PUBLIC-THEOLOGICAL DEBATE – WHO WAS THE REAL JESUS?

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explain the author's understanding of the historical Jesus in terms of a "Weberian" ideal type model. The lack of historical evidence of the role of a father in the life of Jesus in early Christian literature from the period prior to 70 CE, including the letters of Paul, the Gospels of Mark and Thomas and the Sayings Source Q, is explicated in a theological, ethical and cultural fashion. The reference to Joseph as Jesus' father in early Christian literature (which originated after the rift between Jesus followers and Judean adherents to the "Synagogue") is compared to intertestamental Semitic-Hellenistic literature (such as Josephus, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and Joseph and Asenath) in which the Joseph-figure functions as a ethical example for believers. From the assumption that Jesus grew up fatherless, references to Jesus' unconventional allegiance with social outcasts in the New Testament is interpreted from an ideal type of a fatherless child in first-century Herodian Palestine. Such a perspective is labelled as "Christology from the side" and its difference with orthodox Christology is historically explained.

1. Introduction

My position is that of a theologian who interprets the Bible and does theology for the sake of the Christian faith community and the public outside of institutional religion (Van Aarde 2008a).[2] In my view, who Jesus really was, matters on a theological, ethical, and cultural level. The message about a life through faith alone finds its main support *historically* in a gender-equal, ethnically unfettered, and culturally subversive Jesus. From this perspective, historical Jesus research is fundamental to the credibility of Christianity, in that Christianity is not a "book-religion". Christians do not believe in the Bible, but in God. The Christian faith represents belief patterns witnessed to in the New Testament and is modelled on the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians experience as and confess to be "child of God". Eminent German theologian and Biblical scholar, Ferdinand Hahn (2006), sees the quest for the historical Jesus as one of the *Grundsatzfragen* for *Fundamental-theologie*.

At present, the quest for the historical Jesus is of a multidisciplinary nature.

Biblical archaeology, sociology, cultural anthropology, psycho-biography, cultural psychology, medical anthropology and socio-linguistics are some of the disciplines that provide a basis for the investigation of the historical Jesus (M.J. Borg 1994a:3-17). All of this information points to the fact that people in today's Western world will never be able to determine exactly what Jesus would have said or done (cf. J.P. Meier 1991:21-24). Attempts to describe his core message can only be made by means of the literary witness of believers who proclaimed him to be the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Lord, the Child of God, and, indeed, God (cf. Grillmeier 1979).

2. "Above", "Below" or "From the side"?

In the history of Christian theology "patristic theologian" Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (ca 160 – ca 220 CE), anglicized as Tertullian, is perhaps best known for having coined a "new" religious vocabulary (especially in Latin). Terms such as *vetus testamentum* ("old testament") and *novum testamentum* ("new testament"), *sacramenta* ("sacrament"), *trinitas* ("Trinity"), *tres Personae* (for the Koine Greek: *treis hypostaseis*) and *una Substantia* (for *homoousios*) originated with him[3] (F. Bethune-Baker 1903:440-442).

Since Tertullian and since "creedal Christianity" (as it evolved since Emperor Constantine in the fourth century CE onwards; cf D.L. Dungan 2007:32-53), an image of Jesus known as "classical ontological Christology" was developed with the help of complicated Greco-philosophical metaphysics and Roman legal terminology. On a primary level Aristotle distinguished dualistically between primary and secondary categories, namely between *subject* and *predicate*. On a secondary level he distinguished between the *substance* and the *accident* of an object. This allowed him to describe an object as containing at the once both a "primary" substance in which visible, contingent qualities, conditioned by "secondary" features (i.e. "accidents"), constitute the essential character of the object. In other words, there can be a difference "in form" (*formalis*), such as being a son or father, but not "in substance" (*substantialis*), such as essentially being God.[4]

The merging of metaphysical philosophy and judicial thinking provided the building blocks for orthodox God-talk at the incipient phase of the systematization of Christian reflection on the question "who *is* God?". Terms such as *persona* and *substantia* were taken from the Roman legal system. According to this system, the law provided for an individual to

share "some substance" with someone else while still retaining his or her own possessions. From this simple legal regulation, the sophisticated and ingenious monotheistic dogma of the One Triune God was developed by the Cappadocians:[5] God Three-In-One, who share the same substance of being, but at the same time are three persons who feature different aspects of the divine economy of salvation, namely *begetting and providing* (God the Father), *conciliating* (God the Son), and *managing* (God the Holy Ghost).[6]

Focusing on the second category, God the Son, the mode of the theological discussion is to speculate on the two natures of the Son − his divine and human natures. At this point it becomes metaphysical, ontological Christology. Since Plato (circa 427−347 BCE), inter alia in his *Phaedo* (1.66b-66c; edited by J. Burnet [1967] 1990, Vol. 1, St I.57a-118a), which was further developed by Aristotle in his *Metaphysica* in 4th century BCE (edited by W.D. Ross [1924] 1970, 1:980A21-1928A6; 2:1028A10-1093B29), metaphysics has been about the distinction and relationship between "natural" and "supernatural": human-like and god-like. Christology emerged as an enterprise by theologians who reflected and systematized their thoughts about Jesus. They presumed that their thoughts were supported by witnesses in the New Testament. The fact of the matter is that most of these thoughts actually originated in later Christian thought (C.J. den Heyer [1996] 2002:20-26).

Ontology is about the philosophical view that the "true" essence of someone or something exists only in its relationship to the ultimate unseen "idea" which lies beyond what can be empirically known or observed. The word "ontic" has to do with *relating* and not with behaviour or functioning. The question of metaphysical ontology as it pertains to Jesus is primarily focused on what concerns God, not humankind. It is therefore also known as the "Christology from above" (see W. Pannenberg [1964] 1968:35-37). It deals with the identity of Christ, the question who he is. It is concerned with the (ontological) *similarity of being* (*una Substantia / homoousios*) in the *personae* of the Trinity in their (ontic / *homōi-ousiōs*) threefold (*tres Personae / treis hypostaseis*) respective interrelationships (*perichoresis*) (see inter alia Maurice Wiles 1967:92-106; G. Christopher Stead 1975:1-14).

Over against the convictions of the Arians (4th century CE) (see R. Williams 1990:84-90), Nicene and Chalcedonian theologians expressed the relatedness between the human and the divine without separating or

confusing the two sets of terms (which they got from Aristotle). In Reformed theology in Germany and the Netherlands, the Heidelberg Catechism (1663; translated into Dutch in 1566), which built on Anselm of Canterbury (*Cur Deus homo?*; and *Proslogion* C2-4, in 1033/34-1109 CE*)*, as well as on the Belgic Confession (1618),[7] emphasized Jesus' *humanness* over against the convictions of the Socinians[8] (see Jan Rohls and John Hoffmeyer 1998:22-23) and Anabaptists.[9]

However, in the New Testament itself the "dual nature" of Jesus as both "true God" and "true human" is not treated as an ontological concept, but is rather expressed in metaphorical language. In Platonic terms this kind of language expresses the conviction of the earliest Christians that nothing physical or cultural could get in the way of an unmediated spiritual experience of the presence of God. Both Paul and John believed that, analogous to Jesus, a child of humanity could be born anew as "child of God". This "dual nature" metaphor first became a confessional formula and later became the unquestionable, fixed dogma of the two natures of Jesus (see Van Aarde 1999:437-470).

Exegetes and other theologians began referring to the "Christologies" of the authors of the New Testament as "functional." From this perspective, the focus was on Jesus' *behaviour* inferred from his words and deeds that directed his followers. From such a "functional" perspective, theologians acknowledged that honorific titles had been ascribed to Jesus by the authors of the New Testament. This resulted in categories such as the "historical Jesus" and the "kerygmatic (proclaimed) Jesus", coined in 1896 by the systematic theologian Martin Kähler.[10]

In 2008, the New Testament scholar Gerd Theißen explained this relation-ship from a sociological-theological perspective as an "Inter-Rollen-Konflikt" between the "Jesus of history" and the "Jesus of faith" (article published in *Evangelische Theologie* 68/4, 285-304). This means that, in addition to the distinction between an ontological (*from above*) and a functional (*from below*) perspective on Jesus, a perspective *from the side* has now also been introduced (cf. Malina and Neyrey 1988:x-xi),

Non-orthodox exegetes and theologians are convinced that an ontological perspective on Jesus cannot be found in the New Testament, not even in Johannine literature. In John 1:1 we read that the *Logos* (Word/Jesus) was with God and was God. This, however, is no typical ontological metaphysical scheme, but is rather a "functional" way of speaking about

understanding Jesus' behaviour. The term *Logos* which originated in so-called Greco-Semitic wisdom speculation, exhibits clear traits of Platonic thinking and "proto-gnosticism". Johannine literature "converts" such speculative "gnostic" thinking into something less docetic (in other words God only "appears" to be manifested in human form). In this form of theology God's becoming event in Jesus can be explained by using the honorific title *Logos*: from the heavenly realm, God entered into the earthly context (Rudolf Bultmann [1964/1966] 1971:13-83; however, cf. Paul N. Anderson 2007:38-3; see James M. Robinson 2007:86-89). On the other hand, the *functional* perspective emphasizes those words and deeds of the "pre-Easter" Jesus that, in the "post-Easter" period, gave rise to the "majesty titles" that were ascribed to Jesus by his earliest followers.

However, the perspective "from the side" does not endeavour to unravel the interwoven "pre-Easter" and "post-Easter" Jesus traditions. In this investigation, the issue is how Jesus would have been experienced by his contemporaries rather than how his later followers interpreted his words and deeds. The interpretation from a "post-Easter" faith perspective was filtered through "alternate states of consciousness", for example the way in which the earliest Jesus followers re-enacted their remembering of, among other things, the "pre-Easter" Jesus who experienced God's kingdom as the immediate presence of a father-king who takes care of even the most destitute among the poor, and the "post-Easter" Jesus who was resurrected from death and appeared to them.

3. Conceptualization

Taking the complexity of the nature of the Jesus tradition seriously, does not render an historian incapable of constructing a coherent mosaic of probabilities based on scattered isolated evidence. In this regard the German sociologist Max Weber's notion of "ideal type" can be useful. According to Weber (1949:89-112), an ideal type is a theoretical construct in which possible occurrences are brought together in a meaningful relationship, in order to form a *coherent image* of data from the past. In other words, as a theoretical construct, an ideal type is a conceptualization that will not necessarily correspond with the empirical reality. As a construct which displays a coherent image, the ideal type does influence investigations into what could have happened historically.

The purpose of establishing an ideal type is to account for the interrelation-ships between fragmentary historical events in an intelligible manner. Such

a coherent construct is not formed by or based on a selection of what is regarded as universally valid, in other words, what is common to all relevant cases of similar concrete situations that could have happened in reality. In my historical Jesus research I used the model of an ideal type to develop a construct of Jesus as a fatherless figure who called God his father. I am not claiming that this construct is based on what is common to all fatherless people in a first-century Galilean situation, or that it is based on what is common to most types of fatherless people in the Galilean situation.

The ideal type model enabled me to concentrate on the most favourable cases. I was particularly interested in the question why Jesus linked up with John the Baptist and submitted to baptism for the remission of sins. I was also interested in why Jesus, once he parted from the Baptist, so unconventionally for his time became involved with fatherless people, especially women without husbands and children without fathers. An answer to these questions could be provided by means of the construct of an ideal type regarding an individual in first-century Herodian Palestine who had been "healed" from the stigma of being a fatherless son and who started a ministry of healing/forgiving "sinners". My aim was to provide an explanation of the historical figure Jesus who, trusting in God as his father, destroyed conventional patriarchal values while caring for the fatherless within the macro-sociological framework of family distortion in Herodian Palestine (see Fiensy 1991:92-105), which resulted in the marginalization of people who became alienated from God.

An ideal type should be historically intelligible and explanatory. In order to be as close as possible to the real person, the identified social ideal type should rely on contemporary canonical and non-canonical texts that should be interpreted similarly to how archaeologists would interpret their finds from the various strata in order to find the "most authentic" evidence (cf. John Dominic Crossan's and Jonathan L. Reed's chapter "Layers upon layers upon layers", in their book *Excavating Jesus: beneath the stones, behind the texts*, 2001:15-50). Biblical scholars do something similar when they recover the most authentic text from the many layers of manuscripts and translations. This process is called textual criticism.

Historians recover the "historical Jesus" from overlays of tradition which record the history of how the remembering of Jesus evolved through phases of oral and written transmission. This remembering was shaped by how Jesus followers propagated his vision in both positive and negative

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environments (Funk & Jesus Seminar [1993] 1997:19-25). They would alternate between recounting his empowering influence in the lives of down-trodden people to defending his honour against those who had defamed and killed him. Therefore, the reconstruction of who the "real" Jesus was, takes into consideration both the chronological stratification of relevant documents[11] and the social environment of first century Herodian Palestine.[12]

Modern psychiatry and psychology tend to describe behaviour in the Bible from a modern individualistic Western perspective (see John J. Pilch 1997; cf. Bourguignon 1979), whereas biblical cultures were communal, centred not on the individual, but on the group – the nation, tribe, neighbours and family (cf. Bruce J. Malina 1989:131). From a scientific point of view, coming to psychoanalytic conclusions on behaviour without having a sound basis of empirical observation, is dubious at best. In the case of Jesus, information in the New Testament and related literature from antiquity provides the data for an empirical investigation. The fact that Jesus' words were not recorded by himself, but were transmitted only by witnesses, can lead to two fallacies. The first is that it would be impossible to determine the core of the mindset of Jesus. The second fallacy is that it may be deemed undesirable to undertake a historical Jesus investigation because the "real Jesus" is the one to be found on the surface level of the text. The Jesus behind the text cannot be the "real Jesus".

The oldest tradition is that of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Joachim Gnilka 1993:78-79). The historical and social question is why Jesus would have wanted to be baptized. Baptism by John refers to washing away iniquities in order for the baptized person to have a proper ethical life. My understanding of Jesus' baptism is that it was a ceremonial, ritual event through which "sinful sickness" was addressed and healed. In my opinion, the unfortunate relationship with his family as well as his critique against the patriarchal family provide clues for understanding the stigmatization that caused the "iniquity" from which he suffered. Jesus' birth record reveals more about the stigma of being fatherless and the reason for his tense relationship with his family and the people of Nazareth. Textual evidence prompts us to inquire critically whether Joseph fulfilled any role in Jesus' life and whether Joseph was a historical figure at all.

4. The legend of Joseph as Jesus' father

A historiographical investigation indicates that it is historically improbable

that Jesus' birth was the result of Mary having either been raped or seduced by an unknown man. It is also uncertain whether Mary was a virgin at the time of conception. She probably became pregnant when Herod the Great was the king of the Jews. The story of the manger, shepherds and magi should be regarded as unhistorical. This also applies to the reports that the birth took place in Bethlehem, that children were murdered as a result of Jesus' birth, that Jesus was taken to Egypt by his parents after his birth, that John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus and was of priestly descent, and that Jesus was taken to the temple as a child where Simeon and Anna saw him.

Apart from the reference to Joseph in the genealogy of Jesus, the Gospel of Matthew also calls Joseph a carpenter and names Jesus as his son. Mark only mentions that Jesus was a carpenter. Luke does not make any reference at all in this regard. Luke does, however, indicate that Jesus is Joseph's son. There are no other references to Joseph in any document originating before 70 CE. In the New Testament documents that originated after 70 CE reference is made to Joseph's righteousness, his Davidic ancestry, his dream and the angel's conversation with him, his "holy marriage" to the impure Mary, his trip to Egypt with his family and his trip to the temple with Mary and Jesus.

Since the second century some documents have elaborated on the fact that Joseph was a carpenter. They mentioned his righteousness, that he was very old (89 years) when he took Mary as his wife, that he never had intercourse with her, that his youngest son, James, was still a child when all of this happened, that he also had other children, and that he died at the age of 111 (cf. Schaberg 1994:708-727).[13]

Historically seen, it is highly problematic to refer to Joseph as the father of Jesus. All of these references are from the period after the separation of the Pharisaic synagogue and the church after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the termination of the earliest Jesus movement in Jerusalem. No known father played a role in the life of the historical Jesus.

From this perspective an altogether different portrait of Jesus emerges. It is the picture of a "sinner", who was away from his village, who had a strained relationship with relatives, and who experienced a fantasy homecoming in God's kingdom. This was probably the background of the "imaginary reality" created by Spirit of God, which gave Jesus the sense of having been cared for by a heavenly father. He both attested to and lived by

this reality. Through the stories and letters of associates Jesus has become the icon of God's forgiveness of sin and daily care.

My thesis is that the role of the "ethical example" that the Old Testament Joseph-figure fulfilled in Hellenistic-Semitic literature, served as the model for the transmitters of the early Christian tradition. The Joseph tradition was also known to authors of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. Like others of the period 70 to 135 CE, they were embroiled in synagogical controversies about *inter alia* Jesus' "illegitimacy". They counteracted by positioning Jesus as the "son of Joseph, the son of Jacob".

Joseph had children with his gentile Egyptian spouse Asenath. Asenath's virginity is not mentioned in the Genesis account, though both the nature of the marriage and Asenath's virginity were widespread literary topics in the first century CE. For example, Josephus (*JA* ii, 9) – similar to what is recounted in the novel *Joseph and Asenath* – refers to both Joseph's and Asenath's "most distinguished marriage" and Asenath's virginity (cf. Niehoff 1992:106). This reference alone rules out the possibility that the author of *Joseph and Asenath* had taken this topic over from New Testament evidence. It is probable that the tradition in the gospel material and in documents such as *Joseph and Asenath* share a common idealization of Joseph's holy marriage. Rabbinic Jewish literature is concerned with Asenath's alien Egyptian origin and this disturbing fact is accounted for in numerous ways (see Aptovitzer 1924:239-306; cf. Niehoff 1992:107).

The children from the "holy marriage" between Joseph and Aseneth formed the "house of Makir" (see Michaud 1976:77-135). Makir was the adopted [grand]son of Joseph. Manasseh and Ephraim were born to Joseph by Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis (On) in Egypt (cf. Gen 46:19). Jacob legitimated Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen 48:8-12), and did the same with Makir, the son of Manasseh who also was born in Egypt (cf. Gen 50:23b). The Makarites became the forefathers of the Israelites who settled in the northern parts of Israel. The Judeans labelled them "Samaritans".

For the puritan Judeans the name "Samaritan" was equivalent to a bastard. Samaritans could not enter the temple in Jerusalem because they were not "true" children of Abraham (e.g. in the Talmudic Tractate *Kiddushin* 75a and *Masseket Kutim* 27 – see Montgomery 1968:180-181; cf. Coggins 1975:53; see Egger 1986). Joseph and Judah became symbols of conflict concerning issues of impurity and purity in cultic life. In the Gospel of

John (8:48) the Judeans labelled Jesus, whom they accused being illegitimate, a "Samaritan" and "demon-possessed".

In Hellenistic-Semitic literature (such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *Joseph and Asenath*) the "righteous" Joseph, despite his defamation, became the ancestor of those whose sins had been forgiven, who received their daily bread, who were instructed to forgive others their trespasses, to give them their share of God's daily bread, and to pray to God that they would not be tempted to disobey their father's will. The motif of compassion and forgiveness of sin by Joseph the patriarch is the most prominent theme in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The gospel tradition in the New Testament makes use of this motif when depicting Jesus. In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* powerful parallels exist between Joseph the patriarch and the Joseph recorded in Matthew. An example is for instance the references to the "righteous (good) person" (Mt 1:19; *Test. Gad* 6:3-4, 7) who "has not a dark eye", for "he shows mercy to all people, even though they are sinners"; "on the poor person he has mercy; with the weak he feels sympathy" (*Test. Benjamin* 4:4d; cf. also *Test. Zebulon* 6:5; 7:3). This deliberate resemblance is not surprising. In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* the next generations are instructed to imitate "our father Joseph". In her work, *The figure of Joseph in post-Biblical literature*, Maren Niehoff (1992:52) finds: "For one reason or another, Joseph seems to represent for each narrator a certain Idealtype."

The same is true with regard to Matthew's Joseph and the Joseph depicted in the novel *Joseph and Asenath*. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in its present form, is dated round about the second or third century CE, but probably goes back to the second century BCE. *Joseph and Asenath* is dated between 100 BCE and 115 CE (cf. Chesnutt 1996:286). It is a Hellenistic-Semitic novel which focuses on God's intervention in the life of Joseph the patriarch (parallel to the Joseph in the gospel tradition) to take Asenath, an "impure" woman, though a virgin, into his house. It is the story of a "holy marriage". Against this background the story of the Jesus of history was retold by Greek-speaking Israelites who had become Christians. For some, Jesus, despite having been slandered, became the icon of God's forgiveness, thanks to the God of his father (cf. Gen 49:25) Joseph, son of Israel (cf. *Test. Gad* 4:1-2).

No Christian writings from the period 30-70 CE, attest to a connection between Joseph and the Jesus of history. This has far-reaching

consequences for historical Jesus research. It seems that Joseph did not die early in Jesus' life. Historically speaking the only such reference can be found in the 4ᵗʰ century CE work of Epiphanius (see Bertrand and Ponton 1955:141-174; cf. Meier 1991:317, 353 note 6). The earliest textual evidence reveals that Joseph came onto the scene rather belatedly, when Jesus had already been crucified.

For Greek-speaking Israelites Joseph represented an ethical paradigm. For Pharisees he was the symbolic adversary of Judah (cf. also *Test. Gad* 2:3-4 for riposte against the "covetousness" of Judah who sells Joseph for "thirty pieces of gold"). To the Judean Pharisees, Joseph was the forefather of those who either came from the pagan world or mixed with pagans – those Joseph-people whom the Judeans regarded as bastards because they were a mixture of the children of God and gentiles. They should therefore have been treated as people without parentage.

What came first: the chicken or the egg? Who was the first to claim that the fatherless Jesus was the son of Joseph? Could it have been the Pharisees who would have regarded such a charge as a denotation of illegitimacy? Or could it have been the Greek-speaking Christians among the Israelites who would have regarded it as the intervention of God who turned slander into exaltation? There is no definite answer, but both these perspectives help to determine the way in which Jesus is viewed – either as the illegitimate son of Joseph or as the legitimated child of God on account of his adoption by Joseph.

5.   An inflation of historical probabilities

When attempting to construct the life of Jesus in first-century Herodian Palestine, it is not an inflation of historical probabilities to state the following (cf. Van Aarde 2004:231-232; 2008b:719-780 note 37):

• records show that "opponents" alleged that he was born out of wedlock;
• there was no father figure in his life;
• he was a bachelor;
• his relationship with his mother and siblings was filled with tension;
• he was probably compelled to take up carpentry after having been forced out of farming;
• he was stigmatized as a "sinner" and was therefore associated with a revolutionary baptizer;
• he experienced an alternate state of consciousness in which God was

present and acted like a Father;

- he abandoned his craftsmanship – if he ever had been a woodworker;
- he was a "homeless" itinerant along the lakeshore;
- it seems that he never ventured into the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, but restricted himself to the plains, valleys and hills of Galilee;
- he assembled a core of close friends;
- he defended fatherless children, women who were not protected by a patriarch, and other outcasts;
- as and agent of the Spirit of God, he resocialized these outcasts into the household of God (a new "family") by means of empowering healing;
- village elders were offended by his subversive teachings and actions;
- the temple authorities, the Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, and elders in Jerusalem, were outraged at his criticism of their manipulative ploys and misuse of hierarchical power;
- he was crucified by the Romans after an outburst of emotion on the outer temple square;
- circumstances surrounding his death were uncertain and his body was not laid to rest in a family tomb;
- he was believed to have been taken unto the bosom of father Abraham to be among the "living dead", as Scriptures had foretold;
- he was also believed to have been God's beloved child who had already been with God before creation and who was now preparing accommodation in heaven for those who lived by his cause.

In other words, what came before and after "Jesus at thirty" (to use John Miller's 1997 expression) – that is Jesus' baptism – seems to have been his fatherlessness.

I reiterate that fatherlesness is an ideal-typical construction of the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. There is no way of proving that this image describes the "real" Jesus. However, this ideal type is historically intelligible and compatible with textual evidence and archaeological findings. It should rely on contemporary canonical and non-canonical texts and archaeological artefacts, which are to be interpreted in terms of the chronological stratification of the relevant documents. It would also have to be congruent with the social stratification of first-century Herodian Palestine. Moreover, the ideal type of Jesus' social identity as "fatherless" can also be explained by means of social psychology and cultural anthropology.

In my research I applied the social-psychological theory of "status envy" and cross-cultural information about sleeping arrangements as data to develop an anthropological model in terms of which I explain the social identity of a fatherless person calling God "Father". By calling God "Father" Jesus brought healing to marginalized people. He empowered them by his message about God who acts as the father-king of his divine empire (see, e.g., Jesus' Lord's Prayer). This idea goes directly against the patriarchal conventions of the people with power in Jerusalem, Sepphoris/Tiberias and Rome.

Jesus died because of having been "subversive" and because of this "ethos of compassion" (to use an expression from Marcus Borg [1987] 1991, 1994b). It happened against the background of Second Temple ideology and Roman imperialism. His followers were likewise threatened and some died in a manner similar to Jesus' death.

This sketch of the historical Jesus leads to the insight that Jesus' life and work centred on his trust in God as his Father. He redefined the Kingdom of God in terms of a fictive household in which everyone, including the "sinners," had direct and unmediated access to God.

This does not mean that all our historical knowledge of Jesus should be reduced to the single aspect of kinship imagery.

Jesus escapes simplifying definitions. He was a child of Galilee, but Galilee itself was known for its diversity with regard to both its topography and population (see inter alia Richard Horsley 1995:238-255).

The lake of Galilee provided livelihood for simple farmers who fished from ancient boats and for rich lords who managed the fish-salting and pottery industries. Along the lakeshore as well as a few miles away from the lake there were bustling cities with temples devoted to deities and emperors, a royal palace, military fortifications, mansions with mosaics floors that depicted Greco-Roman deities on which aristocrats reclined to enjoy festive meals served by servant-slaves who could have come from nearby peasant communities that were transformed into estates. Galilee was multilingual and inhabited by both pagans and Israelites. There was a great number of mixed marriages of which the Judeans were scornful.

Though they did not necessarily live in Samaria itself, Israelite Galileans were often generally stereotyped as "Samaritans" on account of their real or

alleged mixed parentage or simply for having lived among Gentiles for centuries.

Visiting Judean Pharisees came to teach, threaten and enforce the purity laws of the sacred writings. Jerusalem temple authorities collected taxes (said to be the will of God) from impoverished people who tried to live according to ancestral traditions. In the peasant villages, family courtyards were used for communal gatherings and sometimes also as "synogogical" space for reciting and listening to the Torah. Farmers survived on small pieces of agricultural land. Landless tenant farmers worked for lords who lived in the cities. These farmers often incurred huge debts of which record was kept in mansions and "sacred places" far away, including the temple in Jerusalem. Sons from such families often tried to eke out a living elsewhere. The pottery and fishing industries provided labour opportunities. Some peasants who were forced from their land, turned to carpentry as an alternate profession. Bandits, outcasts, and rebels escaped to the mountains and found shelter in caves. This, in short was "the Galilee of the Gentiles" where the people "lived in darkness".

6. Facets of the scholarly debate

Somewhere there – in "the Galilee of the Gentiles" – Jesus is to be found. He was not with his family and did not pursue his career – if he had ever been a carpenter). He was a revolutionary and healer, a teacher and helper.

Mircea Eliade's (1964) uses the term "shaman" to explain such a spiritual figure. In many ways this term fits my sketch of Jesus. Yet, I do not think that one can condense everything that is known about Jesus and what his followers believed him to be, into the term "shaman" (e.g. Pieter Craffert 2008; see Van Aarde 2008b:767-798).

Quite a number of features identified by Jesus scholars are compatible with my profile of Jesus as "fatherless child of God". Actually, I am indebted to their work. However, some scholarly insights I cannot endorse. For example, I am not convinced that the subversive sayings and deeds of a Galilean peasant could originate from a highly sophisticated Greek philosophical school. The "revolutionary biography" (John Dominic Crossan 1991:207-224; 1994) of an itinerant philosopher (Crossan 1991:345-348) who belonged to such a school could be compared with the life of a "homeless traveller". As such a traveller Jesus could sometimes have found accommodation in the fishing village of Capernaum where the extended

family of a fisher-friend lived (see Mk 1:29) and often would not have had a "nest" or a "hole," like the creatures of nature (see Q 9:58).

However, the philosophical sophistication and domestication of "subversive itinerancy" originated after Jesus' lifetime. Subversive itinerancy occurred when some "Christian" faction or other tried to find its own identity among synagogical and philosophical activities. These "Christians" probably accomplished this by passing on and writing down "the Galilean's" prophetic wisdom and recording his healing performance.

Likewise, the idea that Jesus' initial "prophetic" association with the Baptizer led to an awareness of himself as a "second Joshua" who would lead God's "covenanted people" across the river Jordan and into the "new promised" land (again, J.D. Crossan 1994), is unconvincing. I disagree that he had a perception of himself as the agent of God who forgave the sins of the people. The allusion by the historian Josephus (*Vita* 2) to the "baptizer" Banus (who lived and acted in the desert similar to John the Baptist) could be interpreted as a reference to someone like John who had a political agenda and acted in Joshua-style as though he were the "revived" prophet Elijah (Mk 6:15) (cf. Crossan 1991:115). It is no surprise, as history indeed teaches us (Jos, *Ant* 17.5.2; Mk 6:17), that John was imprisoned and executed by the powers that be. It is also possible that the gospel tradition was correct in saying that these authorities and some others thought Jesus to be "the Baptizer resurrected" (see Mk 6:14). However, the gospel tradition tried to rectify such an image of Jesus that people might have had.

Discerning from the historical facts the respective "prophecies memorized" and "prophecies historicized" in the messages of gospel writers such as Mark and Matthew (although not fully in concordance with each other), a portrait of Jesus altogether different to that of a typical prophet (e.g. N.T. Wright 1996), emerges. It is rather the picture of a "sinner" far away from his home village, who is trapped in strained relationships with relatives, but who experiences a fantasy homecoming in God's kingdom. It was probably in such circumstances that an "imaginary reality" (created by the Spirit of God) brought about an alternate state of consciousness in which Jesus experienced the care of a Heavenly Father. He both attested to and lived within this reality. It is through the stories and letters of associates who were likewise empowered, either by having been personally healed by Jesus or by the tradition of his "memorized" healing, that Jesus became the icon of God's mercy and love.

In my historical Jesus research, the best I could come up with, was to argue that the "ethical example" of the Joseph figure – taken from the Hebrew Scriptures and elaborated upon in Hellenistic-Semitic literature – served as a model for the transmitters of the early Christian tradition.

The Joseph tradition was also known to the authors of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. They found themselves (as did others during the period 70 CE to 135 CE) in synagogical controversies about inter alia Jesus' "illegitimacy". They counteracted by positioning Jesus as the "son of Joseph, the son of Jacob". I demonstrated that in Hellenistic-Semitic literature (such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) the "righteous" Joseph, despite his defamation, became the spiritual ancestor of children whose sins were forgiven, who were given their daily bread, who were instructed to forgive others their trespasses, and gave them their share of God's daily bread and prayed to God that they would not be tempted to disobey their Father's will. Against this background, Greek-speaking Israelites who had become Christians, retold the life of the Jesus of history. Despite the slander, for some of them Jesus became the image of God's forgiveness of sins and daily care, thanks to the God of his father (see also Gen 49:25), Joseph, son of Israel.

However, no Christian writing that originated between the years 30 CE and 70 CE recorded a connection between Joseph and the Jesus of history. Given this, I believe that a historical construct of Jesus' "entire life" within the context of first-century Herodian Palestine can be constructed according to the ideal type of a fatherless figure living in Galilee.

Yet, such a "Christology from the side" cannot escape the reality – with all its diversity – that the earliest re-telling of the Jesus story (according to Willi Marxsen 1976:45-62), the *Sache Jesu* (see Van Aarde 2001b:148-171), took the form of faith assertions. If the faith assertions of New Testament authors and the earliest reception of New Testament evidence in the history of Christian theology are taken seriously, one engages in the *Sache Jesu* – the encounter between divinity and humanness. However, in the hands of the fundamentalists, the dogma of the two natures of Jesus has become a stick with which to strike and a rod with which to destroy (cf. Alister E. McGrath 1990:41).

Unfortunately, later orthodox fundamentalism focused almost exclusively on Jesus' divine nature. According to the fundamentalist view, this dogma generates justifying and saving faith. Those with different views are

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considered to be godless and worthy of excommunication. However, in the process of marginalizing and eliminating opponents, the "retainers" of the dogma often lose sight of Jesus' humanness and humaneness, as well as of the origins and history of the dogma. They see dogma as generating 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.

7.   Conclusion as beginning

Besides my interpretation of "Jesus as fatherless in Galilee", I am also known as someone who finds himself in the realm of the church and therefore would like to uphold the relationship between the *historical Jesus* and the *kerygmatic Christ*.

Yet, I find that the twenty-first century could be the time when the relevance of the church as institution and the Christian Bible as its canon have become outdated and irrelevant to ordinary people (Van Aarde 2001a). If and when the process of secularization should reach its consummation, another Christian generation will be called upon to reconsider both the continued importance of the historical Jesus and to simultaneously reinterpret that figure as the manifestation of God.

Perhaps our present-day postsecular age (see Charles Taylor 2007; cf. Van Aarde 2008a) could be the beginning of that time! I, therefore, would like to encourage my colleague and friend Pieter Craffert to proceed in his exploration of an alternative mode of Jesus research despite his frustration with us "church people".

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NOTES

1. This article contains material which has been elaborated in Andries van Aarde (2000), Jesus and Joseph in Matthew's Gospel and other texts (*Neotestamentica* 35, 1-21); Andries van Aarde (2001a), *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus child of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International) and Andries van Aarde (2004), Social identity, status envy, and Jesus as fatherless child, in *Psychology and the Bible: A new way to read the Scriptures, Volume 4: From Christ to Jesus*, pp 223-246, edited by J H Ellens and W.G. Rollins (Westport, CT: Praeger Press; Praeger Perspectives: Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality), pp 223-246. The article is a reworked version of a paper presented as part of the "public-theological debate" with Professors Ruben Zimmermann (Universität Bielefeld, Germany) and Pieter Craffert (University of South Africa), organized by Professor Etienne de Villiers, the director of the Centre for Public Theology at the University of Pretoria, on 16 October 2008. Dr Andries G Van Aarde is Honorary Professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria.

2. Cf. Van Aarde, A.G. 2008. Theological trends in our postsecular age. A reworked version of a paper presented at the Special General meeting of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) on Saturday 6th September 2008, Johannesburg.

3. See P. Schaff [1908-14] 2004. s v Tertullian, *The New Schaf-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian. Digitized in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*. http://www.ccel.org.

4. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* 3a, Q.75, art. 5) uses these categories from Aristotle to formulate the doctrine of transubstantiation with regard to the "elements" of the Holy Communion, endorsed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) (see A.C. Thiselton 2007:530-531).

5. "Cappadocian Christianity bore its most abundant fruit in the fourth century. The strength of the church in the province at the beginning of the century can be seen in the fact that the bishops from seven cities in Cappadocia attended the council of Nicaea (325) … The glory of the Cappadocian church, however, lies in the work of the so-called Cappadocian fathers: Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, who were active in the second half of the fourth century" (Ronald E. Heine 1990:176).

6. However, see W. Pannenberg (1968:185) and E. Schlink (1961:85): "These statemens cannot be used as 'logical premises.' 'The historic way of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ can be neither inferred nor theoretically explained from the confession 'true God and true man,' [Schlink 1961:85]. Also, in this sense doxological statements are 'final' [i.e. *functional*] statements" (Pannenberg 1968:185).

7. When a papal edict expanded the dogma of Jesus' two natures 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).

8. The Socinians owes their origin to Laelius (1525-1562) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). The Anabaptist movement denied the validity of infant baptism and was launched by Nicolas Stork, a weaver who died in 1525, and Thomas Münzer, a Lutheran preacher and priest (c. 1490-1525).

9. "In the Reformation era Socinians, as forerunners of modern liberalism [sic], pushed the Arian heresy to its ultimate conclusion. The Reformers responded by reiterating the faith of the ecumenical councils: Jesus Christ is 'the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made, … but co-essential and co-eternal with the Father … He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature, but from all eternity …" (Belgic Confession, Article X). As an opposite extreme, certain 'stepchildren of the Reformation' *downgraded the true humanity of Christ*. Therefore, *'in opposition to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of his mother'* the fathers of the Reformation confessed that he took on himself 'true human nature with all its infinities, sin excepted' (Belgic Confession, Article XVIII). Calvin, whose thinking lies behind these creedal statements, adheres strictly to the line of Chalcedonian orthodoxy' (John T. McNeill [1960]: p 482 note 1" (Gordon Spykman 1992:405; my emphasis).

10. The concepts "historic-kerygmatic" and "proclaimer-proclaimed" first appeared in the title of a book written in 1896 by the dogmatician of Jena in the old Prussian Empire, Martin Kähler (1835-1912). There he distinguished between the "historical Jesus," "real Christ" ("der historische Jesus," "der wirkliche Christus") and the "geschichtliche," "biblical," in other words, "proclaimed Christ" ("der biblische Christus," "der gepredigte Christus"). These concepts not only disclose a distinction in German between the "historisch-geschichtlich" and "wirklich-biblisch"/"gepredigt," but also between the names "Jesus" and "Christ". This distinction is related to the dialectic "pre-Easter Jesus"-"post-Easter Jesus."

11. The criterion of "attestation in multiple independent sources" has generally been used in the discussion to argue that the independent presence of a saying in more than one strand of the tradition is an argument for its authenticity (see Marcus Borg 1999:12). The use of the criterion of "attestation of multiple forms presupposes that the appearance of elements of the tradition in more than one literary form, for example parable, miracle story, pronouncement story, and so forth, indicates that these elements are anterior to the forms in which they are found in the gospels, and therefore can be used as an argument for their authenticity (see Charles Dodd [1935] 1936:171-173).

12. Earlier on in historical Jesus research this criterion was also called the "criterion of dissimilarity" (see Ernst Käsemann [1954] 1960:187-214; Joachim Jeremias 1960:12-25). In the case of the Greco-Roman and the Galilean-Syrian contexts, a change in environment caused a discontinuity in the content of words with regard to the transmission of the Jesus tradition,

although a material relationship with Jesus' subversive cause still existed. The term "dissimilarity", therefore, does not cover aspects, continuity and the discontinuity, in the transmission of the Jesus tradition. In view of this shortcoming, Gerd Theißen and Dagmar Winter (1997) refined the issue of "dissimilarity" between Jesus and the Israelite tradition (see Part II of their book *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Von Differenzkriterium zum Plausibalitätskriterium*) and began to use the term "the criterion of environment".

13. See Hollander (1981:65, 69-70. 73); Sklar (1996:51); Zerbe (1993); Argyle (1951-2:256-258).