

Jesus - a *Kerygma* to live by

A postmodern understanding of myth, resurrection and canon

by

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Chapter One

It wouldn't be easy, I have to say

1.1 Prelude

Sometimes there are more questions in my mind than answers. Questions about the Bible and the church, and questions about the church's interpretation of the Bible and their confessions. The issue that triggered me the most was the issue about the two worlds in which the church to which I belong lives. When the church as institute talks politics and economics, those in a position of leadership try to do it in a modern to postmodern register on a relatively high scientific level. However, when the majority of the church members interpret the Bible, they choose to be mythical. To me, these two worlds are irreconcilable.

I cannot live from Monday to Saturday in a postmodern world and on Sundays state that I still believe in the historicity of a virgin conception, a bodily resurrection from death, and a Bible as if it *is* the word of God¹. Yet, I believe in the resurrection, but in the resurrection as a *kerygmatic*² event. I do not read every page or saying and deed in the Bible literally. I consider the books of the Bible as antique documents from a world that has gone by. But I still take the Bible seriously (cf Borg 2002:xi) because I have met God in the *kerygma*³ that is to be found in the Bible.

¹ It contains the word of God, as I will explain later, but to me the Bible is not the only place where one can find the/a word from/of God.

² An event that serves in the proclamation as a metaphor. It is not a positivistic fact of history but a mythological fact in the proclamation.

³ Kerygma is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Christ. As a kerygmatic event, the resurrection of Jesus is not a positivistic fact of history but a "mythological fact" proclaimed by his followers who experienced his presence in an existential way after his death. One can therefore say a "kerygmatic event" serves the proclamation of the church in a similar way as a "root metaphor" that functions as a vehicle in communication, to express authentic existence.

Although I believe in God, I have never had a “personal relationship”⁴ with Jesus of Nazareth and I have never *invited*⁵ him into my heart, because I never heard him *knocking*. It just never made any sense to me. I do not understand the concept of a conversion to a relationship with a personal savior that counts as a prerequisite for your life of trust in, and dependency upon God. Since my high school days, where I took Latin and Roman culture and history as a subject, I knew that the miraculous conception, the deifying of a hero savior after his death, and the ascension of a person who died for a good cause, were part of a mythological paradigm. For many years, I was just too afraid to ask critical questions.

I do not evaluate myths negative. I evaluate a positivistic⁶ interpretation of myths negative, especially when modern people cling to a mythical worldview⁷ of biblistic fundamentalism. People’s anomalous existence of adhering to pre-modernism because it harmonizes with a fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible I cannot endorse because the same people enhance a modern to postmodern worldview for the rest of their lives.

I take it for granted that one can speak of the transcendent only in a mythical way. Yet it is helpful to distinguish between myth as a vehicle for communication about the otherworldly, and myth as referring to a mythological worldview. One does not necessarily need a mythological worldview to use, understand, and to appreciate myths. One can appreciate the value of myths even in a postmodern world.

I believe in God, but I do not think that one can regard the Bible as the only word of God. Yes, one can find the word of God in the Bible as well. Not every word in the Bible is a word of or from God. Sometimes the word of God manifests as a meta-narrative beyond the biblical narrative that meets the eye. I decanonize therefore the Bible when I reflect on it for my own existential well-being. I recognize a canon behind or beyond the biblical

⁴ “Do you know the lord Jesus Christ, and do you live in a personal relationship with him?” This is the first question that devoted evangelists ask a potential new convert.

⁵ That is what you have to do, according to their interpretation of Rev 3:21, to be saved.

⁶ When myths are interpreted as objective historical data and facts.

⁷ Heaven above, earth, and underworld.

canon. However, this canon is not only behind the biblical canon alone. It is behind nature, literature, music, conversations, and interaction with other people as well.

I call myself a Christian and I am a theologian who has a serious interest in the Bible⁸. I live in a relationship with God within the Christian tradition, even as I affirm the validity of all the enduring religious traditions (cf Borg 2002:x).

This study reflects my own subjectivity. It will focus on the three issues mentioned above that triggered me, namely myths, the resurrection of Jesus from death, and the canon. As I investigate these themes, I hope to find a new understanding of my existence. An existence, that arises out of the life and death of Jesus as *kerygma*. The *kerygma*, as Bultmann⁹ said, that could lead to a new self-understanding and a total transformation. Maybe that is what I need most!

1.2 Autobiography as epistemology¹⁰

For long scholarly writing such as a doctorate, was defined by the absence of the “I” or any reference to the personal situation of its writer. This study is different. I am not an objective, indifferent and impersonal researcher. I am myself in flesh and blood. I am doing this research because I have certain questions. I wish to find answers for issues with which I am not comfortable. Although it is a scientific study, it is also about me. My study is thus autobiographical.

Autobiographical biblical criticism entails, according to Miller (in Moore 1995:21) an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism. It has to do, as Miller

⁸ With “Bible” I mean the Old and the New Testament. One cannot picture Christianity without the Hebrew Bible (*Old Testament*). To a large extent the New Testament is the exegetical result of Old Testament theology. For many the New Testament is the fulfillment of the messianic promises of the Hebrew Bible. The writers of the gospels picture Jesus as a Moses/ Elijah-figure. Paul got a lot of his theology “from the scriptures.” Christians who do not read the Hebrew Bible not only reject much of their heritage but also impoverish their understanding of Jesus and Christianity itself (see Borg 2002:58).

⁹ Based on his understanding of Heidegger (in Painter 1987:180).

¹⁰ Epistemology is how we can know anything. Everything has an epistemology. It is the way a person organizes his perceptions and thus ascribes meaning to his experiences.

states it, with a willing, knowledgeable, outspoken involvement on the part of the critic with the subject matter. It yields to an invitation extended to the potential reader to participate in the interweaving and construction of an ongoing conversation, even as it remains a text (cf Henking 1995:241). It gives scholars a critical forum for exploring the connections of themselves as real readers with their exegesis of biblical texts in a self-conscious and autobiographical manner (Anderson & Staley 1995:10). It provides a yardstick with which to measure the autobiographical swerve in biblical studies. It helps to assess the collision of the personal and the professional that has resulted from that swerve, along with its consequences or lack thereof (Moore 1995:20). According to Fowler (1995:232), the widespread acceptance of responsibility to and for our own reading experiences is one of the major catalysts for the present surge of autobiographical criticism, because reading, according to Rohrbauch (1995:248), is never disinterested, not even postmodern reading.

An autocritographer's¹¹ reading can or should never pretend to represent the only way to read a given text (Anderson & Staley 1995:11). An autobiographical critic does not claim absolute truth and pure science. It is rather an opportunity to introduce the flesh and blood of an author as a scholar. It makes the point that no writing or academic research takes place in a vacuum. It creates space for contextualization, culture, and experience (cf Moore 1995:26). However, according to Anderson & Staley (1995:12) it can be a dangerous and bewildering enterprise for scholars to explore how their personal experiences and social locations relate to their professional discourse on the Bible. One of the arguments of autobiographical criticism is that these two, scholarship and life, are always connected. In academic language, someone can easily disguise one's person and life with the third person pronoun and with passive verbal constructions.

According to Fowler (1995:234), autobiographical scholars have discovered that they cannot tell where the text ends and where they as exegetes begin. Existential exegesis as "reception aesthetics" yields that interpreter and interpreted texts are deeply embedded in each other. Fowler (1995:234) stated: "Autobiographical criticism seeks not the implied

¹¹ Autobiographical critic

reader as much as the impaled reader, a real, flesh-and-blood person pierced by the tenterhooks of history, culture, and personal experience.”

Yet to say something about yourself in an academic work makes you vulnerable. It is a risk you take! However, I cannot do biblical criticism without a personal and autobiographical dimension.

Autobiographical biblical criticism is not and never must be or become, the only way to do biblical criticism. Nevertheless, according to Anderson & Staley (1995:14), it has a place in a discipline where a notion such as the “hermeneutical circle” plays a pivotal role. It represents a discipline that takes Bultmann’s rhetorical question of his essay, “Is exegesis without presupposition possible?” seriously. According to Bultmann (in Fergusson 1992:55), interpretation can only commence on the basis of a prior understanding of the subject matter. Any text must thus be interpreted in the light of some pre-understanding.

All autobiographical criticism asks its practitioners to be more, rather than less historical-critical. According to Anderson & Staley (1995:14), “[a]utocritographers must critically reconstruct their own historical circumstances and those of the interpretive communities to which they belong, as well as those of other places and times.” One can therefore confess with Fowler (1995:231) that the implied reader in many of our text “was really myself and the meaning that I was finding was the meaning *I* manufactured in the here and now...*I* am responsible to and for what the text says *to me*.” Autobiographical biblical criticism allows us to begin to see how and why we sometimes wear tinted glasses, and reading a wide variety of autobiographical criticism allows us to see what we share with others and where the colors of their lenses differ from our own (Anderson & Staley 1995:15).

As long as there have been biblical texts, there have been multiple interpretations of texts. According to Anderson & Staley (1995:16) identifying some of the reasons for multiple interpretations and shouting “Vive la difference” is simply not enough. Thus,

autobiographical biblical criticism marks not the end of criticism, but rather points the way toward a more rigorously self-reflective and contextualized biblical criticism. According to Henking (1995:244), it is valuable in the sense that it creates a new tradition of scholarship - one that is betraying and enacting the risky business of biblical studies. It would thus be wise to take Seán Freyne's (1997:91) advice to heart:

“I am convinced that the present ‘third wave’ quest for the historical Jesus is no more free of presuppositions than any of the other quests that went before it. Nor could it be otherwise, no matter how refined our methodologies. If we are all prepared to say at the outset what is at stake for us in our search for Jesus – ideologically, academically, personally – then there is some possibility that we can reach an approximation to the truth of things, at least for now. Even that would be adequate.”

1.3 Situational discourse

If one wants to pinpoint one's interest, one must decide if it is in the text of the New Testament, or if it is something outside the text. I read the texts of the New Testament, but my interest is in something outside the text. Maybe behind or beyond!

If one's interest is in something outside the text it can be themes such as the unfolding of early Christian religion, the historical Jesus, the events of “salvation history”, or maybe a search to understand human existence. I would choose for a combination of these themes and try to formulate it as a question: What is the relationship between the resurrection of Jesus (an event of “*salvation* history”), myth (the search to understand the “authentic” foundations of human existence), and canon (the unfolding of early Christian religion).

To answer this question one must decide if it is going to be a historical project¹², a hermeneutical program¹³, or a dialectical interaction between the two. The latter one

¹² The intention to give an objective, descriptive account of the early Christian life-in-faith process. It can also be to give the meaning of the New Testament in the first-century context.

seems to me to be the most appropriate approach. To do a historical research is not an easy undertaking because even the narratives in the Christian Bible are hermeneutical products and witnesses of interpreters of “salvation history” and its mythical foundations¹⁴ which resulted in oral performances and written records. These traditions are not historical reports as such. They are *kerygmatic* in nature. I thus used the concept text as an access to the real subject matter. Scholars such as William Wrede, Oscar Cullmann and Joachim Jeremias did the same.

William Wrede (1973:84) was interested in the history of early Christian religion and theology, what was taught, believed, hoped for, and striven for through the historical process itself. He called for a theology that is strictly “historical” and “objective”, carried on without regard for the doctrine of inspiration and not limited to canonical sources (Wrede 1973:69). According to Wrede (1973:72), the historian should not be influenced by his or her own contemporary viewpoint and should not be concerned in the first instance to serve the interest of the church or the systematic theology. He was interested for historical knowledge for its own sake.

Where Wrede dealt with the historical unfolding of the early Christian religion, Cullmann (1962:117) dealt with a succession of revelatory events with Christ as the mid-point. Everything, from creation to the history of the people of Israel, fit somewhere on the line. About the Old Testament¹⁵ Cullmann (1962:126) said that the Christ-event at the mid-point is on its part illuminated by the Old Testament preparation, after this preparation has first received its light from that very mid-point. The actuality of the pre-Christian past does thus not rest upon an identity in time between the Old and the New Testament. It rests upon the successive connection in time between past and mid-point. The same principal is true about future events on the line of Cullmann’s salvation history.

¹³ It is an interpretation that acknowledges the proper role of the interpreter’s presuppositions, pre-understanding, or social location that seeks to show that the text can address our present situation as a living summons (see Via 2002:5).

¹⁴ See Chapter Two.

¹⁵ According to Cullmann (1962:59) the Old Testament is redemptive history only in a preparatory way. It can be constructed into a straight and complete line only in the light of the fulfillment which has already taken place in time, in the death and resurrection of Christ.

According to Cullmann (1962:134), the hope of the still future resurrection of the body rests solely upon the already completed resurrection of Jesus Christ, and so we find that every section of the redemptive line has its own unique significance, only because it is determined by the event at the mid-point. Cullmann's theology focuses on the content and significance of the mission of the historical Jesus. Jesus is thus seen as the mid-point and center of meaning of a connected series of real, datable historical events in which God reveals God's self (Cullmann 1962:119). According to Cullmann (1962:94), this redemptive line of the salvation history includes both historically verifiable occurrences and things beyond the reach of historical testing, such as sagas, which are set in a historical framework, or myths, which deal with the processes of creation and nature. He calls the whole of salvation history "prophecy." The stories of the beginning and the end are only prophesy, while the middle section, which is open in part to historical testing, is prophecy of a kind that refers to facts that can be historically established, and it makes these facts an object of faith (Cullmann 1962:97).

For Cullmann (1962:104) the primitive Christian understanding of the history of salvation is correctly understood, only when we see that in it, history and myth (apocalyptic myth) are thoroughly and essentially bound together. They are both to be brought together, on the one side by the common denominator of prophecy and on the other, by the common denominator of development in time.

Jeremias, even more than Cullmann, focused in his theology upon the "message" of the historical Jesus. He used the historical Jesus to interpret the New Testament. His historical pursuit was according to Via (2002:39) a quest for theological authority. According to Jeremias (1971:250) Jesus believed himself to be the bringer of salvation. He designated his preaching and his actions as the eschatological saving event. For the earliest community to believe it meant to live here and now in the consummation of the world.

According to Jeremias (1971:311) the pre-Easter *Haggadah* in 1 Cor 5:7b-8 says that the believer stands in the Easter of the time of salvation; he has been snatched out of a

corrupt generation, doomed to destruction; he has been saved through the waves of the flood and the Red Sea; he is a new creation. These eschatological indicatives presuppose that a real experience of dawning of God's new world stood at the beginning of the history of the church. The preaching and message of Jesus is therefore for Jeremias the largest part of the theology of the New Testament. It thus matters what Jesus did and taught. For Bultmann, on the contrary, the message of Jesus as the proclamation of his death and resurrection is not part of the theology. It is a presupposition for it. There can thus be no theology in the proper sense prior to the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection and the faith awakened by this proclamation (cf Via 2002:8).

In none of these cases is the New Testament itself the primary object of attention. According to Via (2002:26) the focus on some aspect of history outside the New Testament entails certain hermeneutical presuppositions. He listed the following: "(1) the text is valuable as a source of knowledge of something more valuable that lies outside of itself. (2) The text is to be looked *through* rather than *into*. (3) Meaning is found in the relationship between the text and what it refers to with the emphasis on the latter. (4) The language of the text is functioning in a primarily referential way."

Although I know that the texts are polemic, apologetic, political, mythological, and a few other things, I know that the Christian church calls it "the canon", and that it has a certain authority for them. Part of my question is: What in these texts gives it authority? What in these texts is canonical? The traditional, ecclesiastical and confessional answers are not satisfactory any more. I considered them. Now I have put them under suspicion (see Adam 1995:41). My questions need rethinking. A paradigm has to be shifted! Perhaps only my own.

Thomas Kuhn's categories of scientific paradigm provide according to Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:38) a theoretical framework for comprehending theoretical and practical shifts in the self-understanding of biblical studies. A paradigm articulates a common ethos and constitutes a community of scholars formed by its institutions and systems of knowledge. A shift can only take place if and when the institutional conditions of

knowledge production change. However, paradigms are not necessarily exclusive of each other. They can exist alongside and in corrective interaction with each other.

I am convinced that the *institutional conditions of knowledge production have changed* over the last few years enough for a shift in thinking about these issues to take place. For my own *self-understanding in biblical studies* I need to move "... beyond the ethos and mindset of modernity not in order to abolish the achievements of modernity but in order to deepen and enhance them" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999:34).

I am convinced that a postmodern way of thinking can help in the search for some clarity. Postmodernity may, according to Via (2002:97) refer to a style of thought that is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, and objectivity. Postmodern is not so much a method as a stance or posture composed of malleable and conflicting variables. According to Adam (1991:4), postmodernism is characterized by three broad and encompassing features. It is antifoundational, antitotalizing and demystifying. It is antifoundational in that it denies any privileged unassailable starting point for the establishment of truth. It is antitotalizing in that it is critical of theories that seek to explain the totality of reality, and it is demystifying in the effort to show that ideals are characteristically grounded in ideology or economic or political self-interest.

There are as many varieties of postmodernism as there are people who want to talk about the subject. The name itself suggests that it defines itself over against "modernity." It is fair to think of it as a movement of resistance.

Postmodern thinking, to explore the premise of Adam, evolved as a critique on certain values of modernity. It can thus in the first instance be seen as antifoundational. He who believes in foundationalism, believes that knowledge has firm foundations (Mouton & Pauw 1988:177) No absolute truth and premise on which truth claims are based is regarded as the one and only starting point (Adam 1995:5). It is antitotalizing in the sense that no theory can provide the full and total answer to questions posed. Van Aarde (2002:431) states: "Information contradicting a theory or providing another possible

angle can always be found. If a theory claims to be ‘total’, it in effect means that the other possibilities that do exist have simply been disregarded or the criteria were designed to eliminate them.”

Secondly, according to Adam (1995:5), postmodernism is also demystifying: “it attends to claim that certain assumptions are ‘natural’ and tries to show that these are in fact ideological projections.” It questions the presuppositions that certain things are ‘natural’ and others ‘unnatural’ and can therefore be discarded, seen as untrue or marginalized. Generally accepted values that some things have been legitimated by, for instance God or the Bible, are questioned. These ‘natural’ and ‘legitimate’ values are exposed by postmodernism as concealing underlying ideological motives (Van Aarde 2002:431). Economic or political motives can be camouflaged by claims of universality or necessity. A postmodern version of demystification is therefore a matter of permanent criticism and self-reflexive critique.

For long, the foundation of philosophical thought was Descartes’ *Cogito, ergo sum*¹⁶. Postmodern thought undermines this assumption that one needs a foundation. They argue that no philosophical foundation is foundational enough (Adam 1995:6). Therefore, no foundation is necessary. “They do not do the work one asks of them, and they simply provide one more point to which an opponent can object” (Adam 1995:7).

Postmodern thinkers also generally resist totalities because totalities either include everything altogether or proceed by excluding some possible members. “If the totality includes everything, it is intellectually useless ... The sort of totality that serves some useful purpose works by differentiating members from nonmembers, human from nonhuman, individual self from not-self. But the process of exclusion requires us to make judgments about what is in and what is out. This is where problems with totalities come in: Who decides what counts and what doesn’t?” (Adam 1995:8). Totalities are always flux and a totality in flux simply is not total enough.

¹⁶ I think, therefore I am.

Thirdly, demystifying has played a leading role in modern thinking. “The rationalist criticism of theological doctrine, the Marxist critique of capitalism, the psychoanalytical critique of consciousness, all partake in the demystification of institutions and functions which had been thought ‘natural’ or divinely ordained” (Adam 1995:11). When faith is dismissed as wish fulfillment by an analyst, and when a political agitator points out to which extent the electoral process is restricted by financial issues, “they display the characteristically modern ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ which looks in every closet to discover the lurid secrets that are surely concealed there” (Adam 1995:12).

But modernism has generally restricted the scope of this demystifying suspicion to particular classes of institution and theory. Certain domains have remained above suspicion. Postmodernism is changing the situation. No intellectual discourse is above postmodern criticism. “Where modern criticism is absolute, postmodern criticism is relative; where modern knowledge is universal, unified and total, postmodern knowledge is local and particular; where modern knowledge rests on a mystified account of intellectual discourse, postmodern knowledge acknowledges that various forces that are ostensibly external to intellectual discourse nonetheless impinge on the entire process of perceiving, thinking, and of reaching and communicating one’s conclusions. Nothing is pure; nothing is absolute; nothing is total, unified, or individual” (Adam 1995:16).

According to Van Aarde (2002:431), the postmodern way of thinking is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and from a literary point of view, relevant documents should also be read against the background of their chronological periods and respective contexts. He is also convinced that, speaking New Testamentically the influence of Easter should be taken into account on the handing down of Jesus traditions. Exactly this is the aim of my study: to search for a postmodern approach to the relation between resurrection, myth, and canon. This is I think where the relevance of my study lies. I am addressing the issues that are also the main themes for the current debate.

My study is autobiographical. It is in the first place relevant for me. I am seeking clarification for my own questions. The issues studied were issues that I put on the table.

In the second place, because I am a researcher, my study has also relevance for the scholarly community. Scholars in all the theological disciplines ask questions. Exegetes and historical researchers put their results on the table and more questions arise.

It is an open debate therefore the faith community is also involved. The faith community, to whom I belong, asks also its questions. Faith is not dependent upon historical verification. Many of the faith community's questions are for interest's sake only. They are questions about the texts and the historical situation of the first-century. They are questions to understand themselves, their heritage, and their own spirituality better. Then there is the institutionalized church. At this stage, the church is like a watchdog for the dogmas. My study is relevant for them too because confessions and dogmas are questioned and are currently more under suspicion than a few years ago. Maybe the orthodoxy of our time can shift a paradigm when reading this.

Apart from the church, there is the secular community. Because the debate about the historical Jesus is a public debate, there are many people outside the church, who are also interested. My study is also relevant for them because it is not a typical academic dissertation. I am writing in a postmodern idiom and in an autobiographical style. In doing so, I am trying to be as accessible as possible.

Because of the fact that I want my study to be relevant for as wide an audience as possible, it has also an influence on my methodology. Every strict methodology calls for suspicion. Therefore, I do not choose a methodology and stick to it throughout the study. It would be unfair and dishonest to my paradigm. However, roughly, I can call it *deconstruction*. No methodology got all the truth *in sic*. According to Adam (1995:23), perhaps the most important lesson of postmodern thinking is that we cannot guarantee either the correctness or the soundness of our thinking by adopting the right method, or by starting from the right point. Alternatively, for that matter, by not starting at all.

One cannot say: deconstruction as postmodern method is this or that (Norris 2002:134). According to Adam (1995:27), deconstruction does more than it is. Deconstruction

happens! Deconstruction works to show that any interpretation, any sort of communication or even thinking, entails serious risks, which we customarily avoid recognizing.

The problem of “presence” is one of the recurring strands of the deconstructive argument. According to Norris (2002:137) that is the presumption that there are things to which our words refer and to which our thoughts correspond, with which we interact unproblematically. “In order to learn from deconstruction, we need to suspend our assumption that our words refer to things, that our expressions mean things, that there are, in fact, ‘things’ at all - including ourselves” (Adam 1995:27). Deconstruction thus, questions the supposed connection between the “signifier” and the “signified” (Van Aarde 1999b:462). It is about the “how-do-we-know” question. It therefore decenters that which has been constructed to be central.

This argument follows relatively smoothly from the antifoundationalism of postmodernism. “If there can be no foundations to our lives, then surely there can be no inviolable relations between words and things, nor can there be necessarily ‘things’ at all” (Adam 1995:28). For deconstruction nothing exists of itself; “anything about which we say, ‘Yes, that is a thing’ exists by virtue of our distinguishing it from other things” (Adam 1995:29).

There is no center by which we can orient ourselves with respect to the margins, nor is there a real essential identity that we can then distinguish from its various characteristics (Venter 1997:583). Paradoxically, we are not even identical to ourselves, according to Adam (1995:30). Our supposed identities are a composite of countless different identities. He uses the example of Kathy to illustrate the point: Kathy as a daughter, Kathy as an aquaintant, Kathy as a student, Kathy as a parishioner...If we strip away all these incomplete identities, we do not arrive at the one, true essence of Kathy. “Apart from all the partial identities, we discover no identity at all (or, to put it positively, we only ever know Kathy as one of these partial identities). The illusion of a unified self, is a projection of our overwhelming desire for presence” (Adam 1995:30).

Deconstructive critics can operate in various ways. The most familiar is probably a hyperbolically close reading of the text (Norris 2002:136). They pull on a loose thread until it unravels and falls to pieces. Another strategy is that they can continue playing by the rules of a given discourse, but persistently point out how those rules cross one another, cancel each other out, and obstruct the presumed goals of the operation (see Venter 1997:583).

Adam (1995:31) is convinced that when deconstruction moves into the discourse of biblical criticism it displaces many of the cardinal characteristics of institutionally legitimated interpretation. First, it underlines the antifoundationalism. “[T]here can be no absolute reference point by which we orient our interpretations: not the text, the author, the meaning, the real historical event, nor any other self-identical authoritative presence. Second, it implies that when an author tries to compose a text that overcomes the limitations ... she will inevitably fail: there will always be traces of the exclusions and the distinctions that do not make a difference, which a careful reader can locate and use to undermine the rhetorical power of the supposedly authoritative text” (Adam 1995:31). Deconstruction demystifies. It separates history from fiction.

Thirdly, according to Adam (1995:32) deconstruction shatters totalities by deconstructing the identity, the shadowy presence, which they claim to represent. Fourthly, deconstruction grants interpreters permission to interact with texts in ways that we are not at all accustomed to; deconstruction suggests to us that there are no unnatural acts of textual intercourse. The deconstructive biblical interpreter must abandon the illusion that there is something behind the text, which we might get at by way of sufficient research or the right method. They must forget to try to locate the world behind, or in, or in front of the text, and they must remember that meaning is what we make of texts. It is not an ingredient in texts (see Adam 1995:33).

No method can thus claim that it is *the* method. All interpretation is therefore hermeneutical. This taken into account, my methodology is to address my audience. It is

autobiographical. With this, I address myself. I put my own questions and myself on the table. I use my theological competency and my experience as minister and regular preacher as source. From the scholarly community I borrow their exegesis and their canon critique. I address them by participating in the debate. I use the confessions of the faith community, put them under suspicion, and keep on confessing it with them, but with a post-critical naiveté. From the institutionalized church, I got most of my inspiration! They have the dogmas, the positivistic interpretation of the myth, the combination of the mythical (Sundays) and modern (Monday to Saturday)¹⁷ worldview. All the ingredients to write a dissertation about. And with the secular sphere and public community, I share the questions and interest in the ongoing debate. How can the church expect from them¹⁸ to convert, join and believe, if the church herself does not have her story straight?

Let us join in the search and move from the known to the unknown. From what we are familiar with, to what may seem strange to us. The faith and the story stay the same, but let me try to formulate differently, to address the issues, and to come to a new self-understanding.

1.3.1 Issues on my table

“Der christliche Glaube beruht auf der Überzeugung, dass in Jesus sich Gott selbst geoffenbart habe” (Dibelius 1949:5). This I believe. So, the issue on my table is not one of belief, or one of faith. It is a question of how and why.

How did the myth of Easter faith develop into *kerygma*, which became a text with canonical status? The keywords in this sentence are Easter (resurrection), myth and canon. I choose not to understand the narratives as “salvation history” but as *kerygmatic*

¹⁷ See the second paragraph of the prelude.

¹⁸ The secular community/ The outsiders.

texts. The reason for this will become clear later in my study. The issue to be studied is thus the meta-narrative beyond the texts themselves.

1.4 Kerygma as meta-narrative

According to Jean-François Lyotard,¹⁹ a further claim of postmodernism is its incredulity towards meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are the stories we tell about the nature and the destiny of humanity. Lyotard suggests that modern thought has relied on meta-narratives to supply the warrants for its own agenda. They provide a narrative foundation for our way of life; they function to define and enforce totalities; and they conceal the extent to which our practices and assumptions have meanings quite apart from their context in the meta-narrative. One can almost say, according to Adam (1995:17) that modern meta-narratives serve as intellectual expedients that plaster over cracks in the projects of modernity.

In the Bible, there is no single clear meta-narrative (see Venter 1997:583). “The various components of the Bible interweave and argue among themselves” (Adam 1995:18). For the postmodern critic the text of the Bible cannot be an autonomous object of contemplation because there is no “the text”.

If, as Adam (1995:19) said, there is in postmodern accounts neither a unified, totalized reader, nor a unified, autonomous text, then no more is there an author, therefore one can argue that postmodern interpretations are, in a word unauthorized. For the postmodern reader the author is dead. The author is a fragmented, contested range of possible identities, “the modern unified, unambiguous author who authorizes only particular, correct interpretations, no longer exists” (Adam 1995:20). Therefore, postmodern interpreters may operate freely without fear of ghostly authors looking over their shoulders, coercing them to obey “original intentions.”

¹⁹ See Adam (1995:17)

Postmodern critics ignore the boundaries that dictate what one may say but they learned that there are certain things that a postmodern interpreter may not say. They recognize that the rules of interpretation are provisional guidelines rather than commandments; they are not foundations, or natural laws, “but the habits and styles that our teachers have passed down to us in the craft of criticism” (Adam 1995:22).

1.4.1 The sociological foundations of the *kerygmatic* tradition

From ancient times, students of literature, linguistics and folklore have been trained to distinguish the different patterns of speech used to make a point: poetry and prose, proverb and parable, commandment and oracle, miracle story and myth, lament and joke, etc. These are all clearly identified in the biblical texts. It is also widely accepted that the synoptic Gospels were composed of small self-contained units.

It was the scholars of the form criticism, who made us aware of these small units' sociological importance. Form criticism is a sociological approach to understanding a text. A text is only understood when the narrating community is drawn into the exegesis and when the social settings have been recognized. The sociological setting refers according to Gerhard Iber (cf Güttgemanns 1979:54) to a societal reality, which has become customary through its use in a particular culture and which plays such a definite role for speakers and hearers or writers and readers that the utilization of a particular linguistic genre becomes necessary. Therefore, one can state with Dibelius (in Güttgemanns 1979:54) that it was not the personality of the individual evangelist that determines the formalizing of the material, but rather the collective, the congregation, that creates particular genres. Form criticism according to Schmidt (in Güttgemanns 1979:53) talks thus about the community out of whose collective life the literature was composed.

One must always remember, as Gunkel (cf Güttgemanns 1979:237) said that the oldest genres did not originate on paper, but in life, therefore they were brief and short units. It was the expression of particular occasions of actual life. The sociological setting is, according to Bultmann (1963:368) the relation of a literary segment to a general historic situation out of which the genre that belongs to that segment developed. The sociological setting of the gospel narratives for instance was the preaching and life in the early congregations. Therefore, the literary task of the evangelists consisted in giving shape to the *kerygma* of a particular situation and task (Bultmann 1963:369). Mark's intention according to Collins (1992:109), for example, was the unification of the Hellenistic Christ *kerygma*, whose essential content is the Christ myth, as we know it from Paul, with the tradition of the history of Jesus.

The tradition was born, according to Dibelius (cf Güttgemanns 1979:373) out of the desire to illustrate the preaching about Jesus Christ by examples, and exhortations to the church, empowering them with the word of the Lord. The Christian missionaries did not preach the plain *kerygma* in their sermons, but the elucidated, illustrated *kerygma*, provided with examples and expansions. The church needed material for edification, paraenesis, church discipline, propaganda, apologetic, and preaching (Bultmann 1963:368). All of these sociological situations in real life asked for forms. The forms were thus functional for use in the congregations.

The collection of the material began in the Palestinian primitive community who created no new literary genres, but took over those long developed within Judaism (Bultmann 1963:368). These small units were arranged within a larger narrative framework and eventually the Gospels grew out of it.

1.4.2 The *kerygmatic* tradition as resurrection faith

There were especially three *literarkritische formgeschichtlichen* German researchers who were interested in the *kerygma* of the early church. They were Karl Schmidt, Martin

Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. They were especially interested in the pre-literary stages of the small units of the gospel narratives (Vorster 1982:97). This interest is called form criticism. Form criticism is a systematic method of analyzing the genres of the basic oral units preserved in literary works to clarify the history of their formation (Dibelius 1971:2). They were thus interested in the *Sitz im Leben* out of which these small units arose.

It was only in the beginning of the 19th century, however, that scholars began to pay serious attention to these units as relics of the earliest stages of the formation of Christianity. J G von Herder was the first to call attention to the importance of oral forms such as saying, parables, and tales in the composition of the Gospels (see Dibelius 1971:5). Yet it took a work by the Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel, *The legends of Genesis: The Biblical saga and history* (1901), to prompt research on the oral formation of the gospel tradition.

Gunkel formulated several basic principles that were later adapted by New Testament form critics (Dibelius 1971:65). He said that biblical writers are not authors so much as collectors and editors; the forms of oral story telling reflect the social situation (*Sitz im Leben*) for which they were originally composed; changes in social situation lead to changes in forms of communication; oral forms follow set patterns; so, stylistic inconsistencies such as gaps and digressions, indicate later alteration of the original material.

These principles allowed Gunkel to reconstruct the social history behind the written sources of the Hebrew Pentateuch (see Schmidt 1923:170). Based on careful formal analysis of the biblical narrative he traced passages to early or late stages of the oral tradition or to the editorial work of some later scribe.

Gunkel's achievement led Martin Dibelius and other New Testament scholars to relate the oral forms preserved in the synoptic Gospels to social settings in the earlier period when Christianity was taking form. Form critics pointed out that the narrative framework

of each Gospel was composed by the writer and thus was not the original context in which the individual units took form (Schmidt 1928:125). Since the oral Jesus, tradition was filtered through Christian preaching and worship in a Greek world, form critics concluded that the stories and sayings in the Gospels reveal more about the early Christian community than about the historical Jesus himself.

Dibelius, Schmidt, and Bultmann believed that the literary form of the individual pericope was a key to the text's *Sitz im Leben*²⁰ (Osborne 1984:26). The different *Sitz im Leben* of the early church called for *Gattungen*²¹. The early church was no longer Israel. It was a *kerygmatic* community, who needed *Gattungen* to say that the old had passed, there is now something new. It was a cult formed around a cultic figure, namely Jesus, and the *kerygma* of this cult was the death and resurrection of Jesus. This death-and-resurrection-event made the “new” a reality. It made a new way to live in relationship with God a possibility. However, this new cult needed texts. They needed an etiological narrative²² to legitimize their existence. Easter is the bottom line of this narrative. Out of the *kerygma* of Easter developed texts. As time went on some authority was given to these texts. Later, they were united in a collection and they received the status of a canon.

The three *formgeschichtlichen* scholars mentioned above, has each their own theory on how this foundational myth developed into what we today call the gospel narrative. I will, in what follows discuss these theories.

1.4.2.1 K L Schmidt

The question for Karl Ludwig Schmidt was the question of the *Quellen*²³. His most important work was his book that was published in 1919 *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu. Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung*. The other two *formgeschichtlichen* researchers' works to take note of are Martin Dibelius' *Die*

²⁰ Situation in life/situation in the early church/congregation.

²¹ Genre

²² In the rest of the study it will be called a foundational myth.

²³ Sources

Formgeschichte des Evangeliums and Rudolph Bultmann's *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* published in 1921.

An important issue to keep in mind according to Schmidt (Vielhauer 1981:16) is that there are different approaches to a text. There are for example the *historische* and the *literarische* approaches. The Gospels are literature, not history. The content of the Gospels is the *literarische Redaktionsarbeit der Evangelisten*, or as Schmidt (1981:82), himself put it: “*Die inhaltliche Verknüpfung von Worten und Taten Jesu*” is the work of the writers themselves.

While deconstructing the gospel narratives, Schmidt realized that there was a narrative framework in use in the early Church. The *Gattung* of this framework was that of a biography, more specific that of a martyr's biography. This framework consist of the *Erzählung vom Tode des Täufers* and the narrative about the *Tod und Auferstehung und der Kindheit Jesu* (Vielhauer 1981:23). The rest of the gospel narratives can be broken down to isolated pericopes. According to Schmidt (Vielhauer 1981:17), the passion narrative is the oldest unity in the Gospels. These isolated pericopes (*Einzelerzählungen*) were joined together in a narrative by the earliest congregations.

Because the *Sitz im Leben* of each congregation differs, the gospel narrative and the order in which the pericopes were joined, differs as well. The pericopes were joined to the narrative framework like pearls that are laced into a string. If the string holding them together is broken, the pearls may be reassembled in another order without changing the nature of the string of pearls. Thus, the Gospels in Schmidt's (1923:159) view are collections of pericopes loosely strung together by the gospel writers. The narratives are thus *volkstümlicher Literatur* that was shaped by the *Sitz im Leben* of the congregation.

Schmidt did not try to reconstruct the historical Jesus. He tried to reconstruct the *kerygmatic* Jesus Christ based on the consensus between the *kerygma* and the form in which the gospel narrative was transmitted. This Christological *kerygma* is the *geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit* (Vielhauer 1981:20). That is what the canon is all about.

According to Schmidt, the Christological *kerygma* is the canon, not a traditional collection of books. “*Kanonisch ist, was mit dem so gefassten Kerygma übereinstimmt, apokryph, was nicht mit ihm übereinstimmt*” (Vielhauer 1981:22).

Thus, for Schmidt, the genesis of the canon is the Christological *kerygma*. If there were no *kerygma*, there would have been no gospel (Vorster 1982:99). This *kerygma* was transmitted within the framework of the biographical martyr narrative of Jesus and John (Schmidt 1923:159). The evangelist joined all the other pericopes to this framework in the sequence that addressed the *Sitz im Leben* of the congregation the best. The passion was thus the first *Gattung* in the *kerygma* and the rest of the Gospel was a prelude to the *kerygma*.

1.4.2.2 M Dibelius

Martin Dibelius also recognized that the Gospels are collections of material, which was chosen, limited, and finally shaped by the evangelists but not given by them their original molding. He also laid great emphasis upon preaching in the early church as the medium of transmission of the tradition of Jesus’ words and deeds. The materials contained in the Gospels were selected from a much larger mass of recollections that the very earliest followers of Jesus possessed. According to Dibelius (1939:vi) these recollections were handed on because of their usefulness in preaching. In the beginning, Dibelius said, there was the sermon! The actual content of the tradition turns out, upon examination, to be all related to preaching (Dibelius 1911:9).

His analysis of the Gospels’ portraits of John the Baptist convinced him that these were not historical reports but passages designed for Christian preaching. The portraits of Jesus were according to him, developed for the same purpose (Dibelius 1911:2). Thus, the Gospels cannot be regarded as purely objective history.

The gospel writers were according to Dibelius not authors but collectors. They did not fabricate their preaching material but merely polished the elements of previous oral traditions (Dibelius 1929:24). Dibelius insisted that nothing is remembered or communicated without some form and that the form in which something is preserved shapes the content. He distinguished two basic kinds of stories in the gospel namely paradigms and tales (Dibelius 1911:11). Paradigms are example stories designed for preachers, and storytellers for entertainment designed tales or Novelle of miracles. In explaining how the Gospels were composed out of paradigms and tales, he insisted that the prime motivation was each writer's own theology of history.

The Gospels were, according to Dibelius (1939:xvii), written a generation or two after Jesus. When they arose, the Christian church already had a knowledge of Jesus. Stories about him and sayings from his lips circulated both orally, and in writing, were memorized and were read in public worship. The Gospels were not written by their authors upon their own responsibility and all at one sitting, they were compiled out of these narratives and sayings that were already in use. At first, Dibelius (1939:123) said, that there was no account of Jesus' career comparable to a biography instead; there were only the separate narratives, single sayings, groups of sayings, and parables.

The origin of these earliest traditions is most closely connected with the faith of the early Christians, but not so closely with their knowledge. In spite of the fact that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, they did not become biographers. That is proved by the mosaic character of the contents of the Gospels and by the absence of the ordinary biographical data and of every trace of personal recollection (Dibelius 1939:124). The authors of the tradition were according to Dibelius (1939:127) rather preachers than biographers. They preached Easter faith.

For Dibelius Christian faith is Easter faith. It was the Empty Tomb and Emmaus legends that made present and real the Easter faith of the earliest community (Dibelius 1939:181). It was for him in particular the Emmaus legend that made vivid the powerful change that had taken place, from doubt to faith. Out of this legend, the whole Jesus tradition started

to develop (Dibelius 1935:75). The Emmaus legend was like a nucleus out of which everything else developed. All the elements for the life of the congregation are present in the narrative, namely the preaching of the prophets, the breaking of the bread, the passion, the resurrection, etc.

But even older than the Easter faith is, according to Dibelius (1949:125) the *“Überzeugung, dass Jesus nicht im Tode geblieben sei, dass er jetzt bei Gott weile und dass er als Messias-Menschensohn wiederkommen werde.”* According to Dibelius (1939:181) the “how” of the Easter event is left unsaid. It is only the faith in the Risen One that is of interest. That is the content of the preaching. The Christian message does not close with the account of Jesus’ death, but with the witness to his resurrection. It is also important to emphasize that the Christian religion have no account of the resurrection but only various stories relating its effect. The preacher of this message could hardly been satisfied with such brevity. If he was to substantiate what was thus stated, he must have made use of narrative (Dibelius 1939:131).

Thus, with Easter as the meta-narrative and the Emmaus legend as nucleus the rest of the narrative started to develop on an evolutionistic way. One pericope asked for the next, and so the narrative grown.

The passion narrative seems to be the oldest unity and oldest narrative in the tradition.

“Die Leidensgeschichte ist der einzige grössere Abschnitt in den Evangelien, der Begebenheiten im geschlossenen Zusammenhang erzählt” (Dibelius 1949:118).

According to Dibelius (1939:145), we must assume that the passion narrative was already in existence before the Gospel of Mark was written. The preacher used the narrative. He further gave examples of Jesus’ deeds and mighty works of healing, since it is these that proved that God was with him (Dibelius 1939:131) and this is how authority was given to the *kerygma* of the cult.

The preaching of the *kerygma* asked for more detail. “Those early communities were not concerned with the writing of history, but with the preaching of the gospel – and

whatever proclaimed the meaning of that message was welcomed by them” (Dibelius 1939:159). That is why Dibelius (1949:6) could say: *“Die Gesichtspunkte des Glaubens und der Geschichte lassen sich nicht einfach verbinden. Man kann nicht das, was der Glaube sagt, geschichtlich beweisen. Glaube ware ja nicht Glaube, wenn man ihn jedem anbewisen könnte.”*

1.4.2.3 R Bultmann

The form critical approach of Rudolf Bultmann does not differ essentially from that of Martin Dibelius. According to Bultmann the aim of form criticism is to determine the original form of a piece of narrative, a dominical saying or a parable (Bultmann 1921:231). For this work, he summarized certain presuppositions, which are now to be taken for granted, such as the following: (a) Mark is the oldest of the four Gospels and even Mark is the work of an author who is steeped in the theology of the early church; (b) there is a fundamental assumption that the synoptic tradition consists of individual stories or groups of stories joined together in the gospels by the work of the editors; (c) the distinction between traditional and editorial material in the Gospels is an established procedure; (d) the respective literary form which the form critic assigns to the respective gospel units is a sociological concept and not an aesthetic one, although one piece of the tradition is seldom to be classified unambiguously in a single category; (e) form criticism has to move in a circle, inasmuch as the forms of the literary tradition must be used to establish the influences operating in the life of the community, and the life of the community must be used to render the forms themselves intelligible.

What is more, in Bultmann’s opinion, form criticism not only presupposes judgments of facts, but must also lead to judgments about facts, such as the genuineness of a saying and the historicity of a report (Bultmann 1921:241). The immediate historical effect of Bultmann’s research was to put the brakes on most research on the life of Jesus for the next half century, because, to analyze the life of any person one needs historically reliable data and a chronologically accurate sequence of material. So, if the gospel stories and

sayings were molded by early Christian preachers for situations after Jesus died and, if the narrative framework of the Gospels was created by even later writers, then writing a historically accurate biography of Jesus is virtually impossible.

Some scholars criticized Bultmann and other form critics for excessive skepticism regarding the historical reliability of the gospel narratives. Yet form critical work in the synoptic sayings tradition laid the foundation for the resurgence of Jesus research in the last quarter of the 20th century.

One form of speech in early Christian literature is ascribed only to Jesus namely the parable (Funk 1994:5). So, the gospel parables were recognized as a window into Jesus' distinctive personal views on God and the world. Thus, form criticism prompted half a century of research on the parables of Jesus by many scholars including J. Jeremias, C. H. Dodd, R. W. Funk and J. D. Crossan. This led to research by J. D. Crossan and others on the form of the aphorism, which in turn provided the basis for the Jesus Seminar, the largest international scholarly research project on the sayings and deeds of Jesus ever assembled (Crossan 1998:98). Despite a wide range of personal viewpoints, more than 70 members of the Jesus Seminar are convinced that at least 90 sayings, which the Gospels ascribe to Jesus can reliably be traced to him. Thus, the century that began with form critics skeptical about the historical value of information in the Gospels ended with their intellectual heirs using form critical principles to identify a solid core of authentic sayings from the mouth of Jesus himself, in spite of years of oral transmission and editing by gospel writers.

Bultmann argues that we must allow the tradition of Jesus, as it stands assembled in the Gospels, to speak for itself. The Christian church called by the word and ever and again reconstituted by the word, does indeed need tradition (Bultmann 1955:119). It must say what it has to tell us, especially about the conditions under which it arose. He deals primarily with four major forms/types of tradition in the synoptic gospels (see Bultmann 1963:69). The first is the "saying." That is a short, pithy aphorism ascribed to Jesus, that expresses some kernel of truth from the message of earliest Christianity. In terms of the

tradition the sayings are, in Bultmann's mind, the oldest. Many of them, he believes, go back to the first circle of Jesus' followers (Bultmann 1963:69). Many of the sayings of Jesus have been handed down without their historical frame. Being intelligible by themselves, they became disengaged from their historical context; and in this form, they come home to the reader even more directly than if they had a narrative frame. Many of these sayings and sayings-groups are arranged according to topics, showing that they were meant to supply the practical need of the Christian communities – to provide answers to their everyday problems and guidance direct from their master's lips. This was according to Bultmann the controlling motive in the collection of the sayings of Jesus apart from their historical setting.

In Mark, we often find of these collections of several sayings, together as a short sermon (Telford 1999:18). This weaving together was also a function of the tradition, not of the gospel author. Mark 8:34-9:1 is such a mini collection (Telford 1999:19). On many occasions, the mini-sermon is given in answer to a question from someone, most often one or more of Jesus' students. The Sermon on the Mount is a large collection of sayings, with aphorism following aphorism (Bultmann 1963:82).

Another form of the saying that begins to have a bit of narrative is the controversy dialogue (*Streitgespräch*). In some way, such a dialogue is like the next form, the *apophthegm*, and in some way like a mini sermon (Bultmann 1926:245). In Mark 10:2-12 the Pharisees bring Jesus the famous test case between Hillel and Shammai as to whether it is lawful to divorce one's wife and marry another, Jesus gives an extended answer to them (10:5-9) then amplifies his answer to his students when they return home (10:10-12) (see Telford 1999:123).

In Bultmann's (1963:91) taxonomy, parables are specialized forms of sayings. These extended metaphors may either function as a kind of mini sermon or be part of a larger sermon or controversy dialogue.

We obtain from these collections of sayings a very vivid impression of the way in which Jesus spoke. He did not, like Greek philosophers, for example, take an idea and explore it by means of a dialogue with a pupil or an opponent; nor did he deliver little dissertations like a lecturer. Rather, like the prophets of the Old Testament, he proclaimed a message – a message uttered in the name of God.

The next form has been built up by bearers of tradition around particularly difficult sayings in order either to interpret them or, when interpretation is impossible, to highlight them for memory. This form Bultmann (1963:11) calls the *apophthegm*. An *apophthegm* is a story built up around a saying in order to highlight or interpret the saying (or both). Indeed, the story of the man let down through the roof is just such an *apophthegm* designed to illustrate the difficult saying: “The Son of Man has *exousia* in the land to forgive sins.” In Mark 6:1-6 (Bultmann 1963:31), Jesus is rejected in his own country and by his own kin to illustrate the saying “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, by his own kin, and in his own house.” Or, in Mark 10:13-16 (see Telford 1999:220), the touching story of the children coming to Jesus illustrates the extremely difficult saying, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child cannot enter it (10:15).”

Both the saying and the *apophthegm* Bultmann would assign to a very early place in the tradition. The miracle story (*Wundergeschichte*) is for him a product of a later stage in the tradition when the gospel had turned its Palestinian origins and moved into the Greek world where people expected a hero like Jesus to have done miraculous things (Bultmann 1963:209). Walking on water, healings, and exorcisms are all included in the form.

Bultmann (1963:244) also pointed to a fourth form, namely the legend, or the historical narrative. The clear function of these stories is to say something of who Jesus was. The oldest cycle of legends is the passion narrative in the Gospels, the story of the suffering and death of Jesus (Bultmann 1963:262). Here the narrator is led, by the very nature of the matter itself, to strive for a continuous account – all the more so because the passion narrative has a peculiar place within the gospel tradition as a whole. This is discernible

most clearly in the speeches in the book of *The Acts*. When the preachers described there, Peter and Paul alike, speak of Jesus' life, they always refer to his passion and resurrection, but his activity as healer and teacher is mentioned only now and then.

The fourth evangelist (Bultmann 1963:275) affords another evidence of the peculiarity of the passion narrative. Although elsewhere he goes his own way, when he comes to the story of the passion of Jesus, he cannot, speaking largely, tell it otherwise than as the other evangelists have told it. It must accordingly be assumed that even in the earliest period there already existed a fixed model of the passion story, which could be expanded but not departed from, because it had been handed down from the beginning. The resurrection narratives in the Gospels also belong to this form. Such stories do not necessarily have chronological connection with one another but will likely be squeezed into a narrative sequence along with other forms.

When Karl Barth wrote a letter (Jaspert 1981:143-144) to the Bishop Wurts giving him advice about Bultmann's view on the resurrection, he said: "The term '*legend*' may simply denote the literary genre of the Easter stories of the Gospels (a *necessary* one in virtue of their unique content). The resurrection of one who is dead and buried, or his existence as one who is now alive, obviously cannot be reported in the form of a 'historical' narrative but only as a 'saga' or 'legend.' This term says nothing about whether what is reported really happened or not. A legend does not necessarily lack substance. It may relate to real history, which took place in time and space but cannot be told 'historically' (i.e., in a form which is demonstrable and illuminating for everybody). In this sense I, too, can and must describe the Easter story as a 'legend.' For myself, then, I would have to follow Bultmann's appeal to 'most' of his colleagues – if I were not unfortunately aware that by the term 'legend' (which, impermissibly in my view, he associates with the term 'myth') he has in mind the idea that what the 'legend' narrates never really took place."

To understand Bultmann, one has to make the distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. "*Historie* designates what actually happened. It points to those events which

take place in the cause-effect and which can be studied by historians employing scientific methods” (Ashcraft 1972:35). By contrast, *Geschichte* designates an event of history, which continues to have influence or meaning on later persons and events. “It deals with the encounter of persons, and its emphasis is on the personal meaning of events, or existential history” (Ashcraft 1972:36).

Bultmann rejects *Historie* as the basis for faith and contends that Christian faith is grounded in the *geschichtliche* event of Christ. The only sources that we have to study the history of Jesus are the Gospels, and in them Christ was presented as the one in which the disciples believed. He was Lord and Savior. They were not interested in the scientific *Historie*, but rather in the great events as an event of *Geschichte*, which had profound meaning for their lives (Ashcraft 1972:43).

The basic reason why Bultmann rejected *Historie* as the basis of faith is that he believes God spoke and speaks now to man through the proclamation of the Christ event (Ashcraft 1972:36). It thus all boils down to the *kerygma*.

Of greatest significance in Bultmann’s understanding of the historical Jesus are two theological factors. The one is according to Ashcraft (1972:46) that he thinks that the theology of the New Testament deals with the Christ of the *kerygma* and not with the historical Jesus. Secondly, Bultmann thinks that the nature of faith makes the historical Jesus irrelevant.

The theology of the New Testament, largely from Paul and John, deals with Christ of the *kerygma* and not with the historical Jesus. “Paul was not influenced by the historical Jesus directly or indirectly. He based his claim to apostolic authority (Gal. 1:12-17) not upon his knowledge of or acquaintance with the historical Jesus but upon an appearance of the risen Lord (see Van Stempvoort 1972:22-25). In all of his writings, he claimed the authority of Jesus’ teachings in only two instances (1 Cor. 7:10f.; 1 Cor. 9:14), and these are not crucial for faith” (Ashcraft 1972:46).

Paul preached that Jesus had come, died, and had been raised. This was the proclamation he had heard, and he was thereby forced to decide whether he would acknowledge that God had acted redemptively in this event. When he decided to acknowledge Christ, he proclaimed what he had heard, which were neither Jesus' own teachings nor information about him, but rather *that* the event had happened and that it was God's saving act. Jesus was not a teacher with a new concept of God, nor a hero or an example. The cross was not a symbol according to Bultmann (Ashcraft 1972:47) but a naked fact of history, in which it was claimed God's judgment and salvation came to man.

In like manner, Christ confronts men only in the proclamation of this gospel. The *kerygma* was the beginning of faith and of the New Testament theology. There was no "Christian" faith before it. Therefore, according to Bultmann (Ashcraft 1972:47), the teachings of Jesus are a part of Judaism, not Christianity. To put it another way, a complete historical knowledge of Jesus' teachings and deeds would not be the *kerygma*, or the occasion of faith. Jesus' message is therefore the presupposition of theology in the New Testament. Christian faith becomes possible only when the Christian *kerygma* proclaims that the Crucified and Risen One was the event of salvation. For Bultmann (cf Painter 1987:166) the *kerygma* is the criterion of authentic existence and is accessible only in the faith of the believing community.

The justification is effected in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Bultmann (Fergusson 1992:35), God's act of justifying the sinner is made possible through the death of Christ. The significance of Jesus is located neither in his teaching nor in his personality but only in his death. The resurrection is part of the same Christ-event. God's judgment upon the world through the cross of Christ is at the same time an offer of forgiveness. The cross represents the end of self-justification, but the resurrection implies forgiveness and freedom for those who take up the cross in faith. Cross and resurrection must therefore be understood together and in the light of one another (Fergusson 1992:36).

Whereas Jesus had proclaimed the kingdom of God as future, according to Ashcraft (1972:47), Paul preached that it had happened in the event of Christ, a past event. In like manner, the Christian proclamation was not a systematic exposition of Jesus' teachings or concepts, but proclamation *that* God had acted redemptively in him. The Christian *kerygma* deals thus, according to Bultmann (in Fergusson 1992:74) with the *that* of the cross rather than the *what* and the *how* of the circumstances preceding it.

Faith is never validated by historical research, but is always a contemporary existential encounter in which I, confronted by the claim of God in the proclaimed Word, decide to acknowledge Christ (Ashcraft 1972:48).

God's saving act in the historical Jesus is a historic event for Bultmann. Men in faith came to know God. When they proclaim that event, others came to know God. When they proclaim that event, others came to faith. So, proclamation of the event is a continuation of the event and, consequently, a part of the event (Ashcraft 1972:70).

Bultmann argues that to Paul, as well as to him, the important factor is *that* the cross and resurrection are the saving event. This leads to the proclamation, which is all-important to Bultmann. It is the proclamation of the cross and resurrection that becomes the saving act of God (Ashcraft 1972:70).

Although Bultmann considers cross and resurrection as a single event, an event of redemption, it needs to be remembered, that he does not regard the resurrection as historical or physical (Painter 1992:169). That does not mean that he rejects the resurrection. Jesus really is risen and the disciples did encounter him, not as an objective event but in some other way. The disciples were convinced that he was risen because of the way believing in him transformed their lives and believing that he was risen is not regarded as believing in an illusion. It is a truth available only in faith. Jesus is risen in the *kerygma* (Painter 1987:172). Christ meets us in the preaching of the cross and the resurrection, according to Bultmann (see Ashcraft 1972:72). This can only mean that the proclamation is a part, or continuation of, the saving act of God. Thus, salvation "happens" only in the proclaiming

and hearing of the proclamation of Christ (Johnson 1987:239). So, preaching is God's saving act, not communicating information about past events which may, or may not, be established apart from faith. It is God's eschatological event of salvation (Ashcraft 1972:74).

This proclamation of the *kerygma* happened in the preaching of the gospel. According to Bultmann (1963:370), Christ who is preached is not the historic Jesus, but the Christ of the faith and the cult. Hence in the foreground of the preaching of Christ stands the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the saving acts that are known by faith, and become effective for the believer in Baptism and Lord's Supper. It thus happened in the cultic life and cultic gatherings of the congregation. Preaching asks for more than just the *kerygma*. It asks for narratives. Thus for Bultmann did "*Mythus und Kultus verbunden und die Evangelien geformt*" (Schmidt 1981:116). The *kerygma* of Christ is thus cultic legend and the gospels are expanded cult legend. They are expanded illustrations of the motifs of the *kerygma* that one finds in, for example, 1 Cor 11:23-26 and 15:3-7.

1.4.3 *Kerygma versus history*

When the above is said, the choice to be made is the choice for the meta-narrative. The two conflicting meta-narratives mentioned above are the salvation history meta-narrative as described by Cullmann (1962:104), and the *kerygmatic* tradition. The choice depends on one's understanding of history.

"History" refers to specific events that took place in the past. With reference to the New Testament, it refers to events from a distant past (cf Geysler 1999:828). What people in the past did and said, have consequences for the present, therefore people in the present have an interest in the past. In the case of the quest for the historical Jesus, an interest in the past could be said to originate from the desire to better understand one's contemporary historical situation (Geysler 1999:828).

Salvation history puts the Christ event at the mid-point of history. They divide time as time before and after Christ. The mid-point is also the starting point because according to Cullmann (1962:105) the divine plan of salvation opened up in both a forward and backward direction. The involvement of Christ goes back to creation at the beginning of the time line, and as mediator, he will be part of the completion of the entire redemptive plan at the end (Cullmann 1962:107). The line of Christ thus goes like this: Christ the mediator of the creation – Christ, God’s suffering servant as the one who fulfills the election of Israel – Christ the Lord, ruling in the present – Christ the returning son of man as one who completes the entire process and is the mediator of the new creation (Cullmann 1962:108). The biblical narrative is the story of salvation history. But salvation history is actually an ongoing process until the end of history.

One must remember, though, that the past is never at hand as a pure object. It only makes itself available in the form of a memory of a human subject. Therefore, I can find myself in Patterson’s (1998:256) statement when he says: “We have access to history only through *historical experience*.” Or, in the words of Crossan (1998:20) stating: “History matters. And history is possible because its absence is intolerable. History is not the same as story. *Even if all history is story, not all story is history*.” According to Geysler (1999:830), the implication is clear: events of the past are over immediately after having taken place. All that remains is the memory of what happened and the impact it had on human subjects. I am convinced that exactly this is what we find in the *kerygma*.

When it comes to historical Jesus research, we are not dealing with pure science. According to Patterson (1998:259), it is “a humanistic discipline involving one subject’s experience (the historian) of another (Jesus) as mediated through other experiencing subjects (the followers of Jesus, early believers, and others).” Jesus is, therefore, according to Geysler (1999:835) only knowable by way of the impact he has on us.

The obvious choice for me is the *kerygmatic* tradition. I found my peace in Dibelius and Bultmann’s premise: First, there was the *kerygma*! History cannot be used as criterion to judge the *kerygma* (Güttgemanns 1979:23). The Easter *kerygma* is not a dot somewhere

on a time line. It is not an event that can be mapped on the line of salvation history. The Easter *kerygma* is the end of history. The *kerygma* started something new. A new self-understanding. A new understanding of God, the world, and man. Whenever and wherever the *kerygma* is preached and people come to faith, it marked the end of history for them and the start of something new. According to Bultmann (1955:241), the *kerygma* is understandable as *kerygma* only when the self-understanding awakened by it is recognized to be a possibility of human self-understanding and thereby becomes the call to decision.

First, there was the *kerygma*, not the salvation history, because it is faith in the *kerygma*, which tells of God's dealing in the man Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the Christian faith is grounded in the life of a historical person. It is according to Crossan (1994:200) thus "... (1) An act of faith (2) in the historical Jesus (3) as the manifestation of God." Geysler (1999:838) formulates Christian faith as trust in God whom we got to know in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, one cannot eliminate the historical component, especially when dealing with the quest for the historical Jesus. According to Geysler (1999:842), faith and history stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. Geysler (1999:842) also confirms that historical elements do not exist prior to *kerygmatic* pronouncements, therefore he states: "We cannot attain the historical Jesus by moving *around* the christologically colored New Testament. We can only reach that goal by moving *through* the presentation of the kerygmatic Christ in the New Testament. We are confronted with *both ... and* of the dialectical relationship between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ."

History is thus about one subject dealing with the heritage of other experiencing, witnessing subjects, and faith is about the unbreakable relationship between historicity and theology (cf Geysler 1999:841). Historical research into the life of Jesus of Nazareth is, although difficult, possible, but when it comes to faith ... there is only the *kerygma!*

1.5 Where do we go from here?

There are different roads to take. One can do what Burton Mack did. He dismantled the New Testament as a singular collection and located each writing in its own time and place.

He showed that early Christian mythmaking was due more to borrowing and rearranging of myths than to creating original material (Mack 1995:13). He also showed that the New Testament was important because it gave the church the credentials it needed for its role in Constantine's empire. He called it the myth of origin for the Christian religion and according to him the Bible is misnamed by calling it the "Word of God" (Mack 1995:15). In Mack's view (Via 2002:34), it is not possible to locate a single, miraculous originating event for Christianity. That effort should be abandoned and be replaced with a quest to recover the historical circumstances, intellectual resources, and social motivations that occasioned the early Christians' imagining of the cosmic Christ drama. He also claimed that there is no necessary connection between the historical Jesus of the Galilean ministry and the crucified Jesus of Mark's passion narrative. According to Mack, (see Via 2002:35) these two Jesuses are too different to have belonged to the same history. Mack (1995:310) invites the postmodern reader to revise the biblical stories to keep it in line with our own vision of a just, sustainable, festive, and multicultural world. So, the process of mythmaking must carry on!

Or, one can take the road which Van Aarde led (2001b:148). God and not the Bible is, according to him, the church's primary authority. To Van Aarde (2004a:28) the Bible is a book for the theology, for the church, and for the believer. It originated in a mythological world and it consists of myths, sagas, "historical" accounts, cultic texts, and symbols. Because of what the Bible says about Jesus, one can accept that God is love (Van Aarde 2004a:29). The cause of Jesus is for Van Aarde (2001b:149) the actual canon – the canon behind the canon. This cause of Jesus is what he calls "the Jesus event" and that means

Gods becoming event for humankind (2001:156). He thus suggests a form of decanonization so that one can and must read beyond the politics and power struggles of the early Church to discover the testimony of faith. Faith that is seated in the heart, which cause the Christian believer to put his or her trust in God's event through Jesus (Van Aarde 2001b:150).

Then there is the way Funk took. Funk (1996:2) maintains programmatically that critical history and religion should be kept in dialectical interaction. What we believe religiously should be informed by facts as far as we can discover them. The historical goal of the quest for the historical Jesus is factual information, what can be observed, and without regard for religious interest (Funk 1996:24). Funk (1996:306) suggests that Jesus be demoted from the status of divine Son co-eternal with the Father so that he might be more available to us. Jesus should be given a role in a new myth. Take him out of the story of the external redeemer who (like Superman) descends from another world, spends a brief time here, and then returns to the alien world. He suggests (1996:310) that one should rather see him as a hero who begins in the real world, leaves home for an alien space, undergoes trials and achieves victory over evil, returns home, and is reintegrated into society with power to help.

For a start, I accept the distinction that Bultmann made between history as *Historie* and history as *Geschichte*. *Historie* is the past as reconstructed by scholars and as remaining in the past, and *Geschichte* is the past as still impinging upon the present (Bultmann 1964:30). The *kerygma* of the death and resurrection of Jesus belong to the *Geschichte* and the Historical Jesus is part of the *Historie*. For Bultmann (cf Via 2002:8) the starting point of New Testament theology is the faith awakened by the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The basic and fundamental premise for me is, in the language of Bultmann and Dibelius: First, there was the *kerygma*!

This *kerygma* about the resurrection of Christ formed the basis for the Christ cult. According to Niebuhr (1957:130) the resurrection was the event to which the community looked to assure itself that its own present situation was both relevant to and supported by

the past. The *kerygma* was institutionalized in the circles where it was proclaimed. This institutionalization happened along with the breaking of the bread²⁴. Proclamation and preaching asked for more than just one sentence namely that Jesus was crucified and that he was resurrected. And so, narratives developed. Narratives that served as a foundational myth for the cult. When congregations started to form around this *kerygma* and the church started to grow, these myths got authority and it developed in what was, and is still called the Christian canon.

What was condensed in the few sentences above will be worked out in more detail in the rest of my study that follows.

Because the gospel narratives about Easter are mythological and legendary in character, a great deal of my study will focus on the nature of myths and their functioning. There are several ways of looking at myth. Karl Jaspers (in Fergusson 1992:114) argued that the myth and the message were inseparable for any religious outlook because the transcendental dimension of human experience can only be articulated through the medium of myth. Some have criticized Bultmann for his particular view. He defined myth as “primitive science”. It is science in that it assigns causes to certain events, but it is primitive in that these causes are otherworldly (Via 2002:61). However, for Bultmann, myth must be interpreted.

Demythologizing is thus not to get rid of myths but it is a hermeneutical method, a method of interpreting the text (Ashcraft 1972:53). According to Bultmann (Via 2002:61) demythologizing has two moments namely a positive and a negative. Negative in the sense that it acknowledge that the mythological motifs are not “literally true”, and positive because in interpreting myth, the myth’s original understanding of existence is recovered and it gets interpreted in a way that is compelling and pertinent in our situation. As Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:43) states: “Texts have a surplus of meaning that can never be fully mined.” It is like a multicolored tapestry of meaning. It needs constant

²⁴ See Dibelius on the Emmaus legend

interpretation. The whole issue of myths, their function and meaning will be discussed in chapter two.

The second issue is the issue about the resurrection. Within the mythological framework of the texts, the resurrection of Jesus is a historical event and fact. A postmodern reader would rather consider it as a mythological event that happened in an oral narrative, which was later written down. This study is therefore also going to focus on the resurrection and on the influence of Easter on the handing down of the Jesus tradition. Chapter three will therefore be an in depth search for a postmodern understanding of the *kerygma* of the resurrection.

These mythological texts about the resurrection of Jesus are found in what we call the Bible. The Christian church calls the texts in the Bible canonical. For the church, the Bible has authority. The question I am asking is: Must the whole of the Bible be called canonical, or is there a canon behind the canon? Must the canon not be decanonized to get to the real canon? The authority of the canon causes a hermeneutical problem for me. My question is: Is the authority rooted in the Bible, in the canon, or in God? In chapter four the canon as issue will be put on the table.

This study is thus going to search for the relationship between myth, resurrection and canon. In the final chapter, this relationship and dialectical interplay between the three issues will (*I hope*) become clear.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEORY ON MYTH

2. At the foot of Mount Olympus

2.1 My starting blocks

I am beginning this venture into mythology with the story that Crossan used to end the preface of his book *The birth of Christianity* (see 1998:xi). According to Martin Dibelius, as seen in the previous chapter, it is a good place to start. The story is the famous one taken from Luke 24:13-33.

Two Christians traveled from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter Sunday. The risen Jesus joins them on their journey. “But the road to Emmaus is not the road to Damascus. This is an apparition without blinding light or heavenly voice. This is a vision without slow demonstration or immediate recognition. Even when Jesus explains the Scriptures about the suffering and glorification of the Messiah, the travelers do not know who he is. But then they invite the stranger to stay and eat with them. *He* does not invite *them*. *They* invite him... So he went in to stay with them... Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight... Resurrected life and risen vision appear as offered shelter and shared meal. Resurrection is not enough. You still need scripture and eucharist, tradition and table, community and justice; otherwise, divine presence remains unrecognized and human eyes remain unopened.”

You still need scripture and eucharist, Crossan said. A cult is thus formed around myths (scripture) and rituals (eucharist). In this chapter the myth for the Christ cult and the ritual that accompany it, will be identified. Studying and discussing the question about the

mythological worldview and narratives underlying the story and *kerygma* of Jesus of Nazareth, is not only the sole interest of the scholarly community. The faith community, the institutionalized church and the secular community are discussing it as well, although not everybody is equally willing to face the results and consequences of a critical investigation into myth.

2.2 There are no short cuts

Before one can make an informed and learned conclusion about the foundational myth of the Christ cult, one has to investigate all the options, as well as the phenomenon called *myth*. What follows is thus a journey into mythology. I explored the definition, the history of the interpretation of myth, its role in religion, psychology and philosophy, its connection with rituals, and at the end, I appreciate myth even more. Myths are just as important to postmodern man, as it were to our pre-modern ancestors. To understand myth, one must do the whole exercise. So, if there is no short cut, let us hit the road.

Mythology is the body of myths of a particular culture. Mythology is also the study and interpretation of such myths. A myth may be broadly defined as a narrative that through many retellings has become an accepted tradition in a society. Usually it is a story about gods or other superhuman beings, or one told to account for a custom, institutions, or natural phenomenon (Gaster 1982:481). When people began to devise their myths and worship their gods, they were not seeking to find a literal explanation for natural phenomena. According to Armstrong (1999:11) the symbolic stories, cave paintings and carvings were an attempt to express their wonder and to link this pervasive mystery with their own lives; indeed poets, artists and musicians are often impelled by a similar desire today. Thus, as Kerényi (1976:446) states, every view of mythology is a view of man and every theology is at the same time anthropology.

Myths are universal and they occur in almost all cultures. They typically date from a time before the introduction of writing, when they were passed orally from one generation to the next. We are, according to Fontenrose (1959:5) likely to think that, for example,

Greek myths were always told as Ovid tells them. They most certainly were not. A myth moving from place to place, passing from one person to another, and from one generation to another, is constantly undergoing change. New versions are formed in every region and age. “A traditional plot, on entering a new region, usually becomes attached to the gods and heroes of that region” (Fontenrose 1959:6). Asclepius, for example, according to Smith (1971:184), inherited from folklore a prodigious death. Epidaurus provided him with a typical birth story and he let Asclepius taught Delphic morality. When he was admitted to Athens, he was associated with the Eleusinian mysteries and became an initiate. The Stoics equated him with the air and neo-Platonism made him the soul of the universe. In the solar theology, he was identified with the sun, the light of men, the savior. In Syria and Palestine, he was identified with the dying and reviving god Eshmun and when the oracles had a revival he gave oracles and mediated those of Hermes.

Myths deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experience, and because of their all-encompassing nature, myths can illuminate many aspects of a culture. Ancient peoples used myths to express their sense of the past (cf Stewart 1971:76). According to Mircea Eliade (in Segal 1999:21), myth narrates a sacred history. It relates an event that took part in primordial time. Myth tells how, through the deeds of supernatural beings, a reality came into existence. Myths not only narrate the origin of the world, of animals and plants, but also the primordial events in consequence of which man became what he is today. Therefore, myth makes the present less arbitrary and more tolerate by locating its origin in the hoary past. Myths can therefore be characterized by Honko (1984:51) as ontological, because they are incorporated and integrated into a coherent view of the world.

For Bultmann and Jonas (cf Segal 1999:24) myth does not explain the world because myth is not about the world. The true subject matter of myth is the place of human beings in the world, and the function of myth is to describe that place, to express man’s understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Therefore, myth must be interpreted existentially.

Most modern historians of religion use the word “myth” as technical term for that literary form which tells about otherworldly things in this-worldly concepts. Thus, myth expresses truth in a hidden or indirect language (Dinkler 1982:487). Because of this truth, which Frankfort (1946:7) called an unverifiable and metaphysical truth, myth is to be taken seriously. Or as Frankfort (1946:8) summarized the complex character of myth in his own words: “Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behavior, which does not find its fulfillment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth.” In an article, “The truth of myth” Raffaele Pettazzoni (1984:103) states the following about the truth of myth: “Their truth has no origin in logic, nor is it of a historical kind; it is above all of a religious and more especially a magical order. The efficacy of the myth for the ends of the cult, the preservation of the world and of life, lies in the magic of the word, in its evocative power, the power of *mythos* in its oldest sense, of the *fa-bula* not as ‘fabulous’ narrative but as a secret and potent force...” (Pettazzoni 1984:103; cf. Gaster 1984:132-133).

For the philosopher, Ernst Cassirer the definition of myth was much broader. “In non-technical terms it includes not only verbal or written stories but also a type of perception, actions, customs, images, and pictorial representation. Myth is a type of living, feeling and knowing” (Schultz 2000:32). On defining myth, it thus seems the safest to keep the definition as flexible as possible.

2.3 Categories of myths

Although it is difficult to draw rigid distinctions among various types of traditional tales, it is useful to categorize them. The three most common types of tales are sagas, legends, and folktales.

When a tale is based on a great historical or supposedly historical event, it is generally known as a saga. Despite a saga’s basis in very distant historical events, its dramatic

structure and characters is the product of storytellers' imaginations. Famous sagas include the Greek story of the Trojan War. The function of myth in something like religious sagas is to be a vehicle for the word and to give the story eternal value and pertinence. Take for example the exodus narrative, as Gaster (1982:486) suggests. The exodus from Egypt would be for the modern Jew no more than an antiquarian datum, were it not transfigured by myth into a symbol of his people's continuous experience, an experience of God's continuous design and providence, and an exemplification of all men's continuous progress out of their Egypts, forward to their Sinais, and thence, through trial in the wilderness, to the entry of their children into their inheritance.

A legend is a fictional story associated with a historical person or place. Legends often provide examples of the virtues of honored figures in the history of a group or nation. The story of Jesus of Nazareth became religiously significant the moment it was fused with myths. Then he was "regarded as incarnating and punctualizing an ideal, durative figure, variously represented, in terms of traditional mythology, as the son of God, the son of man, or the Christ, and as symbolizing the constant role of God in man, traduced, yet triumphant" (Gaster 1982:486).

The Christological myth developed after the crucifixion. In order to explain the significance of events like the crucifixion and resurrection, earliest Christianity took up a great variety of designs. This led to pictures of his supernatural birth, the empty-tomb stories, and the idea of descent into Hades (cf Dinkler 1982:489). Non-historical features were added to his life to emphasize the meaning that his life has had for his community. His story thus became the foundational myth for the cult that arose.

Folktales, a third variety of traditional tale, are usually simple narratives of adventure built around elements of character and plot for example the Greek tale of Perseus²⁵. He saves the Ethiopian princess Andromeda from a sea monster and then marries her (see Van Aarde 2000:184). Folktales may contain a moral or observation about life, but their chief purpose is entertainment.

²⁵ For more on Perseus, see 3.3 Myths of heroes

Myths may include features of sagas, legends, and folktales. What makes one of these tales a myth is its serious purpose and its importance to the culture. Myth presents its images and its imaginary actors, not with the playfulness of fantasy, but with a compelling authority (Frankfort 1946:7). Myths, according to Armstrong (1999:11) were not intended to be taken literally but were metaphorical attempts to describe a reality that was too complex and elusive to express in any other way. Many myths take place at a time before the world, as human beings know it came into being. Because mythmaking often involves gods, other supernatural beings, and processes beyond human understanding, it is sometimes viewed as a dimension of religion (Brongers 1982:198).

2.4 Types of myths

No system of classification encompasses every type of myth, but in discussing myths, it is helpful to group them into broad categories. There are four unanimously accepted categories: cosmic myths, myths of gods, hero myths, and foundational myths.

2.4.1 Cosmic myths

Cosmic myths are concerned with the world and how it is ordered. They seek to explain the origin of the world, universal catastrophes such as fire or flood, and the afterlife. Nearly all mythologies have stories about creation, a type of story technically known as cosmogony, meaning “birth of the world.” Creation stories also include accounts of how human beings first came into existence and how death and suffering entered human experience. They work with a tripartite world consisting of heaven above, hell beneath, and earth between (cf Dinkler 1982:487). The Greeks called this arrangement of heaven, earth, and underworld a *cosmos*, a world order ruled by unalterable law (Harris & Platzner 1995:46). Cosmogonic descriptions occupy a central position in many mythological accounts. In many religions, they provide, according to Honko (1984:50) a special authority for stories of how a culture originated.

The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the cosmos and the surrounding world is according to Frankfort (1946:4): “for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an ‘It’; for ancient - and also for primitive - man it is a ‘Thou.’” This “Thou” is a presence in nature known only as far as it reveals itself. It is experienced emotionally in a dynamic reciprocal relationship (Frankfort 1946:5). All experience of “Thou” is thus highly individual. Early man was thus convinced that the divine was immanent in nature and nature was intimately connected with society (Frankfort 1946:363). The Greeks, for example saw Zeus as the one who gathered storm clouds, detonated thunder, and hurled lightning bolts. His brother Poseidon was the lord of the sea and earthquakes. The Titan Hyperion (or his son Helios) was the sun, Selene the moon, and Eos personified dawn (Harris & Platzner 1995:31).

The oldest cosmogonies known today are those of Egypt and the ancient Near East. An example is the creation epic of the Babylonians, *Enuma Elish*, which dates back to at least the 12th century BC. Another example is the ancient Hebrew account of creation by a single, all-powered deity.

A cosmic drama is expected in the book of Revelations. In mythological language, John speaks about the aeons that has already taken place, and about the Antichrist that soon will come. The apocalyptic signs are, according to Dinkler (1982:488) present or just around the corner and the eternal reign is at hand.

2.4.2 Myths of the gods

Many myths do not directly concern human beings, but focus rather on the activities of the gods in their own realm (Noth 1966:287). These myths are called a theogony. They are primarily religious works, which concentrate on visions of the gods’ births, offsprings, and genealogical descendants (Harris & Platzner 1995:46). In many mythologies, the gods form a divine family, or *pantheon*. The story of a power struggle within a pantheon is common to a large number of world mythologies. A few places in

the Old Testament still give us a glimpse of a struggle between Yahweh and the chaos-monster such as Pss. 74:13; 89:11; Isa. 27:1; and 51:9 (see Vriezen 1970:329). They also tell the story of man, living between divine and demonic forces, open to and threatened by the world above and beneath (Dinkler 1982:487).

Myths about the gods are as numerous as the cultures that produce them. The story in Isaiah 7:14 about the virgin who shall conceive and bear a child, has for example been linked, with great probability to the fairly widespread ancient myths, familiar from the Iranian lore of the Saoshyant (Savior) and from Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, of the virgin-born hero, and of the miraculous child who is to usher in the new age (Gaster 1982:483).

Take for example the Greek god Apollo. He was the son of the god Zeus, and Leto, the daughter of a Titan. Apollo bore the epithet "Delian" from Delos, the island of his birth, and the place where the cult of Apollo was (Kerényi 1976:150). He also had the epithet "Pythian", from his killing of the Python, the fabled serpent that guarded a shrine on the slopes of Mount Parnassus (Kerényi 1976:48). The function of the Greek sun god Helios were transferred to Apollo, in his identity as Phoebus, the radiant, or shining, one, an embodiment of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment (Harris & Platzner 1995:104). In the Homeric legend, Apollo was primarily a god of prophecy, a seer of future events. As communicator of the gods' will to humanity, he establishes his main sanctuary at Delphi. This was also the site of his victory over the Python. It was also the place of the Pythian cult of Apollo (Kerényi 1976:213). He sometimes gave the gift of prophecy to mortals whom he loved, such as the Trojan princess Cassandra.

Apollo was also the god of agriculture and cattle, and of light and truth. He taught humans the art of healing through his son Asclepius. When Asclepius was still in the womb (Kerényi 1976:107), Apollo killed his mother Coronis for having wedded Ischys; and for the crow who told the god about the wedding, Apollo cursed it and, changing its color from white into black. As Coronis was burning in the funeral pyre, Apollo snatched Asclepius from it and brought him to the wise Centaur Chiron, who brought him up.

Apollo, who was a primary source of healing, transmitted his powers to his son (Harris & Platzner 1995:15).

Asclepius, having become a surgeon, and having carried his art to a great pitch, not only prevented some from dying, he even raised up the dead; for he had received from Athena the blood that flowed from the veins of Medus (Harris & Platzner 1995:104). While he used the blood that flowed from the veins on the left side for the bane of humankind, he used the blood that flowed from the right side for salvation, and by that means, he raised the dead. Zeus did not approve of this and fearing that men might acquire the healing art from him and so come to the rescue of each other, smote Asclepius with a thunderbolt. Both Apollo and Asclepius ascended to heaven after their death (Smith 1971:180).

Both Jesus and Apollonius were like Asclepius, primarily famous as miracle workers and healers, but like him acquired divine fathers and birth stories elaborated with motifs from folklore. “Both were represented as teachers of morality who reformed established temple procedures and participated in or themselves instituted mysteries. Jesus rivaled Asclepius in becoming a principle of cosmic order and a solar deity” (Smith 1971:186). Jesus and Asclepius survived death, while Apollonius escaped it by a miracle, and all three were finally taken up to heaven. Closely associated with that of Apollo, the cult of Asclepius, whom tradition granted posthumous immortality, flourished throughout Greece (Harris & Platzner 1995:15).

2.4.3 Myths of heroes

Nearly all cultures have produced myths about heroes. These stories tend to be tinged with mythological coloration, historical persons, and events assimilated to ideal, mythic characters and situations (Gaster 1982:485). Some heroes, such as the Greek Achilles have one mortal and one divine parent. Others are fully human but are blessed with godlike strength or beauty. The birth and infancy of a mythological hero is often exceptional or even miraculous, like Oedipus. Other heroes were immediately able to care for themselves. Most heroes set off on a quest or a journey of some kind. One of the

earliest tales of a hero's journey is the Babylonian story known as the Gilgamesh epic. The most famous tale of a hero's return home is probably the ancient Greek story of Odysseus.

According to Tylor (in Segal 1999:14), it would be wiser to classify hero myths as legends rather than as myths. Jung disagrees. For him the hero myths are projections onto mere human beings of a divine or quasi-divine status. With that, he means that the hero myth is an unconscious drama seen only in projection, like the happenings in Plato's parable of the cave where the hero himself appears as a being of more than human stature (Segal 1999:69). Psychologically seen the hero in the myth is the ego consciousness, which in the first half of life must defeat the unconscious out of which it has emerged and which in the second half of life must return to the unconscious and reconcile itself with it (Segal 1999:85).

One of the best-known heroes in the Greek mythology is Hercules. He was noted for his strength and courage and for his many legendary exploits. Hercules is the Roman name for the Greek hero Heracles. He was the son of the god Zeus and Alcmene, wife of the Theban general Amphitryon. Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, was determined to kill her unfaithful husband's offspring, and shortly after Hercules' birth, she sent two great serpents to destroy him. Hercules, although still a baby, strangled the snakes (Harris & Platzner 1995:214). Zeus persuaded his wife, Hera, to deify Hercules by adopting him as her son. She adopted him to protect him against the shame of adultery and to legitimize his deification (Van Aarde 2001a:174).

As a young man, Hercules killed a lion with his bare hands. As a trophy of his adventure, he wore the skin of the lion as a cloak and its head as a helmet (Fontenrose 1959:405). Hera was so annoyed at Hercules' growing fame that she cast a spell of madness over him. Out of control, Hercules killed his own wife and children. His remorse was so profound that when he returned to his senses he could find no peace of mind. He visited the oracle of Delphi to see how he could demonstrate his remorse (Fontenrose 1959:401). The oracle advised him to obey the orders of Eurystheus, his cousin, the king of Tiryns

and Mycenae. Eurystheus ordered Hercules to accomplish twelve difficult tasks. He completed the twelve labors and is celebrated to this day for his great courage and strength. According to Aune (1990:4), the Old Testament figure of Samson clearly belongs to the Hercules tradition.

Hercules' life was one of self-sacrifice and sadness. He was considered the greatest example of the Cynic lifestyle by Julian (*Or.* 6.187C). Like Hercules, the Cynic lived simply and endured pain and suffering in order to be liberated from the constraints of physical life. Cynics proclaimed this message of liberation to all who would listen (Aune 1990:8). He was of the Age of Heroes, the fourth generation of mortal men on the earth. Half-man half-god, he was the focus of considerable wrath and love from the immortals. A being divided against himself, Hercules "embodies the quintessential heroic predicament: how to fulfill the demands of the godlike desires for knowledge and achievement that drive him while bound to a mortal body that can neither fly nor turn invisible and which will surely die" (Harris & Platzner 1995:213). Without the comfort of a wife or children, he spent most of his life as a wanderer, ventured out into the world, not necessarily seeking adventure but, more likely, to live a life that was not dominated by vengeful immortals or vindictive relatives. Hercules was the archetype for bravery and living proof that might-makes-right. He was more than a match for men and gods alike.

In all his quests, Hercules "calls upon his divine gifts to commit death-defying acts, but, tainted by his human inheritance, he must finally confront the most formidable obstacle of all: his own death" (Harris & Platzner 1995:220). Twice, Hercules voyages to the Underworld, undertaking the archetypal rite of passage that all heroes must fulfill in this most urgent of human quests (Fontenrose 1959:327). "Having thus gone to the Land of the Dead and been reborn twice - having taken on Death himself, and won - Heracles transcends the limits of the human condition, achieving literally what most heroes can achieve only through the consolation of an immortal reputation. Heracles, like most hero figures, thus mediates the most extreme of contradictions - not only those of nature and culture, but those of life and death" (Harris & Platzner 1995:220).

Hercules was said to have no grave. According to some versions of the myth, his soul goes to the Underworld, while only his reputation endures: other versions, however, portray Hercules as raised up by the gods from his funeral pyre to be a god on Olympus, where he is reconciled to Hera and married to her daughter Hebe, fulfilling at last the quest for immortality, that is central to the heroic endeavor. Homer, combining both versions in the *Odyssey* (book 11), describes Hercules' human part remaining as a shade in Hades, while his divine self takes up residence with the gods. The hero thus, remains divided in death, as he was in life, as complex as human nature itself (Harris & Platzner 1995:220). He was worshipped by the Greeks as both a god and as a mortal hero.

Quite a few attempts were undertaken in the past to call attention to the similarities and parallels between aspects of the life of Jesus and the life of Hercules. There were Emil Ackermann²⁶, Theodor Birt²⁷ and Friederich Pfister²⁸. Pfister listed according to Aune (1990:11) twenty-one parallels. Then there was Arnold Toynbee who found twenty-four points of correspondence between the Jesus of the gospel and the Hercules of Greek legend. These findings suggest that the legend of Hercules may be an important common source from which the story of Jesus on the one hand and the stories of the pagan historical heroes on the other may have derived some of their common features (Aune 1990:13). Aune (1990:14) suggested several Christological traditions in *The Letter to the Hebrews* that exhibit themes and motifs that are associated with ancient conceptions of Hercules.

One of these conceptions is the title son of God. Both Jesus and Hercules are called the son of God. Both filled the role of a high priest who through prayer was as a helper and giver of strength and grace to people in the difficulties of life. Both were obedient to God/Jesus, and although the notion of resurrection is largely absent from Hercules' legends, the notion that he was raised to Olympus with divine status was an integral part of the Hercules myth (Aune 1990:19). For both, death and ascension to heaven resulted in deification.

²⁶ 1907; 1912

²⁷ 1922

²⁸ 1937

Another hero as a holy man to take briefly note of is Apollonius of Tyana. He was known for doing miracles of healing. The similarities between the Gospels and Acts, and the stories of wandering holy men were pointed out by many scholars in the past (Smith 1971:177). Bieler (in Koskenniemi 1998:461) outlined the conventional features in the life of a divine man as follows: “the birth of a divine man is prophesied, and at the moment of his birth miracles occur. From his very youth he is an authoritative teacher, attracting crowds of people and performing great miracles. He is regarded as the son of a god. Thus, people show a divine respect for him. On the other hand, he has enemies. He is accused of sorcery and is put to death. After his miraculous death, he rises again and appears to his own followers.” Apollonius lived in the late second century. Our main source is a work of Philostratus dating from ca. 220 C E. His life and the life of Jesus demonstrated all these features.

Then there was Perseus. As mythological hero, he was a fatherless son who became a hero (Van Aarde 2000:181). According to the myth, Perseus was the abandoned son of Danae by Zeus. Danae was the daughter of King Acrisius of Argos. The king was warned by prophecy that his daughter’s son would kill him so he shut her away in a tower. Zeus went through a narrow window to her in the form of a shower of gold and she became pregnant. Danae called her son Perseus (Van Aarde 2000:182). Perseus was thus a son of god, the god Zeus, born from a virginal conception. He became a hero for rescuing Andromeda and for killing Acrisius with a discus at the games.

Other well-known heroes are the (mythic) figures we know from the Old Testament. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha were all known as miracle workers. The miracles of Jesus are very similar to theirs, especially to the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. Jesus feeds people in a miraculous way (cf. 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4), heals leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 5), raises from the dead (cf. 1 Kings 17), walks on water (cf. 2 Kings 2). Elijah was understood as a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18), and the miracles of Elisha serve to legitimize his role as successor of Elijah (Koskenniemi 1998:465). Many of these hero stories from the Jewish tradition were reinterpreted and used as part of the Jesus myth.

Miracle stories were used to legitimize leadership in the Temple in the last days of Jerusalem and in Cyrene during the aftermath of the war (Koskenniemi 1998:466).

2.4.4 Foundational myths

For almost all the holy places and feasts, there are etiological narratives that explain why these places, persons, or feasts are important for a certain community. Myth tells that kind of story, which purports to tell of the occasion on which some religious institution, a cult or certain of its rites and festivals, had its beginning, and of the divine acts which set the precedent for the traditional acts performed in the cult (Fontenrose 1959:4).

Christianity is no exception. The narrative of Jesus of Nazareth may be regarded as the precipitating or generative event for Christianity. According to McGrath (1990:35) a “community and an associated foundational narrative arose in direct response to that history, which sought to identify and legitimate both the existence of that community as a social entity and its distinctive understanding of God and human nature and destiny with reference to the perceived significance of Jesus of Nazareth.” There is also nothing unique to the foundational myth of Christianity because myths of virginal conceptions, ascensions to heaven and being adopted by the gods are recycled language. In this regard, according to Van Aarde (2000:184), Seneca’s tragedies of Hercules’ adoption and Ovid’s story of Perseus’ conception are most striking. Perseus as a fatherless son also became a hero, and the ancient Eastern myth of Osiris, together with other eastern Hellenistic myths, recounted how the sons-of-gods suffered the human fate of death but again rose from the death (see Van Aarde 2000:186).

The narrative of Jesus of Nazareth, together with the Easter *kerygma*, served as the foundational myth for early Christianity. The character of the Christian community arises thus from their willingness to let this narrative govern their communities understanding of its *historical*²⁹ situation and future. According to McGrath (1990:54) the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth shaped their views and attitudes to power, to pride, to loss, to death, to

²⁹ In a first-century perspective of history

grief, and to despair. According to McGrath (1990:54), Jesus assumes a role within the community of faith equivalent to that assumed by Florence for Dante or Giotto. It thus evokes a deep sense of *happening*, and it keeps the memory of a foundational narrative and its present significance for the community whose identity is inextricably bound up with it. It thus provides a focus of identity for the community.

The New Testament, as the collection of these myths, provides a significant theological foundation for the correlation of the narratives. The New Testament writings affirm, according to McGrath (1990:54) the conformity of the member of the community to Christ, namely that through faith, those who believe in Christ are somehow caught up in him, so that his history becomes their history, his death is their death, and his life is their life.

The vision of the community is thus shaped and informed by the foundational myth, namely the story of Jesus of Nazareth, recalled in the eucharistic celebration of his death and resurrection and the benefits, which these are understood to bring them.

2.5 Interpreting myths and rituals

2.5.1 An overview on the interpretation of myth

The universal human practice of mythmaking appears to be the earliest means by which people interpreted the natural world and the society in which they lived. Thus, myth has been the dominant mode of human reflection for the greatest part of human history. A person viewed happenings in his world as individual events. An account of such events, and their explanation can be conceived only as action and necessarily take the form of a story. In other words, according to Frankfort (1946:6), the ancients told myths instead of presenting an analysis or conclusions.

Many ancient writers portray historical events in language reminiscent of traditional myths (Gaster 1982:485). Greek thinkers of the 6th century BC were the first people known to question the validity of mythmaking. The meaning of a myth must thus be rediscovered by interpretation. Dinkler (1982:489) said: “The leading question in dealing with myth must be: What is principally said about man’s existence before God, of man’s self-understanding in the midst of this world and history?” In the early stages of Greek civilization, as in other ancient cultures, the truth of myths was taken for granted (Dinkler 1982:487). The Greek word *mythos*, from which the English word “myth” is derived, was originally used to describe any narrative. Early Greek authors who employed the term drew no rigid distinction between tales that were historical or factual and those that were not.

In the 6th century, however, Greek thinkers began to question the validity of their culture’s traditional tales, and the word *mythos* came to denote an implausible story. Greek philosopher Xenophanes, for example, argued that much of the behavior that the poets Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods was unworthy of divine beings. He said: “Man made his gods and furnished them with his own body, voice and garment” (Corsar *et al* 1977:7). By the 5th century BC, serious Greek thinkers tended to regard the old myths as naive explanations for natural phenomena or simply to reject them altogether. Nevertheless, myths retained their cultural importance, even after they had come under attack from philosophers. The ancient Greek tragedies, which remained central to civic and religious life in Athens through the end of the 5th century BC, drew their subject matter largely from myths.

In the early 4th century BC, Greek philosopher Plato systematically contrasted *logos*, or rational argument, with *mythos* - which in Plato’s view was little better than outright falsehood. In his philosophical dialogue “*The Republic*” Plato argued that the ideal commonwealth should exclude traditional mythological poetry because it was full of dangerous falsehoods (Stace 1955:428). Plato himself nevertheless devised myths of a sort to explore such topics as the birth of the world and death and the afterlife, which in his view fell outside the boundaries of logical explanation. Plato distinguished between

myth and allegory. A myth was according to him (Bidney 1953:304) a traditional narrative about gods or some culture hero, and an allegory, by contrast, was a fictional narrative with symbolic meaning. An allegory was deliberately invented for its symbolic truth and it was not intended to be taken literally.

After Plato, most thinkers either tried to apply reason to the supernatural elements in myths or interpreted them symbolically. The Stoics and, much later, the Neo-Platonist interpreted myths as allegories. That is narratives, which employ picturesque language and images to convey a hidden message. They reinterpret the myths so, as to read into them their own philosophy of nature (Bidney 1953:305).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the so-called Age of Enlightenment, the allegorical interpretation of myths fell into disfavor. At the beginning of this period, myths were dismissed by intellectuals as absurd and superstitious fabrications, in part because of a climate of hostility toward all forms of religion (Klapwijk 1977:115). But, in the late 17th century, a different approach to mythology arose in the context of new information about mythmaking peoples.

Europeans had become aware of these peoples in the course of the voyages of discovery of the 16th and 17th centuries. Working on the assumption that these cultures could provide insight into the experience of prehistoric societies, European scholars sought the origins of mythology in the “childhood of man,” when human beings supposedly first formulated myths as a response to their physical and social environment (Klapwijk 1977:116).

Most analyses of myths in the 18th and 19th centuries showed a tendency to reduce myths to some essential core. This core remained once the fanciful elements of the narratives had been stripped away. One of the many paradoxes of the study of myth is the fact that interest in it peaks in the 20th century, the age of great technological discoveries and a desperate human search for meaning.

In the 20th century, investigators began to pay closer attention to the content of the narratives themselves. E. B. Tylor³⁰, for instance read myth literally. He considered myths to be expression of a kind of primitive mentality that is incompatible with the modern odes of progress and reason (Boskovic 2001b:1). Myth is thus totally opposed to and incompatible with science. Therefore, myth is for him a passing phenomenon. He argued that humans have myths only until they discover science (Segal 1999:10). He was convinced that there is no myth outside religion. Religion is also a form of primitive science. Myth explains the hierarchy of the gods, their biographies, their past behavior, and their relationship to humans. Thus, myth completes the explanation of the world provided by the rest of religion (Segal 1999:13). It is called: myths of origin³¹.

Mythology has often been an attempt to explain the inner world of the psyche (Armstrong 1999:245). Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud held that myths, like dreams, condense the material of experience and represent it in symbols (Van Niekerk 1996:64). As Freud saw it, myths express suppressed sentiments and desires in the unconscious, the Id. His grand vision was to emancipate his patients, and indeed all of mankind, from the thralldom of Id and usher in the age of rationality. The myths must be interpreted, their true meaning deciphered, and mythological imagery replaced by rational language (Bidney 1953:318).

Freud used his knowledge of Greek and Jewish mythology to analyze his patients' dreams (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen 1988:61). Freud argues that dreams "which typically resemble myths in their imagery and narrative form, are fundamentally the fulfillment of wishes that the waking mind suppresses or denies. Freed of mundane restraints, the dreamer can fly like Icarus, descend into Hades like Orpheus searching for his Eurydice, or battle fire-breathing dragons like Perseus and Apollo" (in Harris & Platzner 1995:34). Dreams, like myths thus, permit one to violate taboos and it gives the dreamer an emotion and activity very different from that of the dreamer's daylight experience.

³⁰ 1832-1917

³¹ Foundational myths

Freud's most celebrated example of mythic wish fulfillment that violates societal taboos is from the story of Oedipus, the king of Thebes. He "kills his father and marries his mother. According to Freud's theory of infantile sexuality, the male child passionately desires exclusive possession of his mother, whom he regards as the source of all nurturing pleasure. To claim the mother entirely, he must eliminate his male parent, whom he instinctively recognizes as the chief rival for his mother's affection. Upon growing older and discovering that both his incestuous feelings and hostility towards his father are unacceptable, the boy experiences guilt and gradually banishes such forbidden wishes from his conscious mind" (Harris & Platzner 1995:35).

This guilt-ritual is best expressed for Freud in the figure of Christ, and in the account of his life, death and resurrection. Among all the son religions, Christianity occupies a special place because Christ is the son who sacrifices his own life to redeem the company of brothers from original sin. According to Freud, (Megal 1979:203) two features of ambivalence come together in this sacrifice. On the one hand, the guilt from the killing of the father is avowed and expiated; but at the same time, the son himself becomes the god, replacing the father religion by the son religion. A clear expression of this ambivalence is for Freud the revival of the totem meal in the eucharist. Its meaning is both the reconciliation with the father and the substitute of the son for the father, with the faithful consuming the son's flesh and blood (Megal 1979:203).

Carl Jung³² took Freud's psychological approach in a different direction. Jung viewed myths not as relics of the infancy of the human race, but as revelations of humanity's tendency to draw on a collective universal store of what he called archetypes (Van Niekerk 1996:88; cf. Tigue 1989:21). The subject matter is according to Jung not literal but symbolic: not the external world but the human mind. The human mind tends to express symbolically that which is poorly understood intellectually (Van Aarde 2000:180). Myth thus originates and functions to satisfy the psychological need for contact with the unconscious (Segal 1998:3). "After studying thousands of myths from cultures all over the globe, Jung was struck by their similarity to dreams in which the

³² 1885-1961

same major figures kept reappearing. It did not matter whether the myth - or dreamer - was Italian, Japanese, African, American, or Indonesian; figures of the great mother, stern paternal judge, threatening stranger, clever trickster, or benign guide were consistently present” (Harris & Platzner 1995:36). Jung found that not only the basic human emotions such as fear, desire, and greed dominate both dreams and myths, but also particular situations and actions - journeys, encounters with frightening monsters, struggles with unidentified assailants, all of these phenomena were universal (Harris & Platzner 1995:37).

Myths thus function to reveal the existence of the unconscious and to open up to it (Segal 1999:24). According to Jung, myths can be used to establish the collective unconscious. Myth is also the best medium for conveying the unconscious. According to Jung (Segal 1999:75), every society as well as every individual inherits myths. That is an inborn disposition to produce parallel thought-formations. The myth of Odysseus for example, “is passed on from generation to generation by acculturation, but the hero archetype that it expresses is passed on by heredity” (Segal 1998:17). There are, however, a limited number of archetypal motifs, or primordial images, which appear in myths and dreams (Bidney 1953:321).

Myths can also be described as identical psychic structures common to all men. Jung called it archetypes of the collective unconscious. “For Jung, these archetypes spring from the collective unconscious of the entire human race, inspiring dreams, religious visions, and mythologies” (Harris & Platzner 1995:37). These archetypes are like templates for organizing the universal themes that recur in human experience. In different cultures and at different times an archetypal content will be symbolically expressed in somewhat different ways, but it will still reflect the basic human experience underlying it (Van Aarde 2000:180). Living in the twenty first century, we can thus still relate to myths of birth, testing, conflict, death, and rebirth that originated thousands of years ago because we have inherited these mythic archetypes from our remotest ancestors. One is thus born with myths.

According to Jung, myths must, to reach their intended audience, be translatable into a language the audience knows. Just as archetypes must be translated into myths, so myths must be translated into the language of those whose myths they are. Just as archetypes are dependent on myths to convey their meaning, so myths are dependent on interpretations to convey their meaning (Segal 1998:11).

The prime function of myth is thus psychological, namely to reveal the unconscious and to help one to experience it, therefore Jung (1984:248) said that the “primitive mentality does not *invent* myths, it *experiences* them.” This experience of myth, according to Jung provides the best entrée to the experience of God (Segal 1999:91; cf. Tigue 1994:3).

Another one is the existential function of myth. Myths makes humans feel at home in the world, even if it does so by explaining events in the world (Segal 1998:19).

For Jung the life of Christ is Christian mythology. The statement that he rose from the dead is to be understood not literally but symbolically (Segal 1999:91). Christ’s life is a symbol of the archetypal journey of the hero from primordial unconsciousness (birth) to ego consciousness (adulthood) to return the unconscious (crucifixion) to reemergence from it to form the self (resurrection). The figure of Christ thus manifests many dimensions of the archetype of the self (Megal 1979:211). Christ is the light of the world, the fullness of humanity, the spotless lamb, the perfection of manhood, and the hero of the struggle with death and evil. Another important mythological symbol for Jung is the archetypal child (Jung 1984:251). According to Jung, one of the essential features of the child motif is its futurity. The child is potential future. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many of the mythological saviors are child gods. This agrees according to Jung exactly with our experience of the psychology of the individual, which shows that the “child” paves the way for a future change of personality (Segal 1998:27).

Jung does not have the same neurotic preoccupation with guilt and futile atonement as Freud, when he evaluates the Christ myth. The figure of Christ symbolizes for Jung (Megal 1979:211) elements of psychological maturity, psychic integration and wholeness. Jesus of Nazareth could never have made the impression he did on his

followers, if he had not expressed something, that was alive and at work in their unconscious, and Christianity could never have spread through the pagan world with such astonishing rapidity, according to Jung, had its ideas not found an analogous psychic readiness to receive them (Megal 1979:211). The christian gospel contains according to Eliade (see Megal 1979:217) many if not all of the archetypal motifs that are to be found in the myths of primitive religions.

Myth and religion have according to Jung, traditionally worked in tandem. “Religion has preserved myth, and myth has sustained religion. The heart of religion for Jung is neither belief nor practice but experience, and myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God, which means to the unconscious” (Segal 1998:35). Jung praises early Christianity for both adopting and adapting various pre-Christian myths. It proves the myth’s vitality but it also proves the vitality of Christianity, which was able to interpret and assimilate so many myths. A religion that fails to interpret its myths is dead. The spiritual vitality of a religion depends on the continuity of myth, and this can be preserved only if each age translates the myth into its own language and makes it an essential content of its view of the world (Segal 1998:35). I must confess that the theory of Jung makes sense to me, and it underlines my own experience and understanding.

Modern Christianity, according to Jung (see Segal 1998:37), has failed to update its myths. It has also erred in its attempt to update itself by eliminating myth. Myth is indispensable to experience and thereby to religion. By eliminating myth, it has eliminated experience as well (Segal 1998:37). Myth must not be eliminated, it must be reinterpreted. To make it acceptable for moderns, it must be interpreted symbolically.

Mircea Eliade³³ regarded myths primarily as sacred stories related to the events that occurred *in illo tempore*, in the mythical time following the creation of the world, and long before the advent of history (Eliade 1961:57). This mythical time, *illud tempus* is separated by an immeasurable gap from our time, and the only way to approach it is through myths (Boskovic 2001a:7). Eliade (1961:161) claimed that the symbol, the myth

³³ 1907-1986

and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life. According to him, myths thus give sacredness, or religious meaning to physical objects and human acts (Van Aarde 2000:180).

While the Christ myth might manifest universal truths, every myth and every symbol are conditioned by the particulars of the time and place within which it is participated in by the faithful. Thus, when the son of God incarnated, according to Eliade (in Megal 1979:222) and became Christ, he had to speak Aramian. He could only conduct himself as a Hebrew of his time, and not as a yogi, a Taoist or a shaman. His religious message was conditioned by the past and present of the Hebrew people. If Jesus had been born in India, the decor of the myth would have been different. Thus, the message of the myth is bound by the limitations of the cultural climate of its day.

According to Joseph Campbell (1972:13), who is strongly supporting Jung's view, myths are telling us in picture language of powers of the psyche to be recognized and integrated in our lives, powers that have been common to the human spirit forever, and which represent that wisdom of the species by which man has weathered the millenniums. Campbell thus sees myth as an eternal possession that can never be displaced by the findings of science. The problem with the romanticists is that they put myth at the top of the cultural disciplines as an independent source of artistic truth-values, as well as a key to the understanding of a people's culture (Bidney 1953:307).

According to Campbell, (1972:13) mythology has four functions. The first one is installation of a sense of awe before the "mystery of existence," a feeling that incorporates the recognition of the numinous, which is characteristic of all religions. The second basic function is the establishment of a cosmology, or image of the universe. The third is support for the existing social order, since myths are always essentially conservative. Finally, the fourth basic function is introducing the individual to the order of reality of his own psyche, leading this individual towards his or her spiritual self-realization (Boskovic 2001a:7).

Segal (1999:139) objects to Campbell's universalistic and psychological-symbolical interpretation of myths. This problem could be avoided if the psychological interpretation of myths would regard the theories of historians and anthropologists with more respect and would examine the meaning of myths more relative to the given time and community from which they emanated.

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (see Segal 1999:46) argued that the primary function of myth is to resolve contradictions between such basic sets of opposites as life and death, nature and culture, and self and society. Myth is distinctive in not only expressing oppositions, which are equivalent to contradictions, but also resolving them, thus the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (Segal 1999:46). Myth as the resolution of these contradictions is a primitive possession. He also argued that myth as primitive science has been succeeded by modern science (Segal 1999:2). Myth is thus, according to Susanne Langer (in Bidney 1953:287) part of an evolutionary process of development. Because myths are elements of culture, Bidney (1953:323) said, it must be investigated with the same empirical and critical methods employed in the study of culture in general.

Apart from the psychological and anthropological views on myths, there are also philosophical attempts to interpret myth. This attempt reaches its most elaborate level with the works of Ernst Cassirer³⁴. Cassirer (in Schultz 2000:14) sees myth as one of the stages in the process of "humanization." It is a necessary step in making humans what they are today. According to him, myths are on a lower level than philosophy or science, but the stage of "mythic thinking" has in itself the kernels of the stages that are yet to come. Although lower and primitive, it is a necessary stage in human development, and any higher stage is simply unthinkable without it. Cassirer defines six major cultural activities of man namely art, science, language, history, myth and religion (Schultz 2000:13).

³⁴ 1874-1945

According to Cassirer, then, man has discovered a new method of adapting himself to his environment. Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be found in all animals, we find in man a third link which may be described as the symbolic system. This is a new dimension of reality and in this dimension, mythic thinking was born. Man cannot escape from his own achievements. He thus now lives in a symbolic universe where language, myth, art, and religion are parts of (Bidney 1953:315). Man has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. Myth is thus shown as inner logic or form for Cassirer (in Schultz 2000:38). All the ideas of mythical societies exhibit a pattern of relating to each other.

Many symbols have no referents or corresponding things in reality. These can be regarded as mythological symbols. Regarding these mythological symbols as part of physical reality is primeval stupidity. Primeval stupidity is the inability to make a clear and sharp distinction between the symbol (in our symbolic reality) and the thing (in physical reality) it represents (Mann 2002:2).

Cassirer's first critical study of myth was published in 1922. The anthropological data that he had access to were not always assembled in a critical manner, nevertheless, the fact remains that Cassirer clearly recognized the importance of myth, as well as the connection between language and myth and the importance of language in human understanding. Cassirer sees myths as early patterns of thought. Thus, man perceives the world in symbolic forms, and science is only one of many other forms (Bidney 1953:315).

Myths are products of some sort of a disease of language, originating from the human incapacity to express their emotions in relation to nature within the limits of language they use. Thus, man has to use metaphor as the only way to reconcile his emotions with their expression and representation (Boskovic 2001a:6). Metaphor can therefore not be overlooked when one speaks of myth. Metaphor is clearly one of the foundations of all our mental activity, a foundation upon which our systematic logics of rational inquiry

also rest, or to use a better metaphor, it is a ground out of which they grow. Myth and our everyday language are permeated with metaphor. Cassirer remarked that the same form of mental conception is operative in both myth and language (Schultz 2000:43). For Cassirer metaphor is the single door that opens onto everything and nothing. Its function relies on the past's essential equivocation between what is and what is not. While concepts give form, and perceptual activity sense, metaphor is the wellspring of meaning.

With Claude Lévi-Strauss' article "*The Structural Study of Myth*" in 1955, he announced the coming of structuralism to the anthropological study of myth. Myths for him, offer direct insight into the ways the human mind operates. He considered the processes of how the human mind functions to be universal (Boskovic 2001b:12). Ricoeur criticized structural analysis for "de-chronologizing" the narrative, since the structural analysis tends to reduce the role of plot to a secondary function of figuration in relation to underlying logical structures and the transformation of these structures (Boskovic 2001b:13). Nevertheless, the structuralist insistence on language, as well as on the use of signs and symbols in the explanation of myths, was an important step forward.

Levi-Strauss (see Boskovic 2001b:13) observed that metaphor is not a later embellishment of language but it is one of its fundamental modes - a primary form of discursive thought. Myth is thus, according to Niditch (1996:19) a product of the human mind working in its poetic, metaphoric mode.

Most simply, metaphor involves representation of one thing as though it were something other. According to Ricoeur, it is a "deviant naming" that generates a new light on the thing being represented. Paul Ricoeur's extensive writings on metaphor can be interpreted as an elaboration on Merleau-Ponty's view of language and creativity (Gay 1992:3). Rejecting any exact knowledge of or adequate language for "things in themselves" or "reality," Ricoeur, according to Gay (1992:3), still views metaphor as one of our best vehicles for enriching our expression and perception. Although he focuses on how metaphor redescribes reality, he stresses that its role is more hermeneutic than ontological, i.e., metaphor interprets, not makes, reality. The creative function of

metaphor pertains to its impact on changing our perception. As Ricoeur says (in Gay 1992:3), the purpose of metaphor is neither to improve communication nor to insure univocal argumentation, but to shatter and to increase our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language.

For Ricoeur (in Gay 1992:3), both metaphor and ideology exploit polysemy, although he makes these points separately and does not pursue their joint effect for his theory of creativity. He presents metaphorical exploitation of polysemy as the heart of linguistic creativity. Ricoeur's view seems to deny that a non-ideological discourse is possible (Gay 1992:3).

Metaphor thus sets thinking in motion, but in non-factual ways. Metaphors do not work simply by reflecting commonly recognized similarities between things; rather it would be more illuminating to say that metaphor creates the similarity than to say it formulates some similarity antecedently existing. What metaphor most clearly exemplifies is the creative power that human beings inherit with orality. We do not all use it equally, but we all have access to it.

2.5.2 Interpreting rituals

Another important issue to keep in mind is that myths and rituals operate together. Rituals, according to Theissen (1999:2), are patterns of behavior, which repeat themselves, patterns with which people break up their everyday actions in order to depict the other reality that is indicated in myths. Myths are the traditional stories that accompany rituals (Fontenrose 1959:3). According to Honko (1984:51), the context of the myth is the ritual. Ritual gives form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth (Campbell 1972:43). Rituals take people out of the old structures of society into a "new" society (see Turner 1969:15). Ritual is a religious or quasi-religious "ceremony in which a prescribed series of actions - accompanied by the repetition of traditional phrases - are scrupulously observed" (Harris & Platzner 1995:32).

According to James George Frazer,³⁵ myths describe the character and behavior of gods, where rituals seek to win divine favor (Segal 1999:39). William Robertson Smith's³⁶ emphasis on the social components of religion in his book *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*³⁷, led him to postulate that it is the action that matters, much more than the belief. The ritual, therefore, must come before the myth (Boskovic 2001b:4). Smith believed that ritual should be considered before myth in not only order of importance, but also that ritual literally preceded myth in time. Actions come first, human attempts to explain and rationalize them afterwards.

The two basic functions of rite, according to Theissen (1999:122-123) are in the first place to structure time, and secondly to co-ordinate people. The structuring of time can be seen in early Christian baptism as initiation rite. Theissen (1999:123) indicates that the co-ordination of life in communities mainly took place through sacrifices, especially where it were connected with shared meals. The early Christian eucharist is thus a rite of integration, which is constantly repeated and renews the cohesion of the community.

This concept of the subordination of myth to ritual did not last very long. One must rather speak of an interdependence of myth with ritual (Boskovic 2001b:10). For the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (see Segal 1999:45) myth provides prescribed ways of understanding and ritual prescribed ways of behaving. The myth thus explains what the ritual enacts. In a sense then myths are the by-product of rituals. Kluckhohn remained close to the psychology-influenced theories, since he concludes that myths and rituals equally facilitate the adjustment of the individual to his society. They have a common psychological basis, and in a sense they are supra individual. They are both cultural products, part of the social heredity of a society (Boskovic 2001b:10).

For Cassirer, we must, in order to understand myth, begin with a study of ritual. Ritual is, according to him (Bidney 1953:316) a more fundamental element in man's religious life than myth. Myth is the epic element and rite is the dramatic element in primitive religious

³⁵ 1845-1941

³⁶ 1844-1912

³⁷ 1885

life. Myth serves to rationalize and symbolize rite. To Cassirer then, myth is nothing but the interpretations of rites. With this view, he connects to a larger extent to Smith than to Kluckhohn.

Thus, it seems that myths are stories invented to explain ceremonies, whose real origins have long been forgotten (Harris & Platzner 1995:32). Rituals therefore comprise, according to Theissen (1999:3) of words of interpretation, actions, and objects. In the words of interpretation, the myth is made present in concentrated form. Through them actions take on symbolic surplus value and as signs are related to the other reality. Then, based on this surplus value the objects present in the rite are removed from everyday, secular use and it becomes a religious expression.

Edmund Leach³⁸ can go along with this when he said that ritual is a symbolic statement, which says something about the individuals involved in the action. Myth is for him too the counterpart of ritual (see Boskovic 2001b:11). Myth implies ritual and ritual implies myth, thus they are one and the same. For Leach (see Boskovic 2001b:11), myths are only one way of describing certain types of human behavior, and ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order. Or, as Honko (1984:51) said: “Myth provides the ideological content for a sacred form of behavior. Ritual brings the creative events of the beginning of time to life and enables them to be repeated here and now, in the present.” This is also Gaster’s (1984:113) viewpoint. According to him, the purpose of ritual is to present a situation in which present and actual individuals are involved. However, according to Lévi-Strauss myths and rituals, although linked, remain opposing rather than parallel members of a pair (Segal 1999:46).

There are still scholars who would like to think that Jesus, as anticipation, to his forthcoming passion, instituted the “last supper” as a Christian ritual. However, one must be careful not to interpret the ritualization of the meal in terms of later Christian eucharist theology. According to Mack (1988:120), the Corinthian Christians certainly did not. The

³⁸ 1910-1989

story of the eucharist is an etiological legend. Paul referred to it as if it were the historicized form of the community's foundational martyr-meal myth. The text is thus evidence for the ritualization of the common meal, using its two special moments to recall the founder's death. If one assumes (see Mack 1988:118) that the meal was ritualized in the process of working out the Christ myth, one can identify the symbols with two figures. One is "my body for you"; the other is "the new covenant in my blood." Both of these figures belong to the myth of the martyr. Body and blood as symbols make sense within the tradition of martyrological thought. The identification of the meal symbol with the mythic reference to martyrology was made by means of the formula "this is." The eucharist is thus the ritual that accompanies the Christ myth.

The *kerygma* of the earliest followers of Jesus states that his martyrdom was a sacrifice, which replaced the many sacrifices. At a secondary stage in the development of the cult, it was connected with a ritual. Then, according to Theissen (1999:125), a symbolic action with an eschatological orientation came into being, and an ordinary meal became a forerunner of the eschatological meal, in memory of the death of Jesus.

2.6 Interpreting myth in the New Testament

By the middle of the second century of the Common Era, Justin Martyr recognized the existence of formal parallels between the career of Jesus and a motley assortment of Greek gods and heroes. The parallels include virginal conception, death, resurrection, and ascension (see Aune 1990:2). A few ages later, in 1835 the German theologian David Friedrich Strauss caused a scandal with the publication of *Das Leben Jesu*, the first in a series of Life-of-Jesus monographs in the liberal historical tradition (Kümmel 1974:22). Strauss rejected both dominant schools in biblical studies at his time: supernaturalism, which accepted the gospel miracles as historically correct in spite of the fact that they contradicted the laws of science; and rationalism, which tried to salvage the miracle stories by giving them a plausible explanation acceptable to modern, rational man. In contrast to both of these interpretations, Strauss declared that the gospel stories for the most part consisted of historical myths (Kümmel 1974:256). Everything in the Bible that

is in disagreement with the laws of sciences or the laws of logic, must be rejected as unhistorical and eliminated, he insisted.

For Kaufman (1981:137) the historical story, which the New Testament has to tell of Jesus is clothed in a mythic story about a divine being come down from heaven and born miraculously to a virgin mother, or a divine spirit descending from heaven like a dove and entering into a man at his baptism. This story, Kaufman (1981:38) said, comes to its climax with Jesus' resurrection from the dead and his return to the heavens from whence he originally came and from which he now rules both the church and the world.

Many questions have been asked about how to interpret the myths used in the New Testament. Roughly, hundred years later, in 1941 the German scholar Rudolf Bultmann demanded, "demythologizing" (Kümmel 1974:170). In *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (1942) he accepted Strauss' proposition that the New Testament is based on a mythical *Weltanschauung*, and he drew even more drastic consequences of his view than Strauss had done (see Borg 1998:37). Not only the parts of the gospel that contradict science and logic must be regarded as mythical, but also their entire message is permeated by antiquated mythological thinking, Bultmann asserted (see Pelsner 1987:167). In his own words, Bultmann (in Jaspert 1981:96) said in a letter to Karl Barth that "... myth lives not only in stories of the gods but also in the world-view presupposed by them. The NT authors did not, of course, present 'general' cosmic relations and connections in the form of a story of the gods. But sharing the mythical world-view of their age, they tell the story of the Christ event as a story of the gods, as a myth. The gnostic parallels, e.g., to Phil. 2:6ff.; Col. 1:15ff., anyone will (rightly) describe as myth."

Bultmann regards myth as a story about the "other side" told in terms of "this side," that is, a story about gods and religious reality told in terms of men and the world. The story of the resurrection of Jesus is a myth, a human story about the resuscitation of a corpse and its eventual elevation to a region above the earth via the clouds (see Pelsner 1997:461). However, the reality so described is the spiritual presence of Jesus in the *kerygma*, the proclamation of the church; it is the power of the proclamation that

manifests Jesus and his offer of authentic existence to any generation of humans in the world. Bultmann asserts that for him Jesus is risen into the *kerygma* of the church (see Pelser 1997:465). In addition, Bultmann is an existentialist, and as such, he claims that myths that speak of the “other side” in terms of “this side” are really talking about the historical reality of being human in the world. So, he accepts Heidegger’s existentialist analysis of the reality of being human in the world and calls attention to the distinction between “authentic” and “inauthentic” human existence (Pelser 1987:176). To go back to the resurrection, then, the possibility of authentic human existence in the world is just that, only a possibility. A possibility apart from the power and challenge of the *kerygma* of the church. By responding to the *kerygma*, and only by responding to the *kerygma*, can men achieve the reality of authentic existence (Patterson 1998a:37). For Bultmann to say that the *kerygma* offers man the genuine possibility of human existence in the world is the same as to say that Jesus is risen into the *kerygma*.

The gospel therefore, cannot be rescued through a process of elimination and deflection. The mythical worldview has to be accepted or rejected *in toto*, and to modern, rational man the first of these alternatives is simply impossible. For Bultmann the message of the gospel must be sought not via a critical elimination of the myth but through existential interpretation (Pelser 1987:169). The real purpose of myth is thus not to present an objective picture of the world as it is but to express man’s understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Therefore myth should according to Bultmann not be interpreted cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially (Hasel 1982:144).

To give another example of the three-story worldview, the parousia idea of the return of Jesus as judge of the world, is as dependent on a view of heaven as spatially “above” the earth as is the myth of the resurrection and ascension. But, it is also interpretable as dealing with the futurity of human existence in the world; to speak of the parousia of the son of man is to speak of the futurity of human existence in the world, that “openness to the future” of which Bultmann and the existentialists speak. For him (Borg 1987:13) the historical Jesus is thus irrelevant when he is seen against a mythological background.

The Bible expresses in celestial terms what it wants to say about man and about the condition of human life, Bultmann explained. In a curious way, then, he combined a critical, enlightenment approach to myths with a strong appreciation of the values, which such myths may have for modern man (Patterson 1998a:28).

For Bultmann the message of myth may be indispensable, but myth may not be indispensable conveying the message (see Segal 1999:2). Demythologized, myth ceases to be an explanation at all and becomes an expression of the human experience of the world. Myth ceases to be merely primitive and becomes universal. It ceases to be false and becomes true. According to Bultmann (in Segal 1999:25), demythologized, God still exists, but Satan does not. Sin becomes one's own doing, and Satan symbolizes only one's own evil inclinations. Damnation is not a future place but one's state of mind as long as one rejects God. Hell symbolizes despair over the absence of God and heaven is the joy in the presence of God. Eschatology does not refer to the coming end of the physical world but to the personal acceptance or rejection of God in one's daily life (Segal 1999:25). At the end of the day, the cross and resurrection are firmly confined to the world of time and space, being traditions about God's act in Christ intended to move us to faith, in which we realize our authentic existence (Rogerson 1984:70).

Thus, according to Bultmann (in Segal 1999:91), myth is not to be eliminated from the New Testament. It must be reinterpreted symbolically in order to make it acceptable to modern people. The concept of myth itself will not help us to decide whether there is a transcendent reality beyond this world, or how it might be possible to talk about it. Other factors than myth will determine our attitude (Rogerson 1984:71).

This widely held view of myth is not the only possible one. An urgent challenge confronting contemporary New Testament scholarship is to approach the New Testament with views of myth other than and in addition to the Strauss-Bultmann view. Another view with which to approach the New Testament is that of Mircea Eliade, as discussed above. According to him, myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time (Eliade 1961:57). Myths tell how, through the deeds of

supernatural beings, a reality came into existence. A myth can be known, experienced and lived by means of recitation and ritual, like the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

Others, according to Dinkler (1982:489) asked the questions: Do we not artificially modernize and thus falsify the New Testament's message by interpreting myth? Can we dismiss the mythical language and symbolic pictures as a vehicle of religious thought? Is not myth a cipher, making transparent that which in its essence is transcendent? Since myth is conceived as worldly speech about non-worldly things and as an objective presentation of a non-objectifiable transcendence, how can demythologizing preserve the proclamation that God acted with man in Christ? Is not the speaking of an action coming from God, concrete in Jesus, necessarily mythological?

Kaufman (1981:56) answered a part of this question by stating that mythic language is so commonplace in the life of the church, and in the work of even leading theologians, that it is often regarded as the only appropriate language for theology.

2.7 The Christ cult, myth and the story of the historical Jesus

Burton Mack's explanation of the creation of the Christ myth makes the most sense to me, therefore I will follow his storyline the closest in this paragraph.

Greco-Roman times were a cosmopolitan age. Cultures clashed, and the Mediterranean was inhabited by a volatile mix of peoples with different ideas. According to Patterson (1998a:180) there was only one empire in the Mediterranean world in the first century and that was the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire saturated every aspect of life.

"From the seven hills of its opulent capital to the dusty roads of its servile provinces, Rome spread its peace to all the world: the *Pax Romana*... Jesus encountered this peace... at the end of his life, when he too became its victim, one of thousands, who died on a Roman cross" as a victim of the *Pax Romana* (Patterson 1998a:181). It was at this juncture, that Judaism and Christianity emerged. Three model societies were in

everyone's mind. That was the ancient Near Eastern temple-state, the Greek city-state (*polis*), and the Roman republic. Eventually, they all came tumbling down in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's campaigns (Mack 1995:19). After Alexander, the memories of the temple-state and the city-state were still alive. They were the proper models to civilization, but the societies organized on those models were no more (Van Aarde 1994:9).

The temple-state was a model that had been shaped to perfection by three thousand years of history. It was governed by the notions of power and purity (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:72). The two systems were merged in such a way that everyone knew his or her place in relation to both authority (power) and propriety (purity). The systems also worked as binary opposites (see Mack 1995:20).

The temple-state also produced a particular kind of law. Laws were needed for the balance between the two systems of governance. The scribes filled the niche between power and purity and mediated between the interests of the king and the temple priests (Gundry 1975:52). They were a professional class of intellectuals. They wrote the laws and composed the myths and ritual texts for the temple liturgies. They were concerned with the well-being of society as a whole.

When the Israelites returned from exile, they wanted to rebuild Jerusalem on the ancient model of this temple-state, but they were confronted with the problem that they were not allowed to install a king. They started to think of their high priest as the "sovereign" of the temple-state (Matthews 1991:183). They did this until the time of the Seleucids, who were aggressive in their program of Hellenization. Guerrilla warfare erupted under the Maccabees, who eventually succeeded in taking control of Judea and then assumed the roles, not only of high priest, but of king as well. Their dynasty lasted for eighty years, from 142 to 63 BCE (Lohse 1976:28).

The Pharisees criticized the Hasmonean establishment and, together with the priests at Qumran, they overthrew them. When the second generation Hasmoneans could not

resolve their internal struggle for power, they turned to Rome for help. Pompey solved the problem by turning Palestine into a Roman province (Lohse 1976:34). Now it was Rome who appointed the high priests and kings. In 63 BCE, the second-temple kingdom was over. The temple was finally destroyed during the Roman-Jewish war of 66-73 CE. But the Israelites kept this model alive. Not in practice, but in the collective memory of Israelites for all times (Lohse 1976:50). Even Christians, until today, cannot put the image of the temple at Jerusalem out of their minds.

The story of the Greek city-state is different. The *polis* was a creation of the Greek spirit of independence and free thinking on the one hand, and the practical need for aristocratic clan leaders to band together on the other hand. The heads of families formed councils, defined citizenship, and voted for officers to administer commerce, the games and defense. The city arose as a place where these country barons met, and so the notion of democracy was born (Mack 1995:23). Athens was the place where all of these cultural manifestations flowered and took their place as part of the ideal city. On a religious level, it is important to note that Greek metaphysics had developed the idea of a *god* before its encounter with Christianity, with the result that the proclamation of the God of Jesus Christ in this milieu involved, according to McGrath (1990:5), somewhat tortuous negotiations with this metaphysical god, leading to a complex and nuanced history of identifications and differentiations such as to identify the figure of Christ with the mediating principle of Middle Platonism³⁹.

The *polis* and the ancient Near Eastern temple-state had collided, and neither was able to work effectively. Then there were the Romans with their law, order, and taxes. According to Mack (1995:26), the challenge was to live in this multicultural world without losing one's sense of identity.

It was also in this period that the famous mystery cults spread. These cults, complete with myths, rituals and priests, are best understood as replications away from home of

³⁹ The engagement between Christian theology and pagan philosophy thus took place in the fields of grammar and logic as much as at the level of conceptualities.

religious institutions that were once located in a particular land and people (Duvenage 1976:25). In the case of Jewish associations, they first called it “houses of prayer” and later they called it “synagogues” (Gundry 1975:39).

In antiquity, the people imagined the universe on the model of the society they had constructed. In the multicultural Mediterranean, it was a problem. There were just too many gods and heroes, pictures of priest and kings, ideal cities and perfect laws, powers and creation myths to comprehend. The question that every intellectual tradition in the Greco-Roman world focused its energies on was the question how to arrange them (Mack 1995:30). They tried to match the gods of one cultural tradition with the gods of another. They reduced the myths of the gods to rational accounts of the natural order by means of allegory. Plato’s myth (Mack 1995:31) of the creation of the world by a divine craftsman who followed the plans in the mind of the highest god was very popular.

The Israelite scholars followed a typical pattern of mythmaking. According to Mack (1995:35) the pattern works in the following way.

“The current state of affairs is not living up to the promise of the past. The recent past comes under critique. The stories of the more distant past are rehearsed to make sure of the promise. The aim is to see the promise more clearly... Reseen, and lifted from its ancient history as an ideal model, the figure can then be used as an image of what the people and their culture were, are in essence, or should be... In second-temple times, the epic of Israel was rich in reservoir of ideal types, and all of them were used at one or another time in the process of mythmaking.”

According to Mack (1995:36), Adam, Abraham, the covenants, Moses, the exodus, the law, the temple charter in Leviticus, the entrance into the land, David, Solomon, the building of the temple, the kingdoms, the prophets, and so forth could all be cast as icons of Israel’s sociology and used for comparison and contrast with the contemporary situation.

Israelites had been revising their epic history since the time of David and Solomon. Reimagining the past was their way of mythmaking. Biblical scholars count four major revisions of the epic before the deportation in 587 BCE. Traditionally they are known as the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and the Priestly school (Gunneweg 1978:79).

During the Hellenistic period, Galilee was introduced to Greek language, philosophy, art, and culture through the founding of cities on the Greek model in strategic locations. With them came Greek learning, schools, theaters, forums, and political institutions (Van Aarde 1994:16). In the time of Jesus, there were twelve Greek cities within a twenty-five-mile radius of his hometown Nazareth. Jesus grew up in Galilee. He must have been something of an intellectual according to Mack (1995:39), for the teachings of the movements stemming from him are highly charged with penetrating insights and ideas. He did not create a social program for others to follow or a religion that invited others to see him as god. He never thought of himself as God (Nelson 1991:10). He simply saw things more clearly. It made sense when he talked about life in his world, and it must have attracted others to join him in looking at the world a certain way.

Two major themes marked the Jesus movement. One is a challenge to take up a countercultural lifestyle. The other theme is an interest in a social concept called the “kingdom of God”, from the Greek word *basilea* (Crossan 1995:55). The teachings of Jesus were a combination of these two themes, driven by a desire to think that there must be a better way to live together than the present. He promoted, according to Crossan (1995:56) a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future. The heart of this lifestyle was a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material resources (Crossan 1991:11). The kingdom that Jesus preached was not a political one. He knew the pain and brutality of the world that he lived in and he constructed in word and deeds a new world (Esler 1994:25). That he called the Empire/Kingdom of God. “... Only as persons choose the parabolic experience as that reality out of which they shall live does the Empire of God become real and realized. In the preaching of Jesus the Empire of God is neither future nor assuredly present; it exist as a potential to be actualized in the decision to live out of its audaciously presumed reality” (Patterson 1998a:183).

The line that can be traced from the earliest Jesus movement, through Matthew's Gospel, to later communities that understood themselves as Jewish Christians, was that they emphasized a lifestyle and found a way to bring the behavior of the Jesus movement into line with more traditional Israelite codes of ethics (Ascough 2001:99). They were not only in line with the ethics, but also with the Scriptures of the Israelites. The Greek Old Testament played a special role in the development of the Jesus tradition. "The Christian community soon began to search the Scriptures for proof that Jesus was truly the messiah. The tendency of the gospel writers, especially Matthew, was to make the event fit the prophecy. In addition, the gospel writers did not hesitate to put words taken from the Old Testament on the lips of Jesus, because those words, too, were sacred words" (Funk 1991b:10). Matthew thus emphasized the continuity with the Israelite tradition (Borg 2002:196).

Another line takes off from the Sayings Gospel of Q and the Gospel of Thomas where Jesus' teachings were understood to bring enlightenment about one's true self (Hartin 1999:1002). "But it was finally squelched by the institutional form of Christian tradition called the church. The church's trajectory had worked its way through northern Syria and Asia Minor where the Christ cult formed to justify the inclusion of both gentiles and Israelites in the kingdom of God. It was this trajectory that converged on Rome, developed the notion of the universal church (from *catholicus*), and created the Bible as its charter. And so a new religion emerged" (Mack 1995:41). Early Christianity was thus a creative response to the multicultural challenge of the Greco-Roman age.

Jesus was not the founder of Christianity⁴⁰. His concern was the renewal of Israel (Borg 1991:125). As a revitalization movement within Judaism after his death, the Jesus movement in an important sense failed. New movements started and so Christianity in effect became a new religion (Borg 1991:126). These movements were groups of people

⁴⁰ "Despite his centrality in Christian theology Jesus should not be seen as the *founder* of Christianity. Although his vision, sayings and deeds constitute the *foundational narrative* of a religion that has become to be known as Christianity, he was not the 'founder' of a cult" (Van Aarde 2004b). Early Christian literature used terms such as "pillars" to refer to people who fulfilled this formative role as "founder patrons" (cf Smith 2000:65-66; Martyn 1997:205).

gathered around a novel combination of three ideas, which generated a great deal of excitement, according to Mack (1995:43). One was the idea of a perfect society conceptualized as a kingdom, called the kingdom of God. Many groups used this notion to imagine a better way to live than suffering under the Romans. The second idea was that any individual, no matter of what extraction, status, or innate capacity, was fit for this kingdom. The third idea was a result of the combination of the first two. It was the novel notion that a mixture of people was exactly what the kingdom of God should look like.

From the very early period, scholars can, according to Kloppenborg (1995:12) and Mack (1995:44), identify five different groups of Jesus people from whom there are some documentary evidence. These groups are (1) the Community of Q who produced the Sayings Gospel Q, (2) the Jesus School that produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories, (3) the True Disciples who produced the Gospel of Thomas, (4) the Congregation of Israel who composed the pre-Markan sets of miracle stories, and (5) the Jerusalem Pillars about whom we have only an early report from Paul in his letter to the Galatians. Each of these groups differ from the others, but they do share a few common features, namely their investment in the idea of the kingdom of God; the practice of meeting together for meals; and all of them considered Jesus the founder of their movement. However, after that, each group developed differently.

According to Esler (1994:50), the road from Jesus to the Christian religion that finally emerged in the fourth century, with its myth of Jesus as the son of God solidly in place, is a very long and twisty path. Christianity was not born of an immaculate conception. It was the product of intellectual labor and negotiated social agreements by the people investing in it. No early group thought of Jesus as the Christ or of itself as the Christian church.

The first followers of Jesus were not interested in preserving accurate memories of the historical person (Patterson 1998a:15). According to Mack (1995:46), Jesus was important to them as founder-teacher of a school of thought. Each group created a Jesus,

not exactly in its own image, but in the image appropriate for the founder of the school it had become or wanted to become. These movements developed as schools of thought, not as religious communities of the kind that gathered in celebration of the Christ myth.

Q⁴¹ is the earliest written record we have from a Jesus movement (Nel & Van Aarde 1994:945). According to Mack (1995:47), the Sayings Gospel Q documents the history of a single group of Jesus people for a period of about fifty years, from the time of Jesus in the 20s until after the Roman-Jewish war in the 70s. The remarkable thing about this group is that they developed into a tightly knit community and produced a mythology merely by attributing more and more teachings to Jesus (Tuckett 1996:211). They did not need to imagine Jesus in the role of a god or tell stories about his resurrection from the dead in order to honor him as a teacher. This means that Q puts us as close to the historical Jesus as we will ever be.

According to Mack (1995:48), Q brings the early Jesus people into focus, and it is a picture so different from that which anyone ever imagined as to be startling. Instead of people meeting to worship a risen Christ, as in the Pauline congregations, or worrying about what it meant to be a follower of a martyr, as in the Markan community, the people of Q were fully preoccupied with questions about the kingdom of God in the present and the behavior required if one took it seriously (Nel & Van Aarde 1994:949).

Like the Sayings Gospel Q, the Gospel of Thomas consists only of the sayings of Jesus (Van Eck 1997:643). In both cases, there is a narrative scene at the beginning to set the stage for the rest of the document (Patterson 1998a:22). The Thomas people, like the Q people, were interested only in Jesus' teachings. Because of their shared experiences about the living Jesus, they shared certain "group-specific metaphors which were alien to other Christian communities and which were related to their unique reception of the Jesus tradition" (Liebenberg 2002a:596). They thought of themselves as the True Disciples of Jesus. They live their lives constantly on the move because life is a journey. Part of the

⁴¹ Q is the name given to the source material believed to lie behind the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

journey is to find that which is hidden (Liebenberg 2002b:1758). This disciple's enlightenment had to do with understanding one's true identity as a spiritual being.

In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus himself is not a teacher like other teachers⁴². He is the enlightened one and those who arrived at the true interpretation of his teachings have become enlightened just as he is (Van Eck 1997:627). Thus, Jesus is the symbol of enlightenment as Gth 77 puts it: "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: From me all has come forth, and to me all has reached. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there" (Davies 2002:98). To end with a Gnostic interpretation of the teachings of Jesus means that the Thomas people took a turn at some point in their history that the people of Q did not take (Den Heyer 1996:152).

The material is clearly polemical. "The Thomas people knew that other Jesus groups had developed into apocalyptic communities on the one hand, and what might be called Jewish-Christian communities on the other. They were at pains to distinguish themselves from both these groups and did so by having Jesus himself counter the wrongheadedness of each" (Mack 1995:63). The Thomas people, according to Mack (1995:64) developed the mythology of a Jesus movement by investing the sayings of Jesus with private and esoteric significance. Although these teachings counted as sayings of Jesus, they were actually the teachings of the Thomas community, for the Thomas community developed as any Hellenistic school tradition would have, by continuing to attribute new ideas to the founder of the school (see Van Eck 1997:630; Davies 2002:2).

Jesus thus became the symbol of incarnate light and life because that is what his teachings dispensed. There was no need for Jesus to perform miracles, prophesy the end of the world, die on the cross as a savior, or come again for the final judgment. They did not attach any redemptive meaning to his death (Van Aarde 2001a:17).

Mark's story of Jesus is packed with miracles that Jesus performed (Collins 1992:21). These stories create the impressions of a divine power that entered history in the person

⁴² From a historical point of view Jesus was a sage like all the other (cf Funk 1994:138)

of Jesus (Van Aarde 2000:189). These miracle stories built, according to Mack (1995:65) upon an earlier collection that had a different rationale. That rationale can be seen in two sets of five miracle stories that originally had their home in a pre-Markan Jesus movement.

These are the two miracle stories (Telford 1999:94) about Jesus and the disciples crossing the sea (4:35-41; 6:45-51), and two stories about Jesus feeding a crowd in the open (6:34-44,53; 8:1-10), and the three stories on both sides in-between (one exorcism 5:1-20; 7:24b-30; and two healings 5:21-23, 35-43; 5:25-34; and 8:22-26; 7:32-37). At first glance, these stories look like reports of miracles typical for the Greco-Roman world. On a closer read, the content of the stories had a special twist. According to Mack (1995:64) the themes and certain detail seemed to be reminiscent of miracles associated with the epic of Israel. A miraculous sea crossing and the feeding of the people in the wilderness were standard items in the story of the Exodus. The miracles in the middle make one think of Elijah and Elisha in the time of David and Solomon. Perhaps some Jesus group wanted to portray Jesus as a founder figure who looked somewhat like Moses and a little like Elijah (who was the one to restore Israel in time of trouble) (Mack 1995:66).

On closer observation, the problems facing the people in the stories were extreme. They were hopeless cases of illness, demon possession and death (Telford 1999:17). These people represented very unlikely candidates for (re)entry into the society of Israel. They were outside the boundaries of the Jewish system of classification. The point that these stories want to make is that it turns out to be a wondrous myth of origin for a group of Jesus people. Jesus, the founder of the new movement, was like Moses, the leader of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and like Elijah, the prophet whose appearance would restore the children of Israel to their rightful role as the people of God (Mack 1995:66). That only underscored the fact that the congregation Jesus led and cared for looked peculiar. It was made up of socially marginal people who did not fit the picture of Israel as the Israelite people. Van Aarde (2001a:42) called them the nobodies.

To make such an incongruous mix of people look legitimate according to Israelite standards, one would certainly need a lot of ‘miracles’ of some kind. “Thus miracles were used as a theme to associate Jesus and the people he collected with Moses, Elijah, and the people of Israel. The miracle set did so by making dramatic the transformation of these unlikely people on the one hand, and then by framing that effect with allusions to the exodus story on the other. The result was a strong suggestion that the listener or reader might think of the new Jesus movement as if it were a Congregation of Israel” (Mack 1995:66).

One has to notice, according to Mack (1995:67), that there is no polemic in these stories, no claim that the Jesus movement is the only right way. There is no reference to a conflict that Jesus must have had with Israelite authorities, and no need to think that these people had been transformed by the message of a dramatic crucifixion and miraculous resurrection. It is a myth of origin, a daring combination of thoughts. Moses the prophet-king of the Samaritan epic and the Elijah-Elisha cycle of stories from the northern kingdom, and so the Jesus movement was on its way as a new congregation of Israel.

In Jerusalem,⁴³ there must have been a group of the Jesus movement made up of Galileans. They left no written records or documents, but we read from them in a secondary report. Paul mentioned in his letter to the Galatians (55 C.E.) that he visited the “pillars” in Jerusalem twice to compare his gospel to theirs (Van Stempvoort 1972:33). He does not give us an account of their gospel, but he gave us the names of Cephas (Peter), James, and John (1:18; 2:1; 2:9). He indicated the main issue as the acceptance of

⁴³ The question is also asked whether such an organized Jesus movement ever existed in Jerusalem during the immediate years after the crucifixion of Jesus (Van Aarde 2004b). Some scholars (cf Miller 1995:27) are convinced that the existence of an organized *ecclesia* in Jerusalem during those early years is a fiction of the author of Acts on account of his interpretation of Paul’s controversy with opponents in the letter to the Galatians. Dennis Smith (2000:62) formulates a similar opinion as follows: “I would argue that the Jerusalem ‘church’ as power broker in Christian origins was a mythological construct from the outset, first appearing among Paul’s opponents in Galatia, then picked up and elaborated on by Luke in Acts. The actual *ecclesia* in Jerusalem, such as it was, most likely played a minor role in Christian origins. But the Jerusalem of myth was utilized to buttress a mythological Jerusalem ‘church’ in order to gain advantage in the early debates among the Jesus movements.” According to Van Aarde (2004b) the term “the Twelve” served as a self-reference of the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem. They regarded themselves as “apostles” and “prophets” of the “new Israel”, analogous to the twelve patriarchs in the Hebrew Scriptures.

gentiles into the kingdom movement, and especially whether the pillars in Jerusalem would, demand that a gentile be circumcised (Acts 15).

They agreed that gentiles need not to be circumcised (Van Stempvoort 1972:35). Their only request was that Paul must remember the poor. That was most probably a reference to themselves and their impoverished constituency. This Jerusalem group must have been a Jesus movement, not a Christian congregation of the Pauline type (Mack 1995:68).

According to Mack (1995:70) “[a]t the beginning, Jesus was remembered as a teacher who challenged individuals to think of themselves as citizens of the kingdom of God. ... It brought people together who were aware of the troubled times and gave them a forum to both talk and action.” The common strategy was to attribute the wisdom they had achieved, and the big ideas they had, to Jesus. They, according to Mack (1995:70) put it in the form of instructions from him by revising his teachings to match the school of thought they were developing. They did this just as any Hellenistic school of philosophy would have done.

They called Jesus savior, just as all the Hellenistic schools had their saviors. As a matter of fact, the ancient world was full of saviors. There were Isis, Ashtarte, Sarapis, Asclepius, Zeus, and Augustus Caesar. According to Patterson (1998b:495) saviors was so plentiful because antiquity was so rough. The question behind the quest for a savior was: “Is there a god who cares what happens to me personally, who loves me?” The answers (saviors) were found in the military power of the Emperor, the healing touch of Asclepius, the mysterious inner sanctum of the Isis temple. “When early Christianity claimed Jesus as their Savior, they were claiming that the love of God was to be found around the open tables of the Jesus movement. It was there that they experienced care. It was there that they experienced love. It was there that they experienced the safety and security that comes only from knowing experientially that there is a God who cares about me personally. Jesus created an experience of the unmitigated love of God for those in his world who had experienced it least: the poor, the blind, the lame, the homeless. They in turn confessed him as ‘Savior’” (Patterson 1998b:495).

One other dimension of this early mythmaking was the way in which each of these groups tried to link its picture of Jesus to the grand traditions of Israel. It was necessary to associate him with images from the past to enhance his stature and to lay claim to the authority such roles had in the history of Israel. The Q community thought of him as a Cynic sage and a (Deuteronomic) prophet, a wisdom teacher, and as the son of God (Hartin 1994:572; Nel & Van Aarde 1994:950). This turned the historical teacher into the appearance of a divine being and his teachings into a revelation of cosmic arrangement (Mack 1995:71).

The attractiveness of the Jesus movement was, according to Mack (1995:73) based on its invitation to experiment with the notion of the kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus, and it flowed from the energies people were investing in the groups that began to form.

Beginning somewhere in northern Syria, probably in the city of Antioch, and spreading through Asia Minor into Greece, the Jesus movement, according to Mack (1995:75), underwent a change of historic consequence. It was a change that turned the Jesus movement into a cult of a god called Jesus Christ. This social experimentation developed over a period of about twenty-five years.

The Christ cult and the Jesus movements differed in two major respects (see Mack 1995:75). The one was the focus on the meaning and significance of the death and destiny of Jesus. His death was understood to have been an event that brought a new community into being. It shifted attention away from the teachings of Jesus and instead it engendered an elaborate preoccupation with notions of martyrdom, resurrection, and the transformation of Jesus into a divine, spiritual presence. The other major difference was the forming of a cult oriented to that spiritual presence. They composed and performed hymns, prayers, acclamations, and doxologies when Christians met together in Jesus' name (Mack 1995:75).

The first person to have left behind anything in writing was Paul of Tarsus. Paul never knew Jesus personally. His direct experiences of Jesus was limited to spiritual experiences, which he understood to be a revelation from Jesus Christ, whom he believed God had raised from the dead (Patterson 1998a:17). His letters tells us more about his own understanding of Christ than about the cult to which he was converted. He includes in his letters the ideas that he got from the cult, but also fragments from their literary production (Mack 1995:76). According to Mack (1995:77), examples of these literary units are the following: Creedal formulas about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 3:24-26; Rom 4:25) as well as highly crafted summaries of Christ myth (1 Cor 15:3-5). Poems in praise of Christ as a god (Phil 2:6-11) and of *agape* as a spiritual power (1 Cor 13:1-13) also occur. There are also acclamations ("Jesus is the Lord" Phil 2:11), mottoes ("Everything is lawful" 1 Cor 10:23), and doxologies ("To our God and Father be glory for ever," Phil 4:20). Then there are scriptural allegorizations such as the story of the exodus in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 and that of the children of Abraham in Galatians 4:22-26. These bits are enormously important because it provided evidence for the congregations of Christ to which Paul was converted and it hold hints we need to account for the transformation of a Jesus movement into a Christ cult.

In this process, a notion was born for a fellowship that includes everyone, irrespective of customary social identities. To make the claim that a mixed group of Jesus people represented God's plan for restructuring human society was not a simple matter. He did this according to Strijdom (2001:615) by appropriating the Israelite epic in order to show that God had the Gentile nations in mind in his plan all along.

The most important texts for working out the logic of the Christ myth are Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-5) and Romans (Rom 3:24-26). Both focus on the significance that early Christians attributed to the "crucified one" who became the "risen one" (Den Heyer 1996:5).

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 can be called the *kerygma* of the early Christian community. Paul said that it was a tradition that he had received and passed on in his preaching (Klauck

1992:107-108). This text is formulaic and carefully composed (Witherington 1995:299). According to Mack (1995:79) four events are in view (death, burial, resurrection, appearance), two of which are fundamental, namely the death and the raising of Christ. This text is composed of two balancing units. Each has the feature of the reference to the Scripture (Lüdemann 1994:35). The burial underscores the reality of Christ's death and the appearance underscores the reality of his having been raised. Paul did not get this from history, but from his exegesis, that is why he states "in accordance with the scriptures" (Patterson 1998a:214). This polished, poetic, *kerygmatic* formula reflects a lengthy period of collective and intellectual labor.

Two mythologies provide the logic underlying the entire enterprise. According to Mack (1995:80) one is the Greek myth of the noble death and the other is the Israelite myth of the persecuted sage. In the Greek myth, the person who died nobly is turned into a martyr who died for a cause. The standard for assessing the virtue of such a death was a person's integrity (with respect to the teaching or cause for which one was willing to die) and endurance (or loyalty to the cause). Therefore, it was that martyrdom came to represent the ultimate test of virtue, and obedience unto death the ultimate display of one's strength of character.

Within Israelite circles, the concept of martyrdom took yet another turn. "Drawing upon the older image of the warrior who died for his country and the significance of such a death as a sacrifice offered in defense of one's people, the idea occurred to some that a martyr's death might be effective. Perhaps it could actually bring to an end the circumstances that had occasioned the death and so establish or strengthen the cause for which the martyr had died (Mack 1995:81).

The Israelite myth of the persecuted sage was also popular at that time. It was also called the story of wisdom's child and it included stories such as Joseph, Esther and Daniel (Loader 1980:157). The plot included two major episodes. "The first was the unjust charge of disloyalty that put the sage 'into the hands of' a foreign despot who threatened to kill him. This was the 'trail' gone wrong. The second episode was the revelation or

discovery of the sage's piety and loyalty by the despot. This revelation resulted in the rescue of the righteous man and his elevation to a position of honor. This was the 'trail' gone rightly, the 'vindication' of his righteousness" (Mack 1995:81). According to Patterson (1998a:218) the idea that God would intervene to vindicate a faithful, yet unjustly martyr is an old and well-rehearsed idea in Israelite tradition. Where the righteous were not always rescued from persecution, foreign powers, and death, the tale was revised by granting the righteous a postmortem destiny and by imagining that the scene of vindication would take place at some other time and place after death, and perhaps in some other world.

The Christ myth is rooted in a combination of both these stories. Mack (1995:82) pointed to three features that indicate that the martyr myth was in mind while the Christ myth was being imagined. The first is the phrase "died for." Without it, one would not know why Jesus' death had attracted any attention. "To die for" was a technical term for expressing the purpose of martyrdom. The second feature is the fact that the purpose of the death was to achieve some effect for the Christian community as a whole. The purpose had something to do with "our sins." The third feature is the reference to Christ's being "raised."

For the Greeks and for the Israelites immortality did not include the body. The postmortem retribution of the martyr was always casted in terms of spiritual transformation (Jacob 1982:689). Martyrs also always died for a cause already in place and by the hands of external powers, but with Jesus, it was different. He would have to confront a condition within the community for which he would then die. The cause and the conditions were also highly questionable. They were characterized by sins and sinners (Mack 1995:83).

Thus, Jesus was a most unlikely martyr dying for a quite unthinkable cause. According to Mack (1995:84), the only way to overcome the implicit contradictions was to exaggerate the drama and consider the event from God's point of view. Four features of the *kerygma* are direct results of this imagination. One aspect of the myth's theology is the use of the

term “Christ” as the anointed or approved one by God. Another is the characterization of the community as “sinners” before God. A third is the appeal to the Scriptures, and the fourth is that this God had proven his approval of both Jesus and Jesus’ cause by raising him from the dead. What mattered was the cause for which Jesus Christ had died.

The resurrection tradition is thus rather an exegetical tradition, than something that was linked to the appearance traditions. For Paul (1 Cor 15:3-4) the resurrection was true because it happened according to the Scriptures (Crossan 1995:168). As much as we might like to think of the resurrection of Jesus as a unique event, which separates Christians even from its Israelite roots, this does not do justice to the origin of the resurrection proclamation itself. “When this proclamation is examined carefully as it appears in early Christian tradition, we can see that this most central claim of Christian faith is a response to the life and death of Jesus that is quite understandable within the culture of ancient Judaism” (Patterson 1998a:222).

Another text of Paul, Romans 3:21-26 puts us in touch with a very early period in the development of the Christ myth. The death of Jesus was in view, and its significance as a martyrdom had been worked out without any need to imagine a resurrection (Crossan 1995:155). From the pre-Pauline fragment behind this text, converge four theological ideas of this interpretation of Jesus’ death. “The first is that God took note of the problem facing the new community, namely that the inclusion of gentiles had to be justified. The second is that God worked it out by regarding Jesus’ death as an expiation for their sins. The third is that the effectiveness of Jesus’ death was due to his faith (fullness). And the fourth is that one who learns to be faithful on the model of Jesus’ faithfulness is justified in the sight of God” (Mack 1995:85). The logic of this mythology is based on a martyrology, for Jesus is said to have been faithful. The factor that turned his martyrdom into an event that justified the new community, and allowed the thought that the new community was the cause, for which he had died, was derived not from Jesus’ own interpretations, but from the way in which God was understood to have viewed the event. God as righteous judge vindicated the gentiles as rightful members of the community if only they regarded Jesus’ death as the mythology that portrayed it.

The notion of sacrifice is also present. “This adds yet another nuance to the imagery, building upon the ‘sacrificial’ aspect of a martyr’s death by using metaphors from the sacrificial system of the second temple” (Mack 1995:86). The Maccabean martyrologies also used metaphors of sacrifice from the temple to describe the effectiveness of the martyr’s death.

The Christ myth was not a narrative of Jesus’ passion as we find in the later gospels. As a martyrology, the Christ-myth does have the potential for becoming a story. Its first conception had little to do with historical reminiscence and no interest at all in setting the event in any historical context. Largely the Gospels and its development are the result of early Christian exegetical activities (Patterson 1998a:222). Only the figure of Jesus, the indications of his martyrdom, God’s involvement in the event, and its meaning for the community are of interest and in view.

The *kerygma* and the passion narrative of Mark’s Gospel are two different, incongruous myths (Mack 1995:87). There is really no way of knowing anything about the historical circumstances of Jesus’ death. Prior to the Gospel of Mark, we cannot be sure that there was a passion narrative consisting of a string of events leading up to Jesus’ execution. There is no reference to Jesus’ death as a crucifixion (Funk 1996:239). It is important to see all these in the proper context. The passion narratives are not historical. They came from a time when the followers of Jesus were still a tiny sect within Jewish life. It was a time of war. “The Jews did not kill Jesus. Pilate did not wash his hands. A crowd of Jews did not say in unison, ‘His blood be upon us and our children’” (Patterson 1998a:207).

What did really happen? According to Patterson (1998a:207) one can only make educated guesses. We know that Jesus spoke about a new empire. Such a word would not have been well-received by those whose stake in the current Empire was great. Jesus did come to Jerusalem, and it could well have been Passover. He visited the Temple. He criticized the Temple and did something that demonstrated his dismay. He was arrested and he was crucified by Roman authorities because he spoke and proclaimed another Empire.

“...[H]e was executed for political sedition under a placard reading ‘King of the Jews,’ a serious accusation couched in irony” (Patterson 1998a:208).

It seems thus the most obvious to conclude that somewhere near the end of the first century, the Christ myth of a martyr and the narrative of the Jesus from Nazareth got interlaced and in the retelling of the narrative Israelite and Greco-Roman mythological elements were used. Therefore, the intertext between the narratives of Hercules, Perseus, Horus, Asclepius, and Zeus are not strange phenomena because they were well known stories in the time when the New Testament was written. And so was also Paul’s use of the concept of Jesus as a child of God thus a common feature with the surrounding world (Van Aarde 2001a:165). In this whole process of retelling the story where the messianic figure is given a mythical role, Jesus became God in early Christian circles. He became a divine figure who comes to earth from beyond, redeems humankind, and then returns to the sky (Funk 1991a:13).

2.8 Conclusion

For the people living in a pre-scientific Mediterranean context, the natural and the supernatural worlds were not separated, but it formed an integral unity. This can be called a mythological paradigm. As I understand it, the Christ myth is a first century Mediterranean version of the ancient inherited subconscious archetypal myths of humankind. It is stories in the language, symbols, and metaphors of the cultures and peoples in which it originated. It is language recycled.

According to Mack (1988:116) the Christ myth gave an account of the history, cosmos, and a founding event that, looked at from God’s point of view, defined the community as a new, divine creation.

To read the myth literally is an error. It was not even valid to read it literally at the time of the first century. Because one cannot read it literal, the reading of the myth leads to the metaphorical interpretation. Not only a few incidents, but also the whole of the gospel must be seen as metaphor. Psychologically speaking, when reading the narrative, one's subconscious connects with the truth hidden beneath the surface of the story. The art of reading the text is to find the resemblance of truth through the myth. However, the real art lies in the understanding of the metaphor.

One's personal horizon must fuse with the horizon that the text proposes. This happens in the *kerygma*. The *kerygma* is according to Bultmann (1987:239) understandable as *kerygma* only when the self-understanding awakened by it is recognized to be a possibility of human self-understanding and thereby becomes the call to decision.

A metaphor works when the literal meaning is not acceptable. This very fact confirms the *kerygmatic* character of the Christ myth. The content is not historical or universal truths but is a personal address in a concrete situation. The *kerygma* of the myth appears in a form molded by an individual's understanding of one's own existence or by one's interpretation of that understanding. Correspondingly it is understandable only to one who is able to recognize the *kerygma* as a word addressed to one in one's situation – to recognize it immediately only as a question asked or as a demand made.

Today more and more readers, scholars as well as members of the faith community and the church realize that the gospel cannot be literally acceptable. Thus, the text as a whole has a metaphorical twist. It is a myth that must be interpreted, as Bultmann said. Because it does not make sense literally, one must regard the whole text as metaphorical and one has to inquire into the dimension of the metaphorical reference. Only when one sees the whole of the gospel as a metaphor, the hidden referential dimension is able to rise. To me, that is the intention that the gospel held from the beginning.

The metaphors used in the gospel narratives are archetypes in the subconscious of humankind. Reading the stories allows one to realize on a subconscious level the

correspondence with the archetypes that exist in the subconscious of man. Thus, the mythical representation through the metaphor of the text communicates with the archetype in the reader's subconscious and that let the reader see (experience) *the* truth.

To understand the gospel is thus to see. To see means to look beyond the story and to let your subconscious revive the myth. When the myth revives, it facilitates your entrée into an experience with God. The myths represented in the narratives are all the myths that one needs for living. It is the myths of life and death and new beginnings, of nobodies who turn into heroes, of martyrs and conquerors. The gospel is a narrative that invites you to join, to integrate your life with the storyline of the text. Once you have joined, the metaphor opens up and through the myth hidden in it, you enter into an experience with God. That is what reading the text is all about. Thus, while myths have their limitations and their dangers they cannot be discarded. They are necessary ciphers for evoking an awareness of the deepest realities in human experience.

Somewhere in the past, along the line the church has lost the experience. It mistaken by historized the Christ myth. The fact that myths generally operate on a different level of reality was overlooked. In recent times, when an attempt was undertaken by the scholarly community to compare these myths with the historical facts, the attempt failed, because the myths were never intended to be history, but only an experience of faith. I am not convinced that the members and leaders of the institutionalized church are currently willing to accept it.

As part of the faith community, I know that God cannot be met in dogmas, creeds, and teachings about God. God can only be met in an experience with God. Myth is the only phenomenon that can reveal the subconscious and that can help one to experience it. This experience of myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God.

If I may recap my conclusion from chapter one, I would like to state again with Bultmann and Dibelius: First, there was the *kerygma*! The *kerygma* was about death and resurrection. The *kerygma* asked for narratives. The narratives were used in the cult as

material for sermons. This narratives that end with the resurrection of Christ became the foundational myth for the Christ cult, for its preaching and its rituals⁴⁴.

The earliest Christians believed in God. Their belief was an act of faith. They met God in the *kerygma*, in the myth, in the narratives about a historical Jesus who was deified after his death and became the resurrected Christ. Christians today still belief that this Christ is a manifestation of God for them, because they could see the love in him. The Christian tradition goes on even after 2000 years. The myth is still read and it still functions as an entrée for an experience with God. The fact that it is a myth does not take its value or its truth away, because the myth is only the vehicle. The truth lies in the *kerygma*! A truth that I can live with!

Supper will never be the same again in Emmaus! After they have arrived home from Jerusalem, and a long day on the road, the man and his companion sat down to eat something. While sharing with one another in a spiritual sense their experience of God and their understanding of the love of God, the one break the bread and passed it on to the other. Then, for the first time, when receiving the bread, the companion understood the kerygma about the Christ that he had heard, and the myth just opens up. In the receiving of the broken bread, the companion experienced the dying of the god. And when he cleansed his mouth and throat with a sip of wine, he felt new and strong again. In their sharing of bread and wine, they realized that God is the God of endings and new beginnings, of love and grace, of forgiveness and reconciliation. From that day on, bread and wine were never for them the same again! Myth and ritual. Ritual and myth. They experienced God, and after supper, they carry on with all the ups and downs of normal life!

⁴⁴ The next chapter will zoom in on the resurrection

Chapter Three

A THEORY ON RESURRECTION

3. A stone rolled away became a stumbling block

Much has been said and written about the resurrection of Jesus from the death. One of the earliest critical scholars was Hermann Samuel Reimarus whose major work, *The aims of Jesus and his disciples*, was published in the eighteenth century. Reimarus listed ten contradictions in the resurrection narratives, which he said were representative of many more. He concluded that they were apologetic errors and on this basis denied that the resurrection occurred. According to Osborne (1984:22), his primary thesis was that the disciples made up the story to promulgate their religion. Their goal was political in terms of gaining money and status. The work of Reimarus did not gain much acceptance at that stage. Today, it is worth giving it a second thought!

There is a constant need for work and further study on the resurrection of Jesus. This event has come to us in the form of a historicizing report and therefore it must be examined. Another reason for studying the resurrection of Jesus is that historically it was of decisive significance for the origin and development of the Christian religion (Lüdemann 1994:9). Without the belief in the resurrection, there would be nothing. At least, so we think! For years, I believed that my faith depended on the historicity of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. At last, I am free of that burden.

In the scholarly community, the resurrection of Jesus is one of the most debated topics at the moment. Scholars tag one another either as a fundamentalist⁴⁵ or as a liberal. In the faith community, it is also a highly debated topic. The so-called *liberals*, who do not believe in a physical and bodily resurrection, are trying to interpret the myth so that it can still make sense and give hope to postmodern people. I may be wrong, but as far as my observation goes, the institutionalized church has set the issue aside by labeling it as heretical. The point that I want to make, is that the topic is relevant and it must be discussed. I, at least, need some clarification for my own peace.

Thus far, in my study I have seen and concluded that the Christ cult and its narratives developed within a mythological worldview. First, there was the *kerygma* of a dying and resurrected Christ. Then narratives, as material for preaching in the early congregations, emerged around the figure of the historical Jesus. These narratives are mythical in character. The crucial part of these narratives is the Easter narrative, and the essence of the Easter narrative is the part about the resurrection of Christ. That is why I devote a whole chapter to this theme.

Many scholars throughout history tried to explain the resurrection. Friederich Schleiermacher (see Osborne 1984:22) for example said that Jesus had some kind of mystical power, which, combined with divine providence, helped to keep him from dying on the cross. He escaped from the tomb and went to Galilee where his privacy could be maintained. According to David Friederich Strauss (in Osborne 1984:23) the disciples produced a glorified Jesus which fit their own beliefs. He is convinced that the “visions” occurred in Galilee where there was no tomb to dispute the myths which arose. Therefore, the resurrection narratives were written in conjunction with Israelite and Hellenistic myths rather than the events themselves.

All the different studies that were undertaken and the results that scholars came forth with, say that there must be something suspicious concerning the resurrection. Wilhelm Bousset (see Osborne 1984:24) teaches that the myth of a dying and risen god in pagan

⁴⁵ Those who cling to a positivistic reading of mythological texts.

literature led to the formulation of such legends as the “third day” motif. According to Persian legend, the soul of the deceased remains in his corpse three days. He said that the resurrection of Christ was purely a spiritual event in the minds of his disciples.

Bultmann (see Osborne 1984:26) believed that the resurrection story was the disciples’ attempt to express the significance of the cross through *kerygma*. The real Easter event was not the resurrection of Christ but the birth of faith in the redemptive effect of the cross as an act of God. According to Joachim Jeremias (see Osborne 1984:27), the passion itself was an observable event occurring over a short period of time, while the resurrection was a series of Christophanies occurring over a span of many years. Karl Barth taught that the resurrection happened outside space and time and thus was not part of history, as we know it. As a result, the believer must reach beyond history to grasp the resurrection by a leap of faith, or as Barth (see Bultmann 1922:60) put it: The resurrection of Jesus is “no event of historical extent *beside* the other events of his life and death, but the ‘unhistoric’ relationship of his *whole* historic life to its origin in God. If the resurrection were itself in any sense a fact of history, then no assertion however strong, and no deliberation however refined, would be able to prevent it from appearing to be drawn into that see-saw of Yes *and* No, of life *and* death, of God *and* man, which is characteristic of the historical superficiality.” Perhaps the best way to describe the eventual divergence between Barth and Bultmann is to say that, while for Barth the primary task was to elucidate the content of what is believed, for Bultmann the task was to elucidate the character of belief (cf Fergusson 1992:23).

The resurrection is, according to Bultmann (cf Pelsler 1997:461), not history but a myth with an existential message, not a past event of salvation but a present proclamation, which leads to self-understanding. The resurrection thus expresses the true significance of the cross and helps us to accept suffering voluntarily.

Because of all these different opinions on such a crucial issue as the resurrection, I can not approach this research by any other method as with the hermeneutics of suspicion

because nothing in the tradition on the resurrection of Jesus seems to be what it seems to be!

It should be noted that there are no appearance stories in the Sayings Gospel of Q, the Gospel of Mark, or the Gospel of Thomas. If one accepts that the empty tomb story was a late development, probably created by Mark, and if one accepts that the resurrection was not a historical event that happened on the first Easter Sunday, it leaves one with the fact that there were Christians and Christian faith prior to the rise of specific appearance stories (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:462). Resurrection beliefs and stories about resuscitated bodies were not unknown in the first-century Mediterranean world. According to Osiek (cf Van Aarde 2001a:170) there is one apotheosis story that one must take note of. That is the story of Hercules by the first-century BCE historian, Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* 38.3-5).

“Hercules mounts the funeral pyre, which is consumed by a bolt of lightning. Those who came afterwards to gather the remains find no bones, and conclude that Hercules has been translated to the realm of the gods.

Paul’s analogies to seed sown and astral bodies in 1 Cor 15:35-44 are open to a variety of interpretations, but it does seem as if some continuity with the physical is supposed in the pneumatic transformation.”

Eugen Drewermann is guided very much in his work by the analytical psychology of C.G. Jung, and by Paul Tillich. He sharply criticized the historical-critical method of exegesis. According to him, the mystery of the resurrection cannot be “established externally. One can only believe it and it can only be communicated in images and symbols. One can perceive the reality of Easter morning only with the eyes of the heart, for everything that makes us live comes from the invisible sphere of eternity” (Lüdemann 1994:5). Lüdemann (1994:6) also quotes Maurice Goguel who said that the purely historical-literary method is not enough to study the reports and the facts concerning the resurrection. One must also work out the feelings, the emotions, and the ideas, which would have gone with the faith of the first Christians in the relevant narratives about the resurrection.

One has to take the gospel stories for what they are and not for what people want them to be. So many has come with false expectations to the texts. They asked questions that the Gospels do not want to, or even can not answer because the Gospels were not written as historical documents or eye-witness reports. One must read the texts on their own terms and one must recognize their own emphases, priorities, and concerns. The witnesses whom we have in the Bible do not describe the resurrection. According to Lüdemann (1995:3), they report what was experienced, and just as anything experienced is interpreted and reported differently by those who experienced it, so too these testimonies are full of inconsistencies and sometimes contradictions.

That is why I choose to approach the issue in a postmodern mode. Postmodern interpreters are suspicious of modernist interpretations that are presented as objective. “Postmodern interpretation is suspicious of hidden ideological interests, both of the biblical text and of the interpreters. Take historiography as an example. Modern historicists strive for objectivity even though they realize that it cannot fully be attained. Postmodern historicists regard objectivity as unattainable and, therefore, a futile endeavor that is to be rejected from the outset” (Van Aarde 2002:432). Any interpretation of an event in the past cannot be anything but a conglomeration of clues from the past and assumptions from the present about the past. What postmodern historicists strive for, according to Adam (1995:46-47), is to understand the cultural currents of the world of the text, in other words the text within and as part of its context, and to be honest about their own constructs.

For ideological critics it is important to point out that the biblical narratives were produced in particular social and economic settings. Biblical ideological critics aim at demystifying the ‘religious’ aura of the Bible. They want to relocate the Bible as a site of and a tool in ideological conflict. “They reveal the ideological cracks that have been plastered over with the façade of ideologically suspect spirituality; they uncover and stress the text that may be useful in countering oppressive structures; and they attack the pervasive ideological bias of the discipline of biblical studies” (Adam 1995:51).

As pointed out by Adam (1995:54-55) there are texts in the Bible that, when they are read ideologically critical, they deliver remarkable results. Texts like Deut. 7:8 (“It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that was sworn to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”) and Rom. 6:23 (“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”), stress the gratuity of God’s grace. On the other hand, there is also a strong emphasis on a theology that characterizes the basis of salvation as an economic exchange. Humanity rectifies its relationship with God in the Old Testament when men offer sacrifices to God. In the New Testament, humanity is saved when Christ ransoms his sisters and brothers by the sacrifice of himself. The difference between these two accounts of how people can rectify their relation to God is neither inconsequential nor ideologically innocent.

According to Adam (1995:54) the sacrificial system, for example, reproduces a hierarchical social economy that subordinates women and that introduces a medium of exchange by which humanity can, in effect, buy a right standing with God. This sacrificial economy pushes women to the margins in several ways. First, women are denied access to the mechanics of offerings because only male Levites and Aaronites may accede to priesthood. Second, women did not typically control possessions suitable for sacrifice, and finally women were themselves value-laden assets, who are therefore subject to being sacrificed (Adam 1995:55).

The work of ideological criticism is never done. Every result and every answer become the object for yet another search (Norris 2002:137). Therefore, I choose to deconstruct the issue. Deconstructive interpretation follows readily from postmodern antifoundationalism, and political criticism from postmodern demystifying. Other sorts of interpretation follow more the postmodern resistance to totalities. Postmodern detotalizing left us with no pure discourses. These transgressive interpretive practices, according to Adam (1995:62), disregard the rules and hermeneutical conventions of the modern exegetical discipline. Transgressive readers assert audacious versions of texts,

such as inversions, extraversions, conversions, perversions, contraversions, diversions, transversions and subversions. Conventional interpretations assume that there is only one appropriate context against which to read a text while postmodern readers deliberately disrupt the interpretive effects. While biblical interpretation customarily sticks within the boundaries of historical discourse, postmodern interpreters, according to Adam (1995:62), feel free to blur and to cross over the boundaries and borderlines to make biblical criticism interdisciplinary and even undisciplined.

Just as there are no pure discourses, no pure disciplines, there are no pure genres, and even the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction disappeared (Norris 2002:139). One can only judge narrative sentences true or false based on the claims they seem to be making. “The difficulty in distinguishing ‘truth’ or ‘history’ from ‘fiction’ becomes even greater when a narrative reports events that may be believable, and that we do not already know to be false” (Adam 1995:63).

If one read for example the gospel narratives, one would be exploring the postmodern riches of intertextuality (Van Aarde 2002:431). This is the principle that every text is constituted by other texts; every text borrows words and ideas from predecessor texts, and loans them to successors. Such intertextual cross-readings would not then be dismissed by us as untrue or unhistorical, but as Adam (1995:64) said, we would evaluate them as works of hermeneutical virtuosity. The only limits to the questions asked to the text are the interpreter’s imagination.

In the postmodern discourse, our interpretations are not authoritative sentences that close the book on interpretive questions, but are ventures in persuasion. I therefore do not pretend to put universally accepted answers on the table. I know that postmodern biblical criticism is a kind of wri(th)ing. To me it is a venture. A search. An ongoing process of digging out more questions.

According to Adam (1995:73) there are few or no rules that might assure me that I am doing it right, but the fact that there are not necessarily a criteria, does not imply that there are no criteria, it is just that the recipe-approach simply does not work.

According to Adam (1995:74) the greatest preparation for undertaking this different path to biblical interpretation comes when readers begin to practice “thinking the opposite,” considering critical possibilities that common wisdom proscribes conceals. To think the opposite in this case is quite an exercise!

However, before one can study the resurrection, or starting to think the opposite, one must first get the background and bigger picture, namely the rest of the elements in the Easter narrative, the death and the burial episodes, straight.

3.1 The death of Jesus

Jesus was Jewish and Christianity began as a Jewish messianic movement. Within a relatively short period of time, Christianity would cease to understand itself as Jewish in any meaningful sense, and instead become a new Gentile religion (Patterson 1998a:188). As time passed, Christianity forgot the family ties and remembered only the rivalrous roots. Christians keep the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus and they think that they must therefore pay a price. This way of thinking about the Jews became so natural that it almost became unrecognizable as anti-Semitic (Crossan 1996:38). “What are we to make, then, of the gospel accounts of Jesus’ final days in Jerusalem ... and of the subsequent hostility of the crowd calling for Jesus to be crucified? On the face of it, these accounts do not make for very good history. The Triumphal Entry is excellent literary theater, quite appropriate to the Christian view of the real significance of this climactic moment. But the scenario itself is not very plausible as actual history” (Patterson 1998a:200).

This must be read as a narrative created in a particular time and place to speak the needs of early Christian communities, not as literal history. The criterion that I and others use to decide what is *history* and what probably happened is in the first instance known as

multiple attestation (Van Aarde 2003a:538). This means, according to Borg (1999: 3-14), that multiple independent written evidence has greater historical probability than either singular evidence or a plurality of interdependent literary evidence. The other criterion is of redactional nature. According to Van Aarde (2003a:538), transmitters of the Jesus tradition often revised material to suit their narrative structures and theological intentions with regard to their particular audience. Material which exhibits the characteristics of a post-Easter life situation of a community for whom the communication was intended, cannot be traced back to the oral period of 30-50 CE and therefore such editorial material cannot be deemed authentic.

As Christians began to retell the story of Jesus' death, they wished to show that Jesus was not guilty of any crime and that he had been executed unjustly. They wish to tell that even Pilate could see that Jesus was innocent and that he posed no real threat to Rome. They wanted to show that the real problem lay not with Jesus, nor with Rome, but with the Jews (Patterson 1998a:201). He was an innocent victim.

Historically, the whole story, the yelling crowd, Barabbas, the choice Pilate gave them, all of these would be rather unlikely (see Patterson 1998a:205). These narratives are some of the most tragic literature in the history of Christian-Jewish relations. "For in them we find the Christian claim that it was the Jews who were really responsible for the death of Jesus" (Patterson 1998a:205). But, as Den Heyer states (1996:4), in the Roman empire it was customary to reserve the abhorrent death of crucifixion for runaway slaves and for all those who had rebelled against the rule of Rome. Pilate condemned Jesus because he thought that he was a rebel.

The next logical question to ask is: what is accomplished with these narratives in the church of the first century? According to Patterson (1998a:206), it establishes an etiology, a point of origin for the Jewish rejection of the church's claim about Jesus. Like Jesus, the church suffers the fate of the innocent victim. In John, where the plot against Jesus is inspired when Jesus makes certain claims about himself (5:18), this is most clear. "Jesus' conflict with the Jews mirrors exactly the conflict Christians are having in John's

day with the synagogue (see esp. 9:22; 12:42; and 16:2). But in Mark and the synoptic gospels the function of the story of the Jewish mob is just as evident. Just as the church struggles to convince the Jews of Jesus' real identity, so also Jesus tries to convince them in the text. But he fails" (Patterson 1998a:206).

When Mark wrote his gospel, there was a war on. Jerusalem itself might have been under siege (Vorster 1991:37). "In this setting Mark transforms the parable of the Tenants into an allegory for how it was that Jerusalem came to be in such dire straits. The Jews, the evil tenants, had rejected Jesus, the son" (Patterson 1998a:207). Mark wove this into the Jewish plot to have Jesus arrested and crucified (12:12). "This plot, which began in 11:18, where Jesus angers the chief priests and scribes with his criticism of the Temple, comes to fruition a few chapters later when these same leaders incite the Jewish mob to ask for the release of Barabbas, the insurrectionist, rather than Jesus. Here is the recrimination. As Mark writes, Jerusalem is being lost. Why? Because the Jews refused to listen to Jesus, and in the end chose Barabbas, the murderous insurrectionist, over Jesus, the Prince of Peace" (Patterson 1998a:207).

It is important to see all of these in the proper context (cf Vorster 1991:39). These stories are not historical. They come from a time when the followers of Jesus were still a tiny sect within the Israelite life. It was a time of war. According to Patterson (1998a:207), the Jews did not kill Jesus. Pilate did not wash his hands. A crowd of Jews did not say in unison, "His blood be upon us and our children."

What did really happen? According to Patterson (1998a:207), one can only make educated guesses. We know that Jesus spoke about a new empire. Such a word would not have been well-received by those whose stake in the current Empire was great. Jesus did come to Jerusalem, and it could well have been Passover. He visited the Temple. He criticized the Temple and did something that demonstrated his dismay. He was arrested and he was crucified by Roman authorities because he spoke and proclaimed another Empire. "...he was executed for political sedition under a placard reading 'King of the Jews,' a serious accusation couched in irony" (Patterson 1998a:208).

According to Lüdemann (1994:44), nobody knows what happened next. The burial of Jesus in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea is a later legend. Nobody knows where the grave was. As neither the disciples nor Jesus' next of kin bothered about Jesus' body, it is hardly conceivable that they were informed about its resting place. No family took care of his body after his death. He died as he was born: a nobody among nobodies (Van Aarde 2001a:43). If he was buried, it was certainly not in a respectable family tomb.

According to Lüdemann (1995:23), the hypothesis that he was buried in the family tomb of Joseph of Arimathea comes to grief on the tendency of the early Christian accounts, which betray knowledge of a dishonorable burial of Jesus, or fear one. Presumably, Israelites took Jesus down from the cross, because according to Deut 21:23 someone who had died from crucifixion might not hang on the cross overnight and because the Passover was imminent (Matthews 1997:128). Ironically, it was not until the time of Constantine that the site of the empty tomb had been "discovered" and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built (Mack 1995:287).

Another interesting observation is that the oldest text we have, namely 1 Cor 15:3 does not give any detail about the burial of Jesus. It does not even mention the way in which he died.

3.2 The resurrection

One of the most important and basic Christian confessional claims about Jesus is that God raised him from the dead. However, the real resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the event itself, is not described in any New Testament text (Lüdemann 1995:24). According to Patterson (1998a:51) many Christians assume that "the resurrection" is that one, great miraculous event that gave Christians a jump-start and proves once and for all that Christians have a unique claim on the truth about God. When someone speaks of "the resurrection", no one ever asks "whose resurrection?" Since the resurrection of famous

people, as it was in the ancient world, is no longer part of our worldview. We have reserved a special and unique place for Jesus' resurrection. Nevertheless, to study the resurrection is not that easy because we have no eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. The resurrection traditions can also not be disentangled from the other traditions, and more and more scholars are convinced that one cannot talk meaningfully about the resurrection outside the experience of faith and testimony (cf Lüdemann 1994:11). The authors of the texts were not eyewitnesses but handed down and interpreted the texts about the resurrection in a way related to experience.

After Easter, the Christian community, looking with new eyes, confessed that God had raised Jesus from the dead on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians for a quite definite purpose (Malan 1991:187). According to Lüdemann (1995:10), he was not concerned about giving a precise account of how Jesus died and what his resurrection appearances were like. Evidently, the only important thing for Paul was in this situation that they had taken place.

The "crucified one" became "the risen one." It was thus the apostle Paul who gave Jesus a unique place in history. As the crucified, Jesus is a righteous sufferer and martyr, and as the risen one, he is a new creation. "From Easter onwards, a surprising new light falls on the cross. It is no longer the tragic end of a man of good will, but forms the overture to a new episode in the history of God and the world" (Den Heyer 1996:5).

Resurrection was a confessional element of most ancient religions. Everybody in those days knew about famous resurrections (see *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 4.45). So, to say that God raised someone from the dead did not say that much. The actual question was: What did this person stand for that God would raise him from the dead?

Most people in Jesus' day believed that the emperor Augustus had been raised from the dead. The resurrection of this great conqueror was to symbolize his power, his final victory, to rise beyond the limits of this world to join the great pantheon of the gods in heaven (Patterson 1998a:51). In Christianity, it was not about power. No, "this

confessional statement was attached to a history, the history of a person, Jesus of Nazareth. He was not powerful, but the victim of power. He did not believe in the Empire, but proclaimed another Empire, the Empire of God” (Patterson 1998a:52). He said things like: Blessed are you beggars, ... you hungry, ... you who cry, ... you when people despise you, ... Prostitutes and sinners go into the Empire of God (Mt 5).

Besides the resurrection, the other problem is that Christians think that Jesus, in his essence, was not really human. They think he was divine. For ancients, the idea that a human being might essentially be divine made sense. In a worldview in which gods sometimes mated with human beings, the offspring of such a conjugation, a divine human being, was a distinct possibility. Today, of course no one believes this. But many still, especially the church and the authority figures in the church, believe that Jesus was essentially divine, accepting this as an article of faith, even though the mythic framework within which such belief might have made sense has long passed from our cultural consciousness. This I cannot understand. For me it is impossible to live within two worldviews at the same time. I appreciate myth in a postmodern world. The resurrection is part of the foundational myth of Christianity and the physical resurrection is not a historical fact. Apart from this, I still believe in the resurrection. It is for me a metaphor with symbolic reference. I believe in ends and new beginnings. It is salvation. God makes it possible.

In the New Testament, the humanity of Jesus is not denied, but it disappears into the background, because that was not an issue for the early Christian community. They were above all interested in his relationship with God. He was called “the son of God” not because of his divinity, but because it was believed that he was chosen by God to fulfil a special task (see Den Heyer 1996:6).

Patterson (1998a:53) argued that the early followers of Jesus did not make claims about him because they sensed something divine in him. They followed him because they heard him say and saw him do certain things. In his life, they experienced a depth of meaning that tapped into what they knew to be true and that truth is called God. In their experience

of Jesus, they had experienced God. “Christian faith began with a decision to see in Jesus’ words and deeds the deepest of all truths, the truth that is God. This is what Christian faith was, and must become if it is ever again to have any meaning in the modern world” (Patterson 1998a:54).

3.3 The empty tomb

When Karl Barth (Jaspert 1981:144) answered Bishop Wurm on the accusation and complaint that pastor Bruns laid against Bultmann, he said the following concerning the empty tomb: “The ‘empty tomb’ is in itself only one representative of that to which the NT writers bear witness: that the eternal Word of God really came in the flesh, that in the there and then to which they refer he came as a Jew to us Gentiles, that he suffered for us, went down to death, and was exalted to glory. The ‘empty tomb’ is not on its own ‘a fact of salvation history.’ What must be confessed as a fact of salvation history in opposition to Bultmann and to so many docetic or docetizing heretics both old and new is the living Lord Jesus, the Christ of Israel, who is as such the Savior of the world – in contrast to a principally timeless Christ-idea which is embodied in this Jesus but can also be abstracted from him. That this confession is not possible with a denial of the ‘empty tomb’ but only with (incidental!) recognition of it – this *context* and this alone can make the ‘empty tomb’ a worthy theme of theological discussion.”

Almost sixty years later and the discussion still continues! This time, not from the viewpoint of the so-called *salvation history* but from a postmodern point of view. The Gospel of Mark, which originally ended at 16:8 (Van Eck 1995:13), does not narrate any appearances of Jesus. It contains only the story of the empty tomb, which Mark, according to Funk and The Jesus Seminar (1998:451) may have created himself. There is no early trace of the story, unless Mark and the Gospel of Peter draw on some earlier source. One of these sources was the sketches and portrayals of divine contemporaries of Jesus. Among these, the figure of Hercules stands out because he conquered death and became the child of Zeus (Van Aarde 2001a:165). The first-century historian, Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* 38.3-5), wrote his apotheosis story. However, this

narrative in Mark 16: 1-8 serves the purpose that it combines the Christian preaching of the resurrection of Jesus with its consequence, namely the empty tomb (Lüdemann 1995:32).

Matthew (28:1-20) borrows and revises Mark's empty tomb story, and adds concise stories of an appearance to two women and an appearance to the eleven on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew is probably responsible for creating the legend of the guards at the tomb (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:474). Luke (24:13-35) adds the legend of the appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus and the ascension to his empty tomb story, which he too gets from Mark. John (20:1-5) expands the empty tomb with a footrace between Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, which is clearly a legendary feature (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:451).

All four Gospels contain accounts of the women as first arrivals to the tomb on Easter morning. The detail differs greatly. The common thread to all four accounts together with the Gospel of Peter is that at least one woman disciple of Jesus, namely Mary Magdalene, came first to the tomb after Sabbath, found it empty, and went away again, confused (Osiek 1997:104). What interests me is that the older report of the resurrection, namely 1 Cor 15 and the formulae in it, say nothing about an empty tomb. It seems obvious that the empty tomb tradition and the appearance traditions were two separate traditions until the gospel writers fused them together in a brand new narrative.

In the eastern Mediterranean societies, it is women who prepare a body for burial, while men actually convey the body into the tomb (Osiek 1997:111). According to the Gospel accounts, the women prepare the aromatic spices that were wrapped into the shroud and deposited around it, while Joseph of Arimathea makes the public contact with the authorities, places the body in the tomb, and secures it. It was, according to Lüdemann (1995:32), not strange that women were the main figures in this legend, since the flight of the disciples was known, so they could not be used as witnesses to the resurrection.

It seems, according to Osiek (1997:110), that the proclamation of the resurrection does not need an empty tomb. The confession that the tomb of Jesus was empty, could only have been made from the message that the one who had been crucified, had been raised. The existing story is so to speak, according to Lüdemann (1995:32) the product of an inference. The core event is the appearances of the risen Christ. The empty tomb is thus not foundational to the *kerygma* of the resurrection. Dunn (1985:66) suggests that one has to match the fact that the earliest Gospel (Mark) ends without any record of a resurrection appearance, with the fact that the earliest account of resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15) has no reference to the tomb being empty. This degree of independence and lack of correlation between the two earliest records speaks favorably for the value of each. There is nothing to indicate that one was contrived to bolster the other.

According to Fuller (see Osiek 1997:110), the empty tomb served not as the origin and cause of the earliest Christian community's Easter faith, but as a vehicle for the proclamation of the Easter faith which they already held as a result of the appearances. According to Dunn (1985:53), the stories of the empty tomb may not have emerged for some years or even decades after the death of Jesus. The empty tomb and the risen body were according to Crossan (1996:210), dramatic ways by which they expressed their faith, while trances or ecstasies were dramatic ways of experiencing that faith. Risen appearances were dramatic ways of organizing and managing that faith. However, Christian faith itself was the experience of Jesus' continued empowering presence. The continued presence of absolutely the same Jesus in an absolutely different mode of existence.

The purpose of the empty tomb stories, according to Osiek (1997:116) has thus less to do with proof than with meaning. The empty tomb indicates not the presence of Jesus, but his absence: "He is risen, he is not here."

3.4 Jesus was raised

The resurrection narratives at the end of the Gospels do have value in their own right, but they are of little historical value. Their value must be measured within the context and self-ordered design in which each is presented to us. “They derive from the second or third Christian generation, thirty-five to seventy-five years after the death of Jesus. In terms of the history of the resurrection tradition, they all represent late developments in Christian thinking about the resurrection” (Patterson 1998a:214). One must keep in mind that within the first generation of Christianity the Christians were speaking about Jesus in divine terms. According to Dunn (1985:61), the most outspoken testimony comes from John’s Gospel. It begins by speaking of the Word who was in the beginning with God and was God, through whom all things were made. John calls Jesus “the only Son.” However, when one remarks this, one must also note that in the ancient world, it was by no means unknown for famous men like kings, heroes of the faith, and philosophers to be thought of as deified after death.

If we want to look at earlier stages of the tradition, we must look at Paul (Lüdemann 1994:30) as our primary source. In 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8 he makes use of what appear to be the earliest Christian traditions about the death and resurrection of Jesus (Osborne 1984:221). It is, according to Bultmann (1955:121), a tradition that corresponds with the cult-myth.

Both the reason for his death “for our sins” and that “he was raised on the third day,” Paul did not get from history, but from his exegesis. That is why he states “in accordance with the scriptures.” The time “on the third day” was chosen to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy (Lüdemann 1995:52). He said that it was a tradition that he had received and passed on in his preaching. According to Dunn (1985:65), it remains a somewhat uncomfortable fact that Paul nowhere mentions the tomb of Jesus being empty, not even in that outline of the basic gospel, which he himself had received at the beginning of his life as a Christian.

In these few verses, we have two traditions represented. The first vv. 3-4 represents an exegetical (confessional) tradition, and the second vv. 5-8 is grounded in experiences people are said to have (Osborne 1984:222). According to Mack (1995:79) four events are in view (death, burial, resurrection, appearance), two of which are fundamental, namely the death and the raising of Christ. This text is composed of two balancing units. Each has the feature of the reference to the Scripture. The burial underscores the reality of Christ's death and the appearance underscores the reality of his having been raised. Only in the case of the primary significance of the death and the raising is there a slight bit of imbalance, namely that the death occurred "for our sins" and the raising occurred "on the third day" (Mack 1995:80). This polished, poetic, *kerygmatic* formula reflects a lengthy period of collective and intellectual labor.

Patterson (1998a:217-218) formulates this "labor" as follows:

"That the death and resurrection statements reflect a distinct confessional tradition, at least among the Pauline churches, is demonstrated by the repeated appearance of a two-member formula throughout the Pauline letters. Paul makes use of it in Gal 2:19-20; Rom 6:3-4; and 14:9. It occurs in its simplest form in 1 Thess 4:14: 'we believe that Jesus died and arose.' However, a still more basic form is also found throughout the Pauline corpus, one that focuses only on the resurrection itself. It appears in various versions, including (1) a participial construction (Rom 10:9; 8:11a, b; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1, describing God as 'the one who raised him [Jesus] from the dead...'; (2) a simple finite construction (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15): 'God raised him [Jesus] from the dead'; and (3) a relative construction modifying Jesus (1 Thess 1:10): 'whom he [God] raised from the dead.' All three of these forms share the following set of common elements:

1. The use of *egeiro* ('to raise') with God as the subject or implied actor;

2. The expression *ek nekron* ('from the dead');
3. The use of the simple name 'Jesus.'

From this form-critical analysis, one can see that in its simplest form, the resurrection tradition is very primitive. This is shown by its explicit *theological* rather than *Christological* focus" (Patterson 1998a:217-218).

The agent is always God, and Jesus, who is never called "Christ", is the recipient of the divine action. According to Patterson (1998a:218) the idea that God would intervene to vindicate a faithful, yet unjustly killed martyr is an old and well-rehearsed idea in Jewish tradition (cf Crossan 1999:25). Two mythologies provide the logic underlying the entire enterprise. According to Mack (1995:80), one is the Greek myth of the noble death and the other is the Jewish myth of the persecuted sage. In the Greek myth, the person who died nobly is turned into a martyr who died for a cause. The standard for assessing the virtue of such a death was a person's integrity (with respect to the teaching or cause for which one was willing to die) and endurance (or loyalty to the cause). Therefore, it was that martyrdom came to represent the ultimate test of virtue, and obedience unto death the ultimate display of one's strength of character.

Within Israelite circles, the concept of martyrdom took yet another turn. "Drawing upon the older image of the warrior who died for his country and the significance of such a death as a sacrifice offered in defense of one's people, the idea occurred to some that a martyr's death might be effective. Perhaps it could actually bring to an end the circumstances that had occasioned the death and so establish or strengthen the cause for which the martyr had died (Mack 1995:81).

The Israelite myth of the persecuted sage was also popular at that time. It was also called the story of wisdom's child and it included stories such as Joseph, Esther and Daniel. The plot included two major episodes. "The first was the unjust charge of disloyalty that put the sage 'into the hands of' a foreign despot who threatened to kill him. This was the 'trail' gone wrong. The second episode was the revelation or discovery of the sage's piety

and loyalty by the despot. This revelation resulted in the rescue of the righteous man and his elevation to a position of honor. This was the ‘trail’ gone rightly, the ‘vindication’ of his righteousness. The social history of the Jews during the late period of the second temple sorely challenges the happy ending of the old wisdom tale. But what other story was there to keep alive the hope that justice would finally prevail?” (Mack 1995:81). Where the righteous were not always rescued from persecution, foreign powers, and death, the tale was revised by granting the righteous a postmortem destiny and by imagining that the scene of vindication would take place at some other time and place after death, and perhaps in some other world.

The Christ myth is rooted in a combination of both these stories. Mack (1995:82) pointed to three features that indicate that the martyr myth was in mind while the Christ myth was being imagined. The first is the phrase “died for.” Without it, one would not know why Jesus’ death had attracted any attention. “To die for” was a technical term for expressing the purpose of martyrdom. The second feature is the fact that the purpose of the death was to achieve some effect for the Christian community as a whole. The purpose had something to do with “our sins.” The third feature is the reference to Christ’s being “raised.”

For the Greeks and for the Israelites immortality did not include the body. The postmortem vindication of the martyr was always casted in terms of spiritual transformation. Martyrs also always died for a cause already in place and by the hands of external powers, but with Jesus, it was different. He would have to confront a condition within the community for which he would then die. The cause and the conditions were also highly questionable. They were characterized by sins and sinners (Mack 1995:83).

Thus, Jesus was a most unlikely martyr dying for a quite unthinkable cause. According to Mack (1995:84), the only way to overcome the implicit contradictions was to exaggerate the drama and consider the event from God’s point of view. Four features of the *kerygma* are direct results of this imagination. One aspect of the myth’s theology is the use of the term “Christ” as the anointed or approved one by God. Another is the characterization of

the community as “sinners” before God. A third is the appeal to the Scriptures, and the fourth is that this God had proven his approval of both Jesus and Jesus’ cause by raising him from the dead. What mattered was the cause for which Jesus Christ had died.

3.5 The origin of the resurrection tradition

The question to answer is: Why did early Christians first say something like “God raised Jesus from the dead?” The most obvious answer might be that they had heard stories about the resurrection, but there is not a single story of the resurrection in all of early Christianity, except for a late story in the Gospel of Peter 10:38-11:43 (Crossan 1996:202). The resurrection itself is never described. “Leaving aside any theological point to be made from this, historically we can say with confidence that such stories were clearly not the basis of the early Christian claim that God had raised Jesus from the dead, because, so far as we know, there are none “(Patterson 1998a:218).

What we do have in abundance are the appearance stories, from which the resurrection might have been inferred. A number of people not only believed they had seen the Lord, they had experienced a seeing of the Lord alive from the dead (Dunn 2003:861). However, the resurrection and appearance stories are not usually presented in tandem. “In this respect 1 Cor 15:3-8 is a bit misleading in its explicit use of the appearance tradition to reinforce belief in the resurrection. Paul does this under the extraordinary circumstance of needing to present an overwhelming argument for the resurrection of Jesus, and then only in the service of his larger aim to convince the Corinthians of his belief in the general resurrection of the dead. Even here, Paul shows that such an argument is precariously constructed when he reverts to the only real basis for his claim in v. 11: ‘so we preached and so you believed.’ For Paul there really are no proofs for the resurrection claim aside from the active faith of the communities, which are themselves the ‘body of Christ” (Patterson 1998a:219). This affirms why I choose the premise of Bultmann: First, there was the *kerygma*! The *kerygma* and the rituals expressing the resurrection were the

key that activates the narratives of the Christ-cult. The *kerygma* was preached and the earliest Christians believed.

Nowhere does Paul mention an empty tomb. The appearance stories are not normally used in the tradition to prove that the resurrection is true. They are in Paul, Matthew, Luke, and even in John 20 presented as a sign of commissioning to preach the gospel.

The earliest simple resurrection formula does not presuppose the appearance tradition. “Rather, it is quite the opposite: the appearance tradition, with its orientation to the commissioning of disciples to preach, presupposes the resurrection tradition. After all, before anyone could be commissioned to preach, there had to be a gospel to preach” (Patterson 1998a:219). And, the content of the gospel is that Jesus, who was crucified, had been raised by God from the dead. And so the resurrection tradition has priority over the appearance tradition. In this sense, it is very unlikely that the resurrection proclamation arose in response to stories of Jesus’ appearance.

The next question then is: What, then, was the basis for the early Christian claim that God raised Jesus from the dead? The answer lies, according to Patterson (1998a:220) in the nature of the resurrection claim itself.

“In Jewish tradition the idea that God would raise someone from the dead arose when Jews faced the disturbing reality that just and righteous people are sometimes killed at the hands of their foes. In Isaiah 24-27 the prophetic voice utters a protest against the demise of faithful Jews: all who have died for Yahweh’s sake shall someday be restored. In Dan 12:1-3 the context is again martyrological, such as 1 Enoch 22-27 (third century B.C.E.); 1 Enoch 92-105 (second century B.C.E.); Jubilees 23:11-31 (second century B.C.E.); 2 Maccabees 7 (late second century B.C.E.); 4 Maccabees 7:3; 9:22; 13:17 et al. (first century C.E.); Wisdom of Solomon 1-6 (first century B.C.E. - first century C.E.); 2 Baruch 49-51 (first century C.E.); 4 Ezra 7 (first century C.E.) - whether a strict concept of resurrection is embraced, or, as in some of the later of these texts,

something like redemption of immortal souls is implied - in this great variety of expressions, the fundamental existential concern is always the same: what happens to just and righteous people done in by a world full of injustice?"

So, the presupposition for any claim about resurrection is not appearance stories or empty tombs. "Resurrection, as vindication, presupposes only that a righteous person has been killed in faithfulness to a divine cause. In a dissident Jewish context, this is all you need. The followers of Jesus could have said 'God raised Jesus from the dead' on the day he died, and probably did. The only necessary presupposition for such a statement is the conviction that, should Jesus be killed, God *would* raise him from the dead. This conviction is one which Jesus' followers would have had the minute they decided that he was right about God and began to participate in the imperial rule of God that he proclaimed. Resurrection is the vindication of a life lost to the forces of injustice in the world. To the extent that Jesus' followers embraced his life as God's own work, the resurrection proclamation would have arisen quite naturally as the appropriate Jewish response to his untimely death" (Patterson 1998a:220). Paul's belief in the resurrection of the dead had been part and parcel of his Israelite anthropology prior to his coming to faith in Jesus Christ (Pelser 1986:39).

The second of the Eighteen Benedictions in the traditional Jewish liturgy says: "Blessed are you Yahweh, who makes the dead to live." This is according to Lüdemann (1994:25) not far from the simple early Christian formulation, "God, who raised Jesus from the dead." Paul uses this benediction in Rom 4:17. The setting in the life of the early church for this formula was worship.

After Jesus' death, his followers would have continued their practice of gathering, probably around a meal to speak of what they had heard and experienced in the company of Jesus. In this context of Christian worship, prayers would have been uttered in the traditional Israelite way. "Among them one certainly would have been something like, 'Blessed are you, Yahweh, who raised Jesus from the dead.' They would have said this

because they believed that Jesus had died for a divine cause. Later, they even might have sung a hymn, whose middle verses went something like...

And being in human form,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient until death, death by crucifixion.
 Therefore, God has highly exalted him,
 and given him the name that is above every name...
 ... Lord Jesus Christ ...

In this familiar pre-Pauline hymn (Phil 2:6-11), even with its bold Christological claims, empty tombs and appearances are nowhere in sight. Jesus goes directly from crucifixion to heavenly exaltation and the only prerequisite for this claim is ‘obedience’ until death” (Patterson 1998a:221). The hymn contains two stanzas in chiasm, and each stanza has three double lines (Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:113). The first stanza describes three stages in the humiliation of a person where the second stanza describes three stages in his exaltation, but the focus here is no longer on a martyrdom. Reflection upon the death as a crucifixion and the resurrection as a vindication of the martyr is no longer the primary interest. According to the Christ myth, Jesus became Christ because of his obedience unto death and here in the hymn, Jesus is the incarnation of a divine figure that possessed equality with God already at the very beginning and had every opportunity to be lord simply by taking possession of his kingdom. He did not grasp that opportunity but he took the form of an obedient slave. Because of this God exalted him to an even higher lordship (Mack 1995:92).

This new myth raised the *kerygma*. Instead of a martyrology, the early Christians now had a myth of cosmic destiny on their hands. Thus, according to Mack (1995:92), the poem is not really about Christ; it is a hymn about Jesus Christ as *lord*. The lord that is above every other lord.

In the cultural turmoil of the Greco-Roman age, even the gods had to compete, and in order to outrank other deities extravagant claims had to be made. “So the Christ hymn

does not contain thoughts that others would have found strange or outlandish per se, if they were claims made in the name of a known god. The audacity, rather, was to think of Jesus as such a god in the first place. To make such claims for Jesus the martyr would certainly have turned some heads. So we need to ask what caused the thought that Jesus had been or was a god” (Mack 1995:93).

The clues are available in the three myths that are the background for this poem (Mack 1995:93). One is the story of wisdom’s child who is rescued from powers that imprisoned it. Jesus had knowledge that only a divine man could have. In the Christ myth, a merger of the wisdom tale with a martyrology suggested the thought that Jesus had been faithful to his teachings and to God and so was vindicated by being raised from the dead and in the poem, he was postmortem exalted to a position of sovereignty.” The second myth was a romantic picture about the ideal king or ruler. According to this romantic, the ideal ruler would not take advantage of his godly appearance and power, but he put it aside in order to serve the interest of the people. The third myth was a myth common to most cultures of the time, namely that the gods would descend from heaven, appear as messengers, and then return to heaven (Mack 1995:93). There is also the possibility that the book of Isaiah may have been the fourth source for some of the imagery of the Christ hymn. The suffering servant depicted from Isaiah 52 was humiliated, killed and exalted. To add here is the claim made by God himself in Isaiah 45 of “every knee bowing” and “every tongue swearing.” “If we see that the Christ hymn is an amalgam of these three (or four) mythologies, easily merged because they shared a common pattern of humiliation/exaltation, the thoughtful meditation that must have occurred begins to surface” (Mack 1995:94).

Jesus was given a place higher than the other rulers were, and his domain was imagined to be larger. The result was that Jesus’ position of authority now encompassed all the kingdoms imaginable within a single cosmic horizon and therefore Jesus Christ could be hymned as lord of all (Mack 1995:94). The myth emerged as an answer to the provocative question of authority. Who had the right to tell them how to behave, how to control their allegiances and loyalties? The Christians making this myth were nothing

more than little ad hoc cells that were no more thinking of themselves on the model of an association, but as a congregation that belonged to a kingdom that was independent from and superior to all the other kingdoms of the world (Mack 1995:95).

Sensitive souls experienced spiritual transformation and a cult developed to celebrate their loyalty to Jesus Christ as lord. According to Mack (1995:96):

“The transformation of a Jesus movement into the Christ cult, where the Christ was acclaimed as the lord of the universe, marks an important juncture at the beginning of Christianity. It was that transition that laid the foundation for a distinctly Christian mentality, a way of understanding one’s place in, but not of, the world. Several notions converged in this complicated mental construct. They are: (1) the sense that the kingdom of God (or divine order of things to which Christians belonged) was universal; (2) the sense that an actual Christian congregation was independent from its social and political milieu; and (3) the sense that some combination of Christian congregation and the spiritual kingdom of God stood over against the kingdoms of the world as a reminder of what they should be like.”

The resurrection tradition is thus rather an exegetical tradition, than something that was linked to the appearance tradition. For Paul (1 Cor 15:3-4) the resurrection was true because it happened according to the Scriptures. As much as we might like to think of the resurrection of Jesus as a unique event, which separates Christians even from its Jewish roots, this does not do justice to the origin of the resurrection proclamation itself. “When this proclamation is examined carefully as it appears in early Christian tradition, we can see that this most central claim of Christian faith is a response to the life and death of Jesus that is quite understandable within the culture of ancient Judaism” (Patterson 1998a:222).

Every ancient resurrection claim is distinctive in some respect and has its own innovation (Crossan 1996:189). One of the distinctive things about Christian resurrection claims has

to do with timing. In most Israelite scenarios of vindication, resurrection is spoken of as a future event involving all of God's faithful ones at some climactic point of history. "But many Christians spoke of Jesus' resurrection as a past event, involving only him. For some early Christians, like Paul, this could only mean that the end had come and that Jesus was but the 'first fruits' of many others who would also soon be raised (1 Cor 15:20-28). However, even this idea cannot be said to be uniquely Christian. In the broader Hellenistic world, it was commonplace to speak of great heroic individuals who had been taken up to dwell among the gods as a reward for and the vindication of a life well lived. This tradition, too, would have been influential in the Hellenized Jewish environment of the first century, and it no doubt influenced the formulation of early Christian claims about Jesus" (Patterson 1998a:222).

3.6 Jesus appeared

Soon after his crucifixion, Jesus appeared to some persons. However, the earliest appearance did not take place at the tomb, since according to Lüdemann (1995:79) the tradition of the tomb and the tradition of Jesus' appearance did not originally belong together. The appearance tradition is a distinct tradition in itself with its own formal features as well as setting in the life of the early church. It is a distinct tradition from the empty tomb tradition. The correlation of these traditions in terms of resurrection rationale is evident, but the correlation of their tradition history is less clear (Dunn 2003:864). In tradition-historical terms the probability is strong that the tradition of the empty tomb, including its discovery "on the first day of the week", goes back to claims made by the women.

However, in the case of the resurrection appearance tradition we rely on what we can glean from the traditions themselves. Here the personal testimony of Paul is crucial (cf Dunn 2003:864). All the references we have to the appearance tradition are associated in some way to the commissioning of the apostles to preach. This suggests the context of mission activity as its place of origin (Patterson 1998a:223). See, for example Paul. Only through the appearance of the risen Christ to him on his way to Damascus was he

entrusted with the mission to the Gentiles, thus having his actions legitimated once and for all (Lüdemann 1995:102). However, what makes the tradition more complex is the claim that God has revealed the risen Jesus to certain living historical persons. Some of the first believers experienced “resurrection appearances” and those experiences are enshrined, as with the earlier impact made by Jesus’ teaching and actions, in the traditions, which have come down to us (Dunn 2003:862). One such person, Paul, is speaking in 1 Cor 15:8 and he claims to have experienced the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1). The question that this tradition poses is: did Paul and the others in fact have experiences, which they took to be appearances of the risen Jesus? According to Willie Marxsen (1975:81), they all proclaimed the resurrection. They did not experience it. Their experience is described as seeing Jesus. Both Jerusalem and Galilee are mentioned as scenes of the appearance and experience events of Jesus after his death (see Lüdemann 1995:80). However, had the first appearances taken place in Jerusalem, it would be impossible to explain those in Galilee because why should the disciples have gone back to Galilee after their resurrection appearance? The earliest community, after all, was in Jerusalem. For this reason, it is also difficult to imagine how anyone could have invented Galilee as the place in which Jesus appeared. Therefore, it seems most probable that the first appearance indeed took place in Galilee and then subsequent ones in Jerusalem, but only at a later date. However, that makes it impossible for these appearances to have happened on the third day after the crucifixion, because the disciples could not have returned from Jerusalem to Galilee in the period from Friday to Sunday with the Sabbath in between. As Lüdemann (1995:80) remarked, in the earliest mention in 1 Cor 15:4, only the resurrection of Jesus and not his appearance, is dated to the third day.

3.6.1 Paul *saw* the risen Jesus

Paul refers, according to Osborne (1984:230), three times in his letters to direct experiences he claims to have had of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; 1 Cor 15:8; and Gal 1:15-16). According to Patterson (1998a:223), the third cannot really be called an “appearance” claim as such. Here Paul says, rather mysteriously, that God had chosen to

“reveal his son *in me*” (*en moi*). This is the way that Paul thinks of Christ’s presence in the life of the believer - as somehow dwelling in him/her. “Whatever this ‘inner’ experience was, it was apparently a powerfully moving one for Paul, since he immediately dropped what he was doing and went off to Arabia (Gal 1:16b-17) to propagate a movement he had previously violently opposed (Gal 1:13). Paul understood this experience as a commissioning to preach (Gal 1:15-16a)” (Patterson 1998a:224). According to Gal 1:16 God was the one acting. He revealed his son to Paul. So, Paul himself does not give a concrete description anywhere of the way in which he really experienced the appearance of the risen Christ. According to Lüdemann (1995:102), Paul always presupposes what once happened to him on his way to Damascus.

Paul refers to this experience again in 1 Cor 9:1, only now he explicitly says: “have I not *seen* the Lord?” So, according to Lüdemann (1995:103) Paul is claiming a visual side to the appearance. Here he used the word “*heoraka*” and again it is linked to his status as an apostle who is commissioned to preach. “For him there was an inseparable link between his apostleship and his vision of the risen Jesus. He makes this connection again in the inside address of his letter to the Galatians” (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:458).

I am convinced, as you will see in what follows, that there is a definite link between the function of the resurrection appearances in the narrative and the apostolic tradition. The claim to a resurrection appearance legitimated the mission of the apostle as a transmitter of the *kerygma*. The resurrection myth became thus the foundational myth for the apostolic authority.

According to Lüdemann (1994:50), Paul in this text is quite appropriately expressing the subjective aspect of the resurrection event. In 1 Cor 15: 8 he is lining up his experience with those of others mentioned in the confessional formulae of 15:5-7. “As in these formulae, Paul says Christ ‘appeared’ to him as he did to Peter, James, the Twelve, other apostles, and at least five hundred other people. So, based on Paul’s own references to his experience, one might well conclude that initially Paul may not have understood his experience as an ‘appearance’ of Jesus, but simply as a revelatory experience, albeit a

powerful one” (Patterson 1998a:224). Scholars are generally agreed that Paul mentions the appearance to him to defend his apostolic authority (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:454).

There is no doubt about the fact that Paul did have a few dramatic religious experiences, but what was his experience like? 1 Cor 15 where the point is not ultimately the resurrection of Jesus, but the general resurrection of all believers at some future time, can give a clue (Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:215). According to Patterson (1998a:225) the argument goes like this:

“You will no doubt agree that Jesus has been raised from the dead (vv. 1-11). If that is true, then you must also agree that there will be a general resurrection; to deny one is to deny the other (vv. 12-34). If there are doubts about the specific way in which one might imagine this future resurrection, I will attempt an explanation (vv. 35-57). It is this last section that is of chief interest. The specific question he wants to address is raised in v. 35: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of *body* do they come?” Paul proceeds to answer this question by way of analogy, using the parable of the sown seed (vv. 36-41). Just so, he says, “what is sown a physical body, is raised a spiritual body” (v. 44b). But how? Through the power of Christ, the second Adam, who himself ‘became a life-giving spirit’ (v. 45b). Just as Jesus, the archetype became a spirit (*pneuma*), so also shall believers become spirits (vv. 46-49). Leaving aside for now the history of religion’s question of how this all works in the mind of Paul, it is enough to notice how the argument works on paper: believers will become like Jesus in receiving a ‘spiritual body’ (*soma pneumatikon*). To be raised from the dead is to receive such a body. This will be true of the believer just as it has been true of Jesus.”

According to Lüdemann (1994:34), Paul could only give this answer from his Jewish apocalyptic framework because the answer is not in line with the Hellenistic pattern of epiphanies. In contradiction to Paul’s spiritual body, the resurrection body is very

physical in Luke (Dunn 1985:74). Jesus himself says (Luke 24:39): “Handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

The question is also asked whether an organized Jesus movement ever existed in Jerusalem during the immediate years after the crucifixion of Jesus (see Van Aarde 2004b:3). Some scholars (cf Miller 1995:27) are convinced that the existence of an organized *ecclesia* in Jerusalem during those early years is a fiction of the author of Acts on account of his interpretation of Paul’s controversy with opponents in the letter to the Galatians. Dennis Smith (2000:62) formulates a similar opinion as follows: “I would argue that the Jerusalem ‘church’ as power broker in Christian origins was a mythological construct from the outset, first appearing among Paul’s opponents in Galatia, then picked up and elaborated on by Luke in Acts. The actual *ecclesia* in Jerusalem, such as it was, most likely played a minor role in Christian origins. But Jerusalem of myth was utilized to buttress a mythological Jerusalem ‘church’ in order to gain advantage in the early debates among the Jesus movements.” According to Van Aarde (2004b), the term “the Twelve” served as a self-reference of the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem. They regarded themselves as “apostles” and “prophets” of the “new Israel”, analogous to the twelve patriarchs in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The religious experience that so transformed Paul, had the quality of luminosity. The history of religions is full of this type of religious experience, “from a variety of cultures and a variety of periods, from Isaiah, to St. Teresa, to Sri Ramakrishna. It is not unreasonable or unlikely to think that Paul also had such an experience” (Patterson 1998a: 226). Pilch (2002:690) explains it as an altered state of consciousness, or as the ecstatic trance experience, that Paul had near Damascus in *Acts of the Apostles*.

Acts of the Apostles reports more than twenty groups, and individual ecstatic trance encounters with beings in alternate reality, such as God, the Risen Jesus, the Spirit, angels, and other spirits. The conversion of Paul is reported in three places: Acts 9:1-19, 22:3-21 and 26:9-18. Instead of calling it the conversion of Paul, which is an interpretation of the event reported, Pilch (2002:697) suggests that it is more appropriate

to name this event as the call of Paul by God to a special function. He continues to say that from a viewpoint of cultural anthropology and cognitive neuroscience, this is a report of Paul's encounter in an altered state of consciousness with the Risen Jesus in alternate reality. He experienced an ecstatic trance.

According to Pilch (2002:698) the bright light from heaven (Acts 9:3; 22:6) even brighter than the sun (26:13) that Paul saw is typical of stage one of an ecstatic trance. In the Israelite tradition, light is the manifestation of God, and from a neurological perspective, the bright color signals a shift in consciousness. Paul also hears a voice asking him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). According to Goldman, (in Pilch 2002:699) ecstatic trance experiences often reflect and include recent personal experiences. Acts introduced Paul as the one who kept safe the cloaks of those who were stoning Steven while he also witnessed the death of this follower of Jesus (Acts 7:58). This event stirred a great persecution in which Paul became a major force. On the road to Damascus, Paul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). This topic preoccupied Paul. "It is not a surprise then that this person should be part of his ecstatic trance experience. From a neurological perspective, Paul's intense focus on persecuting followers of Jesus could have induced an altered state of consciousness 'from the top down'" (Pilch 2002:699).

In stage two of an ecstatic experience, the visionary selects objects of personal, religious, emotional, or other significance and seeks to impose them on his or her trance experience in order to begin to make sense of it. The dialogue between Paul and the risen Jesus emerges from Paul's emotional state and the circumstances of his commission to hunt down those who believe in Jesus (Pilch 2002:700). It is Paul's attempt to make sense of his experience. According to Acts 22:14 Paul will obtain further instructions for his new commission from Jesus in other ecstatic trance experiences, which Acts bears out (see 16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11). Lohfink (in Pilch 2002:703) thinks that these experiences serve to place Paul on par with the eyewitness companions of Jesus, the Apostles.

How did Paul know that it was Jesus who “was revealed in him”? Paul had never seen Jesus. It must be remembered that Paul did not have this experience in a vacuum. When Paul “*saw* Jesus” there were already other persons who confessed that Jesus was raised, and this provided the interpretive context within which Paul could have come to understand his experience (Patterson 1998a:226). However, as Patterson said (1998a:226) here we have reached the limits of historical investigation. “All we can say is that on that day, for whatever reason, Paul came to the realization that Jesus had been right about God, that God had shone through in his life and ministry, and that the continuing work of his followers was indeed the work of God.”

Paul’s gospel has served for the Christian church as the definition of the new religion. His letters from the 50’s are the earliest Christian writings and the only texts from the first century that scholars consider authentic (Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:187). However, there is a big difference between the picture painted by the Jesus movement and the picture painted by Paul (Mack 1995:99). Paul was a leading figure among Israelite synagogues in Syria, conspicuously involved in their intellectual life as a proponent of Pharisaic standards (Mack 1995:101). He was converted to a Jesus movement that had already become a congregation of Christ (Mack 1995:100). His conversion was radical. His concept of Israel suddenly expanded to include both Israelites and gentiles in the one great family of God. His conversion was a personal seeing that the Christ myth was true, that the Christian’s claim about Jesus had significance for Israel’s mission, and that he had to lead the way (Mack 1995:102).

The traditional view of Paul’s conversion (the road to Damascus) as a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus is based on Luke’s story, and that is a legend written some eighty years after the event (Mack 1995:103). According to Paul, he waited fourteen years after receiving his revelation before making a visit to the pillars in Jerusalem. He laid before them the gospel that he proclaimed among the gentiles. Two issues were under discussion: (1) Must gentiles be circumcised? (2) Should Israelites share table fellowship with gentiles? The pillars had not given much thought to these questions and they opposed Paul on his views. He and the pillars agreed to disagree and Peter would be

entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised while Paul would be entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised. The meeting between them can be dated to the year 48, and his letters are all from the 50's. The point is that Paul's persuasion was the result of many years of thinking, not some mystic moment of instantaneous vision (Mack 1995:103).

Luke's stories of Paul's mission are questionable. They support Luke's own theory of Christian beginnings and do not agree with what Paul says about the same places and events. The Christ myth was essentially a Greek answer to a Israelite question about the mixed constituency of a nondescript Jesus movement that had come to think of itself as Israel. "Before the Jesus people found themselves in the midst of that Jewish-gentile dilemma, the Jesus people had not needed a Christ myth. Only gentile 'godfearerd,' who already thought that belonging to Israel was a thing to be desired, would have been impressed with the logic of this Christ myth. And only Jews who shared the social vision of the kingdom of God as a call to expand the borders of Judaism would have been excited about the thought that God's *christos* had died for such a cause. So the Christ myth would have made most sense where Jews and gentiles were already congregating" (Mack 1995:104).

Paul's conversion to the Christ myth is best understood as switching sides in a social and ideological battle on the growing edge of a Judaism in the process of Hellenization. Paul poses as the founding father of Christian congregations but other leaders were also involved in the spread of the Christ cult (cf Crossan 1996:203). Paul was not the founder of the congregations in Rome or Corinth. He was also not the first to introduce the Christ gospel to Athens, Ephesus, and other cities in Asia Minor. The cult spread because of its own inherent attraction (Mack 1995:104).

The Christ cult was not a worshipping community with an orthodox creed. It was a social space for those who wanted to create a brave new world. In this arena, Paul's contribution was to turn the Christ myth into a proclamation. He construed his conversion as a call to become a missionary for this new gospel. Gentiles were now to be summoned as well as welcomed into the house of Israel (Vorster 1991:161). For Paul "the thought of

a gentile mission was irresistible because it more than solved a social issue for Jewish synagogues in the Diaspora by turning their situation into a historic opportunity for the glory of Israel's God. To think that the God of Israel had finally gotten his plan across to visionaries such as Jesus and Paul was already wondrous. To think that the point of the plan was a divine invitation to all the nations to join the house of Israel was simply overwhelming" (Mack 1995:105). Now gentiles could become Christians and join the house of Israel without keeping the law. This made Paul the first dialectical thinker in the history of Christian theology.

3.6.2 What happened to Peter and James?

The James mentioned in 1 Cor 15:7 is according to Eusebius (*HE* 1, 12) the brother of Jesus, who was a pre-eminent figure in the Jerusalem church in Paul's time. However, with Peter and James the case is not as clear as with Paul. There are no first-hand statements asserting that they indeed had such experiences. According to the texts, the second personal eyewitness alongside Paul is Peter (Lüdemann 1994:31). "At best, 1 Cor 15:5-7 is third-hand information: having had such experiences, (1) Peter and James might have said something to others about them; (2) others then repeated their claims in the form of a confessional statement; finally (3) Paul repeats the confessional statement in 1 Corinthians 15. What is more, this information comes to us in confessional formulae, whose purpose it was to confirm the authority of certain persons to preach. Peter and James are both significant enough figures in the early church that, even if they had not been so commissioned, everyone would have assumed that they had been" (Patterson 1998a:227).

According to Adolf von Harnack (in Painter 1997:80), the tradition assumes that Jesus first appeared to Peter in Galilee before appearing to James in Jerusalem and that the appearance to James was subsequent to the appearance to the five hundred brethren at Pentecost. Harnack argues that Cor 15:5 and 15:7 reflect a shift from the leadership of Peter and the twelve in Jerusalem to the leadership of James.

In the formulae of 1 Cor 15:5, 7 the followers of Peter and James, according to Painter (1997:81), each asserted that the risen Jesus had first appeared to their leader. If the original leadership of Peter is accepted the formulae reflects a change of leadership in the Jerusalem church. Lüdemann (in Painter 1997:81) fixes the time of this shift between Paul's first and second visits to Jerusalem, and appeal has been made to Gal 1:18-19; 2:9; and Acts 12:17 to support this view.

In Paul's use of the tradition, according to Painter (1997:81), Peter and James stand together against him. The appearances of the risen "Christ" to them were part of the regular order, while Paul was forced to argue for the validity of the irregular appearance to him. According to Painter (1997:81), this circumstance is reflected in the formula introduction "*last of all*" and the extended explanation in verse 8 – 10. Paul thus does not see a basis in the tradition for setting the authority of James before Peter. Understood as an alternative tradition, verse 7 asserts that the foundational appearance was to James. This is supported by the Gospel of Hebrews (*De vir. Ill. 2*) as translated by Jerome: "But the Lord, after he had given his grave clothes to the servant of the priest, appeared to James."

When Paul narrates the event, according to Painter (1997:81), he claims the title of apostle, formulating it as he did. If the tradition behind 15:5 said "first to Cephas" and the tradition behind 15:7 "first to James," Paul assimilated the two confessions into a comprehensive list including both Peter and James because there cannot be two firsts in the same series. The argument assumes that in each case a first appearance is claimed by rival groups asserting priority for their own leader (Cephas and James). While, according to Painter (1997:82), an underlying tension between James and Peter is evident, Paul saw the two as part of the common mission.

There is at least one appearance story that features Peter and James, along with a third figure, John. That is the Transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:2-13 (Osborne 1984:227). According to Patterson (1998a:228), it has long been suspected that this story was

originally a post-resurrection appearance narrative, transformed into the “Transfiguration” and transposed back into the life of Jesus. As with Paul’s allusions to the luminosity of Jesus’ resurrected body, this narrative, too, assumes that the appearance of the risen Jesus would have had a luminous quality: “his garments became glistening, intensely white” (9:3a). It is not likely that “three persons could simultaneously have had the same sort of inner religious experience that Paul had. If the Transfiguration is a transposed post-resurrection appearance story, it is likely that three different stories have been brought under a single umbrella, establishing the authority of these three apostolic figures simultaneously” (Patterson 1998a:228).

When Paul made his second trip to Jerusalem, he met with three persons there said to be the “pillars” (*styloi*) namely James, Cephas and John. These are the same names that appear in the Transfiguration story. According to Patterson (1998a:229), it is possible that what made them the “pillars” was the fact that they all had experiences of the risen Lord. According to Van Aarde (1999a:821), the authority of James’ upcoming leadership of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem probably depended on his being a primary witness, which meant that he must have *seen* the risen Lord. “The Transfiguration, as an appearance story, would then have developed as a highly stylized representation of those experiences, offered together as an etiology for their commonly held authority.” Why was the appearance story transformed to become a transfiguration story? Patterson (1998a:229) refers to Hans Dieter Betz who argues that the problem with such stories is that for someone with a little education and social standing such stories would have sounded vulgar. The word *pneuma*, which Paul uses to describe the risen Jesus, is the same word ancients use to refer to disembodied spirits (spooks/ghosts) who wander the earth. Therefore, Mark, for example, preferred to end his story with an empty tomb rather than with appearance stories of the sort that might have been typified by the Transfiguration.

When Matthew comes with his appearance stories to supplement Mark’s empty tomb all that is left of the older tradition of Jesus, as a luminous spirit, is an angel descending from heaven with a “visage like lightning.” Jesus himself has a body (28:9). He no longer is just a spirit (Patterson 1998a:231). In Luke, too, one can see the vestiges of a ghost story

in 24:36-7, where the sudden appearance of Jesus startles and frightens the disciples, who think they see a ghost (*pneuma*). From then on Luke demonstrates the physicality of the resurrection. “Handle me and see; for a ghost (*pneuma*) does not have flesh and bones like I do.” This contradicts Paul who argues to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:50) that “Flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s imperial rule” (see Patterson 1998a:231). In John’s appearance stories the same tendencies are at work. His Jesus is able to pass through doors (20:19 and 26), and Mary is instructed not to touch him, since he has not yet ascended (20:17). However “John manages to create a Jesus so physical that he borders on the macabre. ‘Here, stick your hand in my side,’ he instructs Thomas (20:27). John’s Jesus is not a ghost, but a corpse! In the end, John dismisses the entire tradition as second rate to begin with: ‘Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those rather who have not seen, and still believe’ (20:29). One can sense John’s frustration with a tradition that is so easily misconstrued and misused” (Patterson 1998a:232).

So, as Patterson (1998a:232) put it, 1 Cor 15:5, 7 may reflect the historical reality that Peter and James, like Paul, also had ecstatic religious experiences, which they took to be appearances of the risen Lord. The Transfiguration may represent that tradition. John, on the other hand had a luminous kind of experience like Paul’s. This could at the end account for the fact that these three were designated “pillars” in the Jerusalem church. “The canonical gospel writers all follow suit in treating the ‘pillars’ tradition as the Transfiguration and replacing any of the older, luminous-type appearance stories with very physical appearance stories calculated to prove Jesus was no mere ghost. These more ‘physical’ stories should all be seen as late, and, at least in part, generated by these apologetic impulses” (Patterson 1998a:232).

Why did Peter, James and John regard their luminous revelatory experiences as appearances of the risen Jesus? According to Patterson (1998a:232) all three of these pillars had known Jesus and had been in his company. They had committed themselves fully to Jesus’ vision of the Empire of God. They believed in his cause as God’s cause. It was people like them, who would have been the first to say that God raised Jesus from the dead. To say this was to say what they had already said with their very lives namely

that Jesus was right about God. His cause was just and his vision true. Just as they had given themselves over to the cause during Jesus' lifetime, they would now give themselves over to belief that God would not allow the cross to remain as the final word on Jesus' life. They would continue Jesus' ministry, bolstered by his spirit, in the confidence that God had raised him from the dead.

Lüdemann (1994:95) explains Peter's experience of the resurrected Jesus with the help of the theory of mourning of Yorick Spiegel. According to Spiegel (in Lüdemann 1994:99) there are three factors which make mourning difficult and all three apply to Peter and the disciples: 1. the crucifixion of Jesus happened unexpectedly and suddenly; 2. the relationship of the disciples to Jesus was marked by ambivalence and guilt feelings: Judas betrayed Jesus and then committed suicide and Peter denied Jesus and wept bitterly; 3. a dependent relationship of the disciples on Jesus can be seen in the fact that most had left their work and homes to be with him.

With this in mind, one can understand that the world had collapsed for Peter in the drama of the situation of Good Friday. At Easter, according to Lüdemann (1994:97) the words of Jesus about forgiveness once again came to Peter who was shattered and in mourning. Despite his denial of Jesus and despite of Jesus' death he "saw" Jesus. He thus experienced the word of Jesus as something living, as an encounter with the whole Jesus himself, in an image. Peter's situation can thus be described as one of mourning.

3.6.3 Did the circle of twelve see Jesus?

"The Twelve" as a designation cannot be taken literally in 1 Cor 15:5 because Peter was one of the Twelve, but he is named separately (Van Aarde 2004b:3). So at best the formula could mean that Jesus appeared to Peter and then to the rest of the Twelve. Patterson (1998a:232) said that he will take "this term then in the less literal sense of indicating that collective body of authority-bearing persons chosen by the early church to

carry on the task of preaching.” In the early church, “the Twelve” became a body, bearing ecclesial authority.

After Jesus arose in the *kerygma*, which means that he lived forth through the retelling of his cause, Jesus movements developed (see Van Aarde 1999a:819). Some of his followers in early Christianity had experiences of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in the form of the Son of Man in an altered state of consciousness.

To say that Jesus appeared to the Twelve does not mean that they had the same sort of subjective, religious experience that Paul had. Patterson (1998a:234) argues that it is clearly the “institution” that is at issue. By this claim, it is the institution that gains legitimization through the formula, not the individual members of it. So both the Twelve and the church have everything to gain by the assertion that the risen Lord had also appeared to the Twelve. “Including the Twelve in the appearance formulae probably derives from a decision on the part of the early church to expand the sphere of authority that was originally confined to the ‘pillars’ to include the Twelve as well. It is not so likely that it derives from an actual experience of the risen Jesus” (Patterson 1998a:235).

3.6.4 What happened to the Apostles?

1 Cor 15:7 claims that Jesus also appeared to “the apostles.” According to Patterson (1998a:235) all that has been said about the Twelve could also be said about the apostles. “The apostles” is a more open-ended group and less precise than “the Twelve.” It is not at all clear who would be included in this group. Patterson (1998a:236) states:

“Just as with the Twelve, we have here an authority-bearing body already working within the church, a church which came to recognize appearances of the risen Jesus as experiences that convey authority. The inclusion of ‘the apostles’ in this formula no doubt derives from an ecclesial decision to expand the sphere of authority beyond James to include others who could be trusted with the task of preaching. In saying that Jesus also

appeared to the apostles, the church merely asserted that this decision to expand authority was taken under the guidance of the spirit of Jesus.”

3.6.5 More than five hundred others saw as well

1 Cor 15 claims that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time (Osborne 1984:228). The passive construction *ophthe* (“he appeared”) refers to the appearance itself (Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:401). Here Jesus is said to have appeared to a group of people at one time. So it cannot be the same type of experience that Paul had. “If there is a historical experience that lies behind this assertion, it must necessarily have had the character of a collective ecstatic experience, such as glossolalia” (Patterson 1998a:236).

Such things did happen in the early church. Paul mentions speaking in tongues several times in his discussion of Corinthian worship practices in 1 Cor 12-14. In fact, the worship scene has become so wild in the congregation that Paul worries that, should outsiders wander into their gathering unwarned, they might think the whole lot of them was mad (14:23). Paul thought that such things were manifestations of the Spirit, therefore he said: “there are various gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4). According to 1 Cor 12:27 Paul also speaks of the Corinthians as manifesting the body of Christ while they were engaged in such activities. So, according to Patterson (1998a:236) it is not inconceivable that an early Christian group might have interpreted an ecstatic worship experience as an appearance of the risen Jesus, however loosely this might be understood. It is likely that such an experience lies behind 1 Cor 15:6a, and that early Christians could also have come to interpret such ecstatic experiences as “appearances” (Patterson 1998a:237).

According to Dunn (2003:858), a number of common elements are readily discernible in the appearance traditions. A key element is that they *saw* Jesus. Somewhat paradoxically, an almost equally attested motif is their *failure to recognize* Jesus. The narratives in the

Gospels tell the story. Another common motif is that of *commission*. Then there were the appearances in the context of a *meal*; and the appearance *on the first day of the week*.

3.7 What most probably happened?

Mary of Magdala claimed to have been the first to have experienced an appearance of the risen Jesus. This was according to Funk & The Jesus Seminar (1998:479) probably the case (see Mk 16:1, 9; Mt 28:1; Lk 24:10; Jn 20:1; Gospel of Peter 12:50; Epistula Apostolorum 9). This story of a woman as witness was unacceptable in a first-century world, therefore, fortunately, a man, one of the “pillars” could confirm that the master appeared to him (cf Lk 24:34).

According to Van Aarde (1999a:820) it seems Paul believed Peter in that he was actually the first to have seen Jesus (cf 1 Cor 15:5), although Peter himself and the other “pillars of faith” fled during the turmoil surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion (Mk 14:50). Peter claimed to have received the first vision, which is to be interpreted psychologically, according to Lüdemann (1995:129) as failed mourning and the overcoming of a severe guilt complex. He had sinned against Jesus by denying him. However, under the impact of the preaching and death of Jesus, and through an “appearance” of the risen Christ, Peter claimed the forgiveness of God to himself. This first vision became the spark for a further series of visions to take place.

Paul’s appearance did not depend on Peter’s vision, since he was not a follower of Jesus but an enemy. However, as seen above, his appearance served as a confirmation for his apostleship, leadership, and his mission among the gentiles. Thus, according to Lüdemann (1995:130), God must no longer be assumed to be the author of the visions, because there were other motives behind reporting it. We must say farewell to the idea that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event, or that it happened with divine intervention. There are other explanations for the origin of the tradition, and there are other motives for claiming that Jesus appeared to some.

The answer to the questions concerning the resurrection, how the tradition began and what it meant to those who cultivated and guarded it, lies not in the gospel stories about Jesus rising up out of the tomb “as a flesh-and-bones, walking, talking corpse. Rather, we come closer to the truth when we look carefully at the much earlier tradition about Jesus’ resurrection and appearances that Paul uses in 1 Cor 15:3-8” (Patterson 1998a:237).

It is learned from these traditions that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus began as an act of proclamation. The followers of Jesus were convinced that God would raise Jesus from the dead because Jesus had been right about God. Because he was right about God, he should not have been killed, and therefore God would raise him (Lüdemann 1995:132). This connects Christian faith to the Israelite context of martyrology and their reflections on resurrection. Therefore, one can conclude that it was not necessary for Christians to have had experiences of the risen Jesus, or to have discovered the empty tomb. Their belief in the resurrection of Jesus had its origin in the conviction that Jesus had been right about God.

The early church was also a religious movement alive with spiritual enthusiasm, and leaders such as Paul, Peter, James and John claimed that they had ecstatic revelatory experiences. Because they believed that God would and had raised Jesus from the dead, such experiences could be interpreted and understood as appearances of the risen Jesus (Crossan 1996:203). “Since these experiences were also taken as signs that those who had received them had been commissioned to preach the good news, the church gradually came to attribute such experiences to groups, such as ‘the Twelve,’ or ‘the apostles,’ as a formal way of recognizing their authority to preach. Finally, there were manifestations of spiritual enthusiasm in early Christian worship. This, too, came to be understood as the presence of the living spirit of Jesus among those gathered at such events” (Patterson 1998a:238).

For Christians the resurrection did happen. However, the reality in which one can speak of such things is not historical reality but the transcendent. For the believer it was a rapture in history. “That is the point of the earthquakes and darkening skies, the general

chaos and disordering that comes as part of the gospel's accounts of Jesus' death" (Patterson 1998a:238).

The early church interpreted Jesus' resurrection as God's breaking into history in order to redeem history itself from its demonic rebellion against God made known in the life of Jesus. For the Christian faith, Jesus' life did not end on Golgotha, and precisely here lies the decision of Christian faith. It is not a decision about miracles, empty tombs and risen corpses, but it was a decision about Jesus himself. Was he right about God, or not?

For Christian faith to be faith (myth), this decision or risk to believe in Jesus must be embraced without fear. To insist that the resurrection was a historical event and to embrace as true only that which can be proven historically or scientifically, is not faith. "To believe in the resurrection is to have faith that God would redeem the life and work of Jesus from the death sentence imposed on it by history. It is to have faith that Jesus' ministry was the work of God, that his words were the Word of God. History cannot prove that these things are true. One can only risk asserting that they are true, and listen and watch for this same God in one's own life" (Patterson 1998a: 239). This is all that the earliest Christians had to go on and it is all that we have too.

Since Peter experienced the forgiveness of sin in particular in the breakthrough of a guilt feeling, it was certain that the experience of the crucified Jesus was directly connected with the forgiveness of sins (Lüdemann 1995:132). So the experience of the forgiveness of sins became an essential part of the earliest Christian Easter faith. Secondly, according to Lüdemann (1995:133) the Easter faith developed as an experience of the overcoming of death. Real eternal life was experienced there and then as a life, which was influenced by the spirit. It thus became an eschatological faith.

The earliest Christians understood the resurrection of Jesus as a challenge to believe that history is not all there is to human existence. For them the resurrection is a call to have faith that we live in the presence of God, whose gracious and loving character shone forth in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They understood it as an invitation to live life as a

faithful, trusting response to that God, extending that experience of gracious love to others, just as God had extended it to them in the ministry of Jesus. This challenge, call and invitation are still ours today (Patterson 1998a:239).

Resurrection is theologically speaking, not about the resuscitation of a corpse. It is about the resuscitation of hope against all odds that there is indeed a God that loves us. This is the God Christians claim to have met in the life and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth (Patterson 1998a:239).

The earliest Christians really believed that Jesus was right. They believed it before his death. That is why they proclaimed the resurrection in the first place because for them the resurrection depends on whether or not Jesus was right about God, and they believed that he was. There was something in what the first witnesses saw and believe which they could bring to expression only with this term “resurrection.” According to Dunn (2003:874) there seems to have been something about these Easter experiences, which impacted a determinative and decisive way in the affirmation, “God has raised Jesus from the dead!”

3.8 Resurrection in the myths

There were other sages in Jesus’ world, who were apparently able to raise people from the dead. Among them was Apollonius, contemporary of Jesus and fellow itinerant teacher. He raised a young bride who died just as she was getting married (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.45). As Philostratus reports the story, there is some question about whether the young bride was actually dead when Apollonius revives her. In two similar cases in the gospels, Jesus remarks that the patient is not dead, but sleeping. That was the case with the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:457).

Ovid, the Roman poet composed numerous works, of which the best known is perhaps the *Metamorphoses*. All the stories in this collection have to do with transformations. The

story of Orpheus and Eurydice is the story of a failed resurrection that is contemporary with Jesus of Nazareth (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:463).

3.9 Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus is not so much intended to be regarded as a historical fact, but as a foundational event, the interpretative insight into reality which enables discernment of the relative importance and unimportance of all other facts (Dunn 2003:878).

According to Niebuhr (1957:18), the resurrection was the event that the primitive community in all its confusing diversity of perspectives used to interpret everything else: the identity of Jesus, the meaning of his ministry and his death, his coming again, and, finally his birth. Resurrection as a metaphor is perceived as referring to something otherwise inexpressible. It is not a complete story in itself, but it can only be grasped as part of a larger story in which God is the principal actor and in which Jesus is somehow still involved.

The resurrection as the content of the *kerygma* can thus be seen as mythical speech that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. This resurrection narrative legitimized the apostolic authority. The legitimizing of the authority developed into the orthodoxy and they eventually contributed to the canonization of the, for-them-acceptable, documents. This will become clear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

A THEORY ON CANONIZING AND DECANONIZING

4. Our Scripture reading is taken from ...

The precipitating cause of Christian faith and Christian doctrine, according to McGrath (1990:1), was and is a man named Jesus, who appeared in Palestine in the time of the emperor Tiberius and was crucified under the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. We know of him mainly through the traditions of his deeds and words preserved in the New Testament. The primary source of Christian doctrine, according to McGrath (1990:55) is thus Scripture, in that it is Scripture, which mediates Jesus of Nazareth to those who believe in him. I prefer to say that the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth that one find in the New Testament, mediates God to me⁴⁶.

When one keeps in mind the varied and complex history of the writings of the various books of the Christian movement; how the individual books were addressed each to a different community at different stages, one needs to ask how it happened that the twenty seven books that came to comprise the New Testament were collected into an authoritative collection of Scripture? A Scripture that has the status of “canon” for the church. But what precisely is “canon”? It is an understatement to say that confusion currently surrounds the term and permeates recent discussions of the topic. I am not any longer convinced that one can call a list of books *the canon*. Bible and canon are not synonymous any more. I am looking for something in, behind or beyond the Bible that is the canon. In this chapter, I am going to explore this issue.

⁴⁶ Because I do not believe in Jesus of Nazareth. I believe in God.

This is not only my issue. Canonizing and decanonizing is a topic that is heavily discussed among scholars at the moment. Quite a few books covering this issue have been published in recent times. However, *the canon* and the debate concerning it, is not only of academic interest. The believing community struggles with the question as well. People ask the question: Is the Bible the only *Word of God*? What about other *inspired* books? What about the holy books of other religions and faith communities? Is *God* also *speaking* through other myths, narratives and books? What about newly discovered documents that date from the same time as the canonical books?

The institutionalized church takes notice of the debate, but as far as I can observe, the church takes an offensive position in the debate. Apologetically they still confess the Bible to be the only inspired Word of God. The church's point of view awakens questions in the secular community such as: Who said it is the Word of God? Where did the Bible get the authority from to rule and run people's lives?

Again, as one can see, it is a relevant topic for a large audience therefore it is worth discussing it. However, where must I start? What is Scripture, and where does it come from? Let me read through the text to see if I can perhaps see something on the other side!

When Paul preached the gospel (2 Cor 2:14; 4:6), he understood it as a "knowledge of the truth" (Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:106). This knowledge means, "to gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil 3:8). This knowledge (gnosis) was what faith was all about (see Conzelmann & Lindemann 1985:175-177), and in the beginning of the Christian congregation, it was faith, and not the right doctrine (orthodoxy) that distinguished the Christians from the rest (see Bultmann 1955:135). The right doctrine and heresies arose out of the differences, which developed within the Christian congregations. This takes place very early because Paul already curses the Judaizers of offering a different gospel to the converted Gentiles (Gal 1:6-9). As time went by, terminology develops for *the right doctrine* namely "orthodoxy." The orthodox was concerned with the dogma, ordinances, and regulation of the religion.

W Bauer (see Bultmann 1955:137) has shown that that doctrine, which in the end won out in the ancient church as the “right” or “orthodox” doctrine stands at the end of a development or, rather, is the result of a conflict among various shades of doctrine. M Werner defended a similar thesis, regarding the heresy as a symptom of the great crisis of the post-apostolic period, which consisted of the fact that in consequence of the delay of the parousia, a chaos of teachings arose. Christians wanted to hold fast to the tradition but they had to reinterpret it, and so a multitude of attempts at reorientation was called forth (Bultmann 1955:137).

In view of the differences in doctrine and of the conflict between them, the question arose concerning the authority, which might determine “right” doctrine. The answer was that the apostles were the reliable bearers of the tradition. However, the problem was the selection of those writings out of the swelling literary production which could count as apostolic and which could be part of the formation of a new canon, which could take its place beside the Old Testament canon.

In the end, according to Bultmann (1955:141) the authority of the bishop-office decided the matter. For the Greek Church, the thirty-ninth paschal letter of Athanasius conclusively set the extent of the New Testament at twenty-seven writings, and in the West, this decision achieved recognition through Pope Innocent 1.

4.1 But what is a canon?

According to Bruce Metzger (1987:v) the word *canon* is derived from a Greek word. Its use in connection with the Bible belongs to Christian times, but the idea of a canon of Scripture originates in Judaism. Originally, the word *canon* is a Hebrew word meaning “reed, corn-stalk, measuring rod, or measuring stick.” In Greek, the term had a concrete meaning and then several metaphorical extensions (Ulrich 2002:22). Concrete it meant a “rod” or a “measuring stick” and in the figurative sense, it meant “norm” or “ideal.” It is from this basic meaning that the church developed the meaning of “rule” and “list” for

the word *canon*. Thus, one finds in the early church that the word *canon* is also used for “rule of the truth”, “rule of the faith” and “rule of the church.” Canonicity is thus generally taken to imply normativity and, as such, to justify mandatory acquiescence in and obedience to a comprehensive and internally consistent statement of religious orthodoxy (Blenkinsopp 2002:67).

It is also important to distinguish between “Scripture” and “canon.” According to Hahneman (2002:405) Albert Sundberg’s distinction remains essential in understanding the formation of the Christian Bible in the midst of the fourth century. He defined “Scripture” as literature that is appealed to for religious authority, and the early church writers indeed appeal to a variety of Scripture, some of which did and some of which did not eventually make it into the canon. “Canon,” on the other hand, implies for Sundberg (in Hahneman 2002:405) a closed set of “Scriptures,” to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted.

The only relevant occurrence of the term in the New Testament is in Gal 6:16, where it is used in the general sense of “measure of assessment,” “norm of one’s own action,” “norm of true Christianity” (Ulrich 2002:23). According to Farmer (2002:325) the writer’s use of the word includes a set of theological concepts such as: “the new creation,” “the cross of our Lord,” “the truth of the gospel,” “the law of Christ,” and the confession that “Jesus gave himself for our sins.” What the writer is precisely referring to is not exactly clear, what is clear is that it does not refer to a set of books of Scripture.

According to A van de Beek (1998:331), the idea of a list of canonical writings was not the invention of the church, or any other religious community. It had already been used in Greek culture to establish the norm for what was good in poetry or literature. “Canon” is thus originally a concept used in a literary context. The church took over the concept of canon from Greek culture and started to use it as a measure of ecclesiastical acceptability, and so the church became a community of people for whom the canonical books were normative in thought and life. In the Hellenized world of early Judaism and the New Testament, the most influential canon was that of the educated Greek speakers. It

included the works of Homer, Euripides, Menander, Sophocles and Herodotus. The canon promoted in the schools and libraries represented the best examples of the fundamental genres of cultural life: philosophy, epic, drama, poetry, and history. It is like the canon of fundamental English works, including Shakespeare, Milton, and Dickens (Davies 2002:36). Canon formation is a natural process. A list is the version of what a wider group holds to be its own canon. According to Davies (2002:51), canon and authority go hand in hand.

The fundamental difference between the canon of Greek poetry and the canon of the church is that according to the church, the canon has divine authority. There are a number of reasons, listed by Guido de Brès in 1561 (in Van de Beek 1998:333) for people to consider a book to be canonical. One reason is that a great number of people have acknowledged this writing to be authoritative. Another reason might be the antiquity of the writings, or the sanctity of the authors. However, these external arguments are always inadequate to underpin the so-called divine authority that the church ascribes to the canon. This *divine authority*, as I see it, is something that the church accepts *in faith*. It is an attribute ascribed to the Christian canon by the believing community. It is an attribute only recognized and acknowledged by that community. So, actually it is a subjective confession and not an actual or factual attribute.

The history of canon, according to Smith (1998:299), is not primarily one of transmission, but of reception. Authority and power inhere less in the book than in the capacity to manipulate the language of the text, in such a way exegetically as to create *parole*, inviting both a sense of plausibility and conviction. Canon is a sort of “list” or more properly, a “catalogue”, particularly a catalogue of “classics.”

However, Smith (1998:299) argues, that there is a specific difference between a catalogue and a canon; namely, the latter is a list of writings held to be complete. The element of closure may be seen as the formal element that transforms a catalogue into a canon. At the same time, however, the reality of the canon, for instance in Christianity, is

complicated for varying forms of Christianity have varying canons, which leads to the account of the question of the closure of the canon, or is it still open.

The term “canon” was thus transferred to an authoritative list of accepted writings in the meaning of a list of canonical writings known as Scripture. However, these lists are indeed different for different faith communities, but the concept of canon is the same for each (Ulrich 2002:23). Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and others will list different books in their canons, but the definition remains the same for all. The Protestant canon is the smallest and the Ethiopian Orthodox canon the largest. While, according to Sanders (2002:259) canons differ, all believing communities agree that their canon is relevant to their ongoing life. A canon is thus, as Sanders (2002:262) sees it, a community’s paradigm of how to continue the dialogue in ever changing socio-political contexts. Leaders within communities have been and are tridents of the text because they bring the text’s past into the present in the contemporary terms of their ongoing community.

For Ulrich (2002:29) the proper meaning for canon is “the definitive list of inspired, authoritative books which constitute the recognized and accepted body of sacred Scripture of a major religious group, that definitive list being result of inclusive and exclusive decisions after serious deliberations.” The idea of a fixed number of religiously authoritative writings is a peculiarity of Judaism and Christianity (Davies 2002:37).

People, according to Van de Beek (1998:336) did not say at a particular moment, “Come, let us choose a number of texts as a standard for our faith.” It was the other way around. Their encounter with the texts shaped their faith and that made the texts authoritative for them. The texts thus precede the belief, and so it came that they acknowledged these texts as canonical. These texts refer to an inner conviction of the author. In it is an experience of the spirit of God. One hears a witness to Christ and a word from God. The text is not God self. It is not in itself the word of God, but I am convinced that it refers to a confession of someone who believed that he had an experience with who he believed, was God.

Van de Beek (1998:338) has three major problems with this view of a “revelation”. The first is the problem of reconstruction. What did Jesus really teach? Then there is a theological objection because the search for an actual revelation behind the texts is analogous to the search for an actual God behind the revelation. However, the central problem for canonicity is whether the claims for truth, which are implicit in the texts, are right or wrong.

The answer that the Reformation gave to this problem is that of *autopistia*. The Bible is believable as the word of God, because it makes itself believable. Calvin called this process of internal conviction the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit (Van de Beek 1998:339). Canonicity is thus not a formal concept, but it has to do with being convinced by the content. Because you believe, the Bible has become canon. The church is the community of all those people to whom the Bible speaks authoritatively. Through the church, one gets a chance to hear the stories told about God. Thus, the adoption of the Bible as canon is determined by the experience of the revelation of God in its words (Van de Beek 1998:346).

According to H M Vos (1998:352), there are no sacred texts, because no texts are sacred. Sacredness is an attribute, just as canonicity, which can only be conferred upon a writing by its readers. There are no single text that possesses meaning and truth in itself. These qualities can only be established through the reception of the texts. The same can be said about canonization. It was a process performed by early Christians with a specific purpose namely to maintain a pure and correct understanding of the Christian message. “The early Christians were convinced that without these scriptures future generations could easily be deprived of this extraordinary truth. Thus, the impetus for the formation of the canon arose not only out of a concern for the maintenance of the purity of a tradition, but also out of a concern for the preservation and the acceptance of a divine message” (Vos 1998:354).

During this process of canonization, the Christians who took the task upon themselves had authoritative and authoritarian intentions. Their purpose was not only to identify the

texts that qualified as Scriptures, but also to proclaim that these chosen Scriptures are the writings, which truly contain the truth of the faith. “Thus, whoever desires to join the true faith must accept the contents of *these* scriptures as the only real truth of the faith. By linking the faith’s truth to an exclusive group of canonical writings, a special qualification is established. This special qualification surfaces in the *‘faith character’* of the writings: the writings are exonerated from the normal tests of verification” (Vos 1998:356).

Miracles and the divinity of Jesus are not empirical facts they are true only for those who believe that they are. This fact, and nothing else, according to Vos (1998:356) explains why religious texts possess, by definition, a unique character because they inform us of a *truth* which cannot be learned any other way than through those specific writings. This is the reason why Christians perceive the Bible to be “the Word of God”. This is why they read and proclaim it as being the truth. The only way to attain religious truth is thus by faith (Vos 1998:365).

Vos (1998:362) believes that the critique that has been brought in against the canon in the last centuries is not primarily a reaction against the content of the writings rather it is a reaction against the status of the canon as the exclusive framework within which the reality and truth of faith and morality can be presented. “In an age which claims that all ‘the great stories’ are done with, canon critique and decanonization can be plausibly construed as proofs of the advantages of a non-canonical philosophy of life such as humanism” (Vos 1998:362).

Foundational to reading the Christian canon is thus a decision about how you see its origin. To see it as a human product does not deny the reality of God. God is real and can be experienced. Borg (2002:22) sees it as the response of two ancient communities to their experience of God. It is a human product, though generated in response to God. “As such, it contains ancient Israel’s perceptions and misperceptions of what life with God involves, just as it contains the early Christian movement’s perceptions and misperceptions” (Borg 2002:27).

Though the canon is a human product, it is also sacred to three religious traditions. The process whereby the Bible became sacred is known as “canonization.” To speak of the canon as sacred addresses thus not its origin, according to Borg (2002:29), but its status within a religious community. Scholars of the Christian canon are growing more accustomed to viewing their canon as a later phenomenon and they (I) are getting used to the idea that what we call *the canon* is only one of many other canons in other religious traditions. I am convinced that the God in all these canons is human responses to the same, and the only God.

4.2 When writings become Scripture

Although the process of canonization of Scripture was far advanced by the end of the third century to the middle of the fourth century of the Common Era, it was by no means a straightforward and simple process, because some of the books can be, and were, canonical long before there was a canon of Scripture (Ulrich 2002:34).

As nearly as one can tell, there was no canon of Scripture in the Second Temple Judaism. Thus, before the year 70 of the Common Era no authoritative body of which we know, drew up a list of books that alone were regarded as supremely authoritative, a list from which none could be subtracted and to which none could be added (VanderKam 2002:91). One does not know, how, when, or by whom the list of books now found in the Hebrew Bible, for example, was drawn up. All that one has, are hints over a considerable historical span suggesting that some books were regarded by certain writers as sufficiently authoritative that they could be cited to settle a dispute, explain a situation, provide an example, or predict what would happen (Barrera 2002:139). For example, the books of the Law, the Prophets, and Psalms make up the Bible quoted by Qumran’s legal and exegetical literature. “Among the prophets, Isaiah and the Minor Prophets are more highly regarded than Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Former Prophets, or historical books” (Barrera 2002:139). I am convinced that the New Testament quoted the Pentateuch,

Isaiah, Minor Prophets, and Psalms almost exclusively because of the messianic legitimacy that they offer for the Christ myth.

VanderKam (2002:92) is convinced that during the second temple period, there were authoritative writings. These writings were at times gathered into recognizable groupings such as the Law and the Prophets. The expressions “Law and Prophets” and “Law, Prophets, and Psalms” refer primarily to the authority of these books as Scripture. The expression “Law, Prophets, and Writings,” which dates much later, marks instead all the books, which comprise the Scriptures of Judaism (Barrera 2002:144).

The tripartite collection of the Hebrew Bible as described by Josephus can be traced back to the middle of the second century BCE, according to Van der Kooij (1998:18). The authoritative status of the ancient books, which were kept in the temple of Jerusalem, was reinforced due to the crisis in the first half of the second century BCE. Everything that was regarded as basic to Jewish religion and culture became more important in the period of the assertion of their self-identity (Van der Kooij 1998:37).

According to Van der Kooij (1998:38), specific historical circumstances triggered a process by which ancient books, which had already acquired an official and authoritative significance, became in a sense “canonical” as one of the “ancestral” elements basic to the Jewish temple state and religion. Thus, canonization was part of a process of re-establishing Jewish culture and religion after a period of serious threats to their security. From about 150 BCE onwards, the ancient books are represented as a defined corpus. This period marked a crucial moment in the history of canonization of the Hebrew Bible.

Zsengellér (1998:161) draws the attention of the reader to the canonization of the holy books in the Samaritan community. It is argued that the date of the Gerizim temple (end second century BCE) marks the date of the canonization of the Torah and perhaps also of the book of Joshua. Joshua, because of the important role that Mount Gerizim with Shechem played in the text (Zsengellér 1998:166).

The Samaritans accepted only the Torah as their canon, because of the central role that Jerusalem played in the rest of the Scriptures. “It stands to reason that the contrast between the two holy places made it impossible for the Samaritans to accept portions of texts, which favoured the rival temple as divine revelation” (Zsengellér 1998:165). At some later date the book of Joshua was decanonized by the mainstream Samaritans, since it had become a tool of sectarian theology. It is thus clear that canonization and decanonization are related to some crisis of identity. “Both processes are the tools of the self-identification of a given community” (Zsengellér 1998:169).

The shift from the pre-Masoretic period of textual fluidity to the proto-Masoretic period of a more stabilized text, together with the shift in understanding the nature of the biblical text, heightened the need for a stabilized or closed canon by the late first century of the common era (Sanders 2002:258). The Massorah, as Wellhausen said in 1871 (cf Sæbo 1998:45) has forced a text that for a long time has been very fluid, to stop, amid its fluidity.

However, the category of revealed literature was not considered a closed and fixed one, at least not for the Essenes, as one read the Dead Sea Scrolls (Van Aarde 1994:124). They believed that revelation was not confined to the distant past but, continued in their time and fellowship. The Dead Sea Scrolls, according to Mason (2002:126) make no distinction between biblical, pre-Mosaic, and post-Artaxerian texts. Even within the Scrolls’ versions of such biblical texts as the Psalms, there is rearrangement and non-biblical material. The texts of these documents often differ from the Masoretic text (Sæbo 1998:42). At that stage, the canon was thus still pretty *open*. We learned from Sanders (2002:256) that in the early history of transmission tridents of the text, both scribes and translators, could focus on the needs of the community to understand the messages of the text, even to the extent of modestly altering or clarifying archaic or out-moded expressions so that their community could understand what it might mean to them.

For many scholars the Masoretic text has become *the* Hebrew Bible. But one must keep in mind that the vowels of the Masoretic text merely display one of several vocalization

systems, namely the system finalized by Aharon ben Moshe Ben Asher in Tiberias in the tenth century (Tov 2002:234). There are also significant differences between the consonantal text of the Masoretic text and other textual witnesses. However, in spite of other textual traditions, authoritative at that time, the Masoretic text became the central text and the sole authoritative text in Judaism and Christianity (Tov 2002:235). According to Tov (2002:238), some scholars claim that the Septuagint more often than the Masoretic text reflects the original text of the Hebrew Bible, therefore one could make the Septuagint the base for commentaries, since that version has as much importance for biblical scholarship as the Masoretic text. However, in view of the very comprehensive textual study of the Hebrew Bible during the last generations it must now be recognized that especially with the increasing manuscriptal evidence, the problems of the textual history have turned out to be much more complicated than ever before.

The early followers of Jesus began with a set of Scriptures, namely the sacred writings of the Hebrew Bible, but known to most in their Greek translation. Such a new community needed authoritative material for various purposes like baptismal practices, eucharist, prayers, confessional statements, liturgical formulae and moral guidance (Ferguson 2002:296).

Some of the writings currently incorporated into the New Testament such as the general epistles and the Letter to the Hebrews as well as the Apocalypse of John, remained questionable as to their canonical status up to the fourth century and beyond. The period of formal canonization thus belongs to the fourth and fifth centuries (Gamble 2002:291). With the emergence of Christianity as a state religion, in the fourth century, it evolved into the desire for accurate transmission of the text and verbal stability (Sanders 2002:259). It was then that specific lists began to be drawn up clearly distinguishing between those documents that might be regarded as authoritative and read in the churches, and those that might not. Constantine clearly sought to promote the consolidation and unity of the church. Agreement about the scope of authoritative Scripture was definitively reached because Constantine requested Eusebius to manufacture fifty copies of the divine Scriptures for the churches that he built (Gamble

2002:294). The Roman government financed thus the multiplication of copies of Scripture (Ferguson 2002:318). Within a few years under Constantine, baptisteries and basilicas dotted the landscape. The site of the empty tomb had been “discovered” and the Church of the holy Sepulcher was built. Christian iconography announced to the world its themes, bishops gathered in councils to agree upon doctrine, ritual was regularized, the calendar of festival events was established, piety took the form of pilgrimage, salvation took the form of eternal life in the heavenly world, and the Christendom was launched (Mack 1995:287).

In some circles, those that were excluded from the canon were at times considered authoritative such as the Gospel of Peter, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Shepherd of Hermas (McDonald 1995:281). Apart from the writings that comprise the New Testament at present, a great many others were also produced in the course of the first few centuries which imitated the New Testament writings and which, also claimed the status of Scripture. Many of them are essentially expansions and retellings of early Christian traditions. They are called Apocrypha⁴⁷, which means “of hidden origin” (McDonald 1995:281). This means that they were held not to have been written by the apostles or their disciples and thus that there is no direct link between them and the living voice of Jesus himself. Furthermore, they are “hidden” in the sense that they were not permitted for use in Christian worship, since their teachings were not deemed to conform to the rule of faith of the church.

Different churches have different opinions on the apocrypha. The Old Testament apocrypha, for example are included in the Eastern Orthodox Bibles and since the Council of Trent, also in Roman Catholic Bibles. Now current again they are included in most of the Protestant Bibles. In most cases, they are a special section apart from the

⁴⁷ Some of the best-known Apocrypha are: Gospel of the Nazarenes; Gospel of the Hebrews; Gospel of the Truth; Gospel of Philip; Protevangelium of James; Dialogue of the Saviour; Gospel of the Ebionites; Gospel of the Egyptians; Gospel of Thomas; Gospel of Peter; Infancy Story of Thomas; Book of Thomas the Contender; Epistle to the Laodiceans; Correspondence between Paul and Seneca; Acts of Andrew; Acts of Paul; Acts of Thomas; Acts of John; Acts of Peter; Ascention of Isaiah; 5 and 6 Esra; Apocalypse of Peter; and, Christian Sibylline Oracles.

undisputed canonical books. However, they are omitted entirely in Jewish and Evangelical Protestant Bibles (Harrington 2002:196).

According to Harrington (2002:208), many of the apocrypha are best interpreted as historical novels, especially Tobit, Judith and 3 Maccabees.

The letters of Paul were perhaps the first writings of the New Testament to be collected as “Scripture.” This is possibly the collection of letters that the author of 2 Peter (3:15-16) refers to and implicitly regards as “Scripture.” With the passing of time, the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) as well as Hebrews were added, somewhere in the second century CE. Hebrews was initially not accepted as authoritative Scripture, especially in Rome, because of the belief that the Apostle Paul was not the author of the letter.

With the composition of the canonical gospels as they are known, the oral traditions about Jesus had not been exhausted. Oral traditions continued alongside the textual tradition. It is from the world of oral Jesus tradition that further retellings of the Jesus story emerged with a view to reinterpreting and reapplying the Jesus tradition to new situations and contexts, and to serve various theological ends, for example in Jewish-Christian and gnostic groups. Mythmaking, as Mack (1995:13) called it, is a normal and necessary social activity. Early Christian mythmaking was about borrowing and rearranging myths taken for granted in the cultures of context. These myths made eminent sense, not only for their times and circumstances, but also for the social experiments in which they were invested.

In the course of the first four centuries or so, a comparatively large number of gospels emerged. According to McDonald (1995:163) some covered much the same ground as the four that had become canonical such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter. Others developed the theme of the infancy, as did the Protoevangelium of James and the Infancy Story of Thomas, and some purported to contain the post-resurrection

instruction of Jesus to his disciples such as the Dialogue of the Saviour or the Book of Thomas the Contender.

The canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John quickly gained popularity, importance and ascendancy never to be lost, although until the end of the second century the Gospel of John had in some areas been in dispute, mainly because of its popularity and use among gnostic groups (see McDonald 1995:163). The earliest testimony to the Gospels as “Scripture” comes from the middle of the second century, in a written sermon falsely ascribed to Clement, bishop of Rome, designated 2 Clement. Chapter two reads: “And again another scripture says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’ “in this way giving evidence that the Gospel of Matthew (9:13) was by then regarded as Scripture. At about the same time, Justin Martyr, speaks of “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets, [which] are read as long as time permits” (Apology 1.67). Elsewhere, he mentions “the memoirs made by the apostles, which are called gospels” (Apology 2.33.66). It is clear from references like these that the gospels were gaining status as Scripture (McDonald 1995:163). Although they had initially been anonymous, they now circulated under the names of the apostles.

Once a canon becomes a religious collection, the nature of its authority changes. Divine sanction is invoked, even divine authorship can be claimed. “The *fixing* of a canon is a further step that both entails a political and religious authority capable of dictating and imposing uniformity, and also creates a dichotomy between canon and non-canon, making the canon itself a symbol of the distinction between human and divine knowledge. Thereafter the natural processes by which canons would grow are shut off, and the mode of interpretation takes over: The fixed text, the fixed collection is subject ... to *commentary* that must remain formally outside. The meaning of the contents of the canon can, and will, forever change, but that change will not be reflected in the text, but in the framework of understanding that informs its reading” (Davies 2002:52). The primary character of canon is thus its relevance to the communities it served. Once the text could no longer be modified to show relevance, hermeneutic rules were devised to

break open the frozen text, as it were, and make it applicable to the needs of believing communities (Sanders 2002:259).

4.3 Limiting the scope

The first list that corresponds exactly to the New Testament as we know it is furnished by Athanasius of Alexandria in 367, who probably seems also to be the first to use the term “canon” for a fixed list of authoritative documents (Gamble 2002:291). No ecumenical council in the ancient church ever ruled for the church as a whole on the question of the contents of the canon (Hahneman 2002:415).

The *Canon of Muratori* lists canonically recognised works: the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles; thirteen letters of Paul⁴⁸, including the Pastoral Epistles, but omitting Hebrews; Jude, 1 and 2 John; Wisdom of Solomon; and two apocalypses namely the one from John and the other from Peter. It rejects the letters to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians, which it regards as forgeries under Paul’s name. The author also concedes that the Apocalypse of Peter is disputed “which some of our people do not want to have read in the church.” The most interesting part of the *Canon of Muratori* relates to its dealing with the Shepherd of Hermas. As Hermas was almost a contemporary of the author of the *Canon of Muratori*, the Shepherd could not, in his view, be counted among the canonical and authoritative Scriptures. This, despite the fact that it obviously was a very popular work, since the *Canon of Muratori* allowed it to be read but not be used publicly in the church for worship and liturgy (McDonald 1995:211).

According to the *Canon of Muratori*, the Shepherd was not to be counted among the prophets from the Old Testament “since their number is settled” or among the apostles, that is, the New Testament. These words are significant as they bear evidence of how

⁴⁸ Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, Timothy.

consensus had been created in the early church about the books accepted as authoritative and canonical. The list was viewed as being closed, although what exactly constituted the “closed list” might differ from place to place and from time to time. At no time has the whole church agreed upon its canon of Scripture (Hahneman 2002: 415).

The *Canon of Muratori*, furthermore, rejects writings by the gnostic teachers Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades and Basilides (Ferguson 2002:314). This again is significant, for it indicates one of the important reasons for motives behind the closure of the canon of Scripture, namely to distinguish between true teaching, the rule of faith of the church, and the false teachings of heretics.

From the end of the second century CE onwards, the church maintained, according to McDonald (1995:201) the four Gospels as canonical and resisted including other gospels. Acts was accepted, as were the thirteen letters attributed to Paul. The other letters remained in dispute for some time. In some circles, some were dropped and others added, but there was a growing tendency towards more consensus on what constituted the canon of the New Testament.

With regard to third century witnesses to the canon of the New Testament, two theologians stand out, namely Tertullian (160-220 CE) who wrote in Latin in North Africa in the city of Cartage, and Origen (185-254 CE) who wrote in Greek in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Tertullian was the first writer to speak of the “New Testament” for the Christian writings as distinct from the Old Testament (Ferguson 2002:307). According to Tertullian (McDonald 1995:206), the New Testament consisted of the four Gospels, the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, Acts, Revelation of John, 1 Peter, 1 John and Jude. If this list is compared with the *Canon of Muratori* we can see that 2 John, Apocalypse of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon were omitted, but that 1 Peter had been added. Origen had traveled widely and concerned himself with the question as to which books constituted the Christian Scriptures for all churches everywhere (see McDonald 1995:201). He distinguished between the generally acknowledged writings, the false writings and the writings over whose authenticity there is doubt. Unambiguously

accepted for Origen were the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Pauline letters, 1 Peter, 1 John and the Apocalypse of John. The other general epistles were frequently cited by him, but according to his statements, were not generally recognized. Among those disputed in some places, he included James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. Other writings treasured and cited by Origen but which were not regarded as Holy Scripture were the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache and Acts of Barnabas.

The Apocalypse of John remained disputed up to the fourth century in the eastern part of the church, while from the end of the second century it belonged firmly to the canon in the western, Latin, part. Hebrews was initially accepted as a Pauline letter in the eastern part of the church, while the western part rejected it up to the fourth century CE. As regards some general epistles, the uncertainty lasted a long time. Only gradually did a seven-letter canon develop out of the originally accepted group of three, namely James, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

In the fourth century CE, the drive and tendency towards unification in every sphere of the church largely came to a climax. A fourth-century writer, Eusebius of Caesarea, completed his famous *Church History* in 325 CE. In this work, he devoted a chapter to the question of the canon. Following the example of Origen, he distinguished between three classes of documents: (1) the “generally recognized writings” (the four Gospels, Acts, fourteen Pauline letters – thus, despite reservations, including Hebrews – 1 John and 1 Peter); (2) works “which in some churches are recognized and in some disputed” (the remaining general epistles) and (3) the “spurious and therefore rejected writings” (Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Acts of Barnabas and the Didache). It is clear from the description of Eusebius that in the eastern church of the fourth century CE more than one possible make-up of the canonical collection of New Testament writings existed. The New Testament canon could vary between 21 books and 26 books (Ferguson 2002:318).

Eusebius also knew that some apocryphal writings had to be rejected such as the Acts of Paul and the Apocalypse of Peter, which indicates that despite the stabilization of the

canon of which he gave evidence, the inauthentic writings were still read and used in various Christian communities.

In the course of the fourth century, consensus grew as to the limits of the New Testament canon. A clear acknowledgement of the canon of 27 books appeared in the Thirty-ninth Festal Letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in the year 367 CE. This letter largely confirmed what had come to be accepted as the norm for the canon of the New Testament in the church. This list of Athanasius contained the writings that have since been recognized as the New Testament (McDonald 1995:220). As opposed to them, he mentioned the Apocrypha fabricated by the heretics. Beside a few Old Testament Apocrypha, the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas were permitted for reading by those newly admitted to the Church, although these books were not part of the canon.

In the first part of the fourth century C E, the Latin-speaking churches of the western Mediterranean world accepted a canon consisting of the four Gospels, the thirteen letters of Paul, 1 John, 1 Peter and Revelation of John. This concurs with Tertullian's⁴⁹ canon minus the Letter of Jude. In the latter half of the century, the canon accepted in Alexandria and set forth by Athanasius gradually became the standard so that when Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin, he followed the canon set forth by Athanasius. With Jerome, the list and manuscripts of various collections of Scriptures became the Christian Bible (Mack 1995:289).

The Festal Letter of Athanasius in the eastern part of the church and the work of Jerome in the western part of the church marked the formation of the canon of the New Testament as it is now. This canon came to be accepted everywhere, except in Syria. Until the end of the fourth century C E, the canon in Syria consisted of the Diatessaron (Tatian's harmony of the four Gospels), Acts and fifteen letters of Paul (including a third letter to the Corinthians). At the beginning of the fifth century CE, a list substituted the Diatessaron with the four Gospels and omitted 3 Corinthians. In the first quarter of the

⁴⁹ The four gospels, thirteen Pauline letters, Acts, 1 John, 1 Peter, Jude and Revelation.

fifth century, the Syrian church moved closer to the rest of the church by accepting the four Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul, James, 1 Peter and 1 John. After that, Christological controversies drove a wedge between the Syrian church and the rest as a result of which there was no longer any establishment of ties with the Syrian canon and that of the rest of the church (cf McDonald 1995:221).

4.4 The criteria for the canon

From a very early time, one can say from the production of apostolic writings claiming high authority, there was a process involving the writings, attributed to Jesus' apostles that were being read and re-read in the congregation of the mainstream church. According to Balla (2002:384), these writings guided the early Christian community in their everyday life and in their beliefs just as did the Septuagint. The church was thus already tending towards a canon of authoritative Scriptures in the course of the first centuries of the Christian era. However, from the beginning it seems that the church possessed literature edifying as reading matter as well as writings with a higher authority. Several factors contributed to a crystallization of this process of distinguishing between the available literature. The Muratorian Fragment, for example, shows that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was suggested as reading-matter, yet it was accorded a lesser authority and was not to be read publicly in the church, "because it had been written more recently" (Balla 2002:384).

Until the mid-twentieth-century, the critical consensus in canon study postulated a collection of Law closed by 400 BCE, of Prophets closed by 200 BCE, and of Writings closed at the Council of Jamnia about 90 CE. Since then the consensus was questioned by several scholars, of whom W M Christie, Jack Lewis, Raymond Brown, Sid Leiman, I H Eybers, J Blenkinsopp and Robert Newman are perhaps the most important (Lewis 2002:152). According to Lewis (2002:153), neither Josephus nor ancient Christian literature knows anything of a Council of Jamnia or of a closing of the canon of Scripture

at its sessions. The only source for this theory is the one text in the rabbinic source (*m. Yadayim 3:5*) mentioning a discussion of biblical books there. The two books that the Mishna explicitly mentions being discussed at Jamnia are Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (Lewis 2002:154). So it would be safe to say that between 70 and 135 CE the tripartite canon was probably fixed (Lewis 2002:162).

The Christians, along with Greek-speaking Hellenistic Judaism, accepted an Old Testament canon encompassing a wider range of books than the present Old Testament. For example, it included 1 Esdras, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith and Bel and the Dragon, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Jesus Sirach, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Men, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah and the Additions to Esther. The rabbis on the other hand, as much as they admired Sirach, they could not make him part of the Scriptures. Even though the commemoration of the Maccabean revolt formed the basis for a sacred festival, Hanukkah, neither 1 nor 2 Maccabees could be admitted to the canon. These books' inclusion would belie the fit between Scripture and the world, which was the object of contemplation of the rabbinic guild (Lightstone 2002:184). The basic dilemma posed by the Old Testament canon for early Christianity was not the list, but the relationship conceived to exist between the Old Testament, accepted by the church as authoritative Scripture, and the revelation in Jesus Christ. Christianity displayed a new spiritual self-awareness, which altered the function the Old Testament had in Judaism and so shifted the centre of gravity of faith.

According to Mack (1995:283), there are more than 400 references in the writings of the New Testament to non-canonical Jewish literature. This means that early Christians were not dealing in sacred literature of the Jews alone. "They were involved in a new religious movement that had to construct its mythology with borrowed ingredients. They combed through the Jewish scripture this way and that, not because they thought these texts contained the word of God, but because they were literature of a parent culture" (Mack 1995:283).

An interesting question is the question of which canon did the Jesus character of the gospel narratives use? Of course, in his day the canon was not fixed, but at least one may infer which biblical books were important for him (or for the writers of his story) and which books may also have given significant shape to his (or their) theology and his self-understanding. Jesus reportedly quotes or alludes to twenty-three of the sixty-six books of the Hebrew Bible. “Jesus alludes to or quotes all five books of Moses, the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), eight of the twelve minor prophets, and five of the Writings. In other words, Jesus quotes or alludes to *all* of the books of the Law, *most* of the Prophets, and *some* of the Writings. Superficially, then, the ‘canon’ of Jesus is pretty much what it was for most religiously observant Jews of his time” (Evans 2002:185). Jesus quoted Scripture freely. That was partly due to the pluriform nature of Scripture in his day and partly because of his paraphrasing, allusive, and conflating style. Jesus’ allusive quotation of Scripture, according to Evans (2002:195), did not always distinguish text from interpretation. The two seem to blend together (Evans 2002:195).

Early Christian writers, among them 1 Clement, Barnabas and Ignatius were at pains to indicate that the Old Testament contained essentially types or prefigurations of salvation in Christ. Gradually, it became the case in Jewish-Christian controversies that recourse had to be taken to appeals to the Jesus tradition itself. Connected to this was the fact that Christians attached the same value to the Old Testament as the Jews did. They saw it as God’s perfect revelation and law. This immediately necessitated the question about the status of the writings containing the new and final revelation of God’s salvific purpose in Christ. The eventual outcome of this process was the formation of a Christian canon of Scripture into an “Old” and “New” Testament. In my opinion, the New Testament must thus be read as an intertext of the Old Testament.

Controversies in the early church furthered this drift towards a unified and closed canon of Christian Scriptures. The role of Marcion, the Montanists and the Gnostics can be considered here specifically.

Marcion rejected the Jewish writings of the Old Testament as having any authority for Christians, arguing that the God, of whom the Old Testament spoke, was entirely different from the Christian God who had revealed himself in Jesus as the Savior of the world. He said that it was indeed from this evil creator-god of the Old Testament that Jesus delivered his followers (Barton 2002:341). He was the first to fix a collection of Christian writings as exclusively normative (Gamble 2002:292). He believed that the revelation by Jesus had been corrupted by the twelve apostles and was only preserved purely by Paul. In his canon he retained the ten letters of Paul⁵⁰ which were in his day deemed to be the extant of the Pauline corpus and only one Gospel, that of Luke. Marcion probably edited his collection of Pauline letters and the Gospel of Luke to bring them into line with his understanding of the revelation of God (Ferguson 2002:309). Since the body of accepted Scriptures was at the heart of the theological controversy between Marcion and the church, this controversy according to Du Toit (1978:191), added to the impetus to delineate the canon of accepted Scriptures in the church. The tendency in the church before Marcion, had been to add new writings to the body of accepted Scriptures to make up the Christian Scriptures.

According to Bovon (2002:516), Marcion may have contributed to the process, but he was not responsible neither for the idea of a collection, nor for its bipolar structure. A “New Testament” containing gospels and epistles according to him, is the logical outgrowth and materialization of a revelation that articulates an event and the proclamation that follows.

The author of 2 Peter (3:15-16) simply added the letters of Paul to the other Scriptures, that is, to the Hebrew Scripture, the Old Testament. Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century CE added the Gospels to the Old Testament. He read the Old Testament as an allegory in advance of the Christian gospel (Mack 1995:285). With Marcion, that changes as he rejected the Hebrew Scriptures and constituted his own canon for them.

⁵⁰ Marcion excised from his canon all documents containing Jewish ideas and theology, that is, the whole of the Old Testament, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, Acts, Revelation and the general letters and some other letters of Paul. Even the Gospel of Luke and the ten accepted Pauline letters were expunged of Jewish elements.

Although the church was eventually successful in its dispute with him, the Hebrew Scriptures were henceforth separated from the Christian Scriptures in a dual canon of Old and New Testament.

The movement known as Montanism originated in Phrygia, in Asia Minor at around 156 CE in the city of Hierapolis. It took its name from Montanus, the person who had started the movement. It soon spread very widely throughout the Roman Empire and continued to flourish up to the fifth century CE. It was basically an ecstatic, prophetic and charismatic movement claiming to continue the charismatic life and practices of churches, such as that of Corinth of the New Testament (Ferguson 2002:315). Montanus believed that the Holy Spirit spoke through him and that he was the promised Paraclete of John 14 to 16. He was accompanied by two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla. Maximilla practiced prophecies of doom along the lines of the Apocalypse of John. These canonical works, the Gospel of John and the other Johannine writings, as well as the Apocalypse of John, were very popular in Montanist circles and, as a result, suspect in other parts of the church. The opponents of Montanism expressed the conviction that the period of revelation had ended (Ferguson 2002:316).

The importance of the Montanist movement lay in the fact that its adherents believed that they had received new revelations through the Spirit (Gamble 2002:292). With the practices of the Montanists, the church was faced with the question of the openness of the Jesus tradition towards new revelations. What was at issue was the fundamental question of the function and significance of historical tradition, its completeness and its relation to present revelation. In this way, the church was affected by the problem of the consolidation of the normative tradition (Ferguson 2002:315). Through Montanism the questions of the normative character of the tradition, its exclusiveness and also its correct interpretation were brought closer to a solution in the church. This strengthened the move towards the finalisation of the canon of the New Testament (McDonald 1995:173).

The importance of Gnosticism for the emergence of a fixed New Testament canon cannot be overlooked. Gnosticism was a widespread cultural movement in the Graeco-Roman

world, which propagated the saving knowledge that frees the individual from bondage to evil matter (Perkins 2002:356). In its Christian form, it proclaimed Jesus as the heavenly redeemer who descended from above to illuminate and enlighten believers as to their heavenly origin from God and thus to partake of saving knowledge. In Gnostic circles many works were written – gospels, letters, acts, revelations of apocalypses and other types of literature – which professed to present old revelations and traditions, literature governed above all by the concern to import true and genuine teachings of the revealer, Jesus Christ (Perkins 2002:358). They were not initially produced so much in opposition to the writings of the church, as rather in analogy to the free handling of the Jesus tradition, which in the first half of the second century was still a common phenomenon in the church. The charge was lodged against some Gnostics of enlarging the canon to include more books than the great church recognized (Ferguson 2002:312).

Old Jesus traditions were handed down, but at the same time expanded, reinterpreted, transmuted and modified, and new traditions even invented, and put under the names of writers and figures from the old tradition with a view to propagating own ideas as genuine, old and reliable statements of revelation. The debate with Gnosticism compelled the church to reflect upon the true and genuine tradition (McDonald 1995:177). This does not mean that the formation of the canon is to be understood solely as a defense by the church against the Gnostic threat, but in this conflict, the safeguarding of the tradition was regarded as tantamount. Whereas with Marcion, the church insisted on an expanded canon, with the Gnostics the church eventually had to delimit the number of accepted writings.

In the light of the foregoing, it is interesting to note how the *Canon of Muratori* polemicises in its delimitation of the canon against the Marcionites, against the Gnostics and against groups such as the Montanists in its insistence upon the closure of the canon. These controversies certainly contributed to the crystallization of the Christian canon of the New Testament.

The traditional so-called criteria that was eventually implemented for canonization was (i) apostolicity, if a writing was believed to have been produced by an apostle, it was eventually accepted as sacred Scripture to be included in the canon; (ii) orthodoxy, if a writing was considered to be the *truth*, according to the “rule of faith” it was included; (iii) antiquity, a high value was placed upon the past, and what was old was generally considered more reliable and acceptable than what was new; (iv) use, the regular use of writings in the ancient churches was also an important factor in their selection for the canon (McDonald 2002:424-432).

4.5 Canonization

The Scriptures itself, and its authority, is not a case that is above suspicion. The canonizing process is not the result from divine inspiration only, but it is also a human endeavor to seek and maintain power (Van Aarde 2001a:160). The codification of canons thus, has also its dark side. “The people who were responsible for the establishment of canons were the ones in powerful positions who had access to ‘knowledge.’ It is therefore possible to look at the origins of the biblical canon from another angle than only that of divine inspiration” (Van Aarde 2001a:161). A canon is thus also a social phenomenon, which presupposes a position of power by those who institutionalize the canon in the first place (Ter Borg 1998b:69).

At the broadest level, according to Goody (1998:3), the process of canonization can be understood as the procedure whereby human action becomes institutionalized, authoritative, and recognized as canonical. This is a highly generalized process that informs the whole of human culture, involving the creation of custom and the invention of tradition. It defines a subculture (Ter Borg 1998b:71). The fact, according to Mack (1995:276) that the Bible is the Christian canon containing the Christian myth, has made it difficult to study it critical and to be analytical about its composition.

The main difference, when canonization in religions of oral cultures is compared with canonization in religions with written texts, appears to be the nature of the transmission of the traditions. Canonical written texts are copied, but oral myths are recreated in repetition. Oral cultures change their myths constantly, even if the actors at any particular moment view the mythological heritage as canonical (Goody 1998:3). One must also remember that mythmaking never start completely from scratch. It is born of new ideas and of the rearranging of traditional images already at hand (Mack 1995:309).

The assumption is often that a written canon traces its origin directly from supernatural sources or perhaps from those who were close to the supernatural (Goody 1998:3). The written text ensures then that the word of God can be transmitted unchanged over the generations. The “word” is preserved in the canonical text, which is faithfully copied because canonization forbids tampering with the text (Goody 1998:4).

The process of canonization derives from the nature of the written text, which encourages boundary-maintaining religions with an approved corpus of holy works (Goody 1998:15). The canonization of written texts is in principle a deliberate process of selection. One can analyze the procedure involved in this process. Therefore, canonical texts have to be examined carefully because their preservation and transmission lies securely in the hands of the priesthood or the equivalent religious elite whose interests they must broadly conform. The selected texts thus, may represent only the interest of the selectors and not the interest of the whole community (Goody 1998:5). “This means that the texts may give very little attention to the interest of other groups, especially subordinate ones, such as women and the lower classes, the non-elite segments of society. Both the class and the gender aspects are important social factors in this context on account of the fact that the canon obviously stands as a religious ‘authority’” (Goody 1998:4).

Gender is, according to Goody (1998:13) an important factor in the composition, formation and maintenance of a canon. Literacy put great power in the hands of the priesthood, which was almost entirely male. This represented a power of the minority of

the literate over the majority of the illiterate who had thus only indirect access to the canonized text.

As such, the canon is a source of law and normative behavior for all times, because the texts are to be considered to be a-historical, God-given, and everlasting.

In first century Palestine, different groups and coalitions competed for authority that was unequally distributed by the governing class, and for honor in the eyes of the peasants. The emerging conflict between the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes was a manifestation of a power struggle to control the important social symbols within the Second Temple Israelite period, of which the temple was the most influential (Van Aarde 2001a:164). The temple was not only the center of the political life it was also the economic center. In the advanced agrarian society, writing and money went hand in hand.

Against this background canonization functioned as a medium through which the illiterate masses were influenced to accept the authority of the “conventional wisdom” of “court prophets and sages” (Van Aarde 2001a:165).

4.5.1 Mack’s idea of the creation of the canon

For Burton Mack the Christian myth is an unfinished epic. “The story begins at the creation of the world, spans human history, and ends in an apocalyptic destruction of the world. History pivots when Christ appears as the revealer of God’s plan for humans, the world, and the kingdom that God has destined to replace the kingdoms of the world. Those who live according to the plan are promised eternal life, the survival of the cataclysm at the end of the world. Those who do not accept the plan will be destroyed. The myth is based on the Christian Bible, a collection of texts that begins with Genesis and ends with the Apocalypse to John” (Mack 1995:275). The Bible may, in fact, be the only feature of the Christian religion that all Christians have in common. Mack’s approach makes the most sense to me, therefore I choose to give more attention to it.

While all Christians recognize the importance of the Bible, few speak of its significance as epic. “It is thought to be inspired, called the Word of God, regularly read in the course of Christian ritual, appealed to for grounding the doctrines of salvation, and consulted as a guide to Christian faith and life... It is the story of God’s purpose for humankind” (Mack 1995:276). No wonder the Bible is viewed as a sacred text. It is the Christian myth. The Bible consists of two parts. An Old Testament and a New Testament. The Old Testament tells the story of Israel. The first five books told the story of how Israel came to be. It can be imagined as an epic that serves as an etiology for the Davidic monarchy. From David until the end of the second temple, this epic was revised again and again, without changing its essential objective namely the establishment of the temple-state in Jerusalem (Mack 1995:279). Books were added and stories retold. But all served the same purpose.

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the epic had to be revised again. That happened in the Diaspora synagogues. It saw the light in the Mishna and the Halakah. They set a new mythology firmly in place that stated: Living by the purity codes. It would substitute for the temple services (Mack 1995:280). These Jewish literature survived because Christians continue to read it. Christians thought of all these writings as their Scriptures. It was important to them because the God of the Jews was the Father of Jesus Christ. “Consulting Jewish scripture had always been occasioned by some circumstance that had arisen in the course of early Christian history. If the circumstance called for a Christian revision of the epic, that is what Christians did” (Mack 1995:283).

According to Mack (1995:283), there are more than 400 references in the writings of the New Testament to non-canonical Hebrew literature. This means that early Christians were not dealing in sacred literature of the Israelites alone. “They were involved in a new religious movement that had to construct its mythology with borrowed ingredients. They combed through the Jewish scripture this way and that, not because they thought these texts contained the word of God, but because they were the literature of a parent culture” (Mack 1995:283).

The destruction of the temple in 70 CE created a new situation for both Jews and Christians. Mark interpreted the situation and gave the answer. According to him, God destroyed the temple because the Israelites had destroyed Christ (see Strijdom 1997:612). The destruction of the temple is the end of an era, and it gave the Christians a chance to justify their existence as a movement not grounded in second-temple Judaism (Mack 1995:284). From Mark in the 70's to the debate between Marcion and Justin Martyr in the mid-second century, several attempts were made to imagine the Christian movement as the legitimate heir of Israel's promise. The book of Hebrews is the most comprehensive effort (Mack 1995:284). According to Hebrews, the Levitical core of the Mosaic law was only a shadow in anticipation of Christ.

The rest of the writers used a theme from the Scriptures to construct their own myth. Matthew used the law, John the logos, Luke the spirit, and 1 Clement used examples of virtues and vices. After Marcion naïveté was no longer possible. To use a theme, or to believe in the Christians as the true Israel, was no longer good enough. The Scriptures now had to be read different. "On the literal level, the scriptures recorded the history of the Jews, but underneath the surface, at a deeper level of meaning, the scriptures recorded the plan of God that came to light only in the Christian's Christ" (Mack 1995:285). So from Justin Martyr on, reading the Scripture as an allegory in advance of the Christian gospel would be standard practice. "The history of Israel had to be in textual form so one could 'demonstrate' that the history of Israel was 'in reality' the epic precedent for Christianity" (Mack 1995:285).

As for the New Testament, the history of collection, making lists, and producing codices is similar to that of the Hebrew Scripture. Irenaeus used the terms Old en New Testament to refer to the Jewish and apostolic writings, making the point that both witness to the same God, the same truth, and the same faith (Mack 1995:287). From the fourth century on, lists began to be made of early Christian writings appropriate for reading in the churches, but there was no agreement on which one to include (see Strijdom 1997:617).

The event that triggered the creation of the Christian Bible was the conversion of Constantine.

Within a few years under Constantine, baptistries and basilicas dotted the landscape. The site of the empty tomb had been “discovered” and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built. Christian iconography announced to the world its themes, bishops gathered in councils to agree upon doctrine, ritual was regularized, the calendar of festival events was established, piety took the form of pilgrimage, salvation took the form of eternal life in the heavenly world, and Christendom was launched (Mack 1995:287).

With Jerome, the lists and manuscripts of various collections of Scriptures became the Christian Bible (Mack 1995:289). When the Hebrew Scriptures and the apostolic writings were combined in a single book, the church finally had its story straight.

The Bible was created when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire. With Constantine converted, the age-old model of the temple-state could start to work again, and the history of Christendom began (see Strijdom 1997:611). To claim its right to speak with authority the church must always keep the Bible in its hand because the Bible creates the aura of a universal plan, and it grants the church its charter to represent that plan in the histories of the peoples of the world (Mack 1995:294). Christians think they hear the Bible speaking to them. “One can ask any question he or she wants of the Bible, turn the handle `round and `round, and get some kind of answer. If the answer does not appear to be helpful, the handle can always be cranked again until the right answer appears” (Mack 1995:299).

In Christian worship, the readings from the Old Testament function as epic rehearsal and lessons from the past to remind the people of the Lord’s power and will and the New Testament function as stipulation for the present arrangement of authorities and agreements, and as a call to covenant renewal (Mack 1995:300).

Living in this world of multicultural awareness has put tremendous pressure on the Christian vision and myth. Christians have to be honest and critical to their own tradition as well. We must remember that the New Testament was not written by eyewitnesses of an overpowering divine appearance in the midst of human history. That is the impression created by the final formation of the New Testament (Mack 1995:308).

We must also remember that mythmaking never start completely from scratch. It is hard work. It is born both of new ideas and of the rearranging of traditional images already at hand. We must understand and appreciate the mythmaking of those early Christians, but we must recognize that their reasons for telling their stories are not good enough to be our reasons continuing to tell the stories just as they told them (Mack 1995:309).

4.6 Decanonization

The idea of canonicity implies the assignment of high, or ultimate, authority to a specific set of writings such as the Bible. Decanonization, on the other hand refers to a gradual process of invalidation of an extant canon. It does not lead to the complete disappearance of the canon in question (Adriaanse 1998:314).

According to Adriaanse (1998:315), canons are historically conditioned things; as a matter of fact, they have their epoch of preparation, their epoch of being established - canonization in the proper sense - their epoch of being operative, their epoch of disintegration and invalidation and, finally, their pluperfect, the epoch of their complete disappearance. It seems to me that there is a direct relationship between (de)canonization and (de)institutionalization. In early Christianity, an established canon arose at the time when the church became institutionalized⁵¹. At the moment the church becomes de-institutionalized by many and at the same rate the *canon* becomes decanonized. More and more churches, groups, house churches, and even Christians without churches enter the scene. At the same time, more and more voices ask for the consideration of the books

⁵¹ Under Constantine

presently held as canonical for the Christian faith. In the debate some ask for books to be taken out, and others asks for manuscripts to be added. Decanonization, in this relative sense, implies then that it is a process that occurs time and again. Where one canon vanishes, another one comes up. Thus, it seems to be the case that, while this or that canon may disappear, canon as such will not.

In the long run, it appears that any canon (as a list of holy books) has its limitations. On the one hand, it may be regarded as being too large; then the emaciating quest for the “canon within the canon” may start. On the other hand, it may be held to be too narrow; then the addition of new materials or meanings may be demanded. Considering these two opposite tendencies, the canon may represent the golden mean.

In Catholic theology, the problem of the canon was solved with a plea to the authority of the Church. “The Church is authorized to canonize inspired books... Canonicity is thus nothing else than ‘the statement, made officially by the Church through a public decision or, equivalently, through use and practice, of this divine origin and infallible authority’” (Adriaanse 1998:318). The Protestants have not accepted this role of the Church. Canonicity of the canon is not determined and founded in an ecclesiological way, but in a theological one.

As far as the biblical canon is concerned, Adriaanse proposes to abandon the theological perspective and to opt for a broader concept of canon, viz. a canon as a socio-cultural phenomenon. “The general concept of canon, canonicity, and canonization implies that there is no such thing as *the* canon. There are canons, each of them with normative claims, which, as a matter of fact, are mostly conflicting with the claims of other canons. Consequently, a canon must be understood as a socialcultural phenomenon” (Adriaanse 1998:327).

Originally, the Christians had no book of their own. They adopted the books, which were in high esteem among the Jews. Later on, the individual parishes, provinces, and factions all, had their own lists, books, and canons. An entirely uniform canon has never been

realized in Christendom. What we witness at the moment, is a process of decanonization, where the authority of the Christian canon is declining, and where the openness and the possible expansion of the canon get a lot of attention.

H J Adriaanse deals with the phenomenon of the religious canon, in particular the biblical one, from a philosophical point of view. Referring to Gadamer and Assmann & Assmann, Adriaanse (1998:313) quoted six phenomena constituting the ‘canon syndrome’, as they call it, namely:

“1. *Resistance to time*. Canonization is a means to save some elements of tradition from temporality and change.

2. *Dehistoricization*. Canonization aims at immediate expressiveness, at meaningfulness in all contexts without historical mediation.

3. *Institutionalization*. Canonization requires some measure of societal differentiation according to which the preservation of tradition can be consigned to special groups.

4. *Normativity*. Canonization entails the paradigmatic and obligatory character of the parts of the tradition concerned.

5. *Identification*. Canonization is helpful for participants in a given tradition to find their personal and communal identity.

6. *Retrospection*. Canonization implies a consciousness of decline and distance.”

This notion of the canon (a canon) shows immediately that canonization has an enormous cultural and political impact.

More than a generation ago, according to McDonald and Sanders (2002:3), Kurt Aland raised the question of reducing the biblical canon by omitting works that some scholars consider to be an embarrassment to the majority of the church, for example, the apocalyptic literature of the New Testament (2 Peter, Revelation, etc.) in order to promote Christian unity. Not long after that, Ernst Käsemann also asked whether there should be a “canon within the canon” – in essence, a reduction of the biblical text. More recently, some members of the Jesus Seminar have advocated both reducing and expanding the current biblical canon (see McDonald & Sanders 2002:3). Reducing it by eliminating the apocalyptic literature and expanding it by including such writings as the

Gospel of Thomas, the *Gospel of Mary*, and the “Unknown Gospel” of the Egerton Papyri.

One must indeed ask about the appropriateness of tying the church of the twenty first century to a canon emerged out of historical circumstances in the second to the fifth centuries CE.

According to Funk (2002:541), two factors have brought the canon back to the consciousness of Christian reflection. The first is the steady erosion of canonical claims by the advance of historical-critical scholarship on the Bible, and the second is the collapse of the ancient mythical frame of reference for the Christian gospel and creeds.

The Jesus movement began at a very early date to search the “Scriptures” to look for evidence that Jesus was the expected Messiah and had fulfilled ancient prophecies. According to Funk (2002:542), the Christian movement thus, purloined a set of Scriptures, not its own, in a secondary language, and then created a “canon” of proof texts within that “canon” to support its own claims. He suggests that we return the Hebrew Bible to the Israelites whose Bible it is and that we must confine ourselves to scriptures that were historically employed by the first Christians. He said that if we need a collection of ancient documents that function as background to the rise of Christianity, we should readopt the Greek Old Testament and translate it into English as our “First Testament.”

The Christian movement was not a religion of the book from the beginning. It was a movement of the spirit (Funk 2002:544). The shift to writing goes together with the tendency to create something that is stable and that can be handed around on with ease. The notion of canon presupposes tradition that is written. Canonization, on its turn, was an integral part of the bureaucratization and politicization of the tradition (Funk 2002:545).

The first frontal assault on the reliability of the canon was the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, and it was the renewed quest of the historical Jesus that raised the canonical issue to its current crisis level. It happened according to Funk (2002:548) when the mythical matrix collapsed. The myth is the story of a redeemer figure, who drops in from another world, identified by a miraculous birth. He performed miracles then died on a cross to absolve humankind of sin and guilt. After his death, his corpse is resuscitated and he ascends to the heavens, whence he came and from where he will come again.

The growing conviction that much of the narrative gospel tradition consists of fiction has been taken to challenge the theological validity of the canonical gospels. For many the New Testament has long since ceased to be a canon. It lacks authority to many in our society (Funk 2002:553). Funk (2002:555) suggests that we need not one new New Testament but several New Testaments. First, we need one smaller than the current twenty-seven books to indicate that the quest is always searching for a canon within the canon. Secondly, we need at least one larger than the current New Testament because the church fathers unduly narrowed the scope of the founding documents in order to preserve their own definition of the faith and secure the foundation of their power. And in the third place, we need a new New Testament that is differently ordered than the traditional canon, which reflects many mistaken judgments about the rise of the traditional canon, both chronologically and theologically.

The canon is thus subject to reduction, on one side, and to expansion, on the other. According to Funk (2002:556), the limits of both its inner and outer expressions depend on faith's comprehension of itself – on what it takes to be its trajectory from Jesus of Nazareth to the time and place of its appropriation. Thus, in principle, the limits of the canonical New Testament are entirely arbitrary.

This brings one to the question: Has the canon then a continuing function? To answer the question, Dunn (2002:561) said one must observe the historical fact that no Christian church or group has treated the New Testament writings as uniformly canonical. All

Christians have operated with a canon within the canon. And if the New Testament serves any continuing usefulness for Christians today, nothing less than that canon within the canon will do. The continuing function is the belief that it still bears consistent testimony to the unifying center that Jesus the man now exalted is the canon within the canon.

However, the canon is not only important because it canonizes the unity of Christianity, also because it canonizes the diversity of Christianity. According to Dunn (2002:563) it canonizes not only the liberalism of Jesus but also the conservatism of the first Jerusalem Christians, not only the theological sophistication of Paul but also the uncritical enthusiasm of Luke, not only the institutionalization of the Pastorals but also the individualism of John. So, if we take the canon of the New Testament seriously, we must take seriously the diversity of Christianity. We must not strive for an artificial unity. Thus, only when we recognize the unity in diversity of the New Testament and the diversity in unity of the New Testament, and the ways they interact, can the New Testament continue to function as canon (Dunn 2002:579).

In the current debate, I thus think, one cannot talk about the canon without dealing with the issue of decanonization. Many scholars at the moment agree that neither the texts nor the different books of the Bible are *the canon*. There is something behind, above or beyond the text, which is the canon. In line with Willi Marxsen, Van Aarde (2001a:149) for example, calls “the cause of Jesus” the “canon behind the canon.” He identifies God’s presence for us as the cause of Jesus, and that is the canon. The cause of Jesus is for him the canon behind the canon. Thus, what is authoritative for a Christian is not the assumption of an infallible Bible, an infallible church or the inherent rationality of the human mind (cf Van Aarde 2001a:159). “The authority to which the Scriptures witness, lies in its appeal that the believer’s words and deeds should concord with *Jesus’ cause*” (Van Aarde 2001a:160). I am convinced that once you have discovered *the canon* you can experience it anywhere. Not only in canonical texts, but also in apocrypha, and even in so called profane literature. For me the bottom line of the canon is God’s love. I can *see* God’s love in the *cause of Jesus*. I can experience it in the resurrection - the power of

a new beginning. I can learn of it in the parables. I can also read about it in the *Gospel of Thomas*. But God's love is not confined only to the narratives of the Bible or the apocrypha. *The canon* can be seen and read everywhere! I could see the love of God in a movie I recently saw. I experience something of *the canon* in a casual chat, a deep conversation or a little bit of laughter that I shared with a fellow human being because God is everywhere. God's love is not only a theme in Biblical narratives. It is a real and existing phenomenon in everyday life, because God is not absent or packed away in theologies and histories. God is omnipresent in and through everything. As Paul said: In Him we are, we live and we exist. There is thus more to the canon than a list of authority bearing books!

Decanonization can occur in various forms. It can be as a result of the dismantling of the canon. "Historical-critical analysis of the Bible has led to the decomposition and destruction (*viz.* 'de-construction') of that which once was considered to form a unity. Such a process of decanonization can develop under the surface, almost accidentally, as a result of the work of believing Christians. In fact, the very inquiry into the essence of the canon can actually operate to destroy the canon. In this way the canon falls victim to its own pretension" (Vos 1998:363).

In the second place the process of decanonization occurs when the situation arises in which the Bible is hardly ever being read. Then the canon ceases to be a canon because it no longer fulfills the function of a directive and a standard for our life (Vos 1998:363). "Freedom of the mind and decanonization go hand in hand because it is this very freedom which stands at odds with the demand that the Bible, by prerogative, must be the directive and standard for the spiritual life. Under the auspices of this freedom, many 'enlightened' Christians are receptive to other religions and some atheists reject every form of revelation" (Vos 1998:367).

The Christian canon has been brought into discredit in the last centuries because it clashes with modern ideas on pluralism and freedom of mind. Vos (1998:368) suggests

that canon critique and decanonization can be construed as proofs of the advantages of a non-canonical philosophy of life such as humanism.

A canonical text “is a text that is recognized as being a genuine part of a certain tradition, literary or religious. Moreover, it is a text that makes claims upon the participants of a tradition. A canonical text is a text with authority... At this point our problem start” (Hetteema 1998:391).

Hetteema approaches the notion of canon from the angle of philosophical and literary hermeneutics. In doing so, he touches upon the question of the relationship between “tradition” and “reason.” Whereas Gadamer proposes a rehabilitation of authority and tradition, deconstructionism has undermined both rationality and tradition (Hetteema 1998:391).

The notion of authority suggests that a text places imperatives upon the reader, either in the form of a concrete command or in a more abstract form such as an “I must.” We should think of the relation between text and reader as one of negotiation, or as one of seduction (Hetteema 1998:395). The notion of authority according to Dunn (see Hetteema 1998:397) may be divided into at least four components: the authority of the tradition behind a text, the textual level itself, the canonical level of a whole of texts, and the ecclesiastical level.

As an alternative to the latter, the notion of fascination is proposed in order to express an attachment to canonical texts which is not self-evident, but which has a certain rational right. “A literary work attracts a reader. It is by initial attraction that a person is invited to read, interpret, and live with a text, or a corpus of texts” (Hetteema 1998:395). The notion of fascination may be used as a concept of practical rationality in describing the attitude of the participants of a tradition as they develop from readers to ethical agents. It is this element of fascination that leads human beings to praise, to liturgy, and to remembrance.

Van Leeuwen also deals with hermeneutical issues by discussing specific ideas of Ricoeur. He disagrees with Ricoeur when the latter asserts that the biblical canon should be taken as one text; this, says Van Leeuwen, could lead to neo-fundamentalism, and it does not do justice to the Bible as a plurality of texts (Van Leeuwen 1998:401).

According to Van Leeuwen (1998:401), the texts must be read with a historical perspective, because without a historical perspective the reader may be comparing things, which in fact may have little or nothing to do with each other. Any synchronic of canonical reading of a text should be corrected by a historical-critical one because it places the texts within their specific historical contexts.

Readers of the Bible must thus acknowledge that the biblical canon cannot be read as one text. It is a plurality of texts. Ricoeur (see Van Leeuwen 1998:403) speaks of it as a plurality of texts in “one space.” He likes to call it the polyphony within the space of this canon... “un grand intertexte vivant.” According to Ricoeur (see Van Leeuwen 1998:404), biblical revelation originates from this interplay of the different forms of discourse which together constitute the Bible. Each mode of discourse is a different way of naming God and revealing an aspect of the divine. Because of this interplay, Ricoeur regards the closure of the canon a necessity. One cannot add books without changing the kind of revelation that is characteristic of the Bible.

Ter Borg tries to clarify the meaning of “canon” from a sociological point of view, placing the emphasis as a set of objectified standard rules. According to Ter Borg (1998a:411) the canon of the Bible is only one out of many. All the great religions of the world seem to have their canons. To say that it is a standard rule, is a sociological definition. A standard rule is a norm or a value that may serve as a check to any relevant behavior or belief. Whoever violates this rule, rules oneself out of this meaning-system or religion. To call it an objectified rule is to say that a canon exists independent from the individual consciousness of those who adhere to it. It is contained in texts. “Canonized rules are not internalized. People may forget the precise form or formulation of it and look it up in a book or wherever it is recorded” (Ter Borg 1998a:412).

Canons are according to Ter Borg (1998a:413) never completely open, and hardly ever completely closed. A canon may be formulated as an abstract rule or it may be cloaked in a narrative. The social function of a canon is that it governs behavior and belief (Ter Borg 1998a:414).

The canon can very well be seen as the appropriate model of social control when societies grow more and more complex, because it combines objectivity with the preservation of charismatic and quasi-personal qualities. “Human beings need social control because the limits of appropriate behavior are not built in genetically” (Ter Borg 1998a:415).

4.7 Conclusion

The text of the Bible is represented by the totality of its textual witnesses, and not primarily by one of them, for example the Masoretic text of the Old Testament. Each Hebrew manuscript and ancient version represents a segment of the abstract entity that we call “the text of the Bible.” According to Tov (2002:251), one finds the “text of the Bible” everywhere and nowhere. “Everywhere,” because all manuscripts, from the ancient Qumran scrolls to the medieval Masoretic manuscripts, attest to it, and “nowhere,” because we cannot call a single source, extant or reconstructed, “*the* text of the Bible.”

In the second century C E, a considerable growth in the amount of Christian literature can be detected. These writings addressed the problems of their day and are not, in the first place, aimed at preserving the pure words of Jesus, or even the history of past events. Since they are religious writings with clear theological intentions, their historical value should be critically assessed before being used in any historical investigation.

The increase in literature also had the result that a canon developed. Because Christian literature was no longer a novelty, the question arose as to which collection of writings would have authority and which could be used – as a yardstick for evaluating the many ideas that were now expressed within the framework of Christianity. Eventually, the canon was established and the belief in the authority of the New Testament writings became part and parcel of Christian faith itself. Therefore, I am convinced that the New Testament must not be read as a logical presentation of Christian theology, but as a record of the foundational Christian experience, given in a specific literary form⁵².

Of primary concern for the interpreter is the Bible's function as Scripture within the community of faith. For many, the authority of the Bible is to mediate God's grace to and delineate the theological boundaries of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Calling the Bible the Word of God, according to Borg (2002:35) refers not to its origin but to its status and function in a community. There are other faith communities (Islam, the Buddhists, etc) who held other books as their canon. They believe that it contains the Word of God for them.

To recap my argument once again briefly: In the beginning, there was the *kerygma*! The content of this *kerygma* was the death and resurrection of Christ. During the development stages of the Christ myth, this *kerygma* was linked to the life and death of the historical Jesus. His story became a mythical narrative that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. It explains its reason for existence and its rituals. As this faith community grew and became more and more institutionalized (church) more and more literature appeared on the scene. The orthodoxy (people with power) decided which of these literatures contained the *truth* and the *right teaching* according to them. Those were the books that ended on the list that became the index of what we call the Christian Bible or the Canon of the church today.

A major need for contemporary readers of the Bible is thus to move from precritical naiveté (we simply hear the stories as true stories) through critical thinking (concerned

⁵² See McGrath (1990:112)

with factuality) to postcritical naiveté (the ability to hear the biblical stories once again as true stories, even as one knows that they may not be factually true and that their truth does not depend upon their factuality) (Borg 2002:50). Remember that Mack (1995:309) said, one must understand and appreciate the mythmaking of the early Christians, but we must recognize that their reasons for telling their stories are not good enough to be our reasons continuing to tell stories just as they told them.

Chapter five

I rest my case

The history of Jesus of Nazareth, as presented and interpreted in the New Testament, functions as the ground and goal of the Christian religion. The event of his death and resurrection is understood to be authoritative, in that it both establishes the possibility of Christian existence and indicates its contours. It is both the foundational event and the paradigm of Christian life. The authority of Scripture, and the manner in which Scripture is to be interpreted, rest on its perceived ability to mediate the experience of the *risen* Christ to posterity.

The foundational event (or the master narrative as Spangenberg (2003:274) calls it) of the Christian faith is thus understood to be the history of Jesus Christ. Access to this *history*, and a legitimized range of interpretations of its significance, is provided mainly by the New Testament. Van Aarde (2001b:159) puts it as follows: “To see the New Testament as only a part of the Christian tradition is not only a matter of sound historiography, but also a matter of loyalty to what is *foundational* to faith, namely the *cause of Jesus* itself. The *cause of Jesus* is the *proclaiming word* to be found *within* the Scriptures (‘das in der Bibel sprechende Wort’).”

In addition to this, however, is a tradition of reading the New Testament, a particular way of approaching and interpreting it, which facilitates access to the Christian experience. Scripture, tradition and the *kerygma* are regarded as essential for the Christian faith and as such, it has been transmitted, advocated and safeguarded by the community of faith.

My study puts all these *certainties* of the Christian dogma under suspicion. I searched in this study for answers about the Bible and the church, the church’s interpretation of the Bible and its confessions. The issue that triggered me most was the issue about the

functioning of the Christian myth in a postmodern world. At the beginning of my research, I thought these two worlds were irreconcilable.

How can I, seeing myself as a scholar living in a postmodern paradigm, accommodate mythological concepts such as a virgin conception, a bodily resurrection from death, and a Bible as if it *is* the word of God? Thanks to Bultmann and Dibelius I could, early in my study make peace with these issues! I learned that my actual issue was not with myth as such, but with a positivistic understanding of myth. The secret is to understand the distinction between myth, history, and myth historicized. Myth is not history in the modern sense of the word. It may be *history or science* in the pre-scientific sense. Myth is also not a vehicle for western academic modern thoughts and ideas, but it was and still is, a way of speaking about the transcendent and the otherworldly.

This insight gave me peace. I can still believe in God in terms of the Christian tradition, even as I affirm the validity of all the enduring religious traditions. I believe in the resurrection, but in the resurrection as a *kerygmatic* event. I do not read every page or saying and deed in the Bible literally. The books of the Bible are antique documents from a world that has gone by. However, I still take the Bible seriously because I have met God in the *kerygma* that is to be found in the Bible.

I therefore do not evaluate myths negative. I evaluate a positivistic interpretation of myths negative, especially when modern people cling to a mythical worldview of biblistic fundamentalism. People's anomalous existence of adhering to pre-modernism because it harmonizes with a fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible I cannot endorse because the same people enhance a modern to postmodern worldview for the rest of their lives. One does not necessarily need a mythological worldview to use, understand, and to appreciate myths. One can appreciate the value of myths even in a postmodern world.

I believe in God, but I do not think that one can regard the Bible as the only word of God. Yes, one can find witnesses to what the authors believed the word of God for them was, in the Bible. But not every word in the Bible is a word of or from God. Sometimes the

word of God manifests as a meta-narrative beyond the biblical narrative that meets the eye. I decanonize therefore the Bible when I reflect on it for my own existential well-being. I recognize a canon behind or beyond the biblical canon. The canon is not only behind the biblical canon, it is behind nature, literature, music, conversations, and interaction with other people as well.

This study reflected my own subjectivity. I cannot do biblical criticism without a personal and autobiographical dimension. It was a risk that I took, but it was worth it. I focused on three issues namely myths, the resurrection of Jesus from death, and the canon. I put the traditional, ecclesiastical and confessional teachings under suspicion, to find answers that I can live with. A postmodern way of thinking helped me in my search for some clarity.

Because my study was autobiographical, it was in the first place relevant for me. I sought clarification for my own questions. The issues studied, were issues that I put on the table. But, in the second place, because I am a researcher, my study also has relevance for the scholarly community. Scholars in all the theological disciplines ask questions. Exegetes and historical researchers put their results on the table and more questions arise.

Because it is an open debate, the faith community is also involved. The faith community, to whom I belong, also asks its questions. Then there is the institutionalized church that is a watchdog for the dogma, and, lastly there is the secular community who is also interested in the debate. The method of my study was to address these audiences. Because of the fact that I want my study to be relevant for as wide an audience as possible, it also had an influence on my methodology.

The focus of my study was the question: How did the myth of Easter faith develop into *kerygma*, which became a text with canonical status? I thus searched for the relationship between myth, resurrection and canon.

On the issue of myth, I concluded that myth is just as important to postmodern humans, as it were to our pre-modern ancestors. The Christ myth is a first century Mediterranean

version of the ancient inherited subconscious archetypal myths of humankind. It is stories in the language, symbols, and metaphors of the cultures and peoples in which it originated. It is language recycled.

To read the myth literally is an error. It was not even valid to read it literally at the time of the first century. Because one cannot read it literally, the reading of the myth leads to the metaphorical interpretation. Psychologically speaking, when reading the narrative, one's subconscious connects with the truth hidden beneath the surface of the story. The art of reading the text is to find the resemblance of truth through the myth. However, the real art lies in the understanding of the metaphor.

One's personal horizon must fuse with the horizon that the text proposes. This happens in the *kerygma*. The *kerygma* is understandable as *kerygma* only when the self-understanding awakened by it is recognized to be a possibility of human self-understanding and thereby becomes the call to decision.

A metaphor works when the literal meaning is not acceptable. This very fact confirms the *kerygmatic* character of the Christ myth. The content is not historical or universal truths but is a personal address in a concrete situation. The *kerygma* of the myth appears in a form molded by an individual's understanding of one's own existence or by one's interpretation of that understanding. Correspondingly, it is understandable only to one who is able to recognize the *kerygma* as a word addressed to one in one's situation – to recognize it immediately only as a question asked or as a demand made.

Today more and more readers, scholars as well as members of the faith community and the church realize that the gospel should not be literally interpreted. Thus, the text as a whole has a metaphorical twist. It is myth that must be interpreted. The metaphors used in the gospel narratives are archetypes in the subconscious of human beings. Reading these stories allows one to realize on a subconscious level the correspondence with the archetypes that exist in the subconscious of humans. Thus, the mythical representation

through the metaphor of the text communicates with the archetype in the reader's subconscious and that enables the reader see (experience) *the* truth.

To understand the gospel is thus to see. To see means to look beyond the story and to let your subconscious revive the myth. When the myth revives, it facilitates your entrée into an experience with God. The myths represented in the narratives of antiquity are the stories that one needs for living. They are myths of life and death and new beginnings, of nobodies who turn into heroes, of martyrs and conquerors. The gospel is a narrative that invites you to join, to integrate your life with the storyline of the text. Once you have joined, the metaphor opens up and through the myth hidden in it, you enter into an experience with God. That is what reading the text is all about. Thus, while myths have their limitations and their dangers, they cannot be discarded. They are necessary ciphers for evoking an awareness of the deepest realities in human experience.

Somewhere in the past, it seems that the church as institute has lost this experience. The church went wrong when it historized the Christ myth. The fact that myths generally operate on a different level of reality was overlooked. In recent times, when an attempt was undertaken by the scholarly community to compare these myths with the historical facts, the attempt failed, because myths did not pretend to be history. They are rather experiences of faith. A sermon on a Sunday as part of a service, as I understand it, is thus not supposed to be a lesson in history, biblical geography, text-critical remarks, literature analysis, or in first-century Mediterranean sociology, but as liturgist you are facilitator and mediator for the congregation's meeting-experience with God. As preacher, you are facilitator in translating the myths into the idiom that your audience can relate to. The service is thus not about knowing, facts or sharing information, but it is about an experience mediated and facilitated by the liturgist through song, prayer, myth, bread, wine, and baptism so that the audience can experience God in faith. I am not convinced that the members and leaders of the institutionalized church are currently willing to accept such an insight.

As part of the faith community, I know that God cannot be met in dogmas, creeds, and teachings about God. God can only be met in an experience with God. Myth is the only phenomenon that can reveal the subconscious – and that can help one to experience it. This experience of myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God.

Thus: First, there was the *kerygma*! The *kerygma* was about death and resurrection. The *kerygma* asked for narratives. The narratives were used in the cult as material for sermons. These narratives which ended with a belief in the resurrection of Christ, became the foundational myth for the Christ cult, for its preaching and its rituals.

This brought me to my second question, namely the resurrection. For years, I believed that my faith depends on the historicity of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. I confessed *unbelievably* as and with the church, the bodily resurrection of all believers at the end of the days. At last, I am free of that burden. I now understand the Christ myth in its context.

I have seen and concluded that the Christ cult and its narratives developed within a mythological worldview. First, there was the *kerygma* of a dying and resurrected Christ. Then narratives, as material for preaching in the early congregations emerged around the figure of the historical Jesus. These narratives are mythical in character. The crucial part of these narratives is the Easter narrative, and the essence of the Easter narrative is the part about the resurrection of Christ. With Bultmann, I can state that the real Easter event was not the resurrection of Christ but the birth of faith in the redemptive effect of the cross as an act of God. The resurrection is not history, but a myth with an existential message, not a past event of salvation but a present proclamation, which leads to self-understanding. When the myth is read in a postmodern fashion by exploring the riches of intertextuality, a new dimension opens up.

The resurrection as the content of the *kerygma* can thus be seen as mythical speech that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. This resurrection narrative legitimized the apostolic authority as we have seen. The legitimizing of the authority developed into

the orthodoxy and they eventually contributed to the canonization of the, for-them-acceptable, documents. This then was my third issue. The documents - called canon.

The primary source of Christian doctrine is thus Scripture, in that it is Scripture, which mediates Jesus of Nazareth to those who believe in him. I prefer to say that the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth that one finds in the New Testament, mediates God to me. When one keeps in mind the varied and complex history of the writings of the various books of the Christian movement and how the individual books were addressed each to a different community at different stages, one needs to ask how it happened that the twenty seven books that came to comprise the New Testament, were collected into an authoritative collection of Scripture? A Scripture that has the status of “canon” for the church.

Again, it was a relevant topic for a large audience therefore, it was worth discussing it. When Paul preached the gospel (2 Cor 2:14; 4:6), he understood it as a “knowledge of the truth.” This knowledge means “to gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3:8). This knowledge (gnosis) was what faith was all about, and in the beginning of the Christian congregation, it was faith, and not the right doctrine (orthodoxy) that distinguished the Christians from the rest. The right doctrine and heresies arose out of the differences, which developed within the Christian congregations. This takes place very early because Paul already curses the Judaizers of offering a different gospel to the converted Gentiles (Gal 1:6-9). As time went by, terminology developed for *the right doctrine* namely “orthodoxy.” The orthodox was concerned with the dogma, ordinances, and regulation of the religion.

The doctrine, which in the end won in the ancient church as the “right” or “orthodox” doctrine stands at the end of a development or, rather, is the result of a conflict among various shades of doctrine. Christians wanted to hold fast to the tradition but they had to reinterpret it, and so a multitude of attempts at reorientation was called forth. In view of the differences in doctrine and of the conflict between them, the question arose concerning the authority, which might determine “right” doctrine. The answer was that the apostles were the reliable bearers of the tradition. However, the problem was the

selection of those writings out of the swelling literary production which could count as apostolic and which could be part of the formation of a new canon, which could take its place beside the Old Testament canon.

In the end, the authority of the bishop-office decided the matter. For the Greek Church, the thirty-ninth paschal letter of Athanasius conclusively set the extent of the New Testament at twenty-seven writings, and in the West, this decision achieved recognition through Pope Innocent 1. Eventually, the canon was established and the belief in the authority of the New Testament writings became part and parcel of Christian faith itself. Of primary concern for the interpreter is the Bible's function as Scripture within the community of faith. Calling the Bible the Word of God thus refers not to its origin but to its status and function in a community.

To recap my argument once again briefly: In the beginning, there was the *kerygma*! The content of this *kerygma* was the death and resurrection of Christ. During the development stages of the Christ myth, this *kerygma* was linked to the life and death of the historical Jesus. His story became a mythical narrative that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. It explains its reason for existence and its rituals. As this faith community grew and became more and more institutionalized (church) more and more literature appeared on the scene. The orthodoxy (people with power) decided which of these literary works contains the *truth* and the *right teaching* according to them. Those were the books, which end on the list, which became the index of what we call the Christian Bible or the Canon of the church today.

As Borg⁵³ suggested, a major need for contemporary readers of the Bible is thus to move from pre-critical naiveté (we simply hear the stories as true stories), through critical thinking (concerned with factuality), to post-critical naiveté (the ability to hear the biblical stories once again as true stories, even as one knows that they may not be factually true and that their truth does not depend upon their factuality). We also should

⁵³ Borg (2002:50)

remember what Mack⁵⁴ said: “One must understand and appreciate the mythmaking of the early Christians, but we must recognize that their reasons for telling their stories are not good enough to be our reasons continuing to tell stories just as they told them.”

I do also believe in a canon behind the canon. A God of love behind and beyond, in and through Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, to me, is thus the vehicle who makes the content of the *kerygma* accessible. He is the mythological figure, with historical roots, who has become the observable face of God to us. Indeed then, a *kerygmatic* narrative with an invitation to the reader/hearer to join in a mythological experience. An experience to have an encounter with God. The God whose love is preached in the metaphor called Easter. The God, who is self the Canon in and behind the texts that invite us to live in a relationship of trust and dependency before God.

⁵⁴ Mack (1995:305)

Epilogue

In this scholarly writing, presented as a doctoral dissertation within the context of the university as modern institute, I paradoxically chose a mode of communication referred to in chapter one as “autobiographical performance within an act of criticism”. This “autobiographical biblical criticism” did not shy away from the personal pronoun “I” or to references to my personal situation of being the researcher. This “thesis” does not represent objective, indifferent, and impersonal research. It narrates personal crises because of serious theological and epistemological questions. The result of my research is relevant only to my life because I found answers for issues with which I have not been comfortable. However, to reverse what I said in chapter one, although this dissertation was about me it is also a scientific study. Its relevance therefore also prolongs into the context of the wider scholarly and ecclesial community.

The scholarly community may have the impression that when the word “myth” is heard or used by someone in the street, it refers to a primitive, unsophisticated story – an “untrue” fable which had its origin in oral culture and was further handed down by unknown narrators (Van Aarde 2003b:1). However, according to Van Aarde (2003b:1), although the qualifications “true” or “false” are rather inappropriate terms to use in this regard, it would not be improper to describe myth as “folklore” which is not the product of an individual author taking up a pen (cf Kirk 1984:56). Mythmaking in antiquity was the result of a process. A particular culture, in a specific time and place, formulated their beliefs in the transcendent in a language and in symbols that made sense to them. When listening to their myths, we as post-modern readers and believers share their religious experience by approaching hermeneutically myth in a non-positivist manner.

For this purpose Cassirer (1955:62) suggested that we should interpret myth in a *tautegorical*⁵⁵ and not in an *allegorical* way (cf Van Aarde 2003b:17). “An allegorical

⁵⁵ The term “tautegorical” is derived from the Greek words *tauta* and *goreó* and “allegorical” from the words *allos* and *goreó*. Etymologically, “tautegorical” would mean, “to convey the same things” and hermeneutically, it refers to an understanding of the meaning of language as a symbol of communication

interpretation of myth would apply standards of truth or meaning not part of the worldview [in which the myth as speech act is embedded]. A tautegorical interpretation defines meaning and judges its truth according to standards that are part of the worldview” (Schultz 2000:162).

Thus, to understand myth and to revive it as an entrée for an experience with God, one should read it tautegorically. In my study, it was the resurrection myth, as the foundational myth of the “Christ cult”, which I had to deal with in order to re-interpret the dynamics of the process of canonizing New Testament writings in the first centuries of our common era. Those early followers of Jesus who were responsible for these writings regarded the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as material for a sermon in which they conveyed the *kerygma* that God is love. They declared that God expiates sins through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Jesus’ death served as atonement because God gives new life when God resurrected both Jesus from death and those who participate spiritually in his death and resurrection through baptism and live according to the vision of Jesus prior to his crucifixion. The same *kerygma* – now stripped from first century Mediterranean cultural imageries, Old Testament theological concepts of sin and sacrifice, Greek and Roman myth, but still mediated through mythological symbolism – is that God, who is love, is still today the God of endings and new beginnings.

Resurrection faith is thus not the rise of the dead from their tombs. It is a “metaphor” for the passage from the death of self-absorption to the life of unselfish love. It is a transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit. It is to be free from the slavery of the world to the liberty of the eternal.

within the framework of the worldview from which it emanated and for which it is meant. “Allegorical” means, “to convey differently” and denotes the interpretation of language as symbol of communication within another worldview. The dialectical-hermeneutical approach attempts to “interpret” the earlier communication of an ancient worldview in a non-allegorical and non-positivistic manner, in order for it to communicate existentially in a later context. In this sense, allegorical interpretation pertains to positivism and tautegorical interpretation to abductive reasoning which has replaced deductive and inductive epistemology (see Van Aarde 2003b).

For me personally it means that I am free to love. And where I sometimes fall short in my love, I can stop being selfish (end) and start loving again (new beginning). Die and resurrect! That is the story of life to me.

There is a parable in the Gospel of Luke that tells the story of the younger one of two brothers who took his share of the estate and squandered his wealth in wild living. When he ends up longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, he came to his senses and stood up. An ending of a certain way of living, and a new beginning! He died for his old way of living and he *stood up (resurrect)* to a new life. He experienced death and resurrection. He went back to his father and he found open arms, a new robe, sandals, a ring, and the fattened calf was killed for feasting and celebrating. The *kerygma* calls it “resurrection.” A metaphor that explains the love of God. Every time that I make a new beginning and a fresh start, I experience death of the old and resurrection to the new! I do believe in resurrections!

The narratives, parables and aphorisms of the historical Jesus that caused his rejection and death – re-interpreted by those who were responsible to write the books of the New Testament – have created a world. They have created a world where one, also today, can live simultaneously in this world and in the kingdom of God. In other words, while living in this world, one can live in love! Such a life changes one’s whole perspective on life. When allowing the narratives of Jesus of Nazareth to fuse with the narrative of your own life, you realize that life is about love, and love is about God.

Jesus is thus a myth to live by! When living a life in the presence of God and thus in love, you turn the other cheek, you walk an extra mile, and you give of your clothes to your neighbor. But, you also see life differently. It thus provides myth as a way of thinking. You realize that God, and for that matter, love, is everywhere. It surrounds us. It fills the whole world. There where you split a piece of wood and there where you lift up a stone. God is the air that we breathe and the spirit in whom we live.

Even when we sit down to break our bread we can experience the *kerygma*! It happens when the myth of the dying martyr opens up. And when we take a sip of wine, we can revive again. Endings and new beginnings. Life and death. Crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth and Christ of the *kerygma*.

To belief in the death and resurrection of Christ is to live life as a passage from the death of selfish individualism to the life of unselfish love. It is to live a life of bread and wine. Of endings and new beginnings.

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Summary

This study is done from an autobiographical perspective. It focuses on three issues: myths, the resurrection of Jesus from death, and the canon. It approaches the traditional ecclesiastical and confessional teachings from the perspective of a postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion.

Being autobiographical, the study is in the first place relevant for its author. In the second place, because he is a researcher, the study has also relevance for the scholarly community. The faith community also asks their questions. Then there is the institutionalized church that is a watchdog for the dogma, and, lastly there is the secular community who is also interested in the debate.

The study aims to find answers to the question how the myth of Easter faith developed into *kerygma*, which became a text with canonical status? It is a search for the relationship between myth, resurrection and canon.

On the issue of myth, the study concludes that myth is just as important to postmoderns as it were to their pre-modern ancestors. The Christ myth is a first century Mediterranean version of an ancient inherited subconscious archetypal myth. It represents stories in the language, symbols, and metaphors of the cultures and peoples in which it originated. It is language recycled.

On the question about the resurrection, the study concludes that the Christ cult and its narratives developed within a mythological worldview. First, there was the *kerygma* of a dying and resurrected Christ. Then narratives, as material for preaching in the early congregations emerged around the figure of the historical Jesus. The resurrection as the content of the *kerygma* is perceived as mythical speech that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. The third issue was about the documents called canon and questions such as how did it emerge, and how did it become authority bearing?

To recap the argument: In the beginning, there was the *kerygma*! The content of this *kerygma* was the death and resurrection of Christ. During the development stages of the Christ myth, this *kerygma* was linked to the life and death of the historical Jesus. His story became a mythical narrative that serves as the foundational myth for the Christ cult. It explains its reason for existence and its rituals. As this faith community grew and became more and more institutionalized it produced more and more literature. Orthodoxy in early Christianity decided which of these writings contain the *truth* and the *right teaching*. They are the books, which became the index of what is called the Christian Bible today.

The author of this study believes in a canon behind the canon. For him, the Jesus figure is the “vehicle” that makes the content of the *kerygma* accessible. He is a mythological figure, with historical roots that has become the observable face of God to Christians. The New Testament represents *kerygmatic* narrative with an invitation to its readers and hearers to join in this mythological experience and encounter with God.

Keywords:

Appearance narratives;
Canonization;
Deconstruction;
Foundational myth;
Postmodernity;

Autobiography;
Christ cult;
Demystification;
Myth;
Resurrection;

Canon;
Decanonization.
Empty tomb;
Mythology;
Hermeneutics of suspicion.