

THE HISTORICAL JESUS, ESCHATOLOGY AND HOPE FOR THE EARTH?

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Abstract

In an illuminating essay, Nürnberger (1994:139-151) has maintained that a Christian vision of hope for the earth may be quite adequately grounded in a variety of biblical perspectives. But Nürnberger's study gives rise to a more specific and critical question not sufficiently wrestled with in his paper, namely: 'Is there really support for an eschatological hope for the earth within the specific mission and message of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth?' Our opening contention is that this question cannot be easily or simplistically answered by any hasty appeal to either the Gospel tradition itself or the Christian faith. A first and crucial step is to problematise the very debate around 'the historical Jesus' and 'eschatology' itself before any statement can be made about whether or not Jesus himself embraced a vision and hope for the earth. New Testament scholars in the modern and postmodern periods, as we shall briefly illustrate, display too much variety and ambiguity, not only in their construals of Jesus, but also in their understanding of eschatology and how useful it really may be as a framework for understanding the earthly message and mission of Jesus. After a survey of some aspects of the problems relating specifically to 'the historical Jesus' and 'eschatology,' the final section of this article revisits the central question referred to above and seeks to make some tentative responses on the basis of insights gleaned from the studies of some important Jesus scholars in recent years.

1. Introduction

In his important work, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, Norman Perrin (1967:154) has these words of caution that we are wise to heed at the outset of our discussion:

No part of the teaching of Jesus is more difficult to reconstruct and interpret than that relating to the future. So far as the reconstruction of this teaching is concerned, we have to face the fact that early Christian expectation concerning the future was many-sided, and various forms of this expectation have left their mark on the Jesus tradition, e.g. the conventional Jewish apocalyptic view in Mark 13 or the specifically Christian expectation of the coming of Jesus as Son of Man so often introduced into the tradition of Matthew. As regards the interpretation, we always have the almost insuperable difficulties of transcending the gulf of two millennia and of radically different *Weltanschauungen* which separate us from Jesus, but nowhere are these difficulties greater than in the case of attempting to conceive what it meant in the first-century to think in terms of God acting in the future. It is no accident that nowhere do modern exegetes vary from one another more than in their discussions of 'Jesus and the future', that, for example, unanimity with regard to the Kingdom of God as an apocalyptic concept in the teaching of Jesus brings with it the utmost diversity with regard to the

temporal aspects of the teaching concerning the Kingdom.¹

Perrin's words seem as pertinent today, four decades later, as they were for his own time. Indeed, the question of the relationship between the historical Jesus and apocalyptic or the historical Jesus and eschatology continues to be at the centre of heated debate and controversy among New Testament scholars. For example, in the so-called 'Third Quest' of recent years, some scholars have now even spoken of 'the apocalyptic Jesus' versus 'the non-apocalyptic Jesus' or 'the eschatological Jesus' versus 'the non-eschatological Jesus' as one way to characterize the sharp disagreements which exist among scholars on this matter (e.g. Borg 1994b:69-96). Whatever merit there may or may not be in this kind of labeling,² it provides some indicator of the often sharp and seemingly irreconcilable positions which NT scholars continue to take on the question of Jesus and eschatology. These differences stem, moreover, not only from basic disagreements among scholars about certain concepts central to the debate itself (e.g. apocalyptic, eschatology, apocalyptic eschatology), but also, more fundamentally it appears, from certain explicit or implicit ideological presuppositions which influence the differing perspectives of the very scholars themselves. Together, then, there appear to be an array of factors which must constantly be borne in mind as we proceed, very tentatively and hesitantly, to say something further on the specific topic: *The Historical Jesus, Eschatology and Hope for the Earth?*

Two main areas of current research must constitute the broad framework of our discussion *before* we can legitimately address the specific question of the historical Jesus and hope for the earth. In the first place, we must understand something of the overall debate among scholars on the very question of historical Jesus, particularly during the last decade or so. What are some perspectives that exist on the very term 'the historical Jesus?' What relationship exists between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus or 'the historical Jesus' and 'the Jesus of the Gospels?' What interpretative frameworks seem to determine the different images of Jesus among contemporary Jesus scholars, and does this have any bearing on the way we address our main topic? Secondly, we must understand why there still is this persistent controversy and division surrounding the more precise question of the historical Jesus *and* eschatology/apocalyptic in many circles of critical New Testament scholarship today. Many may believe that a Christian vision and hope for the earth may be quite adequately grounded in a variety of Biblical perspectives.³ But can such a vision and hope for the earth find plausible support within the context of the historical Jesus? Some scholars have also made strong arguments for the rootedness of a vision of hope and transformation of the *social world* in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.⁴ Yet there does seem to be considerable hesitancy and uncertainty among Jesus scholars about whether such a vision ever includes the 'physical' earth, environment or world as such. Therefore, the question mark in the title to our paper is quite deliberate. It suggests at the outset that before we can say anything definitive or plausible about the historical Jesus, eschatology and hope for the earth (from a critical New Testament perspective at least), the respective ingredients of this debate must first be problematised.

1 An awareness of this problem is already present in Peril's earlier work, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (1963:84-89, 115f., 121-124).

2 See a more extended discussion of the question of Jesus and eschatology in 2.2 below.

3 See Nürnberger 1994:139-151 and other contributions on this topic in this edition of *Scriptura*.

4 See our discussion in 3 below.

2. The Historical Jesus, Eschatology and Hope for the Earth?

2.1 The question of the Historical Jesus

We may wish to agree with Nürnberger (1994:140) that '[a]t the root of biblical faith including its eschatological hope, lies the experience of the redemptive acts of God in history' and that such hope is, by definition, future-oriented. There appears to be ample support for this in the Old Testament from the pre-exilic period onwards. Diverse traditions of hope for humankind, the earth and the cosmos from the earliest period of the Christian Church have also been developed.⁵ Yet the traditions of the early Christian church are more strongly anchored in the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, rather than the earthly life of Jesus (Edwards 1994:94; Moltmann 1994:71-107, 130-147).⁶ But what support is there for such an eschatological hope within the specific mission and message of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth? This question is a serious one and cannot be avoided. Different answers have been provided by different scholars. For some scholars, the entire Christian doctrine and faith is so deeply and inextricably embedded in the resurrection of Jesus that they prefer to speak only of 'the *real Jesus* of Christian faith [who] is the resurrected Jesus' rather than 'the historical Jesus' (Johnson 1996:142).⁷ From this perspective, the entire quest for the historical Jesus *behind* the Gospel traditions is misguided from the outset because the narrative pattern of the canonical Gospels are essential and primary for a historical reconstruction of Jesus' ministry (Johnson 1996:124-125).⁸ Other scholars argue that the more traditional link between 'the historical Jesus' and 'the Christ of faith' or 'the resurrected Christ,' so evident in the Gospel narratives (as well as other New Testament writings), will not enable us to truly locate the historical figure of

5 See the discussion of some other papers on this topic which are included in this edition of *Scriptura*.

6 Nürnberger (1994:142-144) summarises the shifts that occurred within the Pauline school with respect to the eschatological hope that came to be grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Numerous texts help us to trace the shifts that occurred as we move from the early Pauline letters to the later Pastoral epistles (e.g. 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Cor 5:17-19; Col 1:5, 16-18, 25-29; 3:1-4; Eph 1:9-10; 2:11-22; 3:2-10; 4:10; 1 & 2 Tim; Titus).

7 According to Johnson (1996:142, 166): The 'real Jesus' of Christian faith is the resurrected Jesus, him 'whom God has made Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36)... not simply a figure of the past but very much and above all a figure of the present, a figure, indeed, who defines believers' present by his presence... [he] is first of all the powerful, resurrected Lord whose transforming Spirit is active in the community... the one who through the Spirit replicates in the lives of the believers faithful obedience to God and loving service to others.' Meier (1991:21-40) summarises in somewhat moderate style the differences between key terms which find expression in the current Jesus debate. The 'real Jesus' is the total reality of who Jesus was in his life-time which in principle is unknowable through historical research. The 'historical Jesus' is that Jesus whom we can recover and reconstruct by using the best scientific tools of modern historical research. The 'earthly Jesus' is Jesus as he was during his life on earth. But this terminology is the most problematic because of its inherent ambiguity; scholars who have preferences for either the 'real Jesus' or the 'historical Jesus' also often refer to Jesus in his earthly life. Crossan (1991:426) is quite explicit that historical reconstruction of the 'historical Jesus' is necessary - the very basis of *any* life of Jesus: 'If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in.'

8 Systematic theologian, David Tracy (1981) appears to provide a perspective closely aligned with that of NT scholar, Luke Johnson. Tracy's position, though, wishes to emphasise the *theological* 'inappropriate' nature of the quest for the historical Jesus (1981:295). Tracy (1981:236-37) argues that we can have a 'fundamental trust' in the classic expressions of the Christian tradition, because this tradition is 'the major constitutive *mediating* reality of the event of Jesus Christ.' Furthermore, 'the Jesus-kerygma of the earliest apostolic witness' provides the primary witness to the Jesus even within the whole tradition of witnesses (Tracy 1981:290, 301). In the end, though, the question must be asked: 'despite Tracy's fundamental trust, could one interpretation ever be a norm for other interpretations? Should not the historical event as such, before any mediation/interpretation, be the norm? The problem is that 'event' is already a heavily interpreted category in Tracy's work' (Venter 1995:365).

Jesus (cf Crossan, Jesus 2000 Debate, Week 1). Rather, we may end up with the reconstruction of a docetic or gnostic or spiritual Christianity rather than a catholic, universal or incarnational Christianity.⁹

Whatever else the opposing perspectives of Johnson and Crossan may highlight, they certainly reaffirm once again that we cannot continue to speak uncritically about the person of Jesus and the teaching of Jesus contained in the Synoptic Gospels, or the Johannine literature, or the Pauline letters, or the rest of the New Testament writings *as if* they were simply synonymous with 'the historical Jesus.' Within the framework of *historical* research, at least, speech about 'the historical Jesus' is far more complex than this.¹⁰ Two main reasons help to explain this complexity, as well as the opposing images of Jesus among different scholars: 1) the nature of the Gospel sources themselves allow us to form different images of Jesus, and 2) the history of interpretation of the Gospels has provided quite different frameworks for answering the question about who Jesus really was (cf Vorster 1991:527-531). With regard to the first reason, New Testament scholars generally agree that none of the Gospels provides us with a historical account of Jesus' life, teaching and actions in anything like an exact, chronological and word-for-word fashion. Even Mark, the earliest of our canonical Gospels, has re-told and re-interpreted the stories of Jesus from a post-resurrection perspective and for his own purposes. Moreover, there is evidence for a history of growth and transmission of the material about Jesus within the Gospel records which has made it extremely difficult to know what teaching or action is authentic to Jesus himself and which are to be ascribed to the early Christians.¹¹ Secondly, the long history of interpretation of the Gospels have continued to produce different frameworks for interpreting Jesus' life and teaching. For example, the eschatological/apocalyptic framework has been the dominant one within which scholars have located and explained the life and mission of Jesus in the twentieth century, especially in the wake of the influential work of Albert Schweitzer.¹² This interpretative framework has largely accounted for the emergence

9 Crossan applies this criticism to Johnson's work, but Johnson promptly rejects Crossan's characterization of his specific work in this way (cf The Jesus Debate, Week 1). Johnson sees his stress on the resurrection as 'by no means a denial of what Crossan calls Catholic Christianity, but its opposite, its grounding.' According to Johnson, 'the strong view of the resurrection... is a way of affirming the value of the body and the world, rather than seeking salvation in mystic or epistemic flight.' Against 'Gnostic Christianity' and 'Gnostic Gospels,' he reaffirms the perspective of the resurrection in the context of the canonical Gospels which hold the vision of power [resurrection] in tension with the reality of Jesus' suffering and death [cross]. 'Everywhere in these [NT] writings the image of Jesus involves the tension-filled paradox of death and resurrection, suffering and glory' (Johnson 1996:166). See Arendse (1997) for a fuller treatment of the two opposing paradigms in current historical Jesus research represented by the respective studies of Johnson and Crossan.

10 Acknowledging the tension points which exist between *theological* and *historical* frameworks for understanding 'the historical Jesus' in current research, Venter (1995:376) believes that '[t]he differences must be accepted as a reality and with that in mind we may grope towards a common vision.' Perhaps the essentially, historical' focus of this paper may have to leave largely open the more precise 'theological' significance of the historical Jesus for the our main topic.

11 Perrin (1967:15) sums up the problem relating to the nature of the Gospel sources as follows: 'the more we learn about those sources the more difficult our task seems to become. The major source, the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), contains a great deal of teaching material ascribed to Jesus and yet, in fact, stemming from the early Church. The early Church made no attempt to distinguish between the words the earthly Jesus had spoken and those spoken by the risen Lord through a prophet in the community, nor between the original teaching of Jesus and the new understanding and reformulation of that teaching reached in the catechesis or parenesis of the Church under the guidance of the Lord of the Church. The early Church absolutely and completely identified the risen Lord of her experience with the earthly Jesus of Nazareth...'

12 See our discussion in 2.2 below.

of what we earlier termed 'the eschatological Jesus' or 'apocalyptic Jesus.'¹³ In recent years, a number of scholars, notably in North America, have adopted a very different framework for interpreting the life of Jesus than that one provided by the eschatology. Some have opted, for example, for a sapiential (wisdom) framework which they believe can best help us explain Jesus' life and teaching. One significant result of this shift in framework has been an emphasis on so-called 'non-eschatological' or 'non-apocalyptic' images of Jesus (cf Borg 1986; Mack 1988; Crossan 1991a; 1991b; 1994a).¹⁴

The entire modern and postmodern quest for the historical Jesus, then, must be (for good or ill) the quest for what Nolan (1976) calls the 'Jesus before Christianity.' All this does not necessarily mean that a radical and absolute discontinuity exists between Jesus and the early Christian church that emerged after his death (the usual liberal position).¹⁵ By the same token, however, we also cannot simply insist that a clear and unmistakable continuity existed between Jesus and the traditions of the early church either. To assume this will be to do a grave disservice to the historical and theological shifts that occurred between the pre-Easter and post-Easter periods of early Christianity. And so the vexed question remains: 'how are we to locate the texts which may provide the most authentic accounts of the historical Jesus from the variety of early Christian sources available to us?' This question is even more important, in the context of our present discussion, when we try to search for texts which may help us to understand whether or not the historical Jesus said anything about 'hope for the earth.'

In the last decade, Crossan (1991a; 1994a) has provided what is regarded among many Jesus scholars as one of the most sophisticated methodologies with which to reconstruct the

13 Interestingly enough, though, even the Gospels themselves provide quite different early Christian images of Jesus within an eschatological framework. This makes any simple historical reconstruction of *the* eschatological Jesus itself a very difficult task. For example, Yarbrow Collins (1990:1363-1364) provides a concise description of eschatology in the written Gospels and describes how each Synoptic Gospel contains its own eschatological perspective with its own contingent element of hope. Eschatological hope in Mark is focused on the coming Son of Man. In Matthew, the hope for the return of the Son of Man is retained, although the larger role played by the resurrection of Jesus has placed greater emphasis on the present reality of the risen Lord within the life of the Christian community. The full experience of this hope, however, still awaits 'the close of the age' when the final judgement will occur. Luke-Acts has supplemented the eschatological material of Mark with additional eschatological and apocalyptic material from Q and other sources (e.g. 12:49-50). One important Lukan text (17:20), for example, does not rule out an 'objective, cosmic manifestation of God's rule in the future,' but rather emphasises the fact that 'this rule will arrive suddenly and entirely, like the flood in Noah's time and the fire that destroyed Sodom (17:24-, 26-30). The Spirit provides the tangible 'promise' of what is yet to be fulfilled some time in the future. Although the details of the above discussion are not immediately relevant to our consideration of the historical Jesus, it does help us to appreciate something of the problem we face *even* when we try to fit the historical Jesus too simplistically into an eschatological framework on the basis of the Gospel records.

14 In a very useful study of the historical Jesus in the context of both perspectives of 'eschatology' and 'wisdom,' Vorster (1991:526-543) concludes that it may still be too early to make a final judgement on whether Jesus was an eschatological prophet or wisdom teacher. Our aim in this paper is neither to explore this issue in depth, nor to attempt to resolve it. Rather, we will show only that these opposing perspectives which exist in Jesus research today may have different implications for how we try to address our main topic.

15 As Freyne (1990:136-37) aptly reminds us: 'It is inconceivable that the later Christian movement based on belief in Jesus' name could have been thought of let alone succeed, were it not for the fact that there was an actual historical contribution from those who were followers of Jesus during his lifetime.' Crossan (1991b:1202) also concedes that 'from the very start of Christianity a dynamic relationship has existed between the historical Jesus and the theologically interpreted Christ. The New Testament itself contains a variety of theological interpretations of Jesus, and each of them selects different images of the historical Jesus... each interpretation focuses on its own historical Jesus... the Christian religion has always spoken, and will always speak, of a Jesus-then as a Christ-now.'

teaching of the historical Jesus. Crossan's innovative methodology and multidisciplinary approach has been hailed as 'a model' in the field of Jesus research.¹⁶ It has 'sufficiently changed the discipline' and effectively made less possible 'any simple *historical* quest of the historical Jesus' (Borg 1994b:33-34). We focus here in particular on the 'microcosmic level' of Crossan's triple triadic methodological process where he identifies what he believes are both the intracanonical and extracanonical sources that should be carefully studied if we are to recover the most authentic, that is, most historically reliable or trustworthy sayings of Jesus. Crossan's (1991a:427-450) comprehensive literary *inventory* allows him to position each textual unit into one of four chronological periods or strata: 30 to 60 CE, 60 to 80 CE, 80 to 120 CE, and 120 to 150 CE. Crossan then applies the criterion of multiple independent attestation to this literary database and proposes a list of the earliest and most trustworthy texts upon which to base his reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Out of a total inventory of 522 separate items of tradition for all four strata, Crossan identifies a collection of about 76 literary complexes within the first stratum (30 to 60 CE) that he maintains, in their core form, may be traced back to the historical Jesus himself. These textual traditions provide the foundation for his own historical reconstruction of Jesus.

What has proved particularly controversial in Crossan's method in this regard has been his privileging of extracanonical texts such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Sayings Gospel Q (both of which he locates in the first strata). Crossan (1991a:427-434) places the canonical Gospels in subsequent strata (Mark in the second stratum; Matthew, Luke and the first edition of John in the third stratum; and a second edition of John in a fourth stratum). For example, then, Crossan (1991a:xxxiii, cf 1991a:436) positions the textual unit 'kingdom and children' as 1/4. This means that this particular teaching of Jesus about the kingdom is connected to the earliest or first strata of tradition (30 to 60 CE), and has four independent attestations, namely, the Gospel of Thomas 22:1-2; Mark 10:13-16 = Matthew 19:13-15 = Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 18:3; and John 3:1-10. The general rule here is that the lower the number to the left of the stroke, and the higher the number to the right of the stroke in the classification system, the greater can the claim be made that a particular textual tradition came from Jesus himself.

Interestingly, although Crossan (1991a:434, 436) places the early Christian tradition relating to 'Jesus' apocalyptic return'¹⁷ within the first stratum, he (1991a:243-247) still judges this tradition to be the product of the early church, rather than the historical Jesus himself. And so, after a detailed literary and exegetical study of each specific text pertaining to 'Jesus' apocalyptic return,' Crossan (1991a:247) provides two major conclusions:

One is that this whole stream of tradition, far from starting on the lips of Jesus, began only after his crucifixion with meditation on Zechariah 12:10, then moved on to combine Daniel 7:13 with that prophecy, and finally left only the barest vestige of those beginnings in the perdurance of the *see* verb for the apocalyptic judge. Another is that, despite the background in Daniel 7:13, some early traditions felt no need to speak in a

16 Crossan (1991a:xxviii-xxix) sums up the essential features of his methodology as follows: 'My methodology for Jesus research has a triple triadic process... The first triad involves the reciprocal interplay of a macrocosmic level using cross-cultural and cross-temporal social *anthropology*, a mesocosmic level using Hellenistic or Greco-Roman *history*, and a microcosmic level using the *literature* of specific sayings and doings, stories and anecdotes, confessions and interpretations concerning Jesus. All three levels, anthropological, historical, and literary, must cooperate fully and equally for an effective synthesis... My method, then, demands an equal sophistication on all three levels at the same time.'

17 Crossan (1991a:434) cites 1 Thess 4:13-18; Did 16:6-8; Matt 24:30a; Mark 13:24-27 = Matt 24:29, 30b-31 = Luke 21:25-28; Rev 1:7; Rev 1:13; Rev 14:14; John 19:37 as primary texts here.

titular way of Jesus as Son of Man even if others did. So, on the one hand, Paul and *Didache* 16 presume Daniel 7:13 but think of Jesus as the returning Lord. Revelation 1:13 and 14:14 presume Daniel 7:13 but think of Jesus as the 'one like a son of man' there mentioned. On the other, the *Gospel of Hebrews*, the *Sayings Gospel Q*, and Mark all see Jesus as the titular Son of Man. Such an early bifurcation is hard to explain if it was Jesus who first spoke of himself as titular Son of Man based on Daniel 7:13.¹⁸

And so, even as sophisticated and comprehensive a literary inventory and analysis of the earliest textual traditions of the Christian faith as that one provided by a scholars such as Crossan may still leave us with some doubt, at least, about the possible significance of eschatology /apocalyptic for interpreting the historical Jesus. Furthermore, we still have to ask ourselves whether Jesus' vision and mission, even within a traditional eschatological /apocalyptic sense, embraced anything like a definite 'hope for the earth.' Before we can make any further conclusions of our own, however, we must first explore in more depth the debate around eschatology in the context of historical Jesus research.

2.2 The question of eschatology

The ambiguity and variety of meanings associated with the terms 'eschatology' and 'apocalyptic' throughout the period of critical biblical scholarship have largely contributed to the lack of consensus among scholars on this issue. But what has contributed to this 'lack of consensus,' and what might be the importance of this for our present discussion?

Most Jesus scholars appear to accept that the primary context for appreciating the earthly mission of Jesus is that of 1st century Judaism, and that this Judaism, despite its variety, also bore the imprint and influence of Jewish apocalypticism in some way (e.g. Riches 1980; Sanders 1985; Meier 1991; Crossan 1991a, 1994; Oakman 1986; Horsley 1987, 1989). The question arises, 'can we not assume that the historical Jesus himself inevitably shared in this apocalyptic orientation? Restated, 'did Jesus himself not share in the apparent eager expectation of Jewish society in the late second Temple period and beyond that Yahweh's saving action in the world would bring about its radical transformation in the future?'

Many scholars (e.g. Sanders 1975:5; Meyer 1979:122-128; Sanders 1985:91-95; Meier 1991:9, 176; Yarbro Collins 1990:362; cf. Nürnberger 1994:142) maintain that the definite apocalyptic or eschatological character of John the Baptist's activity and teaching and Jesus' close association with John at the start of his public ministry strongly suggest that Jesus ought to be interpreted in the same framework. For example, Yarbro Collins (1990:1362) argues that 'it would be difficult to explain the apocalypticism of many of the earliest Christian communities if Jesus had been non- or anti-apocalyptic.' But other scholars also draw strong attention to the many notable differences between these two figures as well. For example, Crossan (1991:227-264) notes that 'John lived an apocalyptic asceticism and that Jesus did the opposite.' Jesus presumably accepted John's apocalyptic programme initially, but after John's death, Jesus appears to have abandoned John's apocalypticism, opting instead for 'an understanding of the kingdom which was not apocalyptic' (Crossan 1991b:1202). Vorster (1991:540-541) summarizes further differences

18 Borg (1994b:51-53; 84-86) provides a further treatment of 'the Coming Son of Man' sayings in the Gospels. His analysis supports the conclusions of scholars such as Vermes (1973:160-91); Perrin (1967:164-206); Lindars (1984), Crossan (1991a:238-259) and others that these were not authentic sayings of Jesus himself. With this discovery, Borg (1994b:53) believes that 'the primary exegetical reason for thinking that Jesus expected the imminent end of the world disappears.'

between John and Jesus. Hollenbach's (1982:196-219) essay, 'The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer' aims to show how the parallel ministry that Jesus shared with John at the start of Jesus' public mission, including the practice of baptizing people (cf John 3:22-26; 4:1-3), later had a change of focus. Jesus appears to have broken with the Baptist movement after the first occasion that Jesus healed some one through his exorcism of a demon. According to Hollenbach, this incident in Jesus's ministry seems best to explain Jesus' healing activity, especially his exorcisms. Unlike the more usual thesis that proposes an exclusive apocalyptic framework for interpreting both John and Jesus, scholars such as Crossan (1991b:1202) have now suggested that with John and Jesus we should see that 'apocalypticism and nonapocalypticism are almost equally primordial in the Christian tradition.'

Richard Horsley (1987) is among recent scholars who provide a more cautious and critical response to the whole question of eschatology or apocalyptic in relation to the historical Jesus. For one thing, Horsley is very wary of any hasty connections being made between the historical Jesus on the one hand and Jewish eschatology or apocalyptic on the other. There is just too much uncertainty about how best to speak of the supposed Jewish apocalypticism or apocalyptic orientation which is supposed to have characterized Jewish society in late second Temple times. The result has been several terms for Jewish apocalyptic or apocalypticism which Horsley (1987:131-132) suggests are all unsatisfactory. Firstly, 'messianism' is unsatisfactory because many of the highly varied expectations of an apocalyptic nature that were present in Jewish society over time 'did not involve a human agent of any kind, much less an *anointed king*.' Secondly, more recent use of 'millenarianism' or 'chiliasm,' drawn in large measure from the way social scientists employ the term in comparative studies,¹⁹ is not reliable either because the term 'millennium,' originally derived from the Book of Revelation, is itself infrequent in apocalyptic literature and was not particularly typical of Palestinian Jewish expectations. Thirdly, 'eschatology,' is usually a term borrowed from Christian theology, but it is not clear that ancient Jewish expectations regarding the future were 'eschatological' - i.e., that they referred to 'last things' or 'the End.'²⁰ The debate here, as Yarbrow Collins (1990:1360) helps to explain it further, is whether the term *eschatology* 'should be used only for events and states of being beyond history or also for events within salvation history.' One approach toward resolving this issue is the distinction which some scholars have made between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology. Prophetic eschatology 'includes the expectations of decisive turning points in history due to divine intervention, and so it focuses on the fate of Israel and Judah.' Apocalyptic eschatology 'focuses more on the heavenly world, personal afterlife, and a new cosmic creation' (cf Hanson 1976, 1979; Collins 1984). In short, *eschatology* 'may be used appropriately for events both within and beyond history' (Yarbrow Collins 1990:1360). Finally, Horsley (1987:132) observes that 'apocalypticism' is itself thwart with terminological uncertainties. More narrowly,

19 For example, see Jarvie (1967); Talmon (1965, 1968); Burridge (1969); Isenberg (1974); Gager (1975).

20 According to Yarbrow Collins (1990:1360), 'the term 'eschatology,' from the Greek *eschatos*, was coined in German in the early 19th cent. when it was used primarily for that branch of systematic theology which dealt with the last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. The emphasis was on the destiny of the individual. In the 20th cent., literary and historical perspectives overshadowed the dogmatic. The term has been redefined to take more into account the actual content of biblical and related writings, to include the ultimate destiny of the Israelite or Jewish nation (national eschatology) and of the world in general (cosmic eschatology), as well as the destiny of the individual (personal eschatology). In place of concern for the future of the nation, some texts express hope for a righteous remnant or for the church (collective eschatology).'

'*apocalypticism* is derived from the Greek term for the mode of revelation by which some of the Palestinian Jewish expectations of future salvation were received.' Horsley is also aware, though, that recent scholarship has broadened understandings of the entire genre of apocalypse and extended its study 'to include a wide variety of literature from other periods, places and peoples.'²¹ In the end, Horsley (1987:132) believes that 'apocalypticism' and 'apocalyptic' may be the best terms to use, 'since in the current discussion they still have the important connotations of yearning for revelation and eager anticipation of the attainment of what is revealed.' But we shall see later²² that, in an attempt to better understand the apocalyptic perspective and motivation of Jewish resistance especially at the time of Jesus, Horsley (1987:140-145) moves away from an idealistic, literal or doctrinal view of apocalypticism and apocalyptic and gives them instead a sociopolitical interpretation.

Because of the pervasive terminological ambiguity in the study of apocalyptic literature, many scholars have found very helpful the following threefold distinction of Hanson (1976:26-34; 1979:427-444; 1983:1-15): 1) *apocalypse* as the literary genre itself, 2) *apocalypticism* as the social ideology related to a socio-religious movement, and 3) *apocalyptic eschatology* as a religious perspective. However useful we finally consider Hanson's analysis to be, especially in the context of our current debate, he does provide a timely warning that in any approach to 'apocalyptic,' 'we are dealing with a multifaceted phenomenon, and a phenomenon which is undergoing constant development and change' (1979:429). Even more recently, though, Marcus Borg (1994b:70-74) has distinguished between what he calls a *narrow* and *broad* definition of eschatology which may help us even more to understand the ambiguity and variety that has come to characterise the specific term 'eschatology' in the history of Jesus scholarship.

a) *A narrow definition of eschatology*

Borg's (1994b:73) *narrow definition of eschatology* relates to the aspect of 'expectation' and embraces the elements of: '(1) chronological futurity; (2) dramatic divine intervention in a public and objectively unmistakable way, resulting in (3) a radically new state of affairs, including the vindication of God's people, whether on a renewed earth or in another world.' To a lesser or greater degree, this narrower view of eschatology seems to have dominated 20th century interpretations of the historical Jesus work from the time of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer.

Weiss was one of the first major proponents of an eschatological Jesus, and in this way provided one of the earliest explicit oppositions to liberal Protestant interpretations of Jesus that had either denied or overlooked the eschatological elements in the traditions about Jesus (cf Yarbrow Collins 1990:1360). In 1892, Weiss (1971:133, 135-36, Eng edition) expressed his view as follows:

The Kingdom of God as Jesus thought of it is never something subjective, inward, or spiritual, but is always the objective messianic Kingdom, which usually is pictured as a territory into which one enters, or as a land in which one has to share, or as a treasure which comes down from heaven... The world will further endure, but we, as individuals will soon leave it... We do not await a Kingdom of God which is to come down from heaven to earth and abolish this world, but we do hope to be gathered with the church of

21 Significant works include those of Hanson (1976, 1979, 1983); Collins (1979, 1984); Hartman (1983); Koch (1983); Nickelsburg (1983); Olsson (1983); Rowland (1982); Sanders (1982); Hellholm (1986); Yarbrow Collins (1990).

22 See Section 3 below.

Jesus Christ into the heavenly *basilea*.

Building on the work of Weiss, Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906, German edition; 1968, Eng edition) provided what is commonly acknowledged today as the classic survey and critique of historical Jesus work throughout the period of modern European scholarship from the Enlightenment to the close of the 19th century. Important for our purposes is Schweitzer's (1968:350, 401) insistence that 'the atmosphere of the time [of Jesus] was saturated with eschatology' and that *this* Jesus, furthermore, was historically unknown once 'He is wrenched loose from the soil of eschatology. Eschatology was the hall mark of Jesus' entire life's ministry, and ultimately the reason that best explains his death. For Schweitzer (1968:402), the uniqueness of Jesus, 'that which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based on an eschatological worldview.' A decision for the Jesus of history must be, in Schweitzer's view, a decision for the eschatological Jesus, largely conceived in the narrow terms that Borg has identified. According to Schweizer, though, Jesus' vision and hope of a climactic end to history and the realization of the wholly transcendent and supernatural rule of God in the world was a failure.²³

Schweitzer's thesis of the eschatological Jesus was a proverbial bombshell dropped in the playground of 19th century quests for the historical Jesus. So profound and influential was the impact of Schweitzer's *thoroughgoing* or *consistent eschatology*²⁴ that it came to mark the end of the 'old/first quest' of the 19th century and the dawn of the period of 'no quest' which dominated the greater part of the 20th century (Schweitzer 1968:330-397; cf Tatum 1982; Borg 1994b). Eschatology had now been placed firmly on the agenda of 20th century biblical and theological scholarship and dominated its responses to the question of Jesus of Nazareth in one way or another, even when particular scholars disagreed with many of Schweitzer's main arguments or conclusions.

'The eschatological Jesus,' in Borg's narrow sense, continues to have its ardent proponents today. Most notable among these is EP Sanders whose highly acclaimed study *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) has unabashedly championed an image of Jesus as eschatological prophet. Within the interpretative framework of 'restoration eschatology' which Sanders proposes, his image of Jesus as eschatological prophet appears to make considerable sense. The critical question we must still ask, however, is whether this framework is valid and reliable for understanding the teaching and actions of the historical Jesus (Vorster 1991:534)?

Sanders (1985:10) has consistently maintained that 'enough evidence points towards

23 Schweitzer (1968:370) leaves on record one of his most memorable remarks about what he perceived to be the failed historical enterprise of the eschatological Jesus:

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuse to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind (*sic*), and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.

Borg (1994b:71) apply concludes, then, that 'when Weiss and Schweitzer said that Jesus' message, activity, and self-understanding were dominated by imminent eschatology, they meant that Jesus expected this kind of supernatural world-changing event soon' (Borg 1994b:71).

24 Schweitzer's position is called 'consistent' or 'thoroughgoing' eschatology because his primary view was that 'Jesus' eschatology was primarily oriented to the future; there was no fulfillment or decisive turning point in his lifetime' (Yarbro Collins 1990:1361; cf Schweitzer 1968:350-397).

Jewish eschatology as the general framework of Jesus' ministry that we may examine the particulars in the light of that framework.' Sanders's (1985:11) study is grounded in what he terms several 'almost indisputable facts' about Jesus' career and its aftermath.²⁵ The most indisputable fact of all, and the starting point of Sanders's description of Jesus is his view that Jesus engaged in a controversy about the temple (1985:11-12, 61-76). Sanders (1985:75) concludes his discussion of the Temple sayings in the Gospels as follows: 'Jesus publicly predicted or threatened the destruction of the temple, that the statement was shaped by his expectation of the arrival of the eschaton, that he probably also expected a new temple to be given by God from heaven, and that he made a demonstration which prophetically symbolized the coming event.' Imminent eschatology, then, was indeed the most characteristic and determinative feature of Jesus of Nazareth:

I must urge that the facts about Jesus, his predecessor and the Christian movement indicates that he himself expected the kingdom to come in the near future... that Jesus and his disciples even expected to play a role in the kingdom, obviously in the very near future... What we know with almost complete assurance - on the basis of facts - is that *Jesus is to be positively connected with the hope of Jewish restoration*. This fact - as it now becomes in our study - must set the framework and the limits of our understanding of him... the facts compel us to fit him into that context. (Sanders 1985:118, his emphasis).

When Sanders makes a choice between the 'present' or 'future' emphasis that has dominated much of scholarly debate on the kingdom sayings of Jesus, he (1985:152) argues that 'we must, on the basis of present evidence, put the emphasis on the kingdom as immediately future. What is 'beyond reasonable doubt' for Sanders (1985:153) is that 'Jesus looked for the imminent direct intervention of God in history, the elimination of evil and evildoers, the building of a new and glorious temple, and the re-assembly of Israel with himself and his disciples as leading figures in it.' The image of Jesus which Sanders presents as a result of this eschatological framework is, therefore, that of 'a prophet of Jewish restoration' (cf 1985:222, 319-340). Consequently, '[t]o pull Jesus entirely out of this framework would be an act of historical violence' (Sanders 1985:330).

Sanders (1985:230ff) admits that the overall thrust of his portrait of Jesus is decidedly 'a-political': 'That Israel will be restored is not the view of a realistic political and military strategist... it is far more likely that the expectation that Israel would be restored points to the hope for fundamental renewal, a new creation accomplished by God.' Sanders (1985:231-2) sees a definite continuity between Jesus and what the early church expected after his crucifixion is strongly eschatological and a-political terms:

25 According to Sanders (1985:11), '[t]he 'almost indisputable facts, listed in more or less chronological order are these:

1. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.
2. Jesus was a Galilean who preached and healed.
3. Jesus called disciples and spoke of there being twelve.
4. Jesus confined his activity to Israel.
5. Jesus engaged in a controversy about the temple.
6. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities.
7. After his death Jesus' followers continued as an identifiable movement.
8. At least some Jews persecuted at least parts of the new movement (Gal. 1.13,22; Phil. 3.6), and it appears that this persecution endured at least to a time near the end of Paul's career (II Cor. 11.24; Gal. 5.11; 6.12; cf Matt. 23.34; 10.17).'

'The resurrection did not change political, military, and nationalistic hopes (based on misunderstanding) into spiritual, heavenly ones, but other-worldly-earthly hopes into otherworldly-heavenly... [furthermore] the kingdom expected by Jesus is not quite that expected by Paul - in the air, and not of flesh and blood -, but not that of an actual insurrectionist either. It is like the present world - it has a king, leaders, a temple, and twelve tribes - but it is not just a rearrangement of the present world. God must step in and provide a new temple, the restored people of Israel, and presumably a renewed social order, one in which 'sinners' will have a place.'

b) *A broader definition of eschatology*

Borg (1994b:71) also identifies how a *broader definition of eschatology* emerged in the wake of the formative studies of Weiss and Schweitzer, and found expression, most notably in the work of Rudolph Bultmann, some of Bultmann's students, and the work of CH Dodd.

For example, even when the eminent 20th century theologian, Rudolph Bultmann (cf 1958:8), who was radically sceptical about ever reconstructing the life and personality of Jesus from the available early Christian sources, he could not bypass nor neglect 'the eschatological Jesus' which others before him had laid emphasis on. Bultmann accepted the claim that imminent eschatology, in Schweitzer's terms, was at the core of Jesus' message. However, Bultmann reinterpreted Schweitzer's thoroughgoing eschatology and broadened its meaning to support his own *existentialist eschatology*. In this way, Bultmann came to understand Schweitzer's emphasis on the 'the end of the world' in terms of 'the dramatic internal change within the individual' which the message of Jesus was able engender (Borg 1994b:71). As a result of this 'demythologization' of eschatology, Bultmann could now speak of 'eschatological existence' as a present reality and as at the heart of the Christian message.²⁶ Eschatology had thus been individualized and internalized; it could be used in a sense that involved neither chronological futurity nor change in the outer world' (Borg 1994b:71). Clearly, Bultmann's existentialist eschatology reflected his own commitment to an existentialist hermeneutic which he believed freed theology from outward controls and provided the priorities of his own existential philosophy (cf Tatum 1982:71-74).

British New Testament scholar, CH Dodd (1935) also provided a broader understanding of eschatology of Jesus, but from a different perspective to that which had been provided by Weiss, Schweitzer and Bultmann. Where the latter had insisted on an imminent eschatology as the driving force behind Jesus' eschatology, Dodd maintained, on the basis of Mark 1:15 and Matthew 12:28 / Luke 11:20, that Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God had come as a present reality during his earthly ministry (cf Borg 1994b:71; Yarbrow Collins 1990:1361). Dodd coined the term 'realized eschatology' to describe this notion of a present kingdom in Jesus' message, although many scholars (e.g. Borg 1994b:71) have preferred the term 'present eschatology' as a more accurate description of what Dodd meant.

Although Bultmann's student, Ernst Käsemann, attempted to escape the historical scepticism of Bultmann *vis-a-vis* the question of the historical Jesus in his important lecture in 1953,²⁷ he and other scholars of the 'new quest' had inherited and shared 'a minimalist

26 As Yarbrow Collins (1990:1361) explains: 'Theologically, ... [Bultmann] argued that, whereas the kingdom of God is itself entirely future in the message of Jesus, it is a power which determines the present by calling for human decision.'

27 Käsemann's lecture was entitled 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus' and was delivered at the reunion of Marburg old students on 20 October in Jugenheim, and was first published in *ZTK* 51, 1954: 125-53 (cf

portrait of the message of Jesus conceived in eschatological terms and coupled with existentialist interpretation' (Borg 1994b:5). The 'new' was, therefore rather limited, located more within its theological agenda (finding a continuity between the message of Jesus and the kerygma of the early church) than in any significantly new methods or results.

Joachim Jeremias (1963, German edition 1947), largely indebted to Dodd's emphasis on the present eschatology of Jesus as well as the future eschatological perspectives of Weiss, Schweitzer and Bultmann, proposed a consensus or compromise position, namely that of 'an eschatology in the process of realization' (cf Yarbrow Collins 1990:1361). Many scholars shared Jeremias's position (e.g. Kämmel 1957; Ladd 1974; Perrin 1963), although Perrin (1976:45; cf Meier 1990:1320) later questioned this view, and argued that the kingdom of God was a tensive symbol that could not be related to space and time.

Borg (1994b:71) observes that the broader definition of eschatology has become common in contemporary usage.

There is the understanding of eschatology as the shattering of the conceptual-linguistic world brought about by the subversive effect of Jesus' parables and aphorisms. It is sometimes used virtually as a synonym for 'the future' or 'concern with the future.' Or it can be used to refer to any world-changing event, or perhaps to any really important event...

Borg (1994b:72) notes that certain scholars such as George Caird (1980:243-71) has catalogued seven different nuances of the 'eschatology' in biblical language,²⁸ and this has led to some New Testament scholars calling for a moratorium on its usage because of the difficulty with its precise exegetical meaning.²⁹

David Aune (1992:575-576) has also described what appears to be a narrow meaning of eschatology which he calls *biblical eschatology*. Here eschatology 'refers to a time in the future in which the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can speak of an entirely new state of reality' and concerns 'the last things in a worldwide and historical sense, e.g. an apocalyptic, cosmic cataclysm, and a new age followed by utopian bliss.' Yet, Borg (1994b:72) believes that Aune's survey of what scholars have actually said about biblical eschatology has actually caused him to employ a broader rather than narrower definition of the term. According to Borg (1994b:72), Aune's broad understanding of eschatology, so apparent in his survey, 'is in fact wide enough to include any teaching regarding the future activity of God, whether in fulfillment or promise or execution of judgement, whether through mundane historical events or dramatic divine interventions.' But is this definition not too broad and too inclusive for it to be meaningfully applied to our

Käsemann 1964:15-47). Käsemann effectively inaugurated the period that has become known as the 'new quest of the historical Jesus' which dominated biblical and theological scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s (cf Tatum 1982:74-77).

28 According to Borg (1994b:91, n 11), the subscript system that Caird has proposed for distinguishing these different usages of 'eschatology' or 'end-of-the-world language' in the Bible as well as his conclusions are very illuminating. Borg summarises Caird's system as follows:

- (1) The biblical writers literally believed the world had a temporal beginning and would have a temporal end;
- (2) they regularly used end-of-the-world language to refer to that which they well knew was not the end of the world;
- (3) As with all use of metaphor, we must allow for the possibility of literalist misinterpretation by some hearers and of possible blurring between mode of communication and meaning on the part of the speaker.

29 Borg (1994b:92, n 12) cites as examples here the respective views of Beker (1969:27) and Carnignac (1970-71:388-90).

specific discussion of the historical Jesus? Borg (1994b:72) thinks that it is, because '[i]n this broad sense, much of the Bible is eschatological.'

Therefore, Borg (1994b:74) insists that when it comes to a meaningful discussion of the historical Jesus, we should appreciate the distinction between the narrow and broader definitions of eschatology, and also be aware of the diverse ways in which terms are used by different scholars. But *the* really crucial questions should be: 'what role (if any) did expectation of an imminent future event involving direct divine intervention in an objectively unmistakable form play in the message and activity of Jesus?'³⁰ Stated differently, '[w]hat is being affirmed or denied when one does or does not ascribe an imminent eschatology to Jesus?' (Borg 1994b:31).³¹

c) The 'non-eschatological Jesus'

For many scholars of Jesus in the 20th century, he has been interpreted as an eschatological figure who had the decided expectation of God's imminent intervention in the world to bring about renewal or restoration. This has remained 'the eschatological consensus' of Jesus scholarship, at least until very recently (Borg 1994b:74). Today, in large measure due to the alternative interpretative framework for understanding the historical Jesus, namely that of 'wisdom teacher' or 'sage' (Borg 1987:ch6; 1994a:69-118; 1994b:8-10, 21-28, 143-159), the earlier 'eschatological consensus' has been strongly challenged and rejected. Many more Jesus scholars within the 'third quest' appear to be shifting their perspective towards a view of Jesus that is more 'non-eschatological' or 'non-apocalyptic' (cf Borg 1992:806, 810; 1994b:47-68, 69-96).³² Borg's position, though, is a little more nuanced than an outright rejection of 'the eschatological Jesus' position would appear to demand. Clearly, he wishes to reject any 'narrow' view of eschatology being attributed to the historical Jesus. But he still admits that 'Jesus occasionally addressed eschatological topics and probably had some eschatological beliefs' (1994b:92, n 20), although *an eschatological worldview was not central to the life and message of Jesus* as Sanders and others would insist.³³ Also, Borg clarifies his position further by suggesting that his own understanding of 'end-of-the-world eschatology' or 'imminent eschatology' 'need not involve the end of the earth; in the messianic age, the world of Jerusalem, banquets, and vineyards may remain. But it is an objective change of affairs that results in

30 Borg (1994b:74) emphasises that 'all of the adjectives and adverbs in that sentence are important.'

31 We return to this question later in Section 3.

32 Three main factors are responsible for the shift towards a 'non-eschatological Jesus': (1) a stronger recognition that the primary foundation of the eschatological Jesus, namely 'the coming Son of Man' sayings are not authentic to Jesus himself, but the product of the early church; (2) an understanding of the 'kingdom of God' texts which speak of the imminent end of the world is influenced by the later 'coming Son of Man' sayings, and are without foundation in the kingdom texts themselves; (3) a major rethinking about the nature and meaning of the kingdom of God in the socio-historical and religious context of Jesus himself, rather than the space-time paradigm of present/future which dominated much of 20th century scholarship (cf Borg 1994b).

33 In debate with Sanders's interpretative framework of restoration eschatology, Borg (1994b:78) explains his own position as follows: 'I agree that many within the movement expected that Jesus would return in the near future and usher in the eschatological events of resurrection, judgment, and the everlasting kingdom. It is the most natural way to read a number of passages in Paul and the gospels, and it is the presupposition of the book of Revelation. Thus I agree that imminent eschatology was among the beliefs of early Christians. The important question, however, is whether this provides evidence that Jesus himself was eschatological in a central way... is the eschatology of the early movement most persuasively accounted for by supposing that it is a continuation of the eschatological orientation of Jesus himself?' Borg (1994b:78-80) proceeds to argue against the position of Sanders.

'everything being different...' Yet this kind of expectation, Borg says, was not characteristic of Jesus (1994b:42, n 79).

We have already noted that Crossan provides a portrait of Jesus that is more closely aligned with what Borg terms 'the non-eschatological Jesus.'³⁴ Yet Crossan (1991a:238-259; 1994a:51-53) chooses to redefine some aspects of Borg's terminology, thus illustrating how disagreements continue to exist even among Jesus scholars who would otherwise have much in common in their portrayal of Jesus and his social world. In the first place, Crossan prefers the term 'the apocalyptic Jesus' to describe what Borg means by his narrow view of eschatology. In his reflection on Schweitzer's famous quote,³⁵ Crossan (1994a:52) believes that Schweitzer 'uses the term *eschatological* where I have consistently used the word *apocalyptic*. . . There is a confusion in Schweitzer's text [cf 1968:402] between a wider or generic and a narrower or specific term. Both terms are absolutely necessary, and so is their careful distinction from one another.' Therefore, Crossan (1994a:52) proceeds to make a distinction between 'apocalyptic eschatology' and 'eschatology.' 'Eschatology' denotes 'the wider and generic term for *world-negation*' (Crossan 1991a:238). By this Crossan (1994a:52) means the 'radical criticism of culture and civilization and thus a fundamental rejection of this world's values and expectations. It describes those who have turned profoundly away from normal life in disappointment or anger, in sorrow or pain, in contempt or abandonment. They imagine another and more perfect world whose alluring vision trivializes the one all around them.' This wider notion embraces 'all sorts of ideas and programs and all types of ideal or perfect world' such as 'mystical, utopian, ascetic, libertarian, or anarchistic eschatologies or world negations' (Crossan 1994a:52; cf 1991a:238).³⁶ 'Apocalyptic eschatology' is concerned with an imminent 'end of the world' event; not necessarily involving the end of the space-time world, but certainly some form of 'a divine intervention so transcendently obvious that one's adversaries or enemies, oppressors or persecutors would be forced to acknowledge it and to accept conversion or concede defeat' (Crossan 1991a:238).³⁷ For Crossan (1991a:238), then, 'all apocalyptic is eschatological, but not all eschatology is apocalyptic.' All this relates to Crossan's (cf 1991a:284-291) own preference for a *sapiential eschatology* rather than an *apocalyptic*

34 See discussion on p 9.

35 See n 25 above.

36 Borg (1994b:72) states that this distinction corresponds 'quite closely' with his narrow and broader definitions of eschatology. Borg (1994b:92, n 18) also responds: 'I agree with Crossan that the items in his list are all forms of world-negation; but why use 'eschatology' as a *generic term* for world-negation? Why not simply use 'world-negation?' My point is not to engage in a terminological quarrel. Crossan is very clear, defining his terms with care and precision. Moreover, he and I are agreed that imminent eschatology (what he calls 'apocalyptic eschatology') was not part of the message of Jesus. My point rather is to ponder whether anything is gained by broadening the meaning of 'eschatology' this far.' And again (Borg 1994b:73): 'If one uses the word [eschatology] in its broadened sense, then it seems obvious that Jesus was eschatological. But the affirmation becomes virtually meaningless, given the wide range of meanings its encompasses. It could mean anything from 'Jesus thought something really important was going to happen' to 'he affirmed some form of world-negation' to 'he taught that you could experience a new life now' to 'he was concerned with the hope of Israel' to 'he expected the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment in his own generation.' When eschatology is used in this broad sense, to say 'Jesus was an eschatological figure' has no meaning without further specification.' This is why Borg reserves the term 'eschatology' for its narrower sense alone. See discussion under 2.2 (a) above.

37 Elsewhere, Crossan (1994a:53) defines 'apocalyptic eschatology' as that which 'presumes a world judged so catastrophically evil and deemed so irrevocably beyond human remedy that only immediate divine intervention can rectify it. It furnishes, therefore, a special revelation about the imminent ending of the evil world, about the liberation and exaltation of *us* and the conversion, punishment, or annihilation of *them*, and about a new situation in which *we* are taken up to heaven or heaven descends to embrace us.'

eschatology as a framework for understanding the Kingdom of God in the teaching of the historical Jesus.³⁸

The apocalyptic is a future Kingdom dependent on the overpowering action of God moving to restore justice and peace to an earth ravished by injustice and oppression. Believers can, at the very most, prepare or persuade, implore or assist its arrival, but its accomplishment is consigned to divine power alone. . . The sapiential Kingdom looks to the present rather than the future and imagines how one could live here and now within an already or always available divine dominion. One enters that Kingdom by wisdom or goodness, by virtue, justice, or freedom. It is a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future. This is therefore an ethical Kingdom, but it must be absolutely insisted that it could be just as eschatological as was the apocalyptic Kingdom. Its ethics could, for instance, challenge contemporary morality to its depths. It would be a gross mistake to presume that, in my terminology, a sapiential kingdom of God was any less world-negating than an apocalyptic one (Crossan 1991a:292).³⁹

3. The Historical Jesus and 'Hope for the Earth' revisited

Having somewhat traversed the maze-way of historical Jesus and eschatology research, we must retrace our steps and attempt some responses to the central concern of this paper: 'Is there support for an eschatological hope for the earth within the specific mission and message of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth?' Theological reflection within the framework of our Christian intuition and faith would wish to answer with a resounding 'yes.' But does such theological reflection ground itself adequately in a rigorous historical analysis of the traditions that relate to Jesus? What possibilities or indicators are there, if any, to suggest that the historical Jesus provides a plausible vision of hope for the earth? We return now to our earlier survey of scholarly work on the historical Jesus and eschatology, and attempt to provide some rather *tentative proposals* in this regard.

The narrowly defined eschatological perspectives of Weiss, Schweitzer, and Sanders (and many others in this tradition of scholarship) have lead us to understand the teaching and mission of 'the historical Jesus' in essentially *world-negating* ways. Certainly, Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus would appear to have little concrete ingredients of hope for the earth. In more positive vein, though, Schweitzer (1968:399) wanted to draw attention to the spiritual power of the eschatological Jesus for the modern world. 'Jesus means something to our world because mighty spiritual force streams from Him and flows through our time also.' But is there really *sufficient* grounds for a hope for the earth here, especially when the eschatology and spirit of this Jesus is essentially world-negating rather than world-

38 After some investigation, Crossan (1991a:287) does concede that 'the phrase 'kingdom of God' could easily have been understood in an apocalyptic sense at the time of Jesus.' He maintains, though, that the argument for a 'sapiential kingdom of God' is stronger.

39 Crossan's use of the term '*world-negation*' must be understood in the context of the experiences of peasants in Jesus' social world. In this context, the sapiential eschatology of Jesus becomes the language of peasant resistance. Moreover, Jesus' free healing and open commensality become the essential impetus of this resistance in their world. In Jesus' actions and teachings (parables and aphorisms), the kingdom of God is immediately available to all those who are most undesirable and marginalised in society. See section 3 below for a further discussion of Crossan's image of Jesus in this regard. Horsley (1989b:108-111; 1994:733-751) and Nickelsburg (1994:715-732) reject the tendency of Crossan (and other scholars) to view the sapiential and apocalyptic traditions as indicators of two dichotomous worldviews, and therefore implicitly question the foundation upon which Crossan builds his argument for a Jesus that is closer to the 'sapiential' tradition. See also Strain (1994:115-131) for a direct, critical response to Crossan's (1991a; 1994a) views.

affirming? Indeed, only when this spirit of Jesus is recovered in all its strangeness, with its call to a personal rejection of the world, will modern individuals be challenged to a life of commitment, sacrifice and even death (Schweitzer 1968:401-2; cf Yarbrow Collins 1990:1361).⁴⁰

Sanders (1985:123-156; 223-241), for his part, lays stress on the kingdom of God as immediately future in Jesus' message. But during his lifetime, Jesus' message most likely had a smaller impact than John the Baptist's (Sanders 1985:226; cf 1985:396, n.13). Jesus appears not to have had 'a completely worked out plan which could convey his hope and expectation to 'all Israel,' even though he saw his work as bearing on the fate of Israel as a people (Sanders 1985:227). Jesus had no political or military agenda to bring in the kingdom of God. If there is any hope for fundamental renewal, even of the earth, then God alone will have to bring it about (Sanders 1985:230). Here is 'other-worldly-earthly hopes' at best which is later changed into 'other-worldly-heavenly' hopes after the resurrection (Sanders 1985:231-32). Sanders (1985:296), then, is convinced about the 'a-political' nature of Jesus' message, and he understands it in a rather specific way: 'I have used the term 'a-political' to mean (*sic*) 'not involving a plan to liberate and restore Israel by defeating the Romans and establishing an autonomous government.'

Borg (1994b:98), however, views Sanders's definition of politics as too 'narrow.' Borg insists that there is a clear socio-political dimension to Jesus' message and mission once politics is defined in a 'broader' sense, namely, that 'concerning the shape and shaping of the city, and by extension the shape and shaping of the city, and by extension the shape and shaping of a society's life.' This broader understanding of politics lies behind the socio-political Jesus of many recent and influential Jesus scholars. The rest of our discussion will focus briefly on the perspectives of only a few of these scholars, namely Horsley, Crossan, Oakman, Hollenbach, and Schüssler Fiorenza. It is interesting that all of these scholars, to a lesser or greater degree, appear to move in the direction of a non-eschatological interpretation of Jesus and his message and mission on earth.

Horsley (1987; 1989a; 1989b) portrays Jesus as a social revolutionary. Jesus envisaged a radical change of society from the 'bottom up' (1987:324). Jesus' 'radical' sayings (e.g forgiveness of debts, lending without regard to repayment, giving up possessions) were not 'eschatological' in any narrow sense, but part of a socioeconomic programme for the transformation of ordinary local communities (1987:246-55). Alternative communities of solidarity and egalitarianism were to abolish existing hierarchical and patriarchal relationships (1987:231-45). After locating apocalyptic texts within the Gospels within the historical context of Roman imperialism in Palestine, Horsley (1987:143-144) further gives them a sociopolitical interpretation. These texts have three main functions: '*remembering* God's past deliverances of his people from oppression; *creatively envisioning* '[s]eemingly illusory fantasies of 'new heavens and a new earth' which provided the promise of a life in human values of justice and freedom from oppression; and *critical demystifying* of the established order and strengthening the endurance of the oppressed and even motivating them towards resistance and revolt. Clearly, for Horsley, these apocalyptic texts do not possess an other-worldly orientation, but rather express the hope of this-worldly

40 Schweitzer (1968:403) concluded: 'He [Jesus] comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.'

transformation (cf Borg 1994b:29). The vision of Jesus certainly engenders hope for radical social transformation and liberation (cf Horsley 1989b:12), but we are still left uncertain about whether this kind of transformation also embraces the physical earth as well.

The results of Crossan's two important works on Jesus (1991; 1994a) present us with a Jesus who was a peasant Jewish Cynic. After his comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural and historical world of Greco-Rome and the intracanonical and extracanonical literature concerning Jesus, Crossan (1991:421-422, his emphasis) provides a succinct description of his image of Jesus:

The historical Jesus was, then, a *peasant Jewish Cynic*. His peasant village was close enough to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris that sight and knowledge of Cynicism are neither inexplicable nor unlikely. But his work was among the farms and villages of Lower Galilee. His strategy, implicitly for himself and explicitly for his followers, was the combination of *free healing and common eating*, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power. . . He was neither broker nor mediator but, somewhat paradoxically, the announcer that neither should exist between humanity and divinity or between humanity and itself. Miracle and parable, healing and eating were calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God and unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. He announced, in other words, the brokerless kingdom of God.

As in the case of Horsley earlier, the definite promise and hope of sociopolitical transformation that Crossan sees in Jesus' announcement and activity still leaves us uncertain about whether this hope also pertained to the physical earth, at least in any sense that could please systematic theologians. As Strain (1994:115) states: 'Crossan's Jesus is disconcerting for theologians.'⁴¹

Oakman (1986) describes Jesus essentially as a socio-economic reformer. The parables of Jesus, in particular those of the sower (Mk 4:3-8 and par.); the seed growing secretly (Mk 4:26-29); the darnel among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30); the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32 and par), as well as those other traditions which address issues of land tenure, the debt system, and wealth and resource distribution demonstrate Jesus' solidarity with the poor. Jesus had a revolutionary agenda that involved the complete change of social relations in Palestine in a way that would be liberatory for the marginalised.

Three emphases underscored Jesus' agenda. *Firstly*, Jesus envisioned 'a new economic behaviour' as an important step in a 'bid for social power' on behalf of the poor (Oakman 1986:207). The oppressors could begin to behave toward the oppressed with generosity and magnanimity' (Oakman 1987:168). Significant texts which emphasize this teaching are the parables of the crafty steward (Lk 16:6-7); the forgiving debtor (Mt 18:27); the vineyard workers (Mt 20:9,15) and the wedding feast (Mt 22:10). Jesus challenges the dominant and oppressive structures of patronage and exploitation (in which the landed and property elite controlled the peasantry) by substituting *a model of partnership* where 'the interdependence of tenant/food-producer and landowner/non-agricultural specialist' is emphasized (Oakman 1986:209-210). In its radical extreme, Jesus was calling for the complete 'reversal of the centralization of political power and economic goals' (Oakman 1986:231) and opening up for the oppressed 'the hope for the abolition of private property (Mammon)' which had

41 Strain (1994:115) elaborates as follows: 'Theologies traditionally thrive within institutions whose boundaries they define and, in part, create. Jesus, we are told, transgresses all boundaries, creates community apart from the oppressive weight of institutions. Theologies mediate; Jesus proclaims and performs the unmediated availability of divine power. Theologies discourse about the routes and pitfalls of salvation; Jesus heals. If Crossan's Jesus does not disconcert, a theologian must be seriously self-deluded.'

formerly worked towards the entrenchment of ruling class power in Palestine (1986:213). Key figures in the practical outworking these alternative values of generosity and magnanimity were the 'middle people' or 'brokers,' a group of which Jesus himself was a part (Oakman 1986:213-214). These people were ideally suited to overcome both the ruling class fixation on self-sufficiency, greed and insensitivity, and the peasant classes' virtual enslavement to the concerns of subsistence and survival (Oakman 1986:214-215). *Secondly*, Jesus presented a socio-economic reality where 'the oppressed themselves could find joy again in sharing' (Oakman 1986:169). He unfolds this economic teaching forcefully in such parables as the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37); the widow who celebrates with her neighbours after finding her lost drachma (Lk 15:9), and the stress on the priority of seeking the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33). This was an attempt by Jesus to shift peasant survival towards a dependence on God's providence. *Thirdly*, Jesus proposed a new basis of social relations and moral obligations to that which permeated 1st century Palestine. Against the order for 'balanced reciprocity' where the wealthy patrons were invariably a socio-economic order based on 'general reciprocity' in which the principle of 'giving without expecting in return' became the liberative means for overcoming the exploitative and unjust economic conditions of Palestine (Oakman 1986:215). Important texts which stress this dimension of Jesus' teaching are the love of the enemy (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27), and the parables of the two debtors (Lk 7:41-42), and the good Samaritan (Lk 10:35).

Assuming the historical legitimacy of Oakman's (1986:169) thesis that Jesus' 'vision of the liberation and humanity coming with the reign of God directly attacked principal elements of the Roman order in Palestine and attracted a following of people victimized by that order,' we are still left asking ourselves about the possible implications of this vision for a 'hope for the earth' theology. Perhaps, some answers may be found in an alternative view about why people, notably the peasants, followed Jesus? Oakman (1986:216) believes that this happened because Jesus provided the people with a workable and realistic programme which was not 'entirely utopian.' Yet, if we take seriously Oakman's (1986:213) own suggestion of the curse on human relationships as the arena of struggle into which Jesus proclaimed his vision of the reign of God, then we must question whether Jesus' words and actions could realistically bring about the hoped for social changes within his world. Oakman (1986:217-18), furthermore, shares the despair (except for the one possibility of God acting in a miraculous way) with respect to the realism of the Jesus tradition for 20th century western society. Why, then, should we presume that the context of 1st century Palestine was anything different? The major economic problems in Palestine at the time of Jesus reveals a society just as corrupt, exploitative, and ecocentric as our own modern /postmodern society. In light of this, we must ask ourselves whether feelings of human despair rather than hope for the earth still remain the inevitable consequences of even Oakman's Jesus?

Oakman's study, though, has largely ignored an important dimension of Jesus' activity, namely his healing/exorcising ministry. Paul Hollenbach's (1981:196-219; 1982:565-584) study of Jesus as healer/exorcizer may help to explain both the intense opposition to Jesus by the ruling elite of his day, but also why the oppressed and demon-possessed continued to follow him.⁴² Jesus' social healing together with his proclamation of the reign of God presented an *alternative world of experience* which helped to overcome the disruptive and threatening world of the alienated peasant classes, and it created alternatives for a wealthier class of people who had become convinced of the need for a new and just (Jewish) society

42 Hollenbach's studies have exerted an influence on Crossan's (cf 1991a:317-320) view of Jesus as healer.

to that under offer during the period of Roman domination. Perhaps, a more careful consideration of the theological implications of just such 'an alternative world of experience' may help to uncover the, as yet, hidden elements of a theology of hope for the earth in the context of the historical Jesus.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1983; 1994) provides an image of Jesus as a wisdom prophet and founder of a Jewish renewal movement with a socially radical vision and praxis. She certainly rejects the idea of 'an imminent eschatology' with respect to Jesus, but she does, however integrate a notion of eschatology into her overall image of Jesus. As Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:120) maintains:

Although Jesus and his movement shared the belief of all groups in Greco-Roman Palestine that Israel is God's elect people, and were equally united with the other groups in the hope of God's intervention on behalf of Israel, they realized that God's *basileia* was already in their midst. Exegetes agree that it is the mark of Jesus' preaching and ministry that he proclaimed the *basileia* of God as future and present, eschatological vision and experiential reality. This characteristic tension between present and future, between wholeness and brokenness is generally acknowledged, even though it is interpreted or resolved differently.

Perhaps Schüssler Fiorenza's studies of Jesus provide a necessary compromise view between the radical alternatives currently provided by respective proponents of 'the eschatological Jesus' more closely aligned with the apocalyptic tradition and 'the non-eschatological Jesus' who is more directly aligned with the sapiential tradition.

4. Conclusion:

Our study has attempted to wrestle with the central question: 'Is there support for an eschatological hope for the earth within the specific mission and message of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth?' In order to address this question, it has been necessary to problematise each component of the study as expressed in the title to this paper, namely, 'the historical Jesus,' 'eschatology,' and 'hope for the earth.' One of our more important observations has been that both diversity and sharp disagreements exist among Jesus scholars in the modern and postmodern periods with respect to the question of eschatology and the historical Jesus. Whatever our perspective may be on the merits of Borg's distinction between a 'narrow' or 'broader' definition of eschatology in historical Jesus studies, or his argument that a definite shift has occurred away from 'the eschatological Jesus' towards 'the non-eschatological Jesus' in recent 'Third Quest' studies, the critical issue has emerged. Both New Testament scholars and systematic theologians *cannot* easily talk of nor assume that eschatology or apocalyptic (in whatever form) remains the essential or proper framework within which to understand the historical Jesus. A complexity of nuanced positions among Jesus scholars on this issue must first be adequately and critically assessed.⁴³

Another significant observation of this study has been that many portraits of Jesus which are more closely aligned with 'the non-eschatological' side of the spectrum appear to be

43 And even when we may be tempted to ignore or overcome too simplistically the ambiguity and variety in ongoing talk about Jesus, Venter (1995:386) would aptly caution us: 'No escape has yet been found from the *terminological* maze in which theologians are entrapped. Much greater refinement... is necessary. Apart from the real Jesus and the historical Jesus (theoretical construal) there is an immense variety of images within the canon, within systematic theology, within the church and within popular piety which should be distinguished as such. An indiscriminate use of terms furthers no cause.'

more firmly rooted in a radical *social* hope for world than those on 'the eschatological' side. In other words, the mission and message of 'the non-eschatological Jesus' envisions a 'this-worldly hope' of social, political and economic transformation, especially for the poor and marginalised, whereas portraits of 'the eschatological Jesus' seem to be more 'other-worldly' or 'a-political.' Yet, neither the proponents of 'the eschatological Jesus' nor those of 'the non-eschatological Jesus' suggest that the historical Jesus had anything like a definite hope for the *physical* earth. Perhaps the deliberate controlling *historical* nature of 'Third Quest' studies, have made it both unnecessary and illegitimate to address the more theological notion of 'hope for the earth.' A further *theological* and *exegetical* study of authentic traditions of the historical Jesus in the Gospels may still be needed in order to throw more light on this issue. But such theological-exegetical work can no longer simply bypass the studies of historical Jesus scholars if it claims to be legitimately grounded. Until this kind of theological-exegetical work is pursued, our own study suggests that Nürnberger's (1994:139-151) thesis (that a Christian vision of hope for the earth appears to be adequately grounded in a variety of Biblical perspectives) is far less certain when related to the specific question of the historical Jesus.

Thirdly, we have to conclude that any historical Jesus *reconstruction*, however inevitable and necessary, may never be enough. Jesus of Nazareth remains still more (or less) than any scholarly reconstruction of his person, his world, his message and his mission. We are also driven again to inquire about the *ideological dimension* which underpins the very historical construals of Jesus by scholars, and the influence this may have on the very understanding of Jesus' message and mission. Little overt attention seems to have been given to this specific issue among Jesus scholars themselves (cf Venter 1995:377-384; Arendse 1997). More cautiously, then, we may have to admit that we many never *really* know on the basis of *historical* research alone whether Jesus had any explicit vision, programme or theology which embraced an explicit 'hope for the earth.' On the other hand, perhaps, this specific kind of concern may be far too esoteric and modernist/postmodernist for us to expect it to have had any direct relevance or importance for Jesus and his audience, given their 1st century Palestinian context.

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