

The Mission of Jesus

Edited by
SAMUEL BYRSKOG and
TOBIAS HÄGERLAND

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Both the symposium and the editing of this volume have taken place concurrently with numerous other duties of research, teaching and administration in our Faculty and Department. We are proud and happy to serve an academic institution where, at least once in a while, one is allowed to leave matters of daily bureaucracy aside in order to attend to questions of more profound importance.

The Editors

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Introduction

SAMUEL BYRSKOG and TOBIAS HÄGERLAND

From the inception of critical Jesus research, the questions of Jesus' understanding of his authority and aims have been central to this field of inquiry. Still today, scholars are making efforts toward resolving those questions. This volume is a collection of contributions that were originally presented at the Second Nordic Symposium on the Historical Jesus in Lund 2012. Researchers from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden continue and broaden a conversation that was initiated in Turku/Åbo 2010.¹ The topics of Jesus' identity and aims are here coupled under the concept of "mission," which includes his notion of being sent, the purposes that he aimed to fulfill, and the means of carrying out these purposes. Contributions to the volume analyze proposals made in previous research, discuss methodological problems, and suggest new understandings of various aspects of the mission of Jesus.

Today's scholarly landscape in the Nordic countries is more international than ever and it is virtually impossible to identify a specific Nordic school of thought in Jesus research. Nordic scholars are even exceptionally international. Although proud of the training in their native languages, they interact with scholarship from a broad range of countries and resist the forces of scholarly provincialism. Jesus research produced in English, French and German, and often also in other languages, is mandatory reading for all of them. It is true that each scholar has her/his own preferences and international contacts, but seen together Nordic scholars betray an amazing openness to a vast field different scientific cultures and traditions.

The present volume is no exception and indicates this double characteristic of Nordic Jesus research: the absence of a clearly definable Nordic school of thought as well as a self-evident and thorough international interaction. In research about the historical Jesus, where opinions differ widely and often follow particular schools of thought influential in one country but not in another, this characteristic is an important asset for estimating on equal terms the many voices of the debate and the vast plurality of Je-

¹ Samuel Byrskog, Tom Holmén and Matti Kankaanniemi, eds., *The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices* (WUNT 2:373; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

sus research. Although it makes the task of historical reconstruction even more difficult, it also challenges the prevalent provincialism of historical Jesus research and promises a fair representation of the scholarly discussion.

The contents of the articles suggest some tendencies of what occupies the interest of Nordic Jesus scholars today. A significant number of the contributors, mostly senior professors, study other influential Jesus scholars and the research process. Jostein Ådna (Norway), Per Bilde (Denmark), Samuel Byrskog (Sweden) and Halvor Moxnes (Norway), each in his own distinctive way, focus on questions of scholarly progress and on the contributions of important predecessors in the search for the historical Jesus. Mogens Müller (Denmark) and Kari Syreeni (Finland) discuss possible perspectives and avenues to be used when approaching the historical Jesus and his mission. This interest, whether it concerns other scholars or perspectives in Jesus research, might in itself be an indication of the hermeneutical insight that our (re)constructions of Jesus' mission partly reflect the circumstances and identities of the scholars themselves, but it is also a way of learning more about the historical Jesus by understanding the dynamics involved in historical reconstructions and reconfigurations.

Equally significant are the contributions selecting particular parts of Jesus' mission for closer scrutiny. They range from studies of single episodes to discussion of broader currencies in Jesus' activity. Ville Auvinen (Finland) and Matti Kankaanniemi (Finland) make detailed investigations of significant moments presented in the gospels, while Renate Banschbach Eggen (Norway), Eve-Marie Becker (Denmark) and Tobias Hägerland (Sweden) discuss a number of texts that point to the central role played by Capernaum, the parables and the disciples in the mission of Jesus. This research shows that the discussion of scholars and scholarly processes cannot rid itself from the texts testifying to the mission of Jesus and that these texts have rich potentials containing nuances that have been missed and promising subtle new discoveries.

Nordic scholars thus jointly encompass what it means today to study the mission of Jesus. In a bewildering international landscape of research, they relate far beyond the borders of the north, interacting actively to a variety of scholarly traditions outside their own native countries. They do not speak with one voice about the mission of Jesus, but with a plurality of voices. As this book illustrates, it is precisely in mutual discussion with each other rather than in salient agreement that Nordic scholarship finds its scholarly identity and continues its long-standing contribution to international research about the mission of Jesus.

Part One:
The Mission of Jesus in Research History

Can It Be Justified to Talk about Scholarly Progress in the History of Modern Jesus Research since Reimarus?

PER BILDE

1. Introduction

In the so-called third period of modern Jesus research (1973–2012), many scholars regard it as a matter of course that progress has been made, and can continue to be made – just as is the case in similar areas of historical research, for example research on Socrates, Alexander the Great and Martin Luther.¹ On the other hand, this group continues to be opposed by a considerable number of other scholars, first and foremost an influential school claiming that it is impossible to get behind the surface of the existing sources, primarily the canonical gospels, and thus to reach a more real and historical Jesus than the figure of the canonical gospels.² Thus modern Jesus research finds itself in a sort of stalemate. In my opinion, this situation has existed since 1892, when Martin Kähler first explicitly formulated the second position.³

¹ Cf. particularly Albert Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Hamburg: Siebenstern-Taschenbuch, 1966); William Telford, “Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 33–74; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996); Sean Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008); Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010) and Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

² Cf., e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Verhältnis des urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1965); Leander E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Abingdon, 1981); Helmut Koester, “The Historical Jesus and the Historical Situation of the Quest: An Epilogue,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 535–45; Uwe Swarat, “Die historische Jesusforschung und ihre dogmatische Implikationen,” in *Der historische Jesus im Spannungsfeld von Glaube und Geschichte* (ed. V. Spangenberg and A. Heinze; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 11–33.

³ Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Munich: Kaiser, 1892, repr., 1956).

The purpose of the present article is to illustrate, discuss and – hopefully – solve this stalemate. I intend to criticize the last mentioned group of scholars, particularly the position of James Dunn,⁴ and to argue in favour of the thesis that progress has in fact been made in the scholarly work since Reimarus.⁵ My presentation will proceed in five stages: after (1) this introduction, (2) a catalogue of a hopefully representative selection of the accounts of the history of modern Jesus research, (3) a brief survey of some steps backwards in modern Jesus research, (4) a survey of some of the most important innovations, new departures or progresses in modern Jesus research, (5) a discussion of the two main positions and the causes of the present stalemate in modern Jesus research and (6) conclusions.

2. A Hopefully Representative Survey of Accounts of Modern Jesus Research⁶

When I look at recent summaries, presentations, accounts and interpretations of the history of modern Jesus research, I find that many are purely descriptive, and very few are really analytical and critical examinations. Furthermore, a great number of interpretations of Jesus do not at all contain an account of modern Jesus research. To my surprise, the following impressive number of major and minor discussions and interpretations of the historical Jesus from Günther Bornkamm⁷ over S. G. F. Brandon,⁸ Geza Vermes,⁹ Michael Grant,¹⁰ Morton Smith,¹¹ Humphrey Carpenter,¹² A. E. Harvey,¹³ Howard Clark Kee,¹⁴ John P. Meier,¹⁵ Barbara Thiering,¹⁶ A.

⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making 1; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵ Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger: Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (ed. G. E. Lessing; Braunschweig, 1778); ET *The Goal of Jesus and his Disciples* (trans. G. W. Buchanan; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

⁶ An extended version of this section is available in Per Bilde, *The Originality of Jesus: A Critical Discussion and a Comparative Attempt* (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 47–86.

⁷ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus von Nazareth* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960).

⁸ S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study in the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

⁹ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1973).

¹⁰ Michael Grant, *Jesus* (London: Sphere Books, 1977).

¹¹ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Collanz, 1978).

¹² Humphrey Carpenter, *Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹³ A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History: The Bampton Lectures, 1980* (London: Duckworth, 1982).

N. Wilson,¹⁷ Jürgen Becker,¹⁸ Bart D. Ehrman,¹⁹ Paula Fredriksen,²⁰ Gerd Lüdemann,²¹ Jürgen Roloff,²² Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce Malina and Gerd Theissen,²³ Klaus Berger,²⁴ Martin Ebner,²⁵ Richard Bauckham,²⁶ Thomas Söding,²⁷ Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer,²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger,²⁹ James M. Robinson,³⁰ Joachim Ringleben,³¹ Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb,³² Dale C. Allison,³³ Bernhard Lang,³⁴ Nicholas Perrin,³⁵ Folker Siegert,³⁶ Armand Puig i Tàrrach,³⁷ Gerald L. Borchert,³⁸

¹⁴ Howard Clark Kee, *What Can We Know about Jesus?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; ABRL/AYBRL; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991–2001; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Barbara Thiering, *Jesus the Man* (London: Doubleday, 1992).

¹⁷ A. N. Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Pimlico, 1992).

¹⁸ Jürgen Becker, *Jesus von Nazaret* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995).

¹⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁰ Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

²¹ Gerd Lüdemann, *Jesus nach 2000 Jahren: Was er wirklich sagte und tat* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 2000).

²² Jürgen Roloff, *Jesus* (Munich: Beck, 2000).

²³ Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina and Gerd Theissen, eds., *Jesus in neuen Kontexten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

²⁴ Klaus Berger, *Jesus* (Munich: Pattloch, 2004).

²⁵ Martin Ebner, *Jesus von Nazaret: Was wir von ihm wissen können* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004).

²⁶ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁷ Thomas Söding, *Der Gottessohn aus Nazareth: Das Menschsein Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 2006).

²⁸ Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Jesus und das Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth* (2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 2007–2011).

³⁰ James M. Robinson, *Jesus According to the Earliest Witness* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007).

³¹ Joachim Ringleben, *Jesus: Ein Versuch zu begreifen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

³² Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, eds., *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus. A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (WUNT 247; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

³³ Allison, *Constructing Jesus*.

³⁴ Bernhard Lang, *Jesus der Hund: Leben und Lehre eines jüdischen Kynikers* (Munich: Beck, 2010).

³⁵ Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (London: SPCK, 2010).

Gerhard Lohfink,³⁹ to Niclas Förster, Tom Holmén, Hans Küng and Norbert Scholl, all published in 2012,⁴⁰ do not contain such a specific account of modern Jesus research, and therefore do not discuss the issue of the present article.

Albert Schweitzer was convinced that the development from the various liberal theological reconstructions of the life of Jesus to the eschatological and apocalyptic interpretations of Jesus by Johannes Weiss and himself⁴¹ represented an objective step forward in modern Jesus research. Accordingly, Schweitzer found his most important predecessors in Reimarus and Johannes Weiss.

Gustav Aulén⁴² only describes Jesus research between 1960 and 1971, the so-called new or second quest. On the one hand, Aulén clearly regards this quest as a major step forward compared to Rudolf Bultmann and his classical school (p. VIII). At the same time, Aulén believes that this recent quest has demonstrated that Albert Schweitzer's eschatological interpretation of Jesus is wrong (p. 148). Accordingly, I find that Aulén is convinced that scholarly progress has taken place in the recent phase of Jesus research.

Ben F. Meyer⁴³ begins his book by declaring that most of the modern Jesus research of the last two hundred years "has proved a failure" (p. 13). The reasons for these mistakes have been "the lack of exact source criticism" (p. 13) and "the incompatibility between intellectual honesty and traditional Christian belief" (p. 14). The aim of Meyer's own book is "to understand the Jesus of ancient Palestine," an aim which, according to Meyer, was not accepted by scholars as Strauss, Wrede and Bultmann (p.

³⁶ Folker Siegert, *Das Leben Jesu: Eine Biographie auf Grund der vorkanonischen Überlieferungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

³⁷ Armand Puig i Tàrrach, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey: Studies on the Historical Jesus* (WUNT 2:228; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

³⁸ Gerald L. Borchert, *Jesus of Nazareth: Background, Witnesses, and Significance* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus von Nazaret – Was er wollte, wer er war* (Freiburg: Herder, 2011).

⁴⁰ Niclas Förster, *Jesus und die Steuerfrage: Die Zingrosschenperikope auf dem religiösen und politischen Hintergrund ihrer Zeit mit einer Edition von Pseudo-Hieronymus, De haeresibus Judaeorum* (WUNT 294; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Tom Holmén, ed., *Jesus in Continuum* (WUNT 289; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Hans Küng, *Jesus* (Munich: Piper, 2012); Norbert Scholl, *Jesus von Nazaret: Was wir wissen, was wir glauben können* (Darmstadt: Lambert Schneider, 2012).

⁴¹ Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892); Albert Schweitzer, *Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis Jesu: Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901).

⁴² Gustav Aulén, *Jesus in Contemporary Research* (London: SPCK, 1976).

⁴³ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979).

19). In his account of modern Jesus research (pp. 25–59), Meyer criticises Reimarus for his aim being “to discredit Christianity,” but, at the same time, he praises him for conceiving “the history of Jesus as an unknown that remained to be known” (p. 29). Meyer concludes his account: “Though most of its monuments were failures, the quest remains an ongoing movement because the modern West is irreversibly historically minded. For us the goal of the quest – the understanding of Jesus in his own terms – is not optional. It is indispensable” (p. 58).

Meyer’s work is one of the first products of what was later termed the third quest, and it has been highly praised by E. P. Sanders⁴⁴ and later major representatives of the third quest. Meyer does not list the “progresses” of modern Jesus research. In my opinion, however, he is absolutely certain that – despite all the numerous “failures” of modern Jesus research – such progress has in fact taken place, not least by means of his own contribution, because it seriously, and independent of Christian belief, seeks “to understand the Jesus of ancient Palestine” (p. 19). As first understood and expressed by Reimarus, these two insights represent the most important progresses in modern Jesus research: it is independent of Christian interpretations of Jesus, and it aims at interpreting him in his contemporary Jewish context.

In his critical description of the “state of the question” (pp. 23–58), Sanders does not present a complete account of modern Jesus research from Reimarus to the 1980s. He begins with Schweitzer, who was not faultless, according to Sanders, but at the same time, Schweitzer represents the most important precondition for Sanders’ own position, that is, by painting a picture of Jesus who “stood firmly anchored in the Judaism of his time, being dominated by an ‘eschatological dogma’ which was thoroughly Jewish ...” (p. 23). Compared to Schweitzer, Sanders regards Wilhelm Bousset’s, Bultmann’s, Bornkamm’s, Martin Dibelius’s, Ernst Käsemann’s and other German theologians’ interpretations of Jesus as historically less satisfying (pp. 24–40). They just did not know enough about early Judaism (p. 30).⁴⁵ British scholars such as C. F. D. Moule and C. H. Dodd and, in particular, the German exegete Joachim Jeremias are regarded as more competent by Sanders. However, among contemporary scholars, Sanders points primarily to Meyer and such Jewish scholars as Joseph Klausner and Vermes.⁴⁶ Sanders does not explicitly discuss the question of progress in modern Jesus research. Still, there can be no doubt that Sanders

⁴⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 47–48.

⁴⁵ I can add that exegetically, these German scholars were not helped by their firm theological positions.

⁴⁶ Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928); Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*.

is firmly convinced that progress has been made, first and foremost by Schweitzer, Klausner, Meyer, Jeremias⁴⁷ and Vermes. Sanders's main criterion for this assessment is every single scholar's ability to place Jesus convincingly in his contemporary Jewish context.

Marcus J. Borg⁴⁸ does not offer an account of the (recent) history of modern Jesus research. By "contemporary scholarship," apparently, Borg does not understand the international, but only North American research, more precisely only one part of American Jesus research, namely that of the so-called Jesus Seminar and scholars closely connected to this seminar. Borg's book is an apology for the non-eschatological interpretation of Jesus, proposed by the seminar, and for the actual importance of this interpretation for the American churches. Still, there can be no doubt that Borg is convinced that just this interpretation is more historically correct than the eschatological one, and therefore represents a major step forward in international Jesus research.

In his concluding remarks in a volume edited by Chilton and Evans, Helmut Koester reveals "some long-held misgivings about the entire enterprise" of the search for the historical Jesus.⁴⁹ Koester rejects the eschatological interpretations of the historical Jesus by Weiss and Schweitzer who were "unable to distinguish the human Jesus and his words of wisdom from the secondary apocalyptic and eschatological elaborations of his message" (p. 538, cf. p. 541). Koester further declares that "the return of the interest in the life of Jesus after World War II can therefore be seen as a consequence of the restoration of this [bourgeois] establishment" (p. 539). Like Craig S. Keener⁵⁰ and William Telford (see below), Koester finds that the "vast variety of interpretations of the historical Jesus that the current quest has proposed is bewildering" (p. 544), and Koester concludes his essay by prophesying that Paul's proclamations will appear "a more worthwhile topic than the quest for the historical Jesus" (p. 545). Accordingly, to Koester, any talk about "progress" in the study of the historical Jesus is meaningless.

William R. Telford has written a critical and balanced account of "major trends and interpretive issues in the study of Jesus." He lists the characteristic tendencies of the "third quest" (pp. 57–58) followed by a critique (pp. 58–59) and a conclusion. The contributions to the third quest, Telford

⁴⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie, Erster Teil: Die Verkündigung Jesu* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971).

⁴⁸ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994).

⁴⁹ Helmut Koester, "The Historical Jesus," 535.

⁵⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009).

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