

1. What are the sources for inquiring historically about Jesus?—There are two main kinds of sources: (1) the traditions lying behind and redacted in the synoptic gospels and certain other noncanonical gospels such as the Gospel of Thomas; and (2) one or two references in Latin and Jewish authors that confirm Jesus' having lived and died.

2. Assuming, then, that Jesus' death must be historical if anything is and that he died the death of a condemned criminal on a Roman cross (Tacitus, *Annals* 44, 15), we can establish—by using Josephus also as a source—that Jesus was executed as and because he was the leader of a messianic movement, in more or less the same way in which John the Baptist and any number of others also leading messianic movements were executed.

3. With this much established, we can then undertake to interpret the earliest stratum of the synoptic and other gospel traditions—Q and the Gospel of Thomas (sayings) and Mark (deeds)—so as to make for a coherent picture of Jesus' life given what we know about his death and the reason therefor.

4. The reason, then, that Bultmann's account of Jesus's life is as reasonable an explanation as one can give of the origins of Christianity is that it provides just such a coherent picture without making other assumptions that are difficult, if not impossible, to justify. It asserts nothing that it has good reason to deny and that it does not have good reason not to deny, even as it denies nothing that it has good reason to assert and that it does not have good reason not to assert.

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