The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices

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Foreword

Samuel Byrskog, Tom Holmén and Matti Kankaanniemi

Since the very days of the so-called Old Quest of the 19th century, the search for the historical Jesus has been tackling the question of Jesus' identity. More becoming revealed about the context of Jesus, methods and axioms of the search being introduced, elaborated, refined and replaced, it is necessary every now and then to return to the question. Understandably, too, the concept of identity is an inseparable part of any attempt to profile a figure of the past. Scholars struggling in a stream of progress and change, a short standstill in a collegial island, discussing, reflecting, comparing and combining viewpoints and conjectures is most welcome. With this goal in mind, the *Historical Jesus Workshop* of Åbo Academi University organized the first Nordic Symposium on the Historical Jesus in October 2010 in Turku/Åbo, Finland. The Symposium was summoned by Tom Holmén, and it was patronized by the Åbo Akademi Faculty of Theology. Due to the above-mentioned reasons, the Symposium was titled "The Identity of Jesus", which turned out to be a fortunate choice; it enabled a meaningful sharing of study results as well as suggestions of ideas of more suggestive nature. While the philosophers of science are still out for an exact definition of science, it is imperative for all descriptions of the discipline that critical collegial interchange is not compromised.

Especially in historical sciences – the most comfortable and natural locus of the search for the historical Jesus – the term "identity" has had a strong social psychological echo. This is due to the essentially relational and contextual nature of the concept. Consequently, in order to define the identity of Jesus, it is necessary to approach this enigmatic figure of history from more than one perspective. In what follows, a short overview is given of the general lines of thought brought forward by the participants of the current volume. Some are almost exact copies of the oral presentations held in the Symposium, whereas a few have significantly reworked their original thoughts.

The study of a historical figure always reflects the context and mind of the one conducting the research. No scholar approaches the issue independently from his or her frames of reference, which makes the question about the researcher's horizon a meaningful way to embark on the journey aiming to chart the identity of Jesus. Thus, in the first chapter of this volume Kari Syreeni

analyses the concepts and paradigms used in the quests of Jesus, while paying critical attention especially to the dichotomies used by scholars in categorizing the scholarship. Syreeni's viewpoint is not a standard presentation of the history of the "quests". For instance, against the general practice, he points to the possible truism in such concepts as "historical" Jesus and the "Jewish" Jesus.

From the horizon of the scholar, the focus moves on to a comparative analysis of Jesus and other ancient figures. This important approach, from the field of comparative study of religions, is provided by Per Bilde, who deals with the originality of Jesus – indeed, explicitly outside of a confessional framework. The identity of a person is, by necessity, defined along with a constant comparison of oneself with the figures around. Those features that make a person "original" or "exceptional" are, in all likelihood, imperative in identity formation. The approach is thus very appropriately discussed in the present volume. In comparison with other eschatological prophets of his day, Jesus seemed to be original for example in his announcement of the imminence of the kingdom of God, in his activity as a healer and miracle worker, and in his rather unique relationship to the Mosaic Law.

The recent renaissance of the psychological studies of Jesus has produced strikingly different pictures of Jesus. Not least because of the soon century-long hegemony of the psychoanalytical paradigm in psychology, Jesus' childhood has been interpreted as an important factor in his identity formation. Matti Kankaanniemi analyses two theories concerning the paternal relationship of Jesus and Joseph. He concludes that in the light of the exegetical data and empirical developmental psychological research, it is probable that John W. Miller – *contra* Andries van Aarde – is correct in maintaining that Jesus had a warm and loving relationship with his father Joseph. Later, his socio-emotional skills as well as the inclusive and accepting attitude towards the marginalized and stigmatised can be seen as a result and manifestation of this.

Since the identities are defined with the help of existing categories and significant figures in the context where a religious person operates, it is meaningful to search for the most important points of identification for Jesus in the Scriptures. In the fourth article of the volume, Tobias Hägerland evaluates John P. Meier's suggestion that Jesus would have taken up the role of Elijah the prophet. On the basis of a scrutinizing analysis, Hägerland concludes that while there are numerous similarities between Jesus' and Elijah's ministries, possibly consciously engendered by Jesus, it was the anointed prophet in Isaiah 61 that in particular inspired the primary role-taking by Jesus. The charismatic experience of the spirit and success as a healer led Jesus to consider the possibility that he might be the prophetic Messiah. This apparently led him to act out the other tasks of the anointed one.

One of the most broadly accepted facts about the historical Jesus is his message of the kingdom of God. The kingdom forming the very center of Jesus' activity as a teacher and prophet, it is logical to assume that his identity

was keenly tied with this concept. Hans Kvalbein elaborates the countercultural behaviour of Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom of God, concluding, alongside with Joachim Jeremias, that the table fellowship of Jesus with the sinners was an "acted parable". Furthermore, the very ethos of these banquets was likely echoed in the early Christian Eucharist praxis and the self-understanding and the identity of the historical Jesus.

It can hardly be doubted that Jesus was a teacher and thus had a didactic identity. Didactic identity, argues Samuel Byrskog, did not encompass only a verbal aspect but was intrinsically mixed with visual teaching as well. Therefore, discussing Jesus' didactic identity separately from considering his mighty acts may be an incorrectly biased scholarly practice. As Byrskog maintains, the widely accepted role of "Jesus as a teacher" includes very likely more than meets the eye in the first reading of the relevant source material. This challenges the reader to evaluate many other role categories. As suggested in the present volume, these should be seen as partly overlapping descriptions of Jesus, each of them coming with the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the identity of Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth did not leave anything written for modern scholars to depend on when seeking to profile his identity. The closest scholarship ever gets to him are probably the parables he told, their being regarded as the most authentic block of the preserved sayings of Jesus. Thus it is possible, in some sense, to hear the *vox Jesu* in these figurative narratives he told as an important part of his teaching activity. However, as Renate Banschbach Eggen points out in her article, using the parables as sources for the historical Jesus is complicated, to say the least. The message of the parables is often intergrally connected with the parable contexts that, unfortunately from a Jesus scholar's point of view, vary greatly, thus making the reconstruction of the original setting in the life of Jesus difficult.

While the very notion of Jesus having been a Jew and having lived in a Jewish cultural context is becoming all but a self-evident axiom in the contemporary Jesus research, the influence of this fact on the scholarly understanding of Jesus' identity has much to gain from a detailed study of rabbinic and Qumranic hermeneutical practices. Thomas Kazen sets out to illuminate the complicated question of the characteristics of the *halakah* Jesus taught and its subsequent development in the tradition process. Special emphasis is given to the conflict stories over *halakah*. This is of importance for the topic of the book, since the identity of a person is closely connected with the intergroup conflicts he or she participates in, either passively or – as in Jesus' and his followers' case – actively.

Indeed, it is evident that different "Jesuses" may be reconstructed on the basis of the presentations of the volume at hand. Some might want to highlight the contradictions in order to plead for the pessimistic assertion that the whole scholarship dealing with the "historical Jesus" is but a chaotic mess, a playground for subjective depictions and wishful thinking. Nevertheless, other

could focus on the points of agreement between the different "Jesuses" and come to a conclusion that is quite the opposite or at least one that affords some credit and credibility to this branch of research. While we as the editors sensed a breath of consensus in the presentations of the Symposium, and subsequently in the articles of the current volume, it is wiser to leave it to the reader to decide whether any optimism is justifiable.

It might be asked what the idea of "Nordic" in the title stands for? The scholarly world has been shrinking due to electronic means of communication and even the greatest of the geographical distances are less of a hindrance than, say, half a century ago. Thus, the old division into "geographical scholarships", such as North American, British or German, can legitimately be questioned. Nonetheless, it can also be maintained that "Nordic Jesus scholarship" has enough local flavour in it to deserve their voices to be heard through a specific volume. Most of the contributors here know each other due to frequent participation in common seminars, doctoral disputations and more down-to-earth types of occasions like birthday parties. It is undeniable that this may help to a better understanding of the argumentation of others and, human beings as we are, perhaps sometimes even adds to the willingness to really get the point behind the claims. The common cultural background catalyses discussion and also enhances mutual understanding. The process is reminiscent of one Nordic curiosity, a language called *skandinaviska*, which is when everyone speaks his or her mother tongue and others answers with theirs. Words may be different, pronunciation varies and sometimes idioms are missed, but everyone is communicating and getting understood without having to compromise anything essential.

The Identity of the Jesus Scholar: Diverging Preunderstandings in Recent Jesus Research

Kari Syreeni

My paper discusses three areas of disagreement in recent Jesus scholarship, pertaining to, first, the (hi)story of Jesus research, secondly, the ideological double of Jesus, and, thirdly, Jesus. In all these areas, disagreements arise from the scholars' diverging preunderstandings and reflect their differential social and individual identity.[1] Before embarking on the three topics, I want to explicate my own epistemological preunderstanding, which is a moderate (or "weak") constructivist stance with a slight narrative touch. To illustrate this position and its alternatives, I start from the related field of Qumranic studies – an outside vantage point often gives a clearer view.

1. Overture: From Plato's Cave to Schweitzer's Well

In a chapter of his book *Historical Knowing*, the philosopher Leon J. Goldstein discusses three interpretations of the Dead Sea Scrolls in order to expose the nature of scholarly disagreement.[2] Throughout the book, Goldstein argues against *historical realism*, by asserting that "the historical past is not the real past."[3] By the same token, Goldstein asserts that the historian "in no way confronts the real past. And rather than confront *it*, he constitutes the *historical* past."[4] In other words, the historian is no eyewitness but one, who *constructs,*

[1] My point of view is hermeneutical, and it is basic to hermeneutical theory that understanding, interpretation and application are functions of both the *object* (Jesus) and *subject* (the scholar) of the process of meaning-making. Therefore, in speaking of *Jesus* we are also speaking of the Jesus *scholar*.

[2] L.J. Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (Austin 1976) 93-137 (Ch. 4: Disagreement in History).

[3] Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (see n. 2), 38.

[4] Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (see n. 2), 136 (original emphases). In Chapter 3: Historical Facts, Goldstein discusses the related distinction between the *actual event* and the *historical fact* and acknowledges that this distinction is made by the historian Carl Becker, who unfortunately "is not sufficiently radical in his thinking to realize that he cannot expect to say anything about the former" (p. 74). Similarly, I suggest, we should not expect to reach

or reconstructs, the past. For a number of reasons, not nearly all historians agree with Goldstein's view of historical constitution. For one thing, most historians – and exegetes – are more interested in scholarly praxis rather than in abstract theory, and the practical work is done with concrete documents and data in order to find out how things "really" were "back then." This attitude corresponds to our everyday experience of the "reality" of things. However, the remoter in time, space and cultural affinity the "real past" is, the more everyday experience comes to its limits. Goldstein may have gone too far in denying the relevance of "the real past" to historians, but in some respects his idea is backed up by common sense considerations. If ancient texts and archaeological finds are all we have from the past, then these remains are the historian's object of study and, when interpreted, the best and only available substitute for the "real" past.

However, Goldstein also rejects a narrative view, which treats history-writing as story-telling.[5] Here I find Goldstein's arguments inconclusive, at least if the narrative view is articulated in ways other than those discussed in his book.[6] The canonical Gospels, which are among the best available sources in Jesus research, are four different stories. If we cannot ask to what degree and in which ways these stories are historically reliable, I wonder what Jesus scholars are doing. When scholars write books and essays about Jesus, the resulting texts, while of course having argumentative elements, are also narratives about Jesus, and much of the learned scholarly discourse is about the adequacy of these different narratives. As is known, a standard definition of

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the *real* or *actual* Jesus. A scholarly inquiry can only construct an image of the *historical* Jesus, or simply (as most people would say) an image of Jesus.

[5] Narrative (or rhetorical) and conceptual constructionism are the two distinct but related "families" of epistemological non-foundationalism. Goldstein is the prime representative of the latter. See M. Hobart, "The Paradox of Historical Constructionism," *History and Theory* 28/1 (1989) 43–58 esp. 43–45.

[6] Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (see n. 2), 139–182 (Ch. 5: The Narrativist Thesis). See also 98–99. Goldstein distinguishes between history's superstructure and infrastructure. The former consists of "the literary product of the historian's work," while the latter is "that range of intellectual activities whereby the historical past is constituted in historical research…" (141). Goldstein rightly observes that all narratives are not history writing and that all historical evidence is not in narrative form. However, his discussion is vitiated by the vague infrastructure/superstructure dichotomy. I would rather distinguish between three levels (based on the hermeneutical model of three worlds): the historical evidence (documents and artifacts), the procedures of assembling, evaluating, arranging and interpreting the evidence, and the process of writing the results. The middle level (which corresponds to the "symbolic" world) is already part of the research process leading to the written product. When a scholar publishes a Jesus book, the readers expect to find in it a somewhat unified "plot" – the author's main thesis – as well as arguments that reflect the scholar's way of evaluating and interpreting the evidence. Also, the readers expect that all the relevant evidence is referred to (often in the footnotes). Hence, to say that a narrative view implies that Jesus scholars (or for that matter, the Gospels) "just tell stories" would be quite misleading.

story is that it has a plot, a meaningful sequence of cause and effect.[7] Every time a Jesus scholar opines about the "aims" of Jesus, asks "why" something has happened or constructs a chain of interconnected events, a story is being told. Thus, in Dale Allison's words, "we need to admit that, as historians of the Jesus tradition, we are story-tellers."[8]

Goldstein then goes on to ask whence scholarly disagreements arise. The objects of historical research are usually very complex and much less determinate than single events in real life. Goldstein selects three Qumran scholars – J.T. Milik, Chaim Rabin, and Cecil Roth – who constructed the history behind the scrolls within quite differing frameworks: as the history of the Essenes, the beginning of the rabbinic tradition, and a moment of the Zealot movement. Depending on the framework, these scholars selected different parts of the historical past to interpret the evidence. Goldstein's example makes the point he wished to make, but it does not explain why the scholars chose different frameworks in the first place. Understandably it was not his task to evaluate the relative strength of these scholarly constructions. However, since he has no interest in explaining the emergence of the three different scholarly stories, the point he makes is not particularly enlightening in practice. Scholars select the relevant data differently and may also interpret the same data differently – but what should we make of this observation?

Another, more recent philosophical inquiry into Qumranic studies by Edna Ullmann-Margalit is more helpful.[9] Her book, *Out of the Cave*, discusses the archaeological and textual evidence, as well as the different scholarly frameworks and hypotheses that seek to interpret this evidence. In addition, she gives an account of the emergence and perseverance of the Essene hypothesis, making its inherent appeal as a scholarly paradigm understandable and exposing its moot points. She also suggests several types of ideological bias among both Christian and Jewish as well as conservative and liberal scholars, introducing a number of useful explanatory models and concepts.[10] Ullmann-Margalit also takes a *constructivist* stance, but from a more practical sociology-of-knowledge point of view. She takes the evidence seriously but also focuses on the complexities and social constraints of interpretation. Her study

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[7] The classic example of a rudimentary plot is as follows: "The king died and then the queen died of grief." If the last two words ("of grief") are missing, there is no plot but just two statements. A story with a plot is always an *interpretation* of facts or events.

[8] D. Allison, "How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. T. Holmén and S.E. Porter; Leiden 2011) 1:3–30, here 30.

[9] E. Ullmann-Margalit, *Out of the Cave: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Dead Sea Scrolls Research* (Cambridge 2006).

[10] Among these, I just mention resilience and consilience (53), elasticity, co-optation and phonetic fanaticism (55), prior and posterior probabilities (74–78), and confirmation bias (92– 93).

is an instructive example of hermeneutically – rather than purely philosophically – oriented research history.[11]

However, Samuel Thomas, a reviewer of Ullmann-Margalit's book, discovers in it a much bolder *subjectivist* or postmodern program. According to this reviewer, the book title suggests a reference to Plato's metaphor of cave: "If so," the reviewer concludes, then the author "implies that Qumran scholars themselves have been living in a cave, mistaking their perceptions of history for the ancient reality itself. Drawn out of the cave, we now can see nonreflected truth, and debates about history and text and artifact resolve into the ideal form of a second-order science by which we come to understand not history but ourselves."[12] I am not sure if this vision is quite serious; the book's author certainly did not imply all that. Incidentally, the reviewer also refers to Jesus research: "Not unlike the various quests for the historical Jesus, perhaps our reconstructions of Qumran end up reflecting less real history and more of the historian than we might like to admit." If the reference to Plato's cave was a sarcastic overstatement, this suggestion seems serious, and to my mind quite plausible. It may indeed be the case that our reconstructions – or simply constructions – of the "historical" Jesus reflect our own ideals, hopes and fears much more than we are ready to admit.

What consequences should we draw? I doubt that any form of science can draw us out of Plato's cave, which is our historical, social, and empirical reality. And what if we saw the daylight? Plato would see the objects of desire as they really, or ideally, are. Thomas thinks we would see ourselves as we truly are. However, as things are, we only see traces of the past as well as glimpses of our own biases in constructing the past, and we continuously risk mixing the two. Living in Plato's cave, our only route goes through the cave. Or, to shift to another well-known metaphor, our route to the past is through the well of history. This is the well – a well found by Albert Schweitzer and named by George Tyrrell – where the early questers thought they saw the historical Jesus but in fact only saw their own face reflected in the deep water. This again is an overstatement. More likely, I suggest, they saw a mixture of both.

2. Scholarly Constructions of Research History

The first issue where I look for the impact of scholarly identity is how we construct the (hi)story of Jesus research. A simple plot has only two epochs, "then" and "now." James H. Charlesworth, in his recent contribution to the

[11] At the same time, the hermeneutical interest makes her study to some extent partisan (i.e., against the Essene hypothesis). That is not my concern here, however.

[12] S. Thomas, "Review of Edna Ullmann-Margalit, *Out of the Cave: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Dead Sea Scrolls Research," RBL* (2010) n.p. [cited 7 July 2012]. Online: http://www.bookreviews.org.

symposium volume *Jesus Research* (2009), deems that "more advances have been achieved in biblical research over the past twenty-five years than in the preceding 250 years." Also, "works published after 1980 are often paradigmatically different from those issued in the preceding 1900 years."[13] I think this is short-sighted. Where would Jesus research be today without all the work done, for example, on the synoptic problem during the past two centuries?

In his introductory article to the same volume, Charlesworth does mention a more customary periodizing of the study of Jesus. At the same time, however, he dubs all previous work "quests," while the new era is called "Jesus research."[14] As such, "Jesus research" is a very practical expression, and I have no objection if it is used for the previous "quests," too. But if the term only refers to the present phase in order to propagate a superior scholarly identity, it sounds like a praise to *Amazing Grace* – "I once was blind, but now I see" – or worse, as when Charlesworth speaks of the "blindness" of other, previous scholars which he among others has helped cure. Certainly much progress has been made during the last decades, but to a great extent this is because we are standing on the giants' shoulders.

John Dominic Crossan is critical of the terms "quest" and "search," because" (t)hose terms seem to indicate a positivistic process in which we are going to attain an answer once and for all forever."[15] Instead, Crossan speaks of *reconstruction* of the historical Jesus, something that each generation of scholars must do again, because "the historical reconstruction is always interactive of present and past." I agree in principle. The Jesus "quester" is no Mr. Stanley looking for Dr. Livingstone, because the search will not stop when a scholar says, "Jesus of Nazareth, I presume." Nevertheless, to the degree that scholars are aware of the metaphorical nature of the terms, I think that the terms are relatively harmless.

A modified and slightly nuanced standard version is presented in Gerd Theissen's and Annette Merz's study book. The "five phases of the quest of the historical Jesus" include (1) the critical impulse, (2) the optimism of the liberal quest, (3) the collapse of the quest, (4) the new quest and (5) the third quest.[16] This periodization pays special attention to the early phases, which

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[13] J.H. Charlesworth, "From Old to New: Paradigm Shifts concerning Judaism, the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the Advent of 'Christianity'," in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth and P. Pokorný; Grand Rapids 2009) 56–72, here 56.

[14] J.H. Charlesworth, "Introduction: Why Evaluate Twenty-Five Years of Jesus Research?" in *Jesus Research* (see n. 13), 1–15 here 2–4. The well-known phases are according to Charlesworth: Old Quest (Reimarus to Schweitzer), the so-called Moratorium (1906 to c. 1953), New Quest (c. 1953 to c. 1980), and Jesus Research (c. 1985 to the Present).

[15] J.D. Crossan, "Historical Jesus as Risen Lord," in *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict* (ed. J.D. Crossan *et al.*; Harrisburg 1999) 1–47, here 5.

[16] G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis 1998) 2–13.

causes an inconvenience in the number of the quests. The third quest is characterized by the interest in social history, by the effort to find Jesus' place within Judaism, and by the attention to non-canonical sources. Theissen and Merz note that the recent Jesus research has split into different trends, the most important differentiation being between eschatological and non-eschatological images of Jesus. However, the authors accept that both trends are part of the ongoing third quest.[17]

The standard story does not cut off the present Jesus scholars from the past, but rather identifies the former generations as their "forebears." Despite some justified criticisms, I find this story true enough. There is some irony in the fact that Tom Wright, who first coined the term "third quest" and thus contributed to the by now massive objectivation of the conception of three historical epochs in Jesus research, actually wanted to tell a very different story. It is a story of two ways, one leading – after a fortunate fall caused by the Enlightenment – back to truth and the other to error. Only the way back deserves the status of "third quest." This right path is the *Schweitzerstrasse,* which for Wright means not only Schweitzer's picture of Jesus as a Jewish apocalyptic but apparently also that one need not spend more time in assessing sources and traditions than Schweitzer did. The wrong path is the *Wredebahn*, or the Wrede-Bultmann line, alias the renewed new quest, the followers of which are "endlessly discussing criteria, reconstructing Q, and most recently, setting up a new Seminar."[18]

In the middle of the 1990s, Wright could list some twenty scholars as the chief exponents of the genuine third quest.[19] Wright's criteria for inclusion and exclusion of scholars are arbitrary, however. The two main criteria for the right path – accepting the central role of eschatology in Jesus' mission and accepting the substantial reliability of the Gospels as historical reports – seem often inconclusive so as to raise the question of other, not articulated criteria. Thus Wright concedes that Borg and Crossan "have a far less minimal Jesus than Wrede" and "insist on the importance of "eschatology", in some sense, within Jesus' work" but due to "their major emphases" he nevertheless counts them among "heavily modified Wrede-followers."[20] Also, one of the characteristics of the present scholarship is precisely a keen discussion of the criteria of authenticity. Theissen especially has done much work on clarifying the criteria of historical plausibility, but this does not prevent Wright from classifying him as a genuine representative for the "third quest." As it happens, I

[17] Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (see n. 16), 10–11.

[18] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis 1996) 25 (quotation) and *passim*.

[19] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (see n. 18), 84.

[20] Wright, Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (see n. 18), 28.

myself find an apocalyptic Jesus the most plausible image[21]and consider the temple incident a decisive fact in explaining Jesus' death. Yet why should I follow Schweitzer in his dated methodology?

The usefulness of Wright's metaphor of two ways is also questionable as he simultaneously blurs the clear-cut distinction "just for showing the spectrum"[22]of scholarship. If there is a colorful "spectrum" of views, why reduce them into black and white? That there is a need for such a reduction perhaps depends on still another metaphor Wright employs, namely, the two brothers in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.[23] The elder brother who never left home stands for the traditional Christian Orthodoxy that cherishes an "iconic" view of Jesus. The wastrel son represents the Enlightenment which set off to the far country of historical skepticism. The Enlightenment marked the emergence of critical biblical scholarship, which Wright seems to regard as a *felix culpa*, a necessary and virtually fortunate fall from the Church's traditional creed. To be sure, salvation after the fall is only for those who return home along the *Schweitzerstrasse*. This application of the Lukan parable reflects, not only Wright's high Christology (instead of the father, *Jesus* comes running to meet the returning son!) but his skilful rhetoric as well. Through the parable, Wright sets himself among the paradigmatic "we" who have wandered in the far country and then returned. The slight Ricoeurian intimation – one thinks of the dictum "Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again" – adds to the suggestive idea that Wright is not less, but *more* critical than critical scholarship when *first* leaving home and *then* returning. In other words, the return is not back to biblicism but to a truer form of criticism. Wright suggests that we can have it both ways, be critical and yet abandon criticism in the end.[24] This is good rhetoric, but is it a good story? I think not.

Wright is not alone in telling a story of two ways. Robert W. Funk, one of Wright's main antagonists, is just as determined to categorize the "players in the current quest" in two distinct groups, calling the third questers the "pretend questers."[25] These scholars – Funk mentions such relatively mainstream scholars as Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier – "express no real interest in, or regard for, the Jesus of history beyond historical curiosity." They "take critical scholarship about as far as it can go without impinging on the fundamentals of the creed or challenging the hegemony of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy." For Funk, the present quest is a struggle between "the revolution-

[21] By contrast, it is not evident that Wright is firmly on the *Schweitzerstrasse,* as he understands the apocalyptic language of the Gospels metaphorically (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [see n. 18], 81, 95–97).

[22] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (see n. 18), 28.

[23] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (see n. 18), 9–10, 662.

[24] The circuitous route via criticism legitimates Wright's apparent distancing from traditional conservative Christianity, which according to him worships the "icon" (the Christ of faith) instead of "the real thing," i.e. the historical Jesus.

[25] R. W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco 1996) 64.

aries" and those who want to maintain the "prevailing orthodoxy."[26] Obviously this battle allows no neutrality; if you are not with the revolutionaries, you are against them. More recently, the conventional division of Jesus research into subsequent quests has been criticized by Colin Brown. He, too, suggests that there are just two paths: "Perhaps there are only two quests with many forms: the quest of the *unhistorical* Jesus and the quest of the *historical* Jesus." Obviously the latter path is recommended: "…a Jesus of faith detached from history is a figment of the imagination."[27] As in Wright's and Funk's case, it is doubtful that all Jesus scholars are willing to categorize themselves as representatives of just one of two paths.

For my part, I find the standard story of the *phases* of *Jesus research* (to use the terms I prefer) plausible enough for the purpose it serves. We should be reminded, however, that this purpose is narrowly academic in taking the Enlightenment and the birth of critical study of the Bible as its starting-point; other stories might begin well before Reimarus.[28] In the academic storyline, the newest turn should not be confined to defenders of a certain kind of Jesus or to scholarship that dismisses authenticity criteria and an analysis of sources, tradition-history, and redaction. This said, the story can still be told in many ways.

3. Scholarly Constructions of the Double of Jesus

A strange, yet so familiar expression in the scholarly discourse is the "historical" Jesus. Is this but an instance of scholarly jargon, a means for the initiated to show their superiority by creating complicated expressions? Ordinary people and even historians and scientists from other fields would simply speak of Jesus. There is indeed much in recommending this plain way of speaking, because there is no other than the "historical" Jesus that historians and Jesus scholars are able to study.[29] There are, of course, reasons why Jesus scholars

[26] Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (see n. 25), 65.

[27] C. Brown, "The Quest of the Unhistorical Jesus and the Quest of the Historical Jesus," in *Handbook of the Study of the Historical Jesus: How to Study the Historical Jesus* (ed. T. Holmén and S. Porter; Leiden 2011) 2:855–886, here 886.

[28] See A. Le Donne, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Revisionist History through the Lens of Jewish-Christian Relations," in *JSHJ* 10 (2012) 63–86 esp. 64–74. Le Donne's story has several alternative beginnings: Origen, the rabbis, perhaps already Josephus. If the scope is thus widened, why not begin with the Gospels?

[29] R. Bauckham, "Review article: *Seeking the Identity of Jesus*," *JSNT* 32 (2010) 337–346 here 337, observes that many contributors to the volume, *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (2008) speak of "the historians" Jesus' instead of "the historical Jesus." This is quite in place: the "historical" Jesus is the Jesus that the historians study. Naturally the Gospel stories about Jesus may be objectivated as "the Markan Jesus" or even "the narrative Jesus." The interpretations and beliefs concerning Jesus can be summed up as "the Jesus of

customarily add the seemingly redundant epithet "historical." The fact is that many other Jesuses are around, often with a heavy theological (or christological) package.

The distinction between "real" and "historical" Jesus is the most elementary one. In the opening chapter of the first volume of *A Marginal Jew*, John P. Meier contrasts these two concepts, emphasizing that the "real" Jesus – the total reality or at the minimum a "reasonably complete" record of Jesus – is beyond our reach. What remains for scholars to study is the "historical" Jesus, which is a scholarly construction. Meier's "real Jesus" corresponds to Goldstein's "real past," and both of them are irrevocably lost. Meier rightly sets off to examine the "historical" Jesus, but thereby he shows that there is little use for the "real" Jesus in academic discourse.[30] The "real" Jesus is actually a straw man, but once erected, it calls for the notion of "historical" Jesus.[31]

However, for some scholars the straw man is truly the real thing, unlike the pale image of an "historical" figure. With this turning of the tables we arrive at the realm of ideological (theological) construct – the *double* of Jesus. This *other* Jesus, who is yet the *same* Jesus,[32] has a variety of names: the real Jesus, the risen Christ, the Jesus of faith, the biblical Jesus, the Christ myth, "our eternal contemporary,"[33] to name a few. By invoking such other-than-historical Jesuses – or by not doing so – scholars unveil elements of their own identity.

The double of Jesus is as old as Christianity, or maybe still older,[34] and is necessitated by faith in the risen (assumed/living) Christ. What may seem a

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faith" etc. Such usage is unproblematic as far as the terms are descriptions of the interpretation, effect or reception – direct or indirect – of (the historical) Jesus.

[30] The same holds true for Jesus' audience, too. Cf. M. Wolter, "Jesus as a Teller of Parables: On Jesus' Self-Interpretation in His Parables," in *Jesus Research* (see n. 13), 123–139. Wolter distinguishes between Jesus' real listeners, the historical listeners, and the intended listeners. "The problem is, however, that the real listeners are an absolutely inaccessible quantity, for as soon as we reconstruct them, they change into the second type of listener," namely, the historical listeners (126).

[31] I concede that this statement is a bit provocative in that most research histories regard the emergence of the "historical" Jesus quest as a reaction against the traditional, dogmatic view of Jesus (Christ). So it was; but the story I am telling here is that of the secular Jesus quest, and Kähler's response was to declare the dogmatic Christ as the "real" Jesus.

[32] J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (3rd ed.; London 2006) 403, 437, states that the main unifying feature of New Testament writings is the identity of the earthly Jesus and the risen one.

[33] This suggestive term was proposed by the neoliberal theologian W.M. Horton in his *Our eternal Contemporary: A Study of the present-day Significance of Jesus* (New York 1942). The subtitle – as well as the authors' reluctance to deal with the bodily resurrection of Jesus – indicate that Horton's "doubling" of Jesus is in fact a rhetorical way of speaking of the continuing significance of (the "historical") Jesus.

[34] It is possible but not certain that a double of Jesus originates with Jesus: "the Son of Man" is in the Gospel tradition solely attested in Jesus' words and refers to either a coming heavenly figure or Jesus himself.

"biblical" Christ is really a composite figure: a resurrected body with or without the crucified's wounds, a non-recognized stranger, a visionary experience, a ruler on God's right side, a ubiquitous pneumatic reality, a pre-existent divine Logos and an instrument of the creation. For Paul the double was by far more significant than the earthly Jesus. In 2 Cor 5 and Rom 5, Paul elaborates on a dichotomy which is anthropologically grounded: the believer's former identity is dead and buried with Jesus – the new life is a life together with the resurrected Christ! This was, roughly speaking, also Bultmann's existential model.

Martin Kähler[35] was seemingly anticipating Bultmann's "Pauline" position, but his motivation was very different. Some decade before Schweitzer, Kähler realized that the historical reconstructions of Jesus could not reaffirm the biblical and doctrinal image of Jesus. And certainly the old quest never intended to do that. Seeing the frightening results of this liberal movement, Kähler declared the whole life-of-Jesus research a blind alley. Insisting on the primacy of the church's faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, he recalled Paul's statement in 2 Cor 5:16. Kähler's distinction between the "historical" (*historisch*) and the "historic" (*geschichtlich*) Jesus is much discussed. As I see it, the historical/historic duality is valid to the extent that it can be applied to any person or event, but when Kähler equals the historic Jesus with the "biblical" Jesus of "faith," a new level is suggested. Norman Perrin realized this when making a three-part distinction where the Jesus of faith is distinguished from a mere "historic" Jesus. Perrin wished to refine Kähler's distinction,[36] but in fact he only showed that the "historic" Jesus is a theological concept in secular disguise.[37]

More recently Kähler's line of reasoning is perpetuated by Luke Timothy Johnson. The title of his book, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and Truth of the Traditional Gospels*[38] is telling enough. While his main target is the Jesus Seminar and some of its prominent representatives, Johnson also sets forth his own stance with unmistakable clarity. As with Kähler, there is a pessimistic evaluation of the possibilities to gain

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[35] "M. Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Jesus* (Leipzig 1892). I have consulted the reprint in Theologishe Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert (München 1953). The reprint is based on the second, slightly reworked edition.

[36] N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London 1967) 234, "First, there is the essentially descriptive historical knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth […] Then, secondly, there are those aspects of this knowledge which, like aspects of historical knowledge of any figure from the past, can become significant to us in our present in various ways. Thirdly, there is knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth which is significant only in the context of specifically Christian faith…" In what follows Perrin discusses each kind of "knowledge" in turn, making clear that he is attempting "further to refine" (238) Kähler's terminology.

[37] See also J.P. Meier, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, Vol. 1 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York 1991) 29–30.

[38] New York 1996.

secure historical data about the "historical" Jesus. Johnson by no means belittles the differences and discrepancies between the Gospels. Quite the contrary, his point is that "the present shape of the canonical Gospel is not such as to encourage the historian."[39] But whereas historians are likely to make the best of the available sources in reconstructing the past, Johnson like Kähler downgrades the value of "historical" Jesus because the "real" Jesus is the *effect* of his history. Similarly, Johnson argues, the "historical" Socrates cannot be distinguished, ultimately, from the Socrates of his interpreters: "It was this Socrates, furthermore, especially the Socrates of Plato, that exercised "historical influence" on succeeding generations of Athenians and indeed on Western thinkers from Epictetus to Kierkegaard, and up to the present […] The 'remembered and interpreted Socrates,' or, if one prefers, the 'Socrates of faith,' is ultimately the 'historical Socrates.'"[40] If this argument is taken at face value, historical research in general would only focus on *Wirkungsgeschichte*, perhaps with the exception of contemporary history. Obviously, however, Johnson is not telling what historians should do, but what biblical scholars ought to be doing. He is – I gather – not prescribing that historians should focus solely on the Socrates of faith, but that Jesus scholars should study nothing but the Jesus of faith.

In another context, Johnson even more sharply contrasts the real, biblical, risen and living Jesus of faith with the "fantasies and abstractions" produced by the "misguided quest" of the historical Jesus. While all the critical reconstructions present "a dead person of the past," the believers "whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of the Living One" recognize "the Jesus depicted in the literary compositions of the New Testament" as true.[41] This implacable antagonism – against which the somewhat un-Pauline harmony between the spirit and the letter in the quoted passage is all the more striking – makes one ask whether Johnson should be excluded from Jesus research by his own request.

Modern Jesus research usually rests on subtler ways of doubling Jesus. Meier represents a standard solution, where faith commitments are severed from critical scholarship. This solution comes close to an objectivist ideal, but Meier gives it an ecumenical slant by imagining an "unpapal conclave" where a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, and an agnostic, all honest historians cognizant of first-century religious movements, are locked up in a room and put on a spartan diet until they have hammered out a consensus document on who Jesus was and what he intended.[42] In all likelihood, the poor scholars would either starve to death or publish a very short and uninteresting list of virtually certain things we know of Jesus.

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[39] Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (see n. 38), 108.
[40] Ibid., 106.
[41] L.T. Johnson, "The Humanity of Jesus," in *The Jesus Controversy* (see n. 15), 74.
[42] Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (see n. 37), 1–2.

Another typical strategy is to bridge the Easter gulf with concepts fitted to hold together historical Jesus and his ideological double. James Dunn, in his magisterial *Jesus Remembered*, treats the Gospels as the "memory" and faithful "impact" of Jesus.[43] While the concepts of memory and impact are a variant of Jesus' "historic" effect, these serve especially as a connection between Jesus, the oral Jesus traditions, and the Gospels – the written memoirs. The concepts are feasible enough, but of course not everything in the Gospels is memory; there is also imagination, theologizing, story-telling, and even repression. Dunn's discussion is hermeneutically attuned, touching on a variety of issues such as the hermeneutical circle, Gadamer's idea of a fusion of horizons, and reading as a dialogical encounter.[44] However, in reasserting Kähler's key point that there is no "historical Jesus" apart from the Christ of faith as provided by the Gospels,[45] Dunn adopts a position that risks surrendering to fideism. The attempt to hold history and faith together, even if in a tensive unity, is quite conceivable, but Dunn's hermeneutic excludes in principle the possibility of reconstructing any "historical" Jesus other than one seen through faith.

Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* sets out to replace the historical Jesus with the Jesus of "testimony". Bauckham suggests that the concept of testimony is "both a reputable historiographic category […] and also a theological model for understanding the Gospels". [46] "It is where history and theology meet."[47] At the same time, I suppose, it is where a believing Jesus scholar like Bauckham finds rest. Although the concept of testimony is philosophically sanctified through reference to Paul Ricoeur, in Bauckham's use it makes a special plea to treating the Gospels in a way that most other historical documents are not treated. To regard the Gospels as "uniquely unique" testimonies which can give "privileged access to truth"[48] is simply to beg the question. If the category of testimony offers little more to Jesus scholarship than openly biblicist watchwords "the word of God" and the like), the concluding chapter of Bauckham's book at least elaborates on an attractive *theological* concept: "the Jesus of Testimony."[49] In it, the Jesus of historians

[43] J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered,* Vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids 2003) esp. 129.

[44] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (see n. 43), 118–125.

[45] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (see n. 43), 126. Dunn stresses (99) that he takes only this key point from Kähler, not Kähler's larger theological agenda. Perhaps this restriction explains why Dunn deplores "the antithetical polarization of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith" (51).

[46] R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids 2006) 5.

[47] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (see n. 46), 6.

[48] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (see n. 46), 502. It is hard to see how Bauckham's comparison with Holocaust testimonies proves his point.

[49] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (see n. 46), 472–508.

and the Christ of the faithful community converge, even though only for members of that community. Exegetically, it is noteworthy that remembrance and testimony are major themes first in the Gospels of Luke and John[50], as well as in the Acts, which are later than Mark and Matthew – and it was Justin the Martyr well in the second century who spoke of the "memoirs" of the apostles.

There are many more fusions of Jesus and his double in recent scholarship that I must leave unnoticed, but it is worth noting that Theissen's and Winter's criteria for a "plausible Jesus"[51] can be regarded as an exegetical, secular way of bringing together Jesus and his impact or "post-history." In essence, the plausibility criteria demand that any reconstruction of Jesus' words, deeds and aims must make sense both in his contemporary Jewish environment and in view of his effect on the emergent Christian movement. This general idea will have to suffice for historical (as well as secular "historic") Jesus research, which is governed by the principles of *secondary* hermeneutic. Biblical scholars may, and almost invariably, do have *primary* hermeneutical interest in Jesus and Christian origins, that is, they ask for the significance of Jesus and early Christian faith for themselves or for "us." The relationship between the study object and the interpreting subject is a basic hermeneutical phenomenon, and in *this* sense "there is always a dialectic between an historically-read Jesus and a theologically-read Christ."[52] However, primary hermeneutical convictions concerning Jesus are not Jesus research, no matter how much or little a scholar's faith is reflected in his or her historical construction of Jesus.

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[50] Bauckham's discussion lends much weight to the "Beloved Disciple" in John. See Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (see n. 46), 358–411, and even the two following chapters, 412–471. I have argued elsewhere for the view that the Beloved Disciple is a late invention in John (a relatively common view) and that its function was above all to legitimate a Synoptic (Mark/Matthew) type of passion and resurrection narrative, and to emphasize the bodily nature of the incarnation of God's Son. See K. Syreeni, "The Witness of Blood: The Narrative and Ideological Function of the 'Beloved Disciple' in John 13–21," in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaeus* (ed. A. Mustakallio et al.; PFES 89; Helsinki 2005) 164–185.

[51] G. Theissen and D. Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (Louisville 2002) esp. 210–12. The definition is given on p. 212, with original emphasis: "*What we know of Jesus as a whole must allow him to be recognized within his contemporary Jewish context and must be compatible with the Christian (canonical and noncanonical) history of his effects.*"

[52] J.D. Crossan, "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity," in *Jesus and Faith: A conversation on the work of John Dominic Crossan* (ed. J. Carlson and R.A. Ludwig; Maryknoll 1994) 1–21 here 20, cf. also 145.

4. Scholarly Constructions of (the Historical) Jesus

The point that the historical portrayals of Jesus tend to look like the scholars who advocate them has been made often since Schweitzer. Not unexpectedly the ideological biases of a scholar are best visible to those of his or her colleagues who hold a different image of Jesus. I must leave aside the numerous examples of modernizing or – as is often the case – archaizing[53] constructions of Jesus. It is vital to remember, however, that even anachronistic interpretations can contain grains of historical truth. For example, Theissen notes that a counter-cultural, aphoristic and cynic-like Jesus has a Californian rather than Palestinian "local color"[54] – which is obviously a correct observation but does not render *all* the work of the Jesus seminar obsolete. Instead of multiplying such examples, I focus on a more peculiar phenomenon in recent scholarship, namely, a disagreement on a fact that virtually no scholar denies: the Jewishness of Jesus.

There is no disagreement about Jesus being a Palestinian and Galilean Jew, so one might assume that the historical question only concerns the *kind* of Jesus' Jewishness. However, some recent Jesus scholars have accused their colleagues of presenting a "non-Jewish" Jesus. William Arnal, in his *The Symbolic Jesus*, has argued convincingly that the accusations are false.[55] Arnal then ponders the reasons for this distortion of other scholars' views.[56] His first explanation is the need to distinguish the new phase clearly from the basically German new quest, which the critics see as continued by some profiled American scholars. This explanation coheres with the observation that the supposedly "non-Jewish" images of Jesus are sometimes seen as symptomatic of anti-Semitism, which brings to memory the horrors of Nazi ideology and the Holocaust. At the same time, the defenders of a "Jewish Jesus" tend to have a stereotyped and normative picture of what being a Jew implies, both then and now. In the last analysis, Arnal traces here a clash of cultural identities, with postmodern and liberal scholars on one side and traditionalists on another. The former group regards religious identities as complex and flexible, for the latter they are or should be firm and distinctive. Thus, Arnal concludes: "Promotions of an identifiably and distinctively Jewish Jesus are re-

[53] Idea-historically, many modern historical Jesuses are in fact redressed figures from previous epochs. The main historical types are presented by J. Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (2nd ed.; New Haven 1999).

[54] Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (see n. 16), 11.

[55] W. Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London 2005) 20–38. The term "symbolic Jesus" depicts seemingly yet another double of Jesus, but one which is merely a way of describing *the use of Jesus* as a symbol.

[56] Ibid., 39–72. Arnal's discussion is useful for its differentiation between different *sorts* of identities: political, religious, and cultural identities. Perhaps professional exegetes can also be said to have a variety of academic identities.

sisting postmodern or globalizing homogenization and fragmentation precisely in their insistence on the coherence of "Jewish" identity."[57]

I think Arnal's provocative book has a point. It is in fact surprising that precisely the traditionalists make claims for a "Jewish Jesus." E.P. Sanders's *Jesus and Judaism* signaled this new emphasis, and his driving force was to combat the negative picture of first-century Judaism. In conservative circles this emphasis seems to have another motivation. Jesus the Jew is now the guarantee of the continuity of "biblical" salvation-history, which of course is a thoroughly *Christian* story: a story from Abraham, Moses and the prophets through Jesus on to Paul, the apostles, and the new people of God. Jesus was a Jew, so the Christians are the Israel of God. No matter how one refines this preunderstanding, the result is some version of *Ersatztheologie*.

The equation of Jesus the Jew with the biblical Jesus of Christian faith is typically accomplished by demonstrating that the key points of early Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology come from Jesus. In recent reconstructions, one of the most salient tendencies is to trace as much atonement theology as possible back to Jesus. I must leave it for others to decide whether an image of Jesus orchestrating his sacrificial death or interpreting his body as the replacement of the temple is more plausible than the previous quests' claims of Jesus' unique ethics, personality or self-awareness. What I suggest, however, is that these constructions cohere remarkably with the Christian preunderstanding of the scholars who present them.

This is not to say that a Christian or any other preunderstanding is a hindrance to the historical study of Jesus. Preunderstanding is simply the prerequisite of understanding. In happy cases, a scholar's personal identity is a resource in finding aspects of the historical reality that mainstream scholarship tends to ignore. When, for instance, Halvor Moxnes "puts Jesus in his place"[58] by applying a postmodern queer approach, the resulting interpretation[59] proves that there are surprising ways in which contemporary identities can resonate with the ethos of Jesus. Other examples of unexpected resonance might be found in interpretations that focus on the political, social and counter-cultural aspects of Jesus' activity. We need not deny our modern sensitivities to get in touch with the stranger from a distant past.

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[57] Ibid., 72.

[58] H. Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville 2003).

[59] It should be pointed out that Moxnes builds his interpretation on very plausible historical and exegetical observations, e.g. that Jesus was not married, that he chose 12 male apostles, and that he preached the Kingdom of God.

To follow that stranger after two millennia may not be other than metaphorical, or mystical as Schweitzer described it, but it may still be a metaphor to live by.[60]

[60] When finalizing this manuscript, I received a *Festschrift* on the occasion of my 60th birthday, S.-O. Back and M. Kankaanniemi (ed.), *Voces Clamantium in Deserto: Essays in Honor of Kari Syreeni* (*Studier i exegetik och judaistik utgivna av Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi* 11; Åbo 2012). Kankaanniemi's article in that volume ("Will the Real Third Quest Please Stand Up?" 102–123) discusses the history of Jesus research.