

## TOWARD A NEW APPRECIATION OF JESUS

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AS long as men persist in portraying Jesus to their day, and historians continue in their quest for a factual view of Jesus' time, reconstruction in men's views concerning him will occur and recur. For the theologians' interpretation must always be a fresh synthesis of the data that is thus far known. When new data is disclosed, a new synthesis must be made if the present view of Jesus is to accord with current knowledge. Recent findings in the field of historical scholarship have made apparent that such a reconstruction in the current view of Jesus is needed.

At the present time, modern Christianity, for the most part, views Jesus against a background of nineteenth century research. The portrait that appears in the preaching of the modern pulpit is the one that was painted by such theological artists as Ritschl, Herrmann, Harnack, Clarke and others. A glance at one of their portrayals will make this observation evident:

We get our picture of Jesus, Herrmann wrote, not merely from an external survey of his activities among his contemporaries, but we submit ourselves to his presence and thereby "receive a picture of His inner life. . . . When we speak of the historical Christ we mean that personal life of Jesus which speaks to us from the New Testament, viewed as the disciples' testimony to their faith. . . . For the picture of Jesus' inner life could be preserved only by those who had experienced the emancipating influence of that fact upon themselves."<sup>1</sup> Originally this impact of the personality of Jesus had been experienced only by his intimate contemporaries—his disciples. But they recorded their impressions, and thus passed on to subsequent followers, the reflections of his person. Consequent-

<sup>1</sup>Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*.

ly, continued Herrmann, the Gospel writings introduce Christian people into the presence of Christ, where at least the effects of his personality are observed and felt, even tho they be but a dim reflection of Jesus, himself. No doubt, observed Herrmann, these records are not wholly reliable in their depiction of Jesus; they doubtless are exaggerated representations of him, for enthusiastic disciples would inevitably tend to overstate their personal impressions beyond what the facts might warrant. But no matter, he concluded. We still are able to press back of their exaggerations to the real personality being described, and, standing in that presence, feel the impact, as an immediate experience, of Him whom the Gospel records attempt to depict. In this fashion we apprehend the inner life of the historic Jesus.

This presentation is fairly representative of the Christocentric approach to the historic Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and may be said to be still the classic expression of the liberal Christian's approach to faith.

(Were it possible to assume that the Gospel writings are the "disciples' testimony to their faith," we should have in them first hand impressions of Jesus, recorded by his intimate contemporaries. It would then be reasonable to assume that even tho each of the four gospel writers might have allowed their enthusiasm to over-color their portraits, the personality being depicted would be sufficiently clear in its major characteristics to enable us to see in them the genuine historical Jesus.

But when historical findings are consulted, the assumption that the Gospel writings are the "disciples' testimony to their faith" is rendered untenable. Professor Case has summed up this problem clearly:

"Interest in the apostolic authorship of gospel tradition was a development of the canonical period. Now it was assumed that a popular and widely used book could be further elevated in one's esteem if its origin could be traced back to some revered name among the older Christian worthies. When a gospel contained no indications to the contrary, its assignment to the Apostle Matthew or the Apostle John seemed no mere idle speculation, but a happy fact discovered by faith. Apparently, in some instances, desire to choose a suitable author for a well-known book was embarrassed by facts too familiar to permit of an ab-

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Harnack, *What is Christianity*; G. B. Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*; H. C. King, *Reconstruction in Theology*; W. A. Brown, *Christian Theology in Outline*; H. E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*.

solutely ideal selection. In the case of the gospel called Mark, a name of only second-rate authority was retained, although given added prestige by association with the greater name of "Peter." Mark, it was said, had been this apostle's companion and "interpreter." Hence, this gospel was essentially a summary of Peter's discourses. One may surmise that if Mark's name had not already been intimately associated with the composition of the book, Petrine authorship would have been affirmed outright. Probably John Mark did write this gospel, but an examination of its style and content does not bear out the supposition that it is an unadorned compilation of excerpts from Peter's sermons.

Similarly in the case of the Gospel of Luke the alleged author is not himself an apostle but only a companion of that other great figure in the history of Christianity, the Apostle Paul. . . . Today Lucan authorship of Luke-Acts is in serious doubt. The career and character of the Paul depicted in Acts sometimes deviates widely from what is now known of the Apostle through our acquaintance with his own letters. However that may be, were Luke in reality the author of the gospel, it will have been the work of one who had no first-hand knowledge of the subject treated and whose "Apostolic authority consisted only in attachment to the person of Paul who himself had not been a companion of Jesus."

For the two remaining gospels, authors were found who from almost the very beginning of Jesus' public career had belonged to the inner group of disciples. . . . Were it possible to accept this tradition, one could argue that the statements made in these books are historically dependable because they are recorded by eye-witnesses narrating a period of history in which they themselves had actively participated.

The grounds on which the First and the Fourth Gospel were supposed to have been written respectively by Matthew and John are today not apparent. The former book contains within itself no hint of its author's name. The same is true of the Fourth Gospel, except for the last chapter which is manifestly a later addition. . . . The character of their contents is alone sufficient to refute the tradition of apostolic authorship for either Matthew or John."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Case, *Jesus—A New Biography*, pp. 63-67. Cf. also Burton, *Teaching of Jesus: A Source Book*, pp. 2-7; Burton and Willoughby, *A Short Introduction to the Gospels* (1926); Bacon, *Jesus and Paul* (1921), pp. 16-17; Bacon, *The Gospel of Mark* (1925); Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (1925); Burditt, *The Earliest Sources For The Life of Jesus* (1922); Graves, *What Did*

A further factor which mars the reliability of the Gospel records as sources for the character of Jesus is the lateness of their writing. The Gospel of Mark, recognized to be the first of the ancient biographies, and the major source for Matthew and Luke, did not take form until about 70 A.D.<sup>4</sup> The other three gospels appeared some years later, undoubtedly before the close of the first century.<sup>5</sup> This means that Jesus had been dead almost a half century before the earliest of the accounts of his career had been compiled. At best, then, we have in the gospel records, distant reflections of the personality of Jesus.

But more serious than the facts concerning either their authorship or date, is the purpose of their writing. The Gospels are not historical accounts; they are apologetic portraits of Jesus, each of them concerned to render him worthy of worship to some specific group. What Dr. Burton wrote concerning the teaching of Jesus might also be said about the character sketches of Jesus which the Gospels depict:

"What, in fact, they give us is not a first-hand record of the teaching of Jesus, but a faithful representation of what the men of the time, when they were written, believed to be the thought of Jesus, or what they confidently believed he would have thought and taught if he had been living and teaching in their day and called upon to deal with their problems. Their point of view is similar in this respect to that of the modern expository preacher. They are interpretations."<sup>6</sup>

The life of Jesus "which speaks to us from the New Testament" then, is seen to be the Christ of faith defined and described by first-century Christians, specifically for the purpose of satisfying the theological needs of that period. Accordingly, the Christ of modern Christianity, when fashioned from the portrayals in these records, turns out to be a psychological construct of the personality which primitive Christologies provided.

*Jesus Teach*, Chapt. I, (1919); Case, *The Historicity of Jesus*, Chapt. VII (1912); Goodspeed, *The Story of the New Testament*, (1916).

<sup>4</sup>Case, *Jesus—A New Biography*, p. 76. It is generally acceded among New Testament scholars that Mark was written shortly before or after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Cf. Burton, Goodspeed and Bacon. Prof. Bacon has carefully examined the date and origin of Mark in his book, *The Gospel of Mark: Its Composition and Date* (1925). Streeter places the date of Mark at 60 A. D.

<sup>5</sup>Luke, 80 A.D.; Matthew, 85-90 A.D.; John (the latest of all) at the very end of the first century.

<sup>6</sup>Burton, *The Teaching of Jesus: A Source Book*, p. 2.

## II.

The person whom Christocentric theologians have designated as Jesus has been a peculiarly individualistic character, directly related to God in a supernatural fashion. In consequence of his singular relation to God, these interpreters have ascribed to Jesus a unique religious experience. It was their conviction that Jesus shared a peculiar intimacy with God, so intense, that he was able to apprehend the very mind and heart of God, and was thus able to reveal the character of God. The Ritschlians, for the most part, interpreted this unique relation solely in terms of a spiritual fellowship.<sup>7</sup> Bushnell and Clarke, however, both supplemented this prac-

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Ritschl, Herrmann, Harnack, Foster, King and Coffin. tical relationship with a metaphysical theory; each of them adopted some form of the doctrine of incarnation.<sup>8</sup> Jesus was thus repre-

<sup>8</sup>Cf. also W. A. Brown. sented as a superhuman, God-man, intrinsically possessed with divine capacities.

But in contrast to this individualistic approach to Jesus' character, the whole trend of historical research, during the past fifty years, has been in the direction of understanding Jesus in terms of his historical relationships. Theological assumptions regarding his person have been temporarily set aside pending further inquiries into his historical life. The results of this frank endeavor to discover the historic Jesus have been exceedingly far-reaching in effect upon the interpretations of Jesus, facts, which for the most part, have been wholly ignored by modern interpretations. It is important that these facts be noted, for they constitute the data which must contribute to the new synthesis that is to portray Jesus to the present: (A summary of the significant findings which bear significantly upon an interpretation of Jesus therefore follows:)

1. We have said that the trend of historical research has been in the direction of understanding Jesus against a background of historical relationships. The effort to view Jesus in relation to his social environment naturally turned scholars' attention to a study of Jewish life prior to and contemporary with the time of Jesus. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, historical scholars, having achieved a wider acquaintance with Jewish literature, extended their investigations to the later Jewish books with a view to reconstructing the history of the Jewish people

during Jesus' time. Among other discoveries, as a result of this type of study, was the striking similarity between the apocalyptic teaching of certain Jewish writers of the period, and the teaching of Jesus. In both cases a sudden end of the present world was anticipated, and, in accordance with that expectation, they prophesied and urged preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In the light of this discovery, fresh studies of the life of Jesus followed, the outcome of which was a widespread conviction that Jesus, with his contemporaries, shared in the apocalyptic psychology of his time: that he actually looked forward to the immediate coming of the end of the world in apocalyptic fashion.<sup>9</sup>

Among Christocentric interpretations the apocalyptic element in Jesus' teaching has been completely sublimated<sup>10</sup> or ignored.<sup>11</sup> Although the Ritschlians recognized the fact that apocalyptic expectations were current during Jesus' time, they contended that Jesus "spiritualized" these hopes and ambitions and thus transcended the current psychology.<sup>12</sup> This contention, however, would probably not be supported by historical inquiry. While all scholars are not agreed that Jesus ascribed to himself any messianic role,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>This movement of thought was brought into prominence in Germany by Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906), Translated: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, London: 1910; Loisy incorporated the apocalyptic point of view in his *Les Évangiles synoptiques*, Paris: 1907, and in *Jésus et la tradition évangélique*, Paris: 1910. In England, the movement was represented by W. Sanday *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, N. Y.: 1907. Other important American and English works presenting this point of view are: Mathews, S., *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*, Chicago: 1905; Scott, E. F., *The Kingdom and the Messiah*; Edinburgh, 1911; Emmet, *The Eschatological Question in the Gospels*, Edinburgh, 1911; Dewick, E. C., *Primitive Christian Eschatology*, Cambridge, 1912; and Jackson, H. L., *The Eschatology of Jesus*, London, 1913.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Ritschl, Harnack and Foster.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Clarke, Herrmann, and King.

<sup>12</sup>See Harnack, *What is Christianity*, pp. 124-146.

<sup>13</sup>The conclusion that Jesus believed himself to be the Messianic Christ is expressed in: Mathews, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament* (See also his *Jesus on Social Institutions*, 1928, p. 31.) Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*; Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*; Holtzmann, *Das messianische Bewusstsein Jesu*; Scott, *The Kingdom and the Messiah*. Cf. also Lake, *Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Chapt. VII. Professor Case, in his article "The Alleged Messianic Consciousness of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 46, Parts I and II, 1927, indicates that today scholars are questioning the adequacy of messianic imagery for the self-interpretation of Jesus. Such representations of Jesus' sayings which seem to point inevitably to his messianic self-estimate "may be only a residuum of early christological speculation on the part of the disciples." p. 8f.

it is an assured conclusion that Jesus shared the apocalyptic outlook with his contemporaries.<sup>14</sup>

2. A second line of investigation which has contributed to a clearer understanding of Jesus' character has been the studies of Jesus in relation to his contemporaries. As a result of the revived interest among historical scholars in Jewish life during the time of Jesus, Jewish scholars took an interest in the life of Jesus and thus provided a new wealth of insight into the problem of Jesus' character. Their most significant contribution has been with regard to Jesus' relation to the Pharisees.<sup>15</sup> Traditionally Christian theologians, following the point of view of the Gospel records, magnified the breach between Jesus and the Pharisees to such an extent that Jesus became more and more distinct and even alienated from his Jewish background. This, of course, contributed to his individual uniqueness, and thus aided the claims of Christian christologies. But the recent studies of these Jewish scholars and others outside of Judaism,<sup>16</sup> are compelling historical scholarship to assume quite a different attitude toward the Pharisees and toward their relation to Jesus. It is pointed out by them that the breach between the Pharisees and Jesus was not as prominent, nor as fundamental, as Christian writers have assumed, nor in fact, as Gospel tradition has purported it to be. On the contrary, it is indicated, Jesus and the Pharisees had much in common so far as religious teaching was concerned, and that certainly they shared in a common re-

<sup>14</sup>Dean Shailer Mathews, in his book, *Jesus on Social Institutions*, Macmillan, 1928, has interpreted Jesus' teaching from the standpoint of a revolutionary psychology, which, he suggests, characterized the apocalyptic temper of his times. He points out, however, that this apocalyptic outlook does not necessarily impair Jesus' contribution to ethics, for Jesus concerned himself not with specific "program-making", which, in the nature of the case, might have involved measures of expediency, relevant only to the crisis at hand; but with basic and ultimate ideals that should shape peoples' attitudes in view of the impending crisis. Thus, however vividly and completely Jesus might have shared in the apocalyptic psychology, that point of view, to which may be judged as a type of crisis thinking, only served to intensify his insight regarding certain fundamental implications of God's will for human living.

<sup>15</sup>C. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2 vols. London, 1909; *Some Elements of the Religious Teaching of Jesus*, London: 1910; *The Old Testament and After*, London: 1923; I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism* (Two Series) Cambridge, 1917 and 1924.

<sup>16</sup>A recent and excellent addition to studies in this problem is D. W. Riddle's *Jesus and the Pharisees*, Chicago: 1928. Dr. Riddle has supplemented the studies made by Jewish scholars by carefully considering the data provided by Christian tradition itself.

ligious outlook: in their conception of God, and in their attitudes toward him. Herford's comments are illuminating here:

"With a great deal of what Jesus said about God, and about man's relation to Him, no Pharisee would feel disposed to quarrel—or so far as the evidence goes, ever did quarrel. The discussions in the Gospel did not turn, for instance, on the question whether Jesus should or should not have referred to God as the Father in Heaven or whether forgiveness was God's sure answer to repentance. No Pharisee ever challenged him on either point; or on many another of the directly religious and ethical sayings which he uttered. A Pharisee could not so have challenged him without disowning his own religion. . . . In regard to fundamental beliefs, there was no disagreement between him and the Pharisees.

Both Jesus and the Pharisees shared in common a Judaism expressed in the terms of a spiritual Theism, developed in the Synagogue, and the home, and learned there alike by the Pharisees and by Jesus."<sup>17</sup>

This is not to say that there were no differences between them;<sup>18</sup> for as a matter of historical fact, their differences widened into a breach of such moment that it precipitated the execution of Jesus. But, as Professor Case has pointed out, "it was probably more the method of Jesus than his message" that incurred the hostility of the Pharisees.<sup>19</sup>

The important fact that this line of research discloses is that Jesus, in his religious outlook, and in his thought-world, was a typical devout Israelite. This observation bears materially upon the significance which Christocentric interpretations have given to Jesus' awareness of God. If, in addition to sharing the apocalypticism of his day, Jesus also shared the religious structure of mind of his day in regard to such fundamental matters as the character of God, and the relation of God to mankind, what becomes of the Christocentric supposition regarding Jesus' unique awareness of God? However profound it may have been in comparison with that of his contemporaries, the question still suggests itself, how pertinent is Jesus' awareness of God, conditioned as

<sup>17</sup>R. T. Herford, *Pharisaism, Its Aim and Method*, pp. 115-119, p. 126. Cf. also *The Pharisees*, pp. 198ff, and Riddle, *op. cit.* Part III.

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion of the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus, see Herford, *Pharisaism*, pp. 127-72.

<sup>19</sup>Case, *Jesus, A New Biography*, p. 306. Cf. also Herford, *Pharisaism*, pp. 127ff.

it was by the thought-climate of his time, to the modern man's quest for God? For if historical criticism is correct in its estimate of Jesus' mental and religious outlook, obviously Jesus was quite unaware of the fundamental insights which shape present-day religious thinking. He, and men of his time, had no conception of the vastness of the cosmic order, and of corresponding facts about the universe, which enter so intimately and consequentially into the modern man's religious adaptation, and in terms of which he must construct his religious world view, and his conception of God. He was clearly unaware of the significance of the natural environment for man's welfare. To his mind, and to the minds of his contemporaries, the natural world was but a temporary area of existence, soon to be brought to a catastrophic end. If the historian's painstaking judgment it admitted, Jesus lived in the midst of a thoroughly supernatural thought-world, and shared fully in its views. His world was inhabited by spirits, good and evil alike. Fear, psychic disorders and diseases were all regarded as the results of demon possession, and their cure was possible only as the afflicted were able to enlist the help of other supernatural powers, more powerful than the demons who possessed them. Good spirits were therefore on constant duty as emissaries from heaven, ministering to troubled humans who had invoked their blessing and aid. These religious folk who lived during Jesus' time were fully as conscious of demons and ministering angels as they were of the existence of God. Awareness of God, in fact, carried with it vivid awareness of numerous subsidiary spirits. Such, in general was the religious cosmic structure that lay back of all the numerous religious and philosophic speculations of that period. And it was the background of Jesus' own religious thinking.<sup>20</sup> Acknowledging this, however, does not deny all present-day value to Jesus, for the heritage of his life-span continues to enrich the race. What we mean to point out here is that in view of such conditioning circumstances in the early Christian world of thought, the modern mind cannot yield *uncritically* to the appeal to Jesus as a religious authority.

3. Within recent years this interest in Jesus' relation to Jewish thought and life has been carried still further by scholars in Germany who have sought to make a thoroughgoing investigation of

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Herford, *The Pharisees*, pp. 203ff; Case, *Evolution of Early Christianity*, Chapter II, and *Jesus—A New Biography*, pp. 357ff; and *Experiences with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times*.

New Testament literature in the light of Jewish literature.<sup>21</sup> This line of inquiry has disclosed striking parallels between Jesus' teachings and sayings, recorded in the Gospels, and expressions and teachings in the Talmud and Midrash. Such familiar passages as the "Sermon on the Mount," the "Lord's Prayer," "the Golden Rule," "the Good Samaritan," and others are found to have their parallels in the Jewish books,<sup>22</sup> These discoveries have significant bearing upon an interpretation of Jesus, for many of these ethical teachings, being ascribed to Jesus as original with him, have caused interpreters to regard him as inexplicably unique in moral insight. Now to find them paralleled in earlier Jewish writings throws quite a different light upon his teaching. To be sure, it need not detract from Jesus' own moral and spiritual depth, for he continues to be an embodiment and a teacher of these insights. Nor need it cause one to accuse Jesus of plagiarism, for obviously that would be to charge Jesus with his interpreters' error. Jesus apparently made no pretense of originating new insights: he evidently did what every great spiritual leader does: he gave emphasis and fresh setting to the best moral and spiritual thought of his day. But however one interprets this matter, the important fact is that these discoveries definitely relate Jesus to his Jewish heritage and to his Jewish environment.

4. A further significant discovery has been made by historians in comparing the New Testament writings with Jewish literature in discerning the *native* implications of such phrases as "Son of God" and "Son of Man."<sup>23</sup> These appellations have generally been cited as literary evidence for Jesus' messianic consciousness.<sup>24</sup> Harnack, for example, based his conclusion that Jesus was conscious of a unique sonship with God and that he regarded himself the Messiah in a spiritual sense, primarily on the strength of Gospel evidence that Jesus used these appellations with reference to himself.<sup>25</sup>

But acquaintance with Jewish literature has tended to dispel

<sup>21</sup>H. L. Strack und P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, 2 vols. (1922-24); P. Fiebig, *Jesu-Bergpredigt*, 1924.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. I. Abraham's *Studies in Pharisaism*.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Strack und Billerbeck, *op. cit.* III. See also I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism* (both series) for similar citations.

<sup>24</sup>B. W. Bacon, *Son of God*; Harnack, *Sayings of Jesus*, and *What is Christianity*. Scott, *The Kingdom and the Messiah*; Mathews, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. *What is Christianity* p. 138.

this line of interpretation. Professor Case has summarized this matter clearly:

"The term "son" would have served very well to express for Jesus his feeling of new status as the chosen spokesman of God. But it is far less probable that such terminology, if actually used, would have had a messianic connotation either for him or for his immediate associates. All Israelites were familiarly known as "sons of God," while an especially devout or favored individual, like a wise man or a king, was specifically a "son." There was no incongruity in the Talmudic tradition that the heavenly voice had designated a first-century rabbi, famed for his piety and wisdom, "my son Hanina." Not until the end of the first-century A.D., and then only in one of the apocalyptic books, does the expression "Son" appear as the synonym for "Messiah," a usage exactly parallel to that of the gospels. Among the contemporaries of Jesus, any individual upon whom God's favor was felt to rest in unusual measure had ample precedent for entertaining the conviction that he in particular was a "son." The epithet implied exceptional equipment for duty or special commission for service. But it could hardly have occurred to any one, much less could it have been a generally recognized interpretation, that the designation was an official messianic label. That identification was an achievement of later Christian messianism and of the still later rival Jewish apocalypticism of IV Ezra.

"For 'Son of Man' the case is somewhat different. Since Jesus, like John the Baptist, summoned his hearers to repentance in preparation for the eschatological Kingdom, his followers in later times easily convinced themselves that he had not only predicted the coming of the Son of Man visioned in the apocalypses of Daniel and Enoch, but that he had identified himself with this histrionic figure. . . . It was easier for Christians in the latter half of the first century to designate Jesus "Son of Man" than it would have been for him in his own lifetime so to style himself. In the Aramaic speech of his native land, and with the scriptural background of Ezekiel, the Psalms and Daniel, if not also the Similitudes of Enoch, at his disposal, Jesus might readily have employed this collocation of words. The Semitic tongue, whether Hebrew or Aramaic, framed the expression "son of man" as easily as English "mankind" (literally, "man's child") or German Menschenkind—and with the same generic meaning. But, of course, no one in his right mind goes about calling him-

self "the mankind," "the human race." The assumption that Jesus had put himself forward as the idealized epitome of humanity was a happy discovery of later theologians, but it is without historical justification."<sup>26</sup>

5. Another very recent development in the investigations of historical scholarship is the type of gospel criticism undertaken by the "formgeschichtliche" school in Germany.<sup>27</sup> This group of critics is attempting to extend historical research beyond the results of literary criticism to inquire into the influences which "interests and activities within the Christian community had upon determining the literary form which gospel tradition finally assumed."<sup>28</sup> The conclusions which come from their investigations are to the effect that the gospel writings reflect not so much the style and skill of individual authors, as they do the activities and theological needs of early Christianity. The implications of this observation are far-reaching so far as the sources of the life of Jesus are concerned, for, as Professor Case points out, "From this point of approach one may not assume that either Mark or the Logia has been immune from the same pragmatic influence operating within the Christian communities at the time of their composition that similarly affected Mathew, Luke, and John at later periods."<sup>29</sup> Obviously these facts introduce critical questions which

<sup>26</sup>*Jesus—A New Biography*, pp. 360-387.

<sup>27</sup>"This phase of research," writes Dr. Case, "has been pursued with especial vigor in Germany. Its first exponents were K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, Berlin, 1919, who sought to demonstrate that the tradition incorporated in the gospels was originally devoid of any chronological and topographical scheme of unification; and M. Dibelius (*Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, Tübingen, 1919), who attempted a classification of different forms of early tradition as shaped by the practical needs of the Christian communities. This tradition was found to be the work of unlitary men who framed unconnected narratives—paradigms, short stories, apothegms, exhortations, legends—in accordance with the immediate necessities of their cult-life and missionary propaganda. R. Bultman (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, Göttingen, 1921, made his point of departure not the life-situations within the Christian society but the specific types of different units discoverable in the present gospel books. The result was the differentiation of distinctive forms not essentially dissimilar to those specified by Dibelius."—*Jesus A New Biography* (footnote, pp. 103-04). Cf. also E. Fascher, *Die formgeschichtliche Methode*, Giessen, 1924. For an enumeration of other writers who have followed this line of inquiry, see Case, *ibid.* (footnote) p. 104. See also "The Meaning and Possibilities of Formgeschichte" by Ludwig Kohler, *Journal of Religion*, Oct., 1928; and B. S. Easton, *The Gospel Before The Gospels*, chapter II, as critical estimates of this method.

<sup>28</sup>S. J. Case, "The Life of Jesus during the Last Quarter Century," *Journal of Religion*, Nov., 1925.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

would seriously disturb the literary basis that has been assumed by Christocentric interpretations of Jesus.

6. By far one of the most significant, and, in a sense, revolutionary disclosures, that has come from recent historical research is the startling similarity between Jesus and the Hebrew prophets.<sup>30</sup> This might be regarded as the obvious outcome of studying Jesus in relation to his Jewish background.

Had Jesus been called upon to classify himself, this interpretation reads, "undoubtedly the word 'prophet' would have been the first to spring to his lips."<sup>31</sup> This suggestion of Jesus' affinity with the prophets offers an illuminating explanation of that aspect of Jesus' religious experience which the Ritschlians designated as singularly unique in Jesus—his relation to God. The general assumption throughout all Christian interpretations, in fact, has been that Jesus shared a unique relation to God, not merely an unusually profound one, but a relation that set him apart from every other person in history. Christocentric theology made this assumption basic in its interpretation of Jesus. Viewing Jesus individualistically, as Christocentric theologians have done, and, in fact, as Christian theologians traditionally have done, the characteristics of Jesus' "inner consciousness" do impress the interpreter as unique. But viewing him in relation to the Hebrew prophetic tradition, Jesus' mental characteristics appear quite differently. For example, to deal with Jesus' consciousness of God in relation to his vocational calling, which Ritschlians stressed as significant evidence of his superhuman awareness of God, this seems to have been a characteristic feature of the prophetic consciousness throughout Hebrew history.

"The prophet . . . can scarcely be said to have thought that he was choosing his own task. He performed a duty that seemed to him superimposed by the decrees of heaven. Not on his own authority, but equipped by divine inspiration, he delivered the word of God to the men of his own generation. It was no mere literary device, but was a de-

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Cadbury, H. J., "Jesus and the Prophets." *Journal of Religion*, Nov., 1925. Also S. J. Case, *Jesus A New Biography*. The connection between Jesus and the prophets has always been recognized by scholars, but traditionally Jesus has been represented as being above the other prophets in the sense that he fulfilled their predictions and culminated the prophetic line. Hence the concern has been to *differentiate* Jesus and the prophets. In these recent interpretations, however, emphasis is placed upon their *affinities*, rather than their differences.

<sup>31</sup>*Op. cit.* p. 247.

claration of the prophet's sincerest conviction, when he prefaced his utterances with the typical phrase "Thus saith Jehovah." The prophets commonly make it plain that they pursued their work at the behest of a compelling force from without and not merely in compliance with their moral inclinations. . . . So sure was the prophet that his task was no mere accidental undertaking of his own, but was a God-assigned obligation, that sometimes he projected the divine purpose back to his very infancy.<sup>32</sup> . . . God's special equipment of his chosen spokesmen is a pervasive phenomenon throughout the Jewish Scriptures from the time of Moses down to the days of the apocalyptic seer of Maccabean times. Not only was it true of Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha that their effectiveness was a result of unique endowment, but the prophets of later days often bore testimony to their own sense of a compelling inspiration. . . . They felt that they had been irresistibly impelled to surrender their own wills to the higher will of heaven. This had been their consistent self-representation."<sup>33</sup>

During the time that Jesus undertook his public work, this conception of the prophetic consciousness was well integrated in the social mind. It was natural, therefore, that Jesus, too, should consider his choice of his task as having been prompted by God, and that he should experience the sense of being impelled by God to take up his work. "That Jesus would feel himself empowered by the Spirit for the new work to which God had called him," Professor Case points out, "would be but to repeat in his experience the favor which Heaven had shown in the past to a Moses, a David, and a long line of prophets."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, when one views Jesus in relation to the mind-set of his age, and considers his choice of a life work in perspective with the long line of prophetic tradition, as we know, persisted actively during Jesus' day, the fact that he displayed a marked awareness of God influencing his vocational choice appears as no uncommon or unique feature, peculiar to his personality. And that Jesus should regard his life-calling identical with the divine purpose is likewise consistent with his prophetic consciousness; for, being persuaded that God had called him to his task, the prophet would naturally assume that he was being used by God in projection

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Psalms 22:9; Isaiah 49:1; Gal. 1:15.

<sup>33</sup>*Op. cit.* pp.247-52.

<sup>34</sup>*Jesus—A New Biography*, p. 259.

of his divine will. This, in fact, was the conviction of all the Hebrew prophets.<sup>35</sup>

The historic figure of Jesus that emerges from the findings of historical research, then, seems strangely unlike the "Christ" that has appeared in Christian creeds or in Christocentric interpretations. Following its data one is led to see that Jesus was very much a man of his times; that he shared the apocalyptic point of view then current among Jews; that he conceived of God in terms then current in Israelitish thinking; and that he viewed the natural world with a characteristic supernatural disposition of mind. In practically every respect, his mental and religious outlook partook of first-century proportions. Against this background of ethnic and cultural associations, the modern theologian and the religious interpreter must fashion the new appreciation of Jesus.

<sup>35</sup>See J. M. P. Smith, *The Prophet and His Problems*, and *The Prophets and Their Times*.