

Methods and models in the quest for the historical Jesus: Historical criticism and/or social scientific criticism¹

Andries van Aarde

Department of New Testament Studies

University of Pretoria

Abstract

In this article a distinction is made between social scientific criticism and historiography. Historiography describes what is unrepeatably, specific and particular. Social scientific criticism is to some extent a phenomenological approach. On a high level of abstraction, it focuses on ideal types. The historiographical quest for Jesus is about the plausibility of a continuity or a discontinuity existing between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. This approach has been broadened by the interdisciplinary application of the results of archaeological, sociohistorical, and cultural anthropological studies of the world of the historical Jesus. But it does not mean that historical-critical research as such is now dismissed. The aim of the article is to argue that social scientific criticism can complement a historical-critical analysis.

1. WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The quest for the historical Jesus is about the question “Who was Jesus?” Because of many reasons the writings of the earliest Jesus groups do not give a clear answer to this question. The quest for the historical Jesus implies the plausibility that a discontinuity and/or a continuity could exist between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith as it was witnessed in the writings of the earliest Jesus groups. Even if an exegete can ascertain historically a discontinuity between what Jesus said and did and what his

¹ Paper presented at the International Context Group Meeting, University of Pretoria June 12-15, 2001.

followers wrote he said and did, continuity could still remain to a certain extent. It is a matter of “noncontradiction”. To “noncontradict” is to replicate a saying in different contexts with the consequence that the contextual change could cause correspondence in the intention of the multiple attestation but a discontinuity in meaning and reference. In the past, exegetes have established “noncontradiction” by means of historical-critical criteria. However, John P Meier (1994:452) says: “The problem of logical consistency that the Western mind may raise with regard to the systematic writings of a Spinoza may be beside the point when dealing with an itinerant Jewish preacher and miracle-worker of 1st-century Palestine. Our concern about the principles of noncontradiction might have been greeted with a curious smile by the Nazarene and his audience.” In his *Birth of Christianity*, John Dominic Crossan (1998:143) begins a section, entitled “Criteria are not method,” with a reference to these words of Meier. According to Crossan (1998:145), “*criteria*, no matter how good, do not constitute a *method* unless they are organized on some theoretical basis into some operational system that can be used by anyone.”

The aim of this paper is to ask whether *social scientific method* in the quest for the historical Jesus can be constituted without the use of *historical-critical criteria*. From the perspective of social scientific criticism, Pieter F Craffert (2001:107-108) reckons the application of historical criticism is “overt ethnocentrism.” According to Craffert (2001:109-113), his social scientific position of “cultural dialogue” eludes the hermeneutical fallacy of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism amounts to the accusation that different ethnic cultural codes are unjustifiably fused. Craffert prefers to use the term “historical anthropology” to specify his approach and conceives Crossan and myself, among others, as overtly ethnocentric (Craffert 2001:103). Awareness of ethnocentrism is perhaps one of the many important advantages that have occurred as a result of the application of social-scientific criticism in biblical scholarship. Ethnocentrism occurs where the cultural distance between ancient and modern societies, and among particular cultures in a given period is not reckoned with because of an adherence of irreconcilable cultural phenomena that cannot stand the test of a responsible cross-cultural enterprise.

It seems that Craffert considers historical criticism as part of modernistic epistemology but social scientific criticism (historical anthropology) as postmodern in

nature. According to Craffert's position, historical criticism and social scientific criticism are two exclusive styles of interpretation. By means of personal correspondence Craffert reckons that I misunderstood him totally. Since, at the time of writing and presenting this paper in June 2001, only one article of Craffert was published in which he demonstrated his position I do not consider it necessary to change my opinion here which was triggered by that article. During the last year he has presented other papers and published more articles in which he explained his position in further detail. In lights of these works it has become clear to me that Craffert understands historiography from a cultural perspective in such a manner that it implies a total shift from what has been previously understood by exegetes engaged with historical Jesus studies. In all fairness I think that Craffert should not use the expression "*historical Jesus*" so that he avoids misunderstanding – even by scholars who are approaching historical Jesus studies from a "new historical" perspective (among whom I should be counted) (see esp. *Via* 2002:95-107). This article, however, does not aim to explain what Craffert's approach entails and it does not pretend to argue that it is an invalid or misdirected means of describing in an anthropological way figures from antiquity. On the contrary, I expectantly think that his mode of thinking merits further exploration. For the purpose of this article I intend to stay within the parameters of what scholars herewith have meant when they used the expression "historical Jesus studies".

My view is that a distinction should rather be made between *social scientific criticism* and *historiography* than between *social scientific criticism* and *historical criticism*. Historiography is interested in the "ideographical" (see Mandelbaum 1977:4-14). It describes what is unrepeatable, specific and particular. Social scientific criticism is to some extent a phenomenological approach. On a high level of abstraction it focuses on ideal types, in other words what happens again and again (cf also Wilson 1984; Herion 1986:26). Aspects of Jesus' social world, such as his vision of the Kingdom of God, are not studied in the first place as *historical realities*, but are investigated in conjunction with other *cultural domains*. Culture is researched as a social system. However, according to Gottwald (1979:622) social systems can also be approached in terms of "processual sequences and ... social causation." An investigation of causation, according

to the well-known categories of Ernst Troeltsch,² is a historical-critical inquiry. 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.”

2. A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The results from the past two hundred or three hundred years of historical critical scholarship illustrate the complicated transitions from oral to written traditions, the influence on oral and written traditions of, first, the eastern Mediterranean and, later, the Greco-Roman cultural contexts, and source interdependence. The first written record to be found today in the New Testament only appeared twenty-five years after Jesus’ death, and was written by Paul who had never met Jesus personally. The Gospel according to Mark, which was written circa 70 CE, only came afterwards. Mark served as a source for the authors of the Gospel of Luke (written circa 85 CE) and of the Gospel of Matthew (written circa 85-95 CE). The Gospel of John originated independently of the three synoptic gospels, Mark, Luke, and Matthew, towards the end of the first century. During

² “The historian’s craft combines the art of intuiting the original import of the sources with the discovery of correlative and mutually determinative changes [i e, causation – A G v A]. The historian’s ultimate problems arise from the attempt to understand the nature and basis of the whole historical context and to arrive at value judgements regarding its various forms.

The scholarly investigation of the Bible has accordingly become involved with the general political, social, and intellectual history of antiquity, and the investigation and evaluation of Christianity has been placed within the framework of the history of religion and culture” (Troeltsch [1898], in Dawes 1999:34).

the second century, (Gnostic) writings with a “hidden” way of talking about Jesus, although very diverse in nature and content became prolific (see Franzmann 1996).

Historical criticism made exegetes sensitive to the many layers with regard to the traditions about the origins of Christianity, and accordingly, to the discontinuity and continuity between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. Labeling historical Jesus research as the “New Quest” in distinction to the “Old Quest,” was triggered by James Robinson in 1959 (see Robinson 1983). The term “Old Quest” refers to the constructs of Jesus, which are commonly reckoned to have been brought to an end by Albert Schweitzer in 1906. Proponents of the “New Quest” became the pioneers who moved beyond Rudolf Bultmann’s “No Quest.” The term “No Quest” referred to the upshot of skepticism after Albert Schweitzer ([1906] 1913:642),³ Martin Kähler ([1896] 1969:14),⁴ and Rudolf Bultmann ([1926] 1988:8-10). However, both Schweitzer and Bultmann would be misunderstood if they are viewed as scholars who did not search for the Jesus of history. The term “No Quest” is actually a misnomer if it is used to refer to Bultmann’s study of Jesus. In fact, the criteria for authenticity remained more or less the same during the “No Quest” and “New Quest” periods. What was “new” is that a gradual scale of continuity and/or discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith replaced skepticism (see Porter 2000:36-51).

Since the eighties of the twentieth century, scholars have increasingly become occupied with a kind of historical Jesus research that has been described as a paradigm shift (see James Robinson, cited by Borg 1991:2). Some systematic theologians refer to it as the *postmodern* quest of the historical Jesus (see Breech 1983, 1989). Studies that are intentionally “post-historical” in nature have also proliferated (see Hamilton 1994). The latter are however not the products of *historical* Jesus research, which is by definition historically bound. In 1984, Bernard Brandon Scott (cited by Borg 1988:284) referred to this development as follows: “the historical quest for the historical Jesus has ended; the interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus has just begun.” The

³ “Als ein Unbekannter und Namenloser kommt er zu uns, wie er am Gestade des Zees an jene Männer, die nicht wußten wer er war, herantrat” (Schweitzer 1913:642).

⁴ “Der sogenannte historische Jesus ist für die Wissenschaft nach dem Maßstabe moderner Biographie ein unlösbares Problem; denn die vorhandenen Quellen reichen nicht aus....” (Kähler 1969:14).

interdisciplinary aspect in this new development relates to the application of the results of archeological, sociohistorical, and cultural-anthropological studies to historical Jesus studies. But it does not mean that historical-critical research as such is now dismissed. According to Thomas Wright (1992:13) it only gives a “less artificial, historical flavour to the whole enterprise.” Wright (1988:379-403) labeled this undertaking the “Third Quest.” Wright also has his ideas about the appearance of this “shape.” He describes its main features this way:

One of the most obvious features of this “Third Quest” has been the bold attempt to set Jesus firmly into his Jewish context. Another feature has been that unlike the “New Quest,” the [proponents] have largely ignored the artificial pseudo-historical “criteria” for different sayings in the gospels. Instead, they have offered complete hypotheses about Jesus’ whole life and work, including not only sayings but also deeds. This has made for a more complete, and less artificial, historical flavour to the whole enterprise.

(Wright 1992:13)

These remarks were written in 1992, four years before he wrote in 1996 his *magnum opus, Jesus and the Victory of God*. In 1992, Wright thought that the period of the “New Quest” was over. Four years later he admitted that a “Renewed Quest” is still alive and well, and represents a survival of “the Bultmannian picture, with variations.” According to Wright, the image of Jesus, which has evolved out of this approach, is still preoccupied with the sayings of Jesus and not with his deeds – and this figure is a “deJudaized Jesus.”

The “method” by which the sayings are assessed operates according to Wright with “criteria” by means of which the historical authenticity of the sayings are tested in terms of its date and multiple, independent attestations. The assumption behind this method is that “smaller-scale decisions” with regard to prejudiced sayings in the gospels are selectively fitted into a “large hypothesis” of a particular “demythologized” picture of Jesus. In other words, such a Jesus preaches a message in which “a vertical eschatology” is re-interpreted as “horizontal” subversiveness, a socially and politically minded Jesus. Within this frame of reference, the crucifixion of Jesus was not a “theological” event

prior to the “resurrection.” The latter represents a “coming to faith, some time later, of a particular group of Christians.” Another “early” group of Christians was sapiental/gnostic oriented. They were only interested in the retelling of aphorisms of Jesus but were “uninterested in his life story.” The gospels, in an evolutionary fashion, developed gradually as these sayings of Jesus solidified and “gathered the moss of narrative structure about themselves,” whilst the “initial force of Jesus’ challenge was muted or lost altogether within a fictitious pseudo-historical framework” (Wright 1996:78-82).

The “Third Quest” and the “Renewed Quest” respectively represent the two sides of present-day historical Jesus research. Wright (1996:80) describes the latter as the *Wredebahn* and the first as the *Schweitzer-stream*, referring to the two opposite roads that the two giants, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and William Wrede (1859-1906), working in the beginning of the twentieth century, had taken with regard to the “historical status” of the Gospel of Mark. Wrede considered Mark’s gospel a theological treatise that already presents an apocalyptic interpretation of the historical Jesus, while Schweitzer’s basic position was that the apocalypticism found in Mark’s gospel represents also the context for Jesus. The *Wredebahn* leads to the search for Jesus hidden in the sources behind Mark and in other early documents like the Sayings Gospel Q and the Gospel of Thomas. Wright (1996:80) quotes Schweitzer from his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, saying that there is no third option, “*tertium non datur*,” and suggests that the time when the *Wredebahn* was a “helpful fiction” has now “come to an end.” Although Schweitzer used this Latin catchphrase as a conceptual reference to Jesus’ apocalyptic mind-set, Wright legitimately pulls it into the context of historical methodology. The result of the perception of Mark as primary source without considering methodologically so-called multiplying hypotheses about pre-Markan traditions led both Schweitzer and Wright to their conclusion.

Yet, for me there is a third option! It is not a middle-of-the-road stance but an interdisciplinary social scientific quest for the historical Jesus. When one compares the presuppositions that underlies the “New Quest” with those currently present in the “Renewed Quest” it becomes clear to me that scholars have put on a different thinking multicolored cap. The quest for the historical Jesus has become a historical-critical search within the framework of social scientific criticism. However, one has to keep in

mind that historical-critical criteria for the discernment of plausible authenticity are not as such social scientific methods or models. The social scientific approach serves rather as an addition to historical criticism.

A closer look at some of the similarities and differences between the assumptions with regard to the “New Quest” and the “Renewed Quest” confirm the historical-critical and social scientific interdisciplinary nature of the postmodern quest for the historical Jesus. The following assumptions describe the position of the “New Quest” (see Funk 1991:1-52):

- The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the gospel portraits of him.
- Traditions about Jesus were circulated by word of mouth for many years after Jesus’ death.
- The gospels are made up of layers or strata of tradition.
- Forty years elapsed after the death of Jesus before the first canonical gospel, Mark, was composed.
- Matthew and Luke each make use of additional material unknown to Mark, Q, and each other.
- The portrait of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel differs markedly from that drawn by the synoptics.
- Scholars cannot assume that the Greek text they have in modern critical editions is exactly the text penned by the evangelists.
- Jesus should be studied like other historical persons.
- Historians can approach but never achieve certainty in historical judgments on the probability principle.
- Historians measure the unknown by the known on the principle of analogy.
- The Kingdom of God was a central theme in the teachings of Jesus.
- There is a historical and material continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the kerygmatic Christ.

The following assumptions describe the position of the “Renewed Quest”:

- It is impossible to reconstruct past events, persons, contexts, and so on. These phenomena are constructed by scholars, using whatever material is available, and by applicable methods and models.
- The stratification of the layers in the Jesus tradition is of great importance for the construction of the historical Jesus.
- In judging the historical value of Jesus material with regard to separate witnesses, it is necessary to take into account genetic relationships and attestation.
- Only a few of the sayings of Jesus in the gospels were actually spoken by Jesus himself. However, the criterion of dissimilarity should be used with circumspection with regard to Jesus material.
- Jesus was neither a totally unique person nor a “Christian.” He was a first-century Israelite from Galilee.
- Historical research entails more than the application of the traditional historical-critical methods to the Jesus tradition. It also implies the study of the social world with the help of social scientific methods and models.
- The Kingdom of God was not necessarily an “eschatological” concept.
- The difference between modern societies and first-century Israelite factions in the eastern-Mediterranean world should be studied by applying social scientific methods to the sociohistorical phenomena of that period.
- The context of Jesus has to be studied from the perspective of a social system and not only from the individualistic perspective of ideas, persons, and events.
- The social world of Jesus is not studied for the sake of supplying background material, but in order to supply contexts for the interpretation of texts of a different nature.
- Palestine was fully hellenized in the first century and it is necessary to work out the implication of this for the study of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The Sayings Gospel Q and independent logia in the Gospel of Thomas make it possible to conceive of Jesus as a sage and healer and not as an “apocalyptic” impostor of a cataclysmic end of the world.

- Most written sources about the first-century eastern-Mediterranean world have been written from above, that is, from the perspective of the authorities and important people. In order to understand Jesus and his intentions, it is necessary to construct views from below and from the side.
- Postmodern critical scholarship is based on cooperation among specialists.

The similarities and differences between the assumptions listed above indicate a clear-cut shift between the “New Quest” and the “Renewed Quest.” It involves specifically the emphasis on sociohistorical aspects. To accept Thomas Wright’s invitation to busy oneself with a historical construct of Jesus’ “whole life” (in terms of the context of first-century Herodian Palestine), would hold out the offer of the possibility for a different christology and theology.

What I have in mind, is what Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey (1988:xi) refer to as a “christology from the side.” A “Jesus from above” describes the conciliar debates about Jesus as a figure who had descended from heaven and been incarnated on earth – a Jesus who has been confessed as “true God” and “true man.” A “Jesus from below” refers to modern biblical scholarship where the focus is squarely on the humanity of Jesus. And because both “christologies” represent a dialectic of vertical classification, this perspective on the person of Jesus is chiefly, if not exclusively, concerned with symbols of power or force. “Jesus from above” reflects Christian tradition only after the time of Constantine, when hierarchy became the expressive social structure, with power or force the primary concern. “Jesus from below” expresses twentieth-century concerns with the relationship between natural and supernatural, and the possibility of transcendence in a secular world. Both these views would be rather anachronistic for an adequate understanding of New Testament views on Jesus. Yet, within Christian groups before Constantine, the chief expressive social dimension for non-Roman and Roman non-elite Jesus groups was not vertical, but horizontal – “from the side.” 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.

3. CRITERIA ARE NOT METHODS OR MODELS

The application of different criteria in the process of distinguishing authenticity needs reflection, specifically, when such a historical-critical approach ignores the social contexts in which the analyzed literary units are embedded. Even the criterion of coherency needs to be adapted to our insights today concerning a responsible identification of a stratification of texts and the social world of the eastern Mediterranean. Content and context should fit together. Social history is central to postmodern historical Jesus research.

Historical-critical decisions are guided in particular by the criterion known as multiple independent attestation. This means that multiple independent written evidence has greater historical probability than either singular evidence or a plurality of interdependent literary evidence (see Borg 1999:12). In other words, evidence in independent documents such as Paul and Mark should be historically more seriously considered than evidence in Matthew and Luke, which was taken from Mark. Evidence independently reported in Matthew and John is also probably more historical than that of a single witness in Luke, for example. This does not mean that a single witness should be regarded as unauthentic. However, an argument for authenticity in such a case lacks historical proof, although the contents of the witness could cohere to the typical social world of the eastern-Mediterranean.

The historical-critical exegete takes into account that writers often amended material to suit their intentions and narrative structures. Such material and statements which clearly exhibit the literary preference of a particular writer and the characteristics of a post-Easter life situation often serve as directives toward those Jesus traditions that cannot historically be traced back to the oral period of 30-50 CE. Such editorial material can hardly be deemed authentic sayings or deeds of the historical Jesus.

This kind of historical research, applied to a search for Jesus, assumes that the followers of Jesus attributed or applied sagacity derived from their experience of life and the world to him. Suffice it to say that certain statements by Jesus clearly exhibit convictions characteristic of post-Easter Jesus groups. This is related to the phenomenon that some Jesus groups designed certain apologetic statements, which they attributed to Jesus, in order to oppose defamatory campaigns by opponents. This information assists

us in constructing a particular image of the historical Jesus that can be clearly distinguished from the images of Jesus found in the canonical and non-canonical gospels.

Thus, for example, Matthew represented Jesus in a way that conformed to the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). In doing so, he made use of messianic themes derived from a shared late first-century Hellenistic-Israelite context. In these writings Israel's messiah was depicted among other *images* as the coming Son of Man (see Van Aarde 1998:16-26), a figure who would inaugurate God's perfect kingdom when the despondent believers (seeing this human-like figure come from above) will be justified and rescued. In his representation of Jesus, Luke, in turn, used propaganda motifs that appeared in Greco-Roman stories about deities and in the emperor cult. It was presented in this way in spite of the fact that many of the traditions in the sources of this gospel originated in Israel and Roman Palestine. The Gnostic literature, on the other hand, located Jesus firmly within a heavenly realm entering into the earthly context only apparently human. In an interdisciplinary social scientific quest for the historical Jesus these "imaginative" experiences (see Malina [1989] 1996:179-214) can be studied from the social scientific perspective of altered consciousness.

In this investigation, from a postmodern interdisciplinary perspective, historical decisions are not covertly or overtly made depending on what modern people, within the context of the modern Western tradition, deem rationally possible or acceptable. Because of the grip that the natural sciences had on the spirit of the day since the Enlightenment, *knowing* can only result from *empirical* observation. However, at the time when the Bible was written empiricism was not the prevalent theory of knowing or truth. Contrary to biblical thought, to distinguish between a "supernatural" occurrence and a "natural" happening is a modern-day fabrication. Such a distinction is not valid in first-century Mediterranean culture (see Pilch 1996:134; Saler 1977:46). In the cultural context of first-century people in the area of the Mediterranean Sea, the primary distinction in this regard was between creator and creation. The latter included not only "experienced" things concerning humanity and its constituents, but also "imaginative experiences" concerning the world of God, angels, miracles, diviners, and magic, expressed by rituals and spells. These "spiritual" experiences led to a condition that may be called an *altered state of consciousness* (see Pilch 1993:231-244). Cultural associations and personality

types influence the particular nature of this condition. Without this insight from cultural psychology, rationally oriented people in the Western world today would be inclined toward an anachronistic understanding of the context of Jesus and of its peculiar consciousness which involved, among others, healing and resurrection experiences.

Cross-cultural anthropology helps us to discern between modern Western and ancient Mediterranean concepts. Social scientific studies consciously attempt to take seriously the distance between the ancient and the modern, and the consequent cultural differences. The postmodern quest for the *historical Jesus* is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature. From a literary point of view, relevant documents are read against the background of their chronological periods and respective contexts. The influence of Easter on the handing down of Jesus traditions should be taken into account. In the quest for the historical Jesus pre-Easter traditions are interpreted within typical situations in terms of a first-century, eastern-Mediterranean society.

In postmodern historical Jesus research literary, historical, and social contexts are considered in an integrative way. Postmodern thinking evolved as a critique on certain values of modernity (cf Appiah 1991:360-367). Postmodernism can, for instance, be seen as anti-foundational. No absolute truth and premise on which truth claims are based is regarded as *the* one and only starting point (see Adam 1995:5; cf West 1985, 1989). It is also anti-totalizing in the sense that no theory can provide the full and total answer to questions posed. Information contradicting a theory or providing another possible angle can always be found. If a theory claims to be “total”, it in effect means that the other possibilities that do exist have simply been disregarded or that criteria were designed to eliminate them. Postmodernism is demystifying in the sense that it questions the presuppositions that certain things are “natural” and others “unnatural” and can therefore be discarded, seen as untrue or marginalized. Generally accepted values that some things have been legitimated by, for instance God or the Bible, are questioned. These “natural” and “legitimate” values are exposed by postmodernism as concealing underlying ideological motives. Economic or political motives can be camouflaged by claims of universality or necessity (Adam 1995:5, 11). A “postmodern version of demystification” is a matter of “permanent criticism” and “self-reflexive critique” (McKerrow 1999:441).

No method can be purely “scientific” or “objective”. All interpretation is hermeneutical (see Adam 1995:41). Postmodern interpreters are therefore suspicious of modernist interpretations that are presented as “objective”. Postmodern interpretation is suspicious of hidden ideological interests, both of the biblical texts and of the interpreters. Take historiography as an example. Modern historicists strive for objectivity even though they realize that it cannot fully be attained. Postmodern historicists regard objectivity as unattainable and, therefore, a futile endeavor that is to be rejected from the outset. Any interpretation of an event in the past cannot be anything but a conglomeration of clues from the past and assumptions from the present about the past. What postmodern historicists strive for, is to understand the cultural currents of the world of the text, in other words the text within and as part of its context, and to be honest about their own constructs (Adam 1995:46-47). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2001:84) formulates it in this way:

Since social-scientific Historical-Jesus studies pride themselves being more scientific than other approaches because they engage in interdisciplinary work and use not only historiographical methods but also the approaches and theories of the social sciences such as anthropology, ethnography, or cultural sociology, it is important for them to look carefully at the genealogy of these disciplines as well as the social-cultural political contexts that have shaped them.

In other words, postmodernism as such does not favor social scientific criticism over against historical criticism. In our post-Enlightenment situation one cannot really escape the demand to think *historically*. The application of social scientific models in exegesis does not lead per se to postmodern hermeneutics. It is rather a matter of exposing oppressive values that underlie interpretation – whether a historical-critical style of interpretation or a style of cultural dialogue.

4. THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERION

In the early stages of historical Jesus research sayings of Jesus that reflected an Israelite environment were distinguished from a Greco-Roman one. The term environment refers

to the domestic, social, political, economic, agricultural, urban and religious structures. Jesus tradition that clearly reflects the convictions of the Jesus group in the Israelite as well as in the Greco-Roman environment has not been regarded as authentic Jesus sayings. This criterion was also called the criterion of dissimilarity (see Käsemann [1954] 1960:187-214; Jeremias 1960:12-25). Originally the criterion of dissimilarity was applied in such a way that authentic Jesus traditions were distinguished from, on the one hand, post-Easter “Christianity,” and on the other hand, “Judaism.”

The criteria by means of which can be distinguished between the pre-Easter Jesus and post-Easter “Christianity” have been very much refined since the 1980s. In this regard Theissen and Winter (1997) made an important contribution (cf Roloff 1999:54-58). In Part II of their book Dagmar Winter discusses the contributions of Wilhelm Bousset (1926), Rudolf Bultmann (1931) and James Charlesworth (1996) in order to point out:

- the “dissimilarity” between Jesus and “legalistic Judaism” (Bousset);
- Jesus as the “conclusion and fulfillment” (i.e., “conqueror”) of Judaism (Bultmann);
- and Jesus in “correspondence with Judaism”, but in distinction with “early Christianity” (Charlesworth) (see Roloff 1999:58).

Theissen’s contribution is that he replaced the “criterion of dissimilarity” with the “criterion of historical plausibility”. By doing so he pointed out that Jesus was in continuity as well as in discontinuity with the “Judaism” of his day. This kind of approach creates the possibility to describe and explain the vision of Jesus within the context of the “Judaism” of his time. Theissen uses the terms “Jesus’ Jewish world” and “Judaism” (see Roloff 1999:56).

This distinction opens up the possibility to apply what I refer to as the “environmental criterion”. This criterion can help to identify the similarities and differences, the continuity and discontinuity between the words and deeds of Jesus as sage and healer, and the scribal activity of the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem and that in Galilee and Syria. It is, in other words, not only about the “noncontradiction” between “Judaism” and “Hellenism”, but also about the similarities and differences between the historical Jesus who lived in a Galilean and Judean context, and the scribes among the Jesus groups who lived in a more Israelite or more Greco-Roman context. In this regard

insights into the domestic, social, political, economic, agricultural, urban and religious structures of the various environments help one to distinguish between the words and deeds of Jesus as teacher and healer from the interpretations of Jesus by scribes among the Jesus groups. These insights furthermore enable one to distinguish between a stage when scribes among the Jesus groups in an “institutional environment” institutionalized Jesus’ “charismatic authority” (see Dreyer 2000).

However, also the environmental criterion is not a social scientific model as such. One has to keep in mind that criteria are not methods or models. The application of criteria helps the historian to discern plausible historical authenticity by means of a chronological stratification of textual evidence. Such stratification is a construct on the basis of painstaking historical and literary research. Where such attestation is lacking, as in the case of the empty tomb tradition, historical research is still possible but then the relevant witnesses and those with regard to the experiences of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus will be subjected to the social scientific question: why and with which results did the particular tradition develop or was it enhanced at that particular point in time? The older criterion of coherence has thus been adapted so that sociological and cultural anthropological models (e.g., a model on the basis of the social scientific theory of altered consciousness) are used in a heuristic and expository fashion to contextualize the Jesus tradition within the first-century Mediterranean social world. The social context (or environment) of the historical Jesus needs to be described and explained in terms of a social scientific model in order to understand its social dynamics. On a high level of abstraction such an explanation of the historical Jesus could be seen as a description of a social ideal type.

5. A SOCIAL IDEAL TYPE

In constructing an ideal type of Jesus of Nazareth, I am not attempting to devise a record of concrete historical situations based on empirical data. According to Max Weber (1949:89-112), an ideal type is a theoretical construct in which possible occurrences 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 conceptualization that will not necessarily correspond with empirical reality. As a construct displaying a coherent image, the ideal type does influence the conditions of

investigations into 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 upon a selection from what is regarded as universally valid, in other words that which is common to all relevant cases of similar concrete situations of what could in reality have happened. It is therefore no logical-positivist choice based on either inductive or deductive reasoning.

In consciously using the social scientific model of an ideal type as the point of departure for my postmodern historical Jesus research, I am not, therefore, claiming that my historical Jesus construct as a sage and healer is based on what is common to all sages and healers in the first-century Galilean situation. That would amount to inductive historical reasoning. Neither is it based on what is common to most types of cases of sages and healers in the Galilean situation. That again would amount to deductive historical reasoning. The ideal type model enables one to concentrate on the most favorable cases.

6. CONCLUSION

What this means is that, in my investigation into the Jesus of history, I am focusing on the data that can lead to a better understanding and explanation of the total picture and of particular aspects of the total picture. This ideal type should be *historically* intelligible and explanatory. It should rely on contemporary canonical and non-canonical texts (including artifacts) that have to be *historical-critically* interpreted in terms of a chronological stratification of relevant documents. It should also *social scientifically* make sense within a social stratification of first-century Herodian Palestine.

Irrespective of the differences between Crossan and myself with regard to our constructs of the historical Jesus, methodologically seen, I remain in agreement with Crossan's fundamental principle with regard to the "interdisciplinary method" of the quest for the historical Jesus:

First, my method is interdisciplinary, applying anthropology, history, archeology, and literary criticism to the same subject. Second, it is interactive, involving the reciprocal interaction of those disciplines with one another. Third, it is hierarchical. Moving upward, as it were, from the first to

the last of those four disciplines. Fourth, and above all, it involves three stages that I code with the words context, text, and conjunction. Finally, my method begins not with text but with context.... The first stage establishes the sharpest possible reconstruction of the context. The second stage establishes the earliest possible layer of the tradition. The third stage establishes the tightest linkage between that context and that of the text.

(Crossan 1998:147)

If there is no conjunction between my constructed social context and my constructed historical Jesus data, I can at most speak of a social scientific quest for the Jesus of faith but not of an interdisciplinary social scientific quest for the *historical* Jesus. If I would like to add the attributive “postmodern” to my quest, both constructions need to be subjected to a hermeneutics of suspicion – and that includes a suspicion towards myself. However, my understanding of engaged hermeneutics is a subject for another paper.

Works consulted

- Adam, A K M 1995. *What is postmodern biblical criticism?* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Appiah, K A 1991. Is the “post” in postmodernism the “post” in “postcolonial”? *Critical Inquiry* 17, 360, 367.
- Barton, S C 1997. Social-scientific criticism, in Porter, S E (ed), *Handbook to the exegesis of the New Testament*, 277-289. Leiden: Brill.
- Borg, M J 1988. A renaissance in Jesus studies. *Theology Today* 45, 280-292.
- Borg, M J 1991. Portraits of Jesus in contemporary North American scholarship. *Harvard Theological Review* 84, 1-22.
- Borg, M J 1999. Seeing Jesus: Sources, lenses, and method, in Borg, M J & Wright, N T, *The meaning of Jesus: Two visions*, 3-14. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Bousset, W [1913] 1926. *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (ERLANT, NF 4.)

- Bultmann, R [1921] 1931. *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*. Zweite neubearbeitete Auflage. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck.
- Bultmann, R [1926] 1988. *Jesus*. Neuausgabe. Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Breech, J 1983. *The silence of Jesus: The authentic voice of the historical man*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.
- Breech, J 1989. *Jesus and postmodernism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Charlesworth, J H 1996. *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the place of Jesus in early Judaism*. New York, NY Crossroad.
- Craffert, P F 2001. Jesus van Nasaret as historiese figuur. *Fragmente: Tydskrif vir Filosofie en Kultuurkritiek* 7, 101-116.
- Crossan, J D 1998. *The birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Dawes, G W (ed) 1999. *The historical Jesus quest: Landmarks in the search for the Jesus of history*. Leiden: Deo Publishers.
- Dreyer, Y 2000. Institutionalization of authority and names used for Jesus. PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Elliott, J H 1993. *What is social-scientific criticism?* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress. (Guides to Biblical Scholarship.)
- Franzmann, M 1996. *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi writings*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Funk, R W 1991. Introduction: The problem of the historical Jesus, in Funk, R W & Smith, M H, *The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition*, 1-52. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge.
- Gottwald, N K 1979. *The tribes of Yahweh: A sociology of the religion of liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BC*. London: SCM.
- Hamilton, W 1994. *A quest for the post-historical Jesus*. New York: Continuum.
- Herion, G A 1986. The impact of modern and social science assumptions on the reconstruction of Israelite history. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, 3-33.
- Jeremias, J 1960. Der gegenwärtige Stand der Debatte um das Problem des historischen Jesus, in Ristow, H. & Matthiae, K. (Hrsg), *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus*, 12-25. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

- Kähler, M [1896] 1969. *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*. Neuherausgegeben von E. Wolf. 4.Auflage. München: Kaiser Verlag. (TB Band 2, Systematische Theologie.)
- Käsemann, E [1954] 1960. Das Problem des historischen Jesus, in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Erster Band, 187-214. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck. [Originally published in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 51, 125- 153.]
- Malina, B J & Neyrey, J H 1988. *Calling Jesus names: The social value of labels in Matthew*. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge.
- Malina, B J [1989] 1996. Christ and time: Swiss or Mediterranean?, in Malina, B J, *The social world of Jesus and the Gospels*, 179-214. London: Routledge.
- Mandelbaum, M 1977. *The anatomy of historical knowledge*. Baltimore, Vi: John Hopkins University Press.
- McKerrow, R 1999. Contemporary rhetorical theory: A reader, in Lucaites, J L, Celeste, M C & Sally, C (eds), *Critical rhetoric: Theory and practice*, 441-463. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Meier, J P 1994. *A marginal Jew: Rethinking the historical Jesus, Vol 2: Mentor, message, and miracles*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Pilch, J J 1993. Visions in Revelation and altered consciousness: A perspective from Cultural Anthropology. *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 28(3), 231-244.
- Pilch, J J 1996. Altered states of consciousness: A “kitbashed” model. *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26(3), 133-138.
- Porter, S E 2000. *The criteria for authenticity in historical-Jesus research: Previous discussion and new proposals*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. (JSNT Supplement Series 191.)
- Robinson, J M 1983. *A New Quest of the historical Jesus and other essays*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.
- Rogerson J W 1989. Anthropology and the Old Testament, in Clements, R E (ed), *The world of ancient Israel: Sociological anthropological and political perspectives*, 17-31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roloff, J 1999. The question of criteria in Jesus research: From dissimilarity to plausibility. *Review of Theological Literature* 1(1), 54-58.
- Saler, B 1977. Supernatural as a Western Category. *Ethos* 5, 31-53.

- Schüssler Fiorenza, E 2001. *Jesus and the politics of interpretation*. New York: Continuum.
- Schweitzer, A [1906] 1913. *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. Zweite, neu bearbeitete und vermehrte Auflage des Werkes Von Reimarus zu Wrede. Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Schweitzer, A [1913] 1948. *The psychiatric study of Jesus: Exposition and criticism*, translated and with an introduction by C.R. Joy, and a foreword by W. Overholser. Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Theissen, G [1975] 1979. Die soziologische Auswertung religiöser Überlieferungen: Ihre methodologischen Probleme am Beispiel des Urchristentums, in *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, 35-54. Tübingen: Mohr. (WUNT 19.)
- Theissen, G & Winter, D 1997. *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Von Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus.)
- Van Aarde, A G 1998. Matthew 27:45-53 and the turning of the tide in Israel's history. *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28(1), 16-26
- Via, D O 2002. *What is New Testament theology?* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress. (Guides to Biblical Scholarship. New Testament Series.)
- Weber, M 1949. *Max Weber on the methodology of the social sciences*, translated and edited by E.A. Shils & H.A. Finch. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- West, C 1985. The politics of American neo-pragmatism, in Rajehman, J & West, C (eds), *Post-analytic philosophy*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- West, C 1989. *The American evasion of philosophy*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Wilson, R R 1984. *Sociological approaches to the Old Testament*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.
- Wright, N T 1992. *Who was Jesus?* London/Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK/Eerdmans.
- Wright, N T 1996. *Christian origins and the question of God, Vol. 2: Jesus and the victory of God*. London: SPCK.
- Wright N T & Neill, S 1988. *The interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, 379-403. New York: Oxford University Press.