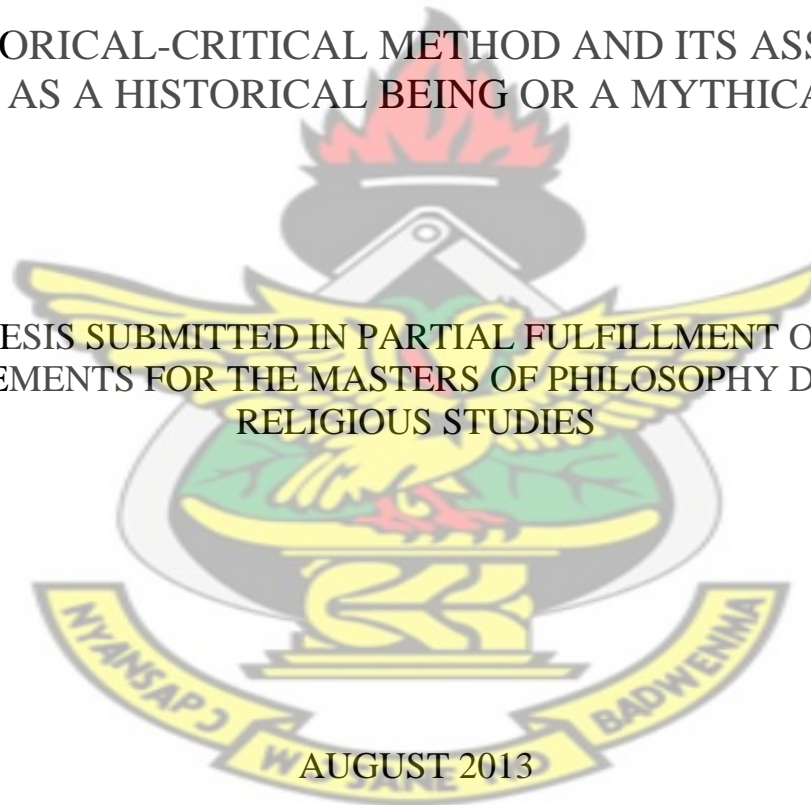


THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY-
KUMASI, GHANA
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

KNUST

THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD AND ITS ASSESSMENT
OF JESUS AS A HISTORICAL BEING OR A MYTHICAL FIGURE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTERS OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN
RELIGIOUS STUDIES



BY

SAMUEL ADJEI-BOADI

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of my research work and that wherever assistance of others are used, every effort is made to indicate this visibly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of other research materials and discussions, in the text such that it is possible to ascertain how much of the work is my own. Moreover, I have not already obtained a degree in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology or elsewhere on the basis of this work. Furthermore, I took judicious precaution to ensure that the work is original, and, to the best of my understanding, does not breach copyright law, and has not been copied from other sources except where such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text.

This work was done under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Dr. Emmanuel Kojo Antwi at the Religious Studies Department, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

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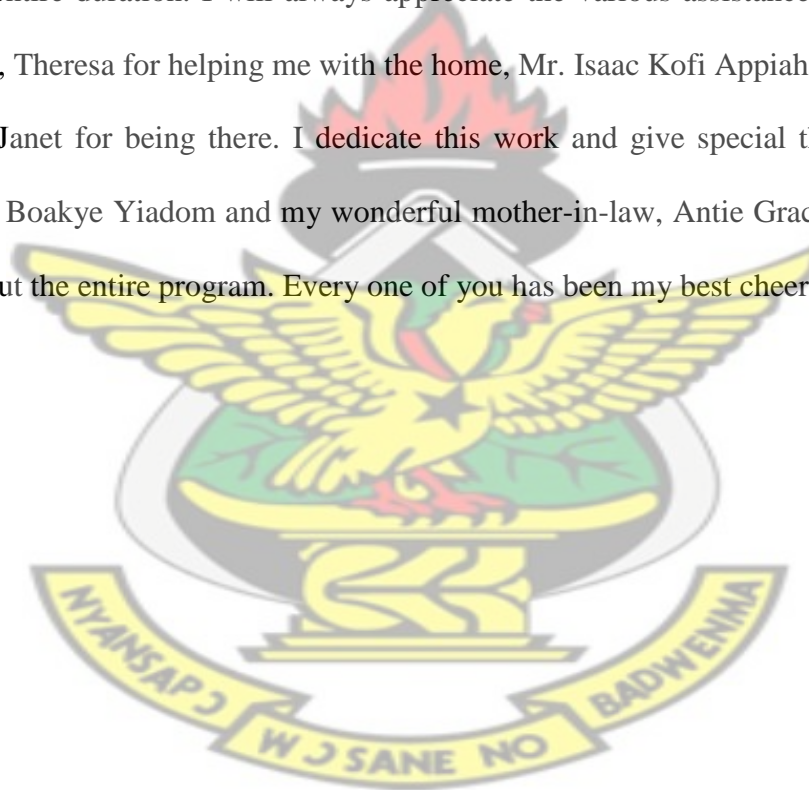
Very Rev. Dr. Nathan I. Samwini Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Head of Department)

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their endless love, support and encouragement. A very special touch of gratitude must be given to my wife, Linda, and my two daughters, Nshira and Ahwenepa, they have never left my side and are very special.

I also dedicate this thesis to my siblings and the church family for supporting me throughout the entire duration. I will always appreciate the various assistances I received from them, especially, Theresa for helping me with the home, Mr. Isaac Kofi Appiah for a very special assistance, and Janet for being there. I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my best friend Kwabena Boakye Yiadom and my wonderful mother-in-law, Antie Grace, for being there for me throughout the entire program. Every one of you has been my best cheerleader.



Acknowledgement

A thesis project like this one is never the work of anyone alone. The assistance and contributions of many different people, in different ways, have made this possible. That is why it is proper to extend my appreciation to most of these contributors.

I thank God for the wisdom and the perseverance He has given me in doing this research project, and indeed, throughout my academic life. Truly “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4: 13). The same goes to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, for their constant support and inspiration throughout my school years.

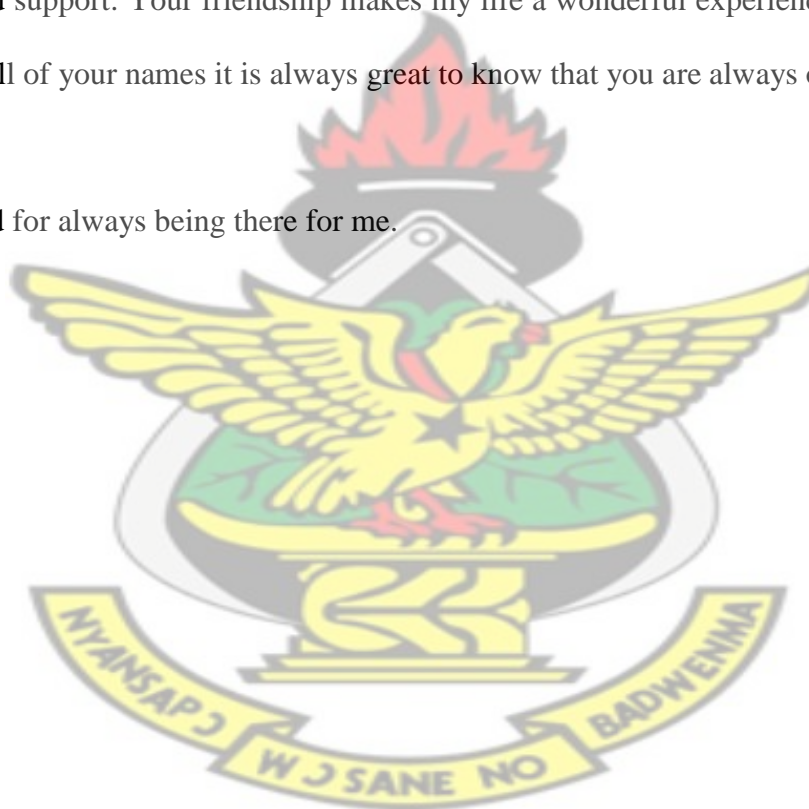
This thesis has been possible with the help, support and patience of my supervisor, Rev. Fr. Dr. Emmanuel Kojo Antwi, not to mention his advice and unsurpassed knowledge in biblical studies. I would like to express my deep gratitude and respect to him for his invaluable instructions and insight to me. For all I learned from him, and for providing the needed support. His attitude to research inspired me to desire to be a member of the academic family. The good advice, support and friendship of Rev. Fr. Dr. Appiah-Kubi, and Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini have been invaluable on both academic and personal level, for which I am tremendously grateful.

I would like to thank Pastor Dr. Kwabena Donkor and Pastor Kwabena Annor Boafo for their kindness, friendship and support. They helped me to address my thesis statement in a very academic manner. Amongst my fellow postgraduate students in the Department of Religious Studies, the effort made by Patience Tandoh and Ernest in promoting an inspiring and

welcoming academic and social environment will stand as an example to those that succeed them. I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends I studied with during our one-year classroom work.

Last, but by no means least, I thank my friends in all the various parts of Ghana and elsewhere for their support and encouragement, some of whom I have already named. However, special thanks are reserved for my mother, Georgina, my dad, Kofi Boadi, and all my siblings for their prayers and support. Your friendship makes my life a wonderful experience, even though, I have not listed all of your names it is always great to know that you are always on my mind.

Thank you, Lord for always being there for me.



Abstract

In this thesis, much attention has been given to defining what historical-critical method is, its insufficiencies and its assessment of Jesus as a historical being or a mythical figure. The method is a way of interpreting the Bible (and any other historical material) by using historical research, literary examination, findings from the social sciences and archaeology. It is called historical-critical method because it seeks to discover the political, economic, cultural, social and religious contexts of the Bible or any other book. The other side of this method is criticism. It evaluates and judges the biblical texts and its narratives in the light of modern scientific methodology. To achieve these two goals, the historical-critical method uses several approaches or methodologies such as textual criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, grammatical criticism, structuralist criticism, historical criticism and its new forms such as the social-scientific criticism.

The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation has been in operation for some years now. For the period of its history, the method has made major contributions, seen as either positive or negative, to the overall turf of Biblical studies depending on who is doing the evaluation. Today, several scholars from diverse theological persuasions have expressed the need not to use the method to de-mystify the Scriptures or the need to modify its use in biblical studies. In assessing the historical Jesus, the historical-critical method questions “who really was the man” referred to as Jesus in the New Testament. According to scholars, the New Testament books do not give a clear answer to this question. Therefore, the critical assumption is that there is a probability that a different being or a similar being could have been used as the Jesus of history or the Jesus of faith (or both) as it has been expressed implicitly in the Gospels.

Lists of Abbreviations

Abbreviation:	Book:	Abbreviation:	Book:
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Jn.	John
Exod. (Ex)	Exodus	Lk.	Luke
Gen.	Genesis	Mk.	Mark
Lev.	Leviticus	Matt. (Mat)	Matthew
Num.	Numbers		

Abbreviation:	Book
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

Dates:	Meaning:
A.D.	After the Death of Christ
B.C.	Before the Birth of Christ
AUC	“ab urbe condita”, i.e., since the founding of Rome

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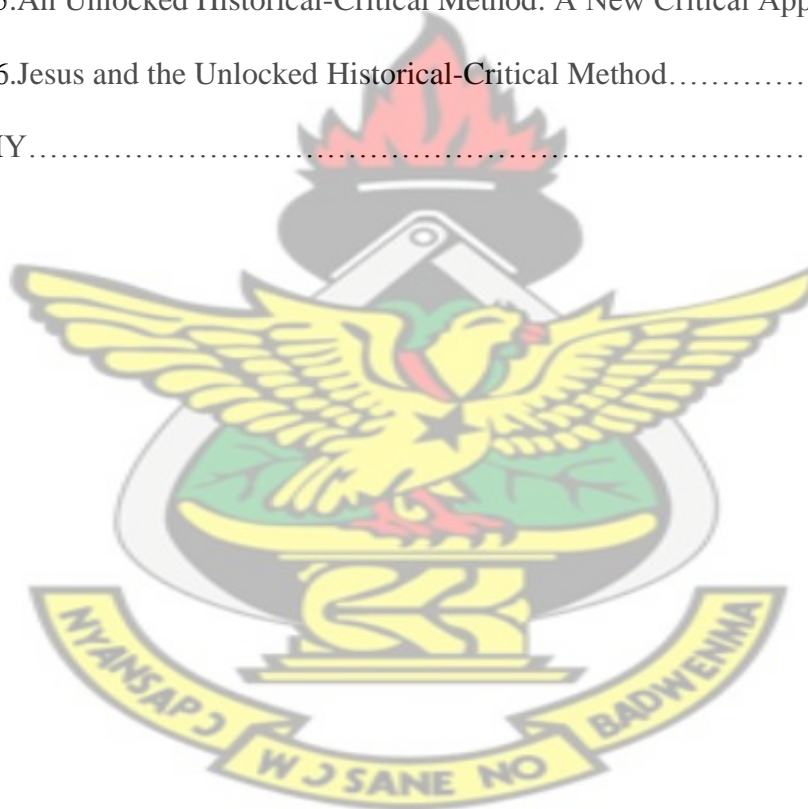
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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Until the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the foundational understanding of Christianity was that God has played an active role in the natural world and human history through creation and divine revelation. Therefore, the Bible was regarded as the foundation of the Christian faith since it explicitly reveals the will of God for the created world. Due to this, the Bible was studied in most universities as part of the curricula prior to the Enlightenment. Since it was required, many thinkers, like Isaac Newton and Copernicus, studied the Bible as part of their education.

However, the age of the Enlightenment and its aftermath brought about sharp rifts and opinions in all the major disciplines of learning. During the Age of Reason and its aftermath, knowledge could be understood as either secular or sacred. The field of science was regarded as separate from religion. Religion, too, was perceived differently. Within the various religions, Christianity seems the most affected by the aftermath of the Enlightenment era. Almost all the Christian doctrines about God, Jesus Christ, creation, redemption, heaven, miracles, etc., have been questioned and criticized. These criticisms have drastically affected the traditional outlook and understanding of the Christian Scriptures.

Contemporary biblical scholarship, to a larger extent, has put on a scientific outlook in order to enhance biblical studies and research. One of such scientific tools is the historical-critical

method. From its scientific stance, the method has questioned many aspects of the Bible including the personality of Jesus Christ. It relies more heavily on the assumptions of science and history. Due to this, some of its conclusions about the Bible are seen as radical among Christians who hold on to the classical understanding of the Bible.¹ Even more disturbing is the claim that some aspects of the Bible and the life of Jesus Christ are myths.²

The historical-critical method in assessing the events and personality of Jesus looks for logical criteria of empirical evidence. The gospels as primary sources are studied in the light of its socio-historical context. The method perceives a lack of accepted synchronous sources and direct empirical evidence for studying 'a' Jesus who lived historically. Price begins this argument by applying the method of form criticism to the gospels. In his application, he dismisses the claims made by the gospels like the virgin birth, the lineage of Jesus, his ministry, and the miracles as simply illogical and a-historical in perspective. As a result, it is especially difficult to reach an agreement on a biography of Jesus.³

The reason given for branding Jesus or some aspects of his personality as myth is that everything written about him in the gospels had already been told about some figures in the ancient myths. That is, many of the details of his life were considered "borrowed" from a contemporary religion (Mithraism) and several other god-man deities of Greek mythology.⁴ The

¹ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 6.

² Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ? Challenging the Existence of an Historical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason, 2005), 1-390; *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ"* (Canada: Fortress Press, 2001), 30.

³ Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), 284; *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 293.

⁴ Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*, 16.

assumption is that the Gospels might have borrowed from the literature of these earlier mythical religions.

A further extension to the argument is that there are a number of historical and mythical beings whose life stories contain the elements of virgin birth, the infant escaping death, execution and final resurrection in glory. However, just as we do not regard Hercules as a historical being, a case can be made that Jesus was also a mythical character. Jesus, probably, existed in the narratives of his followers because his real existence is shrouded in mysteries and myths.⁵ In this sense, Jesus can be logically explained as a kind of ancient mythical savior repeated within a Jewish context. In essence, just as those earlier saviors were spiritual myths, the same can be said about Jesus who was later credited with some miraculous exploits and all the other defining features of Christianity. Therefore, if the above-mentioned arguments hold, then, the Gospels in particular and the Bible in general can be regarded as a copy of mythic literature.

The most intriguing aspect of the historical-critical method is that some scholars (these are known as the historical Jesus scholars; Crossan, Meier, Sanders, Funk, Horsley and others have written several books in defense of a reconstructed Jesus who is noted to be historical)⁶ use

⁵ Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*, 16.

⁶ Scholars who are writing in defense of a Jesus of history are numerous, therefore, for the sake of consistency and clarity this research has chosen to follow the following scholars. Here are some of their works: John D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); Jesus: *A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994); *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened In the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, 1999); Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder Headline, 1996); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol 1., The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Companions and Competitors* (ABRL, 3; New York: Doubleday, 2001); Ed P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Ed

it in reconstructing a Jesus who is historical. At this point, it must be understood that the term “historical Jesus” scholars is used inclusively to refer to all those concerned with the critical reconstruction of the life of Jesus of Nazareth within the historical milieu of the first-century Palestine and beyond, however, some are in favor of the term “Life of Jesus Research”⁷ or “Jesus Research”.⁸ Nonetheless, the Jesus of these scholars possesses varying features; basically, he was a Jew, a sage, selfless, not divine, never performed miracles but fought for justice and freedom for the ordinary human being.

Other scholars⁹ believe that there is conclusive evidence that Jesus Christ never existed as a historical person. Earl Doherty [*The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ? Challenging the Existence of an Historical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason, 2005)] maintains that there is a way to ascertain from the history of Christianity the process by which a mythical figure was accidentally mistaken for a real human being. Accordingly, myth, in the sense of historical Jesus, does not connote a lie, a fable, not “true” or worthless story. Nonetheless in their estimation, they do not dispute that a person named Jesus, connected in some way to the events described in the Bible, once lived. However, they feel that evidence for his existence thousands of years ago, is by historical standards fairly weak. Yet some of these

P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁷ William, R. Telford, “Major Trends in Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus”: In Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 33.

⁸ James H. Charlesworth and Darrell Bock, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), xxii-xxv.

⁹ These scholars are noted for their arguments against a historical Jesus. Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ? Challenging the Existence of an Historical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason, 2005); *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's “The Case for Christ”* (Canada: Fortress Press, 2001); Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000); John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

scholars embrace the idea of the Jesus of faith and the Jesus of history, others are able to hunt for the historical Jesus without denying any of his mythical qualities.¹⁰

Meanwhile, historical Jesus scholars accept the New Testament as evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. However, they disagree with the basic narrative of his life and death, and also deny most of the supernatural claims about him and by him. Those who have adopted this viewpoint are mostly professional historians and liberal biblical scholars. Aside the New Testament, some of these scholars also use the works of Josephus and others from secular writers like Celsus, Suetonius and Tacitus in proving the historical existence of Jesus.¹¹

The underlying issue is, what good is this “historical Jesus?” What is the significance of a man who becomes a Jesus without his miracles, his parables, his moral example, and especially, without his death and resurrection? The question that arises from this response is what possible impact will this reconstructed Jesus have on the Christian faith in terms of Christology, eschatology, creation, redemption and his second coming (Parousia)?

1.2. Statement of Problem

The history of Christianity before the Enlightenment was tied to the notion that the Bible and the Patristic tradition outline all that one needs to know about the Christian religion and its founder Jesus Christ of Nazareth.¹² However, since the Gospels are not direct historical account or biographical records of Jesus, modern scholars have been using the very books of Scripture to fashion out their notions about him. Clearly, historical critical tools have aided scholars to

¹⁰ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 207-208.

¹¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 23-25.

¹² Ibid, 4.

establish some understanding of Jesus as found in the Bible. Yet some of these prepositions are disputed. For instance, the notion that the Gospels reveal a religion that is seen as a fusion of Jewish tradition with some philosophical cults of first-century Greco-Roman world¹³ is obviously debatable. This has stimulated ongoing scholarly discussions on the historical foundations of the Christian religion and its founder. Such discussions focus on the historicity of Jesus and a possible reconstruction of his past.

The second notion resulted as a response to the first. The notion that there was a historical Jesus seems to superficially deal with the problem by employing the scientific techniques of historical-critical method. What makes the problem severe is the new weight of difficulties that the historical-critical tools are now exerting on the Christian Church and its Christological interpretations; an effect which can be, somehow, devastating. The notion that Jesus should be reconstructed stems from the understanding that Christianity has grown from its Jewish setting into a global movement and has dynamically transformed itself from the Judeo-Greco-Roman traditions into a Western tradition and must currently adjust its Christological interpretations to the new cultures of the world.

The first visible challenge of historical-critical method is how to retranslate the biblical texts and its messages back to its earliest beginnings since such developments have come to us today with many missing links. This notwithstanding, historical reconstruction of Jesus is fiercely spreading within Christianity. The un-estimated effect of this new force is its propensity to create doubt in the minds of Christians about the need to see some aspects of the Christian

¹³ Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, 349.

literature as myths and human stories to the extent that Christianity may be regarded as a mythic creation of some second century (A.D.) scholars.¹⁴ Granted that this assertion is a possibility, then, what are the worth of this information for our present age, and the probable future of Christianity having a mythic being as its founder?

1.3. Research Questions

1. What is the historical-critical method and how does it prove the historicity or a-historicity of Jesus?
2. What are the strength and weaknesses of the historical-critical method?
3. What is the best way of handling biblical research in a contemporary scientific world?
4. How should the historical-critical method be used in future biblical studies?

1.4. The Scope, Aims, Objectives, and the Area of Study

The “historical Jesus studies” seeks to clarify the assumptions of the human life and work of Jesus of Nazareth in a manner that can be both accurate and justifiable. The area falls within the field of biblical studies. For this reason, this research covers the era during which the historical-critical method became the indispensable approach of studying the Jesus of history. Since the studies are done within some philosophical and methodical framework, the scope also covers the various methods that make up the historical-critical method. This research explores much of the weaknesses inherent in the historical-critical method and why it can lead to falsely selected conclusions. While this study demonstrates the deficient practicability and insufficiencies of the historical-critical method; it is also within the scope of this research to relate the implications of using this method in the historical Jesus studies. This is done by:

¹⁴ Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, 200-201.

1. Studying the challenges that can result from the historical-critical method in dealing with miracles, redemption, and divine intervention.
2. Demonstrating that the historical-critical method is insufficient in the studies involving the Bible and the figure of Jesus Christ.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Though we generally understand theology, doctrine, and dogmas as mostly exploratory analysis of Scripture by individuals and scholars with the need to establish positions, the study of the historical or mythical Jesus largely contributes to each of these theological, doctrinal, and dogmatic positions. This research seeks to provide a frank motivation and platform on which doctrines on Christology will be based. Hence, it will free scholars from erroneous assertions and also curb relativism and subjectivism on the quest for historical Jesus. Further, the findings of the study will broaden one's horizon on the nature, outlook, and implications of the historical-critical method. It will also be a relevant material for other scholarly research on the subject.

1.6. Study Approach and Methodology

This research work adopts a theological approach and a philosophical approach as its theoretical framework. The theological approach embraces faith in the supernatural and miracles.¹⁵ Whiles the philosophical approach explains the gospel-history on purely natural causes.¹⁶ The theological approach applies both faith and the intellect in studying the Scriptures whiles the philosophical approach uses both the intellect and criticism in studying the Bible.

¹⁵ Frank Whaling, "Theological Approaches" in: Peter Connolly (ed), *Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 228.

¹⁶ Rob Fisher, "Philosophical Approaches" in: Peter Connolly (ed), *Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 116.

In relation to the study approach, the method mainly employed in the historical Jesus research has been principles of historical-critical method. The historical-critical method consists of source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism and several newer versions of criticisms. Its task is to reconstruct the historical situation under which a text was produced and to establish the author's intended meaning from the reconstructed parameters. The method focuses on text analysis and for this reason, other methods of research, such as interviews, surveys and questionnaire, will not be employed.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

There are other areas of the subject that demand investigation and research to accomplish the desired results. For instance, a historical or mythical Jesus will not satisfy those who interpret the man behind the Christ with eschatological ideas. In the study of Jesus, even, history has gotten its limitations since the sources of information about first-century (A.D.) Galilee, the Gospels, and the people at the time of Jesus Christ are inadequate. Therefore, it will be strange to contend that only this research can supply the needed clarifications about Jesus of Nazareth.

Moreover, the critical issue under investigation though thrives on the ontological reality of Jesus Christ; the research takes a keen interest on the method that has been employed in studying the historical Jesus. Whiles some demonstrate how the biblical imageries and the gospel stories are reflected in older religious traditions, found all over the world;¹⁷ this research considers such claims as a means to validate religious pluralism and its philosophical underpinnings. However, such claims are not within the scope of this research.

¹⁷ Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, 183.

1.8. Literature Review

The past two hundred years or so have brought intense changes in the thinking of the world and the Christian Church in relation to the life, ministry and personality of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Many have examined the life of Jesus in many spheres and many are still pursuing the course of knowing who Jesus was in real-time historical context. Samuel H. Reimarus, in the 1760s, became the first to openly question the validity of everything known as the traditional teachings of the Christian Church. However, he did not publish his work until Ephraim Lessing published some fragments of Reimarus' work from 1774-1778. The most controversial one was his *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Junger*, translated as *On the Intention of Jesus and his Disciples*¹⁸ or *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples* in 1778. In this, Reimarus made a clear distinction between the actual Jesus of history and what his followers proclaimed him to be. This research demonstrates that the assumptions of Reimarus on the subject, though modified, have never changed.

A major undertaking that followed the work of Reimarus was David F. Strauss. According to David Strauss, some activities about Jesus were correct; such as his baptism, opposition from the Pharisees and his death but he asserted that the disciples exaggerated the facts in two ways. Firstly, the early church interpreted the life and ministry of Jesus to suite an Old Testament Jewish Messianic prophecy. Secondly, by making him the Messiah, the early church focused on fabricating myths and legends about him after the order of Greek mythology.¹⁹ This research demonstrates that modern studies about the Jesus of history tend to

¹⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Fragments*, trans. R. S. Fraser. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 9.

¹⁹ David F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, translated from the Fourth German Edition by Marian Evans (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 77-191.

follow the argument of David Strauss, except that they consider some of his arguments as radical and extreme.

Another scholar of the same mind as those discussed above was Bruno Bauer (1843). He was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Hegel. Bauer saw the synoptic gospels as blatantly fictitious on the same level as the gospel of John.²⁰ He believed that the Gospels demonstrate the various steps taken by Jews and proselytes to evolve their self-esteem. His notion of evolution in theology is a core approach of modern-day historical-critical method.

Albert Schweitzer, in 1906, became the first to amalgamate all the earlier hypotheses together with his criticisms. His work *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* published in 1906 offered a two-way contribution to the Jesus conundrum. Firstly, in his estimation, the quest of Samuel Reimarus and others was devoid of results. Secondly, he accused these scholars of neglecting the eschatological aspects of Jesus in their research. It can later be seen that some modern scholars do agree with Albert Schweitzer on the eschatological aspects of Jesus.²¹

However, it was Rudolf Bultmann²² whose skepticism and criticism affected the historical Jesus studies in the mid-twentieth century. For him, “the New Testament talks about an event through which God has brought about our salvation. It does not proclaim Jesus primarily

²⁰ Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5-26.

²¹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, translated by W. Montgomery (London: A&C. Black, Ltd., 1910), 223-242.

²² Rudolf Bultmann, “The Case for Demythologizing,” *Kerygma and Myth* 2 (London: SPCK, 1962), 181-194.

as a teacher”²³ nor historical. He focused on the “kerygma” which, he believes provides the authentic history of Christianity; therefore, the gospels must be demythologized in order to obtain the kerygma. This research argues that Rudolf Bultmann’s demythology is comparable to the modern scholars attempt to reject parts of Scripture as interpolations.

Since the historical-critical method has become an indispensable tool of biblical studies, the last decades of the twentieth and the early periods of the twenty-first centuries have witnessed several arguments against Jesus from all spheres of learning. Earl Doherty, an atheist, maintains that Christianity has no historical founder but rather began with a mythical Christ.²⁴

Again, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy relate Jesus to the god-men of the mystery religions.²⁵ These authors draw parallels between the Christ of the Gospels and the Osiris-Dionysus myth to support their hypothesis. It is clear that these scholars share the same argument as Doherty.

A more elaborate approach to the study of the historical Jesus was made by the scholars of the Jesus Seminar. Funk and the authors of the *Five Gospels* outlined “rules” to objectively guide their investigations of the Jesus Seminar.²⁶ However, these “rules” reveal some biases held by these scholars. This assertion is supported based on the fact that this Seminar produced a Jesus who was a wise man, a sage who was not miraculous, apocalyptic or Christological in any way.

²³ Bultmann, “The Case for Demythologizing,” *Kerygma and Myth*, 13.

²⁴ Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, 200-201.

²⁵ Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, 183.

²⁶ Robert. W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 34-85.

In his works, Ed P. Sanders²⁷ states that to establish a clearly defined presupposition on the study of historical Jesus, one must work with three assumptions. His first assumption rests on the conviction that one can know much about Jesus within the first-century (A.D.) Galilean context. Second, Sanders believes that faith should be separated from history since theology may have little or no significance on the study of the historical Jesus. The third is his elaborate methodology. Sanders' works will be frequently referred to since he seems to have wider following on the subject.

Another scholar worth mentioning is Dominic Crossan.²⁸ In his works, Crossan notes that the search for historical Jesus relates solely to the Gospels. It can be said that his works have been widely read and appreciated by many historical-critical scholars; therefore, this research seeks to critique some of his arguments. On the same platform of reconstructing the Jesus of history, John Paul Meier²⁹ believes that his works on Jesus "would be open to verification by any and all sincere persons using the means of modern historical research."³⁰ Though, only the canonical Gospels constituted Meier's primary sources, his commitment to historical-critical method and the need to maintain biblical orthodoxy make his conclusions somehow debatable.

²⁷ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 91-119; Ed P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 48-58.

²⁸ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 196; *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 101-190; *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened In the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, 1999), 96.

²⁹ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol 1., The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Companions and Competitors* (ABRL, 3; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 8-11.

³⁰ Meier, 1991, 5.

As a social-scientific scholar, Richard A. Horsley³¹ points out that the core of Jesus' ministry was to manifest and mediate the presence of the kingdom of God. His arguments represent the social-scientific scholars who study Jesus within the first-century (A.D.) Palestinian social, anthropological and economic context.

However, Nicholas T. Wright argues for a critical realist account of knowledge.³² What Wright means is that no one can do “mere history” from a supposed objective standpoint, just as no one can see an object without using the eyes. He believes that the gospel accounts and our own worldview stand in dialogue, and should be mediated with historical knowledge. Wright is among modern Jesus scholars whose works are regarded as close to conservative Christian position, however, he also sets some criteria to sieve what are regarded as myths from real historical facts. Therefore, this research argues that the standpoint of sieving the gospels corresponds with Bultmann’s demythology.

These literary works on the subject are by no means exhaustive, however, they represent scholars who have made names at every stage of the search for the historical Jesus and may also represent the diverse backgrounds (both nationality and denomination) needed in order to fairly treat the subject. A review of these works necessitates the need to address some concerns by

³¹ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), according to Horsley, The focal concern of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching and practice, however, is the liberation and welfare of the people. Jesus’ understanding of the “kingdom of God” is similar in its broader perspective to the confident hopes expressed in then-contemporary Jewish apocalyptic literature. That is, he had utter confidence that God was restoring the life of the society, and that this would mean judgment for those who oppressed the people and vindication for those who faithfully adhered to God's will and responded to the kingdom. That is, God was imminently and presently effecting a historical transformation. In modern parlance that would be labeled a “revolution,” 207-208.

³² Nicholas T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 2, 7, 30.

future scholars and researchers interested in the historical study of Jesus. First, the demand by scholars to construct a historical Jesus who might meet the standards of modern science must begin with inquiries on the need to bridge the gaps of geography, chronology, culture, customs, etc, between the ancient Palestine and our contemporary world. Second, scholars must take into account the limits of historical research, on any subject, especially, in the spheres of biblical studies. Third, modern reconstructed historical Jesus is heavily detached from the traditions of Christianity and must be placed well within the life, thought, and theology of the Christian Church.

1.9. Organization of the Study

This research is structured as follows: chapter one deals with the general introduction which seeks to outline the thesis proposal and the problem formulation with its attending methodology and the literature review. The second chapter examines the historical-critical method as a tool for biblical research. This is done by examining what constitutes the historical-critical method, its philosophical outlook, its various forms and usage. Chapter three of the research focuses on Jesus as viewed under the historical-critical method.

The fourth chapter critiques the historical-critical method as used in the historical Jesus research. Much is said about the difficulty of using a purely naturalistic and rationalistic tool in studying texts that are by nature divinely inspired. The chapter, then, assess what has been achieved so far in using scientific tools to study the texts of Scripture. This section explicitly underscores the insufficiencies of the historical-critical method in biblical scholarship. The final chapter deals with the conclusions drawn from the research with some recommendations about

the future of biblical scholarship in relation to the use of historical-critical method. It also seeks to offer a solution to take care of some of the insufficiencies of the method by recommending that a new understanding must be given to those aspects of the Bible that are deemed myths, fictions and legendary narratives. Finally, this research proposes for consideration how Jesus must be understood and studied using a modified form of the historical-critical method.

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CHAPTER TWO

AN EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the general introduction to the research and the review of some books that relate to the problem of study; however, this chapter focuses on an examination of the historical-critical method. The use and application of the historical-critical method, in all its forms, has dominated Biblical scholarship undertaken in recent times. With this method, several conclusions about the Bible, the Jesus of the Bible, the Biblical authors and what they wrote have been made. The irony is that, this method is viable to both Christian scholars as well as non-Christian scholars alike. As a result, depending on who is writing, the conclusions sometimes may pose a serious difficulty to some aspects of Christian doctrines of inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible. For instance, in assessing the role of Bultmann and Gunkel in promoting historical-critical method, the Pontifical Biblical Commission believes that any knowledge in the Scriptures that may be gained from their application of rationalistic form-critical method will have a devastating impact on some articles of the Catholic faith.³³

The historical-critical method is the method commonly employed in biblical interpretation. Its usage is characterized by the combination of source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism (literary-criticism and historical-criticism) and others. This method is believed to have resulted from literary-criticism, a venture believed to have originated from Richard Simon (1638-1712). The method of literary-criticism seeks to explain or make plain supposed discrepancies in the Bible. What has emerged as historical-critical method embraces

³³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 38.

the results of literary-criticism as the basis for further research to look for the historical processes which gave rise to the biblical texts.³⁴ The historical process is sometimes called historical science or historical method.³⁵

2.2. Origins and Philosophical Outlook of the Historical-Critical Method

The historical-critical method can be described as the process of using the principles of science to establish the “biblical truth” for modern people in the modern setting by transporting the ancient perspectives of the Bible to the modern scientific perspective. The method is a conglomeration of approaches which “seeks to reconstruct the life and thought of biblical times through an objective, scientific analysis of biblical material.”³⁶ Its history has been an on-going evolution of newer methods of exegesis. And each newer method starts as a branch that grew out of earlier ones, yet perceived as a related part but somehow different from the part. Soulen (2001) and others believe this progression may continue into the future.³⁷ Meanwhile, some perceive that this evolutionary progression (of new methods) can be an end to itself, as it has already produced several problems.³⁸

Joseph Prior affirms the multiplicity of procedures and techniques that make the historical-critical method. According to him:

³⁴ Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 150.

³⁵ Edgar Krentz, *The historical-critical method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 4-19.

³⁶ Mark A. Powell, “The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism,” In: Summary of Proceedings of ATLA, 43rd meeting (1989), 79.

³⁷ Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 2001), 1 ff; John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 1 ff; Victor H. Matthews and James C. Moyer, *The Old Testament: Text and Context* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 28-30.

³⁸ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 5.

The historical-critical method is a collection of exegetical procedures and techniques applied to biblical texts to determine their *literal sense*. This *literal sense* has been described in various ways in the history of biblical interpretation from the obvious sense, to the author's intention, to the meaning expressed in the words of the inspired author.³⁹

The method combines the disciplines of history and criticism in its applications. The historical-critical method postulates that the Bible is a historical book that contains the history of Israel, the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of the early church⁴⁰ in the words of humans who were believed to be inspired by God.⁴¹ And as a human book, the Bible can be subjected to historical investigation like any other book. Its general purpose is to investigate what actually happened in the events described or alluded to in the Bible.⁴²

This method became prominent in biblical scholarship during the early nineteenth century on the foundations of some philosophical ideas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Until the eighteenth century, scholars in Europe and elsewhere were considered, mostly, men of deep religious faith with many having their formal education in theology.⁴³ However, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century began to set the pace for a fundamental distinction between scientific studies and biblical studies. Science thrives on investigation, verification and evaluation of results whiles the Bible embraces faith and history. The great pioneers and founders of the scientific revolution wanted to use scientific methods to harmonize their understanding of the natural world and faith in the Bible. At least these three

³⁹ Joseph G. Prior, *The Historical Critical Method in Catholic Exegesis* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1999), 354.

⁴⁰ Krentz, 1.

⁴¹ David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Eds), *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 76.

⁴² I. Howard Marshall (Ed), *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 126.

⁴³ Warner J. Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado: David C. Cook, 2013), 265-279; Mitch Stokes, *Isaac Newton* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 81-90; Luís F. Rodrigues, *Open Questions: Diverse Thinkers Discuss God, Religion, and Faith* (California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010), 110.

forerunners of the scientific method, Nicholas Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton understood their findings of the universe as a derivative of their perception of God and knowledge in theology.⁴⁴ However, their scientific foundations would become a major tool in humankind's search for a logical explanation of the universe. The results were several, including skepticism that led to naturalism and finally, atheism.

Beginning with the humanistic revival of the European Renaissance (14th-16th centuries), which extolled human creativity and potential, rationalism flourished during the Enlightenment (18th century), with its systematic critique of accepted doctrines and ritual institutions of the Church. It progressed into skepticism by questioning, doubting, or disagreeing with all the generally accepted religious conclusions and beliefs. Later, rationalistic criticisms of the Bible by some scholars resulted in atheism. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) are representatives of this position. In its opposition to faith, rationalism argues that religions operate within the confines of traditional and sometimes irrational beliefs in ways that frustrate the self-realization of human beings, both individually and collectively.

Rationalism, a major tool in the enlightenment era, became the test tube of every subject including theology.⁴⁵ This philosophy emerged from René Descartes' method of deduction which was based on methodological doubt and power of human reason. In this spirit of rationalism, the Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

⁴⁴ Mitch Stokes, *Isaac Newton* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 81-90.

⁴⁵ George Henry Radcliffe Parkinson, ed., *The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism* (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 1, 205.

argued that scientific methods and religious studies were two separate domains that must be kept apart. Kant's theory of knowledge influenced many critics of the Bible to adopt the belief that the writers of the Bible could have known only what they managed to figure out from their own limited experience. This set the stage for the dominant thinking of the first decades of the nineteenth century, the idealistic monistic⁴⁶ philosophy of Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

Hegelian philosophy in the hands of David Strauss and Ferdinand Baur led to the emergence of a *higher criticism* of the Bible in which its supernatural elements were systematically explained away as products of mythology.⁴⁷ Gradually, a number of theologians began the scientific study of the Bible; but maintained a cordial relationship between scientific studies and biblical studies. However, the method of historical science that tries to reduce the Bible to the levels of just any book arose in full force during the late nineteenth century, particularly after the publication of Charles Darwin's revolutionary book, *On the Evolution of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.⁴⁸

In the wake of this rivalry between science and religion arose a powerful influence on Western thinking throughout the twentieth century through to the twenty-first. The concept of the evolutionary development of religion was applied to the Bible. The Bible was studied from the viewpoint of evolution. Judaism and Christianity have been seen as religious movements not

⁴⁶ Monistic philosophy is a theory or point of view that attempts to explain everything in terms of a single principle

⁴⁷ Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism," In: *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963); Bultmann, "The Case for Demythologizing," *Kerygma and Myth* 2 (London: SPCK, 1962), 181-194.

⁴⁸ Richard G. Olson, *Science and Religion, 1450-1900: From Copernicus to Darwin* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 19; Abigail Lustig, Robert J. Richards, and Michael Ruse, eds., *Darwinian Heresies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173-177.

different in kind, but only in degree, from other religious manifestations of the near eastern world.⁴⁹

The objective of this method was to provide logical answers to all the questions resulting from the origin, the form, and the value of every literary production including the Bible. The method seeks to dig out all the component parts that make up every text. Due to this, the premise that the historical-critical method is neutral and that it does not operate with presuppositions is yet to be substantiated by facts. It maintains questionable neutrality in its approach to the Bible.

Naturalism is another important philosophy that underpinned the historical-critical method. It is understood that nature is governed by a set of unchangeable natural laws and that everything in the world should be explained from natural causes alone. Therefore, those that cannot be explained naturally must be considered mythical. It proposes that unless that which is beyond natural laws can be shown to be reasonable, or at least not contrary to reason, it is not appropriate to believe in them. Therefore, the Christian understanding of miracles, divine revelation and the birth of Christ must be seen as difficult-truths that can hardly be accepted as real.

Another philosophy which also influenced the rise of the historical-critical method is empiricism. Empiricism can be explained as all known knowledge must be based upon authentication by experience and research. It maintains that any knowledge which cannot be confirmed through research and experience must be taken with doubt. This notion is summed up by Troeltsch cited in Dawes. He described the historical-critical method under three broad

⁴⁹ Hick and Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 8-9.

categories of criticism, analogy and correlation.⁵⁰ It can be said that Troeltsch's viewpoint hardly works against the Christian Bible. For instance, Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospels is not only the center of the Christian faith, but also a real Person who lived on this earth at a particular time and place in human history. Therefore, the events narrated and the characters presented in the Scriptures must be seen as real and part of the historical continuum, as "evidenced by a growing volume of documentary and archaeological evidences."⁵¹

Similarly, another philosophical antecedent was the Enlightenment, seventeenth and eighteenth century European intellectual movement which spread to have eventual influence over all aspects every knowledge and discipline. The term "Enlightenment", which is embedded in an intellectual skepticism as against the traditional Christian beliefs and canons, denotes an "illumination" which contrasted the hypothetical dark of the previous ages. From its very beginnings, the Enlightenment celebrated the power and goodness of human reasonableness.

Other philosophies that influenced the rise of the historical-critical method include subjectivism⁵² which maintains that the authors of the Bible could not have written about issues

⁵⁰ Gregory W. Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Quest: A Foundational Anthology* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press & Deo Publishing, 2000), 27-29. Dawes examines Troeltsch's explanation of the principle of "criticism" to mean that all past documentary witnesses must not be accepted at face value but must be critically examined to assess the accuracy of the thought they present. Criticism means that witnesses from the past cannot be authoritative, therefore, it should be considered as a matter of probability which will result from a critical, but fallible, sifting of the evidence. The principle of "analogy" dictates that in reconstructing the past, the historian or the theologian must assume that the past was like the present. The attitudes of historical beings can be understood only by referencing the patterns of human attitudes and behaviors in our present setting and that the distortions in our present understanding of events can best explain the distortions in the documents from the past. Therefore, our probable understanding of the past must be based on analogous experiences of our time. Thirdly, the principle of "correlation" is based on the idea that all phenomena of the past must be understood as the products of a particular context and that no phenomenon stands in isolation, not even the Christian phenomenon, but every phenomenon is influenced and conditioned by the totality of events that surrounded its birth.

⁵¹ McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands A Verdict*, 25.

⁵² The belief that an individual can know only the matters of his own thoughts and experiences but cannot know reality outside of the human mind

beyond their time. Evolutionism⁵³ alleges that if the thoughts of Scripture are more refined, then the thoughts are most recently revised and finally modernism.⁵⁴ It must be noted that these philosophical thoughts first contributed to the rise of higher-criticism, which later gave birth to the historical-critical method.

2.3. The Historical-Critical Method Defined

With the emergence of the historical-critical method, many Christian scholars, including the liberals, conservatives and evangelicals alike, have grappled with its relationship to the Bible as a tool for biblical studies. Edgar Krentz discusses about ten issues that could be considered as challenges and objections from several scholars.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the emergence of the historical-critical method has given biblical studies an undertone of philosophical, cultural and socio-scientific consequences. This methodology ushered in a hermeneutical approach based on scientific perception of history but blurs the relationship that must exist between history and theology.⁵⁶

Earliest founders of form criticism, like Bultmann and Gunkel, maintained that the Bible can be studied with the view that divine things can be historically and rationally explained, and

⁵³ The belief that all reality is evolving as a whole in an indefinitely ascending direction, therefore, there can be no place for absolute truths

⁵⁴ The belief that the stance of modern human is grander than that of the previous human; and also, the belief that all religion, including Christianity and the idea of God, arises from a predetermined, sub-rational religious instinct dominant in primitive human being, and that such motivations cannot be accepted by modern scientific human being.

⁵⁵ Krentz, 67-72.

⁵⁶ Krentz, vi; Ernst Troeltsch, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie", in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, volume II: *Zur religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik* (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 729-753; English translation in Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, trans. by J. L. Adams and W. F. Bense (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

that faith is not dependent on the historic accuracy of the Bible.⁵⁷ In essence these presuppositions, arguably, have influenced biblical and religious studies in much the same way as they do in science and historical investigations. As a result, much of the criticism is based on “reason, for all truth is rational, and what is rational is capable of proof.”⁵⁸

Edgar Krentz believes that the method has:

made history criticism the approved method of interpretation. The result is a revolution of view point in evaluating the Bible. The Scriptures were, so to speak, secularized. The biblical books became historical documents to be studied and questioned like any other ancient sources. The Bible was no longer the criterion for the writing of history; rather history had become the criterion for understanding the Bible. The variety in the Bible was highlighted; its unity had to be discovered and could no longer be presumed. The history it reported was no longer assumed to be everywhere correct. The Bible stood before criticism as defendant before judge. This criticism was largely positivist in orientation, imminentist in its explanations, and incapable of appreciating the category of revelation.⁵⁹

This assessment of the method by Krentz is supported in biblical studies, in that “the classic use of the historical-critical method reveals its limitations. It restricts itself to a search for the meaning of the biblical text within the historical circumstances that gave rise”⁶⁰ to the text. That is why the method must be interested in other possible ways of which biblical revelation was given.⁶¹ As a method, it is insufficient in appreciating the aspects of Scripture that are considered as revelation. Barth commenting on its use called for a theological interpretation of the method since he believes that historical criticism is only the first step in the task of interpretation.⁶² Like any other tool of interpretation, the aim of the method is to “wrestle with the text until it speaks to modern man, until the walls between the then and now fall down, and

⁵⁷ David W. Beck, “Agnosticism: Kant,” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Biblical Errancy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 53-76.

⁵⁸ Krentz, 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 38.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* 2nd ed. Translated by E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University, 1932), vi.

God's word addresses man."⁶³ However, it lacks the ability to wholly deal with the Scriptures. It, most often, separates the historic fact from complete faith and it is yet to provide the means in handling the many revelation-related issues in the Bible.

In our contemporary biblical studies, this methodology has been employed by a number of scholars, either in its pristine form or in its modified versions. The pristine form of historical-critical method assumes that either the supernatural can be explained, or it can be safely ignored. However, some of the modified versions seem to recognize the method's inability to subject revelation to scientific investigation and that it makes room for the supernatural.

Krentz adheres to the latter and summarizes his view as this:

There is only one point at which biblical scholarship might conflict with secular historians. The goal of secular history is anthropocentric: the activities of man. In reconstructing the narrative of biblical history, biblical scholarship must ask whether the object includes God's actions with and for man in space and time.⁶⁴

In other words, the historical-critical method must objectively dialogue with the Bible in an attempt to establish its place in biblical scholarship. The Bible as an object of study includes God's action, that is, God's interventions in human history. Even though, the method stresses the human and the historical aspects of the Bible, it must make room for the divine aspects of the Bible.

⁶³ Krentz, 30.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 35.

These are the various approaches that make up the historical-critical method: textual criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, grammatical criticism, structuralist criticism, historical criticism and its new forms such as the social-scientific criticism.

2.3.1. Textual Criticism

The method of textual criticism deals with the process of “reconstructing the original wording of the Biblical text” in a manner that establishes “the history of the transmission of the text through the centuries.”⁶⁵ It involves the two main processes, of recension and emendation. Recension is the selection, after examination of all available material, of the most trustworthy evidence on which to base a text. Emendation is the attempt to eliminate the errors which are found even in the ancient manuscripts.⁶⁶

The aim of textual criticism is to seek the text from the most ancient evidence or manuscripts. In this act, a reading peculiar to a single document is to be considered a suspect that may be attributed to a scribal error; even though, it is well supported in the manuscripts. Again, it notes that in parallel passages the tendency of copyists would be to make the readings agree, and therefore, in such passages, testimonies are to be preferred. The textual critics must maintain that the reading to be preferred is the one that gave rise to the others, or which appears to comprise the elements of the others and that it agrees with both the Old Testament and the New Testament original manuscripts or with the style of the individual writer.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Soulen, 192.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Robert C. Briggs, *Interpreting the New Testament Today: An Introduction to Methods and Issues in the Study of the New Testament*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 45-47.

2.3.2. Historical Criticism

Soulén defines historical criticism as that which deals “with the historical setting of a document, the time and place in which it was written, its sources, if any, the events, dates, persons, and places mentioned or implied in the text, etc. Its goal is the writing of a chronological narrative of pertinent events, revealing where possible the nature and interconnection of the events themselves.”⁶⁸ Also it “is based on assumptions similar to those used in working with other ancient texts. The biblical critic is concerned with both the situation depicted in the text and the situation which gave birth to the text.”⁶⁹

This method investigates the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts that surrounded the birth and the acceptance of the literary work. Historical criticism employs history as a means of understanding a literary work more clearly. It operates on two assumptions: first, the social, political, and cultural contexts affect the creation of any literary work and second, the meaning of literature can change overtime as these same contexts do change.⁷⁰ Due to these assumptions, historical criticism examines both the periods within the story line and the period in which the story was born into.⁷¹

Again, it considers the original audience’s response to the material as well as the meanings and implications of specific words, symbols, images and characters which can change in the course of history.⁷² What this implies is that it is difficult to understand an individual’s life without some sense of the time and place in which the fellow lived. In the same vein, an author’s

⁶⁸ Soulén, 79.

⁶⁹ Hayes and Holladay, 46.

⁷⁰ Soulén, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 173.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

purpose cannot be understood without understanding the cultural norms and events during the writing of the work.⁷³

2.3.3. Grammatical Criticism

John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay define grammatical criticism to include the attempts to deal with issues relating to the language of the text. The issues include the words themselves, either alone or in phrases, as well as the way in which the words are put together or the syntax. It examines the rules of grammar at the time the passage was written and the meaning and understanding of the passage depending upon the existing grammatical issues.⁷⁴ What it means is that this method covers all the grammatical structures employed in word study.

“If textual criticism is concerned with establishing the wording of the text, and historical criticism with investigating the history *in* and *of* the text, grammatical criticism analyses the text through its language.”⁷⁵ According to Hayes and Holladay, the grammatical criticism is concerned with how individual words function as carriers of meaning and how those words are arranged in phrases and sentences to form meaningful grammatical units. The grammatical criticism helps the modern mind to re-create and enter into the author’s thought world by using analytical tools like semantics, philology and linguistics, etymology, grammar and syntax, and lexicography. Its basic assumption is that the language we use gives others access to our thoughts.⁷⁶

⁷³ Lynn Steven, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory*. 2nd ed. (NY: Longman, 2011), 9-37.

⁷⁴ Hayes and Holladay, 27.

⁷⁵ Hayes and Holladay, 72.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

2.3.4. Source Criticism

Source criticism is seen as “that investigation of a text which seeks to explicate the intention and achievements of the author through a detailed analysis of the component elements and structure of the text itself”⁷⁷ by seeking what and why of the text. It can be seen that source criticism deals with the task of analyzing the literary features of a given document to determine its literary appeal, origins, and state of written composition in order to establish what particular sources make up the entire unit.

2.3.5. Form Criticism

Derived from the German word *Formgeschichte*, (literally means “form-history”), form criticism “may be loosely defined as the analysis of the typical forms by which human existence is expressed linguistically; traditionally this referred particularly to their oral pre-literary state.”⁷⁸ Even though, the method is based on the theory of a long period of oral tradition before events were committed to writing, form criticism seeks to get behind the written sources by studying and analyzing the “form” of individual gospel traditions. It describes the characteristics of the various forms and how they developed during the period of oral transmission in the church.⁷⁹

This method arose as a response to an alleged lack of historical trustworthiness in the gospel stories. It takes an evolutionary view of the development of the gospel stories through the era known as the oral period of the church. Form criticism has as its primary goal to recover the full living history of the ancient literature (the Bible) so that all the oral stages can be placed into

⁷⁷ Soulen, 105.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 61.

⁷⁹ Black and Dockery, 176.

their settings in the life of Israel. Its other goal is to operate as a tool of exegesis to help grasp the meaning of texts.

However, some scholars maintain that form criticism is not devoid of philosophical principles. For instance, commenting on the historical-critical method and the role of form criticism, Cardinal Ratzinger argues that “at its core, the debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians; it is rather a philosophical debate.”⁸⁰ He maintains that “in the diachronic reading of an exegesis, its philosophic presuppositions become quite apparent.”⁸¹ However, the Cardinal believes that the method, if purified from its rationalistic tendencies, is a good tool for interpretation. Again, the Pontifical Biblical Commission of April 21, 1964 instructs that

As occasion warrants, the exegete may look for what sound elements there may be in the ‘method of form-criticism,’ that could aptly be used for a fuller understanding of the Gospels. However, he must move with caution in this area, because the method is often interlaced with inadmissible philosophical and theological principles which frequently vitiate both the method itself and its judgments on literary questions.⁸²

Based on these arguments and several others, David Farnell argues that form criticism is more philosophically driven than methodologically driven and must be considered as an ideology. He maintains that to apply its skills in biblical scholarship is to be confined to its presuppositions and invariably damage the historical credibility of the Gospel accounts.⁸³

⁸⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 16.

⁸¹ Ibid, 8.

⁸² EB 647. ET: Cf. [1964] Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Historicity of the Gospels* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions), 4-5.

⁸³ David Farnell, “Form Criticism and Tradition Criticism,” in *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 185-186.

2.3.6. Tradition Criticism

Tradition criticism is basically a part of form criticism which deals with “the study of the history of oral traditions during the period of their transmission.”⁸⁴ It attempts to recreate the entire history of a particular literary piece from its fictional roots, onward development into its oral stage, its composition and final redaction into written form. In its application to the New Testament, tradition criticism is used to establish the growth of traditions from Jesus through the early church to the gospel writers and prepares the stage for form and redaction criticism. It tries to trace the evolution of the form and, sometimes, meaning of concepts, words or sayings.

For instance, tradition criticism may be interested in how a single parable is developed and narrated in two or three different versions.⁸⁵ The presuppositions behind this method compel the critic to be decidedly skeptical about the authenticity or historicity of the gospel traditions. Therefore, its goal is to refute those who wish to take the traditions of the gospels as real history.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Soulen, 200.

⁸⁵ Marshall, 165-166.

⁸⁶ Black and Dockery, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (1991) have stated the three basic axioms for determining authentic traditions, as rebuttal to those created and modified by the early church as: **Dissimilarity** which deals with traditions that are not parallels of Jewish traditions and are not reflections of the faith and practices of the early church; **Multiple attestations** also deal with whether or not a saying occurs in more than one gospel; and **Coherence** which suggest that if the tradition in question has the same form of another tradition that has already been shown to be authentic (using the above criteria), then this saying should also be regarded as authentic, pp. 204-205: Again, Marshall (1992) cites Matthew 18:17 (And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a gentile and a tax collector) as unauthentic, because it goes against the parables of Matthew 13:47 ff (Wheat and Tares and the Dragnet). It is alleged that this passage presupposes a Jewish audience which excludes the Gentiles and the tax collectors, an event which cannot be said about the “historical Jesus” who embraced such people without any reservation. Therefore it must be a later development of the early church, p. 168.

2.3.7. Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism “seeks to lay bare the theological perspectives of a Biblical writer by analyzing the editorial and compositional techniques and interpretations employed by him in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand.”⁸⁷ This method builds on the results of source and tradition criticism. According to Robert Stein, it treasures and examines the editorial work of gospel authors in order to see their emphases and purposes.⁸⁸ Put differently, it seeks to uncover the theology and setting of the author by studying the way they modified traditions, arranged them and stitched them together. In essence, this method asks why the author included, excluded or modified a particular tradition and tries to identify distinctive patterns, interests and theological ideas.⁸⁹

The task of redaction criticism can be summarized as the task of analyzing individual traditions of a text by comparing it with parallels, in order to identify common and unique phrases and words. It also includes analyzing the whole gospel in comparison with other gospels. Unique elements must indicate which way the story is going and repeated phrases must show emphasis and special interests. Finally, as the gospel unfolds individual traditions must interact to produce the intended message.⁹⁰

2.3.8. Structuralist Criticism

Structuralist criticism does not deal with history but rather focuses on the structure of the language to determine the relationship of the “whole” text. In this case, the critic is interested in

⁸⁷ Soulen, 158.

⁸⁸ Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978); *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 238.

⁸⁹ Black and Dockery, 199-200.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 208-211.

how texts communicate and how the meaning relates to what have been communicated. The method answers and emphasizes questions like: how does a particular text produced under particular cultural constraints embody and give expression to universal concerns? How does a reader decode the text or how does the text communicate its deep structure to resonate with the thought categories of the reader? In responding to these questions, the structural critic “falls on the text and the reader and the process of reading and understanding rather than on such matters as the writing and the author’s intention.”⁹¹ This method could be defined as the project of giving literary criticism the speculative firmness of a science of language: the attempt “to rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics.”⁹²

2.3.9. Social-Scientific Criticism

The social-scientific criticism deals with the other:

Phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences. As a component of the historical-critical method of exegesis, Social-Scientific Criticism investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate between composers and audiences. In this process it studies not only (1) the social aspects of the form and content of texts but also the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the communication process, (2) the correlation of the text’s linguistic, literary, theological (ideological), and social dimensions and (3) the manner in which this textual communication was both a reflection of and response to a specific social and cultural context, that is, how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and an instrument of social as well as literary and theological consequence.⁹³

This method attempts to understand the text in terms of the social world by utilizing the tools of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the like “to recreate the biblical world and to

⁹¹ Hayes and Holladay, 112.

⁹² Frederick Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 4.

⁹³ John H. Elliott, *What is social-scientific criticism? Guides to biblical scholarship, New Testament series*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 7.

gain insights into the reasoning behind such things as ritual, shame and disease as a social control device, and legal procedure”⁹⁴

Social-scientific criticism⁹⁵ seeks to complement the historical-critical method by bringing social-scientific scrutiny to bear both on texts and on their geographical, historical, economic, social, political and cultural (including ‘religious’) contexts. It addresses questions pertaining to the social scientific environment of the first-century Palestine, especially, about issues of sociology and cultural anthropology.

Even though it can be said that, any hermeneutical method used as a tool in biblical studies may come with certain assumptions which may be defined as negative or positive toward the biblical text, it seems historical-critical method poses a great challenge to both the exegete and the reader since some interpretations resulting from it can cause Christians to lose confidence in the Scriptures. Cardinal Ratzinger observes that:

“Now, at a certain distance, the observer determines to his surprise that these interpretations, which were supposed to be so strictly scientific and purely ‘historical,’ reflect their own overriding spirit, rather than the spirit of times long ago. This insight should not lead us to skepticism about the method, but rather to an honest recognition of what its limits are, and perhaps how it might be purified.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Matthews and Moyer, *Old Testament*, 29.

⁹⁵ According to Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); *The social setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. & transl. with an Introduction by J.H. Schütz, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) and others [John H. Elliott, ‘From social description to social-scientific criticism. The history of a society of biblical literature section 1973–2005’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 38(1), 26–36; Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime, & Paul Turcotte, (eds.), *Handbook of early Christianity: Social science approaches*, (Walnut Creek: Alta-Mira Press, 2002)] Social-scientific criticism is a necessary and indispensable process of exegesis for several reasons. One of the general reasons given is that every text of the Bible describes events that are social in nature such as social relations, social structures, social institutions, roles performed and statuses held in the social arena, as well as scripts to be enacted in the social dramas of everyday life. Again, all the texts of scripture are not merely literary compositions but also a social and rhetorical product with literary, theological or social aims. More importantly, each of these texts is designed to serve as a means of social communication and social interaction and to prompt social action on the part of its targeted audience. Therefore, the task of exegesis requires a social-scientific dimension, since the biblical texts are both records and products of such sociality, p. 39.

⁹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, 8.

However, the Cardinal admonishes that Christians must never doubt or reject the method but should work on it to reduce some of its inherent limitations. Therefore, the historical critic must be honest enough to come to terms with its insufficiencies and then work towards refining it. Edgar Krentz shares the same concern about the method and proposes a way to handle it. He states that:

critical methods used with common sense and operating in a framework that does not exclude the supernatural are an important and necessary aid to Biblical interpretation. This results in a better grasp of the grammatical and historical sense of the Bible. The course of Biblical history is clarified and it is possible to see the gaps in our knowledge more clearly. The historical character of the Bible is emphasized. The great differences in culture and society between the Biblical world and the modern world are highlighted along with the proper purpose of a passage. This all leads to enhanced theological insight.⁹⁷

While Cardinal Ratzinger and Krentz advice against rejecting the method, Eta Linnemann, a former historical-critical scholar, and other scholars admonish all evangelicals and defenders of classical Christianity to stand up against historical-critical method and its use.⁹⁸ She believes that much of the criticisms done under historical-critical method are based on speculations. For instance, which one does the scholar choose in explaining the crossing of the Red Sea: was the tides low, or a possible drought that reduced the water level beneath the human kneel cap or there was a miracle? In this regard, it is therefore, necessary to consider the need to curb much of these speculations.

2.4. The Historical-Critical Method: The Method at Variance with its Purposes

The response to the notion that Jesus of Nazareth historically never existed has been the need to reconstruct a “Jesus” who will satisfy the demands of historical and scientific research.

⁹⁷ Krentz, 64-66; Cf: Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in: R. J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 1-23.

⁹⁸ Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 49; Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 6.

This response has been several based on the source material, the personality and background of the researcher and the methodology used. “As an analytical method, it studies the biblical text in the same fashion as it would study any other ancient text and comments upon it as an expression of human discourse.”⁹⁹ There is always the tendency to blend criticism with philosophy when the method is not objectively employed. An example of this is cited in Krentz by Johann Semler who differentiates the Word of God from the canon of the church. According to him, the canon does not represent a set of divinely inspired texts but just collections of texts chosen by the Christian Church for homilies.¹⁰⁰ On one hand, some scholars like Krentz and Cardinal Ratzinger, who embrace the historical-critical method claim that the Bible is an inspired book and admonish others on the need to be cautious.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, some scholars, especially Doherty, Freke and Gandy, using the same method claim that the Bible is uninspired.¹⁰² This gives scholars and researchers the opportunity to relatively draw different conclusions on the same subject.

In view of the fact that the Bible is to be regarded as a collection of texts, it becomes self-evident that a biblical text addresses only the intentions of the author and that its meaning is tied to the author’s historical context. Benjamin Jowett affirms this by stating that “scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had in the minds of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it.”¹⁰³ Therefore, the task of historical-critical method is to deal with what it means to understand a text historically. The second part of the method is its critical aspect. Again, given that the biblical texts are a collection of books for

⁹⁹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Krentz, 18.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 64-66; Joseph Ratzinger, 8.

¹⁰² Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, 200-201; Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, 183.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture” in *Essays and Reviews*, 7th ed. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), 378.

homilies, it is obvious that the authoritative claims of the biblical text must be opened to refutation.¹⁰⁴ What it means is that some texts in the Bible can be challenged, refuted or confirmed. There can be no instances of special regard for the Bible when it comes to criticism.

This method has become synonymous with the scientific approach to the Bible, as opposed to the theological or the doctrinaire approach of the church. It should be noted that the tag “scientific,” contains an implied claim to innovativeness and superiority. Consequently, its rise in biblical studies is considered a highpoint in the history of biblical scholarship which separates the pre-critical age¹⁰⁵ from the enlightened and the scientific age.¹⁰⁶ At this stage in the history of Christianity, there appears to be a general consensus that the rise of the historical-critical method has been a positive development; it has been a benefit to the church,¹⁰⁷ even though, scholars are generally admonished to honestly confront its limitations.

When it comes to its benefits to the Church, Eta Linnemann¹⁰⁸ believes that, beneath the garment of scientific objectivity, historical-critical method is an ideology rather than a methodology. Her assessment of historical-critical method sturdily contrasts the positive standard evaluations of the method by Edgar Krenz. Krenz, in evaluating the historical critical method, upholds that “it is a mistake to think that there is such a thing as a sacred method. A method does not have faith or unbelief; there are only believing or unbelieving interpreters.”¹⁰⁹

The argument of Krenz seems to be the norm when it comes to biblical studies and historical-

¹⁰⁴ Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 107.

¹⁰⁵ The era in which people idealistically assumed the Bible to be divinely inspired and infallible

¹⁰⁶ The period in which scholars seek to understand the Bible both historically and critically

¹⁰⁷ Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1993), 30.

¹⁰⁸ Eta Linnemann, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Krenz, 68.

critical method. Unbelieving interpreters, like Earl Doherty, use the method in a manner that rejects much of what had been regarded as orthodox Christian teachings, like the birth of Jesus, his death and resurrection and belief in miracles. It is a tool that can work fiercely against the Bible in the hands of unbelieving interpreters. In the same vein, believing interpreters can make good biblical studies with the method but must be “used in an objective manner.”¹¹⁰

However, Linnemann’s vilifications of the method seem to be vindicated in some respects. She believes that the method has put on a cloak of scientific neutrality and objectivity just to deceive interpreters. It leaves the impression that while orthodox Christian theology is founded on often un-scientific premises, historical-critical method is free from such presuppositions. Again, the method only lays a one-sided emphasis on Scripture: “the work of human authors, documents of ancient religious history, written in a dead language, and a conceptual world no longer immediately comprehensible to us.”¹¹¹ Furthermore the historical-critical method has segmented biblical studies into critical believing interpreters of the Bible and critical unbelieving investigators. Therefore, it can be argued that the historical-critical method has taken the issues in biblical studies and interpretation to the extreme.

It must be noted that Linnemann is not the first to point out the inadequacies of the historical-critical method. Gerhard Maier¹¹² categorically declared “the end of the historical-critical method” as early as 1974. This recognition of the limitations of the historical-critical

¹¹⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 40; Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today”: In R. J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 1-23.

¹¹¹ Werner G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (New York: Abingdon, 1970), 62-69.

¹¹² Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, 49.

method has called for the need to investigate its origins, its philosophical outlook, and its impact on studies about Jesus.

Another insufficiency associated with the historical-critical method is the widespread lack of agreement and the inconclusiveness of the results among scholars. For instance, a section of scholars in the historical Jesus study basically agree on their reconstructed Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet.¹¹³ While another section of the scholars within the Jesus Seminar argue vigorously against the apocalyptic prophet stance. They rather consider their Jesus as a contemptuous philosopher or teacher.¹¹⁴

In all these diversified stances, the most intriguing aspect of the historical-critical method is its relationship with the supernatural. In its strictest sense, this method plies on the hypothesis that all events that counter the ordinary course of the universe and circumstances of divine intervention are not viable to be considered historical. Consequently, all supernatural elements in the Bible are taken to mean any logical indication of something other than supernatural. This presupposition is embedded in the historical-critical methodology in a way that automatically regards miracles as inauthentic.

Furthermore, the method seems to have defeated its own claim of multiple attestations which explains multiple happenings of event in the Bible as authentic. This deficiency is more demonstrated in the rejection of Jesus as a historical being, his miracles in the gospels despite the

¹¹³ Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 31-304. See, for example Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 208.

¹¹⁴ Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 84-88, 313-334.

fact that, recent scholarship demonstrates that the miracles of Jesus are among the best multiplied attested events in the New Testament.¹¹⁵ Miracles are rejected because they flout the laws of nature; they cannot be investigated scientifically and are not repeating themselves in contemporary times. Therefore, the only logical conclusion is that miracles could not have occurred in the past either.¹¹⁶

However, a compromised position seems to emerge. The place of the supernatural is seen on one hand as a philosophical problem and on the other hand as a historical problem. The philosophical problem deals with the ontological explanations of miracles in the natural world and this agrees with Troeltsch's methodology.¹¹⁷ It looks into the reality of miracles happening in the world. In this case, the present and our contemporary understanding of miracles should determine whether miracles did happen in the past or not. While the historical problem deals with the epistemological explanation of miracles in the world; our knowledge of its occurrence throughout the history of human existence. This looks into how humankind has dealt with miracles, its reality and occurrence. This is an approach by Meier¹¹⁸ and Ehrman.¹¹⁹

Yet, the proposed solution by Meier and Ehrman is still within the range of philosophical, though they assert that miracles can occur, their approach leaves traces of disbelief. As demonstrated in the ongoing argument, any use of historical-critical method together with the traditional understanding of the Scriptures will definitely depart at some point. In embracing the existence of miracles, the interpreter may fundamentally depart from that which is considered

¹¹⁵ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 114-139.

¹¹⁶ Gregory W. Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Quest: A Foundational Anthology*, 27-29.

¹¹⁷ Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, 729, 753.

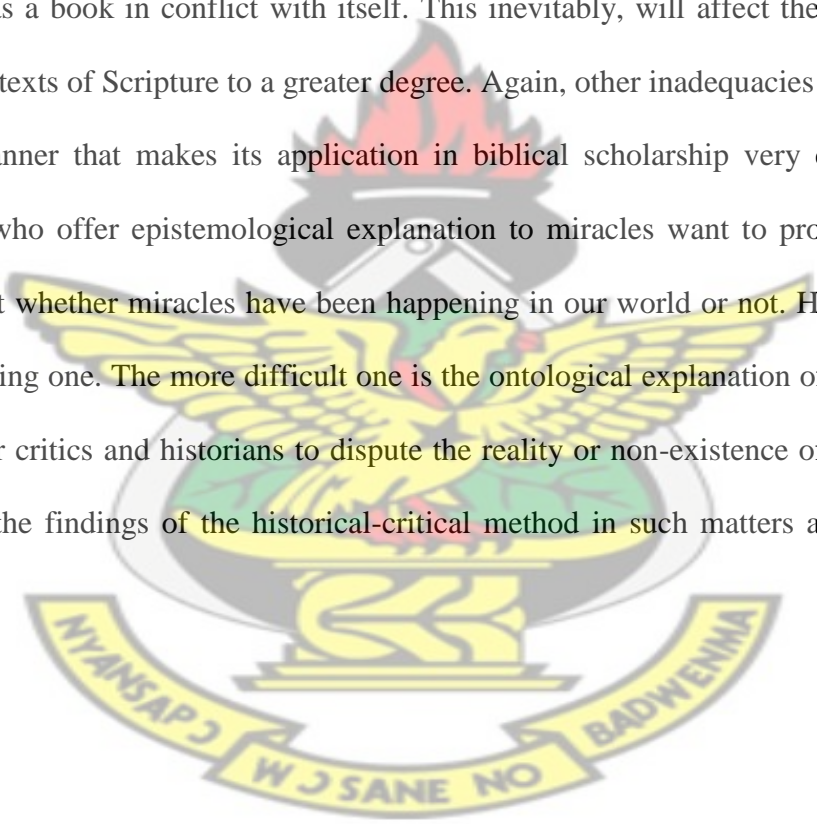
¹¹⁸ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 514-515.

¹¹⁹ Ehrman, 208.

scientific and by using natural or logical modules to explain miracles, the work of the interpreter may sound weird in the minds of traditional Christians. And by blending the two, they face rejection on both sides.

2.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the critical function of the historical-critical method do affect the historical authenticity or reliability of the biblical texts in ways that depict the Bible and its content as a book in conflict with itself. This inevitably, will affect the content of faith expressed in the texts of Scripture to a greater degree. Again, other inadequacies are rooted in the method in a manner that makes its application in biblical scholarship very challenging. For instance, those who offer epistemological explanation to miracles want to provide the needed knowledge about whether miracles have been happening in our world or not. However, the task has been a daunting one. The more difficult one is the ontological explanation of miracles. It has been difficult for critics and historians to dispute the reality or non-existence of miracles in our world. Clearly, the findings of the historical-critical method in such matters as miracles seem problematic.



CHAPTER THREE

JESUS EXAMINED UNDER THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the analysis of the historical-critical method and the possible deficiencies that may hinder well-balanced biblical studies. This chapter delves into how Jesus has been assessed under the historical-critical method. According to Robert M. Price,¹²⁰ many of the details of Jesus' life were "borrowed" from a contemporary religion, Mithraism, and several other god-man deities of Greek mythology. His assertion is based on the fact that these mythic religions were founded before the birth of Christianity; and if the personalities involved were assumed to be mythical, then, the same can be said about Jesus.

The central theme of this argument is that there are a number of historical and mythical figures whose life stories contain these elements of virgin birth, the infant escaping death, execution and eventual resurrection in glory.¹²¹ So what makes the case of Jesus different? Even though, a conservative Christian scholar may argue for the uniqueness of Jesus but just as we do not regard Hercules as a historical figure, a case can be made that Jesus was also a mythical character. Jesus, probably, existed in the narratives of his followers because his real existence is shrouded in mysteries and myths. However, such arguments are prejudiced. The reason is that these myths may have been coined around a particular real story that was about to unfold. Especially, in the case of Jesus, some of his life details can be proven historically. The facts

¹²⁰ Robert M. Price, "Apocryphal Apparitions: 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 as a Post-Pauline Interpolation" *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2/2 (Fall 1995), 69-99; Also cited in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 170-171. Price states that: "In broad outline and in detail, the life of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels corresponds to the worldwide Mythic Hero Archetype in which a divine hero's birth is supernaturally predicted and conceived, the infant hero escapes attempts to kill him, demonstrates his precocious wisdom already as a child, receives a divine commission, defeats demons, wins acclaim, is hailed as king, then betrayed, losing popular favor, executed, often on a hilltop, and is vindicated and taken up to heaven," 170-171.

¹²¹ Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* (Prometheus Books, 2004), 101.

about his life, ministry, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection, and his many followers can be demonstrated historically.

3.2. Assessing the Data about Jesus of Nazareth

The argument in favor of a mythical Jesus is based on the assumption that authors who lived within the first century and beyond wrote nothing or little about him. They believe that secular historians who lived around the time of Christ should have written about him if he really existed. These critics consider his story as too profound to be neglected by the first-century scholars. For this reason they try to refute any historical record about Jesus that had appeared in some secular records as later insertions from some Christian scholars.¹²² As a result, little validation is given to the gospels concerning the authors, the man they wrote about, the towns mentioned and some other details about Jesus of Nazareth. However, a counter argument can be made against such claims.

For instance, the socio-economic importance of Nazareth or Galilee seems to be left out of the argument. Therefore, some questions must be asked. What was the significance of Nazareth within the wider range of Greco-Roman politics, commerce, religion and history? With the exception of political revolts within the Palestinian region in general, how much reports do these scholars read about Nazareth, the region, or the Galilean suburbs from the non-Palestinian authors? There were many limitations in the era of Jesus in relation to international events at the time. The world and the people seemed far apart with little flow of information from one part to the other. Even official information could take a number of months to get to the provinces let

¹²² Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (London: Rigel, 2004), 199-200; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 163.

alone information about a peasant Jewish rabbi. First century Palestine (A. D.) must not be judged from our modern perspective. The irony is that many critics have done so without testing the facts with evidences from the first-century Palestine. It should be stated that if well assessed, the Gospels seem to be filled with many details about Jesus that need to be tested with secular history and other contemporary issues of the time.

3.3. Christianity under the Caesars

As part of his introduction, Luke begins the account of Jesus' earthly ministry with the reign of Caesar Augustus. He mentions that Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus. According to Luke, the entire ministry of Jesus took place in the context of the Roman Empire and under the strong personalities of the Caesars. Every Jew knew that their nation was not free and this has influenced their self-understanding which was apparent during the inter-testamental period. However, there was an ingrained hope during the periods leading to the New Testament era that a new exodus will soon surface to liberate God's people from the yoke of the pagan rulers. This ingrained hope is interpreted as the "Jewish eschatological hope" by Schweitzer.¹²³

This, also, may explain why Luke probably situated his gospel account of Jesus within the time-space reality of the Roman Empire, but never wrote with the motive that "the kingdom of Jesus [will] subvert and overthrow the kingdom of Rome."¹²⁴ This assertion about the Gospel of Luke must be embraced since at the time of writing, Jesus had died and ascended to heaven whereas the gospel is being preached throughout the known world. Therefore, the only way for

¹²³ Simon, J. Gathercole, "The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*" *Tyndale Bulletin* (2000) 51: 261-283.

¹²⁴ Brian J. Walsh, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 69-70.

Luke to include aspects of Roman history will be for the purposes of history; that is, to factually place Jesus within history. Moreover, facts about the Caesars are verifiable and therefore, if well studied, must put to rest issues about the a-historicity of Jesus.

At this point, it should be clear that the author of the gospel of Luke intentionally relates to the Roman Empire for the purposes of history. He states that the birth of Jesus coincided with the decree by Caesar Augustus that the whole world be counted. It must be recalled that Augustus' reign was marked by great building projects as well as peace and security – what has been famously called the *Pax Romana*.¹²⁵ For this reason, it is plausible that his empire-wide census was to ensure fair assessment of the number of peoples in his kingdom and its corresponding tax returns.

Paul Maier believes that Augustus had other interests. One of them was an intense interest in religion within his realm and that the census may also had religious dimension as well. According to him, philosophical skepticism that had resulted from the Greek sophists had decreased dramatically the belief in the traditional Greco-Roman gods and that a growing number of the citizenry were joining the philosophical cults of the Greeks. As a result, Augustus encouraged his subjects to return to the worship of these gods and thus, the need for the people to return to their hometowns to be registered. He, then, restored eighty-two temples in Rome alone and became the *pontifex maximus* (highest priest) of the traditional Roman cult.¹²⁶ Though Maier's point could be a good reason for the census, it proves the factuality of the census and

¹²⁵ Paul L. Maier, *In the Fullness of Time* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 3-10.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 6.

that Luke's intentions are validated. However, a second look at the census may furnish modern readers with some insights about the historicity of Jesus.

Luke 2:1-2 records Augustus' decree to register the known world.

The Greek reads: Εγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηναίου.

This is translated as: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. **This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria**" (NRSV).

The Greek **verb** used is ἀπογραφῆ, from ἀπογραφῶ, which literally means to "enroll" or "register" and connotes an official listing of citizens.¹²⁷ As stated earlier this decree may have several objectives. On one hand, it could have been a census taken in part for the purpose of assessing taxes. On the other hand, it could also mean assessing the number of citizens in his empire or to assess the decline in the number of people attending the traditional religious cults. This research is not interested in the purpose of the registration or the census but whether the Lukan account of an empire-wide census by Caesar Augustus really happened.

Can we point out any historical record outside of the Bible that shows whether Augustus ever issued such a decree? The answer is affirmative. Historical records within the first-century B.C. have revealed that Augustus authorized three censuses during his reign. These are listed in

¹²⁷ James Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (USA: The Ages Library, 1997), 54.

the Acts of Augustus,¹²⁸ a list of what Augustus thought were the thirty-five greatest achievements of his reign. The censuses were ranked eighth in the Acts. The Acts of Augustus were placed on two bronze plaques outside of Augustus's mausoleum after he died. These empire-wide censuses were in 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and 14 A.D. And in all probability the 8 B.C. corresponds well with that of Luke 2:1-2.

Although scholarship popularly dates Christ's birth between 4 and 7 B.C., the 8 B.C. census does fit into the records of the time. Since decrees must first get to the provincial governors for an onward transmission into various localities. At least, by the time it got to Palestine, the time might have elapsed in a year or two.

However, the difficulty with Luke's account is the mentioning of Quirinius as the governor of Syria in 2:2. That which makes this account difficult is a matter of reconciling the Gospel account with the history of the time. Ancient Roman records reveal that Quirinius became governor of Syria around 6-7 A.D., about eleven years later. Much about this man is known to us since many ancient historians wrote about Quirinius. Historians like Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, as well as Jewish historian Josephus all wrote about him.¹²⁹ He was called Publius Sulpicius Quirinius and was believed to have died in 21 A.D.

Some scholars consider this variance as an error and use it as one of the bases in denying the authenticity of the Lukan account and the historicity of Jesus.¹³⁰ However, the statement of Luke does hold the key to solving this alleged anomaly. The phrase "This was the first

¹²⁸ Richard J. Cassidy, *Christians and Roman Rule in the New Testament: New Perspectives, Companions to the New Testament* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 60.

¹²⁹ Maier, 1-9; Tacitus, *Annals*, II, 30; III, 22, 23, 48; Seutonius, *Tiberius* xix; Dio Cassius iv, 48; Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* 17:355; 18:26; 20:102; and Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, (Princeton, 1964), 234-238.

¹³⁰ Gary R. Habermas, "Was Jesus Real," *InterVarsity.org*, August 8, 2008; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 46.

registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria” solves the puzzle. The Greek word πρώτη (translated as first) by its form is an adjective, ordinal, nominative and that it qualifies the nominative noun ἀπογραφη (Census). However, it is an adjective of no degree; meaning, it is not to be counted as one preceding several others of the same kind. It does not suggest a sequence of events. Therefore, it can be translated as “prior to” or “before” when used in reference to time. This may be a viable solution to the apparent variance because the Greek text of Luke 2:2 can be translated as, “This census was taken before Quirinius became the governor of Syria.”

Another point of contention is the reason behind why people in all places under the Roman rule, for instance Joseph and Mary in Palestine, should travel to their ancestral homes for a registration. Some historical-critical scholars believe that this never happened because it could have resulted in chaos since many people would be crisscrossing the world at the same time.¹³¹

However, several evidence point to the fact that those journeys were indeed done under the Roman rule in relation to empire-wide census. And that the decrees, sometimes, took at least a year or two before it reached the far most provinces of the empire. In Egypt, for instance, several of these documents regarding a Roman census prove this fact. A Roman document dated 104 A.D. concerning an ongoing census instructed citizens with specific commands to return to their original homes for the exercise.¹³² The document lists some information people were

¹³¹ Will Durant, “Caesar and Christ,” in *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 3 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 555.

¹³² Maier, 4, who quoted from A. H. M. Jones, ed., *A History of Rome through the Fifth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 256 ff. A second Egyptian census document found in 119 A.D. reveals what was expected of the individual during a census. In this document, a man from Egypt registered with the following details: his name and the names of his father, mother, and grandfather; his original village; his age and profession; a scar above his left eyebrow; his wife’s name and age, his wife’s father’s name; his son’s name and age; the names of other relatives living with him. This document was signed by the village registrar and three other officials serving as witnesses.

expected to provide for the census. This also, somehow, answers the notion why all people from all places moved to their ancestral towns to be counted since it was required.

3.4. The star of the magi

Another historical hint which can help in our modern investigation with regards to the historicity of Jesus was the Star of the Magi, or the wise men from the East and their journey to find out from Israel the meaning of the extraordinary star that appeared on the day Jesus was born as found in Matthew 2. This phenomenon was interpreted as a mere passing away of a meteor or a miracle that is beyond any human investigation.

However, with the coming of Kepler's discovery of more than 700 stars and his subsequent investigations of the heavenly bodies, this mystery has been solved. Johann Kepler, in the early seventeenth century, observed a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and later Mars in the sign of the Pisces¹³³ with such brilliance that it looked "like the most beautiful and glorious torch ever seen when driven by wind".¹³⁴ He concluded that this might lead to the discovery of the year Christ was born. With earnest calculations, Kepler discovered that the conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and additionally Mars, to form an extraordinary star, in the sign of the Pisces occurred in AUC¹³⁵ 748 or 749 which corresponded with the 8 or 7 B.C. dating.

¹³³ **Pisces** is a sign that appears on every February 19 - March 20 and is the twelfth sign of the zodiac, and it is also the final sign in the zodiacal cycle. Pisces is believed to be a symbol of two fishes joined together with a horizontal line found on Jupiter and Neptune.

¹³⁴ John Kepler, *Bericht vom Geburtsjahr Christi* (Opera, IV. 204), quoted from Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume I: Apostolic Christianity. A.D. 1-100* (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 1882), 73.

¹³⁵ A dating system developed by Dionysius Exiguus which means "ab urbe condita", i.e., since the founding of Rome.

3.5. The Death of Herod I

The accounts of the Gospel writers demonstrate that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod I, also known as Herod the Great, who died in AUC 750 or 4 B.C., according to Josephus.¹³⁶ Historians have verified this date to be true by using astronomical calculations of the eclipse of the moon which occurred few days before the death of Herod in AUC 750.¹³⁷ This is to suggest that Jesus was born a year or two before 4 B.C. By this argument, it is prudent to consider 6 or 5 B.C. as the year Jesus of Nazareth was born. Such dating falls in line with the popular command to slaughter children from two years and below.

3.6. Luke 3:1: the fifteenth year of Tiberius

Luke, again, provides his readers with another clue about the period in which both John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministry. It was in the fifteenth year of Caesar Tiberius. Tiberius reigned jointly with Augustus in AUC 765 (or 12 A.D.) and a sole ruler of the empire after the death of Augustus in AUC 767 (or 14 A.D.).¹³⁸ Consequently his fifteenth year will be AUC 782, counting from the period he independently ruled since this was the usual Roman method or AUC 779, if counted from the time he jointly ruled with Caesar Augustus. This was supposed to be their thirtieth birthdays in keeping with the Jewish customs of the day (Num. 4)¹³⁹. By reckoning back thirty years from AUC 779 or 782 will leave us with AUC 749 or 752 as the year they were born since Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist.

¹³⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1966), 8, 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 6, 4.

¹³⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume I: Apostolic Christianity. A.D. 1-100* (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 1882), 73.

¹³⁹ According to Jewish customs a man was eligible for military service at thirty and Levites began their service in the Sanctuary at age thirty (Num 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39). And in keeping with this custom, John the Baptist and Jesus were about thirty years of age at the commencement of their ministries (Luke 3:23).

However, AUC 749 is to be preferred since it agrees with the census of Augustus and Kepler's calculations made from the conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, Mars and other stars that appeared as the star of the Magi. Other references regarding dates and personalities in the passage of Luke 3 do fall in place in the context of the birth, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. Pontius Pilate became the governor of Judaea in 26 A.D. and reigned for ten years. Caesar Caligula deposed off Herod Antipas from the throne in 39 A.D. and Philip, the brother of Antipas, died in 34 A.D.¹⁴⁰ It should be stated that Jesus might have died before 34 A.D., granted that his public ministry lasted for three years.

3.7. Internal Sources: The Synoptic Gospels or all the Four Gospels?

New Testament scholars like Luke Johnson illustrate what has been noted as the difference between the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels. He argues that Jesus "in John appears as more a symbolic than a literal figure. He bears the narrative burden of revealing God in the world."¹⁴¹ This argument is used to support the idea that John's Gospel lacks historical backing to be included in the search for the historical Jesus. The Gospel of John is practically removed from the gospels as a source for the historical Jesus research. What this means is that some differentiate the narratives about Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels from that of John. By symbolic, they mean he cannot be historical. However, such observation can be an overstated assertion. Historical-critical scholarship has somehow overemphasized the theological differences in the four Gospels by equating diversity with incongruity.¹⁴² Un-harmonized

¹⁴⁰ Durant, 281.

¹⁴¹ Luke T. Johnson, *Living Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 183.

¹⁴² Diversity in this sense deals with the various approaches used by the individual authors of the gospels in a manner that bore their personalities, backgrounds and styles. Such uniqueness within and among the gospels does not mean the gospels are un-interrelated, independent of each other and incongruous.

diversity has become a critical dogma which is constantly used to reject one account (the Johannine) from the others (the Synoptics).¹⁴³

It has been asserted that, unlike the Synoptic Jesus, the Jesus of John is not a real historical man.¹⁴⁴ One of the reasons given is that the teaching ministry of Jesus prominent in the Synoptics is missing in the Johannine accounts. Another stated difference made between John and the Synoptics is that most of the Jesus' public ministry in the narratives of John are situated in Jerusalem and small account of his Galilean ministry is reported (John 4:43-54; 6:1-7:1). Again, three other Synoptic accounts that are considered key importance in the search for the historical Jesus are absent in John. Firstly, the baptism of Jesus is not mentioned in John's narrative. Secondly, the twelve disciples appear for the first time in 6:67 of the Gospel of John, without any prior account of their calling by Jesus. And finally, John never mentioned the first trial before Caiaphas and what seemed to have happened to Jesus after he was taken to Caiaphas before he was sent to Pilate (18:24, 28).¹⁴⁵ In essence, these differences are seen as reasons for the rejection of the gospel of John in the historical Jesus research.

However, such arguments tend to ignore some important details that are present in every piece of literature such as the personality of the author, interests, style, purpose of writing, the intended audiences, as well as sources for the narrative. This is one of the reasons why John is not in line with the other three gospels. At the same time, John is in line with the other gospels as

¹⁴³ Harold Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); Peter Davids, "The Gospels and Jewish Traditions: Twenty Years after Gerhardsson," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, Vol. 1., R. T. France and David Wenham ed., (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 75-99.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd, *Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 309-407.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Stein, "The Criteria for Authenticity," in *Gospel Perspectives I*, R. T. France and David Wenham ed., (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 225-263.

sources for the historical Jesus. The difference between the Jesus of John and the other gospels can be seen as a difference of approach and style. It must be understood that even within the Synoptic Gospels, there exist a Synoptic Problem¹⁴⁶.

Another argument against the Gospel of John is that his Jesus spoke more about himself than the Jesus of the Synoptic gospels. Historical-critical scholarship is prejudiced about the ἐγώ εἰμι, “I am” statements attributed to the historical Jesus in John’s Gospel.¹⁴⁷ It is believed that this is possibly the most notable aspect of a second century redaction that seem uncommon to the rest of the Gospels.¹⁴⁸ Due to this, Johannes Weiss argued that “The contemporary state of Gospel criticism justifies our excluding the Gospel of John almost totally from our investigation.”¹⁴⁹ This same argument is supported by Walter Weaver. He points out that John “raises great difficulties and should be largely omitted.”¹⁵⁰ Granted that these concerns may be legitimate to some extent, why can’t investigate what John seem to add as a proof of the historicity of Jesus? May be John was more interested in the divinity of Jesus and for this reason; he could make many references that depict Jesus as divine.

This reasoning is supported by Petr Pokorný. He maintains that, the “I am” statements appeared long before the first-century in self-introductions by a divine being (Exod. 3:14; 20:2)

¹⁴⁶ The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are so alike to each other that they view Jesus “with the same eye” (syn-optic). Such picture of Jesus contrasts that presented in the Gospel of John or the non-canonical Gospels. However, there are also some significant differences among the three Synoptic Gospels. The similarities as well as the differences are very complicated because the Synoptic Gospels while sharing some common materials, do possess individually unique materials common to just one or two. Besides, that which is even common is not always expressed in the same order in the three Gospels. Therefore, what the Synoptic Problem seeks to solve, among other things, is, who wrote first, and who copied from whom?

¹⁴⁷ Stein, 225-263.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 60.

¹⁵⁰ Walter P. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus in the Twentieth Century: 1900–1950* (Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press International, 1999), 46.

and was not a Johannine creation. Even Mark records some of these statements.¹⁵¹ According to Mark, Jesus introduced himself to the High Priest by using the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι: “and Jesus said: ‘I am (ἐγώ εἰμι)’” (Mk 14:62). Again, both Mark and Matthew give an account of Jesus walking on the sea and in order to calm their fears he said to the disciples: “ἐγώ εἰμι (I am); do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50; Mt. 14:27).

In the Great Commission Matthew concludes with the same expression: “ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι (I am with you) all the days (28:20).” This same feature is present in the Gospel of Luke. In his gospel, Luke recorded about three instances in which Jesus used the expression in some of his discourses (Lk. 21:8; 22:70; 24:39). Therefore, what is seen as unique about John is a singular characteristic that permeates through all the gospels. If there is anything synoptic about the four gospels, certainly, the “I am” statements are the common force. Furthermore, if the Synoptic Gospels, with all the “I am” statements, are used in depicting Jesus as historical, then, the Gospel of John can equally depict Jesus historically.

3.8. The Gospel of John and the Historical Jesus

This section investigates the Gospel of John in a manner that demonstrates its inclusion in the search for the historical Jesus more vividly. Particular interest is taken in reviewing some passages in the Gospel of John that affirm the Jewish customs, within the period in which Jesus lived, as historical. This is done as a response to the assertion that the Gospel of John must be considered as unreliable source for studying the historical Jesus.¹⁵² The argument is that none of

¹⁵¹ Petr Pokorný, *Jesus in the Eyes of his Followers* (The Dead Sea Scrolls & Christian Origins Library, 4; North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1998), 81.

¹⁵² Darrell Bock, “The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex,” in M. J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus under Fire*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 73-99.

the gospels is neutrally historical; there is always an inseparable blend of both theology and history.

What seems valid about the fourth Gospel is that it presents much difficulty in tailoring together what can be called “concise sequence of events and topography” of the historical Jesus. So it becomes much easier for one to base his historical work about Jesus on the Synoptic Gospels. Paula Fredriksen supports the apparent chronological and geographical difficulty by asserting that there is “lacking [the] sort of comparative data that the synoptic gospels provide for each other, it is difficult to say ‘what sources or traditions that stand behind John’s Jesus.’”¹⁵³ Therefore, there must be a separation between historicity and chronology.¹⁵⁴ The difficulty of arriving at concise sequence of events and geography does not negate facts about the historicity of Jesus in the gospel of John. Those who reject the gospel of John do miss the opportunity to uncover some unbiased and unselective historical facts about Jesus in the fourth gospel.

For instance, Geza Vermes believes that John’s narration of an “interrogation” not a “trial” in front of a high priest (not two high priests) is reliably historical than the trial narratives found in the Synoptic gospels.¹⁵⁵ The general notion is that Jesus was questioned by two high priests and this is found in all the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26:3; Mark 14:55; Luke 22:52). However, Jewish tradition allowed for one high priest to serve in the sanctuary and would be replaced in the case of death or incapacitation. Therefore, John’s account of a high priest at the

¹⁵³ Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 199.

¹⁵⁴ Whiles historicity looks at the past narratives, including chronology, continuities and discontinuities: chronology deals with events in sequential order. Therefore, the lack of sequence in the gospel of John does not rule out valid history about Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁵⁵ Geza Vermes, *Who is Who in the Age of Jesus*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 135-136.

trial of Jesus depicts the Jewish tradition of the day. John's account sets a more historical setting for the historical Jesus than the Synoptics.

Again, the Gospel of Mark situates the ministry of Jesus around the confines of Lower Galilee and alleges that Jesus visited Jerusalem just once.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, in John chapters eleven to twenty, Jesus worked within the regions of Judea and probably made at least three trips to Jerusalem. Should we follow "the scholars of Synoptic Gospels", it means that the Gospel of Mark has no Judean ministry for Jesus of Nazareth. However, it is in the Gospel of John alone that the student of the Bible is furnished with the truth that Jesus visited Jerusalem quite often. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, maybe except Luke, it is John who tends to suggest that the regions of Samaria played a major role in the ministry of Jesus. Sean Freyne contends that it is only the writings of John which seem to buttress the religious tensions that historically existed between the Jews and the Samaritans.¹⁵⁷

In all these arguments, it should be stressed that what has been provided by John about Galilee and Judea have been duly supported by extra-biblical history.¹⁵⁸ The historian must study Jesus in his Palestinian Jewish context. And such scholar must find John indispensable since his knowledge about Palestinian Jewish practices is evident in most of his reflections about the customs of his day. For instance, John's account on the Feast of Booths has been reported to

¹⁵⁶ J. Scroter, 'Jesus of Galilee: the Role of Location in Understanding Jesus', in J. H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokony (eds.), *Jesus Research: An International Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 36-55.

¹⁵⁷ Sean Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel* (WNUT, 125; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 125.

¹⁵⁸ Mordechai Aviam. *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys, Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Land of Galilee 1; Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 49, 202. In these passages, Aviam proves that the foundations of the Jewish settlement in Galilee go back to the periods of the Hasmoneans and had cultural ties with Judea.

“reflect an accurate knowledge of the festal ceremonies in the Jerusalem Temple area.”¹⁵⁹ Paul N. Anderson believes that archaeology exonerates John more than the Synoptic writers and that it preserves much information about pre-70 A.D. Jerusalem and Judea.¹⁶⁰ In John, the unseen history of Jesus becomes real in the mind of his readers. John mentions the historical Jesus making a whip to drive away the money changers in the Temple. Archaeology has proven that earlier Temples never had the Hanuth (the area for shops and the large animals to be sacrificed) but the Temple built by Herod the Great had such extension where the laws of purity never extended to.¹⁶¹ The Hanuth had those things that whips can be made from in those days. So it might not be surprising if Jesus clearly made a whip to drive away those who made the house of God a market center.

Paula Fredriksen notes that the information in John’s Gospel “is historically more sound [in] the probable duration of Jesus’ ministry, the Sanhedrin’s concern for the political consequences of his preaching, the pitch of popular messianic excitement around the Passover, the extent of the Jewish authorities’ involvement on the night of Jesus’ arrest, the date of his arrest relative to the Passover”¹⁶² than the Synoptic Gospels. It can be argued that Jesus is portrayed more historically within his first-century Judaism in the gospel of John than the Synoptic Gospels.

¹⁵⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York and London: Doubleday, 2003), 92.

¹⁶⁰ Paul N. Anderson ‘Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John: Implications for Investigations of Jesus and Archaeology’ in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 587-618.

¹⁶¹ Dan Bahat, ‘Jesus and the Herodian Temple Mount’ in Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology*, 300-308.

¹⁶² Fredriksen, 198-199.

Moreover, it seems John understood the Jewish customs and purification rites more than the Synoptic writers. In John chapter two, the writer mentions the importance of stone vessels as a reflection of Jewish purification rites¹⁶³ at the wedding Jesus attended in Cana. Archaeologists believe that this fact is well grounded in the customs of the time and that such vessels have been found in two sites vying for the 'Cana' of Jesus' day; these are Khirbet Kana and Kefer Kana.¹⁶⁴ Charlesworth notes that these stone vessels were found in all the villages known to the historical Jesus and that its manufacturing date back to the period of Herod the Great up to 70 A.D. with an exception of few sites like Nazareth that continued the production even after 70 A.D.¹⁶⁵

It has been argued that John's portrayal of Jerusalem and its environs in his writings has received endorsement by recent archaeological discoveries. Among the gospels, only John mentions the presence of a pool north of the Temple with five columned porticoes. His description of the pool and its porticoes is considered more accurate, even, than that of Josephus and other extra-biblical narrations.¹⁶⁶ The Pool of Bethesda has been excavated and verified by archaeologists. It does have five porticoes as stated in John and its ruined columns are visible in present day Palestine.¹⁶⁷

Another Pool called Siloam is reported in John chapter nine and again recent excavations have proven him right. The Pool of Siloam is believed to be the biggest Jewish purification bath that antedates the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Therefore, the gospel of John must

¹⁶³ Carsten Claussen, 'Turning Water to Wine: Re-reading the Miracle at the Wedding in Cana' in Charlesworth and Pokorny (eds.), *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 73-97.

¹⁶⁴ Peter Richardson, 'Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus' in Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology*, 120-144.

¹⁶⁵ James H. Charlesworth, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010) 3-46.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

be considered a key material for studying the real historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. The relevance of such information cannot be overestimated in discovering the Jesus of history. The Jesus revealed in the gospels is the same Jesus who walked around the Pools of Bethesda and Siloam. In essence, if the vessels used at the wedding in Cana are historically verifiable, then, the man on whose accounts these things have been mentioned must be historical.

3.9. External Sources: Evidence from Non-Christian Writers

History and scientific research have revealed that mythical beings have not been involved in real-time human episodes. Again, hardly can such beings be traced with living evidence. However, in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, there are several material evidence and human acquaintances from both the Biblical records and the non-biblical records that coincided with the period he lived in. Just as archaeology has proven that the New Testament is filled with authentic geographical locations, secular and extra-biblical records show that the Bible is also full of genuine personalities.

Much of what the Bible has been accused of as false has later been proven accurate through archaeology. Many of the Old Testament personalities and topographies that were disputed as a-historical have been proven historical by archaeologists. Charlesworth, for instance, has provided some information about the Hittites which at first were considered fictional story of some sort by the biblical authors who as usual created another myth. However, he has provided much information about the Hittites which includes when they founded their

empire, their contributions to history, their language, craftsmanship (iron-smith), geography and chronology.¹⁶⁸

Under the influence of historical-critical tools, Jesus is being disputed as historical for the non-existence of his own personal writings. Meanwhile, the same arguments are used in considering personalities like Socrates as historical. Such critics do not assume Socrates to be a figment of the imagination of his students. Therefore, if Socrates is believed to have lived based on the accounts of his students, then what prevents the world from accepting Jesus as a historical being based on the accounts of his disciples and non-Christian writers.

Josh McDowell in his book, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, argues that no serious scholars will venture into declaring Jesus a myth. He sets out from the very first chapter of his book in providing all the evidence that prove Jesus historically. McDowell comprehensively investigates all the known secular documents that lay claim on the historicity of Jesus. By secular, he meant non-Christian writers whose writings coincided with the history of Jesus or contained some records about him. These included Cornelius Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Gaius Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Thallus, Phlegon, and Mara Bar-Serapion.¹⁶⁹ Considering the worth of information contained in this book, this research work has reviewed some of these writers:

¹⁶⁸ Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology*, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, 119-123.

3.9.1. Cornelius Tacitus (55 - 120 A.D.)

Cornelius was a Roman historian who lived within the first and the second centuries through the reigns of a number of Roman monarchs. He is considered one of the greatest historians of ancient Rome. Cornelius Tacitus is among several other non-Christian authors whose writings confirm the Biblical account of Jesus' execution at the hands of Pontius Pilate (who governed Judea from 26-36 A.D.) during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. He wrote that "Christus, the founder of the [Christian] name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. But the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also."¹⁷⁰

According to the above passage, Jesus was known as "Christus" who existed during the reign of Tiberius. He founded Christianity and had followers who spread some 'pernicious superstition' but was put to death by Pilate. Tacitus asserts that Christianity originated in Judea and later spread to Rome. He regarded the Christian faith as a "superstition" that spread from Judea to other parts of the empire. A superstition which was difficult to be controlled signifies a statement of fact. It reveals the zeal of the apostles in evangelizing the good news about Jesus.

3.9.2. Lucian of Samosata (120 - 180 A.D.)

Lucian lived in the second century and was a Greek satirist. He was also fond of rhetoric and contemptuously ridiculed the early Christian church. Lucian, though ridiculed the early

¹⁷⁰ Tacitus. *Annals*. In: R. M. Hutchins, ed. *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol 15. *The Annals and the Histories by Cornelius Tacitus* (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 15, 44.

Christians and their Christ, his literary works confirmed that Jesus was executed by crucifixion and that he truly founded Christianity.

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day- the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... It was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers from the moment they are converted and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.¹⁷¹

According to him, the crucified man was a sage, a lawgiver, a monotheist and a man who forged for the unity of all his followers. It can be said that words like these from a critic makes Jesus a unique person.

3.9.3. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (69 - 130 A.D.)

Gaius Suetonius was a prominent Roman historian who wrote about the lives of the Roman Caesars. He served as a court official under Emperor Hadrian and also wrote several annals for the Imperial House. Suetonius witnessed the expulsion of the Christian Jews from Rome as ordered by Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2) and confirms that the Christian faith was founded by Christ. He stated that “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Christus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.”¹⁷²

This statement also explains why the Jews wanted the Christians to be killed in order to exonerate themselves as respecters of the Roman law. It says that the disturbances were made at the instigation of Christus, a statement that could only be made by an enemy since Jesus died before Claudius became an emperor. It was part of a grand ploy to get rid of the Christians for exalting Jesus as the Savior of the world. Also, the Jewish leaders could not embrace the

¹⁷¹ Lucian of Samosata, “Death of Pelegrine.” In: *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, 4 vols. Translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949), 11-13.

¹⁷² Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*. Trans. By Robert Graves and revised by Michael Grant (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1979), 25.

message of the apostles that the Jesus who lived in Palestine and died on the cross is alive. Therefore, they initiated most of the attacks against the Christians and also incited the civil authorities to kill them. However, the important point is that this secular writer had heard of Jesus and referred to him as Christus.

3.9.4. Pliny the Younger (63 - 113 A.D.)

Pliny admits that Christians were tortured and executed for not denying Christ. He wrote to Emperor Trajan explaining why too many citizens were being killed for their refusal to deny their faith. He wrote that

I asked them directly if they were Christians...those who persisted, I ordered away... Those who denied they were or ever had been Christians...worshiped both your image and the images of the gods and cursed Christ. They used to gather on a stated day before dawn and sing to Christ as if he were a god... All the more I believed it necessary to find out what was the truth from two servant maids, which were called deaconesses, by means of torture. Nothing more did I find than a disgusting, fanatical superstition. Therefore I stopped the examination, and hastened to consult you...on account of the number of people endangered. For many of all ages, all classes, and both sexes already are brought into danger.¹⁷³

In Pliny's letter, the recurring theme is the willingness of the Christians to die for Christ. Here, Pliny mentions Christ without any reservation about whether he lived or not. He knew Jesus has existed, many had believed his message and that the Caesars wanted them to deny their Lord but they refused. This would hardly be reasonable if Christians, at that time, knew He never existed. He, however, asserted that their religious practices (obviously without images and symbols) were disgusting and fanatical superstition.

3.9.5. Thallus (died around 52 A.D.)

Although the works of Thallus exist only in fragments, he was the first to attribute a natural explanation to the midday darkness which occurred during the Passover of Jesus'

¹⁷³ Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, In: N. L. Geisler, *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 10.

crucifixion. He dismissed the darkness as something that happened without any supernatural occurrence but attributed it to a natural cause (a kind of solar eclipse). Nonetheless, it has been argued that a solar eclipse cannot physically occur during a full moon due to the alignment of the planets. According to Phlegon of Tralles, who was a second century secular historian, there was a total darkness and dismisses it as a solar eclipse. He also states that the event occurred during the time of Tiberius Caesar.

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness. The rocks were rent by an earthquake and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the Passover. But an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time... Thallus records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth-manifestly that one of which we speak.¹⁷⁴

The gospels (Matt. 27:45 and Lk. 23:44-46) report this same account of nearly three hours of total darkness, an event that contradicts the scientific explanations of eclipses.

3.9.6. Celsus (died around 178 A.D.)

Celsus greatly criticized Christianity by using the exact accusations the Pharisees used against Jesus in a manner that subvert what have been addressed in the New Testament. Though many of these non-Christian literatures have been criticized as being either edited or inserted by the early Christians, it can be stated that this is not the exact case with Celsus. Since volumes of his works were purposely intended to damage the reputation of Christianity and the fact that he aggressively attacked all Christian writings; dismiss out rightly any chance by critics to assume such position of any Christian interpolations. As any scholar would have done, Celsus was obviously aware of the Christian faith that is why he wrote his exposition in the form of a

¹⁷⁴ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Anti-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers*, Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), 7-19.

dialogue between a “Jewish Critic” and himself. This also may give us a clue into which sources he used to argue against Christianity.

Celsus commenting on the miracles of Jesus stated that:

Jesus, on account of his poverty, was hired out to go to Egypt. While there he acquired certain [magical] powers... He returned home highly elated at possessing these powers, and on the strength of them gave himself out to be a god... It was by means of sorcery that He was able to accomplish the wonders which He performed... Let us believe that these cures, or the resurrection, or the feeding of a multitude with a few loaves... These are nothing more than the tricks of jugglers... It is by the names of certain demons, and by the use of incantations, that the Christians appear to be possessed of [miraculous] power.¹⁷⁵

Celsus unquestionably confirms the existence of Jesus, but what he did was to debate the source of power behind the miracles he performed. He agreed with the Pharisees by trying to dismiss these miracles as not from God but resulted from demonic possession and deceptive tricks. However it must be noted that in his attempt to refute the miracles of Christ, Celsus entered into much confusion. That is, on one hand he accused Jesus of performing magic he learned in Egypt while a lad, then later stated that it is by the power of possession. On the other hand, he stated that the miracles were not really miracles at all but were illusionary tricks performed by a deceiver and finally he asserted that the miracles never happened. This clearly depicts the intentions of Celsus.

McDowell further argues that, there are a number of hostile documents about Jesus and Christianity from Jewish sources that do confirm his historicity. He considers these attestations too valuable to be ignored in the assessment of Jesus as historical or mythical being. For instance, he analyses what the Babylonian Talmud says about the crucifixion, Jesus and his disciples and the virgin birth. McDowell maintains that the Talmudic passages confirm Jesus as

¹⁷⁵ Philip F. Esler, *The Early Christian World, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2002), 843-847.

real being who lived historically. He, then, turned his attention to Josephus and his testimonies about Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁷⁶ Here is a review:

3.9.7. Flavius Josephus (37 - 100 A.D.)

Josephus was a first century Jewish commander and a historian. He was born only three years after the crucifixion of Jesus and that makes him a credible witness to the historicity of Jesus.

Josephus, in his remarks about Jesus, wrote these:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again on the third day. As the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribes of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.¹⁷⁷

It must be remarked that many critics have disputed some of the words in this passage as Christian interpolations.¹⁷⁸ However, even if one agrees with the critics that indeed some of the words are not Josephus', he still testifies to a number of things in the above quotation. That is, Jesus lived in the first-century A.D.; he performed miracles that caused many to believe him to be the Christ. He was considered a teacher and had many followers. Jesus was tried by Pilate and was crucified. He founded Christianity and the community of Christians exists even up to the time of his work.

3.10. Jesus and the Old Testament

On its peripheral basis, the historical-critical method assumes that certain characters in the Bible never existed. Some aspects of the Bible must be understood as myth or fiction. It is a

¹⁷⁶ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, 123-126.

¹⁷⁷ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (New York: Ward, Lock, Bowden & Co., 1900), 18.

¹⁷⁸ McDowell, 119-126.

text which took several years to evolve. However, when the four Gospels are studied it becomes clear that Jesus never considered the Bible that way. He mentioned Old Testament characters and employed several Old Testament quotations. In investigating the historical Jesus, it is clear that such passages may be of special importance, since they allow the modern scholar to understand the historical viability of Jesus, his understanding of the reliability and authority of the Bible as a historical book.

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Sometimes, it becomes very difficult to understand the notion that Jesus Christ never existed as historical being when a careful study of the New Testament texts reveals a very complex personality difficult to naturally forge or impose upon. For instance, Jesus mentioned about twenty-four Old Testament characters and groups in ways that confirm his knowledge about them. These conversations, however, make it somehow impossible to believe that a second century evangelists created a mythical being and attributed several Old Testament references to him.

Jesus neither gave any logical modules as explanation to any of the Old Testament miracles nor questioned any of the supernatural interventions mentioned in the Old Testament. He embraced the giving of manna to Israel by God as historical (John 6:32). He, even, referred to the strange narrative about Jonah being in the stomach of the sea creature (Matt 12:39-40) and even likened it to his impending death, burial and resurrection. The scholar who is arguing against the historicity of Jesus must not dismiss the importance of these passages and how they were used. The coherence and unity of thought do not agree to the notion of later insertions by the early Christian church.

Jesus accepted the writings of Moses and the prophets as authoritative. They were instructive to him and that he was willing to abide by them. He never thought of abolishing the law and the prophets, rather, he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament texts. Jesus understood the Old Testament as normative and more imperative than performing supernatural signs (Luke 16:29, 31). His personal attachment to the Scriptures makes it less likely to consider him mythical or symbolic. He lived in order to set living and concrete examples for his followers and that he thought of himself as historical.

3.11. Conclusion

Archibald M. Hunter claims that:

The Christian faith stands or falls upon the sinless life, the sacrificial death, and the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ- and all other miracles are minor occurrences in comparison to that one. If the resurrection actually happened, then for God to open blind eyes or heal any illness or make the lame walk or even to open the Red Sea is obviously within the realm of possibility.¹⁷⁹

This passage contradicts others made by several scholars who, though, defend the historicity of Jesus but under the auspices of historical-critical method, present a different view of what historicity of Jesus should mean. Robert Funk¹⁸⁰ and the Jesus Seminar write to defend the historicity of Jesus but dismiss all the supernatural tendencies in the New Testament as second century Christian distortions.¹⁸¹ Again, J. D. Crossan¹⁸², J. B. Green¹⁸³, and K. Lake¹⁸⁴ maintain the same notion about the historical Jesus they portray in their books. The same can be

¹⁷⁹ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 82

¹⁸⁰ Funk, 15-16.

¹⁸¹ The Jesus Seminar, *The Once and Future Jesus* (Santa Rosa CA: Polebridge, 2000), 1, 175.

¹⁸² Crossan, *The historical Jesus, The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 392-394.

¹⁸³ Joel B. Green, "The Death of Jesus" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 147.

¹⁸⁴ Kirsopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (New York: Putnam's, 1907), 250-253.

said about E. P. Sanders.¹⁸⁵ However, supernaturalism is a viewpoint that must be considered by the adherents of the historical Jesus since the Jesus within the Gospels is the Jesus revealed.

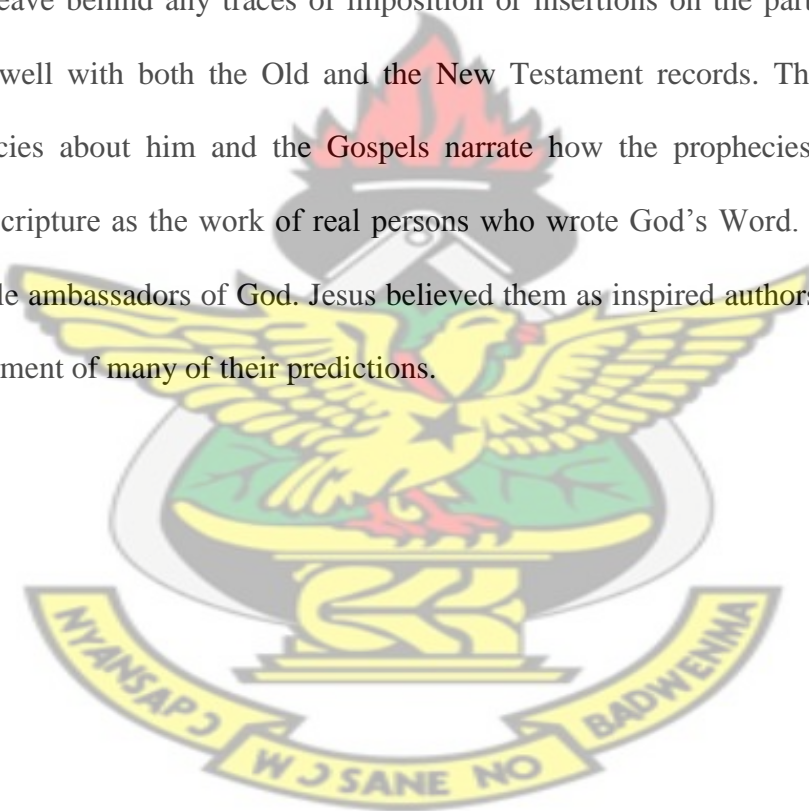
It should be noted that the more historically any scholar tries in reconstructing “the real Jesus”, the more apparent it appears that such a Jesus would become comparatively different from the Jesus portrayed in any of the Gospels. However, if the historical Jesus being sought for by these scholars is the person the Gospels, in their very diversity and commonality, portray to us, then, the historical Jesus must be understood to mean more than the Jesus of any one particular Gospel. Therefore, a significant understanding of the nature of the Gospels (harmonious diversity) must keep New Testament scholars constantly in check.

The fact that each of the four gospels is not a complete portrayal of Jesus should compel scholars to understand that no single gospel gives a sufficient picture of Jesus and that the standpoint of each gospel is just one perspective among the four. The historical Jesus is not present in one single text but in several texts. From several diversified perspectives the gospels reveal him. Therefore, the plurality of the Gospels requires the scholars to be acquainted with this fact. By presenting four different gospel accounts of Jesus that are not synchronized for us, these texts challenge every scholar to seek the Jesus to whom all the four accounts reliably

¹⁸⁵ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 10-319: the Jesus of Sanders plays no role that depicts the religious opposition mentioned in the Gospels between Jesus and the religious leaders and that he certainly could not have died by their charges. According to Sanders, Jesus maintained to a greater extent the principles of “common Judaism” more than his contemporary first-century Jews. This conclusion may, be due in part, a response to the anti-Semitic tendencies expressed by earlier scholars like Bultmann who sought to demythologize the Gospels of all its Jewish myths. Whiles the Jesus who is made to conform to modern persuasions is un-welcomed by historic Christians, scholars outside the church feel a Jesus who acted on social reforms with less interest in miracles and church dogma is more attractive. The argument is that if Jesus is reconstructed and reinterpreted to meet contemporary trends, it does not make him a-historical; rather, he becomes historically relevant.

portray. This hunt for the historical Jesus to whom all the four Gospels reliably reveal, requires scholars not to be content with just a literary character of Jesus in any of these gospels, but must look for the living Jesus outside his literary portrayals.

Finally, in arguing for the historicity or a-historicity of Jesus, it must be stated that the story of Jesus as presented in the Bible does not lend itself to a mythical creation of some sort. It is a life of real historical being with complex details. The reason is that his relationship with the Bible does not leave behind any traces of imposition or insertions on the part of the Christian church. He fits well with both the Old and the New Testament records. The Old Testament contains prophecies about him and the Gospels narrate how the prophecies unfolded. Jesus considered the Scripture as the work of real persons who wrote God's Word. He regarded the authors as reliable ambassadors of God. Jesus believed them as inspired authors of God and that he was the fulfillment of many of their predictions.



CHAPTER FOUR

CRITIQUE OF THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD IN THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS STUDY

4.1. Introduction

Whereas the previous chapter reviewed Jesus under the historical-critical method, this chapter deals with the analysis of the practical issues of the historical-critical method in relation to the attempt to reconstruct the Jesus of history. Christianity from its very beginnings, even within its first-century Palestinian context, faced several challenges concerning the nature and person of Jesus Christ, its founder. According to the Gospels, the main charge that led to his death on the cross was “who he says he is” against what the religious leaders knew he was. This controversy about “the nature and personality of Jesus” has never ended, even, with his death on the cross. It ranges on among his followers, even to the present. The Church Fathers battled with it and all the early ecclesiastical councils were jeered toward clarifying who Jesus is in the history of the Church.

The challenge, interest and inquiry about the figure and personality of Jesus Christ have emanated from both the members of the Christian church and the non-Christian critics. With the rise of biblical criticism, our modern world (as part of meeting the rudiments of scientific research) has tried to create an atmosphere that permits a separation of the historical Jesus (who is thought to have worked within the Galilean region) from the Christ of faith (who has been preached on the pulpit by the Christian church). This separation, then, renewed new studies in the person and figure of Jesus, known in biblical scholarship as the “Quest for the Historical

Jesus.”¹⁸⁶ This quest has taken on many forms and approaches. Whiles those who engage in this research try to appear as much scientific as possible; almost all of them are much influenced by their cultural and philosophical inclinations as well as the prevailing religio-philosophical context of the time.¹⁸⁷ In view of this, some understood Jesus as a myth, others saw him as “Oracular Leadership Prophet”¹⁸⁸; yet many considered him a revolutionary preacher but non-apocalyptic (especially, the Jesus Seminar).

As mentioned earlier, the trend of the research speaks much of the period and its accompanying global philosophical outlook. For instance, the Enlightenment had an anti-dogmatic motivation on all the studies made about the historical existence of Jesus. This was followed by Rudolf Bultmann’s desire to demythologize the Jesus of the Gospels. The period after Bultmann wanted to recover the core teachings or sayings of Jesus; whiles the modern and post-modern periods encompass different groups of people, aims, and methods.

Clearly, each of these phases was engrossed with the first-century Jesus of Nazareth; yet the motivations and presuppositions behind each phase were different from each other. Again, each phase relates to the culture of the day as well as the historical and sociological setting of the period. Another major influence is the advances made in archaeological discoveries (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi) and attempts to provide scholarly insights from the social sciences with respect to what constitutes miracles in first-century A.D. Palestine.

¹⁸⁶ Simon J. Gathercole, “The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Albert Schweitzer’s The Quest of the Historical Jesus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* (2000) 51: 261-83.

¹⁸⁷ John W. Bowman, “The Quest of the Historical Jesus,” *Interpretation* (1949) 111: 184-193; Simon J. Gathercole, “The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Albert Schweitzer’s The Quest of the Historical Jesus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* (2000) 51: 261-83.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 162-168.

In spite of these, it must be noted that the past years (from the 1980s) have witnessed new and radical challenges in the historical Jesus research; challenges that are typified by varied methods and baffling range of reconstructions of Jesus of Nazareth. Example of such works on the various modern phases of the historical Jesus research included Crossan (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1991; *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, 1999), Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism*, 1985), Telford ("Major Trends in Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus": In Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, 1994), Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1996), Meier ("The Present State of the 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain", 1999), Carleton Paget ("Quests for the Historical Jesus", 2001), and Evans ("Assessing Progress in the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus," 2006).

4.2. The Historical-critical method: A Critique

There is the need to question the spirit of the historical-critical method and the scholars assumed ability to rebuild the past behind the texts of Scripture. The ability of scholars with the help of the historical-critical approach to discover the historical context(s) in which the texts of the Bible were written has been a breakthrough in biblical studies. However, there has been a problem with the process used in meeting the goals of historical-critical method. This problem prevails because, in an attempt to discover the meaning of the text, the critic creates a new dogma out of the existing text and calls it "the correct method of understanding the meaning of the Scripture." The irony is that, while the critic seeks to defy the orthodox teachings of the Church; she or he turns out to present rather a more modified dogma out of the traditional

orthodoxy. This is portrayed as the better way of studying the Scripture. Yet, hardly will two or more critics arrive at a common position.

Historical-critical tools have established that a piece of literature may have an existence somewhat independent of its author; therefore, it is the task of the critic to search and provide the “original” intents of the texts. This certainly leads to varying results. Again, the method has established that the books of the Bible might have been composed from one or more sources. This notion is born out of our contemporary research methodology which clearly demands sources in every stage of the composition. Our contemporary method of research clearly forces the critic to make conclusions out of his or her cultural and philosophical orientations. This is certainly not a conclusion resulting from a dispassionate scientific enquiry but out of complete criticism.

Modern literary studies, in the spirit of historical-critical method, have provided another means of scrutinizing all texts. This is done in a manner that allow the expert to consciously view each text through a particular lens, whether ethnic or cultural, as a means of distinguishing how the readings must be heard, in spite of the intended meaning of the text. Critics believe this is another means of exposing the comfortable half-truths that are only parts of the wider picture, held by the author (in this case, the Christian church). It means that no matter the text, there are always some things which are really present in each text but may have been ignored or have not been previously considered. Due to this, preachers and theologians are accused of only teaching half-truths rather than the whole picture which lies in the bosom of the experts and the critical historians.

The import of this assertion is that churchmen must learn to perform their interpretive roles in dialogic (by questioning the text), rather than objectivist (by imagining from the text), terms. In this case, one will learn to appreciate the role of the historian and the critic in reconstructing new meanings out of the old texts. And it applies to the way Jesus must be studied and understood in our contemporary setting.

However, the issue still borders on the matter of how books are categorized; one of this categorization is the inspiration of the Bible. By nature, the Bible is both human and divine book. So, to what extent can the historian or the critic go in critiquing the real meaning of the divine traits associated with the Bible?

One weakness of the historical-critical method is that it deals mainly with the genre of the texts. The genre is based firmly on social and cultural factors as the sole factors in generating and producing all action, including linguistic action. “Genres are primarily defined as the socially ratified text-types in a community.”¹⁸⁹ This understanding rule out all other possible factors that became part in generating and producing the texts that makes up the Bible. Due to this, the many branches of the historical-critical method such as form, source, redaction, tradition criticisms, and others are used diachronically (analytically) rather than being used synchronically.¹⁹⁰ This means that the texts are fragmented in the course of the analysis by the scholar in order to understand the history and pre-history of the texts. It is clear that this preference for the

¹⁸⁹ Gunther Kress and Terry Threadgold, “Towards a Social Theory of Genre”, In: *Southern Review*, 21/3, (1988): 215-243.

¹⁹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today”: In R. J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 1-23. Cardinal Ratzinger proposes an inclusion in the method a synchronic analysis of texts as a means to reduce its limitation. This same synchronic analysis has been adopted by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 40.

fragmented text (the atomization of texts) is deeply rooted in the spirit and legacy of rationalism. As a result, historical critics agree that the more atomistic a text is the more scientific. The defective aspect of this atomization is that it undervalues the original canonical text.¹⁹¹ However, Cardinal Ratzinger opposes the recent tenet of the method which maintains that ideas that seem to be atomistic or simpler in the biblical text is more original and what appears to be complex is assumed to be a current improvement. He believes that “a simplistic transferal of science’s evolutionary model to spiritual history” is an adoption of modern worldview.¹⁹² This evolutionary model results when biblical texts are seen as individual ideas that are not interrelated. In other words, the methodological tools of the historical-critical method oftentimes suffer from blankly elevating the diachronic understanding over the synchronic understanding of the biblical text. That is why the inclusion of the synchronic analysis of biblical texts can be useful.

Another criticism of the historical-critical method is its blatant disregard of any book as possessing some special qualities, since its interest is in the genre of the texts. And so, if the historical-critical method is, primarily, unable to appreciate the fundamental nature of the Bible, as a book that was produced within the social-cultural context of the people of Israel under inspiration, then anyone who opposes the Bible can appropriately query its relevance in biblical studies. Though, such scholar may be regarded as unbelieving, it must be acknowledged that even the believing scholars can draw similar conclusions.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today”: In R. J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, 1-23.

¹⁹² Ibid, 10-19.

Maybe its role in biblical studies is preparatory. That is, it raises the historical, textual, grammatical and literary issues that can lead to correct theological reflections, if studied synchronically. Any other way may pose theological challenges. Theology may be sacrificed in an effort to disconnect the timeless truth of Scripture from its very pages and context.¹⁹³ Therefore, scholars must not study the Scriptures on purely human terms. One of the implications is that biblical truth cannot be applied universally across culture and time. However, timelessness of Scripture means that it can speak beyond the original context; even to the present age.

Yet, in so far as the historical-critical method is concerned, it places all research on the Bible at the level of historical enquiry. The emphasis is on the historical authors, the historical context, and how the texts were composed to the detriment of the Scriptures' divine authorship, timelessness and authority.¹⁹⁴ Its major goal is to establish the historical position of the biblical texts. None of the many facets of the method, as a tool, seeks to adequately deal with the theological issues embedded in the texts. Rather any departure from that which has been considered as acceptable by the method is categorized as 'Biblicism' or 'fundamentalism.'¹⁹⁵

Even the contributions of historical-critical method are sometimes contentious, given the angle one is looking at. It is an undeniable fact that some light has been shed on Scripture with

¹⁹³ Ernst Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology": in James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (translators), *Religion in History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 16.

¹⁹⁴ Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," 16.

¹⁹⁵ Errol Narain, "Fundamentalism, Biblicism, Creationism and Intelligent Design in the global context with reference to South Africa" In: *South African Science and Religion Forum Series* (2012-10), vol 15, 63-83. "Fundamentalism or Biblicism" is the attempt to apply the teachings of the Bible based on the fact that it is inerrant, self-sufficient, self-evident, internally consistent, and universally applicable.

new perspectives and clarity, however, never in the history of biblical studies has the humanity of Scriptures projected highly over and above its divinity. On one hand, students of Scripture have received a further knowledge about the historical context of the Bible with its religious, economic, political and ideological issues at every stage of the history of Israel. On the other hand, it has also succeeded in fragmenting the texts of Scripture by separating biblical texts into its genres and settings. In this sense, some of the texts within a particular book in the Bible can be back-dated while others on the same page are post-dated. This clearly depicts the texts of Scripture as having gone through centuries of editing and that the authors may not be the real writers of the books bearing their names.

Today, tools of historical-critical method are regarded as capable tools to respond to issues of Scripture like origins, creation, meaning, and the *Fall* of man. Through the method, critical scholars have proposed rational theories for dealing with these complex issues. In the end, the several profound truths of Scripture are regarded as unscientific. Theistic evolution has been a proposed solution that offers a scientific explanation for the creation account. The same can be said about the miracles found in the Bible. Jesus has been given either given a symbolic explanation to take of the many science-related issues that come with his historicity or a mythical explanation. The implication is that, Jesus may not be the Incarnated Son of God. If he never existed, then, he never died on the cross and never resurrected. Therefore, the promises of the kingdom become coping strategies for the Christian and that settles it. In essence, modern biblical scholarship is defining what is supposed to be accepted as truth with regards to the

Scriptures. Eta Linnemann, affirms that the “Critical (human) reason decides what is reality in the Bible, and what cannot be reality.”¹⁹⁶

4.3. The Present Stage of Historical-Critical Method

The most remarkable feature in this area of study is the “reconstruction” of a Jesus who is decisively “historical” in nature. This characteristic distinguishes the nature of current historical Jesus research from the earlier phases which were characterized by deep Christological and religious issues. Currently, the historical Jesus research is considered as part of scientific research which must be subjected to the same methodological procedures and constraints applicable to all scientific studies. As a result, research players and contributors are not drawn from exclusively Christian-Protestant denominations, but generally from all areas of the academia including Catholics, Jews, and non-religious groups (agnostics, atheists, and secularists). Due to this, Christians (even the conservatives) can no longer determine the direction or the outcome of any research done to prove or disprove the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. And since all the major players embrace the modern scientific methods of historical enquiry, the only acceptable norm and methodology permitted in this field of study is the historical-critical method.

Yet the results or the outcomes are always different. This is due in part to the area of study which is considered “historical” rather than “theological.” However, the definition of history in this regard is not fairly clear and simple. Another weighty feature is the “extent” of

¹⁹⁶ Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*, 6.

how the historical-critical method (in its various forms) must be employed in studying the texts of Scripture. Presently, the extent is somehow limitless.

Finally, another factor that influences the results or the outcomes is the obscure dichotomy that lies between what is considered historical and theological in the context of the historical Jesus research. The assumption that Jesus can be studied in a purely historical context is hardly workable assumption. The reason is that all the various forms of criticisms that constitute the historical-critical method do operate within the core areas of many disciplines; like archaeology, history, social science, anthropology, theology, and so on. As a result, the outcome must be well informed and synchronized.

4.4. The Historical Context of the Historical Jesus Studies

The context of the historical Jesus research has always been the historical milieu of the first-century A.D. Palestine. In this regard Jesus is considered a Jew.¹⁹⁷ However, the treatment of Jesus' Jewishness has come with several and different philosophical stances. The relevance of his background is downplayed by earlier scholarship; since the early quests hardly saw how Jesus could be able to transcend the limitations of the early first-century A.D. Palestine in becoming the figure depicted in the New Testament.

Another challenge to the historical context of Jesus research is the assumptions of form criticism. It postulates that the Gospels in its present form were derived from several stages of oral transmission and that its final edition was done by the early Church. This methodology

¹⁹⁷ Maurice Casey, "Who's Afraid of Jesus Christ? Some Comments on Attempts to Write a Life of Jesus": In James G. Crossley and Christian Karner (eds.), *Writing History, Constructing Reality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 129-146.

directs context towards embryonic Christianity rather than its first-century Jewish context.¹⁹⁸ In the instances where Jesus is considered a Jew, the criteria that attest to such fact sets him apart from his Jewish context.

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, present scholarship on the subject maintains that Jesus must be studied within his Jewish context in order to appreciate the structures and norms of the first-century Palestine, especially the Jewish World. In this instance too, the impact of the scrolls led to many different prepositions. On one hand the Second Temple Judaism was understood to be complex and legalistic with several rabbinic attitudes. If rightly understood, then, a Jesus who was at odds with the established institutions certainly may not be the true historical Jesus of the first-century Palestine.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, the Jesus found within the Second Temple Judaism is understood to have operated within a prescribed monolithic Judaism where much of the teachings were based on righteousness by works alone. This explains why he was always at odds with the religious institutions of his day.²⁰⁰

In all these enterprises, Jesus is clearly demonstrated as a Jew but the difficulty is where to locate him within the complex and diverse structures of the Second Temple Judaism. The branch of first-century Judaism which Jesus is thought of to belong has become one of the main points of departure. Was Jesus a Nazarene or Essene? Yet again, which office did he hold; a prophet, or a sectarian? Whiles such complexities are yet to be addressed, some scholars believe that the aforementioned instances are abstract and must be studied in the broader socio-political

¹⁹⁸ Eta Linnemann, "Historical-Critical and Evangelical Theology": in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 5/2 (Spring 1994), 19-36.

¹⁹⁹ Charlesworth, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010), 3-46.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

context of first-century Palestine. In this regard, Jesus is tested with the ‘criterion of plausibility’, in which the main thrust of the matter is whether the actions and deeds of Jesus make sense within the first-century Palestinian context.²⁰¹

Since the context has become a very important element in the historical Jesus research, present studies on the subject centers on reconstructing the history of the first-century Palestine. In this regard, most of the current researches made on the historical Jesus are on the first-century Galilee with respect to the extent of syncretism that existed within Judaism and Hellenism, the effect of Antipas’ urbanization policies, military operations and relations, patterns of settlement and architecture, the systems of taxation and political structures within the region of first-century Galilee and environs.²⁰²

There is also a tendency to rely on interdisciplinary approaches that depend on sociological, cultural, anthropology and the social sciences models in an effort to appreciate the first-century Palestinian peasant societies; acts that were considered honor and shame, the nature of purity rites, the kind of relationships that existed among the various social classes, and the diverse socio-political and religious movements.²⁰³ In the same spirit of unearthing the historical Jesus, several works on archaeology have emerged to play some crucial roles in understanding the multiple gaps that seem to exist in the gospels. Many excavations have been done in various locations and sites throughout Palestine; areas in Jerusalem, Caesarea Maritima, Sepphoris,

²⁰¹ Gerd Theissen, and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 201.

²⁰² Mark, A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47-55; Morten H. Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 124-126.

²⁰³ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 20-58; See the work of Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

Capernaum, and Bethsaida have been excavated.²⁰⁴ By insisting on the wider context, several scholars have done their studies on the social and religious lives of women together with gender issues in the first-century Palestine.²⁰⁵

Even though the primary sources for the historical Jesus research seem mainly to be the gospels, several scholars in this area of study tend to consult wide range of materials believed to be contemporaneous with the era in which Jesus lived. The works of Josephus have been studied in relation to the first-century Palestinian issues, especially, within its political milieu.²⁰⁶ Several Jewish sectarian literatures have been examined in connection to the historic or otherwise of the accounts found in the gospels.²⁰⁷ G. Vermes has done a particular study on the Dead Sea Scrolls,²⁰⁸ B. Chilton on the targums,²⁰⁹ and several others on the New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,²¹⁰ all in relation to reconciling the gospel accounts with the history of the first-century Palestine. However, it must be stated that not all the above mentioned scholars do their studies with the intentions of reconstructing the Jesus of Nazareth,²¹¹ however, these materials provide sound bases upon which one can situate the Jesus of the gospels within his Galilean context.

²⁰⁴ Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology*, 38-55.

²⁰⁵ Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 25-228.

²⁰⁶ Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* 2nd ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), xviii, 318.

²⁰⁷ Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: The Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* 2nd ed., (London: SPCK, 2002), 1, 425.

²⁰⁸ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1997), 1, 710.

²⁰⁹ Bruce Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Own Interpretation of Isaiah* (London: SPCK, 1984), 1, 206.

²¹⁰ Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. rev. ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991 & 1992), 1:55-60.

²¹¹ Krentz, 75.

Meanwhile, there has not been much breakthrough in reconstructing a Jesus who meets the standards of both scientific research and that of the Christian religion. It can be seen clearly from its very beginning that the historical enquiry into the existence of Christ was bound to elicit diverse results. Since the field of the research and the methodological tools do present a kind of irreconcilable merge from its beginning to the end. The Bible falls under theology which basically relies much of its interpretations and applications on faith while the method as part of being historical and scientific rely much of its process on reason and critical investigations. The first effect of this irreconcilable merge is the tendency to reduce the gospels to mere historical documents for the Jesus research. As mere historical sources, critics are bound with several issues that are limited to historical research. Such issues are bound to be regarded as myths and interpolations. The end result will certainly fail to meet any standard, be it scientific or theology.

What makes the task even more daunting is the fact that the acclaimed reliable data from historical enquiry for solving the historicity or a-historicity of Jesus are so inadequate that, in the end, the results must be considered as hypothetical. As a result, different hypotheses have generated several platforms for Jesus to play all kinds of characters. Based on the same historical-critical research, skeptical minded scholars, like Doherty, Price, Freke and Gandy, have declared him a-historical figure, a mythical creation of some pre-critical era and that nothing can be known about him. Even if he existed at all, he is believed to have possessed the same religious inclination as the Buddha or a pantheistic teacher and nothing more. The believing minded critics like Crossan, Funk, Meier and Sanders do consider him a sage, a prophet, and a teacher of righteousness whose death earned him messianic status by his

followers. Jesus has become a figure of all manner of creations due in part to the methodology in use.

Consequently, it must be understood that a correct acquaintance of historical-critical method is not a guarantee to the discovery of the real historical Jesus capable of furnishing Christianity with Christological truths. However, what it does is to make contributions that will primarily prepare the grounds for biblical studies. History can be a stimulus in this field of research since it can broaden an individual's scope of the context and period within which Jesus can be studied. Such enterprise of studying Jesus within the historical scope and context can be educative to modern minds who want to support religion with facts.

4.5. Ideologies and Sources: Diverse

Hardly can one underestimate the importance of sources in the historical Jesus research and the need to arrive at the real Jesus of history and of the Bible. That is, the scholar's use of a source in this research fundamentally determines what kind of Jesus emerges as historical. In general terms, one's ideological inclination do influence the kind of sources considered as vital in discovering the Jesus of history. The liberal scholar is more likely to use extra-material apart from the four gospels while the conservative is willing to use, at least three of, the gospels as the only sources for discovering the historical Jesus. Meier,²¹² Fredriksen,²¹³ and Charlesworth²¹⁴ consider all the gospels, including John, in reconstructing the historical Jesus. Therefore, it is by

²¹² Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol 1., The Roots of the Problem and the Person; A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Companions and Competitors*, 1:167-195.

²¹³ Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 266-267.

²¹⁴ Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology*, 11-63.

no means an accident that the Jesus of Meier is different in picture from the Jesus of Sanders,²¹⁵ Crossan,²¹⁶ or Horsley.²¹⁷ Once a major emphasis is laid on some sources, the Jesus of each scholar begins to look different from the other.

With regards to those who use the Q or the Gospel of Thomas as sources, the death of Jesus and its significance to the Church is given less prominence.²¹⁸ These sources hardly narrate the passion story or the crucifixion with any explicit importance, let alone making any relevance of his eschatological promises about the end of this world. In the end, the research findings from such sources provide us with a Jesus who is more like a Gnostic teacher. Such a portrait of Jesus is given since the gospels are believed to be interpolated by the early church. Therefore, the issue of whether the gospels' eschatological traditions really came from the historical Jesus or from the early church has become very controversial among modern Jesus scholars.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 116-132.

²¹⁶ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*; *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 304-310; *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened In the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, 29.

²¹⁷ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 20-58.

²¹⁸ Crossan, *A Revolutionary Biography*: Dominic Crossan's use of the *Gospel of Thomas*, both as an independence source for historical Jesus material as well as his initial dating of the document, has at least been criticized by scholars like Charles Quarles "The Use of the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Research on the Historical Jesus of John Dominic Crossan", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, July 1, 69 (2007): 517-536 and Nicholas Perrin "Thomas: The Fifth Gospel", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1, 49 (2006), 67-80.

²¹⁹ Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*: Moreover, on the issue of how ideologies and types of sources provide distinct portrayals of Jesus from one scholar to the other, Krentz provides notes on scholars who are inherently conservative like Ladd and Mildenburg, secular minded scholars like Nitschke and Frye, scholars who believe in the eschatological sayings of Jesus like Pannenberg and Moltmann, and those thought of as methodological like Stuhlmacher. Nevertheless, Krentz refuses to critique any of these scholars and again, offers no solution to the issue of how Jesus is portrayed by these scholars. He concludes his book in a manner that neither condemns nor condones the use of historical-critical method and its associations. The reader is left to make decisions based on the arguments expressed in the book, pp. 58-69.

4.6. Conclusion

The insufficiencies associated with the historical-critical method are diverse, open and unrestraint. It possesses a deep level of relativism with regards to the process, what is regarded as valid sources and the outcomes of the research. Contemporary biblical studies have shown that the Bible can be studied from several angles, and depending on the angle, be it, sociological, anthropological or historical, the Jesus of the researcher is bound to be different from what Christianity has maintained over the centuries. This aspect of the method makes it very difficult to be used by some Christian scholars; hence, its open and blatant rejection by some Christian denominations, these denominations are referred to as the fundamentalists by historical-critical scholars.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. The Historical-critical method in Perspective

It is believed that the attempt to undertake biblical studies using the same methods of hermeneutics as other experts studying other academic disciplines is a major breakthrough for biblical studies. However, this method is unable to deal sufficiently with issues of divine revelation, authority and inspiration of Scripture. Therefore, historical-critical method alone cannot be a sufficient tool in dealing with biblical studies in general. Some of the approaches discussed in this research work are source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism and tradition criticism in relation to discovering the Jesus of history. In spite of its usefulness in biblical studies, the historical-critical method needs to be improved upon in order to be able to handle issues relating to revelation and authority of Scripture.

As noted earlier, the growth of the method saw other developments such as the importance of grammar and historical context in biblical studies. In its current state, the method is not only interested in determining the truth about the Scriptural text, but the ability to reconstruct the intent and mindset of the original author. This has added valuable information about the background and the context of the Bible. The task of source criticism is to scrutinize the authorship and the literary integrity of the books in the Bible. With source criticism, the scholar can authenticate the authorship of most of the books of the Bible. Scholars can hunt for possible source materials that they believe were used by the authors of the Bible. These source materials are collected and scrutinized for modifications in style, genre and history. It has been argued that source criticism has been vital in the analysis of the books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For instance, it argues, to some extent, that Matthew and Luke revised

an earlier source document called Q with Mark in composing their gospels. However, the argument about the nature of this Q source is still ongoing. Charlesworth believes that “Q is only a modern imagined source, as numerous scholars are now contending.”²²⁰

In a similar fashion, form criticism maintains that the authors were not the writers of the books bearing their names but collectors and compilers of traditional oral works which had been handed down from one era to the other. It also looks into the classifications of the several forms of narratives used in the composition of the books. Form critics explain etiological stories which deal with origins of things, such as logically explaining the origin of the universe, death and natural causes. Other related issue that form critics ascertain is ethnological stories that explain how international relations came about, for instance, the relationship between the Israelites (descendants of Jacob) and the Edomites (descendants of Esau). It offers explanation to geological issues about some significant landmarks. For instance, the credibility of Lot’s story is at stake if critics are unable to locate the pillar of salt as narrated in Genesis. Form criticism, again, looks into ceremonial issues in the Bible. Why should a ceremony, like the Passover, that is frequently celebrated in the Bible be forgotten without a trace by modern people of the same lineage?

Redaction criticism is another approach that examines what has been, supposedly, left out of the Scriptures. Critical scholars assert that the gospels were compiled and edited with the passing of time and several important materials were left out by the authors. According to critics, for instance, the Gospel of Luke initially contained redactions suited for religious and political

²²⁰ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology*, 19.

purposes, but later focused on the eschatological issues found in the original Gospel of Mark. However, when the promised *Parousia* delayed, Luke's Gospel was edited and revised. Finally, when the early church realized the failed eschatology concerning the end of the world, they did further redactions to the gospels turning their attention to creating a just and loving community of believers. These redactions are attributed to the various early church councils from Nicaea in 325 to Carthage in 419, which also sealed the books that were to be canonized and that which were not.

Clearly, the debate about the usefulness or otherwise of the historical-critical method still rages on. It has made the stages in exegesis very credible by helping to determine what the texts initially meant to the audience that both penned and received them. Again, the texts did have a meaning at the time of the writing, and these documents undoubtedly never lost that meaning when they were carried across from their original setting and culture. While it is difficult to get through the layers of antiquity, the historical-critical method is proving helpful in establishing what was originally meant. The method is well established in biblical studies in a manner that makes it indispensable. Therefore, a call to modify and revise some of its excesses is in line.

5.2. The Search for the Historical Jesus

The search for the historical Jesus, in view of the historical-critical method, is a puzzling enterprise. The Jesus of the Bible is believed to have been born in Galilee between 7-4 B.C. According to the Gospels, he was born of modest home, became a rabbi who preached against injustices and social evils, spoke about the Kingdom of God and taught ethical doctrines which he illustrated with parables. Though much of the information about the period of his existence

are known, historical-critical scholars insist that there is scanty substantiation, in terms of history, of a person who could be a possible Jesus of that era. Due to the attributed lack of substantiation, some critics consider the personality of Jesus a mythical creation by the early Christian community. As a result, scholars like Earl Doherty²²¹ Freke and Gandy²²² and Robert Price²²³ have drawn a decided conclusion that the Jesus of the Bible is a myth.

However, some scholars known as the historical Jesus scholars, using the same historical-critical method, have argued otherwise. According to Meyers, Jesus actually existed as a messiah and a leader in a multi-national repentance drive.²²⁴ E. P. Sanders,²²⁵ also, maintains that Jesus was historical and eschatological. In making a case for the historical Jesus, Dominic Crossan²²⁶ argues for a Jesus who was partly magician, and partly a cynic-Greek philosopher. Again, the Jesus Seminar led by Robert Funk together with a group of about 150 scholars has voted for a Jesus who was “an itinerant Hellenistic Jewish sage and faith healer who preached a gospel of liberation from injustice in startling parables.”²²⁷ Whiles the social-scientific scholars like Horsley embrace a historical Jesus who alleviated the poor and stood against injustices.²²⁸

The emerging trend among scholars in the search for the historical Jesus is that each person within a particular period creates a distinct Jesus. Again by using the critical tools,

²²¹ Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, 201.

²²² Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, 183.

²²³ Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*, 16.

²²⁴ Eric M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 153.

²²⁵ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 223-225.

²²⁶ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*; *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 27-28; *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened In the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, 62-69.

²²⁷ Birger A. Pearson, “The Gospel According to the Jesus Seminar,” *Religion* 25 (October, 1995): 317-338; Craig L. Blomberg, “The Seventy-Four ‘Scholars’: Who Does the Jesus Seminar Really Speak For?” *Christian Research Journal* Fall (1994): 32-38.

²²⁸ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 319-321.

scholars tend to see no irrefutable evidence for a historical Jesus in the Gospels and the Bible in general. It can be said that the possibility for any historical scholar to convincingly produce a Jesus that agrees with the Gospel accounts with historical-critical method is skeptically minimal. The method must be looked into; a change of cause in this research may be the right thing to do. A method that fundamentally recognizes the Bible as a revealed Word in the language of human authors seems the key to unravel the mystery of the actual existence of Jesus. A faith-based approach is never irrational and unscientific; therefore, the method must embrace faith in its dealings with the Bible.

5.3. The Argument against Historical-critical method

In examining the historical-critical method, it can be stated that some of its philosophical underpinnings make it insufficient for biblical studies. The simple reason is that, there is an initial point of departure; the difficulty of reconciling rationalism with faith, naturalism with supernaturalism, and philosophy with theology. Again, to what extent can the researcher go in separating the inseparable union of the divine and human nature of Scripture? How can the divinity and humanity of Scripture be separated in a way that gives much concentration to the human aspects? The method must recognize the inseparable union of the divine and human elements of Scripture.

The research have reviewed some basic methodological challenges of the historical-critical method, some common features among scholars of modern Jesus research and some matters of considerable difference. In the examination of the method, it can be said that both the method and the area of research (the historical Jesus research) do not cut across continents and

cultures. Its outlook is deeply rooted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' European Enlightenment, it is too philosophical and reductive in analysis, and does not relate directly with the majority of the church members who are not trained in this field. Aside these, it is yet to intensely dialogue with scholars from the third-world or the theologians and scholars from the third-world are yet to contribute to the debate about the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Apart from its diversified approaches, no attempt has been made to have an agreed format and methodology on which to pursue the historical Jesus research. Why can't the players have agreed sources? For instance, if the sources are irreconcilably many, then the outcomes will take on the same form. This way, every work on the historical Jesus is open to refutation just as the Jesus Seminar has been criticized on the basis of cynic traditions in the first-century Galilee together with using applications of sociological models. The same can be said about Doherty, Price and other like-minded scholars who are using the media (the television and the Internet) in discrediting the Christian traditions, because such enterprise has yielded a very less sympathy.

One major limitation of the historical-critical method is subjectivism. It becomes dominant when scholars in an attempt to dig up the Jesus of Nazareth end up digging up their own creations and shadows. In an effort by some scholars to reconstruct a Jesus whom they believe lived historically, they end up producing a Jesus who may agree with or may not agree with their presuppositions. The matter of subjectivity in this field of research is becoming a proof of agenda-driven researches among some scholars like the Jesus Seminar. On this issue, the Pontifical Biblical Commission reviewed the history of the quest for the historical Jesus, particularly those done within the nineteenth century, with all its limitations and proposed some

improvements to the historical-critical method that made room for more fruitful historical research. The proposed improvements included; a) the recognition of the difference between objectivity in the natural sciences and human sciences, b) the recognition of the role of the historian's own subjectivity, and c) the recognition of the impossibility of neutrality and complete objectivity in the historical study of the life of Jesus.²²⁹

Another side of the argument is that the thoughts of postmodernism have laid questionable claims on the neutrality of historical-critical method in the historical Jesus research. Researches on the historical Jesus are embedded with several issues like culture, audience, background and ideological inclinations. Clearly, modern scholars consider it an advantage to detach their research from the ancient sources (the Gospels). They want to relate the Jesus of the Bible to the socio-cultural context of first-century Palestine. However, much caution must be taken in permitting contemporary ideologies to influence the known understanding of Jesus of Nazareth by the Christian tradition. This is because in such attempt the figure of Jesus will be an imposing one. And that has been the case all these years, since the historical Jesus has always been the creation of scholars based on their individual sources and hypotheses. This reconstructed Jesus is distinguished from the real Jesus of the Christian faith based on the facts from the Scriptures.

Though, the Jesus of historical-critical scholars may clearly share some common features with the Jesus of Christianity, he cannot be imposed on the Christian church. Historic Christianity has freely ascribed special attributes to the Jesus of the Bible that are deeply theological and Christological; and such attributes and values cannot be given to the

²²⁹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 5-7.

reconstructed Jesus by critical scholars. The Christian church, by these attributes, has gotten the standard upon which every other personality vying for the figure of Jesus is tested and judged. This test cannot be thrown away easily.

An emphasis must be made on the fact that the Jesus of the Gospels must be deeply appreciated than the reconstructed Jesus of critical scholars. This is because the historically-created Jesus comes with some agenda. For instance, a Jesus with an egalitarian and a social agenda cannot be embraced by all, particularly Jews who may understand such personality as a reformer of a bad religion (Judaism) and thereby establishing a good religion (Christianity). A similar case can be made against the Jesus Seminar who intends to reform Christianity by presenting a Jesus who conforms to a figure of social activist. This also contradicts the traditional dogmas of Christianity. Again, Liberation theologians may want to depict a Christ figure that had a strong socio-political agenda to liberate the oppressed, yet such figure of Jesus is incomplete theologically. The same can be said about the feminist who maintains that Christians must focus on the Jesus-movement rather than the personality of Jesus in order to appreciate the importance of the oppressed and women as an alternative to a Christian-movement dominated by men.

Though, one cannot rule out the fact that some improvements have been made through the historical-critical method, however, the desire by scholars to modernize Jesus to meet the needs of contemporary science and information technology era is a controversial venture. It seems future studies on the historical Jesus under the influence of historical-critical method is bound to be intellectually interesting and theologically challenging in the twenty-first-century and beyond. The reason is that, contrary to scholarly opinion, the twenty-first-century is yet to

discredit miracles as myths. Majority of people living in this scientific era do believe in miracles. Many are still engaged in prayer and spiritual exercises. A lot more daily recite the traditional creeds with hope and faith in the personality of Jesus. Yet, while some aspects of the historical-critical methods are being challenged, its centrality in biblical studies is becoming well established.

Meanwhile, the sources for studying Jesus will continue to be diverse and debated and hardly will scholars have an agreed-upon position in areas of common methodology and sources for the historical Jesus study. The area of much contention is the historical-critical method itself and how it can be fine-tuned to give attention to the supernatural and the divine. Issues of subjectivity and some degree of scholars' imagination seem to feature in most historical Jesus research. The future figure of the historical Jesus can be anything or may be let time define him in the near future.

5.4. Recommendations

From its very beginnings, this research work has emphasized the insufficiency of historical-critical method as a sole means of investigating biblical data. Therefore, it proposes a revised form of the method in biblical studies. It is being argued that historical-critical method must be revised to be able to reduce its default philosophical stance. In this way critical scholars can stand in a position of viewing the Bible holistically, thus, being able to recognize both the divine and the human aspects of the Bible. This modification presupposes that historical-critical method must make room for an approach that will help deal with the divine aspects of Scripture methodologically. That is, both the divine and the human aspects of the Bible must be

investigated without overemphasizing one to the detriment of the other. In this case, this research work proposes a new approach called *an unlocked historical-critical method* as a means to investigate those areas that are regarded as myth by historical-critical method.

A second recommendation is a call on critical scholars to consider other methods of interpretation that makes room for the supernatural aspects of the Bible. One of such methods is historical-biblical method.²³⁰

5.5. An Unlocked Historical-Critical Method: A New Critical Approach

After examining the historical-critical method, it leaves the individual in dilemma concerning the nature of the Bible and the figure of Jesus. Is the Bible a unique revelation from God or a mere ancient literature? At the heart of this dilemma among those who object to this method of Bible interpretation is the question of how can it be possible to use the historical-critical method without making the Scripture any other material?

The doctrine of special revelation gives a distinct meaning to the books in the Christian Bible. The Scripture contains revealed *Will* of God for His people. This revealed *Will* can be termed as sacred history and it is the meaning of this *Will* that God intended to reveal to human beings by communicating through human writers. It is deemed so because of the absolute fact it

²³⁰ The historical-biblical method is sometimes called the biblical-grammatical method, historical-grammatical approach or the grammatical-historical method. It attempts to interpret the Bible by determining the meaning intended by the original writer of the text through careful literary exegesis of the text. This is done through an understanding of the historical, social, and cultural context of both the writer and original audience of the text, as well as employing passages in Scripture that are more clear on the subject to interpret those that are less clear and never vice versa [Paul M. Elliott, *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism* (Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2005), pp. 240-243].

contains and its relation to faith.²³¹ This is different from secular history. Secular history deals with what happened in the past with adequate chronology. The tools of science and historical-critical method are adequate means of investigating secular history. However, sacred history records what was revealed and can be an interpretation of what happened or what is about to happen. Its primary purpose is to offer direction to a particular group of people and does not necessarily lend itself to the rigors of science. The reason is that the authors had their audience in mind; therefore, they were less particular about historical details and chronology.

Against the background that the Bible contains sacred history, it must be understood that the authors recorded what was revealed but not what was tested or investigated. Divine revelation, in the context of Christianity, maintains that the sovereign God in all His fullness, objectively and directly manifests himself by intelligible words, commands and acts.²³² This stresses the classical Christian understanding of divine revelation as that which has been given in the form of verbal truths inerrantly transmitted through the inspired writings known to us as the Bible.²³³ Therefore, it is important for all the hermeneutical methods to recognize this fact in biblical scholarship.

However, based on its presuppositions, the historical-critical method maintains that the biblical world seems mythical or fictional as compared to the modern world. It argues that the world of the Bible seems superstitious than the modern world. Again, the “historical method

²³¹ David E. Mercer, *Kierkegaard's Livingroom: Faith and History in The Philosophical Fragments* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 156.

²³² Carl F. Henry, “The Priority of Divine Revelation: A Review Article” in *JETS* 27/1 (March 1984): 77-92.

²³³ Ibid.

includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a *closed continuum* of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect.”²³⁴

Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd in their book the *Jesus Legend*, reviews some of the arguments from Van Harvey and others on the nature of the world in which the Gospels were written. The basic argument is that their world was naïve and mythological and that they never understood the laws of nature; therefore, they could only attribute unusual things to supernatural beings of all kinds. However, the authors of the *Jesus Legend* believe that such arguments are prejudiced by western-oriented world-views.²³⁵

Eddy and Boyd argue against the notion that a closed continuum universe presupposes that the universe is governed by universal laws which regulate everything in the world and with these laws the universe keeps a fixed and immutable order and that nothing can contravene these natural laws. And since it is impractical to defy these natural laws, the logical conclusion is that miracles are impossible in the natural world. What it means is that natural laws explain logically caused-regularities while miracles portray illogically caused-singularity.²³⁶ If a natural law is understood as the normal, methodical and universal way that the world functions, then it means that a miracle is a strange, unsystematic, and infinite way by which God intervenes in the natural world. By this logic, then, miracles do upset the natural order.²³⁷

²³⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma And Myth: A Theological Debate*, 291.

²³⁵ Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd, *Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 27-39.

²³⁶ Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, 27-39.

²³⁷ Hugh Rice, *God and Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 92: “Faith and Merit” in *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008):141-153.

However, it has been observed that “humans actually experience the regularity of the world; we do not experience a closed continuum.”²³⁸ Eddy and Boyd contend that this kind of regularity that occurs in this world includes both the natural and the supernatural.²³⁹ Therefore, any denial of the supernatural must be seen as a denial of some aspects of the world. In other words, if a miracle occurs, it is not a contradiction or violation of the ordinary laws of cause and effect, but rather a new effect produced by the introduction of a supernatural cause.

It is, therefore, inaccurate to define a miracle as something that breaks the laws of nature. It doesn't, if God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all normal laws, and nine months later a child is born. The moment it enters her realm it will obey all the laws.²⁴⁰

Hence, it can be argued that the universe does not operate within a closed continuum, a system that prevents supernatural interventions. The supernatural must not be understood as a negation of nature, simply because those things that are considered contradictions are undefined and pointless.

In order to complement the method's inability to scientifically explain the supernatural aspects of the Bible, this research work proposes *an unlocked historical-critical method* as a modified form of the historical-critical method. This modified form of the method, in this research work, is taken to mean an attempt to embrace those aspects of Scripture which are yet to be repudiated or affirmed by scientific investigation due to humankind's inability to test those aspects as true or false.

²³⁸ Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, 49.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Clive S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 59.

Therefore, it is another way for scholars to give meaning to those aspects of the Bible that have been classified as myths because they lack scientific explanations. Those aspects that are considered as myths are, in reality, the means the biblical authors communicated the word of God to the people of Israel. Oswalt distinguishes ancient myths from the biblical narrations. He rejects the notion that the authors followed the existing ancient stories in writing the Bible. His argument is that the Bible is fundamentally distinct from the religious texts of the ancient Near East and the rest of the world. Oswalt maintains that “the similarities do not indicate unity with the thought world around Israel but are the results of cultural adaptation, using readily available forms and terms to say something new.”²⁴¹ This argument is a good cause to propose an open form historical-critical method that would not regard the aspects of the Bible deemed myths or fictions as “too true stories to be believed” but as means by which biblical truth were expressed.

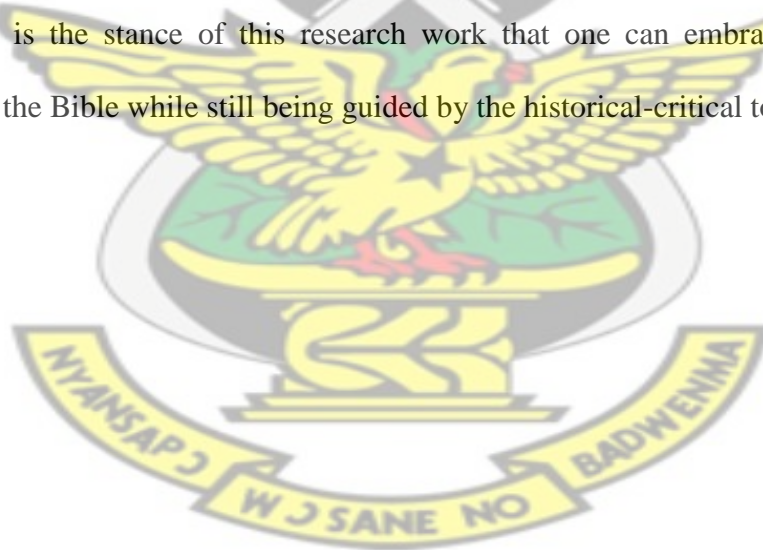
5.6. Jesus and the Unlocked Historical-Critical Method

Against the background that the aspects of scripture deemed as myths or fictions are understood differently, then, it must be recommended that:

1. Although there can be diverse historical sources and hypotheses, this should not make the results of the modified historical-critical method on the historicity of Jesus an arbitrary or purely subjective endeavor.
2. The assumption is that, under the unlocked historical-critical method, there must never be an apparently irreconcilable gap between what has emerged as the “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of faith.”

²⁴¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique or just different?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 85.

3. A modified form of historical-critical method like the one mentioned above, proposes that any argument in favor of a specific reconstruction of Jesus that may be regarded as the “real historical Jesus,” that may be used to undermine the Christ of faith is one-dimensional and naive. This is because, Christianity has known only one Jesus who is regarded as human and divine. That is why almost all the reconstructed Jesus by scholars, whose works have been reviewed, found himself at odds with the Jesus Christ preached by the Christian church.
4. A modified form of the method must curb the issue of relativism and subjectivism among critical scholars. Therefore, scholars must not use critical tools to promote countless and inconsistent agendas. Currently, critical tools are being used to meet the individual goals and objectives of scholars about Jesus; hence, he is understood differently.
5. Finally, it is the stance of this research work that one can embrace the supernatural aspects of the Bible while still being guided by the historical-critical tools.



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