

ISSUES IN CONSTRUCTING A LIFE OF JESUS

I. THE “QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS”

- A. The “Quest for the Historical Jesus” = Modern Scholars’ Attempt to Reconstruct a Reliable History of Jesus of Nazareth Apart from the Church’s Christologized Views Found in a Devotional Reading of the Canonical Gospels
 - 1. Attempts to Investigate Jesus through Critical Methodology without Creedal or Theological Bias
 - 2. Differentiates Between the Historical Figure Jesus of Nazareth and “the Christ”
 - 3. Tends to Doubt the Deity of Jesus and the Reliability of Accounts of Miracles
 - 4. Views the Gospels as Filtered Theological Narratives (can the historical Jesus be known through them?)

- B. Periods of the “Quest for the Historical Jesus”
 - 1. Early Efforts Resulted from the Enlightenment’s Focus on Reason rather than Revelation as the Basis for Religion
 - 2. Death of the “Quest” in the Early 20th Century
 - a. Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus: each interpreter’s bias was the driving force of individual quests; obscured Jesus’ apocalypticism
 - b. Rudolf Bultmann: Historical Jesus unnecessary for the Church; Existential View
 - 3. The Renewed “Quest”
 - a. Focus on Individual Theologies of Gospel Writers
 - b. Recent Work has Emphasized:
 - 1) Social History of Palestine/Galilee in Gospel Period
 - 2) Use of Non-Canonical Sources
 - c. Role of “The Jesus Seminar”; Emphasis on “Q” as a mid-1st c. Document
 - d. Recent Literature Presents Jesus as:
 - 1) Itinerant Cynic Philosopher (Crossan)
 - 2) Charismatic Man of the Spirit (Vermes, Borg)
 - 3) Prophet of Social Change (Theissen, Horsley)
 - 4) Marginal Jew or Jewish Messiah (Meier)
 - 5) Eschatological Prophet (Sanders)

II. SOURCES FOR A LIFE OF CHRIST

- A. Canonical Books (primarily Gospels)

- B. Non-Canonical Christian/Gnostic Literature (Gospel of Thomas, etc.)

- C. Secular Works from the Roman World
 - 1. Josephus
 - 2. Tacitus
 - 3. Suetonius

- D. Rabbinical Literature

III. POSITIVIST APPROACHES

- A. Harmonistic Approach: attempts to intertwine the four gospel accounts

- B. Literary Approach: treats each gospel as independent literary account without attempt to harmonize