9 ~ THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF JESUS

Deconstructing Dogma

This study is partly about the historical Jesus and partly about the early Jesus movements. Both parts are studied against the background of the intermingled contexts of the Judean, Herodian Galilean, Hellenistic-Semitic, and Greco-Roman worlds in mind. In Ovid's story of the virginal conception of Perseus and in Matthew's and Luke's nativity stories, Zeus and God appeared whenever what was legitimate was called into question. I said that the implication is that the divine and the human cannot be separated wherever legitimacy is concerned. For Ovid, the legitimacy of Perseus laid in Perseus' heroic deeds that resulted in his kingly enthronement. For the early Jesus movements, the legitimacy of the fatherless and crucified Jesus laid in Jesus' claim to be God's child. In this chapter, the focus is on the dogma of the "two natures" of Jesus. This dogma is *deconstructed* to *affirm* the significance of the metaphor of being child of God. Deconstruction means moving back to the building blocks. And the first of these "blocks" is Jesus himself. The chapter, to a certain extent, serves the purpose of condensing the previous eight chapters into a conclusion. It is done by showing that the dogma of the "two natures" of Jesus as both *human* and *divine* developed out of the dialectic of the historical, fatherless *Jesus who called God Father*, and *believers who confessed him as child of God*.

My quest for Jesus did not begin at the point where Jesus met John the Baptist. The starting point, in other words, was not when the voice from heaven declared that Jesus

was the child of God. This declaration was of course Mark's confession. To confess means to verbalize a basic religious experience. Mark's experience was grounded in Jesus' *Abba* experience. Mark began and ended the life of Jesus with *Abba*. In the Gethsemane episode, the words Mark chose for Jesus to pray are the typical words spoken at meals where the eldest son asked his father if the cup could be handed to someone more worthy than himself at the table. The story of the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane was Mark's answer to this question. Jesus, and none other, was the child of God in whom God delighted. This *Abba* experience originated before Mark. It began with Jesus himself.

Jesus called God "Father." To call someone "father" presupposes conception by means of the father. Mark (like the Jesus movement in Jerusalem)[86], however, does not contain any reference to the birth of Jesus. My study, therefore, starts before the beginning of Mark (and the Jerusalem faction). Matthew and Luke also go further back than Mark. They took up the Jerusalem faction's conviction that God adopted Jesus as *Israel's messiah* and Mark's conviction that Jesus was adopted at his baptism as *God's child*. For Matthew and Luke, God adopted Jesus at his *birth* as *God's child* and declared his status again at his *baptism*, as though people met Jesus there for the first time.

The tradition of Jesus' dual nature, his divine and human origin, is spoken in the language of confession. By means of myths and metaphors, the creeds express the experience of a special intimacy between God and humankind. Here too the articulation of this experience connects to a more foundational experience in the life of Jesus himself.

Paul (and in a certain sense, Matthew and John) extends this experience to include other believers who participated in the similar experience of being "children of God."

Paul especially made use of the metaphor "adopted as child." His metaphor originated in a Greco-Roman world where blood relationships between a father and his children were not of the utmost importance. Children from outside the family could be adopted as children. "Children of Abraham" should therefore be understood spiritually rather than physically. Gentiles could also become part of God's household.

Much later, John articulated this matter in a similar way when he distinguished between a *natural birth* and a *spiritual birth*. According to him (as with Paul), Jesus was born in a natural way, but as child of God, in a spiritual way too. A further similarity between Paul and John is that both describe Jesus' sonship of God not as beginning at his birth but as a matter of preexistence. John opposed the Gnostic idea that God does not engage transient humanity. God's only begotten son became human in all respects, including his birth.

John's (and Paul's) idea cannot be reconciled with the miraculous birth stories found in both Matthew and Luke. They are radically opposing ideas. In his controversy with the Gnostics, Ignatius harmonized Paul and John on the one hand, and Matthew and Luke on the other hand. For the first time in the history of biblical interpretation, the virginal conception of God's eternal son was emphasized. The rest of the New Testament, besides Luke, does not attest to this idea. Ignatius was responsible for the combination of mutually exclusive myths. The point he wanted to stress is that Jesus was truly human. Seemingly, every time the early church mentioned Jesus' virginal conception in a confessional way, it was strongly communicating the message that Jesus was undoubtedly human.

This process pertains to the way religious language originates and develops. "Language" (*langage*) must be distinguished from "language usage" (*parole*). The term "language" in this instance must not be seen as referring to a specific language (*la langue*), such as French or German. Language is the expression of experience. Language usage is characterized by specific articulation. Aspects such as style belong to this category. Religious language (a specific type of *langage*) is the verbalization of religious experience. Religious experience is essentially an individual matter. Religious experience is uniquely personal–it is one person's encounter with God. The only possible way to describe and interpret this encounter is to make use of imagery. Religious language speaks of God's encounter with a human being in an objectifying manner. God is not an object. In God-talk God cannot be introduced to people by any other means than imagery derived from the world of human experience. Imagery is figurative language usage (*parole*). Poets, for instance, freely make use of figurative language. Figurative language becomes *metaphor* when it transcends the language usage of the individual. When a group acknowledges the power and validity of an image, the *image* becomes a *metaphor*. Metaphors are specific to culture and time.

Religious experience has to be *expressed*. It is expressed in figurative language usage. Individual religious experience is extremely private and personal, but religion (a cultic activity characterized by specific rites) is always group oriented. Therefore, the language that expresses religious experience common to a specific group (bound by culture and time) will consist mainly of metaphorical language usage. When this metaphorical religious language usage becomes standardized, it becomes confessional formulae. Creeds, in turn, become fixed entities, that can remain relevant across the

boundaries of time and culture. When a creed begins to function separately from the context and time of its origin, it becomes dogma. When confessional formulae function abstractly, timelessly, and continually, they act in a doctrinal way. A doctrine presupposes the teaching of specific truths. Truthfulness goes hand-in-hand with what a particular group regards as correct. It assumes cognitive consensus and disapproves of dissention. Dogma represents distance (in German: *Entfernung*) from individual subjective experience. Dogma can be used as an instrument to manipulate, to marginalize, and to eliminate opponents. This complicated process implies four simple phases. It represents a movement from *foundational religious experience* to *metaphorical language usage* to *confessional formulae* to *dogma*.

In this study, my encounter with Jesus through engaging the historical and literary evidence, brought me to articulate his foundational experience of God in terms of inclusiveness and egalitarianism. In the time of Jesus, the Judeans had a very specific foundational experience in God. Outside the boundaries of the Promised Land, no meaningful existence was possible. God was only present to "full-blooded" Israelites in an exclusive way. God could only be encountered at a particular place of cultic worship, namely Jerusalem. God's saving acts were performed in the temple. The exile and the siege of Jerusalem when the temple was destroyed caused a crisis in the Judeans' religious experience. This resulted in the apocalyptic expectation of a heavenly utopia.

The fatherless Jesus grew up in Galilee of the Gentiles. His God-talk consisted of imagery, that expressed an alternative experience in God. His stories about the Kingdom of God and his healing acts became metaphors of which God's limitless, unmediated presence was expressed. Jesus made use of a symbol, that, in his culture, signaled a most

intimate bond, that of the father-son relationship. A father without a son had no honor or credibility. A son without a father had no honor or identity. However, even in his use of this symbol Jesus subverted the cultural arrangements of his time. According to these hierarchical arrangements in the culture, the patriarch represented his family before God. No one in the family could experience God's presence without being embedded in the realm of the father.

Jesus, however, did not use the metaphor *father* as the way to God, but *child*. Those not childlike could not experience the presence of God. Even more radical than this is that Jesus did not use the child who had been legitimized by the father as symbol. He pointed to an illegitimate child as a symbol of those who belonged to the realm of God.

It seems as though Jesus expressed his own fundamental religious experience through this symbol. As a fatherless figure, Jesus saw himself as the protector of fatherless children in Galilee, as well as of women who did not "belong" to a man. These women and children were regarded as outcasts since they did not fit into the patriarchal system. In many ways, Jesus acted like a woman. For example, it was said that he took the last place at the table, served others, forgave wrongs, showed compassion, and healed wounds. But it was also said that he protected patriarchless women and fatherless children; not as a patriarch or father himself, not from above, but from a position of being one of them. Jesus not only called God "Father," but also lived among the outcasts as if they were all children of God. In other words, Jesus lived as their "fictive" brother.

As the cause of Jesus expanded, the metaphor "child of God" became part of the Christian language usage. They were the people who experienced God's presence in

their lives because of their embeddedness in the cause of Jesus. Believers now became "children of God" and therefore brothers and sisters of Jesus, the "firstborn." Paul's Jesus was a Hercules figure who was publicly and mightily declared to be God's child on account of his victory over death at his resurrection. This idea influenced Luke. Luke, however, already attested to Jesus' sonship at the conception that Luke regarded as divine. Hercules was also the product of a divine conception. Even stronger parallels are the myth of the birth of the healer-god Asclepios and Ovid's story of Perseus where divine conception canceled illegitimacy. In Luke's view, the Divine Spirit conceived Jesus and he was adopted as child of Joseph. According to Luke, Joseph's genealogy can be traced to Adam, child of God. Another parallels can be found in Diodorus' story of Hercules' empty pyre and Seneca's story of Hercules' ascension. For Luke, Diodorus, and Seneca, the act of adoption as son is "proven" by the empty tomb and the "fact" of resurrection and ascension. The Greco-Roman ideas of the emperor cult and divine-human legends are mirrored in Luke.

Luke also provided insight into the tension between the synagogue and the church. Because of the schism between the synagogue and the church, the rumors of Jesus' illegitimacy began playing a more decisive role. The legend that Joseph adopted Jesus as his child seemed to have originated within this context. Joseph was regarded as the forefather of the Samaritans. Luke emphasized the tradition that Jesus traveled through Samaria. Jesus was even identified as a Samaritan. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan plays the role of Jesus. Against the background of a schism between synagogue and church, John, in his apology, noted the label of Samaritan given to Jesus.

John referred to two origins of all of God's children (this includes Jesus and his followers). They had a physical and a spiritual birth. In the same vein, this gospel speaks of physical bread and spiritual bread, physical water and spiritual water. This means that although people were born in a natural way, they were also spiritual people born in a spiritual way. This pertains to Jesus as well and very specifically to Jesus as the beloved child ("firstbegotten") of God. With this rhetoric, John wanted to persuade people not to place their ultimate trust in the tradition that Jesus was the physical son of Joseph, but rather in the faith that he was God's spiritual child. The consequence of such a faith is that whoever sees Jesus sees the Father. The thrust of this rhetoric is that the humanness of Jesus should not become an obstacle to experiencing God's presence when the Jesus-kerygma is proclaimed.

In Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John the metaphor "child of God" was used in a functional way. Their focus was on the events: what Jesus did and what believers did and do. In the New Testament, the proclaimer became the proclaimed. After the New Testament, the event of Jesus' sonship of God became dogma. Functional metaphors became philosophical metaphors. Functional christology became ontological christology. What was concrete became abstract.

In the New Testament, the "dual natures" of believers functioned to stress their human and spiritual origins. After the New Testament, this metaphor became expression of the way in which Jesus was in relationship to the heavenly Father (a static, abstract, ontological category).

The "dual nature" concept first originated in metaphorical language usage. This language usage expressed the foundational experience that nothing physical or cultural

could hinder a spiritual, unmediated presence of God. A child of humanity is born anew to be child of God. This "dual nature" metaphor became a confessional formula and later the unquestionable, fixed dogma of Jesus' two natures. Against the convictions of the Arians (4th century), the Socinians, and Anabaptists (16th century), this dogma emphasized Jesus' humanness.

Later orthodox fundamentalism has reversed the emphasis and the divine nature has become almost the only concern. Ironically, those who have participated in the Jesus cause by paradoxically loving the *cosmos* unselfishly have become the opponents of the fundamentalists. Engaging in the cause of Jesus means taking the encounter between divinity and humanness seriously. However, in the hands of the fundamentalists, the dogma of Jesus' two natures has become a stick with which to strike and a rod with which to destroy. According to the fundamentalist view, the dogma generates justifying and saving faith. Those whose views are differing from theirs are regarded as opponents of the dogma. They are therefore considered to be godless and must be excommunicated. In the process of marginalizing and eliminating opponents, the "retainers" of the dogma often loose sight of Jesus' humanness and humaneness, and of the history of the origins of the dogma.

However, reconstructing the foundational religious experience that gave birth to the dogma does not equal foundationalism.

> He who believes in foundationalism, believes that knowledge has firm foundations. The theory reasssures us both that we have a solid foundation for our knowledge, and that we have a mechanism to construct the rest of the edifice of knowledge on this firm foundation.…In short, it reassures us that we can answer the

> sceptic.…This theory has a long history that can, in modern times, be traced to the period immediately following the Reformation–a fact that is in itself not without significance....An obvious response to the anti-foundationalist position, such as outlined above, is to say that it inevitably results in relativism....Anti-foundationalism [however] does not preclude certainty–neither in epistemology nor in theology.…The anti-foundationalist theologian should also have no problem with certainty regarding elements of his [or her] faith. What she/she refuses to do, however, is to situate these certainties at the basis of his/her theology, and attempting to infer the rest of the edifice of theological knowledge from them. Certainty is more or less randomly distributed through the fabric of knowledge, it is not in the basement, because there is no basement! Anti-foundationalism has no hang-ups about a certain foundation because it does not take the possibility of radical scepticism seriously.[1]

Constructing an image of Jesus and then considering it to be the exclusive legitimate basis for God-talk operates exactly according to the principles of foundationalism and of orthodoxy. It is also in discord with the cause of Jesus. Favoritism was not part of Jesus' vision. Foundationalism favors a pretended fixed basement and the certainties built upon such a foundation. Thus, deconstructing dogma does not aim to recover the historical Jesus as the "foundation" of our faith assertions. Quests that have tried to do this are like waves that come and go. However, my program of deconstructing dogma is not a choice for relativism, which means that anything goes.

Engaged hermerneutics does not presuppose absolute freedom from ecclesiastical confessions. On the contrary, it takes faith seriously and respects confessional formulae in terms of their intentions. It is a *search* for what is foundational to faith and seeks to find it distributed through the fabric of our *quest for Jesus*, knowing the dialectic between

the pre-Easter Jesus "telling" of God as Father and the post-Easter church "showing" Jesus as God's child. Engaged hermeneutics presupposes a lifelong journey. Every quest will be determined by the circumstances of the time and culture in which the traveler exists. To engage is to distance oneself from one's culture to such an extent that one can see the pain that cultural measures cause. Engaging in the cause of Jesus necessitates culture critique. It asks for a critical reading of and conscious reflection on the Scriptures and dogmas. It is a journey that never ceases.

It is clear that in a strategy of engaged hermeneutics intolerant foundationalism will be unacceptable. The metaphors by which faith assertions are expressed are bound by culture and time and can lose their relevance. However, a choice for anti-foudationalism is not a choice for relativism. Relativism occurs when creeds have no guiding function anymore. There is total freedom. However, engaged hermeneutics, though anti-foundationalistic in nature, does not intend that anything goes. The rhetorics of the dogma (the contents that the dogma wants to convey; i.e., the doctrine taught) remain important. To uncover the rhetorics of the dogma, one must deconstruct it.

As I have said, deconstruction involves moving back to the building blocks. This strategy distinguishes the four phases in the development of dogma. The foundational religious experience is expressed by metaphors that in turn are transformed into confessional formulae that can lead to fixed dogmas. Power interests come into play when dogmas are formed. Those who are powerful use dogmas to manipulate or excommunicate opponents. Deconstructing dogma does not mean to get rid of the confessional formulae as such. Deconstruction in this regard has a positive and a negative motivation. On the negative side, power interests are to be exposed and on the

positive side, the relevance (or lack thereof) of confessional formulae are to be ascertained. The positive strategy asks two questions: firstly, whether the metaphors used are still functional and secondly, whether the confessional formulae are adequate vehicles for the expression of the foundational religious experience.

It is an illusion to think that worldly interests do not play a role in the formation of dogmas. The nature of these interests varies in different times and cultures. Sometimes economic and political interests will prevail, while at other times familial and political interests triumph. In the course of the development of the dogma of Jesus' two natures, familial and political interests dominated in the beginning. During the last phase, the familial was no longer a factor.

The last phase occurred in the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Firstly, a papal edict expanded this dogma to include the immaculate conception and the perpetual virginity of Mary. The Socinians, who did not accept the full humanity of Jesus, were thereby declared heretics. In the Netherlands, the Calvinists conformed to this edict, with the exception of the Mariology. They had a political motive for doing so. By means of the Belgic Confession, they implored the Roman-Catholic Spanish king of the Netherlands to stop the persecutions of the Calvinists.

The intention of both the Belgic Confession and the papal edict was to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. With this confession, the Calvinists refuted the Anabaptists who undervalued the humanness of Jesus. Ironically enough, the wording used to emphasize Jesus' humanness in relation to his divine origin later (since the seventeenth century) became the instrument of orthodoxy to emphasize Jesus' divinity and to downplay his humanness. The phrase "Joseph had no sexual intercourse with Mary" (used by Pope

Paul IV and the Belgic Confession) was the trigger for orthodoxy to underplay the humanness of Jesus and to place the main emphasis on his divinity. The proof text that the Calvinists used to substantiate this came from the Johannine metaphoric expression of the dual nature of a child of God who was born physically and spiritually (Jn 1:13). The proof the papal edict used was taken from apocryphal evidence (Proto-James, Joseph the Carpenter and Pseudo-Matthew). Both the Roman Catholics and the Calvinists were seemingly unaware of the different types of christology that formed the context within which these metaphors were used in the first century. They simply expanded the evidence found in the Nicene Creed (from the fourth century).

The political interest behind the formation of the Nicene Creed was Constantine's wish to preserve the unity of his empire. He used the religious controversy with the Arians to attain his goal. The Arians were Gnostic in their orientation and also denied the humanness of Jesus. In other words, the two natures of Jesus expressed in the Nicene Creed intended to emphasize Jesus' humanness. The Nicene Creed originated with Ignatius (second century C.E.). He combined mutually exclusive christologies that were expressions of Jesus' humanness and divinity. The New Testament was mainly written during the first century. The faith assertions about Jesus' dual nature expressed in the New Testament made use of metaphors from mythology and the emperor cult. Jesus, child of the heavenly emperor, described in his metaphoric stories God's kingdom in categories other than worldly hierarchies. These metaphors were utilized to express the faith, based on the words of Jesus, that Christians were children of God even though they did not physically belong to the family of Abraham. Thereby, they emphasized the

unmediated access to God. The foundational experience in the life of Jesus underlying this faith is that he, as fatherless person, experienced God as his Father.

The issue is whether the rhetoric in the last phase of dogma formation is congruent with this foundational experience. It is clear that orthodox fundamentalists' understanding of the dogma of the two natures is incongruent with this foundational experience. They use the dogma to generate faith, whereas Jesus understood faith as living in the immediate presence of God. Fundamentalists use the dogma to bar people from God's presence. For Jesus, outcasts symbolized those who live in the presence of God. Another concern is whether the metaphor "child of God" is still relevant for a postmodern era. The postmodern era brought sensitivity for the disadvantaged. One of the most urgent problems of our time is the prevalence of street urchins in societies all over the world. The extent of their misery is understood by all. We have seen that these children were the symbol Jesus used to express God's healing presence for disillusioned people. When the church formulates its faith assertions today, the power of this symbol should not to be violated.

Jesus for Today

Is the investigation of the historical Jesus significant today? This question can be approached from a number of angles. The church, for instance, constitutes one such angle and the university another.

As far as the church is concerned, the preaching and the dogmas of the church cannot claim to be free from testing. Depending on the current scientific paradigm,

criteria for testing may take different forms. Here one should bear in mind that the discourse of the church should under all circumstances be bound to the gospel with regard to Jesus. The word "gospel" implies *soteriology*. Like many other technical terms used by theologians, the word *soteriology* points to something intrinsic and foundational to human experience. It is an experience that assumes peace between God and humankind. To meet God as savior is to experience serenity amidst adversity. For the Christian, God-talk is bound to the essence of Jesus' foundational religious experience. At least, God-talk for the Christian implies the quest for what this experience could have been. In its articulation of this experience, the earliest church referred to it soteriologically as *good tidings*–the gospel with regard to Jesus, child of God (cf. *inter alia* 1 Th 1:5; Mk 1:1).

The church is supposed to be the bearer of the gospel. Therefore, it may be that people today want to test the validity of what the church says on the basis of the concrete effect of the gospel on the church and society. The church inherently faces the possibility of, and mostly unknowingly, falsifying and obfuscating the gospel, and even of manipulating and exploiting *others* in the name of that gospel. By doing this, the church alienates itself from the One to whom it bears witness.

That possibility was already present in the earliest Jesus movement, as well as among those who handed down the Jesus tradition orally, those who put it to paper and adapted it editorially, and those who canonized the twenty-seven documents as the New Testament. Generally, we believe that this process of the handing down of tradition and the writing of the Bible took place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, I do not picture or experience the work of the Holy Spirit in a mechanical way. The Holy

Spirit did not detract from the humanity of either the writers of the Bible, or of those who, before them, had handed down the gospel, or of those who, afterwards, interpreted it. What has been included in the canon, after all, has not lost its worldly or human character. Two examples of social phenomena found in and advocated by the canon that cannot be traced back to Jesus of Nazareth are a concept of office with a twisted claim to authority and the submission of women (cf. 1 tim 2:9-15; Tit 2:5).

Apart from the scientific merit of the historical Jesus investigation, because it helps us to clarify in a responsible fashion the process by which the New Testament was historically handed down, the church may with the assistance of this investigation reach greater clarity with regard to the self-understanding of Christendom. This benefit of Jesus research can be referred to as an inwardly directed desirability.

Yet there is also an outwardly directed desirability. The church also needs the investigation of the historical Jesus for the sake of the interreligious debate. In the world, Christians are confronted with the question: Who is this Jesus you confess and proclaim and whom you invite us to accept as our redeemer? How is it that he, who was a particular Israelite from Galilee, is presented as universally significant? A paper character without “flesh and blood” would, in such a situation, lack credibility! If we do not ask the question as to the historical Jesus, then the kerygma and the values of Christians could become an ideology, that could be manipulated as people wished. When we remind ourselves of the images of Christ presented to people of different religious persuasions during crusades, colonization in the name of missionary work, and in gas chambers, then the historical Jesus question assists us in rediscovering the inclusive and antihierarchical meaning of the gospel.

Furthermore, Jesus of Nazareth ceased to be the sole property of the church a long time ago! The sole applicability of the *kerygmatic Christ*, as well as the priority of the "proclaimed Christ" over the "proclaiming Jesus," is therefore inconceivable. Whether we like it or not, the importance of the Jesus question stretches further than Sunday services in church buildings, further than the normative documents of the official church, further than churches' programs of evangelism, further than the God-talk of Christians in the street. One need only think of novellas and films, of art and music, that use Jesus as a theme.

One could barely imagine the implicit lack of service to a diverse community if scholars would be unwilling to undertake basic and fundamental research on the historic origins of Christianity and on the Jesus of history! Those in a non-Christian, post-Christian, or plural religious community, just as those in the church, could be reminded by historical Jesus research of the possibility of the alienation of the Jesus of history.

Historical Jesus research matters. At least, it makes a significant contribution towards the historical understanding and theological application of the New Testament. The Jesus of history is either the implicit or explicit point of departure for inquiry into the sources behind, the social locations of, and the theological tendencies represented by the New Testament writings.

The fact is, in the New Testament a material relationship does exist between the "proclaimer" and the "proclaimed." Theologians should not avoid the exegetical task tracking this relationship to show the existence of a core continuum between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith without, however, denying a discontinuity regarding various aspects or claiming that faith, in order to be true faith, must be based on historical facts.

Historical Jesus research is fundamental to the credibility of Christianity, in that Christianity is not a "book-religion" but represents belief patterns witnessed in the New Testament and is modeled on the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, experienced and confessed by Christians as child of God. The quest for the historical Jesus is also important with regard to the interreligious dialogue. In this realm Christianity was often, either unjustly or justly, accused of being exclusive since it was built upon the Jewishness of Jesus. But the fact is, Jesus of Nazareth, ethnically an Israelite, had been crossing boundaries all the way without being "un-Jewish." The kerygma about living through faith alone historically finds its main support in a gender equitable, ethnically unbound, and culturally subversive Jesus.

Therefore, with regard to engaged hermeneutics, the quest for the historical Jesus illuminates what emancipatory living, in memory of the Jesus of history, entails existentially. As the living symbol of God's unmediated presence in terms of God's unbrokered household, the historical Jesus set people free and, as the risen Christ and *Kyrios* (Lord), still sets people (irrespective of sexual orientation, gender, age, ethnicity, social, and religious affiliation) free from distorted relationships with oneself, with *others*, and with God. Christian ethics is not an abstract ideology but is based on the humanness and the humaneness of the Jesus of history. Thus, the quest for the historical Jesus is to play an important role in postmodern theological thinking. This opinion should be seen against the background of the conviction that postmodernity features a mondial and pluralistic perspective as a result of a broadened rationality that goes beyond foundationalism and relativism.

The category “kerygmatic Christ” (the faith assertions of the church modeled on the New Testament) seems to increasingly lose its explanatory and heuristic power in the secular and postmodern religious age. I, however, still find myself within the realm of the church and therefore would like to uphold the relationship between the *historical Jesus* and the *kerygmatic Christ*. Yet the twenty-first century could be the time when the relevance of the church as institution and the Christian Bible as its canon became outdated for people on the street. If and when the process of secularization reaches its consummation, another Christian generation will be called both to reconsider the continued importance of the historical Jesus and to reinterpret simultaneously that figure as the manifestation of God.

The question as to the relationship between the historical Jesus and the faith assertions that follow, will have to be asked and answered over and over again. Never in history has this question been adequately and finally answered. The challenge is to find a meaningful answer to this question for the immediate present. We cannot do more. To acknowledge our limitations is no weakness. When times change, the answers will change. This does not mean that we were wrong before. To think that the journey ended in the fourth century or in the sixteenth century or in the twentieth century is a betrayal of the cause of Jesus. Or to think that the journey ended with the *Old Quest* or the *New Quest* or the *Third Quest* or even the *Renewed Quest* is to miss the reason for the search for Jesus. The direction to follow is to engage in the dialectic between Jesus and God in such a way that we today can still acknowledge him as child of God and also find ourselves as children of God living in the presence of God.

END NOTE

1. Mouton, J. & Pauw, J.C. 1988, “Foundationalism and Fundamentalism: A Critique,” pp. 177, 185-186.