

## Do We Need a Fresh Quest for the Historical Jesus?

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### Abstract

Jesus Christ has significantly influenced religion through his teachings. Historical Jesus research has been conducted through four periods: Old Quest, Intermittent Period, New Period, and Third Period. The Third Quest, a historical Jesus study, integrates multiple disciplines to illuminate Jesus' context, addressing issues like overemphasis on irrelevant information and undervaluing relevant data. It has expanded historical Jesus studies with a more nuanced understanding of Jesus' life and teachings. Feminism plays a very important role in Third Quest. By studying the roles played by women in historical Jesus, we can explore Jesus' stance on women's liberation; This cannot be ignored.

**Keywords:** historical Jesus, feminism, Bible

No other individual in the history of humanity has probably had a more significant effect on religion than Jesus Christ. Because of his status as the central character in the Christian faith, his teachings and how he lived his life considerably impacted the progression of human history. Consequently, Jesus is sometimes referred to as "the man who changed the world." However, the particulars of his existence have never been resolved, which is typical of the pattern that has held throughout history. Moreover, due to the fact that Jesus was both God and man, the historical veracity of a variety of distinct texts has been called into question by many experts. As a direct consequence, the historical veracity of Jesus has thus been put into doubt. In this article, I will first discuss an important section of historical Jesus research and then introduce the authors who have made outstanding contributions to that section. Then, I'll analyse the obstacles they faced and how to process information to reconstruct the historical Jesus. Furthermore, I will argue that the pursuit of the image of Jesus in history impacts nonreligious disciplines, such as feminism, which has been redefined in the Third Quest.

The viewpoints and investigations of the Bible could be roughly grouped into these four time periods: the Old Quest, the Intermittent Period, the New Period, and the Third Period. For the old quest period, a few academics need to be noted because of their notable contributions to the study of the ancient Request.

Learning about Jesus' life was believed to cause individuals to abandon the faith they had been taught in churches (W Barnes Tatum, 1999). During the Age of Enlightenment, dogma and revelation were no longer regarded as reliable information sources. Instead, historical sources and objectivity were emphasized through the lens of critical history to discover the truth. At the time, the historical inquiry was considered the only method for scholars to discover the truth about Jesus. They believed it would be useful for eradicating the erroneous interpretations his adherents had developed after his passing.

Due to the evident success of this research strategy in other fields, they decided to implement it in their study of the Bible. When this historical method is applied to the Gospels and their protagonist, a strikingly different picture emerges than is typically presented. At issue was the widespread belief that the historical Jesus and the religious Christ were not identical. The religious Christ was fashioned from the historical Jesus by credulous individuals. The church's theology would presumably need to be revised in light of this new historical revelation — its recovery of the historical Jesus in The Old Quest (Schweitzer, 2015). The Christianity and the church had

passed down through the centuries was founded on a misunderstanding of history. This new information requires an adjustment in perspective.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus inspired this investigation into the past. He never discussed his Christian beliefs during his lifetime. However, following his death, his personal beliefs were revealed. "On the Aim of Jesus and His Disciples" is the most important section because it was the first paper that ignited an interest in discovering the true Jesus. According to Reimarus' (1970) theory, Jesus' disciples have significantly exaggerated his characteristics.

Wright's analysis of Reimarus is quite effective. Jesus was a politically active and fervent Jew who failed as a reformer. On the cross, he had no more hope that his deity would save him than he did at that moment. The adherents resumed their previous Messiah worship, proclaiming his "resurrection" and awaiting God's end-of-the-world intervention. As Reimarus would have advised, they founded the early Catholic church rather than languish in their affliction based on (Wright, 2012)

Jesus and his adherents were viewed as dishonest artists who propagated false fiction about him at the time. Reimarus believed that the revelation of a historical Jesus incompatible with the Christ of faith destroyed Christianity as he knew it. Once the Quest for the true Jesus had begun, it was pursued with tremendous vigor. David Friedrich Strauss was one of the nineteenth century's most renowned scholars. *The Life of Jesus: A Critical Analysis* is the magnum opus of Strauss. In it, he argued against the existence of a higher power and referred to the Christian view of Christ's life as a "myth." Strauss acknowledged the broad contours of Jesus' life, including his baptism by John the Baptist, his teaching and the formation of his disciples, and his execution by the hostile Pharisees. However, the early church added to these facts and transformed the historical Jesus in two ways (David Friedrich Strauss, 2010). First, the church validated Jesus as the Messiah by recognizing him as the individual whose life epitomized the Old Testament's promises and teachings. The church propagated falsehoods and legends about Jesus to elevate his status as the Messiah. The sincere but erroneous devotion of the church transformed Jesus from a historical figure into the heavenly Messiah. According to Strauss (David Friedrich Strauss, 2010), this makes it extremely challenging to unearth the actual life story of the historical Jesus.

During the Old Quest, these scholars made significant contributions to studying Jesus' life and times. This opened the door to new research and upended long-held beliefs about Jesus and the Gospels. Moreover, their emphasis on Jesus' humanity and historical context paved the way for future scholars to delve deeper and generate new hypotheses about the actual Jesus.

The Intermittent Period comes after the old quest. Rudolf Bultmann was the person who most exemplified the negative historical view that prevailed throughout that time. As a consequence of his education, he had the intellectual capacity to understand the concept. The critiques he offers in "The History of the Synoptic Tradition" are important contributions to the canon of the study. During this period, Bultmann was instrumental in helping to move the historical focus away from the life of Jesus and toward that of the early church. The information included within the Gospels provides greater insight into the culture of the early church than it does into the life of Jesus himself. The teachings of Christ were not those of the historical Jesus but rather those of the Christ of faith, and the statements that are credited to Jesus were really given by Christian preachers in his name. In other words, the teachings of Christ were not those of the historical Jesus but rather those of the Christ of faith. According to Bultmann and Marsh (1994), the New Testament literature does not provide the required knowledge to reconstruct the life of Jesus, which means that his existence cannot be represented.

Despite this historical obstacle, Bultmann stated that the church's teachings did not require modification. The church's teaching could not be altered by historical scrutiny because it was founded in response to Jesus rather than based on historical truth. Throughout the Intersitial Period, authors such as Bultmann prioritized theological and existential interpretations of the New Testament over studies of Jesus' historical context, as Burer (2009) notes. This effort laid the groundwork for later periods of research, such as the New Quest and the Third Quest, which would refocus attention on the historical Jesus and emphasize the need to place him within the context of first-century Judaism.

Then it moves to the New Quest. While Bultmann's future investigation into the historical Jesus helped temper his skepticism, it did nothing to alter his general contempt for the historical record of the New Testament. In this revised edition, many of the claims made in the original Old Quest have been retained. Ernst Kasemann's "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" discourse marked the commencement of the New Quest. Significant distinctions exist between Bultmann and The New Quest (Burer, 2009). Kasemann argued that Jesus required a historical foundation and opposed Bultmann's separation of religion and history. The New Quest satisfactorily answers this query. However, the New Quest shared many similarities with its predecessors. New Quest adherents like Bultmann emphasized Jesus' teachings as the primary source while deemphasizing Jesus' personal experiences.

Contrary to Wright's assertions, The New Quest extensively uses critical methodologies such as source and form

analysis, which he asserts have hampered attempts at accurate historical reconstruction (Wright, 2012). The New Quest avoids apocalyptic scenarios. The majority of it is based on the teachings of the early church, which is of no use for fact-checking (Wrede, 2022).

The New Quest movement's most prominent outward expression is the Jesus Seminar, which was founded in 1974. Robert Funk is the leader of the Jesus Seminar, which has committed to carrying out an in-depth, academic investigation of the material contained in the New Testament in order to discover the truth about who Jesus was and free the Christian church from its erroneous interpretation (Funk and Hoover, 1993). The Jesus Seminar has been the subject of research by many academics, and as a result, two primary concerns have surfaced. In the first place, the Jesus Seminar is on board with Bultmann's skepticism and even shares it. It is not hard to discover claims in the literature of the Seminar that call into question the historicity of the New Testament. They don't believe many sayings and actions are exactly what Jesus said or did. Thus, they only use a limited quantity of evidence to rebuild Jesus' life. This skepticism is mirrored in the fact that they only use a small amount of evidence to recreate Jesus' life. Second, it's probable that the Seminar intended to bolster its own preconceived notions about who Jesus was in his historical context. The writers of *The Five Gospels* give a series of criteria they seem to accept at face value as absolute truths and by which they would conduct their inquiry (Burer, 2009). These criteria are presented as how the authors would conduct their study. On the other hand, the fact that many of these suggestions have not been addressed by more recent research reflects the prejudices present during the Seminar.

The Third Quest is the quest now and it is distinct from its predecessors, not in chronology but in concept and method. Despite this diversity, certain patterns do emerge. Scholars in The Third Quest take history seriously, relocating Jesus to his original Hebrew eschatological context, for instance. This investigation denies the historical skepticism of the New Quest in favor of Schweitzer's central theme for Jesus' life, revising it to be more consistent with the Judaism of Jesus' day (Wright, 2012). Alongside conventional historical studies centered on eschatology, a new field of study, early Christology, has emerged. Examining the development of Jesus Christ's teachings within the New Testament canon, early Christology expands beyond the study of Jesus Christ. A Jesus who lived in the past. Through a detailed reading of New Testament texts, this study attempts to trace the origins of the Christian concept of the Christ of faith to Jesus' life and teachings (Hengel, 2004).

In the Third Quest, there are two competing systems of thought, both of which provide historically accurate theology. In The Old Quest, Reimarus prompted a thorough examination of Jesus's life story. Scholars such as Strauss began questioning the traditional interpretation of Jesus and the Gospels, paving the way for new research. Under Bultmann's direction, the emphasis shifted from the historical Jesus to the theological and existential implications of the New Testament during the Intermittent Period. This detour from researching the historical Jesus advanced the topic by drawing attention to the Gospels' concealed meaning. Scholars of the New Quest period, such as Kasemann and the Jesus Seminar, tried identifying Jesus' authentic teachings and situating him within his original Jewish milieu. The ongoing Third Quest has considerably widened the field of historical Jesus studies by employing interdisciplinary approaches and delving deeply into Jesus' social milieu. Scholars like Wright have contributed significantly to our comprehension of the historical Jesus in recent decades.

Both The Old Quest and The New Quest are rooted in German Protestantism. Without diminishing the contributions of earlier historians, we must acknowledge that the religious concerns of the Protestant German scholastic community in the late 19th and early to middle 20th centuries naturally influenced and constrained these two endeavors. Due to the participation of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews worldwide, this third expedition had a global and ecumenical reach. Many of the primary and secondary objectives were actually clandestine religious missions. Highly recommended is having a Christology or theology that is informed by history. Christologies that seek to benefit from historical studies of Jesus should be distinguished from solely empirical, historical pursuits for Jesus that disregard what is understood through religion (Meier, 1999).

The richer and more nuanced portrait of Judaism during Jesus' time arises from the third quest. It could be argued that the persistently dishonest portrayals of Jesus by first-century Judaism have shaped or distorted the majority of the first and second quests' conceptions of Jesus. The historical study of Jesus necessitates a profound plunge into the recesses of first-century Jewish society (Meier, 1999).

Therefore, the third quest attempts, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to remedy the inaccuracies of the previous two missions concerning Judaism. In modern academics, a clear and uncontested image of Judaism cannot be presumed simply by countering distortions of Judaism in the first two objectives. Despite their disagreements on other matters, the majority of Palestinian Jews in the first century concurred on the significance of Yahweh, the true God who had chosen Israel as his people, and the Jerusalem temple. Consequently, Jesus belonged to a "mainstream" Judaism, from which he distanced himself (Sanders, 1992). Attempts to reconstitute Palestinian Judaism at the turn of the century are pertinent to comprehending this apparent contradiction in Jesus' Jewishness. The third pursuit is commendable because it sincerely attempts to

depict first-century Judaism in all of its vibrant richness and to place Jesus the Jew within that image.

Lonergan proposed three levels of historical analysis: the basic, the specific, and the general. From a study of historical context, the basic can deduce the timing, location, and magnitude of an effect. Therefore, it explains and describes as thoroughly as possible the things on which people worldwide concur. Specific histories document literary and theological shifts, societal and political developments, and doctrinal shifts in disciplines such as history and theology. It is conceivable that the concept of a complete past exists only in principle. The general histories would add dimension to the conventional narrative. From this vantage point, a panorama, or at least a close-up one, is possible. This is how the historian would interpret and evaluate the seismic shifts in the society's cultural, political, and ideological landscapes (Lonigan, 2017).

In the context of biblical history, "data" refers primarily to the information provided by the biblical historian acting as an exegete, with the interpretation of archaeological digs, including inscriptions, architecture, and comparative historical data, serving as supplementary resources. But, again, these figures do not indicate actual occurrences (Bernier & Keith, 2016).

Numerous substantial issues now beset the study of the historical Jesus. These concerns relate to the central question of what these data represent. The first is an inclination to overemphasize irrelevant information and downplay the significance of relevant information. Regarding concerns about Jesus' actions, anthropological and ethnographic research on 20th-century societies is even less likely to yield useful information than archaeological research on Roman Galilee (Charlesworth, 2014). In recent decades, the irrelevant categories have received far more attention than they merited, while the useful ones have been persistently and unjustifiably neglected for decades. Current research on the historical Jesus has resolved the third Request, integrating findings from multiple disciplines to shed light on Jesus's historical context. Schüssler Fiorenza is widely recognized as an industry leader. She made an unquestionable contribution to the field by examining in depth a number of disparate topics, such as women's rights studies and the historical Jesus.

Schüssler Fiorenza's body of work encompasses both the New Quest and Third Quest periods; therefore, it is essential to evaluate where she stands within the quests based on her responses to the defining concepts of each period. It is unclear where Schüssler Fiorenza fits within the New Quest movement, which is known for its multi-criteria form criticism and its separation of Jesus and Judaism, the latter of which appears to have been intended to produce a Jesus who is strangely detached from both his Jewish milieu and the church that followed him. Regarding anti-Judaism in biblical studies, Fiorenza draws a clear line (Walters, 2020).

Unlike the Old and New Quest, the Third Quest does not endeavor to reconstruct the historical Jesus in opposition to first-century Judaism. Instead, it portrays him as profoundly ingrained in the culture of his time. Nevertheless, Schüssler Fiorenza (2015) argues that the Third Quest is not prepared for religious discourse.

Experts in biblical women's studies contend, citing Fiorenza's "Jesus and Judaism" (Fiorenza, 2001), that it is unlikely that Jesus and his adherents repudiated the prevalent patriarchal institutions of his day. Given the patriarchy of his time, the backdrop of The Third Quest suggests that this is based on the premise that Jesus was a devout Jew. According to Fiorenza, the prevalent practice of emphasizing how Jesus is distinct from other religious leaders and how his ethical movement is fundamentally unique contributes to an anti-Jewish argument. This is due to the fact that Jesus was willing to perish in order to combat Judaism, which is his enemy.

Fiorenza (1984) wants academicians to recognize that Jewish women and their vision comprise the feminist foundation narrative of Christianity. Feminist interpretations of the New Testament must avoid making anti-Semitic alterations to the text. Academics reject Judaism when they disregard Jesus' emancipatory stance toward women in preference for a distorted depiction of ancient Israel's legalistic culture.

The Third Quest's optimism is another of Fiorenza's main gripes. To avoid a positivistic reading of the Bible or history, she advocated venturing into a rhetorical realm of interpretation (Walters, 2020).

Fiorenza challenges the misleading view that social science data is objective. By suggesting that the study of how memory works as a model for reconstruction, she undermines the search for proof. She suggests studying the politics of interpretation, meaning-making, and remembering as a means to this end (Fiorenza, 2001).

As proposed by Fiorenza (2001), the emphasis of the Third Quest should be shifted from Jesus as an extraordinary person to encouraging intellectual contact with memory in the discipleship. This would signify a shift from a "supernatural" theoretical framework to a "memory" framework. Using the context in which Jesus' words would have been heard, she contends for the equality of all individuals. According to Fiorenza (2002), this alteration disproves the notion that women had no influence on the teachings and actions of Jesus. Fiorenza's memory framework focuses on practises, systematic structures, and women in order to better comprehend what the Jesus movement meant for those it directly affected and for those it continues to inspire.

Fiorenza aims to learn more about the theoretical and linguistic lenses used to interpret the Bible and engage in

feminist Christological conversations through her research (Fiorenza, 2015). If researchers of the historical Jesus are permitted to participate in an emancipatory politics of interpretation, they will stop supporting scientific discourses of dominance. To better comprehend the “meaning-making” at the core of historical Jesus literature, Fiorenza (2001) suggests that historians examine the Jesus movement through the lens of contemporary social movements. Reconstructing a biblical passage requires consideration of both the author’s original intent and the text’s contemporary theological significance.

Similarly to Fiorenza’s views on the importance of literature, Birch (2015) argues that the Bible’s content was shaped by the needs of the Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman communal contexts in which it was written. Fiorenza’s works are currently in focus, demonstrating the continued relevance of the historical Jesus studies to religion and society. Fiorenza harshly criticizes her peers and brings up the social settings of historical Jesus studies.

This is a perfect example of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work to deconstruct the narratives supported by those who claim to have discovered the “truth,” as she demonstrates how the environment of each study influences the results. Academics need a hermeneutic of skepticism to recognize that biblical texts are androcentric constructs of biblical history, given that narratives can be deconstructed using a politics of interpretation approach. This is a crucial aspect of her research, as the study of Jesus’ historical context has implications for how Jewish and Christian women are viewed and treated. Academics would be doing women a favor if they acknowledged their role in the composition of the New Testament (Walters, 2020).

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that since the doctrinal paradigm regards the Bible as God’s direct revelation, it restricts the scope of potential interpretation and reconstruction (Fiorenza 2002). Fiorenza is a member of the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus, despite the fact that her work diverges significantly from that of the other members. She is capable of guiding either a Third Quest Critical Stream or a Fourth Quest Stream (Walters, 2020).

In conclusion, the study of the historical Jesus has been a centuries-long, intricate endeavor. Using textual analysis, archaeological evidence, and cultural context, scholars have pieced together a more accurate portrait of the man behind the fiction in an effort to discover the truth about Jesus’s life and teachings. It remains a dynamic and ongoing field of inquiry, with the potential to cast new light on one of the most influential figures in human history, as new evidence and approaches continue to arise. In the end, however, the search for the historical Jesus is a profoundly personal and subjective endeavor, shaped by our own beliefs, values, and cultural context and influenced by the intricate interplay between faith and reason, history and myth.

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