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Introduction: locating Jesus outside the Gospels

It does not take much exposure to Gospels studies, or to biblical scholarship more generally, before one encounters the term ‘historical Jesus’. The expression itself is unattested within the biblical record, but is instead a scholarly phrase or construction, a term devised within the discipline to describe the Jesus of history, the Jesus ‘who really was’. For a number of centuries now, scholars have sought to get to this ‘true’ Jesus, the Jesus behind the theological and doctrinal superstructure overlaid by the Gospel writers and the early Church, and thereby construct an objective ‘life of Jesus’ free of theological or ecclesial influence. The means by which this ‘real’ Jesus has been determined vary greatly from scholar to scholar, and the various criteria used to distinguish what ultimately goes back to Jesus are contested, manifold and diverse. The degree of suspicion with which the canonical material is viewed likewise varies, and a veritable industry of divergent methodological approaches has materialized, each reckoning to present the supposed ‘real’ Jesus.¹

As such, the historical Jesus is the Jesus created by historians, a figure that is simultaneously delineated from the so-called ‘Christ of faith’ and focused solely around the supposed person of Jesus of Nazareth. It may be that other terms are more suitable – the ‘historical figure’ of Jesus,² the ‘historic Jesus’ or the ‘earthly Jesus’

¹ For a helpful review of the historical Jesus project and its major protagonists, see James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Robert M. Price, John Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, James D. G. Dunn and Darrell L. Bock, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009) 9–54.

² Cf. D. Moody Smith, ‘The Historical Figure of Jesus in 1 John’, in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, Christopher Kavin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008) 310–24.

perhaps – but the underlying principle remains the attempt to free Jesus from dogmatic overlay and present instead a life of Jesus that is historically rigorous and persuasive. Scot McKnight, albeit in an essay proclaiming the end of the historical Jesus project, construes its depiction in particularly dualistic terms as the ‘Jesus whom scholars have reconstructed on the basis of historical methods over against the canonical portraits of Jesus in the Gospels of our New Testament, and over against the orthodox Jesus of the church.’³

In recent years, though, scholars have challenged some of the key premises of the historical Jesus project. Some have ventured that the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is a false dichotomy (and one not made by the biblical authors).⁴ Some have challenged the very heart of an enterprise that seeks (subjectively) to distinguish the kernel of genuine, historical tradition.⁵ Some have questioned the very purpose of the historical reconstruction, venturing that the only Jesus who matters is the living Jesus encountered and present today.⁶ But even those who are sceptical about the aspirations of the historical Jesus project would still consider that Jesus of Nazareth is a figure of some interest; likewise, while historical Jesus is a contested term, with its depictions of Jesus essentially constructions, there remains the common focus that it is the earthly Jesus on whom attention is rightly focused.⁷

The key point for our purposes, however, is that by their very nature, historical Jesus studies inevitably focus on the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, canonical and non-canonical alike. The scholarly

³ <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/april/15.22.html>>.

⁴ Paul Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ*, After Jesus 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) vii–ix, 176.

⁵ Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010) 459–60.

⁶ See, for example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) 3–22.

⁷ For our purposes, we will continue to use the term, recognizing that its referent is the earthly Jesus, and using the two phrases interchangeably. This is not to separate the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith – as we will see, the NT evidence seems to place them in continuity – but is merely to keep the scope of our exercise manageable.

portrayals so generated along the way certainly vary, sometimes in remarkably divergent fashion, as do the methodologies and techniques so deployed. The Markan Jesus, for example, differs significantly from the Jesus presented in the Johannine Gospel, often in quite radical terms. Likewise, the Jesus of N. T. Wright diverges from that espoused by Marcus Borg or Dominic Crossan⁸ in ways that cause one to speculate as to how such divergent conclusions can be arrived at from what is effectively the same source material. However, laying such differences aside for the moment, the ‘source material’ used in Jesus studies tends to be restricted to Gospel texts, normally the canonical four, but with the occasional inclusion of other non-canonical, evangelical material (notably the *Gospel of Thomas*) as and when deemed appropriate.⁹ The other New Testament testimony is commonly rendered secondary as a result, its ‘value’ supposedly limited by either genre, late dating or merely disavowal; these texts are deemed to be more interested in the Christ of faith than in any remembrance of the Jesus of history. There is something of a parallel here, perhaps, even with Gospel studies and historical Jesus discussions, with the Gospel of John commonly sidelined in such historical questions, as it too is invariably seen as more interested in the (theological) Christ of faith.¹⁰

This book seeks to address such neglect, by focusing specifically on the non-Gospel material in an attempt to discern how these other texts of the NT contribute to framing the picture and identity of the earthly Jesus. It will have constituent chapters on Jesus in the respective later NT texts, along with a concluding chapter that seeks to tease out any overarching themes or findings

⁸ See the debates, for example, in Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (London: SPCK, 1999), or Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

⁹ The Jesus Seminar, for example, advocates a fivefold Gospel comparison – see Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

¹⁰ See, for example, the discussion in Marianne Meye Thompson, ‘Jesus and the Victory of God Meets the Gospel of John’, in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (London: SPCK, 2011) 21–40.

from the analysis. It will consider the implications of these non-Gospel texts for our understanding of Jesus and the emergence of traditions about him, while offering a bridge between the canonical Gospel portrayals of Jesus and the later apocryphal pictures that subsequently emerge. It is not a complete book-by-book analysis, and there is some element of generalization within our discussion. We will not, for example, be able to focus specifically on Jesus according to Romans; there are related books available that do embark on this book-by-book approach,¹¹ but for our purposes and strategy, space precludes that level of analysis. Instead, we will group together the respective letters of the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline corpuses, if only as a convenient way of marshalling the relevant data in a hopefully helpful fashion. But that should not limit our capacity for exploration; bearing in mind the diversity within the canonical testimony, there remains plenty of scope to explore the full contours of the canonical Jesus.

Sources for the study of Jesus

At the outset of our discussion, though, it is probably worth establishing the purpose or value of an exercise such as this. After all, books on Jesus abound, not perhaps to the scale alluded to in John 21.25, but to a significant extent nonetheless. This rather begs the question as to why another volume should be added to their number.¹² One might also venture that the Gospel genre, as a biography of Jesus, would seem appropriately fit for purpose, and more than capable of presenting Jesus as the one remembered by those who followed after him. This would be even more the case were the Gospels, as some have recently suggested, the product of eyewitness testimony to Jesus' ministry.¹³ By comparison,

¹¹ For example, Keith Warrington, *Discovering Jesus in the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009).

¹² See Beverly, Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays, *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 1–3, for a similar (and persuasive) self-justification for adding to the plethora of Jesus-related tomes.

¹³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

any recourse to the non-Gospel material would be only secondary, and of incidental value compared to these putative 'life of Jesus' accounts. Furthermore, and more significantly perhaps, scholars tend to view the non-evangelical accounts as uninterested in the earthly Jesus, and more concerned with the proclamation and worship of the exalted Lord. Beyond the Gospels, only Acts and Paul avowedly cite any dominical sayings – and, even then, only rarely so – and any appeal to Jesus' parables or mighty deeds is minimal in, or even absent from, the non-Gospel texts. Edgar McKnight's muted summation therefore articulates the challenge faced: 'the nongospel material in the New Testament, like non-canonical references to Jesus, adds little to the overall picture of Jesus, but it does confirm the historicity of Jesus and some of the events recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.'¹⁴

Viewed in such terms, investigation of the non-Gospel testimony might seem to have little purpose or add minimal value. The function of historical corroboration could just as well be attested by non-Christian sources such as Josephus, and to view the non-Gospel texts as merely endorsing Synoptic material effectively consigns them to a secondary status when compared with their Gospel counterparts. Even someone as reticent about the historical Jesus project as Carl Braaten ends up sidelining the non-Gospel material (inadvertently perhaps), opining that: 'My view is that the only Jesus is the One presented in the canonical Gospels *and that any other Jesus is irrelevant to Christian faith*.'¹⁵ To be fair to Braaten, he does subsequently offer some reflection on the NT epistolary corpus's witness to Jesus, and ventures that the 'access we have to the real Jesus of history is solely through the picture of faith left behind by the apostles.'¹⁶ By this, one suspects, he includes Paul, John, Peter and others. But the point still remains, that engagement with Jesus tradition – be that in historical terms or otherwise – tends to be focused primarily,

¹⁴ Edgar V. McKnight, *Jesus Christ in History and Scripture: A Poetic and Sectarian Perspective* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999) 39.

¹⁵ Carl E. Braaten, *Who Is Jesus? Disputed Questions and Answers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 3, my emphasis.

¹⁶ Braaten, *Who Is Jesus?* 46.

sometimes exclusively, on the *Gospel* accounts of his life. There is the common tendency to remove the rest of the New Testament from the equation in terms of framing Jesus tradition, preferring (once the canonical four Gospels are taken as read) to look to other (non-canonical) sources for reference, be they the so-called apocryphal gospels or other *agrapha* found in Early Christian writings.¹⁷ This may reflect the expectation or prejudice that such texts have little to contribute to Jesus studies – notably those focusing on historical matters – but any such assessment remains surely that: a prejudice.

Now of course, some caution in handling the non-Gospel texts is certainly appropriate, and one must concede that the respective genres of the NT material necessarily impact upon how one goes about the study of the earthly Jesus. The Gospels are ‘about Jesus’ in a way that the non-Gospel texts are simply not. Both in terms of genre and content, the canonical Gospels encapsulate the life of Jesus, whereas the NT epistles testify to the communal life of congregations gathered in his name. The letters of Paul or Peter are situational in nature, addressing particular concerns and contexts, and one commonly has to read between the lines as to the situation or issue that they address. The nature of the documents should also caution us from *over*-expectations as to the role

¹⁷ This seems implicit in Robert L. Webb’s otherwise excellent review of historical method in historical Jesus studies (Robert L. Webb, ‘The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research’, in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 9–93). He carefully addresses the appropriateness and relevance of various sources, but omits to consider what value the rest of the NT might have for this exercise. Likewise, in his review of potential historical Jesus sources, Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), covers a number of salient texts, including Talmud and midrashim, but does not include the NT. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012) 105–17, is therefore quite unusual for giving attention (albeit relatively briefly) to the way in which the non-Gospel material (and particularly the non-Pauline texts) attests to the existence of Jesus. Michael Labahn, ‘The Non-Synoptic Jesus: An Introduction to John, Paul, Thomas, and Other Outsiders of the Jesus Quest’, in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 1933–96, also includes some discussion of how certain non-Gospel texts impact upon historical Jesus concerns. His titular designation of these texts as ‘outsiders of the Jesus Quest’ sums up our point well.

occupied by the earthly Jesus in the particular texts, and one cannot ignore the important datum that the non-Gospel texts do not yield substantial information in this regard. Indeed, the relative silence of the rest of the NT on Jesus' life and teaching is something of a given, even in relatively conservative scholarship, and we shall explore the important implications of that fact for Jesus studies particularly in the final chapter. However, rather than viewing the (relative) silence on Jesus in the NT texts as a matter of embarrassment that has to be assuaged, we will consider what such silence means for the remembrance of Jesus within the life of the early Church.

Moreover, the genre difference between the Gospels and the non-Gospel material does not preclude the latter having something significant to contribute to constructing a portrait(s) of Jesus. One might, for example, distinguish between the Gospels as *biographies* of Jesus, interested in recalling the events of his life, and the non-Gospel material as sources for, or windows onto, the *identity* of Jesus – a different lens, perhaps, but one that seeks to spread the vision wider than just 'historical' or biographical questions. To use James Dunn's titular phrase,¹⁸ the non-Gospel material contributes to the portrayal of 'Jesus Remembered' in a different way or function from the Gospel presentation, but it contributes nonetheless.¹⁹ The NT epistles possess (potentially genuine) testimony to Jesus tradition, and reflect it as such, offering different ways in which such tradition is utilized; they yield other ways by which Jesus is remembered – be that in liturgy, in proclamation, in teaching or in paraenesis. References to Jesus' life need not be limited solely to the biographies/lives of Jesus, and the celebration, worship and preservation of Jesus memory in the life and practice of those who followed after him is both a window onto the identity of Jesus and also something fundamentally rooted in the discussion of who he is. To put the matter another way, if the Gospels are still valid sources for recollecting Jesus' significance,

¹⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making 1 (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹⁹ This distinction is made in Gaventa and Hays, *Seeking*, and in Hays's chapter within the volume ('The Story of God's Son: The Identity of Jesus in the Letters of Paul' 180–99). Note, though, the criticism leveled at it from N. T. Wright concerning the book's lack of attention to historical questions, and the critique of Richard J. Bauckham, 'Seeking the Identity of Jesus', *JSNT* 32 (2010): 337–46, that eyewitness memory is similarly undervalued.

and if the dichotomy between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history is a false one, as many now conclude, it would seem warranted to ensure that the non-Gospel texts (those that still appeal to Jesus as central to their self-understanding) are allowed a voice in the shaping of the identity of Jesus. It may, of course, be that the exercise proves to be a fruitless one; it may be that they have little to say, or contribute, to the question. But equally it may prove a rich and fruitful enterprise, and suggest that the canonical Jesus is more than just the evangelical Jesus.

One might add some further reasons to suggest that the non-Gospel material has something to contribute to Jesus studies. First, *to restrict the non-Gospel materials' contribution merely to echoing or confirming Jesus' historicity is simply to place false restrictions on them.* The non-Gospel material certainly has something to say about Jesus, about how he was remembered, how he was proclaimed and celebrated; such testimony is not lacking in historical value, quite the reverse. Indeed, it is hard to think otherwise from this – one would surely expect to encounter at least *some* reference to, or *some* invocation of, Jesus' life and ministry within the non-Gospel material. The testimony of the Pauline literature, for example, is that Jesus tradition formed part of Paul's preaching when founding churches; he can speak of publicly proclaiming Jesus' death before the Galatians (Gal. 3.1) or of passing on Jesus traditions to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15.3), both, it seems, as part of his missionary preaching.²⁰ Likewise, Hebrews can speak of Jesus' salvific message being proclaimed by him and passed on to the Hebrews by his first followers (Heb. 2.2). As such, 'it remains very unlikely that there ever were Christian communities who lived only with the tradition about Jesus, or only with the confession of his death and resurrection without knowledge of his earthly activity.'²¹ One would therefore expect such tradition to feature

²⁰ Cf. Martin Hengel, 'Eye-Witness Memory and the Writing of the Gospels', in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus N. A. Bockmuehl and Donald Alfred Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 70–96: 'The message they proclaimed was too uncommon, even offensive, for them not to have to report something definite about Jesus' (75).

²¹ Eduard Schweizer, 'The Testimony to Jesus in the Early Christian Community', *HBT* 7 (1985) 77–98 (96).

in, or be alluded to, within the epistolary discourse, however incidentally. To push the matter further, there also seems to be little direct evidence of *Gospels* functioning as texts used in very early Christian worship.²² By contrast, we have clear evidence of letters and epistles being read (cf. 2 Pet. 3.16), such that when it comes to remembering the story within a liturgical framework, or encouraging each other through written discourse, it is evident that the epistles bear that mantle more than the Gospels. Thus, even if the volume of data on Jesus is not huge, it is still historical data per se, and contributes in some fashion to the overall 'biblical' picture of Jesus, and to both the recognition of the diversity of the canonical witness and the multivalent portrayals of Jesus therein.

Second, *the person of Jesus and the Jesus movement that followed after him are surely intertwined* – a rigorous historical method seeks to account for why/how people became committed to his cause, particularly after his death. That which people followed has to make sense of what has come before, and it 'is not at all easy to detach Jesus from his followers'.²³ First-century historian Paula Fredriksen, for example, takes this approach, beginning with the movement that followed after Jesus and then working *backwards* to the Gospels in order to try and explain the historical data from that point.²⁴ In this sense, then, the NT material is historically valuable, both for (perhaps) reflecting on the life of Jesus and also for bringing out how Jesus was understood by those who followed after him. Furthermore, recent developments in historical Jesus studies make the inclusion of non-Gospel material all the more valid, especially in the appeal to *memory* as the way in which Jesus tradition is preserved. There are different takes on how memory may be seen to operate,²⁵ but core to all of them is the language

²² So W. A. Strange, 'The Jesus-Tradition in Acts', *NTS* 46 (2000) 59–74 (73).

²³ Francis Watson, 'Veritas Christi: How to Get from the Jesus of History to the Christ of Faith without Losing One's Way', in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 96–114 (114).

²⁴ Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999) 74–8.

²⁵ See inter alia Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*; Allison, *Constructing*; Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).

of remembrance, and a move away from reliance on the written word as the means by which the tradition is preserved. If this is the case for the Gospels, if they are ‘Jesus Remembered’ – that is, remembered for the impact or relevance to their situation – then the same logic surely applies to the other NT material whereby the effect of Jesus on the various communities is recalled and articulated. Anthony Le Donne helpfully reminds us of the impact of memory, averring: ‘Memory is the impression left by the past, not the preservation of it. In memory, we do not re-experience the past. What we experience is the impact left by the past . . . Memory is what is happening in our minds *now*.’²⁶ If the remembered Jesus impacts *now*, then the contextual aspect of that ‘nowness’ is as valid for the non-Gospel texts as it is for the Gospels. They offer an alternative insight or milieu by which the remembrance happens – by reflection upon life and practice, rather than by biographical testimony.

Third, *it is probable that many of the NT texts* – the Pauline corpus certainly, but possibly James and/or Hebrews as well – *actually predate the canonical Gospels* (in their written form at least) and, on temporal grounds alone could stake a claim to record and present genuine Jesus tradition. As Dunn opines: ‘the forty-or-so-year gap between Jesus and the written Gospels was not empty of Jesus tradition. The stream of tradition did not disappear underground for several decades only to re-emerge when Mark put pen to paper.’²⁷ Moreover, the purported authors of some of the non-Gospel texts (i.e. Peter and James) seem to be figures named elsewhere as knowing Jesus, and even if the attribution of the texts is pseudonymous, there still remain good grounds to investigate what particular picture the texts yield. After all, if Jesus studies have ‘arrived’ at any consensus in recent years, it is to provide ‘a Jewish Jesus who is credible within first-century Judaism, who gave rise to the basic contours of the early Christian movement,

²⁶ Anthony Le Donne, *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 24–5.

²⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Christianity in the Making 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 111.

and who can truly be Lord to the church and human enough to be brother to the church as well as other humans on the face of the earth.²⁸ If it is legitimate to consult other first-century sources to ascertain how they might speak to historical Jesus questions, be they early Christian texts such as the *Didache* or other material such as Josephus, then one must at least accord the non-Gospel texts the same invitation. Surely, as texts of those who follow after this figure – as brother and Lord – it is only good historical practice to consider what picture such sources might portray, and how different or distinctive their respective portrayals might be.

Fourth, *the non-Gospel material can actually cause the reader to re-evaluate or reassess the portraits of Jesus offered in the Gospel accounts.* While one can understand and, to an extent, justify the prioritization of the Gospels as those texts giving the clearest presentation of Jesus, this customarily leads to the tendency to make them the authoritative texts against which others are measured or judged. Inverting such relationships, however, can yield some different and interesting results. The depiction of James the Just (Jesus' brother) would be one such example. James is commonly seen as unsympathetic to his brother's ministry (John 7.3–5; Mark 6.3–4) and therefore not part of the Twelve; he is then only 'converted' post-resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15.7) and subsequently assumes the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1.19; 2.9, 12; Acts 12.17; 15.13–21). When we read the epistle of James, which may (though not necessarily) go back to James the Just himself, however, we notice a number of similarities with Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, perhaps suggesting that James was more familiar with, or supportive of, his brother than is often thought; he may well have been both brother and 'believer' from the pre-Easter period, possibly even from the outset of Jesus' ministry.²⁹

²⁸ Scot McKnight, 'Jesus of Nazareth', in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) 149–76 (176).

²⁹ For this more positive view of James's attitude to Jesus, see John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 11–41; Richard J. Bauckham, 'James and Jesus', in *The Brother of Jesus: James the Just and His Mission*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 100–37 (106–9).

Portraits of Jesus

If, then, the non-Gospel material does have something useful to contribute to studies of Jesus, how might we go about using them? Our approach in this book will be to try and answer two distinct but related questions. First, we are seeking to find out what, if anything, we may discern about the historical Jesus from the non-Gospel texts under consideration. This may be partly about how they inform or confirm the Gospel testimony, the degree to which common or shared material may be found. But it may also elucidate aspects of the portrayal of Jesus that are extra or supplementary to the Gospel record, data or information that adds to the portrait of Jesus gleaned from the evangelical corpus. To put it another way, we will be looking to see how the non-Gospel material contributes to our understanding of Jesus' life, and of the remembrance of him by others beyond the Gospel writers and their communities. This may mean setting the Gospels theoretically to one side and letting the non-Gospel texts speak for themselves, answering the question: 'What would we know about the earthly Jesus from these texts if we didn't have the Gospel testimony?'

At the same time, though, texts do not exist in a vacuum – historical, canonical, intertextual or otherwise – and one cannot, of course, remove the Gospels completely from the discourse. Indeed, to do so would be counter-productive. A key feature of our discussion will be identifying the commonalities between the respective materials and discerning where there is shared data or testimony between the Gospels and the non-Gospel corpus. And where there *is* common ground between them, the principle of multiple attestation would suggest that such data has a stronger claim to being historically 'genuine'. Furthermore, sometimes knowledge of the Gospel tradition is a prerequisite for uncovering Jesus tradition elsewhere; it is only by *making* the comparison that one identifies usage of Jesus tradition. The epistle of James would be a case in point; as we shall see, the letter has many parallels with the so-called Q material, and seems to be making some Jesus connection accordingly, but one can only arrive at

that conclusion by making the comparison with the Gospel witness.³⁰

Second, and more expansively, we will consider the particular picture or portrayal of Jesus gleaned from each of the constituent authors. If we can speak of distinctive evangelistic portraits such as the Lucan or Markan Jesus,³¹ each of which contribute to the diversity of our understanding about Jesus, what do the other canonical texts have to contribute in this regard? What is the Petrine Jesus, the Pauline Jesus, the Jacobean Jesus or the Jesus of Hebrews? How does the Jesus of Revelation compare with the Jesus of the Deutero-Pauline corpus? In short, what contours and shape are there to the ‘canonical’ Jesus?

A word on scope is probably in order at this point. The focus of our enquiry is not so much *Christological*, but rather ‘*Jesus-ological*’; Jesus – rather than Jesus *Christ* – is the subject of our attention. This is not to negate the idea that the NT testimony acknowledges Jesus as Lord and Christ, nor that the NT writers consider there to be a fundamental continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ. The Jesus remembered is a Jesus who is worshipped as Lord and in whom post-Easter faith is placed.³² Rather, it is to focus – or, in effect, limit – our attention to discussion of Jesus’ earthly existence, and to what the non-Gospel writers made of it, how they understood that life and its (historical) consequences for them and the communities they addressed. The appellation – and preservation – of the Jesus title is therefore significant; why did the non-Gospel writers preserve the name Jesus? More provocatively, if the life of the earthly ‘Jesus’

³⁰ A similar case, though with fewer examples, can be made for 1 Peter and Revelation.

³¹ For helpful reviews of the distinctive, individual Gospel portrayals, see Edward Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (London: SPCK, 1994).

³² Cf. Braaten, *Who Is Jesus?* 33. He treats the term Jesusology with some suspicion, suggesting that it becomes merely an exercise in ‘hero worship’. He therefore prefers to think in Christological terms, which ‘account for the central place of Jesus as the Christ in the life and worship of the church’. Our approach seeks to uphold both aspects, proposing that good history seeks to take account of how the Church’s life – as exemplified in the non-Gospel accounts – testifies to, and utilizes, Jesus’ earthly existence.

was supposedly incidental to the non-Gospel materials, why do they not speak only of *Christ*?

Christology as a discipline, of course, has a wider focus than earthly Jesus concerns; it addresses the full gamut of Jesus Christ's identity, engaging with notions of pre-existence, exaltation, worship and divine identity among many other aspects. Such topics are important ones, but they are outside our immediate concerns. The landscape of 'New Testament Christology' is terrain relatively well traversed, with a number of volumes available that give a book-by-book analysis of the respective NT authors.³³ While we shall refer to such works as a matter of course, their contribution is generally speaking less concerned with the particular *historical* questions that Jesus studies normally invoke. Terminology, therefore, is not unimportant here, and some may wish to speak of the 'historical Christ',³⁴ particularly for the way that such phrasing prevents the (false) separation of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith. As we shall observe, the apostle Paul sees no discontinuity. However, in order to keep our focus Jesusological, we shall speak of the 'Jesus of faith' – or 'remembered Jesus' – as the better focus for our concerns.

Framing the canonical Jesus

What, then, is the overall aim of our project? At one level, its aspirations are somewhat modest. It recognizes the limitations of the historical Jesus enterprise, acknowledging that any attempt to get behind the Gospels, whatever one's motivation for so doing, will always be fraught with challenge. And if one is working with situational, contextual texts such as the NT epistles, their very

³³ See inter alia: C. M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Richard N. Longenecker, *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999); Mark Allan Powell and David R. Bauer (ed.), *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999). Other text-specific Christological studies will be mentioned in the relevant chapters.

³⁴ Barnett, *Finding 176*; cf. also Dale C. Allison, Jr.'s deliberately titled *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

nature and genre are even less geared to separating the layers of tradition and to piecing together the true Jesus. That is why our discussion is orientated towards the 'Jesus of faith', recognizing that that is how memory functions in the preservation of tradition and (hi)story. As to whether events categorically happened or not, one cannot really say, but the fact that they were *remembered* in the present for being so gives them some value as historical data.

And that surely is the nub of our task. We are seeking the Jesus articulated by the 'confessional', avowedly faith-geared position of the biblical authors, and specifically those responsible for the non-Gospel material – what we might term the 'canonical Jesus'. This is a phrase we have already used but not properly defined. Scot McKnight adopts the appellation to define the reflection that biblical writers used when describing Jesus in terms of redemptive categories or titles such as Messiah or Son of God, and he does so wanting to distinguish the discussion from any historical Jesus attempt to construct a 'pure' Jesus.³⁵ Now, such 'canonical Jesus' terminology reflects a faith consensus, and avowedly so, but that should not limit the value or import of the approach/title, and we will retain it as part of our historically orientated inquiry. For as many have recently proposed, such theologizing is not alien – and is indeed integral – to the historical task. It does not preclude reflection on the life and teaching of the earthly Jesus in whom many came to put their faith pre-Passion; indeed it is necessary to it. It is nonsense – or just perhaps merely 'bad history' – to think that people would follow after a crucified Galilean only after his death; there must have been some reason to attach oneself to him pre-Easter, and one is duty bound to explain how/why such things happened. Moreover, a key part of establishing the identity of any figure is to consider how they are afterwards interpreted and understood; we understand their significance through subsequent reflection upon a person, or by attention to their impact upon the world after their death. Karl Marx, for example, is a case in point of someone better understood after his death, and in the light of the subsequent impact and appropriation of his thinking and writing.

³⁵ See McKnight: <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/april/15.22.html>>.

But the ‘canonical Jesus’ appellation pertains to more than just the Jesus remembered through subsequent theological reflection and consideration. The canonical appellation is also a reference to the specific composition of texts that comprise that library we know as the ‘New Testament’ – it is the composite picture of Jesus’ identity as outworked through the constituent canonical voices. Our task is to tease out the nature and diversity with which (if at all) a canonical portrait of Jesus is framed, and it is done in the explicit knowledge that some theological or qualitative claim is being made about the texts concerned. The Jesus remembered within such material is a Jesus to whom worship is offered and whose resurrection from the dead is celebrated and proclaimed.

At one level, particularly in terms of historical considerations, this decision to focus solely on the canonical testimony may seem somewhat specious or biased. If this were just a historical exercise, there would be good reason both to exclude some later texts (2 Peter would be, for many, the obvious contender) and introduce other, apparently earlier, texts into the discussion. We think of the *Didache* as a strong candidate in this regard, as it is normally dated to the latter part of the first century. ‘Canon’ is also a contested term; there are a variety of canons within the Christian tradition, and the term is commonly viewed as a (later) overlay onto the constituent biblical texts. We will work, though, with the generally agreed Protestant canon, neither wanting to exclude other significant contemporary texts of the time, nor to rule out the possibility that Jesus tradition isn’t (similarly?) replicated in extra-canonical texts such as *1 Clement*. Rather, it is to accept that one has to start somewhere, and the received Protestant NT canon is as good a place as any, particularly if the canon somehow illustrates the rule of faith for a particular community of believers. One may say that this privileges the canonical texts at the expense of other non-canonical ones, but one must equally recognize that they have been privileged already; the very existence of the canon as a grouping of texts means that certain theological assumptions have been made. If the biblical canon is in some way linked to a greater story – or stories – then the other NT texts are at least fellow contributors to the framing and elucidation of that story.

One further point is worthy of mention. As well as being interested in historical questions, we are also concerned with narrative strategy, namely what portrait is painted of the particular Jesus in each of the respective sources. Stories have the capacity to yield a portrayal and perspective on a figure in a way that isolated quotations or statements do not. It is surely no accident that the four canonical Gospels – unlike *Thomas*, for example – are those that locate Jesus within a narrative framework, rather than just a list of sayings. Mark Allen Powell, for example, talks of the ‘Jesus of story’ rather than the ‘Jesus of history’ as a suitable label for summarizing the authoritative portrait of Jesus within the biblical record.³⁶ If anything therefore, we err on the side of narrative-canonical questions, and are advocating an approach to Jesus studies akin to that of Luke Timothy Johnson, in that the only Jesus that matters is the one encountered in the life of the Church (and specifically in the accounts of the life of the early Church as represented by the non-Gospel material).³⁷ But that is not at the expense of historical questions; we are still interested in the portrait of the figure of Jesus pre-resurrection (albeit mediated through post-resurrection glasses). ‘History’ does matter (more than Johnson tends to allow), and thus the celebrated memory of the figure, one suggests, must have some resonance or foundation in reality. Story and history are not in tension; story has the capacity to reveal or bring out history; Jesus’ ‘history’ is part of Jesus’ story.³⁸

Let us put it another way. Borrowing from the approach taken by Gaventa and Hays in their edited volume,³⁹ our task is to tease out the ‘identity’ of Jesus as expressed within the non-Gospel

³⁶ Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 8–9.

³⁷ See, for example, Johnson, *Living Jesus* 3–22.

³⁸ On such matters, see Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, WUNT 123 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

³⁹ Gaventa and Hays, *Seeking* 4–18. They speculate positively on the value of using the non-Gospel witness as sources for constructing the identity of Jesus, but the constituent chapters do not pursue every part of the NT canon.

material. Within the Gaventa/Hays book, Katherine Grieb outlines three ways by which identity may be articulated:⁴⁰

- 1 *Sameness*: what do they have in common with others?
- 2 *Distinctiveness*: how do you spot them in a crowd?
- 3 *Singularity*: what really counts about a person?

Our discussion of the canonical Jesus will allude to all three characteristics. The criterion of sameness will not be absent from the account and, indeed, it will be easy to underestimate the extent to which the respective accounts ‘share’ common ground in their portrayal of Jesus. The fact that, for example, Jesus’ death is a centrepiece for Paul, Hebrews and 1 Peter probably goes without saying, but it is worth underscoring nonetheless. At the same time, we will focus especially on what makes the respective accounts distinctive or singular in their portrayal of Jesus. We will attend particularly to the way in which the identity of ‘Jesus remembered’ is characteristic of that text and unique to it; one thinks, for example, of the lack of interest in Jesus’ death in the epistle of James, or Revelation’s particular association of the exalted Christ and the earthly Jesus. Each chapter finishes with a concluding paragraph that summarizes the distinctive or particular contribution to the depiction of Jesus given by the text(s) in question. Consequently, while this will undoubtedly require some comparative work with the Gospel depictions of Jesus, we will seek to give the texts themselves the space in which to unpack their own testimony. The aim is to let the respective texts or authors have their own voice, and to hear their particular ‘take’ or portrait of Jesus.

Conclusion

In sum, our object is not for ‘pure’ historical recovery or synthesis, but rather to tease out how the different depictions of Jesus function

⁴⁰ A. Katherine Grieb, ‘“Time Would Fail Me to Tell . . .”: The Identity of Jesus Christ in Hebrews’, in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 200–14 (205–6).

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within, and contribute to, the canonical identity of Jesus. Our approach is to see what these portraits of Jesus *outside* the Gospels might bring to the portrait of Jesus *in* the Gospels; that is, what happens, or what does 'canon' do, when different, or extra, portrayals are added. Throughout, our attention will be focused on the 'Jesus remembered'; what do the individual non-Gospel texts remember about him?