The relation between Jesus, Christ and Christian faith in current historical Jesus scholarship

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ABSTRACT
Since the historical figure Jesus 'lived on' as Jesus Christ, new attempts at reconstructing this figure raise the question of the implications of the reconstructed Jesus(es) for the Christ(s) of the New Testament and of Christian faith. In this article a look is taken at a few recent answers given to this question. The answers are also briefly related to those given in earlier phases of the quest for the historical Jesus.

1 INTRODUCTION
If New Testament scholars were storytellers, their stories would probably seldom have endings. Or they would have 'open' endings.

To put it differently: New Testament scholars, especially those with an historical approach, usually do not spell out the theological implications of what they do, say and suggest. It is left to those who read and hear what they have to say to make sense of the results of their research.

The most obvious reason for this is that New Testament scholars do not regard it as part of their job to spell out the implications of their work. Much of the work done in the field does not lend itself to this. Their work is, moreover, of such a nature and so specialised that it is hardly of any relevance to people outside the field. To spell out the implications of their work, some would add, is not only not part of their job, but would also be a violation of the boundaries of historical research.

Sometimes, as in the case of historical Jesus scholarship, it becomes necessary to give the 'story' some kind of ending, if only a provisional one.

One of the things which can without any doubt be said about Jesus is that for most people who remembered him he lived on as more than an historical figure. The marginal Jew (Meier) or Mediterranean Jewish peasant (Crossan) lived on as Jesus Christ. It is exactly due to this 'living on' that extensive research on the historical Jesus is still being done. While history books of the time referred to him only in passing, his followers expressed what they regarded as his significance in different genres, namely Gospels and hymns (Koester 1994:535). The quest for the historical Jesus does indeed comprise
more than the quest for an important historical person. Patterson's remarks in this connection are to the point: 'The quest for the historical Jesus involves more than mere historical inquiry into the life of a famous and influential person. It is a loaded question. It has become a question about ourselves and our quest for God' (Patterson 1996:2) And: 'Whenever Jesus is the subject, someone in the discussion is thinking also about God' (1996:21). A flourish in historical Jesus research, as is nowadays taking place especially in North America and by New Testament scholars influenced by them, raises the question: Is this research in any way related to the more than historical figure which Jesus became? In short: How do historical Jesus scholars view the relation between the historical figure Jesus and the Christ (or Christs) of the New Testament and of faith? Even for a New Testament scholar this is not an inappropriate question, for to ignore it is to ignore a piece of history.

For another reason it has become necessary for New Testament scholars to reflect in some way on the relation Jesus/Christ. As long as their work, especially the historical-critical part of it, and the results thereof were confined to their studies and classrooms there was perhaps no real need for this. But this situation is changing. The public is nowadays to a greater extent than in the past exposed to the results of New Testament scholarship, specifically historical Jesus research. This implies a closer contact than before between 'worlds' which for a long time existed more or less apart from each other, both busying themselves with the same thing, each, however, on his own and in his own way (cf e.g. Johnson 1996:57–80).

2 THE RELATION JESUS/CHRIST: DEFINITION

When viewed against the background of the New Testament and the history of its research, specifically historical Jesus research, one realises that this expression is much more problematic than it appears at first sight. In fact, one could complicate this relation endlessly. Neither Jesus nor Christ nor the relation between them is self-evident. With regard to Jesus, we are dependent on a great variety of reconstructions of Jesus by New Testament scholars. Since there are a number of 'historical Jesuses', one would in actual fact have to ask: Which Jesus? Moreover, although it is possible to detect certain patterns in the way Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament (cf e.g. Johnson and Koester), one cannot deny the variety in the interpretation of Jesus right from the beginning. Besides, we have the confessions' interpretation of Jesus, which many Christians regard as the last word about him. What, therefore, do we have in mind when referring to Christ? What exactly is at stake when we talk about the relation Jesus/Christ? Jesus/Christ then or Jesus then and Christ now or both? Is there (or should there be) a difference between Christ then and now? Are Jesus and Christ related in the New Testament? And how
is the relation viewed in New Testament scholarship? Are scholars' reconstructions of Jesus regarded to have implications for Christ? What are these implications? Does the one make the other irrelevant (cf the 'back to Jesus' of the Old Quest) or must the one be reformulated in the light of the other? On the other hand there are also those who still regard the interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament as the final word about him and who object to the quest for the historical Jesus. The question of the relation Jesus/Christ also extends to include questions such as the relation history/faith.

Of course it will not be possible to pay detailed attention to all these matters. The most important ones will be referred to when dealing with a few 'endings' which have recently been given to the historical Jesus story and therewith to the Jesus/Christ relationship.

3 PART OF A MORE COMPREHENSIVE QUEST

To distinguish the contemporary quest for the historical Jesus from previous ones, it is usually labelled the 'Third Quest' or the 'Re-newed Quest' (cf Telford 1994; Patterson 1996). Although the present quest differs from previous ones, especially with regard to method(s), it agrees with them in some respects (cf e.g Koester 1992). This applies especially to the matter under discussion. It would perhaps not be inappropriate to call it an episode in a serial. To put the contemporary quest in perspective, a glimpse must be taken at how previous quests or phases of the quest dealt with the relation Jesus/Christ.

New Testament scholars usually distinguish four phases in historical Jesus research: the Old Quest, No Quest, New Quest and Third Quest (for a survey of this see Patterson 1996, and also Telford 1994).

With regard to the relation Jesus/Christ, one could say that under the influence of rationalism the 'Old Quest' of the nineteenth century detected a discrepancy between Jesus and Christ. This discrepancy implied that the early Christians and New Testament writers changed Jesus into someone he never was. To reach the 'real Jesus' one had to go back to the historical Jesus. These questers were concerned with a Jesus who would be both historically plausible and theologically relevant (Patterson 1996:9).

It is obvious that in this case one cannot really speak of a relationship. It would be more appropriate to say that a choice was made in favour of the 'historical Jesus' against the Christ of faith. Various attempts were made to reconstruct an historical Jesus relevant for their time, of which Albert Schweitzer's classic provides evidence.

In the No Quest period, in which Kähler was the most influential figure, a choice was made for Christ against the historical Jesus. According to Kähler the church is not really interested in the historical Jesus. It is interested in
what makes Jesus significant for our lives, that is his death and resurrection. Not only are the gospels not intended as history, but it would be a violation of the nature of faith, which always entails a risk, to found it on history. Kähler's line of thought was pursued by influential scholars like Barth and Bultmann (cf Käsemann 1964:16; Patterson 1996:14).

The New Quest, which commenced with Käsemann's lecture 'The problem of the historical Jesus', was, in a sense, a reaction to the views of Kähler and his followers. Taking the Gospels as his point of departure, he emphasised the close relationship in them between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. On the one hand 'the significance of this Jesus for faith was so profound, that even in the very earliest days it almost entirely swallowed up his earthly history' (Käsemann 1964:23). On the other hand 'it is to the earthly Jesus that the Gospels ascribe their kerugma' (Käsemann 1964:25). Acceptance of the proposition that the Christian message is founded on the Easter faith should not prevent us from realising that according to the Evangelists the life history of Jesus indeed had relevance for faith (Käsemann 1964:25). In fact, for the Evangelists the earthly and the exalted Lord were identical (Käsemann 1964:33, 34).

The present quest for the historical Jesus is perhaps not so sharply defined with regard to intention, participants and even time scheme as a label like the 'Third Quest' might suggest. A contribution like that of Batdorf (1984) raises the question whether the quest ever really stopped and started again at a particular point in time. Even while the quest was not 'officially' on, books on (the historical) Jesus still appeared regularly. It can, however, without doubt be said that since the middle eighties the quest increased in intensity. Sanders's *Jesus and Judaism* was published in 1985. What would later become Meier's three-volume work was started in 1984 with a request to write an article about the historical Jesus for the *Jerome Bible Dictionary*, published in 1990 (Meier 1991:2). The work of the Jesus Seminar, the most visible and audible participant in the present quest, also commenced in 1985. Apart from the work of the Jesus Seminar itself, prominent participants in the work of the Seminar like Borg and Crossan also published their own books on Jesus.

Although the present quest (or at least part of it) is characterised by a new course as far as method is concerned, it is perhaps more difficult than in previous quests or phases of the quest to speak of an overarching aim or objective (or perhaps it is easier to simplify and reduce something which lies further in the past). The greater the number of participants and the more diverse these are, the more diversity one would expect with regard to intention. As for the Jesus Seminar, Funk right at the start emphatically spelled out their intention: something which had been done for a long time, the quest for Jesus' own *voice*, had to be resumed more extensively and
intensively (cf Funk 1985:7). Characteristic of the quest, or at least of the Jesus Seminar’s proceedings, is that they intended to do their work ‘in full public view’ (Funk 1985:10). The initial aim, then, was to make public the results of the Biblical sciences. From Funk’s statement of aim it seems as if it was, in a sense, born from frustration with the perceived irrelevance of the work of biblical scholars: ‘we must quit the academic closet...begin to sell a product that has some utilitarian value to someone...’ (Funk 1985:10).

Sanders’s intention is to find answers to especially two questions with regard to Jesus: ‘his intention and his relationship to his contemporaries in Judaism’ (Sanders 1985:1). Apart from the fact that Meier was requested to write a book on Jesus he also wanted to investigate for himself what historical research could tell us about Jesus ‘who unleashed one of the major religious and cultural forces of the world’ (Meier 1991:4).

As to the matter under discussion, it is not, as in the case of the ‘New Quest’ the motive of the present questers to reflect on the relation Jesus/Christ. Only in a few instances do historical Jesus scholars reflect explicitly and systematically on this, although it seems as if at least for some of them the matter is never completely out of sight. Since the matter of relevance has been on the agenda right from the start, at least in the case of the Jesus Seminar, reflection on this can in the long run not be avoided. The question is whether it is justified to merely situate two ‘worlds’ next to each other without reflecting on the implications of the one for the other.

From the following discussion it will become clear that the whole spectrum of views about the relation Jesus/Christ in previous quests as well as the responses to this are also to be found in the present one, although in a somewhat different form.

Since each of the New Testament scholars whose views will be discussed here, has more or less his own opinion on the matter and answers the question in his own way, the most viable procedure is to discuss each one’s view under his name.

4 MARCUS BORG: A RELEVANT JESUS OR: A COMPROMISE ANSWER WITH MORE THAN ONE FACET

4.1 A multi-faceted, relevant Jesus

Of present historical Jesus scholars Borg is probably the one who has reflected the most as well as most explicitly on the relevance of historical Jesus research for Christian faith. Since the world of the academy and of the church come together in his own person (Borg 1995:7) he, as it were, breaks through the ‘keeping apart’ of these two worlds. Because his view includes more than one answer, it can be called a combination of answers or a compromise answer with more than one facet.
As is to be expected from an historical Jesus scholar, Borg pays special attention to the reconstruction of the ‘historical Jesus’. This is his main interest and is related to the situation in which he works, namely that of a state university with students who are interested in what Jesus was like and not in the relation between historical-critical study of Jesus and Christian faith and theology (Borg 1995:8). By using a cross-cultural typology of religious personality types he reconstructs a historical Jesus made up of five ‘strokes’: a spirit person or religious ecstatic, a healer, a wisdom teacher who by means of aphorisms and parables invites his hearers to ‘see in a radically different way’, a social prophet and a movement catalyst (Borg 1994:74; 1995:8–10).

Although Borg says that this is how he, as an historian, sees the historical Jesus, it seems that even when speaking as an historian his view is coloured and in part determined by his personal history. It is indeed a question whether he ever speaks solely as an historian.

Although the alternative image of Jesus with which he comes up is the result of historical research (Borg 1994:1, 2), the most fundamental ‘stroke’ of his Jesus, namely that of a spirit person, clearly relates to his own experience and history. In his Meeting Jesus again for the first time which is aimed at the general public, he specifically places his view of the historical Jesus in autobiographical context. His dissatisfaction with the most general image of Jesus as the divine saviour in whom people have to believe to be saved, led to a period of unbelief. During this time he had experiences of nature mysticism which meant that God became for him an element of experience and therefore a reality. His understanding of God now influenced his understanding of Jesus: ‘I was now able to see the centrality of God (or “the Spirit”, to say the same thing) in Jesus’ own life. I began to see Jesus as one whose spirituality... was foundational for his life’ (Borg 1994:15). Although Borg’s reconstructed Jesus has traits of various types of religious personalities, his Jesus is above all a spirit person, that is someone with an ‘experiential awareness of the reality of God, a mediator of the sacred’ (Borg 1994:29). Borg’s experience ends up in the study of such persons in other religions/cultures. According to him ‘spirit persons are known cross-culturally. They are people who have vivid and frequent subjective experiences of another level or dimension of reality’ who then become ‘mediators of the sacred’ (Borg 1994:32, 33).

In contrast with for example Crossan, he is of the opinion that his ‘historical Jesus’ has direct relevance for Christian faith and life. His new view of Jesus leads him to the conclusion that Christian life is not so much about faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died for people’s sins. ‘Rather, the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points, which may be spoken of as God, the risen living
Christ, or the Spirit. And a Christian is one who lives out his or her relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition’ (Borg 1994:17).

One can say that, in a sense, Borg is in a mild way de-dogmatising the Jesus(es) of the New Testament and of the church’s confessions. Jesus still makes sense. There are even striking similarities between his view and that of orthodox Christianity (cf e.g his emphasis on the relationship with God). But Jesus is no longer the only way to God in whom people have to believe to be saved. He is one of various mediators of the sacred.

4.2 The relation Jesus/Christ

If Borg’s emphasis is on a relevant Jesus, does he still adhere to a relationship between Jesus and the Christ(s) of the New Testament and of the confessions or does the latter become irrelevant as in the case of the Old Quest?

Under the heading ‘The Historian and the Christian’ (Borg 1995:14) Borg admits that the historical approach is not essential for being a Christian. Long before this research started there were already Christians.

Although he focuses primarily on (his reconstruction of) the historical Jesus which to him implies that some aspects of the interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament become meaningless, Christ does not really disappear from the scene in his work. He reflects on the relationship Jesus/Christ and tries to understand how the one ‘went over’ into the other. Instead of the terms ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ of faith’ he prefers the terms ‘pre-Easter’ and ‘post-Easter Jesus’. The former refers to Jesus as an historical figure and the latter to the Jesus of Christian tradition and experience. To him the post-Easter Jesus is not merely a vague figure that can only be believed in, but an experiential reality (Borg 1995:7). He also insists that both the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus are of significance to Christians and Christian theology (Borg 1996a: week 2.3).

The question how the one (the historical figure Jesus) historically led to the other (a divine reality who is one with God) Borg answers as follows: This process started at the resurrection which means that his followers ‘continued to experience him after his death, but in a radically new way. They no longer knew him as a figure of flesh and blood, but as a spiritual reality’ (Borg 1995:11). What this spiritual reality entails and how it relates to the historical Jesus remains somewhat vague. It seems as if when speaking about the post-Easter Jesus he has a kind of presence in mind. According to Borg this experience continues to this day. In the past this experience led to metaphor which in turn resulted in dogma: ‘Experience gave birth to symbols (metaphors) which gave birth to thought (doctrine)...even its full doctrinal expression in the Nicene creed continues to reflect Christian experience’ (Borg 1995:13).
It is doubtful whether one can really speak of a relationship between Borg's reconstruction of Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus in the sense that the one influences the other. It seems as if Christ remains the same while he mainly focuses on and associates himself with his reconstructed Jesus.

4.3 Historical truth the only truth?

Although the historical Jesus is very important to Borg and he even wants to build faith through critical history (Borg 1995:16; Johnson 1996:41), history to him does not have the final word. In his view truth includes more than historical truth. Therefore he also takes into account and tries to respect that which succeeded Jesus and took place as a response to him: 'I want to avoid the historical reductionism that affirms explicitly or implicitly that historical 'happenedness' is the only legitimate basis for theological affirmations' (Borg 1996b:6). He, for example, regards the birth narratives as true in the sense of metaphor or myth. The traditional Christian claims concerning Jesus as Son of God, the second person of the trinity 'are to be understood as statements about the post-Easter Jesus...they are ultimately grounded in religious experience, namely, experiences of Jesus as a living spiritual reality after his death.'

Borg's work generates some important questions. Firstly: How convincing is his 'historical Jesus'? Is it really possible to know so much about Jesus as an historical figure? How do the various 'strokes' cohere? Is it possible to relate them in a meaningful way? How consistently historical is Borg's work? In this respect it may be added that although he works historically in the sense that he reaches his conclusions by making use of a cross-cultural typology of religious types, he does not arrive at his Jesus by means of the consistent use of a clearly defined method. His Jesus is, moreover, related to and made possible both by his personal history and his adherence to the current shift, especially within a section of North American historical Jesus scholarship, away from an eschatological figure in favour of a teacher of wisdom.

As far as the question of a relevant Jesus is concerned: It is clear that not all historical reconstructions of Jesus will be of relevance to the present. Whether relevance is possible will depend on the Jesus one comes up with. Borg's reconstruction does indeed differ from the traditional image of Jesus, but is at least partly not foreign to our time and its needs (cf e.g the current emphasis on spirituality).

The fact that Borg's reconstruction of the historical Jesus has limitations should not prevent us from seeing its value. Perhaps one has to distinguish between merely seeing what one looks for and glimpsing something of what there was, made possible by looking from a certain perspective—a perspective to which many factors contribute. Borg's work may at least give us a...
In the end any historical reconstruction of Jesus is also, in a sense, an interpretation. When this is realised and acknowledged, a reconstruction like Borg's can be seen as part of the process of making Jesus meaningful to different audiences, a process which started already in the New Testament.

With regard to the relation Jesus/Christ it seems as if in Borg's view historical Jesus scholarship leaves Christ or 'the post-Easter Jesus', to use his own formulation, intact. Although his main focus is on the historical Jesus and he is of the opinion that his reconstructed Jesus has significance for the Christian life, this does not cancel or replace the 'post-Easter Jesus'. It seems as if he is saying that context will determine which one of the two will be necessary and meaningful.

In the end Borg does not really give an historically consistent answer to the question of the relation between Jesus and Christ. One has to ask: Can an historical Jesus scholar who takes seriously the history of and after Jesus be expected to answer this question in an historically consistent way? Borg realises the problem. His remark on this is to the point: 'This “both-and” affirmation is messy. It would be “cleaner” to affirm that EITHER the historical Jesus is the definitive norm, OR that the canonical/credal Jesus is the definitive norm. But the first overlooks the significance of the community’s experience in the post-Easter situation; the second overlooks the significance of the life which Jesus lived' (1996a: week 7.3).

Although Borg's work does not fit neatly into previous phases of the quest for the historical Jesus, his work corresponds in a way with the Old Quest. His emphasis is also on a relevant Jesus, although he also incorporates what they rejected.

5 JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN: FAITH ALREADY IN THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Of the work of present historical Jesus scholars that of Crossan is perhaps best-known. According to him Jesus was a peasant who preached a radical egalitarianism and thus a kingdom accessible to all. His program of egalitarianism found expression especially in his healings and open commensality (Crossan 1994a; cf Craffert 1995 for a summary and discussion of Crossan's work).

Although his work is historical in nature and he only pays attention to its implications for Christian faith in the epilogues of his books, Crossan does not regard himself as solely an historian. 'The subject of my historical study is Jesus and early Christianity, and that is a religious and theological issue. So
I am a theological historian and an historical theologian (Crossan 1991a:1204). He therefore regards his work to have theological implications. According to Crossan there were already during Jesus’ lifetime people who believed in him. People reacted to Jesus in different ways. ‘Faith’ can be described as the response of those who called him divine and wanted to worship him. ‘This...response...is Christian faith and it was there as soon as it was uttered or performed—before any death or resurrection, just as well as after it’ (Crossan 1994b:4). According to Crossan ‘Christian faith is an act of faith in the historical Jesus as the manifestation of God’ (1994b:3).

His view of the importance of the historical Jesus for Christian faith is related to, even dependent on his reconstruction of various Christianities in the first century AD. The reconstruction of these is dependent on his view of Jesus’ resurrection, more specifically the resurrection appearances in the Gospels.

How does he view the resurrection? It is clear that in his view the resurrection played a less decisive role in early Christianity than is traditionally ascribed to it. Foundational to this is his view that ‘those final chapters in our present gospels have nothing whatsoever to do with the origins of Christian faith but have everything to do with the origins of Christian authority’ (Crossan 1994b:4).

Crossan’s view of the resurrection appearances as the legitimation of authority is not really original (cf the references in Craffert 1989). What perhaps is original is his implementation of this insight in the developing of different kinds of faith within earliest Christianity, or then different Christianities (see however Mack 1988).

Using available (Thomas and Pauline) and reconstructed sources (Q) Crossan distinguishes four kinds of Christian faith in the fifties of the first century AD: faith as it found expression in the Gospel of Thomas (opposed by Paul in 1 Corinthians), that of Pauline Christianity, that of the Q community and the faith of what he calls exegetical Christianity. Of the four types of Christianity Crossan distinguishes, a vision of the resurrection was, according to him, important only for Paul. In contrast to this the historical Jesus was important for all types of Christian faith except for the Thomas Christians. ‘The faith of the Q community is faith in the historical Jesus in an almost physical sense of the term. They are living and acting in continuity with his life to the point where faith and imitation are indistinguishable’ (Crossan 1994b:15). As for Paul, ‘the historical Jesus, particularly and precisely in the terrible and servile form of his execution, is part of Christian faith. It is to the historical Jesus so executed that he responds in faith’ (Crossan 1994b:10). With regard to ‘exegetical Christianity’ Crossan is of the opinion that immediately after Jesus’ death learned followers of him started
searching the Scriptures in order to understand his death. To them the historical Jesus was so important that they created history from texts. ‘Their faith in the historical Jesus was so strong that they were constantly inventing more of it all the time, more of the history, that is, so that there could be more of the faith!’ And: ‘They believed in the historical Jesus so much that they kept creating more and more of him out of biblical type and prophetic text’ (Crossan 1994b:20). They may have created, but was this the reason? Was history to them just as important as to a twentieth century historical Jesus scholar?

It is clear that Crossan’s view of the utmost importance of the historical Jesus for Christian faith is closely related to his view of the resurrection appearances in the Gospels and therefore of the role the resurrection played in early Christianity. This view leads him to detect four types of Christian faith in the middle of the first century. To only one of these, Pauline Christianity, a vision of the resurrection was important.

His view is also partly dependent on his reconstructed sources. The question is whether he is not over-using hypothetical sources.

This is not the place for a careful criticism of Crossan’s view of the resurrection and its role in early Christianity. It can only be mentioned that a number of historical Jesus scholars still accept that Jesus’ followers had resurrection experiences shortly after his death (cf e.g Frederikson 1995:85; Sanders 1993:280).

How does Crossan view the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Jesus whom Christians confess as the Christ?

As to the relation Jesus/Christ then there existed right from the start a dynamic relationship between the historical Jesus and the theologically interpreted Christs. The variety of theological interpretations of Jesus one encounters in the New Testament select different aspects of the historical Jesus: ‘You could say that each interpretation focuses on its own historical Jesus’ (Crossan 1991a:1202).

Crossan later on (1994b:20; 1996) clarifies this relationship even further by speaking of an ‘interpenetration of past and present’, an ‘intertwining of then and now’ whereby at least the canonical gospels ‘always go back to the historical Jesus and speak thence to new situations and problems. Jesus-then becomes Jesus-now. No, better: Jesus-then is Jesus-now’. And: ‘Gospel is good news: good means from somebody’s specific point of view; and news means it must be permanently updated for different times and places’ (Crossan 1996: week 1.3).

This brings us to Crossan’s view on Jesus/Christ now. Since the dialectic between Jesus-then and Jesus-now (or Christ) is, according to Crossan, normative for all Catholic Christianity (1994b:19; 1996: week 1.3), the last
word about neither Jesus nor Christ has yet been spoken. Historical Jesus scholars are left with the task of making the best reconstruction of the historical Jesus they can by contemporary standards. And 'Christian faith must confess what that historical Jesus means for now' (Crossan 1996: week 1.3).

Although Crossan has much confidence in his own reconstruction of Jesus (he even intended his book to be for the twenty-first century what Schweitzer's had been for the twentieth century, 1994c:151), he does not consider this Jesus to be of direct relevance to the present or his program as something which can be put into practice in our time. He relativises, but does not go on to say what the Christ who stands in a dialectical relationship to his reconstructed Jesus would look like. Despite his insistence that a new time needs, as it were, a new Christ, he, perhaps somewhat inconsistently, admits that reconstructions of the historical Jesus do not have to mean the end of traditional christologies. The New Testament indeed contains sections where Jesus is regarded as the only mediator between God and man, but 'when Christianity tries to define this relationship between Jesus and the divine as clearly as possible, it declares that Jesus lived among humans as the unmediated presence of God' (Crossan 1991a:1203). At least some of the New Testament is therefore not in opposition to his own reconstruction of Jesus.

In the context of the historical Jesus research of the past hundred and fifty years Crossan should be awarded a position right opposite of Kähler. While Kähler regarded the historical Jesus as unimportant for faith, it is foundational to Crossan's view that people believed in Jesus already during his lifetime, which means that they believed in the historical Jesus. If this is the case, how can he then be unimportant for faith? Kähler did not want to found faith in history because this would remove the risk of believing. But taking history seriously does not remove the risk, it enlarges it.

6 FAITH WITHOUT HISTORY

Johnson's work can only in a qualified sense be called part of historical Jesus research. In fact, it was written as a reaction to the work of the Jesus Seminar and recent Jesus books such as those of Borg, Crossan and a number of others. To reach a more comprehensive picture of what is done on the subject it is important to pay some attention to his view.

Johnson's book gives evidence of the variety within the field of New Testament scholarship. Contrary to the New Testament scholars against whom he writes, he studies his subject within the framework of church, canon and confession. In his view the problems in New Testament scholarship started with the reformation and especially since the nineteenth century
when the framework of canon, confession and church started to disintegrate (Johnson 1996:71).

What historical Jesus scholars regard as the key to the understanding of Jesus, namely history, he considers to be problematic in various respects. In his view these scholars regard history as something unproblematic and deal with it accordingly (Johnson 1996:81). To construct an historical image of Jesus from the New Testament is, however, nearly impossible. As insider literature which is permeated by the conviction of faith, the New Testament writings do not lend themselves to such a reconstruction (1996:87–89). The difficulty of getting at historical knowledge about Jesus is also not the only problem. Johnson uses Socrates as an example to make the point that it is in his case not only impossible to reach the real (historical?) person, but that it was precisely the interpreted Socrates, especially the Socrates of Plato, who exercised ‘historical influence’ (Johnson 1996:106). ‘Whether Jesus or Socrates, the most critical thing about a person is precisely what most eludes the methods of critical historiography, namely the meaning of a character’ (Johnson 1996:133). The question is whether meaning is fixed once and for all.

Johnson is strongly opposed to the view that historical knowledge of Jesus can be normative for faith and theology. He emphasises that Christian faith was never based on historical reconstructions of Jesus, even if it involved a number of historical claims concerning Jesus. ‘Christianity in its classic form has not based itself on the ministry of Jesus but on the resurrection of Jesus, the claim that after his crucifixion and burial Jesus entered into the powerful life of God...’ (Johnson 1996:134). And: ‘Whatever the character of the ministry of Jesus or the “Jesus movement” before his death, it is the experience of the transformed Jesus as Lord that begins the “Christian movement”’ (Johnson 1996:135–136). Christians do not direct their faith to the historical figure of Jesus but to the living Lord Jesus (Johnson 1996:142).

What is important for Christian faith is not the historical Jesus, but the real Jesus who is encountered in the writings of the New Testament. Despite diversity, Johnson is of the opinion that a clear and consistent pattern can be detected in the way Jesus is interpreted in the New Testament. In his view the ‘real Jesus’ comprises especially two features. On the one hand he is portrayed as ‘the powerful, resurrected Lord whose transforming spirit is active in the community’ (Johnson 1996:166). On the other hand all the New Testament writings picture him as the one who suffers in obedience and service—the suffering Messiah or Son of man (Johnson 1996:153–166).

It is clear that Johnson’s view on the relation between the historical Jesus and Christ/Christian faith is exactly the opposite of Crossan’s. Whereas to Crossan the historical Jesus is of paramount importance (people initially
responded to this Jesus in faith), to Johnson only the Jesus whom we encounter in the New Testament is relevant to faith. If Crossan perhaps over-emphasises history, Johnson more or less ignores it.

Johnson’s position is also not without problems. If one leaves history aside, with what content should Jesus as resurrected Lord be filled? It brings us to the question what Christian faith is about. Was and is it something completely ahistoric or was and is it a response to an historical person who acted and spoke in a specific way and therefore related to history? If one opts for the latter, research on the historical Jesus, with all the problems accompanying it, cannot be irrelevant.

It is noteworthy that there are also New Testament scholars, who regard historical study of the New Testament as of crucial importance and who devote their whole lives to such study, who have reservations about historical Jesus research and its relevance for Christian faith. In his article Jesus the victim and also in his contribution to the volume Studying the historical Jesus Koester notes these reservations. He points out that the early Christian communities were established without recourse to the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth (1994:535). All that was needed was the story of Jesus’ suffering and death, the ritual of the Lord’s Supper and hymns of mythic poetry (1994:536). ‘Exactly what modern scholars would regard as unhistorical was central for the ancient church’s understanding of Jesus’ (1994:539). Apart from the fact that the sources at our disposal do not provide an unproblematic entry to the historical Jesus, there is in his view no real hope of discovering an historical Jesus unprejudiced by Western consciousness (1994:539, 540). Of the current historical Jesus research he writes: ‘We are again on the way toward a human Jesus who is just like one of us...’ (1992:7). Thus, except for the fact that in his case the resurrection does not play such an important role, in this matter he comes very close to Johnson’s position.

Even to Meier, himself a major historical Jesus scholar, historical Jesus research has only limited implications for Christian faith. Although he is, like most present historical Jesus scholars, not really concerned with Christ as the object of faith in his books on the historical Jesus, he makes a few remarks in this regard. He agrees with Kähler and Bultmann that the Jesus of history cannot be the object of Christian faith. Throughout many centuries people believed in Jesus Christ without having any knowledge of the historical Jesus. The object of Christians’ faith is not the reconstruction of scholars, but a living person who is for ever in the presence of the Father (Meier 1991:198)

Yet Meier is of the opinion that historical Jesus scholarship can be valuable if one is asking about ‘faith seeking understanding, i.e., theology, in a contemporary context’ (1991:198). Since Western culture has since the En-
lightenment become permeated with an historical-critical approach, theology needs to incorporate an historical approach into its methodology if it wants to speak to this culture in a credible way. Meier goes on to indicate four ways in which the quest for the historical Jesus can be of help to faith. It can prevent Christian faith from becoming something totally vague. It takes the humanity of Jesus seriously by emphasising that the risen Jesus is the same person who lived as a Jew in Palestine during the first century. By pointing to the embarrassing aspects of Jesus, historical Jesus research can prevent Christianity from 'domesticating' Jesus in their own interests. Historical Jesus research will make clear that Jesus can also not be 'easily coopted for programs of political revolution' (Meier 1991:199).

Contrary to Borg and Crossan the scholars discussed under the heading 'Faith without history' keep the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith' apart. Once again this procedure is not without problems. For example, on the one hand 'the risen Christ' as object of faith is used by Johnson and Meier as if its content is self-evident and totally independent on the Jesus of history. On the other hand Meier says that the risen Jesus is the same person who lived and died as a Jew in Palestine. If the risen Jesus is the same as the one who lived as a Jew in Palestine, how can research into his life make no real difference to the object of faith, the risen Christ?

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although present studies on the historical Jesus are characterised by greater methodological sophistication and a number of new 'historical Jesuses' have recently emerged, the relation between Jesus/Christ/Christian faith is not viewed totally differently than in previous quests or phases of the quest. To some the emphasis is still on reconstructions of the historical Jesus, to others on the Christ(s) of faith. To some the two should be totally separated, while others, even while focusing primarily on the one, try to relate the two in some way or another.

Crossan's insistence on faith in Jesus already during his lifetime is not completely new (cf Marxsen 1992), but his clear statement of this deserves attention. If the early Christians' confessions of faith in Jesus really were 'a response to what he had said and done' and they thereby 'claimed that in his words and deeds they had come to know who God really is' (Patterson 1996:24), is it legitimate for a New Testament scholar to keep Jesus and Christ apart?

With regard to the relation Jesus/Christ the real question is perhaps not whether the last word should belong to history—Johnson's view of the problem with regard to research on the historical Jesus—but whether Jesus' significance was fixed once and for all in the interpretations of him in the New
Testament. Should previous answers merely be repeated or should new answers time and again be formulated? In practice the latter happens all the time. But they are only partly new, because they stand—and should stand—not merely in a dialectical relationship with one or more reconstructions of the historical Jesus, but also with at least some of the many interpretations of Jesus which started already during his ministry.

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