

# “Anthropological rabbits” and “positivistic ducks”: An experiential reflection on Pieter Craffert’s “shamanic Jesus”

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## Abstract

*This article aims at conversing with aspects of the contribution Pieter Craffert (New Testament scholar from the University of South Africa) has made in his book on the historical Jesus, *The life of a Galilean shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological-historical perspective* (2008). In the book traits of the “shamanic complex” are heuristically used to explain the layering of traditions as reconfigurations of each other within the same cultural area and to argue for continuity from the cultural constitution of a social personage to the communication and enscripturation of that social personage within the same cultural system. Jesus’ healings and his encountering of spirits are understood in terms of the notion of alternate states of consciousness as polyphased consciousness. The book’s point of departure is the conviction that an anthropological-sensitive reading scenario represents an epistemological alternative to that of scholars who emphasize the historical-critical analysis of strata in the development of the Jesus tradition. The article consists of an appraisal and a critique. It argues for a different judgment rather than posing a thesis of a paradigm shift. The approach of some scholars who consider the investigation into the stratification of overlays in the Jesus tradition as central to historical Jesus studies is evaluated as complementary to a cultural-sensitive reading scenario.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article’s focus is on epistemology. It aims at an inter-scholarly conversation with aspects of the contribution Pieter Craffert has made by his decade long study of the historical Jesus and the recent publication of his book *The life of a Galilean shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological-*

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*historical perspective* (2008).<sup>2</sup> The article consists of an appraisal and a critique. The critical response in the article is shaped in the form of a self-critical interpretative process that can be considered to be experiential reflection.<sup>3</sup> The article’s point of departure is Craffert’s conviction that his approach to historical Jesus research represents an epistemological alternative to that of previous scholars who have emphasized historical-critical analysis of strata in the development of the Jesus tradition. This approach is labeled “positivistic.” Because my own historical Jesus research is built upon the assumption of the stratification of textual overlays in the Jesus tradition, I used my own approach as the perspective from which I assess Craffert’s explanation of his profile of the historical Jesus against the background of a “shamanic complex”.

The article argues for a different judgment than posing a thesis that such a cultural-anthropological insight represents a paradigm shift with regard to the approach of those scholars who consider the investigation into the stratification of overlays in the Jesus tradition as central to historical Jesus studies. The aim is to argue for an epistemological *continuity* between a *historical-critically sensitive* Jesus research and an *anthropologically sensitive* Jesus research. The article begins with quotes to depict a background against which the appraisal and critical response is executed. In the article’s conclusion the relevance of these quotes is illustrated.

## **2. QUOTES AS PRELUDE**

### **2.1 Another way of doing “historical” Jesus research**

Anthropological historiography as an alternative theoretical paradigm offers a way out of the impasse in current historical Jesus research. It does not occupy a position somewhere in between positivist and postmodern historiography but represents an alternative paradigm that acknowledges multiple cultural realities and the existence of other forms of life as constitutive of the historical subject and the historical record. It offers an interpretative framework for a culturally sensitive understanding of Jesus of

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<sup>2</sup> Craffert, P F 2008. *The life of a Galilean shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological-historical perspective*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. (Matrix. The Bible in Mediterranean Context.)

<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of a “realist theory of science”, interpretation through “experiential reflection” / “experimental activity” does not intend an “active interference” in the “condition of empirical regularities” in order to produce subjective structures or constitutions. However, according to Roy Bhaskar ([1975] 1978), even with regard to the observation of the so-called “structured character” of “closed systems”, where “the empiricist” is faced by “causal laws”, “empiricist ontology in fact depends upon a concealed *anthropocentricity*” (emphasis by Bhaskar).

Nazareth as social personage embedded in his social system and worldview and by employing cross-cultural and anthropological models strives to cross both the temporal and cultural gaps faced by the historian.”

(Pieter Craffert 2008:421)

## 2.2 William Wrede – the doyen of historical-critical Jesus researchers

“In accordance with what we have suggested, the much lauded concreteness of Mark will perhaps have to be assessed differently from usual [e.g. J Weiss – to Wrede’s ‘great pleasure’, more sceptical than most – A G v A] ... It is not as if the other Synoptics were any more concrete .... The distinction lies here: through the plasticity of his remarks Mark stimulates the demand for concreteness more strongly and yet leaves it unsatisfied. A brief hasty word of Jesus’ or someone else’s and a short remark on the impression is made; quick sudden changes of location throughout and within individual scenes and manifold changes in the environment of Jesus; the people or the disciples’ psychological condition for now appearing and now withdrawing. The psychological and other motivations would have been the pre-condition for giving palpable shape to the events are lacking. But it is not because they might be freely supplied that they are lacking, but because they were not thought of it at all. Thus the appearance of Jesus and of the other persons in the drama frequently gives the impression of something hasty, shadowy, almost phantasmal. Naturally not for this reason alone. If an exhaustive description were merited it would specifically be necessary to show how the superhuman features of Jesus<sup>4</sup> contribute to this impression. But the Gospel [of Mark] does also really contain much that is concrete. Yet here the entire character of the writing warns us not to regard concreteness too quickly and incautiously as a characteristic of historicity.”

(William Wrede [1901], in Gregory W Dawes 1999:127-128, reprinted from *The messianic secret*, 1971)

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<sup>4</sup> According to my understanding of the “spirit” of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century *religionsgeschichtliche studies*, the expressions “superhuman” and “something hasty, shadowy, almost phantasmal” do not reveal in the first instance a “dichotomous” thinking inspired by modernistic-positivistic “pre-Kantian metaphysics” – as Craffert says in his reponse on my paper during the UNISA Symposium on “Jesus studies and the shamanic complex” held on 13 May 2008. According to me, Wrede’s idiom expresses rather a feeling for spiritual otherness and holiness. Overviewing the “psychological dynamics” embedded in the “theology” of people such as William Wrede, one can guess that if present-day insights in “shamanism” had been available for them, they would have easily expressed their “feeling” for the “nonordinary” features in the records about Jesus’ life with the language which these insights provided. See works by inter alia Michael Harner (1990), *The way of the shaman*; Angeles Arrien (1993), *The four-fold way: Walking the paths of the warrior, teacher, healer, and visionary*; Hank Wesselman (1996), *Spiritwalker: Messages from the future*; Sandra Ingerman (2001), *Medicine for the earth: How to transform personal and environmental toxins*; Katie Weatherup (2006), *Practical shamanism: A guide for walking in both worlds*.

### 2.3 Travelers on the “Wredebahn”<sup>5</sup>

“Similar to a lawyer, a historian should determine how good the memory, vision, and hearing of a witness are, and whether testimony is based on hearsay or first-hand experience ... The notion at work here is that more than one reliable witness can testify what has actually happened ... In some instances it is explicitly stated, such as Van Aarde from the Wredebahn, who claims, ‘[t]o decide whether something is historically plausible demands, according to our insights today, independent multiple attestations. These witnesses should be attested in documents that are chronologically stratified’ ([*Fatherless*] 2001, 27; italics [emphasis] mine [=PF C]).

(Craffert 2008:47 and 47 note 16)

### 2.4 Individuality matters

“Sociology will make you a more attentive observer of how people in groups interact and function. It will also make you more aware of people’s different needs and interests – and perhaps more ready to work for the common good, while still recognizing the individuality of each person.”

(R T Schaefer 2007, co-author of *Sociology Matters*)

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<sup>5</sup> Craffert (2008:40ff) uses Thomas N Wright’s (1996:25, 79, 83-84) distinctive metaphorical description of two streams of current historical Jesus research, namely that of the “Wredebahn” and that of the “Schweitzerstrasse” (cf. Craffert, P F 2003, Mapping current South African Jesus research: The Schweitzerstrasse, the Wredebahn and cultural bundubashing). According to Wright (1996:21), the first group of scholars deems that little about Jesus is known and most of the information which we have tells more about the church’s futuristic apocalyptic-colored concerns than about the historical Jesus’ vision of God’s reign in people’s present everydayness. The second group supplements Albert Schweitzer’s portrayal of Jesus’ context within “apocalyptic Judaism” and also postulates a closer continuation between Jesus and the church than the first group. The expression “Wredebahn” as figure of speech goes back to Norman Perrin’s (1966) review article on the reprinting of the Charles Dodd’s *Festschrift* (edited by W D Davies & D Daube) in 1964 (first published in 1954) in which he used the term “Hauptstrasse”, rephrased by Crossan as “Autobahn”. In 1998 Wright referred to this figure of speech as follows: “The current state of play in the study of Jesus is notoriously difficult to describe ... I said to Dominic Crossan last year [1997] that we needed to revise Norman Perrin’s dictum of thirty years ago, that the *Wredestrasse* had become the *Hauptstrasse*; and he replied that it wasn’t a *Strasse* any longer, but an autobahn, with lots of intersections and a good deal of traffic going in various directions. I agree; but I think, in fact, that there has been so much heavy traffic on the *Wredebahn* in recent years that it is time to rebuild properly the old *Schweitzerbahn*, which always offered a quicker route and a better view.” However, my own position is formulated as: “Yet for me there is a third option. It is not a middle-of-the-road stance .... I shall learn from whatever is proffered from whatever direction, consider the insights scholars are proposing, make my choice, and proceed” (Van Aarde 2001:33).

## 2.5 Alternate states of consciousness and the “shamanic complex”<sup>6</sup>

“At the heart of shamanism lies the journey. It is this that helps to distinguish from other ecstasies, healers, and mystics.<sup>7</sup> ‘Any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman,’ wrote Eliade, because ‘the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.’<sup>8</sup> Eliade’s focus on the journey as the defining feature of shamanism has been much debated, but it is certainly a distinctive feature of the tradition. Others may enter altered states, or heal, but it is shamans who primarily engage in soul flight.”

(Roger Walsh 2007:151)<sup>9</sup>

## 3. AN APPRECIATION

Craffert’s inattention to my well-intentioned previous critique<sup>10</sup> of his modus operandi with regard to *historical* Jesus research makes me hesitate to offer a critical appraisal of his new book, *The life of a Galilean shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in anthropological-historical perspective*. However, the importance of Craffert’s contribution to New Testament studies begs for continuous dialogue. Appreciation is without doubt appropriate. The guild of social-

<sup>6</sup> See Roger Walsh (2007), *The world of shamanism: New views of an ancient tradition*. The quotation is a English version of Walsh’s earlier work published in 1992 and translated into German in 1992, *Der Geist des Schamanismus*, aus dem Amerikanischen, von D Kuhaupt, p. 117: “Das Kernstück des Schamanismus ist die schamanische Reise, der Seelenflug. Er ist es, der den Schamanen definiert und ihn vom anderen Ekstatikern, Heilern und Mystikern abhebt; er ist es, der den Schamanen zum kosmischen ‘Traveler’ macht. ‘Man kann daher’, sagt Eliade, ‘nicht einen jeden Ekstatiker als Schamanen betrachten; der Schamanen ist der Spezialist einer Trance, in der seine seele den Körper zu Himmel- und Unterweltfahrten verläßt.’ Andere mögen in veränderte Bewußtseinszustände eintreten, religiöse Funktionen ausüben und heilen, doch allein beim Schamanen steht der Seelenflug derart im Mittelpunkt.”

<sup>7</sup> In explicit reference to other publications by Roger Walsh, Pieter Craffert (2008:217 note 4) gives “[i]n the description of the shamanic complex preference ... to ASC’s [alternate states of consciousness] (instead of soul journey) as essential for defining shamanism. Soul journeys as a form of ASC nevertheless remain one of the main indicators of this complex and one of the main features distinguishing the shaman from other social-type practitioners (or religious entrepreneurs).”

<sup>8</sup> Quotation from Mircea Eliade (1964), *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> In a personal e-mail correspondence (19 May 2008), Craffert says that he subscribes to the following, less exclusive, definition of Walsh (2007:15-16), published in his 2007 work: “Shamanism can be defined as a family of traditions whose practioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves or their spirit(s) interacting with other entities, often by traveling to other realms, in order to save their community” (Walsh 2007:15-16).

<sup>10</sup> Van Aarde, A G (2002), *Methods and models in the quest for the historical Jesus: Historical criticism and/or social scientific criticism?*, pp. 419-439.

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scientific critical exegetes is proud of Craffert’s book. It is indeed a “groundbreaking study” (John Pilch) which is a “sharp challenge” to the previous “generation” of traditional historical Jesus studies” (Richard Rohrbaugh). Craffert’s “rationale for a realization of a work of anthropological history is quite on the mark” (Bruce Malina).<sup>11</sup>

I agree with both Malina’s praise and his reservation concerning the use of the term “shaman” as a category to describe the “social type” that the historical Jesus possibly represents (see Craffert 2008:x). Let me explain by taking into account what Craffert’s renowned forte is. He is especially commended<sup>12</sup> for reflecting critically on the interpretative models that biblical scholars use to describe and explain the texts and context of Mediterranean antiquity. This consists of a socio-cognitive theoretical reflection on whether a specific interpretative model is an adequate vehicle for description and explanation. David Horrell (1999:20) points out that a similar reflection takes place in the social sciences in general. For example, he refers to sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984:xiii-xxxvii, 1-40) who prefers to focus on particularity rather than abstract generalization (cf. Horrell 1996:9-32).

The way in which the Context Group, of which both Craffert and I are members, go about finding an adequate interpretative model, is often accused of positivism. The reason for this is that the critics see a model as a hypothesis which is forced onto interpreted data in an inductive fashion. This is exactly the criticism Craffert directs at the “generation of traditional historical Jesus researchers”, including myself. Being a member of both the Jesus Seminar and the Context Group, I truly realize what the allegation of positivism concerns.

Philip Esler (2005:58), however, defends the way in which the members of the Context Group use interpretative models. According to the critics, empirical research which focuses on concreteness is of more value than abstract theory formation. Esler disagrees. According to him, theory formation at an abstract level and empirical work are complementary. In anthropology in general, field work and theories by means of which anthropologists interpret the results of the field work, are dialectically related. This can be seen in the best ethnographic work. Yet, it is not always clear exactly where theory formation ends and empirical work begins. Esler uses a metaphor to explain: at an altitude of 30,000 feet one can only see the larger structures of a landscape: lakes, mountains, plains etcetera. As the plane

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<sup>11</sup> See the dust cover of Craffert’s book for these commendations by Pilch, Rohrbaugh, and Malina.

<sup>12</sup> See Van Aarde (2007b), *Social-scientific critical exegesis of New Testament texts – an ongoing debate without end* (Original in Afrikaans), p. 1121.

descends, one loses the bigger picture and starts to identify the detail: individual buildings, trees, cars and even people. When on one of these levels, the other level is not in focus. The danger is that the existence of the other level may be forgotten. Even worse is when that level is denied existence. The ideal would be to design a model which includes both levels, that of theory and concreteness. In such a model theory should be enriched by concrete particularities and particularities should derive their meaning from theory formation. Some members of the Context Group tend to operate at a higher level of abstraction.<sup>13</sup> Craffert's book is an example of such a *modus operandi*.

Craffert calls the theory behind his "quest of the historical Jesus" the "shamanic complex". The use of the shamanic model is pioneering work within the New Testament guild. Craffert provides information to better understand Jesus in his historical context. It is not that Craffert discovered *new* insights which were unknown before that causes his book to be truly innovative. To me, it is the comprehensiveness by means of which he explains both components of the Jesus tradition and core aspects of (what Craffert refers to as) the "shamanic complex" against the background of the context in Mediterranean antiquity in a cohesive way. To me, the most convincing components and aspects are Craffert's explanation of:

- Strata of Jesus traditions as configurations of each other within the same cultural area;<sup>14</sup>
- A continuity from the cultural constitution of a social personage to the communication and enscripturation of that social personage within the same cultural system;<sup>15</sup>
- Alternate states of consciousness as polyphased consciousness;<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> According to Dennis Duling (in a personal e-mail note), the Context Group "is not totally agreed in a high level of abstraction, but only that one must attempt to be aware at what level the analysis occurs and state it clearly". For example, Bruce Malina and John Pilch usually operate at a higher level of abstraction. John Elliott, however, is a "close text reader" (see, e.g., his commentary on 1 Peter – Elliott, J H 2000, *1 Peter: A new translation with introduction and commentary*. Richard Rohrbaugh has done most of his work on the parables and sets about reconstructing their original forms as part of the interpretative process – even though he works with Malina in the synoptics commentary (see Malina, B J & Rohrbaugh, R L 1992, *Social-science commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*). John Kloppenborg's work is also heavily historically focused (see, e.g., Kloppenborg, J S 2006, *The tenants in the vineyard: Ideology, economics, and agrarian conflict in Jewish Palestine*). Also Dennis Duling, among others, works on "discrete text segments" in light of theories and models on a higher level of abstraction (see, e.g., Duling, D C 2993, "Whatever gain I had ....": Ethnicity and Paul's self-identification in Phil 3:5-6, in Gowler, D B, Bloomquist, L G & , and Duane F Watson, D F (eds), *Fabrics of discourse: Essays in honor of Vernon K. Robbins*, 222-241).

<sup>14</sup> *The life of a Galilean shaman*, see esp. diagrams on pp. 81 and 83.

<sup>15</sup> See esp. diagrams on pp. 115 and 125.

<sup>16</sup> See esp pp. 146-169, 175-177.

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- Mythical expressions as interjections into “cognized worlds”, that is natural, social constructs;<sup>17</sup>
- Anthropology in terms of a “great chain of being”;<sup>18</sup>
- Human beings as “souled-bodies”;<sup>19</sup>
- The meaning-response in the healing process;<sup>20</sup>
- The encountering with and controlling of spirits;<sup>21</sup>
- Mediterranean sexology.<sup>22</sup>

I only can hope that these insights will not only be explored in future but also internalized by both scholars and other people with a passion for the Bible. In future Jesus studies, I myself will certainly absorb them, thanks to Craffert. For example, I anticipate a personal elaboration on the first two components mentioned in the list of bullets above, namely the “configuration” and “enscripturation” of strata of tradition in terms of Jesus as a “social personage”. What I have in mind is to suggest a broadening of these components within the context of the *study of intertextuality* (cf. Van Aarde [2008c]).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See esp. p. 173 and diagram on p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> See esp. diagram on p. 187.

<sup>19</sup> See esp. pp. 187-191.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 9; esp. pp. 281-282.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 9; esp. pp. 299-307.

<sup>22</sup> See esp. pp. 378-376.

<sup>23</sup> See Van Aarde [2008c], “Intertekstualiteit – ensiklopedie en argeologie: Matteus se voorstelling van Jesus as geneser-messias”. Article submitted for publication in *Acta Theologica*. In this study I apply insights of Jonathan Culler ([1981] 2001:103) who describes “intertextuality” as follows: “The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts.” To me, a traditional historical-critical layering of strata of texts could be seen as related not only to the above-mentioned concepts of “configuration” and “enscripturation”, but also to both Culler’s understanding of *intertextuality* and what Gérard Genette (1982:8) refers to as *types de relations transtextuelles* (i.e. “kinds of transtextual relationships”). Ulrich Luz (2003) calls such a “configuration” and “enscripturation” of tradition the “Enzyklopädie” des Autors oder Erstlesers” (i.e. the “encyclopaedia of the author or the first/original reader”). In short, such an historical approach to texts and their pre-texts involves an assessment of different receptions of texts by evaluating them within the constraints of the texts themselves. It is practically the same as a synchronic approach that does not neglect texts’ diachronic “evolutionary history”, that is to take the stratification of textual overlays into account without asserting historical-positivistically that *ippsissima verba et sentiendi* can be established.



## 4. A CRITICAL RESPONSE

### 4.1 Premises

In Craffert's book neither my work on the historical Jesus nor my published hermeneutical reflections are cogitated at all, except in two brief instances.<sup>24</sup> My interpretation of the Jesus tradition in both these occasions is seen by Craffert as the product of epistemological dichotomous thinking and ontological monism. Members of the Jesus Seminar particularly are found to be representative of this ethnocentrism. Their investigations into the overlays of strata of Jesus tradition is reduced to being almost a fascination with an "historical quest" for what could actually happen in Jesus' life. Craffert calls this approach the "authenticity paradigm" (see esp. Craffert's diagram on p. 326).

Although it could be seen as a misplaced overestimation of my own role in the history of Jesus studies, for the purpose of this article, I am considering myself as "representing" the proponents of the so-called "authenticity paradigm" – however, definitely neither apologetically nor arrogantly, but for no other means as for the purpose of inter-scholarly discussion, at least in South Africa. In the words of Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili (1990:236, in Craffert 2008:175), such a self-critical interpretative process takes place in an experiential reflexive way by turning "on itself in self-awareness". My critical response to Craffert's book is therefore in the form of an epistemological model – which is Craffert's preferred mode and which I have said explicitly in the past, is also my preferred mode. This preferred

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<sup>24</sup> In the latter, concerning Paul's understanding of Jesus' birth according to Galatians 4:4, Craffert (2008:374) proposes another "plausible" interpretation. He argues that Paul's "understanding of the birth of Jesus as a preexisting divine being is just a cultural variant of Matthew and Luke's divine-conception accounts." Craffert's view here denotes a point in case for my argument posed in this article, namely that the essential difference between our epistemologies seems to be a matter of abstraction versus concreteness. On a high level of abstraction there is no difference between Craffert's treatment of the "shamanic complex" to explain mystics' (such as Paul's) consciousness that creates those kind of "trance-like conditions" which theologians call "pre-existence" and "post-existence" (cf. Van Aarde 2008a:540 note 40, 546). The context in terms of which I argued in *Fatherless* was the "concrete" textual diversity between Paul and John, on the one hand, and Matthew and Luke, on the other hand, but also that of the so-called "Gnostic Christians", in the third instance. My point of view is in this way "concrete", that I show how Ignatius understood, in his own words, the "enigma" of Jesus' conception, by merging diversity into one "truism" – which has become the foundation of the creedal statement of church dogmatics about Jesus' ontology (see Van Aarde 2001:158-159).

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mode means experiential reflection, which includes self-critical suspicion. It is “abduction as interpretative process”.<sup>25</sup>

In 1993 Jill Dubisch published an article in the journal *American Ethnologist*, titled “Foreign chickens’ and other outsiders: Gender and community in Greece”, in which she queries the assumed consensus with regard to honor-and-shame stereotypes according to gender difference among Greeks (Dubisch 1993:325, 328). Carolyn Osiek (2008:328) builds on Dubisch’s and others’ insights when turning around some assumptions which were unquestioned for years. Though she holds on to assumptions of Mediterranean *cultural unity* and *cultural continuity*, she argues for “a system of *complementary differences*.” However, my present contribution is not about a cultural concept such as honor-and-shame, but about the quest of the historical Jesus. Yet, I would like to reapply Osiek’s conceptual argumentation to the “quest of the historical Jesus”, which is nothing but a social construct manifesting as a great academic endeavor.

The title of this contribution is indebted to the title and content of Dubisch’s essay and Osiek’s wisdom regarding differences that may seem incompatible on face value, but are actually complementary. One can only come to this insight if one is able to move from a high level of abstraction to the grassroots level where differences are lived in social practice. Yet, there is a more direct reason for choosing a title which includes terms referring characters of the *natural world*. With the reference to “rabbits and ducks”, and “chickens”, I have both the continuums Craffert-Kuhn and Dubisch-Osiek in mind. Not only does the “Spirit of Shamanism” (Roger Walsh)<sup>26</sup> relate to a *natural world* in which “animals could speak”,<sup>27</sup> but also to the academic world

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<sup>25</sup> The nineteenth-century “philosopher of symbols”, Charles Sanders Peirce (cf. Schultz 2000:36-37), evaded the positivistic empiricism of both a deductive and inductive epistemology. His non-positivistic approach has become known as “abduction” (see Peirce 1957:236-237; cf. Ochs 1998:114-120). An abductive argumentation functions like a fresh metaphor which communicates freshness by transforming the conventional. Abductive reasoning inducts a shock, a challenge, a disorientation which breaks traditional frames of reference and conventional thinking. Such an argument confronts a reader or listener to construct reality anew (see Peirce 1932:152-153). Schultz (2000:37) describes Peirce’s view on communication as an “act of speech” by thinking about it as a process of “symbolic reference” because communication amounts to the transference of ideas by means of a process through which symbols obtain meaning because they become repetitively new symbols in an unending fashion – though some signs seemingly attained a “fixed meaning” outside this process of the “infinite referral” of symbols. For a reflection on the usefulness of abductive reasoning in social-scientific critical exegesis of New Testament texts, see Malina (1991:259-260); Elliott (1993:48-49); Van Aarde (2007a:529-530); Craffert (2008:79-82).

<sup>26</sup> Roger Walsh (1992), *Der Geist des Schamanismus*.

<sup>27</sup> According to Bourdieu (1963:55-72; in Neyrey & Rowe 2008:300, 311 note 12), this type of experience is not “measured by the revolutions of sun and moon, but something truly mysterious, strange and new, other than the realm of sight and sense, having its place in the realm of the incorporeal and intelligible, and to it belongs the model and archetype of time, eternity and *aeon*. The word *aeon* ... signifies the life of the world of thought, as time (*chrónos*) is the life of the perceptible.”

of epistemology which is the reflection on the “source, nature, and limitation of knowledge”.<sup>28</sup> In the following quote, Craffert<sup>29</sup> also links epistemology to the natural world when he describes his *alternative* historical Jesus by means of Thomas Kuhn’s definition of paradigm shifts (Craffert 2008:420):

Within a real paradigm change, Kuhn (1970, 109, 111) says, “there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions ... What were ducks in the scientist’s world before the revolution are rabbits afterwards.” Anthropological historiography represents such a change in historical Jesus research because, despite a great variety and apparent constant renewals, there is a remarkable singularity in historical Jesus research. It remains trapped in the historiographical framework from which it emerged more than a hundred and fifty years ago and is limited to the positivistic/postmodern historiographical continuum. This is confirmed by the nested assumptions shared by the majority of historical Jesus researchers.

Kuhn ([1962] 1970:182) is well-known for his view that a paradigm shift implies that the new paradigm replaces the old. Scholars who find themselves in a specific paradigm share convictions concerning scientific problems and their possible solutions. The implication is that the values of scholars of the new paradigm differ from the values of scholars of the old paradigm. However, in his later work, “Second thoughts on paradigms”, Kuhn (1977:293-339) modifies his view and says that a later paradigm can include certain aspects of the previous one. When a new paradigm excludes aspects of the previous paradigm, it is based on a new epistemology that is incompatible with that of the old paradigm. Epistemology pertains to the nature of knowledge, that is the nature of the relationship between the scholar as observer and the observed data. If this relationship is dualistic then the paradigm will be incompatible with a paradigm in which the epistemological relationship is

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<sup>28</sup> *Oldhams Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 384.

<sup>29</sup> *The life of a Galilean shaman*, p. 420. In a probable “misuse” of the truism of Laughlin et alia, quoted by Craffert (2008:175), I will address Craffert’s accusation of being a positivistic historical Jesus scholar – though almost in contradicting way, postmodernistic as well – in radical “self-awareness” by seeing myself as one of the culprits. Craffert himself, seemingly being aware of the pitfalls of positivistic argumentation, articulates cautiously and in a non-totalitarian manner when he refers to the “majority” of historical Jesus scholars as being among the positivists. One can only guess who is excluded, since Craffert does not name them. However, my critical conversation with Craffert is not from today (see Van Aarde 2002:419-439; Craffert 2002:440-471; cf. Craffert 2001:101-115; Craffert 2003:339-377). In a surprising selective and partial quote from my book *Fatherless*, Craffert seems to be still convinced of my position within the positivistic continuum (Craffert 2008:47 n 16).

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interactional/dialectic. When this relationship is emancipatory for the observer and/or the observed, such an emancipatory paradigm will be compatible with a dialectical paradigm but not with a positivist or structuralist paradigm in which the epistemology represents a dualistic ontology. However, in my view scholars within a structuralist paradigm could share values with scholars in a poststructural and dialectical paradigm. They are not mutually exclusive.

My contention is therefore that Craffert’s “shamanic Jesus” and my “fatherless Jesus” do not necessarily represent epistemological alternatives, as Craffert would like to see it, but rather *complementary differences*. It is conceivable that historical Jesus researchers over the past 150 years could have had different epistemologies. However, I disagree that the historians who consider the stratification of textual overlays in the Jesus tradition as *one* important criterion (among others)<sup>30</sup> should be labeled positivists. Instead, I would argue for an epistemological *continuity* between a *historical-critically sensitive* Jesus research and an *anthropologically sensitive* Jesus research.

It is not “historical criticism” or “social scientific criticism” which determines whether one is positivist or not (see Van Aarde 2002:419-439). It is rather the nature of the epistemology and ontology<sup>31</sup> of the researcher. If the ontology and epistemology are *dualistic* the danger of positivism lurks. However, if they are of an *interactional* (dialectic) nature, the researcher can escape the danger of positivism.<sup>32</sup> This means that an anthropological sensitive historical Jesus investigation could also be trapped within a positivist ontology and epistemology.

To illustrate this point: I am convinced that Craffert’s ontology and epistemology form a continuum with other Jesus’ researchers such as John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg,<sup>33</sup> and me. The emphasis of Craffert on

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<sup>30</sup> See inter alia James H Charlesworth (2008:27-30); Robert W Funk ([1990] 2008:19-24).

<sup>31</sup> Ontology refers to *being* issues and epistemology to *knowing* issues.

<sup>32</sup> In a positivist epistemology, knowing is a one-directional process in which the objects of knowing are subjected to the manipulative power of the knower. The ontology of such a knowing has thus ethical implications. Plato’s classical dualism sought to separate body and mind from each other. Dialectical thinking redirected classical dualism in a revised form so that in the social sciences the world of people is conceived as simultaneously divided and linked as the (objective) observable social world and the (subjective) world of thought and experience.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Borg & Crossan (2007:28, 36) who explicitly state that their epistemology and ontology differs from that of the Enlightenment: “Of greatest importance for our purposes, Modernity has pervasively affected how modern people think. It produced what has been called the ‘modern mind,’ a mind-set that shapes all our thinking. The Enlightenment generated an understanding of truth and reality very different from that in the premodern world. In philosophical terms, it generated a new *epistemology* and a new *ontology*. The former focuses on ‘How do we know?’ and ‘What is true?’ The latter focuses on ‘What is real?’ and ‘What is possible?’ ... The debate is not only fruitless, but a distraction, for it shifts away from the truly important question: what do these stories mean? Quite apart from whether they happened, what did they and do they *mean?*” (Borg’s and Crossan’s emphasis).

shamanism, that of Dom Crossan (2000:127-128) on “imperial victimization”, that of Marcus Borg (2006:117-136) on “Jesus as a ”Spirit-filled Jewish mystic”, and mine on “fatherlessness against the background of patriarchalism”, speak of the similar ontological and epistemological frames of reference, although differences exist with regard to cultural particularities. None of these scholars claim that their Jesus (whether the marginalized “Galilean peasant, victim of Rome”, or the “Spirit-possessed Jesus, experiencing the divine”, or “Jesus, the Galilean shaman”,<sup>34</sup> or the “fatherless Jesus, calling God *Abba*”) would be the only historical and anthropological possible profile of Jesus (see esp. Crossan 1991:426).

From the perspective of critical realism,<sup>35</sup> there are certain weaknesses in each approach. Critical realism implies that no theory or approach is fixed for all time or above critique. For instance, Crossan’s and Borg’s approach could have dealt more explicitly with Mediterranean alternate states of consciousness. With regard to my own work, alongside the too small number of references to ASC’s, without hardly any exploration, I have failed to appreciate and utilize aspects of insights with regard to almost each item that I consider to be the authentic<sup>36</sup> Jesus tradition.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, with regard to

<sup>34</sup> “[I]t is possible that the same person might fulfil different roles, and, second, that the shaman role, by definition, overlaps with that of other religious specialists and is therefore not always so clearly identifiable” (Craffert 2008:199).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Meyer, B 1979. *The aims of Jesus*. London: SCM.

<sup>36</sup> My understanding of the concept of “authenticity” is influenced philosophically, more specifically by Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of the German word “*eigentlich*”. In the introduction to his commentary on Heidegger, Michael Inwood (2000:26) puts it as follows: “To be authentic is to be true to one’s *own* self, to be one’s *own* person, to do one’s *own* thing.” Looking out for “authenticity” would therefore not intend to mean, at least to my opinion, be tantamount to what Craffert (2008:89) eloquently calls the “fallacy of chronological closeness” as though it would mean “what actually happened” (see esp. Craffert 2008:351, 384-385).

<sup>37</sup> Van Aarde, A G 2004a. Social identity, status envy, and Jesus as fatherless child, in Ellens, J H & Rollins, W G (eds), *Psychology and the Bible: A new way to read the Scriptures. Volume 4: From Christ to Jesus*, 223-246. Westport, Con: Praeger Publishers. (Praeger Perspectives: Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality), esp. pp. 231-232: “Having constructed Jesus’ ‘whole life’ within first-century Herodian Palestine, it seems to me that it is not an inflation of historical probabilities to say that the following features of Jesus’ life go together ...:

- Records show he was born in a context in which there are indications that ‘opponents’ alleged that he was born out of wedlock;
- A father figure was absent in his life;
- He was an unmarried bachelor;
- He had a tense relationship with mother and other siblings;
- He was probably forced from farming to carpentry;
- He was stigmatized as a ‘sinner,’ which led him to be associated with a revolutionary baptizer;
- He spiritually experienced an altered state of consciousness in which God was present and acted like a Father;

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what I deem to be my strength, I could have added aspects of what Craffert refers to as “social type” to my use of the Weberian *ideal type* as interpretative model.<sup>38</sup> Had I done that I could have been more concrete and less abstract.<sup>39</sup> However, in both my book *Fatherless* and my dissertation on the *Infancy*

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- He abandoned craftsmanship, if he ever was a woodworker;
  - He was ‘homeless’ and led an itinerant lifestyle along the lakeshore;
  - His journey seemed never to take him inside the cities Sepphoris and Tiberias, but was restricted to the plains, valleys, and hills of Galilee;
  - He assembled a core of close friends;
  - He defended fatherless children, patriarchless women, and other outcasts;
  - He called them a ‘family’ by resocializing them into God’s household by empowering healing as an agent of the Spirit of God;
  - He offended village elders by subversive teaching and actions;
  - He outraged Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, and elders in Jerusalem by criticizing the manipulative ploys and misuse of hierarchical power by the Temple authorities;
  - He was crucified by the Romans after an outburst of emotion at the outer Temple square;
  - He died under uncertain circumstances and his body was not laid down in a family tomb;
  - He was believed to be taken up to the bosom of father Abraham to be among the ‘living dead’ as Scriptures foretold;
  - He was believed to be God’s beloved child who was already with God before creation, and who is now preparing housing that is actually already present for those who still live by his cause.”

<sup>38</sup> See Craffert’s (2008:136 n 2) quote of Oz Almog (1998:6): “The nature of ideal types (of which social type as described here is an instance) is such that ‘it is possible to identify and describe a social type without ever finding a single living soul who possesses the full range of features typical of the social type model’.” My proposal of defining Max Weber’s understanding of “ideal type” is formulated as follows: “Max Weber (1949:89-112) states that an ideal type is a theoretical construct in which events which possibly occurred are brought into a meaningful relationship with one another so that a coherent image may be formed of data from the past. In other words, as a theoretical construct, an ideal type is a conceptualisation which may not necessarily correspond with the empirical reality. As a construct which displays a coherent image, the ideal type influences the investigations of what could have happened historically. The purpose of establishing an ideal type is to account for the interrelationships between discrete ‘historical’ events in an intelligible manner. Such a coherent construct is not formed by or based on a selection from what is regarded as universally valid, in other words that which is common to all relevant cases of similar concrete situations. Therefore it is not a logical-positivist choice based on either inductive or deductive reasoning. The use of the social-scientific model of an ideal type as point of departure for explaining a faction such as the Pharisees, is not a claim that the characterization of an individual Pharisee such as Paul should be based on what is common to other members of the particular faction. That would amount to inductive social reasoning. Neither is it based on what is common to most of the Pharisees in first-century Palestine. That, too, would amount to deductive social reasoning. The ideal-type model enables one to concentrate on the most favourable cases” (Van Aarde [2008b] Social-scientific criticism, in Du Toit, A B (ed), *Reading the New Testament: Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*. (Forthcoming).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Browne, M N & Keeley, S M 1990. *Asking the right questions*. Third edition. Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon. Browne & Keeley (1990:143) show the pitfalls of “rigid and intolerant” positivistic “dichotomous thinking” and demonstrate the “importance of context for a particular answer” in order to create space for “multiple conclusions”: This qualification process requires you to ask about any conclusion: 1. *When* is it accurate? 2. *Where* is it accurate? 3. *Why* or for what purpose is it accurate?”

*Gospel of Thomas* I explicitly applied ideal type in a concrete way, not positivistically but *abductively*, in the first as a “fatherless outcast against the background of patriarchalism” and in the second as, in Henri Daniel-Rops ([1959] 1988:112) words, “children copying grown-ups”.<sup>40</sup>

The weakness in Craffert’s approach, I find to be that he denies the relevance of a historical-critical stratification of textual and archaeological data. This point of view leads to an almost too abstract generalization of Jesus as shaman. In historical studies phrases such as “could have been” (p. 95), “could plausibly” (p. xvii; cf. p. 421), “much more complex” (p. 170) or “possible” (p. 129),<sup>41</sup> indicate historical uncertainty in an explicit way. He uses these terms, but provides neither an *historical* nor a *critical* argument as to why he regards it as historically uncertain. Historical criticism has helped Crossan, myself, and others to motivate and explain our historical uncertainties.

The late Daryl Schmidt, another eminent member of the Jesus Seminar, in probably his last academic contribution, reflects on the various interpretations of the term “historical” in the work of historical Jesus scholars against the background of the widespread criticism of the Jesus Seminar. Schmidt would probably label Craffert’s painting of “anthropological historiography” as “soft historiography”, while being critical towards his co-fellows in the Jesus Seminar who might practice “apologetic scholarship”.<sup>42</sup>

Most of the criticism of the results of the Jesus Seminar seems to be formulated in terms of a very “soft” understanding of history, in contrast to the rather rigorous understanding of history at the basis of the Jesus Seminar. For example ... arguments often proceed

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<sup>40</sup> Van Aarde, A G 2005a. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a heroic myth of the child-god Jesus within the context of Ebionite early Christianity. DLitt dissertation, University of Pretoria; cf. also Van Aarde, A G 2005b. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: Allegory or myth? – Gnostic or Ebionite? *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26(3), 826-850; Van Aarde, A G 2006. Ebionite tendencies in the Jesus tradition: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas interpreted from the perspective of ethnic identity. *Neotestamentica* 40(2), 353-382.

<sup>41</sup> Craffert considers textual references to so-called “historical events”, such as Jesus’ trial and travels, his temple activities and teachings, as “not totally dependent on the cultural system”, but as “events and phenomena that belong to all human beings, qua their humanity”, of which “the establishment of the historical plausibility ... takes a different route in the interpretative process” than those kind of “cultural activities” which are “unique to a given cultural system” and “those that are unique cultural interpretations or representations of normal human phenomena” (Craffert 2008:31-32). However, I cannot see why the quest for historical plausibility would be important in the case of “human activities”, but not in the case of “cultural activities”. Furthermore, I cannot see why the textual evidence of some human activities would not be influenced by cultural conditions and therefore needs a different epistemology.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Mahlon Smith (2004:1), editor of *Foundations and Facets. Forum*, in his preface to the volume [7(1) 2004] titled “Tracking the Jesus Tradition”.

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along the line: “it is not impossible that ....” This constitutes a “weak” historical hypothesis – it takes little evidence to support and it is almost impossible to disprove. Furthermore, such hypotheses are almost never tested against any substantial amount of data ... It is not clear what would constitute counter-evidence .... After all, what is not “impossible” is “surely” possible. The whole approach seems to evade open historical inquiry.

(Schmidt 2004:23)

Any historical inquiry – specifically biblical scholarship – should be aware of the pitfalls of anachronism and ethnocentrism. We should not forget that our Western mind’s concern of “logical consistency” might have been “greeted with a curious smile by the [1st-century] Nazarene and his audience” (Meier 1994:452). Yet “modern historiography”<sup>43</sup> could not simply be replaced by an anthropological sensitivity under the pretension that anachronism is avoided. We also should acknowledge that “anthropological historiography” is also a post-Enlightenment scholarly undertaking. The hermeneutical fallacy of ethnocentric misplaced concreteness lurks here as well. I therefore reiterate what I said in my conversation with Craffert seven years ago (Van Aarde 2002:422):

The social scientific approach should, therefore, not be seen as an alternative to historical criticism. With regard to the use of cultural-anthropological models, Rogerson (1989:31) formulates the complementary relationship between historical criticism and social scientific criticism as follows: “Anthropology can indicate the complexities of social organization and indicate broadly what is possible and what is not. *It cannot be a substitute for historical research.* Thus it is likely that anthropology will continue to be used to support positions that are derived from historical and textual studies” (my italics; cf. also Theissen 1979:3-34; Barton 1997:277-289). A similar opinion can be seen in the work of John H Elliott (1993:7): “Social-scientific criticism complements these other modes of critical analysis, all of which are designed to analyze specific features of the biblical texts.”

It is possible that I misunderstand Craffert’s point of view even today, as he said seven years ago. In his book he clearly states that he is aware that some evidence was interpolated into the Jesus tradition that might be a “possible addition” and therefore should be “removed” if it can be indicated “that it was created later” (Craffert 2008:129). What the impact of his differentiation between Jesus as a “historical personage/figure” (p 129) and Jesus as a

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<sup>43</sup> Mandelbaum (1977:4-14) considers modern historiography to be “ideographical”, because it aims to describe what is unrepeatable, specific and particular. Anthropological historiography, on the other hand, is to some extent a phenomenological approach, because it operates at a high level of abstraction by focusing on social, ideal types.



“social personage” (e.g. pp. 31, 225) on the question as to the relevance and methodology of the distinction between earlier and later traditions is not clear.

Despite his important remark that “[a]ny *additions* can only be identified as a secondary phase in the interpretative process of abduction”,<sup>44</sup> his differentiation between Jesus as *historical* and *social* personage seems to be the reason why he considers his Jesus research to be an *alternative* to the “traditional” quest. He is also methodologically vague about how such a historical discernment would come about without using historical criticism within the so-called “authenticity paradigm” (pp. 354, 364). Historical criticism, irrespective of plausibilities because of hypothetical theories regarding “intracanonical and extracanonical” “differences and discrepancies between accounts and versions” (Crossan 1991:xxx), tends to distinguish between “tradition” and “redaction” – the same task Craffert foresees by uncovering “possible additions”.<sup>45</sup>

The question is now whether Craffert considers such a task as theologically and ethically important. At least his hermeneutics of suspicion deals with an issue that requires further explanation. Craffert states in no uncertain terms that he does not necessarily need to “agree with the people of the first century or, for that matter with any other person coming from such a [biblical] worldview” (Craffert 2008:180-181). For some historical Jesus researchers such ideology-criticism spreads out to theological and ethical matters. Actually, it is one of the reasons why Crossan reckons that historical Jesus research has a validity and necessity. This theological view is taken for granted despite the complexity of the painstaking historically critical unraveling of overlays. It is through this process, according to Crossan, that we are able to give an answer to the question: “Where do *you* find your God? Choose” (Crossan 1998:29; his emphasis).<sup>46</sup> It is, however, not only someone like

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<sup>44</sup> *The life of a Galilean shaman*, p. 121 (emphasis by Craffert).

<sup>45</sup> In light of Craffert’s (2008:214) justifiable dislike in terminology such as “mythological addition”, as if ASC’s would be less authentic (similarly in *Fatherless*, p. 27), it remains unclear to me what the epistemological and methodological difference would be, according to Craffert’s opinion, between “additions” as evidence injected at a later chronological level (p. 129) and “ritual enactment of shamanic interjection” by “means of different mythic means” (p. 173). Methodology asides, Craffert’s confusing references to “myths”, negatively now (e.g. pp. 39, 51) and positively then (e.g. p. 173), especially in light of his endorsement of Rudolf Bultmann on page 183 (which I approve) need to be clarified. One should not forget that Bultmann ([1958] 1964:14) makes a dialectical distinction between mythology (worldview) and myth (an objectifying speech act as expression of such world view). Therefore, scholars should be careful not to interpret “myth” as “non-mythical” (cf. Van Aarde 2003:259).

<sup>46</sup> “We cannot live without group ideology (or, if you prefer, theology), but we must be able to keep it in dialectic with public evidence – if, that is, we make claims to such data. My own position as an historian trying to be ethical and a Christian trying to be faithful is this: I do not accept the divine conception of *either* Jesus *or* Augustus as factual history, but I *believe* that God is incarnate in the Jewish peasant poverty of Jesus and not in the Roman imperial power of Augustus” (Crossan 1998:29; his emphasis).

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Crossan or just another member of the Jesus Seminar who deems that the *historically critical* historical Jesus research matters theologically and ethically. Ferdinand Hahn (2006:54-56), for example, considers it as one of the *Grundsatzfragen* for *Fundamentaltheologie*.<sup>47</sup> According to my own opinion, “[t]he kerygma about living through faith alone finds *its main support historically* in a gender-equitable, ethnically unbound, and culturally subversive Jesus” (Van Aarde 2001:203-204; emphasis not in original). Seen from this perspective, 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” (Van Aarde 2001:203).

However, it seems that Craffert does not think along this line. He refuses to take into account how the first Jesus followers interpreted Jesus in the context of their faith communities. The influence that their faith in Jesus had on their interpretation of the Jesus tradition escapes him. An anthropologist has the freedom to do so, but a theologian trying to communicate the relevance of her or his faith for believers today, does not have that freedom. If such theologians wish to communicate in a scientifically responsible way, they cannot but discern at least two broad strata in the biblical texts, namely that of the *historical* Jesus tradition and that of the interpretation of this tradition by the later faith communities. In the history of biblical interpretation this is what historical critics tried to do, while acknowledging the hypothetical nature of their theories. In his explanation of the complementarity of historical-critical with sociological approaches to exegesis, Norman Gottwald paraphrased the philosopher Immanuel Kant in this way: “sociology without history is empty; history without sociology is blind.”<sup>48</sup>

Craffert could argue that his opinion that historical criticism represents a wrong road in the exegesis of biblical texts or, and especially, his blasé outlook on the so-called “kerygmatic tradition”, is exegetically seen, not a weakness, but rather a liberation from ecclesial prejudice and hegemonous arrogance. In spite of all of this, and despite my own disdain of totalitarianism, I deliberately choose to “translate” hermeneutically the interpretations of faith by the earliest Jesus followers to present-day faith communities – and, according to their own testimonies, it seems that this is also the choice made

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<sup>47</sup> Hahn, F 2006. *Studien zum Neuen Testament, Band 1: Grundsatzfragen, Jesusforschung, Evangelien*, herausgegeben von Jörg Frey & Juliane Schlegel. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. (WUNT 191.)

<sup>48</sup> Gottwald (1979:17; see Van Aarde 2007:531).

by Crossan and Borg and many other members of the Jesus Seminar, so often caricatured as one homogenous “personality”.<sup>49</sup>

My choice presents an exegetical challenge to approach the text in a way which takes the evolutionary historical development of the Jesus tradition into account. Without such a historical sensitivity it would be impossible to minister to my faith community, which is supposed to be the continuation of the values embedded in the Jesus tradition.<sup>50</sup> I object to being labeled a positivist because of my use of historical criticism. This did not prevent me from knowing of Jesus’ ASC’s and using this insight in my interpretation of the Jesus tradition. Because of my cultural sensitivity I also assume that the followers of Jesus also had ASC’s and what they knew of Jesus’ ASC’s were reenacted by means of rituals and ceremonial sayings.<sup>51</sup>

Craffert deals only with the available data about Jesus. Yet, he knows that some “originated later in time” but see them as “configurations of each other within the same cultural area” (Craffert 2008:93). According to him, this insight of the existence of a “chain of elements of tradition” does not require

<sup>49</sup> See Miller, R J 1999. *The Jesus Seminar and its critics*, esp. pp. 66-69.

<sup>50</sup> Recently, Lane McGaughey (2008:72-73), a well-known member of the Jesus Seminar, explains the continuity between the so-called “New Quest” and the work of the Jesus Seminar: “Since the failure of the nineteenth century Old Quest to discover the historical Jesus had removed the historical foundation of Christian preaching, Bultmann’s question formed the agenda for the so-called New Quest of the last generation. Even though we do not have historical sources to construct a full biography of Jesus, and even though the sources we do have are written from the theological viewpoint of post-Easter faith, the New-Questers attempted to recover at least the message of Jesus in order to determine whether the intention of Jesus’ words and the intention of early Christian preaching are coherent ... The agenda of the Jesus Seminar thus evolved from the New Quest .... The scholarly route from Rudolf Bultmann ... to the ... Jesus Seminar can thus be traced through studies like Gunther Bornkamm’s ... Norman Perrin’s ... Robert Funk’s ... John Dominic Crossan’s and Bernard Brandon Scott’s ....” This continuum between two generations of historical Jesus researchers corresponds to a movement away from positivistic historicism (the Old Quest) towards an historical endeavor that features an “experiential reflection” which is at the core of the present approach that Pieter Craffert advocates – although different questions and therefore different answers have been asked and offered. I myself (with G M M Pelsler as co-author) (2007:1388) puts it as follows: “Historicism had the ideal of *reconstructing* the historical facts without presuppositions. Bultmann does not regard this is possible, because the actual, true meaning of historical events are not observable for a neutral, uninvolved observer. Here we can also see the influence of Kant (via Schleiermacher and Dilthey). This view of the ‘subjective’ nature of historicity is often seen as an alternative to the view of Leopold von Ranke (1824) who describes the task of historiography as ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.’ [See Leopold von Ranke’s (1824), *Geschichte der romanische und germanische Völker von 1492 bis 1535*, in Iggers & Von Moltke 1973:xix-xx.] In other words, the investigator must (try to) reconstruct the historical situation as it really was. Experts on Von Ranke point out today, however, that Von Ranke did not mean the word ‘eigentlich’ as *historically real* in the positivistic sense of the word, but *historically essential*. [Cf. also Pieter Craffert 2008:78 note 2 and the doctoral dissertation of Piet Geysler, University of Pretoria 1999, pp. 2-5, on the “hermeneutical principles” of the so-called “new historical” approach to Jesus studies, prepared under my supervision.] In this regard there is consequently no difference between Von Ranke and Bultmann. According to Bultmann, texts can only really fulfil their task as historical sources if they are questioned about their understanding of human existence. Perfect objectivity in understanding a text is not possible, however. The investigator is him-/herself part of history and is in an existential relationship to history” (Pelsler & Van Aarde 2007:1388).

<sup>51</sup> See the thesis of my doctoral student, Jonanda Groenewald (2005), *Baptism, Eucharist, and the earliest Jesus groups – from the perspective of alternate states of consciousness*. DD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2005. Jonanda studied in close collaboration with John Pilch, the pioneer who introduced the relevance of ASC to Biblical studies, including Craffert’s work with regard to the shamanic complex. Under my supervision, Jonanda also paid extensive attention to shamanic studies and to the results of “traditional” historical Jesus research in her dissertation, yet in an *abductive* epistemological way.

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the attention of the Jesus researcher in a historiographical way. Cultural sensitivity would cover what the exegete should do to understand the Jesus tradition. To me, however, such a limited exegetical approach would deprive the meaning of exegesis while the interpreter is actually deluded.

Though Craffert rejects both historical criticism and the relevance of the “kerygmatic tradition”, he relies on the results of historical criticism without acknowledging or seemingly doesn’t realize it. The biblical data investigated by him as anthropologist is not data *an sich*. The original texts are lost. The evidence which Craffert finds in the texts of both the New Testament and the Old Testament (and in some other documents which originated in the context of the Mediterranean antiquity), is textual data reconstructed and reproduced by means of textual criticism, a modern approach embedded in the paradigm of historical criticism.<sup>52</sup> Such a *modus operandi* does not necessarily escape positivism. Similarly, others deal with historical data while being culturally sensitive. This *modus operandi* is also not necessarily positivist.

#### **4.2 The “son-of-man” sayings**

I am now going to illustrate the *complementary difference* between Craffert’s approach and mine by means of two case studies used by us both. For example, concerning the “son-of-man” sayings I differentiated between the *historical* Jesus and the interpretations of the earliest faith communities. At the end of my response I will return to the relevance of the differentiation between ASC’s and the “shamanic complex”. At this stage I only refer to my contention that Jesus did not use the term “son of man” in the so-called “Danialic” way when referring to himself. With “son-of-man” Jesus probably meant: I, the human being. This human being, however, was very much aware of the divine presence in his life. This manifested in his ASC’s. His followers, aware of his spirituality, used this term in a “shamanic” way when referring to Jesus. Their context was influenced by among others Daniel and Enoch, where the son of man is a divinized “sky traveler”.

Historical criticism helped me to see that it was not the historical Jesus who was the “sky traveler”, but that his followers interpreted him as such a divine figure.<sup>53</sup> Their interpretation was a statement of faith. A positivist would be interested in the historical facticity of Jesus as a divine sky traveler. A non-

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<sup>52</sup> It seems however that Craffert does not consider historical criticism as an exegetical approach which includes textual criticism, something he does not hesitate to utilize (see Craffert 2008:221 note 6; 253 note 10).

<sup>53</sup> See Groenewald, J & Van Aarde, A G 2006. The role alternate states of consciousness played in the baptism and Eucharist of the earliest Jesus followers. *HTS* 62(1), 41-67.

positivist such as myself is interested in communicating the *meaning* of the confession of the *faith* that Jesus is divine to today's community.

### 4.3 The Infancy Gospel of Thomas

With regard to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (IGT), historical criticism helped me to discern an earlier manuscript tradition in which the child Jesus was seen as adult-like and god-like. This could have been possible only because ASC's were part of their frame of reference and they could have recognized it in the Jesus tradition. Without historical-critical inquiry the available data would have been limited to a concoction of disagreeing translations and manuscripts, augmented by gnostic motifs, which was published by J Fabricius in the eighteenth century. From this concoction shamanic traits can be identified only at a high level of abstraction. It is impossible to escape the eighteenth century and interpret the shamanic traits in a context closer to Jesus and the earliest faith communities who were responsible for this tradition.<sup>54</sup>

In the endeavor to describe concreteness more "hypotheses" (theories) are necessary in order to find one's way among the plurality of possibilities. A model is chosen to find one's way among the plethora of possible theories and data sets. It is not the choice to fly high or the choice to land on the concrete which will cause scholars to be positivists, but whether scholars absolutize either "theory" or "praxis". Then they have fallen into the trap of positivism. In order to escape the trap of positivism scholars both on the level of theory formation and methods of praxis should see theory and method as complementary, though one might choose to remain on one level only. Such a choice should however not amount to negating the existence of the other level. Historical criticism as a practical method and anthropological theory are both necessary in historical Jesus research *because the data require it*.

For example: both Craffert and I tried to treat IGT with respect and to stay out of the trap of positivism. Craffert identified plausible shamanic appearances in the relevant data at a high level of abstraction. I used both an anthropological theory and historical criticism to describe the god-child Jesus as a *child copying grown-ups*. Neither Craffert nor I absolutize our model. Our models are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. Both of us have treated the text with respect rather than rejecting it as non-Christian, non-orthodox nonsense.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Fabricius, J (Hrsg) 1703. *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Band 1. Hamburg: Schiller, pp. 159-167.

<sup>55</sup> Pejoratively, some scholars assess the IGT "illogical" (Hervieux 1960:106), "un-Christian" (Elliott 1993:68) and "banal" (Schneider 1995). A more positive judgment is that it is either "gnostic" (Lapham 2003:130) or "purified of Gnosticism" (Klauck [2002] 2003:77) and merely one of many ancient tales about the history of Jesus as a child (Hock 1995:96).

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Both Craffert and I have restrained from stating that the IGT’s characterization of Jesus represents the precise historical words and experiences (*ipssisima verba et sentiendi*) in the text.<sup>56</sup> Despite the similarities, there is a big difference in our *modi operandi*. One can either choose to use the text of the IGT which was concocted and published in the eighteen-century concoction or one can follow the painstaking historical critical route of investigating all the available quotations (from the second century) and later manuscripts and translations up to the eighteenth century. The end result of the latter process was the choice for an existing manuscript which originated in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was found in Cyprus as the most plausible authentic text of the IGT. Would it be more positivistic to try and discover a plausible authentic witness, or to uncritically settle for a concoction? The historical critical process enabled me to discern that the more authentic Jesus tradition in the IGT is probably Ebionite and that the gnostic additions are of a later date. Of course shamanic traits are present in both the Ebionite and gnostic traditions. Identifying shamanic traits presupposes an anthropologically sensitive approach. In order to determine whether gnostic traits are chronologically later than the Ebionite an approach which is both historical critical and anthropologically sensitive is required. In other words, both the Ebionite and the gnostic traditions contain shamanic traits. It is not the identification of shamanic traits or an anthropological approach as such which will provide more historical results than other approaches.

Neither *religionsgeschichtliche* exegesis nor social scientific criticism (which both deal with data from antiquity) has been able to provide criteria by means of which to identify the chronological development of historical traditions. Historical criticism has provided the tool for both. *Religionsgeschichtliche* exegetes or a social scientific critics can choose not to focus on chronology, but they cannot deny the validity and relevance of the quest for chronology.

In the case of the IGT chronology is important. The difference in the time span from earlier to later manuscripts affect the intended meaning of the manuscript traditions. The earlier manuscript tradition witnesses to an Ebionite context and meaning, whereas the later tradition was influenced by gnostic elements.

Similar principles apply to the Gospels in the New Testament. If chronology is not taken into account, the meanings of the Gospels would be conflated and the result would be a concoction of the texts. An interest in

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<sup>56</sup> “To me, it seems obvious that not only does the Infancy Gospel of Thomas contain stories that cannot be taken literally in our sense of the word ...” (Craffert 2008:380).

chronology would lead to an investigation of the preliterate tradition behind the tangible text which would bring the investigator closer to the historical Jesus.

If such an interest is lacking the investigator will be left with a social personage of the past to whom a concoction of texts witness. The description of such a social type will remain on a level of high abstraction. The endeavor to be more concrete is obviously more challenging and risky, but certainly not irrelevant.

## 5. RÉSUMÉ AND A RETURN TO THE QUOTES

The findings of exegetes are influenced by their specific paradigms, models, and perspectives on the social world.<sup>57</sup> Exegetes and the authors of the texts they investigate have different social locations. Peter Berger (1967:4)<sup>58</sup> calls such contexts *Seinsgebundenheit* (“the existential determination”) of human knowing. Exegetes live in specific times, have specific attitudes, express themselves in specific cultural codes, and find themselves in either an ecclesial or a secular context. All of these have an influence on their perception of reality, their communication with their audience, and the kinds of questions they regard as relevant to their context.

The expectations of the context and audience will determine whether historical criticism is relevant or not. Because the Bible is a text from antiquity, the contemporary exegete cannot ignore the social world of the text. Social scientific criticism provides the tools. This enterprise takes place on a higher level of abstraction. Historical criticism needs not be seen in opposition to this. It provides the tools to “land on the concrete”. Epistemologically seen, empirical research is inadequate unless it includes theoretical reflection. Theoretical reflection, however, will not necessarily result in an empirical investigation. Anthropological sensitivity is more theoretical, whereas historical criticism is a practical empirical exegetical method. Anthropological sensitivity and the historical imagination are more theoretical, whereas anthropological field work and historical criticism are more practical and empirical. An historical critical exegete, like an anthropologist, will have to move to and fro between theory and practice. In the past some historical critics did ignore theoretical reflection and fell into the trap of positivism. My contention is that, when theoretical reflection denies the existence and relevance of empirical studies it is also positivistic.

I will now summarize by returning to the quotes: In the first quote Craffert states that the current historical Jesus research that has utilized

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<sup>57</sup> See Van Aarde (2007:515-516).

<sup>58</sup> Berger (1967), *Sacred canopy: Elements of a social theory of religion*.

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historical criticism represents an *alternative* epistemology and ontology to his cultural sensitive description of the historical Jesus. His anthropological history explains the social personage of Jesus in terms of the so-called “shamanic complex”. I see it not as an alternative, but as complementary.

The second quote of William Wrede (who paved the way for members of the Jesus Seminar) illustrates that he is clearly not a positivist. According to the quote he distinguishes between Mark’s description of Jesus and Jesus himself, and between Mark and the other gospels. He sees the distinction not in a dualistic way, but rather as interdependence. His language is not the exact formulation of positivism either. He cannot be called a positivist just because he used historical criticism.

The third quote illustrates how Craffert sees my historical Jesus studies and those of the Jesus Seminar. According to him, we absolutize one historical critical criterion in order to say what exactly happened. However, the Jesus Seminar and I use various criteria in an “abductive” way and the findings are formulated in the language of “plausibility” and not in positivistic factual language.<sup>59</sup>

By means of the fourth quote I appeal to take the individual cultural contexts of the various Jesus researchers more seriously. For example: we all work in the context of the academy. Some are also pastors working in the context of a Christian faith community. For others the interests and needs of faith communities are irrelevant for historical Jesus research. For the latter the unraveling of both the discontinuity and continuity between the historical Jesus’ ASC’s and those of the earliest Jesus followers could be only an academic matter of “cultural configurations of each other and connected via the cultural processes that constituted the social personage [of Jesus], the oral tradition and the literary texts” (Craffert 2008:93). On the one hand, the question as to the discontinuity or continuity between what the historical Jesus tradition could have meant in the past and could mean today for people who find themselves within ecclesial structures and the broader public domain, is certainly not only an academic enterprise. In *Fatherless*, I put it as follows: “Christian ethics is not an abstract ideology but is based on the humanness and the humaneness of the Jesus of history” (Van Aarde 2001:204).

The last of the above quotes demonstrates the possibility that the relevance of “shamanic complex” could have been taken too far by Craffert.

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<sup>59</sup> However, see in Craffert’s (2008:447, 447 note 16) quotation an equation of expressions “actually happened” with my “historically plausible”; and note my epistemologically explicit critical-realistic formulation, “according to our insights today” (see Roy Bhaskar 1997, *A realist theory of science*, pp. 258-259, in which he elaborates on the so-called historicizing aspects of Thomas Kuhn’s view of paradigm shifts).



The following quote illustrates how Craffert relativizes the core of shamanism (according to Roger Walsh):

As indicated, the aim of the shamanic model is not to find a new way of identifying authentic material or to discover new historical information about Jesus. Its aim is to uncover a whole cultural dynamics and the working of a cultural system within which such figures operate in a specific way. It is based on a cable-like interpretative process where biographical elements are not divorced from the kind of figure or from the social dynamics that accompany such a figure. In addition to the labels (*son of God, son of man, and Messiah*) used to constitute Jesus as social personage, there a number of other labels that were used to describe his functions and activities as shamanic figure. These include *prophet, teacher, rabbi, healer, and exorcist*.

(Craffert 2008:244)

Craffert could have avoided this problem, namely, sponging up almost each and every one of all the alternate states of consciousness that occurs in early-Cristian lore into the “shamanic complex”, had he been prepared to also apply complementarily historical criticism to his anthropological research.

Does my epistemology differ so much from Craffert’s? Had I done this investigation, how would I have approached it? What I would do is to use historical criticism complementary to social-scientific criticism. However, from an epistemological perspective, according to Craffert, my approach would not constitute a “cable-like interpretative process”. Yet, the only epistemological difference I see is that he operates at a higher level of abstraction and I at a more concrete level. I agree, similar to Craffert’s understanding, that the shamanic complex is important.

For example Craffert opens perspectives on the use of the “son-of-man” sayings in the Jesus tradition that certainly need to be taken into consideration in future research. However, if one would like to interpret these sayings only terms of an *interconnection* with the occurrence of the concept “kingdom of God” in the Jesus tradition (see Craffert 2008:348-349), one should at least be prepared to converse with age-old studies. To state that your perspective represents such a radical alternative that debate is actually unfruitful would not satisfy – without claiming that this is Craffert’s attitude. To me, the interconnection in Craffert’s view, especially in such an absolute way,

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does not have exegetical support,<sup>60</sup> despite the compelling contribution he makes by throwing the light of the shamanic complex on both the “son-of-man” sayings and the concept “kingdom of God”.

I work with at least two broad strata in historical Jesus research, the one being Jesus and the other the interpretations of his followers. For Craffert these are simply “configurations of each other” whereas for me there are at least two identifiable strata. This difference brings about different results with regard to the relevance of the “shamanic complex”. In one stratum Jesus would probably have described himself as a “child of God” and “simply one among others” (i.e., “son of man”, “son of Adam”). In another stratum Jesus’ followers would probably have described him “from the side”<sup>61</sup> as “prophet” and “rabbi”, which for them would have included “diviner”, “healer”, “exorcist” and revolutionary “teacher”. Indeed, the “shamanic complex” provides

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<sup>60</sup> In my article on the “meaning” of the term son-of-man in both the “little tradition” and the “great tradition” in Jesus’ Mediterranean context (Van Aarde 2004:423-438), I began to say that we as scholars (see references to specific studies and textual references in the bibliography of my article) do not longer find ourselves in 1896 when Hans Lietzmann argued that in the Jesus tradition “son-of-man” simply means “humankind” (cf. also Geza Vermes). Even Oscar Cullmann conceded that there are only two possible sayings in which Jesus collectively referred to humankind in general and not in terms of his work as God’s servant (*ebed Yahweh*). According to Cullmann, this applies to all the other “son-of-man” sayings in the Jesus tradition. However, I said as well, that we neither find ourselves where Hans Conzelmann was in 1969 when he denied that Jesus ever referred to the figure “son-of-man” at all. The relevance of Conzelmann’s argumentation is that he demonstrated that this “incorrect” view results from an identification of Jesus’ kingdom of God sayings with the sayings on the son-of-man. Rudolf Bultmann differed from Conzelmann and argued that Jesus referred both to himself and “prophetically” to someone who was still to come. Other scholars (e.g. Norman Perrin, Philipp Vielhauer and John Dominic Crossan) also argued that Jesus never used “son-of-man” as a “christological title”. According to Vielhauer the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem used the title “son of man” to describe Jesus on account of their experience of Easter. Perrin also regarded the use of “son-of-man” as an attempt by Jesus followers to make sense of the death of Jesus. By identifying Jesus with the son-of-man they expressed their faith that God vindicated Jesus on account of his resurrection. Crossan is of the opinion that Jesus did refer to the “Danialic” figure, but not as a self-reference. (In Daniel, according to Crossan, “son-of-man” was also not used as a title.) After Jesus’ death his followers utilized the “Danialic” connotation in a defensive apologetic sense, interpreting Jesus’ death as a divine vindictive event and understood identified Jesus with such a “Danialic” figure. My approach follows the work of Adela Yarbro Collins in her contention that Jesus used “son-of-man” generically, meaning humankind. According to Yarbro Collins, this use resulted in the identification of Jesus with the “apocalyptic” son-of-man by his followers after his death. I do not share the opinion that Jesus’ thoughts reveal an apocalyptic mind-set. For me, the hypothesis that Jesus’ use of “son-of-man” should be understood in the context of the little tradition of peasants seems to be more probable. His followers reinterpreted Jesus’ usage as an honorary title in terms of what I refer to as the “great tradition”.

<sup>61</sup> See *Fatherless*, pp. 14, 38: “However, the perspective ‘from the side’ does not endeavor to unravel the web of pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus traditions. In this investigation, the issue is how Jesus would have been experienced by his contemporaries .... The interpretation from a post-Easter faith perspective was filtered through experiences of resurrection appearances ... The *historical* investigation practiced in this book [*Fatherless*] is multidisciplinary in nature. From a literary point of view, relevant documents are read against the background of their chronological periods and respective contexts. A multiplicity of congruent, independent evidence from a particular tradition carries relatively greater historical weight. The influence of Easter on the handing down of Jesus traditions is taken into account. This is necessary to distinguish historically between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus. Pre-Easter traditions are interpreted within typical situations in terms of a first-century, eastern-Mediterranean society ... Jesus as a first-century Israelite from Galilee should be studied like other historical persons and should not be regarded as absolutely unique, using whatever material is available and by applicable methods and models.”

information on how to interpret these labels. It gives us insight into what scholars of “shamanism” refer to as “nonordinary reality”.<sup>62</sup> When the followers remember Jesus because Jesus’ ASC’s had an empowering effect on them, they would have transformed his ASC’s through re-enactment into rituals and ceremonies because ASC’s were natural to their context too. The rituals and ceremonies would have perpetuated the empowering effect of the ASC’s.

When we ask which label would remind the followers of Jesus most of his ASC’s, it would probably be the “shamanic” term “sky traveler” – the divine son of man sitting on a throne at the right side of God, even though historical-critical scrutiny reveals that in all probability Jesus did not see himself in that way.<sup>63</sup> We do, however, know that this was not the only confessional vision of their faith in Jesus. There were also other representations of the resurrected Jesus. These other representations are less “spiritual” states of consciousness than the “normal” human-like states which refer to war, peace, and the role of a divinized patron (e.g. the imperial *kyrios*, son of God and *sōtēr*). These have less to do with the core element of the “shamanic complex”, namely the so-called *Seelenflug*, but have everything to do with *alternated* states of consciousness.

Despite the richness of the “shamanic complex” to describe the *historical Jesus* and the *historical faith in Jesus*, it seems however that this complex does not cover the whole range of confessional possibilities. For some of Jesus followers – in the past and today – other possibilities are clearly more compelling. Only a positivist would not accommodate these people, as well.

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<sup>62</sup> See again footnote 4 and references to works on “shamanism” such as Michael Harner (1990), *The way of the shaman*; Angeles Arrien (1993), *The four-fold way: Walking the paths of the warrior, teacher, healer, and visionary*; Hank Wesselman (1996), *Spiritwalker: Messages from the future*; Sandra Ingerman (2001), *Medicine for the earth: How to transform personal and environmental toxins*; Andrei A Znamenski (2004), *Shamanish: Critical concepts in sociology*; Kocku von Stuckrad (2005), *Constructions, normativities, identities: Recent studies on shamanism and neo-shamanism*; Katie Weatherup (2006), *Practical shamanism: A guide for walking in both worlds*.

<sup>63</sup> In other words, contra to what Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), says in his 2007-Jesus book, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the baptism in the Jordan to the transfiguration*. According to Pope Benedict’s (2007:323) implied insinuation, my kind of exegesis (and, for that matter, the exegesis of many other scholars, e.g. Adela Yarbro Collins 1996:139-158) that “[s]plit[s] up the Son of Man sayings in this way ... might be appropriate for rigorous professorial thinking”, but “it does not suit the complexity of living reality, in which a multilayered whole clamors for expression.” Such exegesis has resulted in “a graveyard of mutually contradictory hypotheses” (Ratzinger 2007:322). In contrast, papal exegesis has “found three terms in which Jesus at once conceals and reveals the mystery of his person: ‘Son of Man,’ ‘Son,’ ‘I am he.’ ... All three are therefore possible only on his lips .... None of the three terms as such could therefore be straightforwardly adopted as a confessional statement by the ‘community,’ by the Church in its early stages of formation” (Ratzinger 2007:354). However, see Gerd Lüdemann’s (2008:112-118) critique in his book *Eyes that see not: The Pope looks at Jesus*, a scholarly adjustment by applying historical criticism.

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