

# From Apocalyptic to Sage

## Paradigms of Jesus in the 20th Century

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Within the field of New Testament studies one might say that the 20th century was framed by the publication in 1906 of Albert Schweitzers account of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung: Von Reimarus zu Wrede*<sup>1</sup> and by the publication in 1993 of *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*.<sup>2</sup> From Schweitzer and the history-of-religions school to the Jesus Seminar and the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus — thus runs one significant trajectory of New Testament scholarship in the past century. In this paper I shall try to point out some of the more important stages of this trajectory and comment on their position within a broader history of theology and culture.

### Albert Schweitzer and the Historical Jesus

In 1913 Schweitzer re-edited his book under the title: *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu Forschung*. The *Leben-Jesu Forschung* or the First Quest for the Historical Jesus was originally an Enlightenment project, based on mistrust in the dogmatism of the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, and mistrust in the Bible which was seen as superstitious and mythological. But in the last

decades of the 19th century this rationalistic criticism was made part of the new historical-critical paradigm of Biblical scholarship. The Bible was to be studied as ancient literature, and as the source for a historical understanding of the origins of Christianity, not as a theological or dogmatic textbook. This new paradigm was of course met with strong resistance from more conservative scholars and theologians, but in reality it was just as apologetical as it was critical. It was part of the great vision of liberal theology seeking to harmonize Christianity and modern civilization. To understand the biblical writings as ancient literature was also to pardon the mythological world view and the inconsistencies within these writings. They mirrored the conditions of their time; but in addition they were also writings reflecting the genius of Jesus. It was the goal of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* to comprehend the true timeless aspect of this genius. Based on a historical-critical understanding the modern scholar was able to liberate Jesus from the misunderstandings of his contemporaries and of the Church theologians and present him as a true modern figure. Jesus was way ahead of his time, but in modern civilization the conditions for understanding his humane and divine message were present. This message was primarily a moral message aiming at the perfection of man's civil and personal behaviour. The true human society was the Kingdom of God, and the progress of modern society brought the realisation of this Kingdom within reach.

Schweitzer's criticism of this quest for the modern historical Jesus was devastating. The

<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, Tübingen 1906. 2. ed. *Geschichte der Leben Jesu Forschung*, Tübingen 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Funk et al. (eds.), *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, New York 1996.

image it painted of Jesus was far from historical. Schweitzer launched what became the classical criticism of historical Jesus research, i.e. that it was a projection of the scholar's own moral and civilizational ideal. What the Jesus-scholar painted was not a portrait of the ancient Jesus of the 1st century, but a portrait of a Jesus conspicuously fitting the demands of the late 19th century: the ideal modern man. But why could not Jesus be the ideal modern man? The criticism of projection was not in itself a convincing counter argument; if Schweitzer had to abandon this modern <historical> Jesus it was because he had found another Jesus who was anything but modern. Schweitzer was convinced that he himself was able to see Jesus as the historical figure he had really been. It was not so much a choice between a historical or a non-historical Jesus as it was a choice between one historical Jesus and other ones. And the Jesus figure that Schweitzer had in mind was the better one, because he was not modern, and therefore could not be suspected of projection.

Schweitzer's historical Jesus was apocalyptic; he was a preacher of the imminent end of the world and the creation of a new world where God would reign over his righteous people, so therefore he was also a preacher of conversion and a moral behaviour that was more fitting in the next world than in this one. The Kingdom of God according to the message of Jesus was quite the opposite of progress and civilization; it was a message of the end to civilization and of judgement on all human effort. This Jesus was as far removed from modern man as imaginable according to Schweitzer. And more than that, he was mistaken, for the end of the world did not come, the world was still standing. So the truly historical Jesus was no standard for modern Christians; they had to interpret the message of the New Testament according to new demands in another age.

Schweitzer's image of Jesus was of course not an invention of his own; it was a result of the progress of scholarship within the historical-critical paradigm itself as manifested in the so-called *history-of-religions* school whose most prominent representative within New Testament studies was Johannes Weiss. By way of comparative studies of the New Testament and other

religious writings of the period, the understanding of early Christianity changed dramatically. It now seemed that Christianity was not a unique religious phenomenon, rather it looked very much like other movements in Judaism and Hellenism. The concept of the Kingdom of God was very close to visions and ideas found in Jewish apocalyptic writings; and the Pauline Christianity was to be seen as another Hellenistic mystery cult. So instead of maintaining the liberal Jesus, historical studies undermined him; to a comparative history-of-religions view Jesus was so much a figure of his time that it seemed difficult for a modern human being to find much of relevance in his gloomy, apocalyptic end-of-the-world preachings. This historical Jesus was really a figure of the past, and therefore could not be suspected of modern projection.

Or so it seemed at the time; for now, nearly a hundred years later, we can see that this apocalyptic Jesus had more in common with the new period than his partisans could have been aware of. They were experiencing not only a *fin de siècle*, but the end of a whole epoch based on a long period of peace and progress; the epoch of industrial optimism was being met with spleen and nihilism by the more sensitive artists and scholars. The decadence of symbolistic poetry was almost as apocalyptic as the Jewish apocalypses of antiquity, although it knew nothing of the hopes of ancient apocalypticism. The First World War came not only as a sudden interruption of continuous progress; it came as the logical culmination of a culture that had exhausted its potentialities, so that the melting down in collective bloodshed was almost felt like a relief. Into this epochal picture I am afraid that the apocalyptic Jesus of Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss fits very well, meeting the demand for an anti-ideal Jesus that might articulate the desperate hours of the breakdown of the great liberal cultural synthesis. I do not think that the apocalyptic Jesus in the very direct way was a projection of the imagination or desires of Schweitzers and the history-of-religions scholars; but I think that he was the Jesus that fitted into the changing of the times, and that it was the time bound sensibility of the scholars that enabled them to find this Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament.

## From Bultmann to the Second Quest

After the First World War there was a huge effort to re-create a European culture almost from bottom; the different spheres tried to redefine themselves as nothing but themselves. The theatre was to be theatrical, not mimetic; painting was to be pictorial, colors and shapes, instead of motif; the study of language had to be linguistic and structural, not historical or psychological; and the study of theology had to be theological, not anthropological — this was of course the programme of *dialectical theology*, which was part of this great endeavour to redefine and thereby recreate a trustworthy European culture. At first Bultmann was the most ardent partisan of this new beginning within theology and exegesis. But he was also a historical scholar of New Testament and even more critical regarding the Quest for the historical Jesus than Schweitzer had been. From Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus he took over what was eschatological, but left Jesus behind. From the point of view of Bultmann there was no possible historical recognition of Jesus, since the sources in the New Testament had all been shaped by the belief in his Messiahship and resurrection; they were all post-Easter writings and therefore no valid gateways to a real Jesus of history.

Bultmann was one of the pioneers of a new method in New Testament studies: *Form criticism*. The basic assumption was that the small units of the Gospels, the pericopes, had led a life of their own in the oral tradition before they were written down. In the oral tradition they had been shaped, transformed, and even created by changing needs and expectations. One had to reckon with different kinds of uses in different kinds of circumstances, from missionary preaching to post-baptismal education, from discussions with Jews and other opponents to esoteric teaching and moralizing. What we read in the New Testament Gospels therefore does not mirror the deeds and sayings of the historical Jesus, but the changing needs and circumstances of the tradition process of formative Christianity; the traditions were sources of the belief in Jesus within the first and second generations of Christians, but not of Jesus in his own life before his crucifixion and resurrection. The Gospels

were legendary and cultic literature going back to the nascent church; they were not historical documents leading us back to what happened in the life of Jesus. With this methodological background Bultmann had to be very sceptical about any possibility of a historical recognition of Jesus. But this served his theological agenda just as well. Our relationship to God was not to be jeopardized by its being tied up with an ever changing and relative historical knowledge; it had to be based on personal belief. Only the personal decision to believe was matching the absoluteness of God. Therefore it was no weakness but a «sachgemäss» strength that the writings of the New Testament bear witness to the belief in Jesus, not to a historical Jesus from before he was believed.

In the endeavour to recreate a truly *theological* theology dialectical theology had abandoned humanness; but where was one to lay the basis of this renewed theology if not in human belief? One party chose to maintain an absolute revelation as its basis, but the absoluteness of revelation was no objective fact so in the end one had to return to human belief. Bultmann was ready to follow that consequence and so he departed from the «revelation positivists» and established an alternative theology based on *existentialist* anthropology. Man was the only given thing and he created his world by choosing it. Belief was a decision to live in a world defined by the belief. One could not escape this circularity, which was the only way absoluteness could exist in an objective world of relativities; thus it had also to be the basis of theology. Moreover, this existentialist dialectics of the relative and the absolute was the perfect match for a modern interpretation of the eschatology of the New Testament. This original, ancient eschatology was of course bound to an apocalyptic mythological world view; it was based on the expectation of a future but imminent end of the world, to be taken literally: This world was to disappear probably through cosmic disasters to give way to a new creation meant for the elect righteous believers. In modern time this mythological world view had long since disappeared; but man's relationship to a future that is unknown and uncertain, yet has an end as certain as death, was not so different. Man's existence is

an endless series of projections towards a future that at any time may be — and at one time will be — the definite, all-ending future. In the futurity of existence we have the basis of an «existential interpretation» of eschatology — here eschatology does not mean the future end of the world, but man's constant confrontation with the transcendent. Seen in this way eschatology is one way to formulate and bring to an understandable expression man's life in a world of relativities which also always borders on the ultimate absoluteness. So Bultmann's demythologizing and existential interpretation separated eschatology and apocalyptic mythology as distinctively as form criticism had separated belief in Jesus from the historical Jesus. Eschatology was an existential condition and therefore a means to interpret the New Testament message for modern man. Jesus on the other hand was a figure of the past to which we have no access; and if we had, he would be disappointingly foreign, belonging to the religious history of ancient Judaism.

Bultmann had a tremendous influence on New Testament studies and theology in general both before and after the Second World War. Form criticism became the dominant method; and hermeneutics and New Testament interpretation were the names of the game in German theology. In the field of methods *redaction criticism* took over as the dominant tool within New Testament exegesis after the War; but redaction criticism was more like a supplement to form criticism than an alternative. It took the Gospels even further away from the historical Jesus than form criticism, since it saw each Gospel as a theological creation of the individual evangelist, thus adding a further *Sitz im Leben* to that of the oral tradition process. On the other hand, redaction criticism meant a return to the Gospels as coherent stories, while form criticism had focused on the small units. Form criticism and/or dialectical theology had launched a fierce attack on the Jesus-biographies of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, and the Gospels had been caught in the fire. They were not allowed to be seen as biographies; they were cult-legends and «*Kleinliteratur*» outside the genres of the ancient literary system. Nevertheless, they told the story of Jesus from his birth or his baptism to his death

and resurrection; they might not be historical sources, but they were stories of a life. No one in German theology dreamt of denying that they were first and foremost kerygmatic proclamations of Jesus the Messiah; but the proclamations took the form of a biography. Redaction critical scholars were more focused on the war between different traditions and interpretations, which they thought were played out in the Gospels. But they rehabilitated the reading of the Gospels as coherent stories, and the Jesus of these stories could not be irrelevant to the proclamation of his Messiahship. At least, that was the argument of some of Bultmann's best known pupils who dared reopen the question of the historical Jesus. They succeeded in reopening the question, but they did not succeed in finding the historical Jesus. Their main argument was that since the Gospels tell the story of the earthly Jesus they must be keys to the historical Jesus. But this was of course a methodological mistake. The earthly Jesus of the Gospels is not historical, he is literary; he is a creation of the gospel-telling evangelists. The Gospels were still not documents that could substantiate a real historical Jesus, and the Second Quest was more of a theological demand than an exegetical answer. New Testament studies had come to a standstill; new methods were needed to open up for new insights and interpretations.

### Third Quest (1): The Jewish Jesus

A major shift in New Testament studies took place about 1970. A whole series of new methods and perspectives were introduced; most often they came from Europe, but they were turned loose on Biblical scholarship in America. Two main trends of methods and perspectives can be distinguished: one literary and one social scientific. In certain ways the literary studies continue the existential interpretation of the Bultmann era; they endeavour to make the writings relevant to modern readers, although through other biases than Bultmannian existentialism. In their capacity of being literature the New Testament writings create narrative universes in which the imagination of modern readers will also be able to habitate. In this way the earthly Jesus of the gospel stories becomes a

model of imagination that may still very well be eschatological — so long as the end of the world is a feature of the narrative world. This is the more post-modern option. The modernist option is the social scientific search for the historical Jesus once more — the so-called *Third Quest*.

Two aspects differentiate this Quest from the first two ones: social contextuality and Jewishness. In the first two Quests Jesus was seen as an outstanding, singular figure; this was expressed in the so-called criterion of dissimilarity. Only features that could not be found either in contemporary Judaism or in the early church were recognized as genuine Jesus-material. Taken rigorously, the criterion is almost absurd in its minimalism. Even if one was able to construct a coherent picture of Jesus based on such dissimilarities, this picture would be completely non-historical, since historicity is the interaction of contemporary persons, institutions, events, beliefs and so on, in one word: context. In this respect the new Quest is very wise in replacing the criterion of dissimilarity by a criterion of contextuality. Therefore Third Quest Jesus-scholars do not abstract Jesus from tradition, but they reconstruct a vast context of ancient economy, social stratification, structures of patrons and clients, conflicts between landowners and farmers, villages and cities and so forth. And into that reconstructed picture of ancient society they insert Jesus, and all that fits they tend to regard as historical. Most Jesus-scholars are not satisfied, however, to reconstruct *an* ancient society, since Jesus was part of the much more specific Jewish society with its very special behaviour, conflicts and concerns. The new historical Jesus is first and foremost a Jewish Jesus. This is also quite novel, since it was taken for granted by the first Quests that Christianity emerged due to a break with Judaism, and also that this break must have been occasioned by Jesus himself. But after *Holocaust* no serious New Testament scholar would dare suggest that Christianity had ever been anything but a Judaism. The new Jesus-Quest is a very important part of this post-Holocaust scholarship. But this is of course far from an explanation of the most surprising feature of all in the new Quest: the shift from an apocalyptic to a wisdom Jesus.

The first important move towards a new Quest was made by Gerd Theissen in his small book *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*<sup>3</sup> from 1977. It was meant as an introduction to a social scientific understanding of the original movement centered around Jesus. Theissen was very prudent not to say anything about the historical Jesus, only about the collective phenomenon: the Jesus-movement. This was seen as an inner-Jewish renewal movement trying to overcome the devastating conflicts that haunted the Jewish society: struggles for power, for control of the land and its crops, and control of the minds of the people. Where other Jewish renewal movements sought to strengthen the Jewishness, the Jesus-movement aimed at reconciliation. Theissen's book was not on Jesus, but it might have been, for what was said about the Jesus-movement could probably also be said about Jesus. The later development of Theissen's Jesus-research confirms this impression.<sup>4</sup> Theissen was not the only one to introduce social scientific methods into Gospel and Jesus-research; it was like a new wave, which was of course part of the greater movement in all of the humanities towards political and social consciousness in the 70's. After the personal and individual Jesus of the existentialist period now followed a series of images of Jesus as a political figure with a social programme defending farmers and villagers against the exploitation by Roman colonists and Jewish elite. This wave has been the most explicitly Jewish of the new Quest, also seeking to understand the social and political logic of Jesus' execution. For the most part this political Jesus remained eschatological, hoping for and trying to establish a true theocracy in the Jewish society. But it was no longer the all-destructive apocalyptic eschatology of Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss; it was more in line with the now popular theology-of-hope formulated by Jürgen Moltmann in accordance with the Utopian marxist Ernst Bloch. In this vision eschatology was like a horizon of hope beyond realistic

<sup>3</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, München 1977 (Danish translation, *Jesus-bevægelsen og dens sociale baggrund*, Copenhagen 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der Historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*, Göttingen 1996.

expectations, a «counter-factual» world of hope that nevertheless was able to inspire and conduct actions and behaviour in this world in accordance with the eschaton rather than with the realities. So the political Jesus was still in this new way an eschatological Jesus.

### Third Quest (2): The Wisdom Jesus

In American scholarship of the 80's an entirely new vision appeared, that of a Jesus more in line with the surrounding Hellenistic culture than with the specific Jewish concerns of his time. This was part of a softening up of boundaries, which had hitherto been taken for granted. When I was a student we were told that there was a great gulf between the Hellenistic world and the Biblical world, and that Christianity meant a decisive break with Judaism. Today we teach our students that originally Christianity was a sectarian movement within Judaism, i.e. Christianity is a Judaism; and that Judaism itself was thoroughly Hellenized, i.e. Judaism of antiquity was a Hellenism. Therefore there is no contradiction in maintaining that Jesus was a Hellenized figure and at the same time that he was a typically Jewish figure. On the other hand: Jesus, the Hellenized Jew, is quite another figure than Jesus, the political Jew. In 1985 a group of academic, critical North American Jesus-scholars formed the Jesus Seminar. They met regularly to discuss the authenticity of the words of Jesus as found in the Gospels. And then they voted on the authenticity of these words. This was of course a rather peculiar way of doing scholarly research. It has been met with wonder and laughter in European circles. But the aim was to publish a book presenting the results, therefore a decision had to be made. On the other hand, this publishing of the results was a decision made by the Jesus Seminar itself; no one had asked them to do so, or, indeed, forced them. I think that the Jesus Seminar was designed to attract public interest, e.g. the interest of the medias, and that the voting was a very important part of the game in this respect. The Jesus Seminar wanted to communicate an academic, scholarly view on the Bible to an American public that is dominated by conservative or rather fundamentalistic views of the Bible to a degree that Europeans can hardly

grasp. And the strategy has succeeded, the Jesus Seminar with its votings and its colour-print of the Jesus-words has attracted great interest in American medias — and has been met with widespread opposition and suspicion. But again: a bad press is better than no press.

Anyhow, in 1993 the Jesus Seminar published its results in *The Five Gospels*. (The fifth Gospel, by the way, is the Gospel of Thomas that has hereby attained an almost canonical status). The reading of *The Five Gospels* is very interesting, not because we now have an authoritative decision on the authenticity of the words of Jesus. Of course we have not; what we have is a picture of the dominant opinion of major North American Jesus-scholars at the end of the 20th century. And their opinion is quite surprising to an exegete brought up in the European/German tradition. Only 18 % of the Jesus-words are printed in red or pink, which means that they have been voted authentic or probably authentic; a surprisingly small percentage to the American public, and a surprisingly great percentage to a European scholar. But even more interesting is the character of the red/pink words; no apocalyptic or eschatological words are included; no Kingdom-of-God words; no political or social-reformation words; no words from the passion narrative; all the words in red or pink are wisdom words — especially the words of the so-called pronouncement stories. This reflects the dominant view on the historical Jesus in contemporary American scholarship; according to this view, Jesus is best seen as a teacher of wisdom. The kind of wisdom, that Jesus was teaching and practicing, however, was not the well-known conventional wisdom of accepting the way things are in life and society; it was an alternative wisdom criticizing the state of affairs in society and expressing a vision of a better and more humane life. It was not a preaching of political action, of the ultimate take-over of God, or of the final judgement on sinners and oppressors. It was a teaching of personal independence and freedom, of an un-condemning morale, and of a generous trust in God. It seems to me that this Jesus at the end of the 20th century is the Jesus of political correctness.

But how did this transformation of an eschatological Jesus into a wisdom Jesus come

about, scholarly speaking? Exegetically, it is based on a renewed interest in American scholarship in the so called *Q*, the hypothetical common source of the gospels of Matthew and Luke besides Mark. This is an old hypothesis of German scholarship; it was supposed to contain only words of Jesus, not a story of his life, not even a passion narrative. *Q* has had many defenders, but also many critics who doubted the possible existence of a writing of this non-narrative kind. But the discovery in the 40's of the gnostic library in Nag Hammadi in Egypt also brought to light a coptic translation of the Gospel of Thomas, whose existence was known from old documents, but which had never been found. It appeared that this Gospel was a sayings-gospel, just like *Q* had been supposed to be. *Q* and the Gospel of Thomas are not the same writings; but the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas has confirmed the existence of such a genre, a sayings-gospel, and this has strengthened the belief in *Q*. The more so that American scholars have not only reconstructed the wording of *Q*; they have also managed — or so they maintain — to find different layers of tradition in the reconstructed *Q*. And a convincing argument can be made that the wisdom words belong to an older layer of tradition than the apocalyptic words.

This is of course quite hypothetical; but there is a certain logic and historical probability in the distribution of wisdom and apocalypticism on pre-Easter, historical Jesus on the one side and post-Easter church on the other. One has, namely, to consider the meaning and function of apocalypticism. To do so briefly: *Apocalypticism* presupposes a situation of «cognitive dissonance»; not necessarily a crisis in the outer world, but a mental crisis where beliefs on one side and worldly experiences on the other clash. In such a situation the revelation of another world — which is the essence of apocalypticism — may save the threatened world view. In the perspective of another, heavenly world the negative experiences of this world are seen not to be the last words; in due time God will intervene and straighten things out, beliefs will be confirmed and hardships vindicated. If, for the sake of argument we accept that Jesus was a sage, there was probably no room for this kind of world-

transforming revelations in his world. It was to be transformed by human behaviour. But after the death of Jesus, after the horrible and unjust humiliation and public execution of their leader, his followers must have felt a cognitive dissonance of world shattering dimensions. And they had to live on in this miserable world that not only did not live up to the expectations of Jesus, but persecuted and ill-treated his adherents; indeed, and this was the most important of all, they had to live on in a world where Jesus was no longer present. They might choose either to abandon their belief in Jesus, or to recast their understanding of the world in apocalyptic, world-transforming visions and expectations. The apocalypticism of the Jesus-tradition could therefore be seen as part of the post-Easter myth-making which tried to work out the meaning of his frightening fate, even though he himself had not been an apocalyptic.

### Third Quest (3): The Jesus for Our Time

I shall not deny that this is a hypothesis within the limits of historical probability; on the other hand I myself find it hard to understand why Jesus was crucified if he was only a teacher of wisdom, even if this was an alternative wisdom. I find it more probable that he would have been felt to be a threat to those in power, if he was a partisan of political or social reform or if he was a preacher of imminent apocalyptic disasters. But in the end I do not believe at all that we are able to establish a trustworthy historical picture of Jesus; in this respect I am a Bultmannian sceptic. But the interesting, remaining question is why the apocalyptic Jesus was felt to be a convincing image of Jesus at the beginning of the century and why the non-apocalyptic wisdom-Jesus seems to be the convincing image at the end of the century. I have already tried to picture the spleenish cultural situation that fitted the apocalyptic Jesus. The wisdom-Jesus seems much more in line with the *Leben-Jesu*-images of the liberal theology; and it is not hard to find similarities between the situation of western societies in our age and in that of the end of the 19th century. We too have experienced a long period of peace and prosperity; especially after

the downfall of Communism we are no longer confronted with serious military or political threats; we are confident in our abilities and most of the time we are satisfied with our lives — although they may be a bit stressed. Life could of course be even better, if we were not such slaves of conventions and social censorship or if we were more open to spiritual perspectives. In this perspective Jesus, the teacher of an alternative wisdom, is just the Jesus for our time. He is the Jesus of personal fulfillment rather than social action.

The liberal Jesus of the 19th century, however, was part of a programme, so to speak. The Kingdom of God had not yet been achieved, but it was within reach, and Jesus was showing us the way. It was a programme aiming at a collective effort for a civilised, humane society. The wisdom-Jesus of the late 20th century is perhaps part of a personal programme, but not of a vision of civilisational progress. Wisdom by its very definition is above time; it concerns the individual in a timeless understanding of world and society. The situation within theology at the end of this century resembles the situation at the end of the 19th century; we want to see Christianity as part of culture in a broader sense and we want theology to act within this broader cultural context. But whereas the liberal synthesis of culture and Christianity was also a synthesis of individual and social concerns, it seems that this unity has been broken in our time. If we look back over the last 30 years, we can see that these concerns have alternatively dominated theology and exegesis. In the 70's and first part of the 80's

social concern was predominant whereas individual concerns have been at the center of theology as well as of culture by large for the last 15 years. It seems as if the liberal synthesis was split up into its social and individual parts and distributed first into an image of Jesus as political activist and then into an image of Jesus as teacher of a personally liberating wisdom. If this is so, the eschatological Jesus who dominated the first 70 years of the 20th century would seem to be an isolated incident in the longer history of Jesus interpretations; this end-of-the-world Jesus reflects a theology that wanted to understand itself in opposition to culture and humanism, a sort of desperado-theology reminiscent of the cultural breakdown of the first decades of the century. And the political as well as the wisdom Jesus would seem to be in continuity with the more normal trend of theological history which presupposes a Christian culture and/or a cultural Christianity. If the detour of eschatology and apocalypticism has had any impact on the new Jesus-images it will be the inclination to see Jesus as a representative of an anti-Establishment attitude — be it political or personal. On the other hand, the eschatological detour has left a permanent mark on New Testament studies, since hardly any scholar would be able to deny the existence of eschatological material in the New Testament; what is open for discussion is the pertinence of this material to the understanding of Christian origins. This is a fight still to fought; and some of us may still be more desperados than sages.

