach between New Testament scholarship concerning the historical Jesus and systematic theology more acutely than this determining frame of reference. The strange ambivalence of the relationship is to be found here: the one discipline pleads for an increased detachment from theology; the other pleads for a more consistent orientation to theology. Theological disciplines are theological to the degree that they share the task of advocating the truth of the Christian discourse about God. All themes and doctrines within systematic theology must be related to the reality of God (Pannenberg 1991:8, 59). Tracy (1991:134) formulates this controlling perspective of systematic theology well:

For Christian theology must be radically theocentric so that no single symbol or doctrine in the whole system of doctrines can be adequately understood without explicitly relating that symbol to the reality of God.

Both the lines suppressed by the Third Quest, God and salvation, converged prominently in the work of Schillebeeckx. He has resolutely opted for the man Jesus as the starting-point of all his reflection (1979:33) but states
very emphatically that faith in this historically localisable individual would be problematical if his personal relation to the living God is not clear; enthusiasm for the Jesus of Nazareth would not entail any binding invitation unless God is personally implicated in this event (:31). The expectations of the first believers were fulfilled by this man; their experience of him was one of salvation (:19-26). With this emphasis Schillebeeckx markedly differs from the Third Quest.

These differences contribute to the fragmentation and alienation mentioned and deconstruct any simplistic building metaphor expressing the relationship between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology. New Testament scholarship no longer moulds bricks with which systematic theology erects totalising systems. The relationship has been immensely complicated. The aim of this paper is not to negotiate the differences or to venture value-judgements. The existence of these differences must also not implicate the integrity of either discipline. The differences must be accepted as a reality and with that in mind we may grope towards a common vision.

5.2 Towards a common vision

Having accepted the fact of these differences, and with the integrity of each discipline uncompromised, I want to pursue the question of whether it is still possible to bring the two closer together in such a manner that the research on the historical Jesus is productive for both.

One question, however, must still be asked before such an attempt: is there any rationale for insisting on the need for co-operation and conversation? Should the fact of an irrevocable parting of the ways not be accepted? The motivation for dialogue can be stated succinctly: fragmentation is not only scandalous, but impoverishing; interrelationship is not only ethically imperative, but intellectually enriching.

Previous uniting forces—the Bible, God, the church, a ministerial training—have silted up; whether they can be resuscitated for grounding an interaction is doubtful. The crisis in theology is exactly the failure and loss of these centripetal forces. Their effect has ironically been reversed.

What has remained, and what we have in common, is our intellectual vocation within a common physical location. Precisely this could furnish a common vision to reinvigorate conversation and co-operating activity. This is not self-evident but must be established by a common reading—as an ethical decision, as an act of spiritual commitment—of both the epistemological conditions of our intellectual horizon and of the social imperative of our situation. If a common, shared, and consensual reading could be accomplished, it would inform an ethic of the intellectual vocation for both New Testament scholarship and systematic theology. The formal existence of a common intellectual vocation and a common physical location does not
provide a common vision; this must be materially established by the appropriation of a common reading.

The story of modern reflection on the nature of human knowledge is one of disillusionment and exposure. Progressively the hybris of certain, final, correct, objective, or universal knowledge has been eroded. Intellectual endeavours can no longer be extolled in terms of the sublime; they can only be visualised in terms of the conflictual. This long path to coming of age has ended with the basic realisation: all human knowing or reflection, in its origin, is limited by a contingent horizon and permeated by power-values, concerns, interests, exclusions. Moreover, knowledge is never innocent but deeply effectual in its operation. This feature of knowledge could be described as the ideological dimension of all reflection. The positivistic ideal of true knowledge has thus been replaced by a search for ethically accountable knowledge. The acceptance of this one basic epistemological fact could establish a common reading of our intellectual landscape.

Within each context there is a clear and real contingent exigency which meets the intellectual as a situational imperative which could either be avoided or attended to. Situational conceptions are power-strategies within academic discourse which tend to focus or to blur, to include or to exclude this imperative in the discourse. A discipline like theology is unthinkable without any operational understanding of the situation. What is the situational imperative in Southern Africa? My suggestion is that it should be profiled by the pervasiveness of both Afro-pessimism and the quest for reconstruction. This is here and now the need to be addressed. This is the situation which confronts academic work with the challenge for solidarity. If such a reading could be accomplished as a consensus, grounds for a common vision could be established.

This could generate rapprochement: the ethic of our intellectual vocation informed by the inescapable ideological nature of our reflection and by the reconstructive need of our social imperative. What this implies materially for both historical Jesus research and for systematic theology must be argued in the next two sections.

5.3 Challenges to historical Jesus research in Southern Africa

On the basis of this proposal for a common vision, critical questions can be put to the historical Jesus research. It must be pointed out that this entails questions by a systematician; technical problems, like the dating of the Gospel of Thomas, are obviously not at stake here. The aim is to search out and argue for common ground on the theoretical level between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology.
Two cardinal statements by Crossan (1991:426, 1994:160) clearly indicate the issue to be addressed here:

But one cannot dismiss it [the scholarly reconstruction of the historical Jesus — R V], or the search for the historical Jesus as mere reconstruction, as if reconstruction invalidated somehow the entire project. Because there is only reconstruction.

My book intended to launch a third quest (lower case) and that was why method is so vital to it. Method does not make it right, but method is where Frans Jozef van Beeck [one of Crossan’s critics—R V] must meet it and never does.

Here are the theoretical challenges: re/construction and method. If these should be addressed, the possibility of common ground is real. Historical Jesus research must not only reflect the prevailing epistemological and religious atmosphere of its time (see Meyer 1979: 54ff), but be consciously engaged in a critical evaluation of its own theoretical assumptions and convictions which ultimately drive the whole project. Advanced methodology is not to be equated with an accountable and sophisticated hermeneutic.¹⁰ What I believe is lacking in the Third Quest, on the level of conscious reflection, is an account of its ideology: its motivation, its aims, its ethical and social responsibility, its resultant effects.

What is the nature of the activity of the historical Jesus research? This, I believe, could be conceptualised as constructive representation. A fragmentary profile of the actual Jesus is represented by researchers, not encyclopaedically, but coherently and perspectivally through construction.¹¹ This situates the whole endeavour centrally in the epistemological and hermeneutical debates of our time. There is no vantage-point from which the research could be quarantined from the vicissitudes of history, power, concerns, values, and interests. By deliberately excluding theological questions, and by pretending to operate only as historians or social scientists, scholars have not sanitised their research at all. A statement like Evans’ (1993:35)—'philosophical factors no longer drive life-of-Jesus research to the extent that they once did'—is purely erroneous and naive.

The Third Quest is essentially a scholarly attempt to represent an Other—Jesus—under contemporary historical, scientific, epistemological and social conditions. The aim of situating the research explicitly within the context of representation is three-fold. (a) This would hopefully heighten the sense that description of the Other is problematic and should be approached with a

¹⁰ See the work of Schneiders (1991). She interestingly accuses New Testament scholarship of lacking a developed hermeneutical theory (21) despite a ‘methodological fascination’ (23). Her proposal differs from my tentative suggestions in this paper.

¹¹ Van Aarde (1994:246) distinguishes between reconstruction, which is impossible, and construction, which is the activity of Jesus scholars.
sense of uncertainty, hesitation and modesty. Problems of description become problems of representation when elevated to a central concern of theoretical reflection (Marcus & Fischer 1986:8-9). Historical Jesus research can benefit from this radicalised concern in disciplines like ethnography. (b) The dangers inherent in any description of the Other would hopefully be sensed. All representation has the potential of being violent, that is, transforming the Other by abstraction (Tyler 1987:65, 120).12 (c) A double ethical responsibility surfaces by placing the Jesus research within this problematic: towards the Other and towards the receivers. Representation sharpens the awareness of the conservative nature of research and the way it tends to silence the Other who is objectified by the research process (Gitlin 1994). To avoid ‘silencing,’ ‘injuring,’ or ‘failing’ the Other but rather ‘privileging the voice of the Other’ (Drews 1995:268-275) is the ethical imperative. Representation may also function as ‘a material productive force’ (Harvey 1990:219) with certain effects on its receivers. This responsibility is my focus in this section. Situating the research in a specific context assumes that there is not just one single representation (Harvey 1990:27-28). My concern is about the ethical responsibility of all representations.

What I am pleading for is a conscious acknowledgement of the ideological dimension operative in all reflection, especially for the immediate concern—historical Jesus research. ‘Ideology’ means different things for different people. By referring to the ideological dimension of all knowledge, I want to call attention to the total configuration of perspectives, interests, power and social effects of all knowledge and research.13 To emphasise this is to counter the mentality that ideology means, ‘His thought is red-neck, yours is doctrinal and mine is deliciously supple’ (Eagleton 1991:4). After Gadamer, Habermas and Foucault, the reality of horizons, interests and power could never be expelled from any notions of knowledge, research, and reflection. This also includes the methods used. Our very research methods are infused with power (Gitlin 1994:2). This is the realisation I miss in Crossan’s meth-

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12 There is some truth in Tyler’s (1987:208) view that, ‘The whole ideology of representational signification is an ideology of power.’ To replace it with ‘evocation’ (206) does not solve the problem of power, which is too pervasive. An ethical sense must be instilled into the problematic. Representation need not work only with a correspondence theory of truth (196). The effects of representation bring a pragmatic theory into view.

13 For an excellent treatment of the wide variety of historical meanings of ‘ideology’ see Eagleton (1991). I concur with him that ideology refers specifically to the way power-struggles are fought out at the level of signification (113), and to their effects at the discursive level (193-220).
Any attempt at speaking, representing the Other, requires some self-doubt, some anxiety. This belongs to the post-modern climate (Drews 1995:268).

All constructions rest on choices which are made; Carlson (1994:35, 39, 41) correctly refers to ‘selective reconstruction.’ Different portrayals are to be traced back—ultimately—to different decisions made. The perspective in which Jesus is placed is one of these fundamental decisions to be made. This frame of reference not only functions heuristically concerning Jesus, but it profoundly affects those who accept the construct. One illustration should suffice. Sanders (1993:95) claims explicitly: ‘The setting of Jesus’ mission is more important for understanding his life and work than any other conceivable context.’ This ‘framework of Jesus’ overall mission’ is restoration eschatology, that is, God would soon bring about a change in the world. Compare this to Crossan, who situates Jesus in the ancient Mediterranean social world teaming with elites and peasants, class and gender, magic and meal, and who understands all of these with cross-cultural anthropological models. Both authors intend the same. Sanders (1993:97): ‘I shall repeat the aim of this book: I shall try to lay out what we can know about Jesus with great confidence, and separate it from less certain inferences’. Crossan (1994a:xiv): ‘...my endeavor was to reconstruct the historical Jesus as accurately and honestly as possible. It was not my purpose to find a Jesus whom I liked or disliked, a Jesus with whom I agreed or disagreed’.

Same aims, different frames of reference, different construals, different effects. For one, Jesus is a peasant Jewish Cynic (Crossan 1991:421), advocating radical egalitarianism, and open commensality; for the other, a radical first-century eschatologist (Sanders 1993:259), a theological idealist (:96), a prophet for whom social reform was not important (:188). What effects would Crossan’s and Sanders’ construals have if we subscribed to their visions? Whose would bring personal liberation, social reconstruction, and ecclesial renewal? The resultant effect of construals must be part of ethical choices from the beginning.

Probably nobody has seen this as clearly as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Her work, Jesus: Miriam’s child, Sophia’s prophet (1994), intends to explore ‘the hidden frames of reference that determine malestream as well as feminist christological discourses’ (:3). She warns against ‘preconstructed frames of meaning’ which affect christological discourse (:34ff). For her own work she

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14 See the very important and relevant volume of essays in Gitlin (ed) 1994.
15 Telford (1994:68; see also 52) makes a similar claim: the proposed background, e.g. wisdom tradition, can be established as the ‘most important interpretative context for the reconstruction of Jesus’ teaching and mission’.
rejects a sex/gender system as discursive frame and opts for an analytic of kyriachy (:12-18), that is, the multiplicative interstructuring of systems of dehumanisation (:62). She insists that christologies must critically scrutinise their own presuppositions, methods, interest and social functions, and should test their implications for legitimatising or for changing kyriarchal relations of domination (:61). Her view of the Third Quest articulates the thrust of my own argument and is worth quoting at length:

The Newest Quest's stance of liberal relativism, its refusal to reflect on its own ideological or theological interests, and its restoration of historical positivism corresponds to political conservatism. Its emphasis on the "realia" of history serves to promote scientific fundamentalism since it generally does not acknowledge that historians must select, reject, and interpret archaeological artifacts and textual evidence and simultaneously incorporate them into a scientific model and narrative framework of meaning.

A shift in the focus of the Third Quest is overdue: from historically 'correct' representation to ethically accountable representation. The fascination with facts and insights must be replaced with a responsibility towards social location. The excitement about an interdisciplinary methodology tends to suffocate the fundamental questions about ideological strategies within all jesuological discourse: its social location, its aims, its public/s, its effects and its in/exclusiveness of the Others.

Historical Jesus research can never be totally free from constraints. Though ecclesial and theological constraints may be discarded, ethical constraints can never be escaped. The ideological dimension should be raised to a level of conscious acknowledgement, critical discussion and explicit articulation. This would contribute to the validity, legitimacy and credibility of construals.

Construals cannot and should not be the same in Southern Africa and in the United States of America. This is the implication of the argument proposed here. A universalising discourse tends to blur the profile of a location. Construals must be local. Historical Jesus research in Southern Africa comprises more than just keeping abreast of the state of scholarship in the United States of America for example, or pursuing questions epigonically; it requires vigorous and creative Southern African construals. This is the challenge.

What this would entail is a question which can obviously not be addressed here and should rather be the damarcated terrain of investigation in Southern Africa for the next couple of years. I can only venture a few brief and tentative suggestions:

(a) Historical Jesus research invites solidarity with the Southern African experience and reality in a comprehensive and inclusive way. Any notions of 'the relevance of the Jesus of history for Native Africans' (see Van Aarde
must be expelled as perpetuating the deep social divisions and the sense of—if unintended—exclusion. What is the relevance of the research for us in search of a common future? This is the question. Localised discourse cannot divorce itself from this commission of being inclusive.

(b) A thorough social analysis must be explicitly undertaken. What constitutes the situational imperative for Southern Africa? By having crossed the borders of insular methodology into the land of interdisciplinary research, researchers have no excuse for failing to do this. I have already suggested that reconstruction (cf Villa-Vicencio 1992) should be the Archimedean perspective from whence the Southern African social reality should be seen. This denominator must be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible: poverty, multi-culturalism, ecology, gender equality...—the list is daunting. The previous categories—inculcation and liberation—are no longer adequate for an African theology (see Martey 1993) or an African christology (see esp Nyamiti 1991). The need is for African theologies/christologies of reconstruction.

(c) The nature of the contribution of historical Jesus research to the reconstruction debate must be expressly and clearly stated: it can be nothing but a religious, and eventually theological, contribution. Without this qualification, the connection—historical Jesus research and reconstruction—is meaningless. Religions have contributed to the crippling of this continent; they now have the obligation to exorcise the demons of the past and to participate in its renewal.

(d) The extent of Afro-pessimism and the nature of reconstruction invalidate simplistic (Jesus is the answer) and atomistic models (arguing for points of contact between Jesus and Africa for better understanding). An integrating and confrontational conceptual frame of reference is needed. The interaction of symbolic worlds, value-systems, and ethos may provide such a perspective to understand the plight of Southern Africa, the historical Jesus and their potentially productive correlation.

(e) By assigning primacy to the situation, researchers must also allow it to dictate an ethos (not ethic) to the research of the historical Jesus. If the situation is not enmeshed with the faith/history problematic or primarily with secularism, the research should correspondingly not dally with these. In a Southern African context the research should be an explicitly religious, and not humanistic, enterprise. This choice between a religious or non-religious interpretation of a religious figure is real for the Third Quest, especially with the proliferation of social-scientific models. The Southern African situa-

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16 For this distinction see Hick (1993).
tion is deeply imbued with the reality of religion. Without this it would never be understood. This situation demands two special referents in the integrating conceptual frame: notions of the Transcendent, and notions of well-being (see Hick 1989 for this connection between religion and soteriology, esp chapters 2-3). This, I believe, has crucial implications for the historical Jesus research and also for the argument of this paper: insistence on an ethic of research leads to an ethos of research which widens the scope of research and illegitimatises any exclusion. If historical Jesus research is ethically accountable, it would include theological and soteriological concerns. In this way the myriad images of the sacred and the yearnings for well-being and the historical Jesus may be critically correlated. The Southern African situation may provide heuristically a key to understanding Jesus, and an antidote to silencing him in our representations. It may allow us to speak more truthfully about him.

It is also exactly at this point that a renewed intersection with systematic theology is established. An incorporation of explicit theological and soteriological questions may also create the need for a conversation with a filial discipline where these questions figure prominently.

By way of concluding this section, a brief reference to the important work of Marcus Borg may be appropriate. His work illustrates several of the issues and concerns of this section. He is well aware that he is working within a specific situation (see 1994b:9), and simultaneously for a specific situation (the whole book, Jesus: a New Vision, is based on this). Borg is also acutely aware that images of Jesus affect images of the Christian life (1994a:193-195).

The significance of the historical Jesus for Christian faith, which is a clear concern to him, lies at this level. Borg's work (1987), utilises two categories, Spirit and culture, to understand Jesus historically and to construct a new image of him, but also to argue at the same time for his contemporary significance. This procedure underscores what I have proposed: the research should be done consciously in and for a specific context. The values in present-day American life, for example, affluence, achievement, consumption, et cetera, which Borg critically questions in the light of Jesus' ethos of compassion (:195) are not really the Southern African problem. However valuable his work might be, it is not a construal for our situation. His work also exemplifies two of the weaknesses of the Third Quest. It must not be overlooked that the 'Spirit' is a very ambiguous and vague category which ultimately contributes to the erosion of a fully theocentric perspective. He admittedly equates or relates it to 'God' (see e.g. :100, 110, 155, 160, 191), but the strong sense that God is present in Jesus is absent. By depreciating 'kingdom' (see :202 n 20), he ultimately forfeits a theological centre of gravity. His operating with the category 'paranormal' (1994b:27-29) rein-
forces my suspicion. Secondly, what is ‘salvation’ for Borg? This is not clear to me. Just to ‘see life differently,’ to opt for compassion, to enter into a new culture—is not really salvation.

5.4 Challenges to systematic theology from historical Jesus research

The far-reaching developments taking place in historical Jesus research pose several challenges to systematic theology. Six of these challenges will be briefly stated in this section and this serves to register problems which should be treated in greater detail.

(a) Systematic theologians engaged in christological reflection should clearly grasp the shifts occurring in the discipline and the specific challenge from New Testament scholarship. The sociologising of truth in our time and the acute awareness of concrete suffering in multiple manifestations have caused the demise of metaphysical thinking. The turn to historical and local modes of reflections have engendered a renewed interest in the figure of Jesus in christology. This development does not, however, warrant an unqualified reference to ‘the shift to the historical Jesus.’ What is actually happening is a shift to the earthly Jesus or the Gospel Jesus. The challenge is to refine and direct christological discourse towards greater sophistication and discrimination in this regard. Simultaneously historical Jesus research is experiencing a Renaissance which is aptly called the Third Quest. The dialogue between systematic christological reflection and this Newest Quest has yet to start. The challenge is to sense this shift, and to sense the opportunity to guide it by entering into critical conversation with the Third Quest.

(b) It is probably too early to state retrospectively what the achievements of the Third Quest are. Historical Jesus research is too much in flux itself to provide such a clear profile. Systematic theology must take note of certain prominent and dominant trends which pose challenges. The following should be viewed as unequivocal gains:

* The positive attitude that something significant can be said about Jesus’ ministry from a historical perspective is constructive. The demise of ‘minimalist construals of Jesus’ (Borg 1994b:27) must be welcomed.
* The insistence that Jesus must be placed in a broader social world has already yielded significant advances in comparison to earlier scholarship. This work is significant because it allows us to see what Jesus’ humanity really entailed.

Several insights and emphases of the Third Quest, however, are more problematic. These form particular challenges to systematic theology and should be the agenda for penetrating discussions in the future between the two disciplines. I highlight the following:
The ‘major preoccupation of contemporary research’ (Telford 1994:70) has been Jesus’ relationship to Judaism and the resultant emphasis on his Jewishness. The theological significance of this has still to be worked out fully. This radicalises the humanity of Jesus and it bodes well for possible inter-religious dialogues.

The upsurge of sapiential interpretations of Jesus is probably the single most important challenge posed to systematic christology. The wisdom tradition has always been an orphan in systematic theology. There probably does not exist a single systematic theology which has seriously appropriated this in its construal. Whether sapiential eschatology is the opposite of apocalyptic eschatology or only a modern scholarly dichotomy which should be deconstructed is a question which still has to be resolved. The recovery of wisdom perspectives in Jesus studies is sheer progress; whether it will lead to a ‘non-eschatological Jesus’ (see Borg 1994a:47-96) is questionable in any case. The implications of the latter are so drastic that the effects this may have on construals of Christian identity is unforeseeable. The effects of this debate on questions of social involvement must be clearly grasped. This holds immense promise for what I have pleaded earlier in this paper.

The broadening of the source-base and the consequent relativising of the New Testament canon are problematic. The canon has been inextricably bound with the definition of Christian identity. The inclusion of as many sources as possible is a natural move in historical studies; the exclusion of sources is an obvious strategy when forming identity. To what extent may we include non-canonical sources in our construals? To what extent may Christian identity put constraints on research? These are complex questions which in future should be discussed in depth.

Apart from these general and theoretical challenges, specific advances must not be ignored. Work done for example on Jesus’ relationship to John the Baptist, the Galilean location of Jesus’ ministry, the miracles, the parables, Jesus’ self-understanding and the death of Jesus requires careful study and discernment to determine how it may transform dominant images of Jesus in systematic christology (see the excellent volume of essays edited by Chilton & Evans 1994).

(c) Systematic theology has several options vis-à-vis the challenges posed by the Third Quest. An escapist option would not be defended easily. An encyclopaedic option is nothing but a concealed attempt to avoid intellectual commitments. The only satisfying and ethically accountable option is an interactional one. Systematic theology must not only continually acquaint itself with new historical Jesus research, but must also critically evaluate new insights in order to see how they may be integrated into more comprehensive
christological projects. There is an emerging consensus that Jesus as a historical figure does matter for faith (see e.g. Galvin 1991:291). Interaction with historical Jesus research is the obvious choice for deepening the christological discourse.

(d) One often encounters the question about the theological significance of the historical Jesus research. As stated at the beginning this has not been my concern in this paper. The question can, however, not be avoided. What intrigues me is how should this issue be approached? The challenge is to formulate a hermeneutic of the theological significance of the historical Jesus. For my over-all focus—to further interaction between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology—a few suggestions may be relevant. A brief structural analysis reveals at least four constituent elements of such a hermeneutic:

(i) No escape has yet been found from the terminological maze in which theologians are entrapped. Much greater refinement than even Meier’s (1990) is necessary. More levels should be distinguished. Apart from the real Jesus and the historical Jesus (theoretical construal) there is an immense variety of images within the canon, within systematic theology, within the church and within popular piety which should be distinguished as such. An indiscriminate use of terms furthers no cause.

(ii) The central question to be addressed is: to what extent could a historical Jesus construal be used to inform a systematic christology? Galvin (1991:291) has correctly seen this: ‘One disputed issue is of major importance: the sufficiency of the historical Jesus as the historical reference point of christology’. The possibility that a christology could be written on the basis of the historical Jesus must not be discarded too easily. As far as I know this has never been attempted. The question of possibilities and limitations of Jesu-centric reflection must be treated in-depth.

(iii) The distinction between event and interpretation in all christological endeavours must be maintained. It is exactly this space which has prompted historical Jesus research and complicated all christological thinking. To visualise the relationship only in terms of either continuity or discontinuity is too simplistic and also unsatisfying. Crossan’s (1991:423) emphasis on a dialectic between Jesuses and Christs at the heart of both canon and tradition is most perceptive. His formulation of the structure of Christianity—‘how we see Jesus-then as Christ-now’ (1991:423)—should be accepted as maxim in all systematic christology.

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This leads automatically to the criteriological functions of the historical Jesus in theology. The more comprehensively this is viewed, the greater the theological significance to be discovered in him. (1) He continually subverts the adequacy, validity, and truth of all theological constructs about God, about himself, about wo/man, about the church, and about salvation. He intensifies the realisation of the tentativeness of all theological systems and assertions. (2) This can be done because the historical Jesus discloses who God is, how wo/man should be, and what alternative possibilities of social living there are. (3) This he did by the model he left for us to follow. What he enacted, what he embodied with his praxis becomes a summons to his disciples. (4) What he instituted, however rudimentarily, continues to be celebrated by the church from the foundation he laid. (5) He remains a source of encouragement and hope in the face of despair, suffering and injustice.

e) The challenge to systematic theology is to perceive the vital and indispensable role of New Testament scholarship. If the historical Jesus does matter, and if he renders significance to the tasks of theology, the church, discipleship, and society—the New Testament scholarship will contribute to a clearer vision of him. The potential of blurring the focus is always present; but historical Jesus research assists systematic theology to see better, to see clearer. The exciting developments in historical Jesus research must be given credit for the constructive task it has to fulfill. Ignoring the research being done may keep systematic theology near-sighted.

(f) Finally, the challenge to systematic theology is to be aware of the limitations of the historical Jesus research. For christology it must always constitute only one of the voices to be listened to in the dogmatological conversation. This is true for the following three reasons:

(i) The function of the historical Jesus may never be thought of apart from the question of the identity of the Christian religion. Attempts to define the Christian faith christo-centrally, let alone Jesu-centrally, had to make way for the increasing insistence on the centrality of the trinity in Christian theology. Apart from this development, the question of the identity of a religion is too complex to reduce it to one denominator.

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18 That God is to be known only in and through Jesus is often indicated as the Christian way of speaking about God. A consistent and comprehensive Jesuological discourse about God has yet to be done.

19 Theologians from diverse backgrounds and orientations such as Boff, Gunton, Jüngel, Kasper, LaCugna, Moltmann, and Tracy have all argued for the centrality of the trinity in Christian theology.

20 See, e.g., the proposal of Smart 1969:15-25. Any religion has at least the following dimensions: the ritual, the mythological, the doctrinal, the ethical, the social, and the experiential.
Jesus is one element, albeit a very important one, in a total constellation of elements. For this very reason, findings of the historical Jesus research should never be threatening—if some may perceive it as such—to the identity of the Christian religion. Historical Jesus research may refine the identity, but never deconstruct it totally.

(ii) The Jesus believed in, followed and worshipped has always been conceived of as transcending the boundaries of his earthly life. His continued influence has always been interpreted as the result of his personal presence and not only as the continuing influence of his personality (Moltmann 1990:70). The historical figure of Jesus matters because of present experiences of him as personal and as salvific. That he is greater than his earthly life is the impetus for research, and not the fact of that life in isolation from him as the Christ of God. This greater mystery of his person compels us to learn more about him as a historical person. To accept this transcending mystery of his person is also to accept the limited scope of historical Jesus research.

(iii) The connection between Jesus and salvation has been so firmly established that it can never be severed. To limit salvation to his earthly life would be to surrender to the ubiquitous threat of ethicising his significance. This has been the tendency of the First Quest and it is now also the danger facing the Third Quest. Jesus is more than a moral hero to be followed. Imitation has seldom delivered the expected salvation. Only after the resurrection and a fully developed trinitarian understanding of God have been included in the discourse can salvation as holistic well-being emerge.

Systematic theology is confronted with these six challenges. Only when they have been positively responded to can a meaningful conversation ensue with New Testament scholarship.

5.5 Inter-dependence

The argument can be briefly recapitulated. The tragic alienation between New Testament scholarship and systematic theology can never be accepted as fait accompli. Historical Jesus research may radicalise the estrangement or it may occasion a closer relationship. The common social location necessitates such an interaction. To address the concrete exigency of the context, systematic christology needs historical Jesus research for clearer vision. To provide the religious underpinning for reconstruction historical Jesus research needs systematic theology for guidance. Without systematic theol-
ogy, historical Jesus research may become trivial,\(^{21}\) forgetting the accumulated wisdom and depth of the Christian tradition. Without historical Jesus research, systematic theology may become fossilised, forgetting the dynamic and disruptive life of Jesus. To combat this amnesia, the plea for conversation must be heeded.

6 CONCLUSION: THE INTELLECTUAL VOCATION

May I conclude by calling attention to the operative assumption of this paper: the New Testament scholar and the systematic theologian have a vocation as intellectuals. This is the common ground and because of this conversation should be advocated.

The change of our time may be chronicled as the changing role of the intellectual. This the sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman, has done most lucidly (1992:1-25; cf 1987). In a modernist era with its self-confidence and certainty, the intellectual was a legislator, making authoritative statements which became correct and universally binding. A post-modern era with its plurality of traditions has abandoned this ambition, and the intellectual has become an interpreter who facilitates communication between autonomous partners, communication between systems of knowledge enclosed within their respective stocks of knowledge and communal systems of relevance (22). It is exactly this conception of the task of both New Testament scholar and systematic theologian that I have pleaded for.

Moreover, the intellectual, as Foucault (1980:125-133) has pointed out, can be nothing but a 'specific intellectual' who stands in a specific relation to a local form of power, who can no longer be considered 'the rhapsodist of the eternal, but the strategist of life and death' (129). It is this kind of engagement in the local social world fraught with power-conflict that I have tried to advocate.

Intellectuals are individuals with a vocation of representing truth to power, as the post-colonial critic Edward Said (1994) argued. In this role of representation the intellectual can never be a private person, only a public one. It is this vocation of representing that I have attempted to champion.

For too long fragmentation and alienation have destroyed our society. Our vocation is to search for a common vision. Only when the two disciplines, New Testament scholarship and systematic theology, although seemingly incommensurable, are engaged in such a common aim, can Jesus be represented as the truth.

\(^{21}\) After one has been intimidated by Crossan's erudition, enchanted by the beauty of his prose and overwhelmed by the innovation of his method, one cannot but ponder: isn't there more to this Man?
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