Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift. Årg. 87 (2011)

Bringing Out of the Treasure What is New and Old

Trajectories in New Testament Research Today

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1. Introduction: New Testament Study in Context

"Don't let the past dictate who you are, but let it be part of who you become." This quote is not from Marcel Proust, Simone Weil, or Nathan Söderblom, but from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, an American[1] movie released some years ago. The film humorously wrestles with the problem of ethnic identity and the merging of cultures as love brings people together in a way that utterly and provocatively disregards their respective backgrounds. The quote nicely captures, I believe, much of what is happening today in the field of New Testament studies, particularly the tensions between what is old and what is new, and the struggle to advance knowledge in the midst of a rapidly changing—and shrinking—world.

While increasing specialisation tends to isolate individual areas of research from each other, and while the steady stream of new studies published at an unprecedented speed may blind us to our connectedness with history and the world that surrounds us, it must be emphasised that no academic discipline is an island. We are all linked together with countless threads, both to our field's history *and* to our contemporary neighbours in the academy and in society. On the one hand, any survey of research would show that, already from the very origins of our discipline, what we do within the academy is very much influenced by circumstances and attitudes in society. On the other hand, it is equally true that what happens within academia feeds back into society and changes it. This influence brings responsibility. In New Testament studies today, this dialectic relationship between society and academy is more important than ever to keep in mind, especially in light of recent developments of globalisation in our field. Consequently, keeping the future of our field in mind, it is of some importance to remind ourselves where we are, how we got here, and in which ways what we do now is the result of previous and contemporary developments. Such an exercise in collective memory may prove helpful as we proceed into what is, in all likelihood, the birth of a new era in the study of the New Testament.

The present essay will, therefore, address the current situation in the field of New Testament studies from the perspective of how it relates to what surrounds us diachronically and synchroni-

[1] The writer is, however, Canadian; the movie was shot in Toronto and Chicago, and was released in 2002.

cally. In order best to capture key developments, it is not enough to dwell on topics and themes that have become especially popular and influential as of late. Rather, we need to pay special attention also to methodological advances and, perhaps even more, to significant changes in perspective, i.e., to discussions about *how and why* we see—not only *what* we see—when we engage in our exegetical undertakings.

Due to the space constraints of a journal article, it is impossible to present a complete picture of the situation. So much has happened in the last number of decades in terms of methodological developments as well as in shifting consensuses regarding what we now think we know. Multiple works that list and discuss such developments in some detail already exist. In order to orient the reader in these exegetical advances I have included at the end of the present article an annotated bibliography of studies that are helpful for attaining an overview, covering topics like hermeneutics, methodology, postcolonialism, and feminism. In the following, however, I shall select only a few key trajectories within the field which specifically highlight aspects of our interconnectedness with history and the world around us in order to suggest strategies for creatively continuing to expand and reinvent New Testament exegesis as an academic discipline in the future.[2]

We shall proceed in three steps. First, we will look at contemporary trajectories from a diachronic perspective in order to reveal the present-ness of the past in our modern and postmodern approaches within a larger epistemological frame. This will give us perspectives on the box within which we think. Then, we will move to a more synchronic perspective and take a closer look at a selection of key topics currently engaging New Testament scholars worldwide. This section will locate our field between yesterday and tomorrow, beginning with one of the oldest topics in the history of modern New Testament studies, the historical Jesus, and ending with what promises to be an unending task, reception history. The idea that our field, in all its diversity, may be described as a mosaic will be problematised as a yet unfulfilled dream. Finally, we shall conclude with a few words on the present and the future, on complexities and opportunities within our field.

2. The Present Past of Current Trajectories: Notes on the Box in which We Think

Postcolonial scholar Fernando Segovia has described the development of our discipline in three basic periods, the third being the status of the field in the current moment: 1) Historical criticism (ca. 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries); 2) literary criticism and socio-cultural criticism (mid-20th century); 3) cultural studies.[3] It is easy from such a periodisation to get the impression of a development in which one period replaces the other and scholars proceed as if stepping on a ladder. Indeed, referring to hegemonic oppression following with old paradigms, some scholars would claim that this is both what is, and what should be, happening.

But what we see today within New Testament studies cannot (yet) be understood as one paradigm replacing another. Gender studies and postcolonialism, for example, are perspectives rather than methods in a strict sense: under these umbrellas we find several methodologies applied, including refined historical-critical work. Indeed, many New Testament scholars today combine in a single investigation several methods from all of the stages listed by Segovia. Insights from narrative criticism may be used together with historical methodology, and socio-historical investigations integrate a multitude of sources and methods.

Interestingly, the current reaction against oppression and the aim of a liberation that weaves

[2] It goes without saying that topics other than those I have chosen could also have been treated. I believe, however, that the current selection is enough for indicating the main points of the study. For further examples and discussion of methodologies (such as, e.g., narrative criticism and reader-response criticism), I refer the reader to the annotated bibliography below.

[3] Fernando F. Segovia, "Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism as a Mode of Discourse," 1-17 in *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (ed. F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 2-3.

together academy and activism, such as certain streams of feminist analysis strive for, is in itself very similar to what we find when the historical-critical methods first emerged on the scene in the 1700s. Indeed, the seeds of the historical-critical paradigm bring us even further back to the period of the Reformation in the 16th century. The socio-cultural circumstances at that time were such that people involved in the whirlwind of redefining what was possible were often persecuted, sometimes even executed. Translation of the Bible was a dangerous activity, a political act. This was not only a Christian matter, as the excommunication of Spinoza (1632-1677) from his Jewish community indicates.[4]

The key factor in those days, which in itself is the origin of a trajectory that brings us all the way into the 21st century, was the idea of 'original text' and historical 'method' (rather than doctrinal exposition) as a tool for attaining religiously significant knowledge. History took a front seat when old theological questions required new answers, and historians of the Bible began a journey to power. When such a paradigm was formed, revolutionary as it was in its call for a return to the (historically understood) sources, it challenged authority structures and conflict and rivalry followed. Seen from this perspective, it seems that Simone Weil's insight that every revolution ultimately replaces one form of oppression with another is true also within academia; much of history, unfortunately, continues to be defined by struggles for power. If, within our field, the current emancipatory trajectory itself, including feminism and postcolonialism, *as a socio-academic phenomenon,* can be related to the very beginnings of our modern discipline, this is true for many other current trajectories too. I will give just a few examples.

In the field of linguistics,[5] we have seen recent developments in which scholars prefer to focus on larger units or groups of words as carriers of meaning instead of individual lexemes. Theories of translation are moving in new directions, but *the question itself*—why translate the Bible at all into modern languages used by ordinary people?—is not a given; it is culturally determined by a trajectory reaching back to the 16th century, with some of its roots going even further back in time.

Much the same is true of recent advances in textual criticism by scholars like Eldon Epp, William Petersen, and others. Due to the nature of the manuscript sources, they problematise the traditional search for an 'original text' of the New Testament.[6] While Barbara Aland and, most recently, Tommy Wasserman[7] are slightly more optimistic, such a change in attitude and approach overturns the certainties of previous generations—from the 1979 26th Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek text back to Westcott and Hort in the 1880s. The discursive trajectory about an original, reconstructed text, however, was born centuries earlier. Our field's seldom

[4] It is of some interest to note that Spinoza's books were listed as prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church in the *Index librorum prohibitorum.* This index was first published in 1559 and was abolished officially in 1966 by pope Paul IV.

[5] Some recent studies include Stephanie Black, "How Matthew Tells the Story: A Linguistic Approach to Matthew's Syntax," 24-52 in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. D. M. Gurtner and J. Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). A key player on the international scene in this area is Stanley E. Porter. His most recent contribution includes a welcome discussion of terminology and concepts, which will help students and scholars who do not work primarily in this field to see more fully the advantages of linguistics for New Testament exegesis: "Matthew and Mark: The Contribution of Recent Linguistic Thought," in *Mark and Matthew: Comparative Readings.* Vol 1: *The Earliest Gospels in their First Century World(s,* (ed. E-M. Becker and A. Runesson; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011 [forthcoming]). See also the excellent website, www.opentext.org.

[6] William L. Petersen, "What Text Can New Testament Textual Cricitism Ultimately Reach?" 136-52 in *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis and Church History: A Discussion of Methods* (ed. B. Aland and J. Delobel. Kampen: Kok-Pharos, 1994); Eldon J. Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," 245-81 in *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999). For discussion, see Tommy Wasserman, "The Implications of Textual Criticism for Understanding the 'Original Text,'" in *Mark and Matthew: Comparative Readings.* Vol 1: *The Earliest Gospels in their First Century World(s)* (ed. E-M. Becker and A. Runesson; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011 [forthcoming]).

[7] See Wasserman's study listed in n. 6 above.

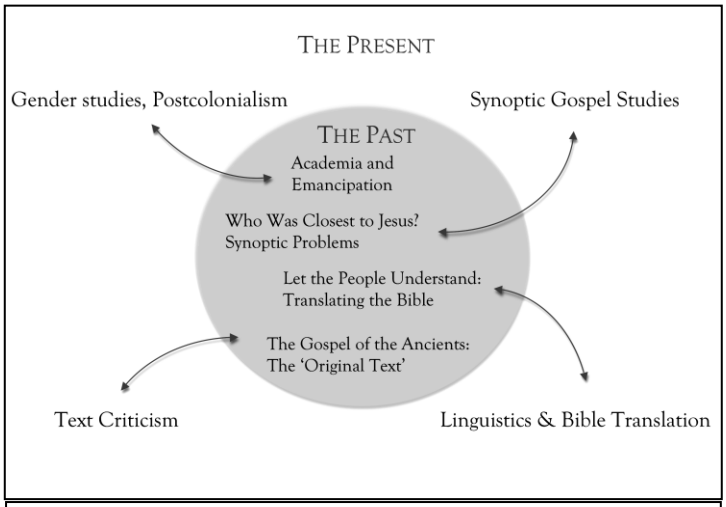

Figure 1. The Past in the Present in New Testament Research Today: Some Examples.

reflected on—but absolute need of—textual criticism, regardless of our perspectives and methodological preferences (without it, we would not have a text!) connects us inescapably with century-old paradigms in which historical questions cannot be done away with, only constantly refined.

Another of these older traditions within our field that controls other approaches, such as redaction criticism, deals with the internal relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke: the Synoptic Problem. From Augustine's (354-430) work via the rise of modern New Testament studies in the 18th and 19th centuries, this task has never ceased to intrigue scholars. This probably depends on the (problematic) idea that if we can decide which gospel is the earliest, we will have better and more authentic access to the historical Jesus. When the two-source hypothesis was launched and the hypothetical document Q was drawn into the picture, such hopes increased even more, since Q was assumed to be older than all the other documents. But after hundreds of years of work, the latest contributions from 2008[8] and 2009[9] both dispense with Q, and they are not alone.[10] One of them, a study by Armin Baum, works statistically on ancient comparative material, especially rabbinic texts, then combines this with results from experimental psychology and oral poetry research, to demonstrate that it is highly improbable that the Synoptic Problem can be explained in terms of simple copying of texts. Instead, connections between the gospels are primarily oral. This revolutionary result would, if correct, take us back via von Herder's theory from 1796 on orality to pre-Augustinian assumptions by Papias, Justin, and Irenaeus, that all three gospels built independently on oral tradition originating with eyewitnesses. Based on the above discussion, the current situation as it connects with the past may be captured in an illustration, as shown in fig. 1 (above).

In sum, then, from a diachronically oriented bird's eye's view of the field of New Testament studies, we find regarding historical-critical research that the Archimedean search for a firm place to stand, the beginnings of what gave birth to the modern academic study of the Bible, has proven to be as intriguing as an impossible figure by Oscar Reutersvärd: it can be imagined, and thus drawn, but not built or inhabited. Still, current refinements of the inter-subjective game rules of historical research create a discourse that *is* able to move us forward. History, most would agree, should not be understood as the sum total of the past, but rather as "an ongoing conversa-

[8] Armin D. Baum, *Der mündliche Faktor: Analogien zur synoptischen Frage aus der antiken Literatur, der Experimentalpsychologie, der Oral Poetry-Forschung und dem rabbinischen Traditionswesen* (Tübingen: Francke, 2008).

[9] James R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), see especially 209-42. Edward's main insight regarding the Synoptic Problem is that Special Lukan material is based on an earlier Hebrew Gospel, which would explain the Hebraisms in Luke (these can not be explained as dependent on the Septuagint, according to Edwards). Matthew's Gospel was authored after Luke, according to his theory.

[10] See especially the thorough discussion by Mark Goodacre, *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002).

tion between the past and the present."[11] The past is open for such conversations, which, in turn, have profound meaning and political implications for contemporary society, including its religious institutions.

Such a conclusion does not in any way diminish the contributions made by recent methodological developments that take us beyond the historical paradigm. John Sawyer, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies and series editor of the Blackwell Bible Commentaries which focus on reception history, speaks for many in the New Testament field when he says,

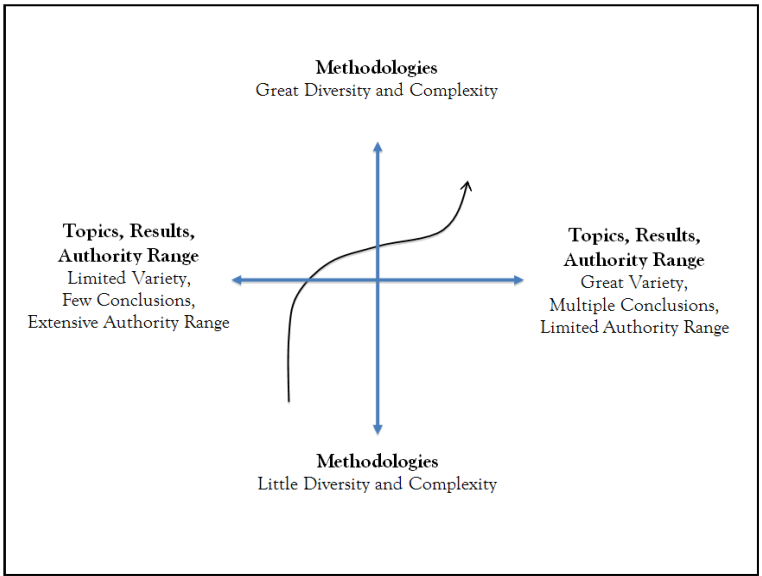

Figure 2. Methodology, Topics, and Authority Range: Where We Are and From Where We Came.

> Clearly, there can be no theoretical objection to the continuing application and refinement of historical-critical methods… But by the same token the value and success of other methods of interpreting the Bible, informed by structuralism, feminism/womanism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism and the like, can no longer be denied.[12]

Or as the rabbis said long before postmodern scholars reintroduced the idea in the West: "Just as a hammer striking a rock makes several sparks, so too every scriptural verse yields several meanings."[13] The past continues to feed into the present as much as the present defines the past.

3. The Contemporary Scene: A Mosaic?

Now, as we move to a synchronic perspective, let us first note briefly were we are from a more

[11] J. Maxwell Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically: The Historians Approach," 17-34 in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 17-18. Several problems remain to be addressed. Historians offer explanations that make sense in our own time and culture, which most often means Western culture, and thus dispense with supernatural factors as explanatory components in a theory, since such factors lie outside the Western intellectual paradigm. The Western contemporary worldview is thus the key as the past is being translated and understood today. But what happens when, in the process of globalisation, scholars from other parts of the world, other cultures with other worldviews want to enter the discussion? The issue of 'translation' becomes acute; epistemologies clash and conflict enfolds as we try to cope with the fact that we are not the only ones inhabiting the world, and that we do not have the sole right to define globally what are correct or meaningful interpretations and reconstructions. We shall return below to a discussion of postcolonial studies. One solution chosen by some scholars is to define and evaluate the 'correctness' of an interpretation as dependent on how consistently the chosen methodology is followed within the relevant interpretive paradigm.

[12] John F. A. Sawyer, "Introduction," 1-7 in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture* (ed. John F. A. Sawyer; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 3.

[13] *B. Sanhedrin* 34a.

general perspective, if we juxtapose developments in methodology and topics studied. The above grid (fig. 2) may illustrate the situation. As the vertical arrow shows, we have moved towards increasing complexity in terms of methodologies. At the same time, horizontally, we have moved towards topical diversity. Note also on the horizontal line the aspect of authority range, which has diminished as complexities have increased. Today, a consensus on any given issue is extremely difficult to establish compared to in previous periods, and the questioning of 'received knowledge' is commonplace.

Since it is impossible to cover contemporary diversity within New Testament studies comprehensively, I have chosen four topical cross-sections in order to indicate something of the current nature of our discipline; this in turn may provide a basis for reflecting on the future. We will begin our survey with the most ancient quests of all: the recovery of the historical Jesus.

3.1. The Historical Jesus: From Text to Economics to Anthropology

Although scholars in antiquity also had an interest in historical aspects of the Jesus story, the modern study of the historical Jesus is famously divided into three periods, beginning with Reimarus (1694-1768) and continuing—since the 1980s—into its third phase today. Scholars have focussed variously on Jesus' teachings and his deeds, the latter most significantly during the third quest after Ed Sanders' work in the 1980s.[14] This focus on deeds has lead to recent insights that the Galilean socio-political and economic context in which Jesus lived is key for understanding both what he may have wanted to achieve and how those around him perceived of his aims.

When we look at the sources scholars have used for their reconstructions, almost all Jesus-research through the centuries—including Craig Keener's 2009 831-page opus magnum[15]—have made use of texts only, and of course, the New Testament Gospels are at the centre of attention. The basic perspectival approach, rarely reflected upon, has been that of Enlightenment rationalism in one variant or another. A new development of this trajectory is the use of multiple source-types. Among these, archaeology has become increasingly important. For some, this has meant that the quest for the historical Jesus has almost become the quest for the historical Galilee, where Jesus, according to the literary sources, grew up and spent most of his time teaching, healing, and exorcising demons.[16] Such a shift in source material helps to inspire new questions. Or, to put it differently, the use of such source material is often inspired by new ways of asking the question about the historical Jesus. Roman imperialism, taxation, urban-rural relationships, manufacturing and trade patterns, banditry, and so on, come into focus. What can such phenomena tell us about Jesus' aims? If you say the words 'Kingdom of Heaven' in such a context, what would it mean?

[14] See especially E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985) and idem, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin press, 1993).

[15] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). In addition to treating thematic problems related to the historical Jesus, this book covers topics such as historiography and oral and written sources. Unfortunately, even the heading entitled "Galilean context," a heading that should have opened up for extensive discussion of recent advances in archaeological research, deals with archaeological remains on only one page.

[16] Recent key studies include Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000). While not a study specifically on Jesus, Morten Hørning Jensen's *Herod Antipas in Galilee: the Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) is a good example of the crucial importance of studying first-century C.E. Galilean society and politics in order to enable reliable reconstructions of the historical Jesus. Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean. A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: T & T Clark, 2004) combines literary and archaeological sources with an intimate knowledge of ancient Galilee in a manner few scholars can: this book is a good example of contemporary historical-Jesus research at its best.

But it does not end there. One of the most recent developments in historical research questions the perspectival foundations we have inherited from the Enlightenment. In her Ph.D. thesis from 2009, Amanda Witmer sets the spotlight on Jesus' exorcisms and their social and political meaning.[17] She notes that since our minds are formed by our own experiences—and few of us have any experience of exorcisms—we cannot trust our individual brains to provide a relevant perspective. Rather, she argues, we should take into account the results of anthropological cross-cultural investigations on demon possession and exorcisms from across the globe. Then we need to read the textual, archaeological and other ancient evidence from the perspective that such results yield. As a consequence, key insights of her thesis revolve around the relationship between demon possession, exorcisms, and social marginality. The complexity of the question about the historical Jesus and the sources we use has increased considerably, as shown in the above figure.

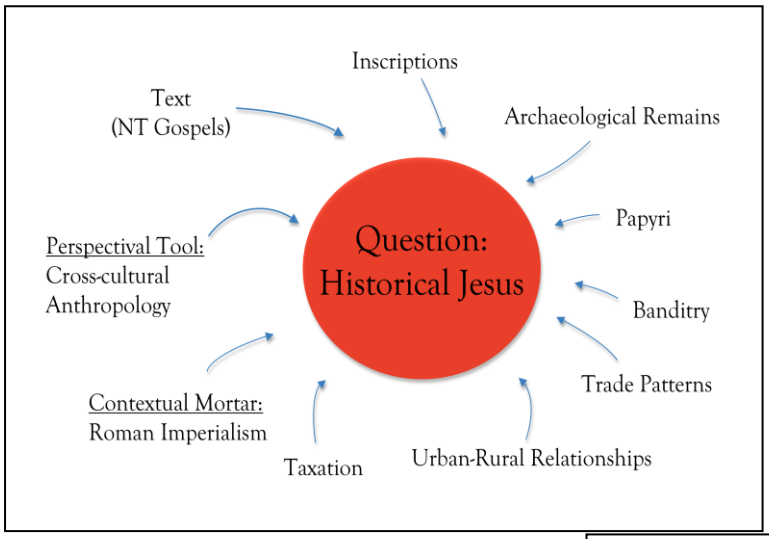

Figure 3. Source Material and the Perspectival Approach in Historical Jesus Research.

Methodologically, we are light-years from Reimarus. But, intriguingly, the basic question about the historical Jesus is still the same. Why is it that this question seems so impossible to answer? A look at postcolonial scholarship will broaden the scope and add insight from cultures not our own.

3.2. Postcolonial Optics: A Farewell to Historical Criticism?

Turning to the field of Postcolonial New Testament research with the same question of the historical Jesus, scholars here would immediately ask (from outside the box): Why is the historical Jesus important at all? Is it even possible to reconstruct Jesus, and who needs a historical Jesus anyways? What is the *relevance* of these types of questions and which functions do they fill in academia, in society—even politically? The postcolonial critic often targets not only traditional historical-critical methods, but also the entire Western scholarly paradigm more generally.

Postcolonial New Testament studies entered the academic scene in the 1980s and 90s. While regular sessions at the Society of Biblical Literature's (SBL) annual meetings have contributed to the growth of this perspective, some key players, such as Fernando Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah, have been at the forefront of this approach as it has made its way into to our field. Significantly, Sugirtharajah has worked tirelessly collecting and publishing in edited volumes articles first appearing in journals of low circulation in the so-called two-thirds world, and in this way has made them available to Western scholars.

While postcolonial studies are closely related to postmodern and feminist/womanist studies, there is a multitude of approaches within this

[17] Amanda R. Witmer, "Jesus, A Jewish Galilean Exorcist: A Socio-political and Anthropological Investigation" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 2009).

perspective.[18] Its distinguishing mark is its focus on political and colonial realities and the marriage between academics and activism. Analyses range from the use of hegemonic New Testament interpretation in Western colonial enterprises, to critique of Western hermeneutics, to the use of local indigenous interpretive techniques, such as the Indian method of Dhvani,[19] to studies of ancient colonialism in the New Testament.

All indications point to a future in which postcolonial scholarship will have increasing influence on how Biblical studies are constructed, even in the West. As this happens, tensions between different interpretive paradigms will, predictably, continue to increase. Historical questions of importance to Western societies will have to be re-negotiated in light of the political on a global scale. But the future seems not to hold a single transformed and restructured academic arena in which all would approach issues in Biblical studies from similar points of view, as if to imitate a never realised American melting pot dream. Rather, as the world shrinks and globalisation takes on new dimensions, it is key that we learn how to interact responsibly, allowing for fundamental difference without silencing the other. We shall return to this below. The quest for the historical Jesus is not as innocent as it may first seem, but rather a prism through which insight on the current moment may be gleaned.

3.3. Jewish – Christian Relations: Post-War and Beyond

A third central area of current New Testament studies orbits questions related to Jewish – Christian relations. Beginning as a reaction against the use of the New Testament for anti-Jewish purposes in European history,[20] this area is now one of the more important within New Testament studies. This is because it has had and continues to have significant influence on several other large subfields, such as historical Jesus research, Paul, feminism, and now, most recently, postcolonialism. Many scholars involved in religious dialogue work with these questions, but there is also a new emerging group of researchers claiming this as a site of investigation: messianic Jews, a growing and diverse movement, mostly in Israel and the US, which is now establishing their own academic institutions.[21]

Due to the nature of the question, scholars working within this field do so utilising a variety of sources, such as archaeology, inscriptions, papyri, and literary texts. Approaches range from rhetorical to social-scientific analysis. Issues like conflict stories in the New Testament, Jewish and Christian identity formation, and socio-religious interaction in synagogue settings receive treatment today. Indeed, as shown in recent publications as well as in several annual

[18] For an introduction to and analysis of the contribution of postcolonial scholarship as it relates to the field of New Testament studies, see most recently Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Biblical Interpretation Series 104; Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[19] See Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making* (n.18 above), especially section 5.3.8, pages 108-113.

[20] While this is true, the relationship between biblical studies and Jewish and Christian interaction goes back to the very beginnings of the modern academic enterprise in the Reformation period. For example, Martin Luther seems to have thought initially that Jews had been quite correct in rejecting the (in his view degenerated) form of Christianity proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church. Through his own work with and translation of the biblical texts, however, he anticipated that many Jews would recognise the Gospel and convert. Historical rather than doctrinal readings of the sources would thus, as he saw it, promote mission to the Jews. When this never happened, he took offense and turned to violent rhetoric with disastrous consequences for Jewish – Christian relations. Scholars working within this general area today, however, could not be further from the aims of Luther in this regard. Instead of mission, many try to open up venues for peaceful co-existence through historical understandings of the Jewish context of the New Testament and the many similarities between the traditions in the ancient period. Other scholars, from all backgrounds, simply find that previous interpretations of the New Testament have been confessionally biased and want to reconstruct a historical narrative less based on centuries of Christian interpretation.

[21] Such as, e.g., Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, with centres in the USA and in Israel.

SBL sessions, debates now also concern how we speak about these ancient phenomena. Terminology has become a hot topic. Should we, for example, translate the Greek *Ioudaioi* with the English 'Jews' or 'Judeans'?[22] Is it anachronistic to speak about 'Christians' in a first century context? Our choice of terms for the phenomena we discuss and analyse has had, and will continue to have, a deep impact on our interpretive results.

A major question within this field that has attracted massive attention lately is the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. Traditionally, scholars have pointed to Paul as the key figure in this process, but this is now contested by many, if not most scholars. Today, specialists construct complex scenarios with local variations and a process that continued over several hundred years before we can identify clearly two distinct (although related) religions. Recent book titles like *The Ways that Never Parted* are revealing regarding where we currently stand, although such statements require more detailed definitions of what is meant by 'parting.'[23] In any case, most would agree that Gentile Christian anti-Jewish use of New Testament texts has played a key role in the process of separation. The use of text is, of course, not necessarily the same as the intention of the text, and every context in which a text is interpreted and applied affect the sense of meaning that readers attributed to it. This leads us to the fourth and final example of current key trajectories in our field: reception history.

3.4. Reception History: Beginnings of an Unending Quest?

When and where does New Testament reception history begin? Does this trajectory have its own methods? How diverse can it be before it becomes too complex for a single discipline to handle? The developing interest in the reception of the New Testament is new in our discipline, which has traditionally been more focussed on 'original meanings' of the texts, or, to some degree, biblical interpretation by the church fathers in Late Antiquity. As with all new developments, this means that methodological discussions have only begun, and we can expect advances in this area within the near future.

While pioneers such as Ulrich Luz,[24] have focused on patristic and mediaeval interpretations of the New Testament, today our perspective on reception extends to art, architecture, music, film, literature, ethics, theology, liturgy, sermons, hymns, inter-religious dialogue, and official church statements. Some studies combine focus areas, such as Rachel Nichols' 2008 analysis of the reception of Matthew's fourteenth chapter in 19th century theology and art.[25] A promising development in new directions is also shown by Irvin Anderson's study on Biblical interpretation and British and American Middle East policy, which brings the relevance of Biblical Studies into the field of Political Science and beyond.[26] Reception-history encompass, thus,

[22] For discussion of this problem, see Anders Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodotius I," 59-92 in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[23] Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

[24] See especially his multi-volume commentary of the Gospel of Matthew: Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (3 vols; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-2007). See also Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). On the one hand, this study has taken a wider approach to reception than Luz has, but is, on the other hand, much shorter and lacks the attention to detail characteristic of Luz's work.

[25] Rachel Nichols, *Walking on Water: Reading Mt 14:22-33 in the Light of its* Wirkungsgeschichte (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[26] Irvine H. Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy: The Promised Land, America, and Israel, 1917-2002* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005). While Anderson, professor emeritus of American diplomatic history specialising in the Middle East, has provided the field of Biblical studies with an important work which vitalises the field and opens up new directions for future research, there are still problems here in terms of methodology that need to be addressed. One of the strengths of the study is that Anderson puts the spotlight on how popular culture (including Sunday school education and TV

2000 years of effects of the life of Jesus, from the reception of orally transmitted traditions about him as text in the late first century, to the creation of the modern Middle East and its consequences.

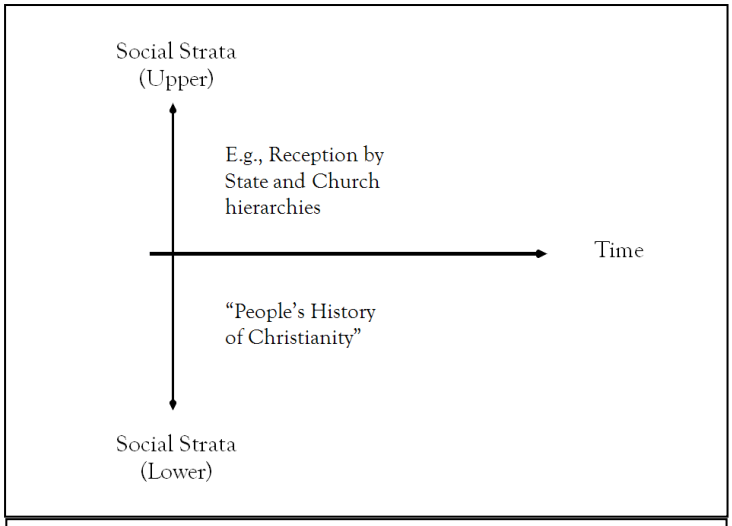

Figure 4. Basic Aspects of Reception-historical Analysis.

The dynamics of this area of study lies to some extent in that fact that every form of reception involves interpretation and a potential move away from the intentions of the source, even within the lifetime of the author. We may recall, for example, Karl Marx's famous dictum towards the end of his life: "Moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste" ("as for me, I am not a Marxist"). This was picked up by Freud, who applied the judgment to his own reception: "Moi, je ne suis pas Freudiste." If we follow scholars who regard as problematic the term 'Christian' for a first-century C.E. context, we may need to add for Paul: "Moi, je ne suis pas 'Chrétienne'" ("as for me, I am not a 'Christian'"). As the field continues to develop, it will be important to clarify various factors involved in interpretation, such as social strata in relation to the type of source material used, as well as the range of the conclusions drawn.[27] This is shown not least by the phenomenon of Christian anti-Judaism in Late Antiquity, which was mostly an upper social strata phenomenon; such attitudes cannot be generalised. A simple grid reminds us of some basic parameters of reception-historical work (fig. 4, left).[28] While it is clear that one of the advantages with the study of reception-history is that it puts our own interpretations of the New Testament in a mind-expanding context and perspective, the significance of this area extends far beyond this. Institutionally, it has the ability of bringing disciplines together in close co-operation. This means furthering methodological developments, wider distribution of the work we carry out, and, more generally, a greater appreciation of Biblical studies within academia and in society more generally.

In sum, our field today, in all its diversity of methods, perspectives and topics, is hardly best described as a mosaic. While the colours and forms are certainly there, they do not yet produce a varied but harmonious pattern. We do not hear the sound of a single choir, to change the metaphor, but rather of several choirs in addition to more isolated solo singers. The way forward, however, is not back: the time of methodological hegemony is gone, to the advantage of scholarship. But we need to find ways of bringing constructive cohesion to our field, so that our different voices will more fully experience the benefits of synergy. This brings us to some concluding reflections.

evangelism) may have influenced policy decisions through individual (and powerful) politicians.

[27] New Testament scholarship has only recently realised that much of what we have termed the (earliest) history of Christianity is in fact concerned with reconstructions of upper social strata life and practice. The majority of Christians, the so-called grassroots, have, by and large, been silenced. A welcome attempt to expand the scope of research to include a focus on the lower strata was published a few years ago: Denis R. Janz, ed., *A People's History of Christianity: The Lived Religion of Christians in the First Two Thousand Years* (7 vols; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005-2008; paperback edition 2010).

[28] While I believe the parameters listed here are necessary for all reception historical analyses, there are, of course, a number of other aspects that also need to be taken into account.

3. Conclusion: *Synagogē* – Bringing Together and Seeing Anew

The most characteristic feature of today's field of New Testament study is, beyond question, its diversity. Add to this the recent loss of consensuses in most subfields, and one wonders how the future of the field may look. Will the current state of things lead to disintegration? While this is certainly a possibility, I would rather see these developments as a sign of the strength of our field and as a real opportunity for constructive change and intensified contribution to society and its institutions. Such a way forward in our increasingly internationalised world is not achieved by silencing voices, but by letting all speak.

This requires that we seek to establish a 'room' for methodological creativity and space for different epistemological positions to meet in respectful conversation. I like to think of the ancient synagogue and its architecture as a heuristic metaphor in this regard. The space is built for conversation, with benches lining all walls. The focal point is not on any of the sides, or any specific feature placed against them, but on the empty space in the middle. Such architecture is meant for interaction and the exchange of ideas, and as long as the focal point stays empty, discussions will thrive and hegemonic tendencies will be kept at bay. It should further be noted that synagogue institutions in the first century C.E. were open to all, men, women and children, without any separation barriers, balconies, or walls. People from different ethnic backgrounds, non-Jews, were also allowed entry, and they left their mark in history under the designation 'god-fearers' in inscriptions as well as in the New Testament.[29]

In such a space, not only the winners of history and their perspectives are studied, but a fuller portrait of all aspects of New Testament studies may be formed. So, in other words, if we were to add to the characterisation of our field as diverse, it would be, in my opinion, an optimistic vision of *synagō*, of a *synagogē*, which is Greek for 'bringing together,' a 'gathering,' leading to new knowledge. As Indian scholar Anand Amaladass noted in 2003,

> There is a growing awareness today that unless boundaries are overcome and borders crossed, one is bound to be stratified and genuine growth will not take place. Crossing the borders is an epistemological necessity in order to understand the other. Understanding the other is also the process of self-understanding.[30]

Such a process of integrated understanding and self-understanding will, I firmly believe, serve us well as we develop the field of New Testament studies in the 21st century.

Suggestions for Further Reading on Recent Developments in New Testament Studies

Hermeneutics

Thieselton, Anthony C. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. (Comprehensive and chronologically structured presentation of hermeneutics from ancient Greek, Jewish and New Testament hermeneutics to womanist, postmodern and postcolonial hermeneutics.)

Meyer, Ben F., *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Re-*

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[29] This openness of the institution was unfortunately partly lost as Christian persecution and marginalisation of Jews in European society took political and legislative form in the fourth century C.E. onwards. This only shows how delicate inter-group relations are and how tragically easy it is to collapse good developments into factionalism and isolation built on forced estrangement and fear. For a recent comprehensive analysis of the ancient synagogue, see, e.g., Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2nd edition; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[30] Anand Amaladass, *Indian Exegesis: Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutic* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2003), 127. Amaladass is Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy at Satya Nilayam Research Institute in Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai.

alist Hermeneutics. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994. (Builds to a significant extent on Bernard Lonergan's work.)

Amaladass, Anand. *Indian Exegesis: Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutics*. Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2003. (Includes presentation and discussion of Dhvani exegesis [102-126]).

New Testament Interpretation in Historical, Hermeneutical, and Practical Perspective

Porter, Stanley E., ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*. London: Routledge, 2007. (Comprehensive in scope. Deals with major interpreters from Augustine and Luther to the modern period. Includes discussion of philosophical and theological preconceptions at play as the texts have been interpreted throughout history, the influence of various schools of thought etc.)

McKim, Donald K., ed. *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007. (Covers major figures from the early church to the 21st century.)

Anderson, Janice Capel and Stephen D. Moore, eds. *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008. (Using the Gospel of Mark as a test case, this book introduces more recent methodologies, such as, e.g., reader-response criticism, deconstructive criticism and social criticism.)

In Swedish

Mitternacht, Dieter and Anders Runesson, *Jesus och de första kristna: Inledning till Nya testamentet*. Stockholm: Verbum, 2006. 2nd (revised) printing, 2008. (On discussion and application of various methodologies, see especially 33-54, 387-481).

Olsson, Birger. "Ett bidrag till metodfrågan." *Svensk exegetisk årsbok* 45 (1980): 110-121. (Deals with the problem of handling methodological diversity.)

Postcolonialism and Feminism

Runesson, Anna. *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies.* Biblical Interpretation Series 103; Leiden: Brill, 2010. (Maps current postcolonial critique of and contributions to New Testament studies. Part 2 of the book presents studies by scholars from Africa, Asia, and North America, illustrating the diversity of current postcolonial studies as applied to individual New Testament texts).

Sugirtharajah, R. S., ed. *Voices From the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Revised and expanded 3d edition. MaryKnoll: Orbis, 2006. (Including 35 articles divided into 6 main chapters, this book introduces and displays the diversity of the field.)

Moore, Stephen D. *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006. (In addition to a chapter mapping postcolonial interpretation, discussion focuses especially on Mark, John, and Revelation.)

Stichele, Caroline vander, and Todd Penner, eds. *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005. (Collection of essays that challenges dominant historical-critical discourse. Contributions are structured along three focus areas: methodology, Hebrew Bible, and New Testament and Early Christianity.)

Levine, Amy-Jill, ed. *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2001–. (A Multi-volume series aimed at wide-ranging coverage. So far, the series includes volumes on, e.g., the gospels, Acts, and Paul, as well as Apocrypha, Patristic literature and Mariology.)

Cultural Studies

Sawyer, John, F. A., ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. (Comprehensive discussion; contributions divided into four parts: I. Historical, from the ancient world to the modern; II. The Nomadic Text, covering Judaism, Islam, and vast geographical areas from Asia to Latin America; III. The Bible and the Senses, discusses reception in various media from literature to music, architecture and theatre; IV. Reading in Practice, analyses range from contextuality, to politics, ecology, psychology, gender, and postcolonialism.)