

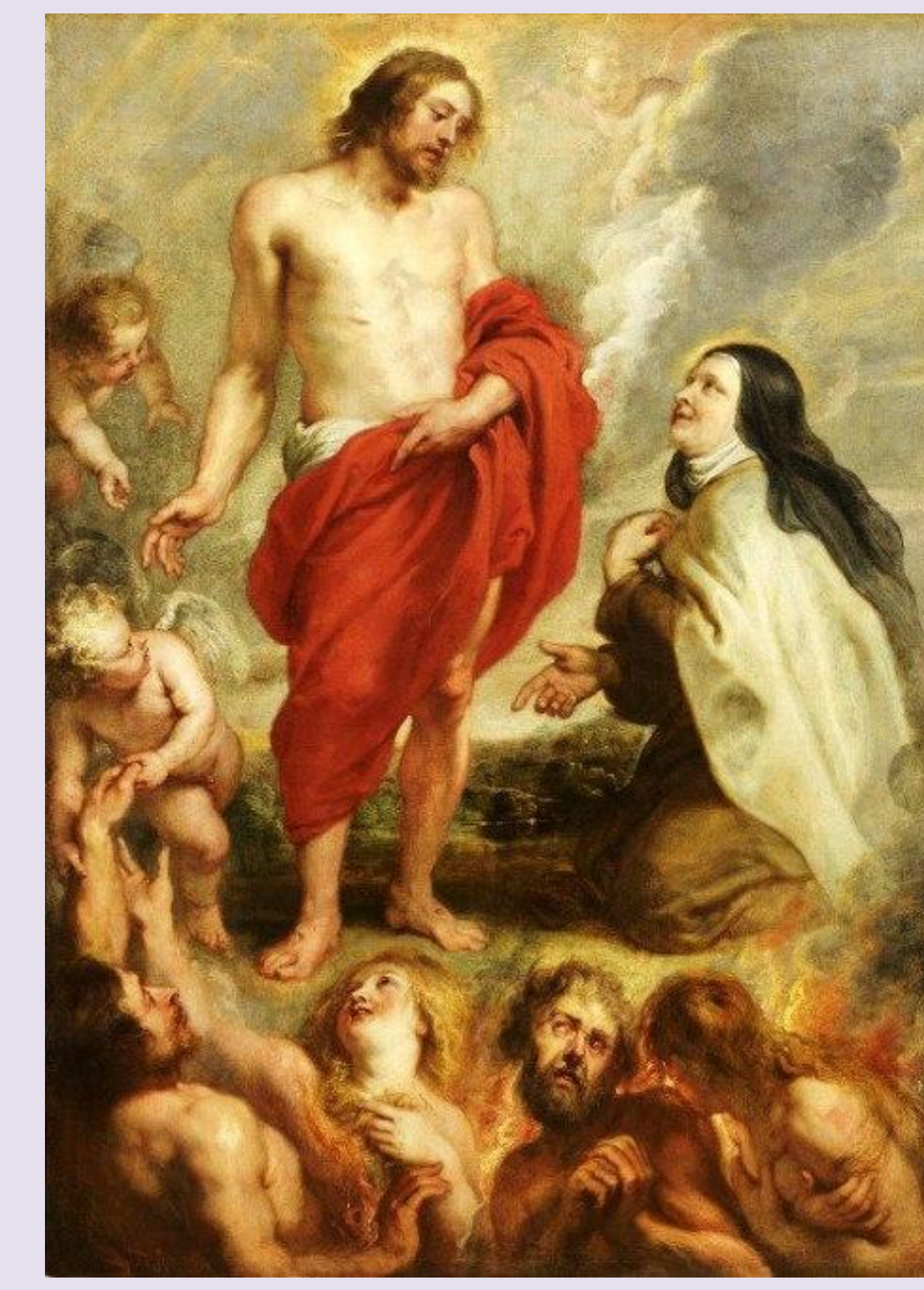
# The changing conceptions of Jesus

Modern trends and outlooks of research into the historical Jesus

Lucy Ellis, Supervised by Professor Pierluigi Piovanelli, Department of Classics and Religion

## 1. Introduction

Research into the historical Jesus has developed into a popular and contentious field over the course of the last two and a half centuries. This research aims to distinguish the “Christ of Faith” from the “Jesus of History.” There have been three separate scholarly quests in this field. The First Quest began in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and was based largely on biblical criticism. The New (Second) Quest introduced new criteria for authenticity and historical analysis. The Third Quest is currently underway. Archeological data in addition to a deeper study of the gospels- both canonical and non-canonical- have led scholars to create a rich depiction of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. While working to expand our understanding of Jesus can help to develop a better perspective on both modern issues and those related to religious doctrine, it is often the case that the political/religiously biased framework in which the research is conducted may affect how the material is interpreted. Thus, it is important to look at the broader scale of research to develop a more complex understanding of the historical Jesus.



## 3. Results

Critics of the Third Quest of historical Jesus research have stated that the resulting portraits of Jesus are disparate and varied. However, there are some common threads. The study and use of non-canonical texts is prominent among Third Quest researches, with a few vocal exceptions such as Maurice Casey. The overwhelming majority also take into consideration the archaeological data to reconstruct plausible daily life. Representation of women was minimal, with only 15% of the sampled texts discussing the role of women in Jesus’ life. The commonalities end there. There is a divide between the conceptions of Jesus as a man concerned with contemporary life as opposed to the afterlife. Approximately two thirds of the texts participate in the viewpoint of Jesus concerned with ethical teachings and the oppressed classes. The other third emphasizes Jesus as a prophet who is more concerned with the Kingdom of God. Intertwined with this viewpoint is Jesus as a Messianic figure who will lead the restoration of Israel. The texts are almost equally divided between looking at Jesus in a Hellenistic context versus a Jewish one.

## 2. Methodology

This project analyzed books on the historical Jesus by specialists of Early Christianity which have been published since 2008 . Ten critical questions were used to evaluate the texts in this study:

1. Does the author take into account the archeological data?
2. Does the author consider Palestine to be highly integrated into the network of the Roman Empire, therefore believing Jesus to be influenced by Greek culture?
3. Are social scientific models used to explore the history and personality of Jesus?
4. Does the author look at more than the synoptic gospels?
5. Is Jesus viewed as a radical social reformer?
6. Is Jesus thought to have special relations with members of the elite?
7. Is Jesus seen to be more concerned with the current world or the afterlife?
8. Is Jesus viewed as an apocalyptic prophet?
9. Is Jesus regarded as a Messianic figure?
10. In the publication, is there special emphasis on women, in particular, Mary of Magdalene?



## 4. Conclusion

Research in this field has moved from a purely theological pursuit to one rooted in history, sociology, archeology and other fields. The introduction and acknowledgement of non-canonical gospels lends credibility to existing theories of Jesus as well as provides different conceptions of him. Jesus is polarized by the different religious and political backgrounds of those who study him. He is an eschatological prophet, a Messianic figure, a social reformer, a teacher, a sacrificial figure and more. The role of women is rarely touched upon, perhaps because of the biases against women at the time of Jesus’ life and ministry, or perhaps because of biases that continue to exist in modern times. Overall, there are few things that experts are willing to agree on about the life of Jesus. This state of diverse portraits and polarization will likely continue as more information and theories are shared and argued over. However, while there may not be a consensus, historical Jesus research is still important for developing a more complete understanding of theological issues, modern religious practices, and aspects of our society that are rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition.

## References and Acknowledgements

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## Contact Information

Email: lelli075@uottawa.ca