

Below is one of my abandoned works (Did I write "abandoned"? I must have)

The Jesus Wars and The Bug in NT Scholarship

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Prologue

In a scene in *The Matrix Reloaded*, the starring, Neo (Keanu Reeves), meets, for the first time, the architect of the *Matrix* (Helmut Bakaitis), who is frustrated by failure.

NEO: "Who are you?"

THE ARCHITECT : "I am the architect. I created the *Matrix*. I have been waiting for you. You have many questions and though the process has altered your consciousness, you remain irrevocably human. Ergo, some of my answers you will understand and some of them you will not. Concurrently, while your first question is the most pertinent, you may or may not realize that its also the most irrelevant."

NEO : "Why am I here?".

The architect: "Your life is the sum of a remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the matrix. You are the eventuality of an anomaly, which despite my sincerest efforts I have been unable to eliminate from what is otherwise a harmony, of mathematical precision. While it remains a burden assiduously avoided, it is not unexpected, and thus not beyond a measure of control. Which has led you, inexorably,... here."

NEO: "You haven't answered my question.

Introduction

Like the architect in *The Matrix Reloaded*, the third historical Jesus questers, when asked about the historicity of Jesus, respond that "while the question is the most pertinent, it is also the most irrelevant", though not in these exact words. They now presume that a methodology is more important than this very fundamental question which they ignore altogether or treat in a cavalier manner. Like Neo's question, the question about whether a historical Jesus existed is left unanswered by those elaborate historical Jesus methodologies which instead, seek to show which portrait of Jesus is the correct one.

Like the successive integral anomalies in the matrix, historical Jesus variants emerge, each with varying grotesqueness. Like in the matrix, where the anomaly

is systemic and creating fluctuations in even the most simplistic equations, in HJ methodology, this unanswered question introduces and compounds errors which spread, crack-like, across the entire reconstructions of historical Jesus. Leading, ineluctably, to successive mutations of historical Jesus.

Like the architect, they are frustrated by failure. And they are beginning to let out their frustrations on each other like we can see in the Jesus wars with HJ scholars criticizing each other and profusely churning out competing Jesuses.

Like the architect of first matrix, the third questers reasoning is quite naturally, correct, their theories like works of art, sublime. But like the first matrix, whose triumph was only equalled its monumental failure, will they also fail?

We learn from *The Matrix Reloaded* that the imperfection inherent in every human being made the doom of the first matrix inevitable. But what are the implications of developing a HJ methodology whilst treating the existence of a HJ as a basic assumption?

What if the assumption that there is a voice of historical Jesus at the lowest strata (as assumed by JD Crossan and others) is actually false?

If the assumption that a HJ existed is incorrect, as I argue it is, then the historical certainties HJ scholars assign to the pericopes and the HJ reconstructions they engage in are at best irrelevant; at worst they are deceptive and misleading to readers who haven't familiarized themselves well with this field of study.

I argue that this assumption inevitably informs the choices they make in their criticism. The assumption, without doubt, makes them reject alternative possibilities as they analyze historiographical evidence and taints every conclusion they draw. Like a brush soaked with paint, every stroke they make is colored by this assumption, even when it is not intended.

This historical Jesus epidemic has spread across the entire range of multifarious historical constructions from the textual stratigraphy, to the archaeological examination to the sociological lens.

An important point to bear in mind is that the data does not allow us to assume, *a priori*, that a historical Jesus existed. Quite the contrary. But that, is exactly what biblical scholars do: they treat the existence of a HJ is a maxim. I argue that this is the untamed demon undermining their earnest efforts and damning their conclusions.

A Horrifying Profusion of Anomalous and Grotesque Jesuses

In *The Historical Jesus* (1991), John Dominic Crossan says regarding the unstandardized nature of historical Jesus research: "the historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke".

Crossan adds that because of this comical and irregular nature "it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography". However, Meier, as we learn below, thinks that Crossan and like-minded scholars are deluded on this and he contends that HJ scholars are doing theology, whether they realize it or not.

Crossan's observations may be correct but the only problem is that he is part of the 'bad joke'. Instead of extracting himself from the obviously flawed process and undertaking the burden of assiduously seeking and eliminating the anomaly that makes a harmony unattainable, he instead, like a moth to the flame joins the orgy.

While he complains that there is "acute scholarly subjectivity" pervading the Historical Jesus studies, a neutral observer can easily discern that, in the midst of the melee of the Jesus Wars (as some Americans refer to it), Crossan too, with his face glistening with sweat and chest heaving with exertion, suffers from the same bias he accuses his warring colleagues of suffering from. Perhaps not the exactly in the same fashion, but it nevertheless contributes to the malaise in HJ research.

What are the symptoms that indicate to us that HJ research is in serious jeopardy? Its output. HJ scholars have come up with a horrifying profusion of anomalous and grotesque Jesuses. Lets have a brief rundown of these Jesuses:

N.T. Wright proposes that the historical Jesus was a revolutionary and saviour. Geza Vermes presents a historical Jesus who is a charismatic teacher, healer, and exorcist - a Galilean holy man. Robert H. Stein proposes that he was a supernatural historical miracle worker and saviour. Marcus Borg talks of Jesus as a spirit person, subversive sage, social prophet, and movement founder. John Dominic Crossan and Burton Mack tell us that the historical Jesus was a cynic sage/ landless labourer, displaced peasant. J.P Meier tells us that Jesus was a marginalized jew (a 'blip' on the radar screen of pagans and mainstream Jews), a radical egalitarian feminist socialist with a social agenda. Stevan Davies tells us that the historical Jesus was a healer - alternate personality as "the spirit of God,". Robert Eisenman hypothesizes that the historical Jesus was a Torah-observant and nationalistic Jew of insurrectionist leaning. Paula Fredriksen, Bart Ehrman, Theissen, E.P. Sanders, Dale Allison and Ludemann all claim that Jesus apocalyptic prophet. Richard Horsley tells us he was a social revolutionary for an egalitarian society. Stevan Davies claims he was a Galilean charismatic,

Luke Timothy Johnson persuades us that Jesus as a son of god who was baptized and died for our sins. Riley tells us he was a Hellenistic hero. The Jesus seminar vouch for an uprooted, iconoclastic Jesus who is dissimilar to both the antedecent Jewish tradition and the christian one that followed it and who is a wandering cynic philosopher, and so on and so forth.

These Jesuses can be grouped further along certain lines or even split further. I follow no strict categorization in enumerating them. They can be shifted around the groupings because there are features that overlap among them. They are to be regarded as collage potraits and not mosaics.

Now, laymen are literally buried under the sheer weight of this uncontrolled flood of Jesuses. The outlandish variegation of these Jesuses is evocative of an artist attempting to craft human figures from whatever he picks discriminately from a garbage heap: one having a tin head, another with an electric cable for the head, another with a brick for his heart, another with a packet of milk for its head and so on and so forth.

Which portrait of Jesus is the correct one? Now, that depends on who you ask. Simple logic tells us that they cannot all be correct, but that they can be all wrong. I lean towards the latter. Let us move on to the root cause of this mind-boggling surfeit of historical Jesuses.

The Cause of the Problem

A phenomenon known as the HJ epidemic has been identified as one major problem in NT scholarship. Its symptoms include uncritically assuming a HJ behind every relevant saying and every deed even those that are clearly not Jewish (like bedrock CST). Its genesis is the primordial 'divinity school' theological seminary" background that is weighing down the efforts of most NT Scholars today like a ton of bricks.

For example, Crossan received a doctorate of divinity from Maynooth College, Ireland, in 1959. JP Meier, his compatriot, and who is normally on the receiving end of his criticism, is a Catholic University scholar who believes that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. He is a scholar who, among other things, has tried to bridge the gap created by Rudolph Bultmann's dichotomy, which sought to separate Christ from the historical Jesus. Meier holds a doctorate in sacred Scripture (1976) from the Biblical Institute in Rome. In 1968, he graduated from the theology program at Gregorian University and has served as a Catholic priest.

Meier thinks that "a lot of the confusion comes from the fact that people claim they are doing a quest for the historical Jesus when *de facto* they're doing theology, albeit a theology that is indeed historically informed. Go all the way back to Reimarus, through Schleiermacher, all the way down the line through

Bultmann, Kasemann, Bornkamm. These are basically people who are theologians, doing a more modern type of Christology"[1]. When asked about historicity of Jesus' miracles, he opines that "It's a matter of faith." *ibid*.

Now, Crossan and Meier have been the most outspoken about historical Jesus methodology. Some schools of thought of about the HJ have been built around them and Crossan openly criticizes Meier's methodology in his works. The whole maelstrom about a HJ has seen titles like *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, emergin in publications.

To what extent can someone, like Meier, who believes in the trilogy, and who believes a HJ existed, be and critically objective in his reconstruction of a HJ? Remember, the apple never falls far from the tree. Can these scholars afford to publish works that will disturb their friends and family? To what extent can they divorce their thought systems from what they learnt in the divinity schools?

We know they have valiantly tried to shed the theological seminar training and perhaps indoctrination. Crossan is regarded by conservative Christians as a liberal scholar and his works are derided by orthodox christians, some of whom claim he has a hidden agenda.

But, in spite of their efforts to free themselves from the christology that they learnt in divinity schools, and the theology that they were tested on in the seminaries, they have been unable to entertain the thought that perhaps, just perhaps, a HJ never existed, and that salvific Jesus was erstwhile an intermediary saviour figure called "the son of God" as we see in *Shepherd of Hermas*. They have never asked themselves why *1 Clement* refers to Christ, not as a past personality, but a present power. Why in *Odes of Solomon*, *Didache* and *Gospel of Barnabas*, none of Jesus' teachings are mentioned and why they refer only to God for knowledge and wisdom and why Pilate, Mary or Jospheh are not mentioned by these early writers, why in Philippians 2:6-11 Paul writes of a God who came down and suffered and for that act, was exalted by being named Jesus - why Paul says Jesus was killed by [a]rchons[/i] (demons) and not Pontius Pilate as the Gospels indicate?

Have they asked why Tatian, in *Apology to the Greeks* c.160 had as his main focus, the *Logos*. When he expounds on *The Doctrine of the Christians*, he focuses on the creative power of the Logos in bringing about the universe, its being the first-begotten of the Father through whom the world was made. Why Tatian never mentions that there was an incarnation of the Logos. Why Tatian uses expressions like 'God taught', never 'Jesus said', or 'Christ taught'. Why the names 'Jesus', 'Christ' and 'Christian' don't appear in *Apology*. Why, when Tatian talks about Christians belief in the resurrection, he never mentions Jesus or christ, or that Jesus resurrected.

And why the same author, a decade or so later, in *Diatessaron* c.175, references the gospels and why, suddenly, a historical Jesus emerges in his theology?[2]. Why does *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* state that "God did not, send to men any servant, or angel to the Christians"? Didn't the author know that Christianity was founded by a man called Jesus who was sent by God? Why does the author, who is a Christian, write lengthily about *The Manifestation of Christ* and never once mentions the name Jesus or Mary or Nazareth? Isn't it odd?

Why do HJ methodologies focus only on Jesus' sayings and not on his personality - was Jesus a radio? Why is it that the voice of a HJ is missing in the first strata (Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans - where the words "son of God", Pilate, Joseph and Mary,[terms which appear in the latter strata] are markedly absent)? Why is there no Jewish voice in the common sayings tradition? Why is it that Mark has no infancy narrative? And why did the three gospels copy Mark and move around Markan material without any regard to context? Why is it that almost the whole of Mark was constructed via literary borrowing and midrash from the old testament if there was an actual story of a historical Jesus? Is it a coincidence that events in Mark so closely parallel those in Kings - from sequence, structure, plot and characters?

These are questions that NT scholars have failed to ask themselves, or have asked themselves but ignored them because of their potential to ignite a maelstrom in NT scholarship. Or because of certain theological commitments that they have been sworn to. It is my belief that they whiz past these questions because of their theological commitment to a historical Jesus. And that commitment, borne out of divinity classrooms, is the cause of the problem.

How bad Is it Anyway?

Very bad.

The Jesus Seminar, who purport to represent the academy on HJ questions tell us that, after more than a decade of their meetings, the one thing we can know for certain is that Jesus was crucified.

Finally one certain thing. Ok, so, who crucified Jesus and why?

We look into Crossan's *The Historical Jesus - The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. Crossan (who chaired the Jesus Seminar) says in it that he knows the crucifixion happened but doesn't know why. When queried further, he murmurs suspiciously that he thinks the temple incident in Mark 11 had something to do with it.

Fair enough. So we start contemplating how bad this temple ruckus must have been, making the high priests start plotting to get rid of Jesus and all...

But Paula Fredricksen interrupts our thoughts and tells us she has visited the temple scene personally and thinks its very unlikely that it happened as narrated. She supports this with unassailable reasons. While we are digesting this, Fredricksen sedately reminds us that even the crucifixion could not have happened as described. She proceeds to explain that the grisly manner in which Jesus was crucified was preserved for political insurrectionists and that if Jesus was one, he could not have been crucified alone, but with his followers too. We also know that whereas Josephus, the Jewish historian, recorded the crucifixions carried out by the Romans, Jesus' crucifixion is missing in Roman records which have a number of Jesuses, but no Jesus of Nazareth.

So anyway, how come Jesus was crucified alone? Crossan tells us that as soon as Jesus was arrested (for what - a temple incident that never happened?), his disciples fled back to rural Galilee and never got to know what his fate was (and bear in mind that Crossan rejects the historicity of the twelve. He says that the prospect of a gang of 13 idle men wandering in a shame-and-honour society like Galilee while the women and children did meaningful things is out of the question). So, Crossan tells us that, after a while, these diciples came together and combed the scriptures then constructed the passion narrative from passages like Psalms 22. This is what he calls the 'cross gospel' which, he informs us, the author of Mark later used and which was the source of the passion narrative of the other three gospels. Other scholars, critical of the Jesus Seminar, disagree and say Crossan is using that unattested document as a crutch.

*****TO BE CONTINUED*****

Historical Jesus Methodologies or Historical Jesus Guides?

1. Lack of adequate explanation for dating the documents included in the strata
2. Speciously narrow date ranges in the strata renders the strata dubious.
3. Absence of a Historical Jesus in the first strata beats reason because it is supposed to be closest to a historical Jesus.
4. Single-minded preoccupation on Jesus' words or sayings rather than his person (identity), his deeds and experiences, casts a shadow of doubt regarding his historicity.
5. The void in the (CST) Common Sayings Tradition points to the acute absence of a focusing earthly figure.
6. Lack of attestation of a historical Jesus by Josephus. This flies in the face of the idea that Jesus taught a radical philosophy and was responsible for a wide ranging movement as depicted by HJ theorists.
7. Paul's disinterest in Jesus' alleged 'achievements' in Galilee
8. Missing references to a HJ in Q where expected.
9. No Jewish references in bedrock layer of CST.
10. Criteria plus stratum does not equal Methodology
11. Unreliability of the methodologies.

There is little or no external corroborating evidence to the gospel events. That means there is no way to test the conclusions which makes the arguments for validating the methodologies, circular.

1. [*Finding the Historical Jesus: An Interview With John P. Meier*](#)