

FROM JESUS TO CHRISTIAN ORIGINS



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Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme

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FROM JESUS TO CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

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Edited by

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“ALETHURGIC” DISCOURSES ON JESUS

The Gospel-Narrations as “True Discourses”

L. ARCARI

1. INTRODUCTION

What many scholars define as the “third quest,” despite authoritative exceptions (see M. J. Borg, J. D. Crossan, P. Friedriksen),¹ believes that it is very difficult (or really impossible) to write a “history,” or even a “life” of Jesus.² According to such a perspective, it seems most preferable to offer a presentation of the various aspects of Jesus’s “personality”, or also stances about different elements of the culture of his time, without trying to assume, in a diachronic sense, further “developments” in Jesus’s action and/or preaching. For this, I believe that the research about the “historical” Jesus seems to have set out for an horizon in which “events” in themselves have not mainly relevance (considering the ambiguity of the concept of “event” itself), above all emphasizing the perception that the recollection of some discourses, *also* transmitted as biographical “events”, creates in more or less wide group contexts and their subsequent reactions.³

1. Respectively, see *Jesus – A New Vision. Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (New York, 1991); *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York, 1992); *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York, 1999).

2. About the issue of the possibility of reconstructing the life of Jesus or not, especially for what concerns the 1800s and the 1900s’ theology, see the accurate *status quaestionis* by C. E. EVANS, *Life of Jesus Research. An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1996). See also the more recent work by S. E. PORTER, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research. Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (London-New York, 2004) and the comprehensive assessment by T. HOLMÉN-S. E. PORTER, eds, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus. 1-4*. (Leiden-Boston, 2010-2011). Starting from Harnack on and having been definitively (re-) affirmed the kerygmatic feature of the gospels, scholars are not inclined to associate the concept of “life” of Jesus with that of “historical significance.” We also have to say that the gospels (even though not entirely) are less liable to be considered as a biography of Jesus during his “mundane” life (the earthly Jesus of the gospel *genre* represents one single aspect of a more complex parable with a “double dimension,” i.e. Jesus is represented like a figure which cannot be examined only in a merely “earthly” dimension).

3. See the Part One (“Contemporary Methodological Approach”) in T. HOLMÉN-S. E. PORTER, eds, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus. 1*. (Leiden-Boston, 2010).

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The main focus I intend to clarify in this essay concerns the *also* of the last sentence. If we postulate a real difficulty in reconstructing the history of/about Jesus without bypassing the kerygmatic perspective of the gospel sources, it seems legit to question ourselves about whether the modern and contemporary historical discourse on Jesus often reproduces, in reconstructing some “historical” paradigms concerning Jesus’ activity, the evangelical perspective about Jesus’ mundane life as a starting point for the development of the faith of his followers which, for this, have preserved and transmitted their discourses on/of Jesus also, and from a particular time onwards almost exclusively, according to the evangelical-biographical form of narration.

Is it legit to associate terms such as “history,” “historicization” and “historian” exclusively to what we consider as modernity? As it is known, already in ancient times discussions about historical narration and other forms of past narrative are attested. Starting from the Aristotelian distinction, many ancient authors have questioned themselves about the truthful statute of historical narration. Aristotle (see *Poetics* 1451 a-b) has observed how the poet describes what is possible to describe according to the laws of verisimilitude; therefore, the difference between an historian and a poet doesn’t lie in the fact that the first writes in prose and the latter in verses; rather, it lies in the content which distinguishes respective works: actual facts for history writings, possible facts for poetic writings.⁴ As Arnaldo Momigliano has argued, the ancient and the modern ways to understand narrations concerning the past are certainly different. But if a deep discontinuity of meaning between history and *historia* undeniably exists (since historiography first emerges in Gibbon’s work and includes the intellectual traditions of history/philosophy *à la Voltaire*),⁵ I want to measure the distance of ancient historiography from the “modern” views of history especially in the light of John L. Austin’s speech acts theory,⁶ and especially as this was reviewed and re-adapted by Michel Foucault in order to clarify the different functions of “telling the truth” in Greek and Roman societies, and therefore in Late-Antiquity.⁷

4. The Aristotelian approach to the problem of “historicity” is often recalled with the intent to resolve the question of the *genre*-related classification of crucial texts in ancient literary reflection, as for instance Virgil’s *opus maximum* or Lucan’s poem about *Bellum civile* (see Servius’ *Commentary on the Aeneid* 1.382 and 7.678, or also Isidorus’ *Origins* 8.7.10).

5. See A. MOMIGLIANO, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950) 285-315, now in ID., *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955; rist. 1979) 67-106. Momigliano’s argument is discussed in a wider perspective in C. GINZBURG, *Rapporti di forza. Storia, retorica, prova* (Milan, 2001) 63-64.

6. See *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edition; Oxford, 1987).

7. Apart from the fundamental lessons held in Berkeley in 1983 recollected in *Discourse and Truth. The Problematicization of Parrhesia*, Edited by J. PEARSON

In his lecture about Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* contained in the lessons which took place on 28 April 1981 in Louvain,⁸ following G. Deleuze and F. Guattari’s analysis,⁹ Foucault interprets narration concerning Oedipus’ life as a history of a power, of a political power; in Foucault’s opinion, there is a certain relationship between power and knowledge, between political power and discourse, a kind of relationship from which our society has not freed itself yet and that the tragedy of Oedipus has contributed to establish. In many cases Foucault uses the term “alethurgy” (or technique of true-telling) to indicate the “manifestations of truth” or the “veridictions” as forms of discourse subjected to a kind of “historical” or “historicized” truth.¹⁰ It seems that Foucault separates – based on M. Detienne’s arguments – the “historicized” veridiction from magical-religious words, which “realize” and “accomplish” and which do not represent the reflection of a previous event, but one of the elements of its realization, and which, once uttered, becomes a power, a force, an action.¹¹ In this way, Foucault emphasizes the functions of representations and language, trying to establish their illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions in the attempt to define the intrinsic political value of their pragmatics in a performative and alethurgic key.

2. THE GOSPEL AS A “VERIDICTION-NARRATION”

In this section I do not want to re-open the debate as regards the Gospel narration in light of the *genre* perspective. As it is well-known, several New Testament scholars have compared Gospel narrations with ancient novels,¹² including Michael Vines, who has also compared the Gospel of

(Berkeley, 1985), see also *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, Edited by F. BRION, B. E. HARCOURT, Translated by S. W. SAWYER (Chicago, 2014); this book, the fruit of the lessons held by Foucault in Louvain in 1981, analyzes the *dispositif* of penitential practices in early Christianity up to the procedures of veridiction of the self in late-antique monasticism. On some coincidences between Momigliano’s methodological reflection on history and Foucault’s distinction between archaeology and genealogy, see R. GOULD, “Antiquarianism as Genealogy: Arnaldo Momigliano’s Method,” *History and Theory* 53 (2014) 212-233.

8. See *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, Edited by F. BRION, B. E. HARCOURT, Translated by S. W. SAWYER (Chicago, 2014) 56-89.

9. See *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Preface by M. FOUCAULT, Translated by R. HURLEY, M. SEEM, H. R. LANE (Reprinted Edition; London-New York, 2000).

10. On the term/concept of “alethurgy,” see M. D. JORDAN, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford, 2015) 133-135.

11. See M. DETIENNE, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (2nd Edition; Paris, 1981) 47 and 101-102.

12. See R. F. HOCK-J. BRADLEY CHANCE-J. PERKINS, eds, *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta, 1998); J. A. BRANT-C. W. HEDRICK-C. SHEA,

Mark specifically with the genre of the Jewish novel.¹³ It is also widely known that the *genre* discussion has often contrasted such a comparison with that to Greco-Roman biographies;¹⁴ in this regard, it should also be noted that there is a great diversity of biographical literature in antiquity, which means that not all Greco-Roman biographies are similar in terms of their style and methodology.¹⁵ For this reason, I do not dispute the comparison of the Gospels to Greco-Roman biographies, also for the fact that there are many novelistic biographies in antiquity – such as the *Alexander Romance* and the *Life of Aesop* – which overlap with the ancient novel, the Greco-Roman *bios* and, *lato sensu*, a particular aspect in ancient historical narration. For the purposes of this essay, I maintain that the Gospels can still be categorized as ancient novelistic writing while still having both “biographical” and “historical” elements.¹⁶ As far as I am concerned, I want to emphasize that for the Gospels, as they was presumably read and/or listen in their definitive form, it is not always possible to identify and rigidly categorize biographical or historicizing words/actions, and therefore what I call historicizing veridiction certainly represents one of the main elements justifying the existence of the evangelical genre itself, as it is authoritatively proven by Luke’s preface (see Luke 1:1-4).¹⁷ Although

eds, *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (Atlanta, 2005); M. P. FUTRE PINHEIRO-J. PERKINS-R. PERVO, eds, *The Ancient Novel and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: Fictional Intersections* (Groningen, 2012).

13. See M. E. VINES, *The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel* (Leiden, 2002).

14. See R. BURRIDGE, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge, 1992); D. FRICKENSCHMIDT, *Evangelium als Biographie: Die vier Evangelien im Rahmen antiker Erzählkunst* (Tübingen, 1997).

15. As T. HÄGG, regarding R. Burridge’s study (which compares the Gospels to a canon of ten ancient biographical texts), has observed: “There is a great diversity within each of the two groups, the four gospels and the ten ancient biographies; and it is this very diversity, we should note, that makes it possible always to find a parallel in one or several of the ten Lives for each feature occurring in one or more of the gospels. What is proven is that the investigated features of the gospels are not unique in ancient biographical literature; but no control group is established to show which features may be regarded as significantly typical of this literature.” T. HÄGG, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2012) 155.

16. The genre of the Gospels has been compared to the novelistic *Life of Aesop* by L. WILLS, *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (London-New York, 1997), as well as by W. SHINER, “Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: The Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark,” in R. F. HOCK-J. BRADLEY CHANCE-J. PERKINS, eds, *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta, 1998) 155-176.

17. I am here overlooking the problem concerning the use by early Christ’s followers of the term *euaggelion* and whether this could be *tout court* associated with the Gospel *genre*. From the evidence in our possession, I could say the answer is negative. As mentioned by H. KOESTER, *Ancient Christian Gospels. Their History and Development* (London, 1990) 4-7 (also see *Id.*, “Written Gospels or Oral Tradi-

with notorious discussions and *distinguo*, the recent research considers this text as the most accomplished instance of conciliation between a classical historiographical account and the faith in Jesus, considering it as a kind of acknowledgement of the historicizing process of Jesus' life events (already recognizable in the gospel *genre* itself since the text considered as its traditional *protos heures*, the Gospel of Mark), in which these events are dramatized and theologized in a discursive *dispositif* focusing, to say it in Aristotle's words, on “what [Jesus] did or what happened to him” (*Poet.* 1451 b 11: Aristotle's phrase alludes to Alcibiades).

As it is obvious in these cases, the research has vastly discussed the question of relationships between the third Gospel and the Greek historiographical tradition and there are not shared conclusions yet.¹⁸ First of all, there is no agreement about the definition of genres as well as about

tion?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, 1994, especially 293-295), the most ancient use of the term can be found in Paul's letters where it is a “technical term [...] for the Christian message and its proclamation,” probably to be included in an ancient context of missionary preaching. Moreover, in some proto-Christian texts, the sentence *en to euaggelio* is often an introduction to Jesus' words which coincide with the synoptic ones (for instance, see *2 Clem.* 8.5; *Did.* 8.2; 15.3, 4), but this does not mean that the term exclusively refers to evangelical “texts.” On the contrary, this term alludes to the dynamism and the immediacy of the oral proclamation of Jesus' message (we could say *hic et nunc*, without considering whether that message was attributable to the “historical” or earthly Jesus): see H. KOESTER, *Ancient Christian Gospels. Their History and Development* (London, 1990) 15, 17-18 and 22-23. One of the most ancient uses of the term *euaggelion* in reference to a written text seems to be Justin's one (see *1 Apol.* 66.3; *Dial.* 10.2 and 100.1), but – apart from the ambiguity which the term brings along at least in two cases out of three (the clearest instance seems to be *1 Apol.* 66.3) – it is interesting to notice that, when explicitly referring to Jesus' life and preaching accounts, Justin himself prefers to use propositional phrases such as *ta apomnemonemata ton apostolon* or, more simply, *ta apomnemonemata* (see *Dial.* 100.4. 5; 101.3.7; 102.5.9; 103.6.4; 104.1.10; 106.1.11; 106.4.6; *1 Apol.* 66.3.2; 67.3.3; 103.8.1; 105.1.9; 105.5.6; 105.6.4; 106.3.3; 107.1.2). The term *ta apomnemonemata* also appears in imperial Greek historiography to indicate the account written as a historicizing veridiction: see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl.* 1.14, Plutarch, *Pomp.* 2. More generally about the issue, see A. YOSHIKO REED, “ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002) 11-46. On the term *euaggelion* as a “book title”, see L. ARCARI, “‘Vangelo’ o ‘parole’? La *subscriptio* del *Vangelo di Tommaso* (NHC II, 51, 27-28) nel quadro dei flussi di trasmissione protocristiani delle parole di Gesù,” *Segno e testo* 15 (2017) 281-312.

18. About Luke's preface, see the bibliography and the discussion in L. ALEXANDER, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel. Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (2nd Edition; Cambridge, 2005). The discussion mainly focuses on the *Acts of the Apostles*, read in line with the third gospel: see G. E. STERLING, *Historiography & Self-Definition. Josephos, Luke-Acts & Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden, 1992). Also see D. L. BALCH, “Acts as Hellenistic Historiography,” in K. H. RICHARDS, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, 1985) 429-432; ID., “Comments on the Genre and a Political Theme of Luke-Acts:

the most suitable terminology to define relationships between the Gospel genre and the historiographical narration in a broader sense. Moreover, another aspect to be taken into consideration concerns the scholars' research of parallel terms or their effort to establish "to what extent" it is possible to separate Luke's apologetic narration from the historicizing *Fachprosa*. Therefore, in my opinion it is difficult to question the fact that the prologue of the third Gospel presents all the typical functional traits of a historicizing (or truth-telling) discourse. It could be stated that at the time during which the third evangelist composed his account, the historicized or historicizing discourse included a remarkable range of formal features to the extent that both Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Diodorus' *Universal History* as well as Lucian's eulogistic stories in his essay on *How to Write History*¹⁹ and Plutarch's as well as Suetonius' biographies were included in this *macro-genre* of narration which covers, as recent studies are emphasizing, many different and varied narrative declinations, in which different contents and styles of narration are combined (often in prose) going beyond what moderns consider as history; also biography has to be included in this narration and the gospels (not only the canonical ones), in various ways and in different cases, seem to fall under the same "alethurgic" function.²⁰

3. THE GOSPEL GENRE IN THE CONTEXT OF PROTO-CHRISTIAN STREAMS OF TRANSMISSION ABOUT JESUS

Generally speaking, I believe that the question presupposed in the title of this paragraph implies that the supremacy towards the veridiction-reconstruction of Jesus's biographical events probably appears in a more or less advanced phase of proto-Christian group dynamics.²¹ However, for a more

A Preliminary Comparison of Two Hellenistic Historians," in D. J. LULL, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, 1989) 343-361.

19. See Lucian, *How to Write History* 9-10.

20. See the works quoted at footnote 14. For a recent close examination of the question, see also A. WINN, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel. An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (Tübingen, 2008) 3-4.

21. About the different modalities of transmission of Jesus's words in the proto-Christian groups, see M. PESCE, *Le parole dimenticate di Gesù* (Milan, 2004) xi-xxxi. See also ID., "I detti extracanonici di Gesù e la loro rilevanza per la ricerca sul Gesù storico," *Ricerche storico-bibliche* 10/2 (2005) 105-132. A comprehensive assessment about the use of Jesus' words in Paul can be found in L. WALT, *Paolo e le parole di Gesù. Frammenti di un insegnamento orale* (Brescia, 2013). About Jesus' "fragments," which often trigger the production of historicizing discourses, see E. NORELLI, "Gesù in frammenti. Testi apocrifi di tipo evangelico conservati in modo frammentario," in A. GUIDA-M. VITELLI, eds, *Un altro Gesù? Il Gesù storico e il cristianesimo delle origini* (Trapani, 2009) 39-88. On the concept of "streams

or less period of time this procedure seems to coexist with other transmitting forms concerning Jesus’s sayings until its pervasive affirmation for a series of historical factors, among which the abatement of a oral memory of transmission, the overlap of transmitting streams in various groups and the necessity to stigmatize competitive authorities who present themselves as such by selecting the “same” memories about/from Jesus. However, in order to prove that historicizing transmitting streams did not monopolize – at least for all the first and the second centuries – memories about/from Jesus, we shall consider that for a rather extended period of time groups of Jesus’ followers, as in Paul’s case or the Nag Hammadi writings, continued to gather streams of transmission which were not verifiable through historicizing alethurgic/veridiction procedures. For this reason, the “truth” carried out by such documents does not have to be validated through its projection in a near past since it has to be taken into consideration *hic et nunc* and it does not derive from direct observation of that Jesus who lived and operated on earth in a particular past.

When reading Paul’s letters as well as John’s *Revelation* (as well as other many proto-Christian texts, like the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Ascension of Isaiah*), we are confronted with mainly functional documents where the transmitting streams from/about Jesus are used effectively, as veritable *speech acts* that do not “convey” the result of a “pre-existent event” but rather “one of the elements of their realization.”²² Certainly, the gospels often confront us, with this kind of *speech acts* but it is undeniable that the process of reconstruction by way of historicizing veridiction represents the main structure which channels and orients the same re-reading of that effective *speech acts*, thanks to the gathering of traditional streams of information coming from different materials and streams of transmission.

At the basis of effective *speech acts* in documents such as John’s *Revelation*, Paul’s letters, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, is it possible to identify the alethurgic re-proposal of memories concerning Jesus’s life events which uses a truthful discourse functionally and effectively in a *hic et nunc* perspective? In many cases, the use of different streams of transmission (also found in the gospels) is demonstrable whereas in other cases this element can be hypothesized but not easily showed. In some other cases, the inference is due to the explicit or implicit use of *argumenta e silentio*. Although it was fully affirmed during a rather advanced phase of the history of proto-Christian groups, the Gospel-line will prevail when a peculiar “Christian” doctrine will be fully developed,

of transmission” among early-Christian groups, see M. PESCE–M. RESCIO, eds, *La trasmissione delle parole di Gesù nei primi tre secoli* (Brescia, 2011).

22. These expressions are taken from M. DETIENNE, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (2nd Edition; Paris, 1981), 48-52.

probably in reaction to the excessive proliferation of narrations concerning Jesus's life events through which his "true" message had to be deduced.

4. HISTORICIZING ALETHURGIES AND MODERN VISIONS OF JESUS

Despite the enormous distance which separates Bultmann or Käsemann's or even Strauss or Reimarus's considerations from proto-Christian texts, I believe it is possible to support the idea that these modern authors' stances continues to bear a resemblance with Luke's or, more generally, with the evangelists idea about the "history" of what Jesus would have actually said/done. E. Käsemann's position on the matter, which according to many scholars represents a fundamental turning point as for the quest concerning the "historical" Jesus, can be considered as an emblematic one. This is not a suitable place to remember the complex debate created by Bultmann's pupil.²³ What is relevant to my argument is to notice how the *impasse* of the modern research about the historical Jesus reveals itself (almost self-evidently) during the open debate in 1953 exactly through Käsemann's conference titled *Das Problem des historischen Jesus*.²⁴ The theological evidence concerning the problem lies in the statement that it is fundamental to pose the question about whether it is demonstrable that the announcement of the glorified Lord promulgated by Jesus's followers is somehow a continuation of the message of the historical Jesus. It is probably an obvious thing to state that every historical research cannot be neutral, in the sense that it cannot be separated from the context in which it is produced; for this reason, I believe that the thread what links ancient and modern historiography about Jesus is much more resistant than many would like to think. Both the complex question concerning the research

23. On the *querelle* between Käsemann and Bultmann, see the seminal work by J. M. ROBINSON, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Naperville, 1959; German Edition: *Kerygma und historischer Jesus* [Zürich, 1960]), and the critical discussion on Robinson's analysis carried out by V. A. HARVEY-S. M. OGDEN, "How 'New' Is the New Quest of the Historical Jesus?," in C. E. BRAATEN-R. A. HARRISVILLE, eds, *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* (Nashville, 1964) 197-242 (German Edition: "Wie neu ist die 'neue Frage nach dem historischen Jesus'?", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 59, 1962, 46-87). See also the more recent works by G. JOSSA, *La verità dei Vangeli. Gesù di Nazaret tra storia e fede* (Rome, 1998) 56-65, G. W. DAWES, *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority* (Louisville, 2001) 298-313 and G. GAETA, *Il Gesù moderno* (Turin, 2009) 50-63.

24. For what concerns the English translation here used, see E. KÄSEMANN, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus (1953)," in *Essays on the New Testament*, Transl. by W. J. MONTAGUE (London, 1964), now in C. E. EVANS, ed., *The Historical Jesus. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. 1. The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions* (London-New York, 2004) 133-158.

of an historical Jesus in Germany during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and the systematization of a German- and Protestant- centered history about the research of an historical Jesus by A. Schweitzer – a linear and selective history meant to consecrate the centrality of German nation²⁵ – do not have to be considered as an exception with respect to the wider and more general ideological use of antiquity carried out in the *Altertumswissenschaft* of nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁶

If the main problem scholars had in the research about the historical Jesus between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries is the same that the authors of the gospels had (although different in forms and contexts), I believe it is legit to ask ourselves: when the “modern” research about the historical Jesus begins? Schweitzer’s work certainly is an attempt to retrace *à rebours* the outcome of his exegetic position and perhaps, also an attempt to consecrate the German supremacy in a specific field of studies. For this reason, if the position of those who stress the fact that the research about the historical Jesus begins with Reimarus is not legitimate (why not with Giordano Bruno, who spoke about Jesus as a magician, or Abraham ben Troki, who acknowledged Jesus in the Jewish background?),²⁷ it is probably not entirely persuasive to reduce the association between the Jesus of the gospels and the historical Jesus, also considering the ambiguity that such association implies (which gospels? Or which parts of the gospels? Which words belong to the historical Jesus and which ones were attributed to him by his followers?).

In one of his recent contributions, based on the research by the Italian philosopher and historian T. Gregory (1929-2019), M. Pesce stresses how one of the elements which determines the distance and the difference between medieval and modern thinking lies in the conception of nature.²⁸

25. See A. SCHWEITZER, *From Reimarus zu Wrede. Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen, 1906). On the “nationalistic” aspects of the German research on the historical Jesus during the nineteenth century, see H. MOXNES, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism. A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus* (London-New York, 2012) 61-120.

26. On the “use” of antiquity in nineteenth century nationalisms, see T. FÖGEN-R. WARREN, eds, *Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the Idea of Nationalism in the 19th Century: Case Studies* (Berlin-Boston, 2016).

27. Cf. M. PESCE, “The Beginning of Historical Research on Jesus in the Modern Age,” in C. JOHNSON HODGE-S. M. OLYAN-D. ULLUCCI-E. WASSERMAN, eds, *“The One Who Sows Bountifully.” Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers* (Providence RI, 2014) 77-88; see also Id., “Per una ricerca storica su Gesù nei secoli XVI-XVIII: prima di H. S. Reimarus,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 28 (2011) 433-464. See also I. ADINOLFI-G. GOISIS, eds, *I volti moderni di Gesù. Arte, filosofia, storia* (Macerata, 2013).

28. Cf. M. PESCE, “L’esame scientifico della natura e la caduta del sacro. L’importanza del cristianesimo per il pensiero filosofico nel libro di Tullio Gregory *Speculum naturale*,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 28 (2011) 416-424; see also Id.,

In Pesce's (as well as in Gregory's) analysis, this new way to observe nature seems to imply a substantial difference between medieval and modern "reality." This implies, almost inevitably, the affirmation of an idea of truth capable of re-formulating this conception also from a theological point of view, offering to theology itself a double-sided interpretation which could both question its premises and, in a way, confirm and enrich them. The achievements of philological and literary humanism do not merely appear as an anti-traditional and anti-theological instrument: the use of textual criticism by those prominent intellectuals of various churches and the importance of the philological methods in the development of both anti-catholic and anti-protestant movements during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are all elements which prove the double-sided nature of the "truth" that "scientific" methods want to achieve. If the "new" factual truth of the "scientific" philological method feeds the renovated historical narration carried out by Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623) since the beginning,²⁹ this truth has also allowed the writing of works such as Cesare Baronio's (1538-1607) ones, where the possibility to achieve a "factual" truth is inserted in a totally opposite ideological system to Sarpi's one.³⁰

5. CONCLUSIONS

Although recent methodological conquests have pointed out the impossibility, in a rigorous historical research, to keep canonical divisions about textual materials,³¹ there are still some difficulties in integrating the historical (i.e. the veridiction and alethurgic vision about the life of Jesus) background of the gospels with that of various documents that, for dif-

"'Illuminismo' inteso come negazione della fede dogmatica, categoria applicabile alla ricerca sul Gesù storico?," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 29 (2012) 171-189. Pesce quotes the following books by T. GREGORY: *La polemica antimetafisica di Gassendi* (Florence, 1959); *Scetticismo ed empirismo. Studio su Gassendi* (Bari, 1961); *Etica e religione nella critica libertina* (Naples, 1979); *Origini della terminologia filosofica moderna. Linee di ricerca* (Florence, 2006); *Speculum naturale. Percorsi del pensiero medievale* (Rome, 2007).

29. On Paolo Sarpi, see the seminal work by B. ULIANICH, ed., *Paolo Sarpi. Lettere ai Gallicani* (Wiesbaden, 1961). See also the book by D. WOOTTON, *Paolo Sarpi. Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (2nd Edition; Cambridge, 2002).

30. On Cesare Baronio, see G. A. GUAZZELLI-R. MICHETTI-F. SCORZA BARCELONA, eds, *Cesare Baronio tra santità e scrittura storica* (Rome, 2012).

31. On this topic, further discussion and bibliography in E. NORELLI, "Considerazioni di metodo sull'uso delle fonti per la ricostruzione della figura storica di Gesù," in E. PRINZIVALLI, ed., *L'enigma Gesù. Fonti e metodi della ricerca storica* (Rome, 2008) 19-67, and M. PESCE, "Lo studio storico della trasmissione delle parole di Gesù," in ID.-M. RESCIO, eds, *La trasmissione delle parole di Gesù nei primi tre secoli* (Brescia, 2011) 9-31.

ferent reasons (mainly for the gaps in our documentation), seem to be un-comparable with them. Such a reticence is also due to the idea of the essential importance of the gospels as for the reconstruction of the “historical” Jesus. Such a modality of reconstruction puts aside the evidence that concentrating on what Jesus *said* and *did* in his (earthly) past life appear only as one of the typical practices of transmission of Jesus’ words in different proto-Christian groups. For instance, let us think about the fascinating background of the visionary Jesus, that is, that Jesus who promulgates revelations, and, therefore, words or facts connected to groups of believers who claimed to have had non-ordinary contacts with him, i.e. a quite different Jesus from the “historical” one.³²

If it is dangerous to make an indiscriminate use of Paul to shed light on that Jesus as he was re-functionalized by the followers behind the synoptic gospels – not accidentally such a methodology has often been charged with the accusation to flatten the internal differences characterizing the various group contexts of believers in Jesus –, it is also problematic to think that the “historical” Jesus emerging from the gospel *genre* can be understood without taking into account streams of transmission which do not provide any historicizing alethurgy of what Jesus said and did during his human existence.



32. On this topic, see the following essays by A. DESTRO-M. PESCE: “Continuità o discontinuità tra Gesù e i gruppi dei suoi seguaci nelle pratiche culturali di contatto con il soprannaturale?” in L. PADOVESE, ed., *Paolo tra Tarso e Antiochia. Archeologia, storia, religione. Atti del IX Simposio Paolino* (Rome, 2006) 21-43; “Continuity or Discontinuity between Jesus and the Groups of his Followers? Practices of Contact with the Supernatural,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 24 (2007) 37-58. See also L. ARCARI, *Visioni del figlio dell’uomo nel Libro delle Parabole e nell’Apocalisse* (Brescia, 2012).