

## THE JESUS OF PIETY AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

When Roger Haight asked me to be on this panel, he asked me to address two questions. The first: "Is there a historical Jesus on whom we can all agree?" and the second: "What is the significance of Jesus for theology or what difference for theology's self-understanding would agreement on Jesus make?" Many reasons suggest that "no" is an appropriate answer to the first question and recent history suggests that "very little" might be an appropriate answer to the second question. Such answers would indeed be troubling to many. Therefore, I shall first attempt to analyze the reasons for such answers. Then I shall propose a somewhat different framework for the questions, namely, the contrast between academic theological reflection and popular piety, between the interpretation of Jesus in historical exegesis and the reception of Jesus in popular Christian religious piety. Finally, I shall relate these questions to the issue of relation between theological reflection and Christian faith, on the one hand, and historical knowledge and history, on the other hand.

### NEITHER CONSENSUS NOR CHANGE

In regard to the first question, much more disagreement seems to exist now in the current research about the historical Jesus than thirty years ago. At that time Käsemann's critique of Bultmann and the New Quest for the historical Jesus were in fashion and widely accepted in Roman Catholic circles. A consensus, even if limited, had emerged about the historical Jesus: Jesus was an eschatological prophet. However, this consensus about Jesus as an eschatological prophet no longer prevails in the USA though it still does in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Today, historical interpretations of Jesus are much more diverse, not only in how they historically categorize Jesus, but also in how they approach Jesus through historical, anthropological, or social methods of analysis.

Recent books about the historical Jesus display diverse and contrary viewpoints. Compare E. P. Sanders's depiction of Jesus as a covenantal Jewish prophet with Burton Mack's portrait of Jesus as a Hellenistic cynic.<sup>2</sup> Weigh John Meier's appeal to Jesus' proclamation of imminent eschatology in order to

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<sup>1</sup>Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993) and *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) and *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

eliminate any social or political concern on Jesus' part with Richard Horsley's political interpretation of the *basileia* or Marcus J. Borg's argument for the social implications of conflicts about holiness.<sup>3</sup> Contrast John Crossan's allegation, in a book praised by the popular press, that the passion and resurrection accounts lack historical foundation and are tantamount to fictional narratives (or more precisely "historicized prophecy") created by later generations with Raymond Brown's charge that Crossan's arguments are extravagant, incredible, implausible, and without foundation in history.<sup>4</sup> And if I may be so bold, compare the historical arguments of *In Memory of Her*, which reclaims the memory of women as missionary apostles, with a recent apostolic constitution that overlooks such a historical memory of women as apostles because it equates the notion of "Apostle" with that of the "The Twelve."<sup>5</sup> Agreement appears to recede further away on the horizon than ever before.

The answer to the second question should reflect on recent developments within Roman Catholic theology. Has consensus on exegetical and historical issues had an impact on theological reflection? On those issues, often controversial, where exegetical agreement has emerged in the last decades, such a consensus has often not led to a change in theological positions. A consensus was reached between Roman Catholic and Lutheran scholars on Peter in the New Testament—an admirable achievement. Did it lead Roman Catholics and Lutherans to agree on the nature of Petrine ministry or the papacy within the contemporary Church? No. Issues hotly contested in the Reformation, such as the institution of individual sacraments, or controversial issues of modernism, such as Jesus' use of christological titles or his foundation of the Church, have generally been resolved. Today one accepts historical criticism on these issues, so that Ratzinger's academic writings appear to be much more historically critical

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<sup>3</sup>John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); Richard Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>See Richard Ostling, "Religion: Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple," *Time* (January 10, 1984) 38-39. John D. Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) and *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). Most recently, "I maintain that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. What we have now in those detailed passion narratives is not *history* remembered, but *prophecy historicized*." John Crossan, "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity," in Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig, eds., *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1994). For a contrary view, cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) esp. 1317-49.

<sup>5</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) and John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Apostolic Letter of May 30, 1994, section 2, published in *National Catholic Reporter* 30 (June 17, 1994) 7.

than Loisy's writings ever did. Yet theories of development, growth, and reception have made it possible, and, in many instances, rightly so, for theologians to accept the results of biblical criticism and at the same time maintain traditional orthodox beliefs and practices. The Roman Catholic Church still remains much more sacramental than Reformation churches even if the historical consensus has emerged that the individual sacraments can no longer be traced back to the earthly Jesus and, therefore, cannot be correlated with his acts.<sup>6</sup> Through the use of the categories implicit/explicit and through the application of developmental categories to Christology, the exegetical consensus that Jesus did not apply most of the christological titles to himself has in no way affected the Catholic Church's affirmation of Chalcedonian Christology. A Roman Catholic and a Unitarian scholar might very well agree that the historical Jesus did not apply christological titles to himself. Yet they will still disagree about the legitimacy of the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds.

#### JESUS IN THE LIFE OF CHRISTIAN PIETY

These negative responses to the two questions should, in my opinion, be placed within the wider framework of another question—one of my concerns—the gap between scientific culture or expert knowledge and everyday life.<sup>7</sup> This gap between the culture of academic expertise and popular Christian piety leads me to pose the question differently: Does agreement about the historical Jesus influence theology as the academic theological reflection of expert theologians or does it influence the reflection implicit in the religious piety of the average Christian? Roman Catholics derive their religious beliefs about Jesus through a variety of sources in addition to that of historical research. I list just three of these sources.

*Lives of the Saints as Models of Jesus.* First, Jesus is mirrored in the lives of the saints. They are concrete representations of Jesus as depicted throughout the history of Christianity. For example, St. Francis is not simply a saint; rather his life mirrored Jesus insofar as it gave content, form, and shape to the imitation of Jesus. Franciscan preachers, who gave annual week-long retreats in my parish, proclaimed that no saint's life mirrored Jesus more perfectly than Francis' did. (Obviously, I accepted the statement of these Franciscans as an unbiased objective fact—after all, I had not yet read critiques of foundationalism. But the model was there and I secretly hoped that if I were very good, maybe some day I too could talk to animals and birds as my patron saint did.) I personally took the zeal of Francis Xavier and the kindness and gentleness of de Sales as models of Jesus that I should imitate. I was proud to have the name of three saints who for me

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<sup>6</sup>Historically, such a nuanced awareness was present in the medieval Church and in the discussions at the Council of Trent.

<sup>7</sup>Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority: Interpretation and Reception," *Interpretation* 44 (1990) 353-368.

mirrored Jesus. (Frances Cabrini was not yet canonized then—so I am not being sexist in listing just male saints with the name Francis.) It is important to note that the saints as models of Jesus are living in new situations and circumstances. Therefore, their lives illustrate a new synthesis of the new and the old (*ex novis et veteris*) of Catholic Christian identity.

*Scriptural Readings of the Liturgy.* Second, the Scripture reading in the Sunday liturgy with specific pericopes, parables, and sayings of Jesus form a framework for selectively interpreting what is paradigmatic about Jesus. In addition, specific vocational ministries within the Church often appeal to specific Gospel parables or stories. Christians engaged in a ministry of social action often quote the parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25 as the paradigmatic meaning of Jesus for their lives and ministry. Contemplatives often quote the Mary/Martha story as paradigmatic of the Christian discipleship of Jesus (though not with Augustine's contrast between this life and the next, but with Origen's contrast between the contemplative and active life). Before he died, someone close to me stated that a particular verse spoken by Jesus meant a lot to him and guided his whole life. I did not respond, "You have based your life upon an error. Jesus did not speak that verse. It is a tertiary addition by the second or third redactor of the hypothetical Q-community." Popular piety often selects particular Gospel narratives as paradigmatic of the significance of Jesus. The allegorical interpretation of Scripture, especially the parables and events of Jesus' life, practiced with a high degree of nuance and even speculation by the fathers of the Church, often lives on in a Christian's everyday life and in contemporary Christian piety.

*Liturgical Life and the Mysteries of the Life of Jesus.* Third, there is a liturgical life of the Church. Christians celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, his presentation, his baptism, the events of his life, especially the passion, death and resurrection. The liturgical year with readings and holy days specifies how Catholic Christians often view Jesus. Likewise Christian Catholics also pray the mysteries of the rosary, which represent another framework for the memory of Jesus within contemporary piety. It is instructive, also, to keep in mind the mysteries of the life of Jesus as present in the liturgical year and to analyze how Thomas Aquinas interprets them in the third part of the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>8</sup> Thomas relates the birth of Jesus to the human existence of God's eternal son and the mystery of his baptism to the saving event of our birth in becoming adopted children of God. The miracles of Christ signify the extraordinary healing of human beings. The mystery of the suffering and dying of Christ are the carrying out of his sonship and the saving events of satisfaction, merit, and

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<sup>8</sup>Gerd Lohaus, *Die Geheimnisse des Lebens Jesu in der "Summa theologiae" des Heiligen Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985) and Gustave Martelet, "Theologie und Heilsökonomie in der Christologie der 'Tertia'," in *Gott in Welt*, vol. 2, Festgabe für Karl Rahner, ed. Johannes Baptist Metz, et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1964).

sacrifice. The mystery of the resurrection of Christ is the perfected human life as the glory of the eternal son in a human way. The appropriateness and "convenience" of these mysteries relates them to existential dimensions of the Christian's life. Thomas presents the life of Jesus in a way that Jesus' earthly life is not simply a historical fact, but is appropriate to our humanity and is the saving event in our human lives.

In short, for Catholic Christians, the interpretation of Jesus takes place through more sources than historical research: Jesus is mirrored in the lives of the saints, proclaimed in paradigmatic Gospel stories, and is actualized in the liturgical calendar commemorating the key mysteries of his life.

### HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Yet the acquisition of a historical point of view is part of the process of education. As children we learn the legends about Abraham Lincoln. He was honest Abe and walked ten miles barefoot to return a book. In college we learn that when Lincoln campaigned in Southern Illinois, he gave racist speeches, but in Northern Illinois, he said the opposite. Countless secular beliefs and legends have been overturned through a historical education. Christian religious piety also encounters the academic world of scholarship and learning. The question becomes: "How does research on the historical Jesus relate to the religious significance of Jesus in the cultic piety of the Christian?"

The less than positive response to the questions posed and my account of the formative influences within Christian piety upon the Christian image of Jesus bring us to an impasse. This impasse raises central theological questions. How does Christian religious piety relate to academic historical research? How does the Christian faith in God relate to the historical person of Jesus? Is the relation only accidental and contingent, existing only for the sake of pedagogy and symbolism? If so, then the Christian faith is independent of both historical research and even history. Many theologians have maintained such a position. At the turn of the century, the historian of religion, Wilhelm Bousset declared: "What is important is the symbol and image itself, it and not some ultimate truth and reality."<sup>9</sup> Ernst Troeltsch took a more ambivalent position: he wanted to locate the Christ of cult in the historical Jesus, but primarily affirmed its roots in the psychological need of the Christian community.<sup>10</sup> More recently, David

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<sup>9</sup>Wilhelm Bousset, "Die Bedeutung der Person Jesus für den Glauben," in *Fünfter Weltkongress für freies Christentum und religiösen Fortschritt*, Max Fischer and Friedrich Michael Schiele, eds. (Berlin-Schöneberg: Protestantischer Schriftvertrieb, 1910) 305.

<sup>10</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, "The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith," *Writings on Theology and Religion*, ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977) 182-207; see Brian Gerrish, "Jesus, Myth, and History: Troeltsch's Stand in the 'Christ-Myth' Debate," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975) 13-35, and Sarah Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford:

Tracy has declared that the historical Jesus is theologically irrelevant or "at best a relatively external and secondary criterion of appropriateness."<sup>11</sup> This line of reasoning does not sufficiently take into account the role of historical consciousness in the formation of our historicist relation to the past. It solves the problem by slicing the Gordian knot rather than unraveling it. I would suggest an approach which, by considering two issues involved in historical research, shows both the advantages and limitations of historical research. The first issue is that of contextual distance and the second is the hermeneutical circle or interrelation between selectivity of interpretation and identity.

*Contextual Distance.* Historical research often has an unintended result. Historical research attempts to understand the past by contextualizing it through linguistic, social, and political parallels. It thereby demonstrates that the past is integral to its own context and time period. By locating the past within a past context, historical research "distances the past" from our own context. Such a "distancing" has the advantage of showing the distinctiveness of the past, for example, that Paul's concepts of spirit (*pneuma*), body, and flesh do not correspond to the ideas prevalent either in nineteenth-century idealism or in our century. Although such contextualization of the New Testament has the advantage of making vivid the past by showing the text's interaction with its context,<sup>12</sup> it has the disadvantage of making the past "foreign"—other and different from us. One might claim that this grasp of the otherness prevents "eisegesis," the reading into a text of our ideas and ideals. It prevents direct appeals to the historical Jesus for particular contemporary social and moral agendas. Yet it also raises the question: if the distance is so great, then does the historical Jesus have any meaning or significance for our context?

*Selectivity.* The hermeneutical circle between our current viewpoints and the results of historical research on Jesus are such that interpretation emerges out of a fusion of both. Two simple examples illustrate this circle. When I began graduate studies, it was commonly accepted in New Testament studies that in addition to multiple attestation by independent sources, a saying probably went back to the historical Jesus if its origin could be traced neither to Judaism nor to the early Church. Commonly accepted, but indeed a biased and minimalist rule! What does this rule mean? It means quite simply: if one can show that a statement is at the very same time both anti-Jewish and anti-Roman Catholic, then, behold, *ecco*, one has shown it to be an authentic saying of Jesus. Such a principle corresponds perfectly to the anti-Roman Catholic and anti-Jewish biases of much of earlier Protestant theology. Today, because we have become aware of the anti-Judaism of much of Christian scholarship, we are able to root Jesus

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Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup>See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 238.

<sup>12</sup>Freiherr von Soden, *Does the New Testament Gain or Lose in Significance for Religious Life by Historical Criticism?* Fifth International Congress for Free Christianity and Religious Progress (Berlin-Schöneberg: Protestantischer Schriftenvertrieb, 1911).

much more strongly within Jewish traditions and we realize the inadequacy of identifying as belonging to Jesus or as Christian primarily that which is distinguished from Judaism rather than rooted within Judaism.<sup>13</sup> In a similar fashion, we should explore interpretations of Jesus in ways that draw lines of continuity as well as discontinuity between him and the early Christian communities.

The other example is the emergence of modern bourgeois culture with its individualism and its stress on the individual's autonomy, genius, and consciousness.<sup>14</sup> The bourgeois and individualist culture found its expression in the focus within the history of religions on the great individual personality standing behind the individual major religion as the founding figure of that religion. Within New Testament scholarship, this cultural perspective underlies the modern emphasis upon the intentionality and consciousness of Jesus. It also influences the focus within nineteenth-century liberalism on the personality of Jesus and its impact. The emergence of the modern quest for the historical Jesus does not simply correspond to the rise of modern historiography but it also corresponds to modern bourgeois culture and even mirrors its individualism. Therefore, just as we have to learn to be conscious of anti-Jewish and anti-Roman Catholic biases present in the criteria of what constitutes authentic sayings of Jesus, so too do we have to become conscious of the biases toward individualism, intentionality, and consciousness within contemporary scholarship. We should be careful not to determine what is normative exclusively upon such historical judgments about the historical Jesus to the consequent neglect of the ecclesial and historical development of Christianity.

#### REFLECTIVE SELF-AWARENESS AND EFFECTIVE-HISTORICAL RECEPTION

What results from this awareness of the hermeneutical circle and the biases present in past historical research? On the one hand, it should place before us the imperative that in all historical research we have to be self-reflective and self-critical of our own standpoints, perspectives, and methods and how they often determine the results of our scholarship. On the other hand, to avoid the distancing of historicism, we have to view the historical figure of Jesus not simply as confined to his historical appearance. Instead we have to view Jesus in relation to his *Wirkungsgeschichte* as well as to reception history, that is, in relation to

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<sup>13</sup>It was a characteristic feature of Schleiermacher's reinterpretation of revelation in terms of the category of newness that led him and others to accept John's Gospel rather than the Synoptic Gospels as the main source for the historical Jesus. The category of newness led him to devalue the Synoptics (they had too much Jewish material) and to praise John's Gospel (where the originality of the Christian genius is evident).

<sup>14</sup>Dieter Georgi, "The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 85 (1992) 51-83.

the history of both the impact of Jesus upon his disciples and upon consequent Christianity and the reception of Jesus by his disciples and the successive generations of Christian community. In many respects, what we know of the earthly Jesus is through the testimony of those who followed and believed in Jesus. Reconstructions of a historical Jesus are reconstructions in and through the preserved and written testimonies of early Christian community. The distinct trajectories of the historical Jesus throughout early Christianity as well as throughout the history of Christianity are trajectories of the effects and reception of Jesus.

These trajectories consequently stem not merely from the historical Jesus or the Christ-symbol. Theological reflection should, therefore, not regard the earthly Jesus or historical Jesus as theologically irrelevant and focus merely on the Christ-symbol.<sup>15</sup> The historical Jesus is, therefore, theologically relevant, not as an isolated origin, but as part of a larger whole—the root, catalyst, and impulse of a tradition. What undergoes historical development is not simply a symbol, but a historical impetus that refracts through diverse trajectories and images. It is not simply the case that one can argue from effect to cause, from the effect of Christ on community to the historical Jesus, as the *Glaubenslehre* of Schleiermacher might argue in distinction from his biography of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> Instead historical reconstructions need to be interpreted diachronically as well as synchronically, not only in relation to their contemporary context, but also in relation to a history of receptions.

These trajectories have their practices and effects that enable us to judge the meaning and significance of Jesus for our Christian identity. When we seek to interpret this meaning and significance, we stand as Christians within the trajectories of the historical Jesus as well as within the trajectories of how Christians have interpreted and understood their Christian identity. This history of Christianity is not only exemplified by our failures to be disciples of Jesus. It is also constituted by learning experiences that teach us what it means to be Christian. These learning experiences constitute paradigms as well as correctives of Christian identity. On the one hand, the lives of the saints often provide positive paradigms of Christian identity that we should model. On the other hand, we have learned from the Holocaust that we have to interpret Jesus and understand Christian identity in ways that overcome the anti-Semitism of interpretations that contrast, often negatively, Judaism with Jesus (and thereby Christianity). The colonialism, often brutal, associated with missionary activity has been a learning experience for the Christian understanding of the "Other."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>A distinction between the earthly Jesus and the historical Jesus is often made to signify that the latter often represents the latest consensus of historical-critical research.

<sup>16</sup>For an analysis of the complementarity between Schleiermacher's approach in his *Christian Faith* and his *Life of Jesus*, see Dietz Lange, *Historische Jesus oder Mythischer Christus: Untersuchungen zu dem Gegensatz zwischen Friedrich Schleiermacher und David Friedrich Strauss* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975) 83-169.

<sup>17</sup>See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza: "Redemption between Colonialism and Pluralism"

We have learned from the experience of "battered wives" in marriage of the inadequacy of conceiving male/female relationship in marriage in terms of the Christ/Church relationship along with the doctrine of "moderate correction."<sup>18</sup> Such experiences have to guide our interpretation of the past.

Nevertheless, because historical reconstructions of the historical Jesus are possible, even within the limitations of the hermeneutical circle, they can serve as a critical corrective of Christian piety and they can offer a significant paradigm just as contemporary Christian piety and experience serve as a counter balance to historical judgments and past receptions. Historical reconstructions not only seek to uncover the preaching and actions of the earthly Jesus, but they strive to differentiate the diverse oral and written traditions within early Christian interpretations in faith of the significance of Jesus for diverse historical communities. Such reconstructions do not point to an archimedean point, but display a diversity of interpretations and a plurality of receptions.

In the encounter between religious piety and historical reconstructions principles of historical evidence and coherence of a tradition's ideals come to the fore and come face to face with principles of ethical experience and the learning experiences of Christianity. We need to critically reflect upon our own viewpoints from past historical paradigms just as we need to reflect upon the past from the insights gathered through the practice of Christian reception in history. The interpretation of Christian identity involves an evolving equilibrium in which diverse elements are brought to bear upon one another. Such equilibrium should take into account the value of the historical reconstruction as well as the value of both positive and negative learning experiences from the history of Christianity.

Such an approach avoids a method of correlation. One cannot simply relate the historical Jesus to a present question, issue, or problem. At the turn of the century, some asked, "What would Jesus do if he were in my shoes or in our times?" Now some ask, "What if a structurally parallel correlation exists between Jesus' situation and our situation?" Such questions appear to assume that theological method involves a correlation and a jump over two thousand years of history for the sake of application.<sup>19</sup> Such reconstructions are often simplistic, as when social movements claim in order to appropriate Jesus that he was a socialist, feminist, liberationist, or a fundamentalist Christian. Such appeals do not consider the complexity of changes in both the social-historical development

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in *Reconstructing Theology*, ed. Rebecca Chopp and Mark K. Taylor, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

<sup>18</sup>Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Marriage," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 307-46, esp. 330-31.

<sup>19</sup>For a critique of such a method of correlation, see my forthcoming *Beyond Hermeneutics: Theology as Discourse* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

of societal systems and the development of understanding in Christian reception and practice.<sup>20</sup>

Can there be agreement about the historical Jesus and can it influence our theology? My reflections suggest that historical consensus or a demonstrated agreement about the historical Jesus do not suffice to demonstrate the truth of Christian identity. Nor does a transcendental deduction of Christian identity from human existence or from the consciousness of the Christ symbol suffice. My arguments suggest that Roman Catholic theology and tradition have always maintained a rich diversity of sources and norms. Just as Roman Catholicism has rejected a Lutheran *sola scriptura* as an adequate conception of theology without rejecting the importance or significance of the Scriptures, so too, today, Roman Catholic theologians should not replace "Scripture alone" with the "historical Jesus" alone as either the sole source or norm of theology—without of course denying the importance of the earthly Jesus or historical reconstructions. Historical reconstructions are indeed (within a contemporary historical mind-set) a significant source and interpretive perspective, but not an exclusive one.

Roman Catholic theology has to seek a reflective equilibrium among diverse sources and norms. These include a mutual counterbalancing, between historical reconstructions of Jesus as the historical root and center of Christian faith and the diverse receptions of Jesus throughout the history of Christianity, from its presentation in the Gospels to its lived practice in the lives of saints, its proclamation, and its liturgy, and to present theological and ethical reflection upon the practice of Christianity as involving retroductive warrants.<sup>21</sup> Can there be agreement about the historical Jesus and what impact would it have on theology? My answer comes full circle: if there is agreement on what Christian identity is and what constitutes Christian theology, then there might be agreement about the historical Jesus. Historical reconstructions of the historical Jesus contribute to this identity, but are not its sole norm and source.

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<sup>20</sup>For discussion about how the learning process within Christianity and societal changes affect the Church's mission, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Church: Social Mission" in *Dictionary of Roman Catholic Social Ethics*, ed. Judith Dwyer (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1994) 151-72, and "Works of Mercy: Theological Perspectives" in *The Works of Mercy*, ed. Francis Eigo (Philadelphia: University of Villanova, 1993) 31-71.

<sup>21</sup>Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).