

REVIEW ARTICLE: JESUS' RESURRECTION IN JOSEPH'S GARDEN

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ABSTRACT

The article is a lengthy review of the book *Jesus' resurrection in Joseph's garden* by P.J.W. (Flip) Schutte. The book represents a quest to trace the relationship between Jesus' resurrection, myth and canon. Schutte finds the origin of events underlying the biblical canon in proclamation. His focus in the book is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ, which, in its developmental stages, hinged on the life and death of the historical Jesus. Proclamation developed into a mythical narrative that became the foundational myth for the Christ cult, validating its existence and rituals. With the growth and institutionalisation of the faith community (church), came an increased production of literature, causing the power-wielding orthodoxy to identify a body of literature containing the 'truth' and 'correct teaching', thus establishing the authoritative canon. In, through, behind and beyond Jesus of Nazareth, Schutte has perceived a canon behind the canon: a God of love. In Jesus, the man of myth with historical roots who has become to us the observable face of God, Schutte confesses the kerygma to open up before him. The proclamation therefore extends an invitation to join in a mythological experience and an encounter with God whose love is preached in the metaphor called Easter.

INTRODUCTION**The foundational narrative (the *kerygma*) and metanarratives**

Flip Schutte's book, *Jesus' resurrection in Joseph's garden*, is the published version of his PhD dissertation, obtained in 2005 from the University of Pretoria. Dr Andries G. van Aarde, currently honorary professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria, was the supervisor of Schutte's doctoral studies in the Department of New Testament Studies. Apparent at the onset of Schutte's book, is his frustration at the contradictions he finds within the church, as well as his frustration at the many unanswered questions regarding the Bible, the church and the interpretation of the Bible, and its creeds, by the church. To Schutte, the church appears to operate within two discrepant worlds: a modern (or postmodern) one, accessed by those in leadership positions with regard to political and economic matters, and a mythical one, accessed by the majority of church members, where Biblical interpretation is concerned. Schutte verbalises, to an extent, the growing sense of unease experienced by members of 'the church', whether active or passive, regarding issues of canon, creed, dogma, one's relationship with the church as institution, and what membership of the church entails and says about its adherents. Three citations from the book illustrate Schutte's (2008) uneasiness with the institutional church:

This book reflects my own subjectivity. It will focus on the three issues ... that interests [sic] me most, 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 has arisen from the life and death of Jesus as proclamation. The proclamation ... that could lead to a new self-understanding and a total transformation. Maybe that is what I need most!

(Schutte 2008:11)

No method can claim that it is the method. All interpretation is therefore hermeneutical. This taken into account, my methodology in this book is to address my audience. It is autobiographical ... I address myself. I ask my own questions and reveal my own thoughts. I use my theological proficiency and my experience as minister and regular preacher as source. From the scholarly community, I borrow their exegesis and canon critique. I address them by participating in the debate. I look closely at the confessions of the faith community, question these ... and continue to confess with the faith community, but with a post-critical naivety.

(Schutte 2008:21)

Most of my inspiration I got from the institutionalized Church, which adheres to dogmas, the positive interpretation of myth and the combination of a mythical (Sunday) and modern (Monday to Saturday) world view. With the secular sphere and public community, on the other hand, I share the questions and interests in the ongoing debate about the Church, the Bible, dogmas and ethical issues.

(Schutte 2008:22)

It was Funk (1996) who pointed out the inevitable consequences of this unease and discontent:

Christianity as we have known it in the West is anemic and wasting away. Members are exiting the mainline churches but not moving to right-wing versions ... The death of the churches is by no means imminent, yet their demise seems inevitable if their health does not improve.

(Funk 1996:305, 306)

Marcus Borg (1995:4–30) states what has become obvious, namely that we are living in a time of major change. He speaks of paradigm change and conflict among Christians in North America, comprising nothing less than conflict between two comprehensive ways of seeing Christianity as a whole. He summarises the major differences in opinion on certain key issues between what he calls the 'earlier' and the 'emerging' paradigms. The earlier paradigm believes the Bible to be a divine product with divine authority, interpreting it literal-factually and viewing it as the revelation of doctrine, morals and rules for beliefs and actions that constitute a Christian life and are a prerequisite for a happy afterlife. Within the paradigm of 'emerging Christianity' the 'function of the Bible' and the 'emphasis

of Christian life' are respectively seen as follows:

Sacred in its status and function, but not in its origin. Living within the Bible and tradition as a means whereby the Spirit speaks to us ... To be Christian does not mean believing in Christianity, but a relationship with God lived within the Christian metaphor and sacrament of the sacred [= living in the Bible].

(Borg & Scorer 2003:91)

Over and against the paradigm of 'emerging Christianity', a paradigm of an 'earlier Christianity' emphasises 'an afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved.' Such an emphasis of Christian life 'takes faith to believe things that are hard to believe. [T]he [r]eally important question [is]: where will you spend eternity? [It is a] [r]eligion of requirements and rewards. Believe in Christianity now for the sake of salvation later' (Borg & Scorer 2003:91).

Even though it is unfortunate that these divisions and pronounced differences exist – and nowhere as sharply contested than at the very heart of Christianity – Borg (1995:16) wishes to make it clear, through a number of suggestions, that potential ways for bridging the gap exist. Furthermore, he points out that despite the differences, similarities do exist and that these similarities are nothing less than the central convictions of the two paradigms: '[T]he reality of God, the centrality of the Bible, the centrality of Jesus, the importance of a relationship with God as known in Jesus, and our need ... for transformation' (Borg 1995:17).

According to Schutte (2008:9–11), however, the two worlds in which the church seems to operate are irreconcilable and he demands to know how the church can expect the secular community or outsiders to join its ranks if it 'does not have its story straight' (Schutte 2008:22). He then proceeds with much confidence to 'straighten' this story for the church. From his confident postmodern vantage point, Schutte revisits Joseph's garden, to explain to the reader what probably happened when Jesus was purportedly resurrected. He elucidates the sources at hand by a number of means, such as an autobiographical reading of the text and situational discourse.

Schutte proposes a specific *modus operandi* on how to address the malaise within Christianity and, hopefully, prevent the church from haemorrhaging itself to death. Funk (1996) has some suggestions with regard to this, the first of which reads:

If Christianity recovers its roots, it will undergo a transformation. A new version of Christianity will involve a recision of many traditional elements and the creation of new symbols, stories, and a new cult.

(Funk 1996:n.p.)

The second is as follows:

Give Jesus a demotion ... He asked for it, he deserves it, we owe him no less. As divine son of God, coeternal with the Father, pending cosmic judge seated at God's right hand, he is insulated and isolated from his persona as the humble Galilean sage ... A demoted Jesus then becomes available as the real founder of the Jesus movement ... With Jesus as the actual leader, this movement will be subject to continuing reformations born of repeated quests for the historical Jesus.

(Funk 1996:306)

Schutte (2008:22) can, to a certain extent, agree with the credo of the Christian faith that God revealed himself in Jesus. His own confession is that there is something of God in Jesus. The issue before him is therefore not a matter of belief but of how the myth of the belief in the resurrection developed into proclamation and how that proclamation became a text awarded canonical status. He opts for an understanding of the biblical narratives as proclamation, rather than salvation history and seeks the metanarrative beyond the texts as object for study.

Funk (1996:301) poses a question as to whether the origin of Christianity is Jesus – his words, his actions, his essence – and whether he continues to provide the Christian faith with its

essential content. If this is found not to be the case, Christianity needs to be re-anchored and realigned to concur with the imagination and vision of Jesus. Funk answers his own question with a resounding 'No!' Modern-day Christianity does not require, or even permit, Jesus to endorse it.

Creedalism is a religion that supersedes Jesus, replaces him, or perhaps displaces him, with a mythology that depends on nothing Jesus said, or did, with the possible exception of his death.

(Funk 1996:304)

Van Aarde (1995:624) credits Martin Luther for his conviction that both the proclamation and the dogma of the church may be tainted with human ideology, to the extent that they obscure the act of God in the Jesus events. He believes it to be wise to heed the warning of Ernst Käsemann (in Van Aarde 1995:624) that the *kerygmatic* Jesus remains anchored in the historic Jesus. In this he echoes his mentor Rudolf Bultmann (in Van Aarde 1995:624) who saw the presupposition of theology in the historical Jesus.

It is the opinion of Van Aarde (1995:623) that a continuum exists between Jesus and New Testament Christendom (*die Sache Jesu*) and that, although he does not believe the historical Jesus to be the founder of the church, the cradle of the church is to be found in the relation of the life and death of the Jesus of history to the resurrection belief of the post-paschal movement. Therefore, the vision and programme of the historical Jesus may not be neglected when reflecting on the nature of the church in the New Testament or the vocation of the church throughout history up to the present day.

An historical investigation into the life of Jesus and the continuity thereof in the life and proclamation of the movement initiated by his followers, which reached fulfilment in the nativity of the church, yields what Van Aarde calls the 'the cause of Jesus' (*Sache Jesu*). Van Aarde (1995:625) deems this Jesus matter to be so important that, if it were not central to the mission of the church, the church as a social entity would be in danger of dissipation. Yet, within all of this, it is the resurrection belief that is the cradle of the church.

Schutte (2008:96) is convinced that the origin and development of Christianity hinges on the resurrection. Without the belief in the resurrection there would be nothing. He adds, 'At least, so we think' (*ibid.*). The reader might expect him to follow up this exclamation with other possibilities from which Christianity might have originated and developed. Instead, Schutte (2008:136) merely reinterprets resurrection as historical fact, to resurrection as 'mythical communication that serves as the foundational myth for the Christian cult.'

Bultmann (in Schutte 2008:38) distinguishes between the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ of faith and the cult. The meaning has to be guessed at when Schutte (2008) formulates the Bultmann's theory as follows:

...in the foreground of Christ's preaching stands the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the saving act that is known through faith, and becomes effective for the believer through baptism and sharing in the Lord's Supper.

(Schutte 2008:38)

Furthermore, Bultmann (in Schutte 2008:38) states that myth and cult united to form the Gospel. 'The proclamation of Christ is therefore a cultic legend and the Gospels expanded cultic legends.'

The Christian faith, according to Schutte (2008:40), is trust in God whom we come to know in the life of the historical person – Jesus of Nazareth. The historical component cannot be omitted, 'especially when dealing with the historical Jesus' (and one would hope not). History is about a subject involved with the heritage of experience and witnessing of other subjects, whereas faith is about the 'unbreakable relationship between history and theology' (Schutte 2008:40). Faith and history, therefore, cannot but stand in dialectical relationship to each other – a very important premise because not all taking a postmodern stance place a similar emphasis on history.

The quotation of Piet Geysers (in Schutte 2008:40) on the subject is well worth heeding, namely that the historical Jesus cannot be reached by moving around the 'Christologically coloured New Testament', but only by moving through the image of the *kerygmatic* Christ as he is presented to us in the New Testament. A scholar needs to contend with both the historical Jesus and the *kerygmatic* Christ. The Greek word *kerygma* means 'proclamation' and this *proclamation* has a 'metanarrative'. Schutte (2008:23) defines metanarratives as stories people tell about the nature and destiny of humanity.

One such metanarrative that Schutte distinguishes, centres on how form criticism drew attention to the existence and significance of the small self-contained units that constituted the Synoptic Gospels. Schutte (2008:24) calls form criticism a sociological approach to the understanding of a text. The sociological setting, according to Gerhard Iber (in Schutte 2008:24), refers to a societal reality that is so frequently utilised within a particular culture, that it carries special significance for speaker and audience, writers and readers alike, and requires the utilisation of a particular linguistic genre. The formalising of the material is determined not by the personality of the individual evangelist, but rather by the congregation, who creates particular dramas as the sociological foundations of the *kerygmatic* tradition. 'For this reason, form criticism focuses on the community from whose collective life the literature was composed' (Schutte 2008:24).

The Christian missionaries preached an expanded, illustrated and elucidated version of the *kerygma* about Jesus, desiring to present to the church examples and exhortations to illuminate their preaching rather than offering it plain proclamation.

The collection of material began in the primitive Palestinian community that did not create new literary genres, but took over those long developed within Judaism. These small units were arranged within a larger narrative framework – out of which the Gospels eventually grew.

(Schutte 2008:25)

The pre-literary development of the above-mentioned small units and the sociological situations from which they arose captured the attention of three German scholars: Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. Applying form criticism, they analysed the genres of these oral units preserved in literary works to investigate the history of their formation. Basing their research on the work of predecessors, such as Gunkel (in Schutte 2008:25, 26), who was convinced that 'biblical writers' were editors and collectors rather than writers, that the *Sitz im Leben* for which stories were composed is reflected in the oral forms of storytelling and that changes in social situations were reflected in changes in forms of communication, these three form critics each developed their own theory on the progression of the foundational myth into what is currently known as the Gospel narrative. Schutte (2008:28–38) identifies with the conclusions of Dibelius and Bultmann, namely that a sermon – the Easter proclamation – was the starting point of it all. The proclamation evokes renewal in the receiver – a new understanding of self, of God and of the world and humankind. The *kerygmatic* tradition becomes resurrection faith. Schutte (2008:40) quotes Bultmann (1955:241) who says that the proclamation is understandable as proclamation only when the self-understanding it awakens is recognised as a possibility for human self-understanding and thereby becomes the call to make a choice. Schutte (2008) concludes as follows:

Faith and history stand in a dialectical relationship to each other ... History is about one subject dealing with the heritage of other experiencing, witnessing subjects, and faith is about the unbreakable relationship between historicity and theology. Historical research into the life of Jesus of Nazareth is, although difficult, possible, but when it comes to faith, there is only the proclamation!

(Schutte 2008:40)

ISSUES ADDRESSED AND TOOLS WIELDED

Schutte's view on the Bible per se is as follows: although the Word of God is to be found in the Bible, not every word in the Bible can be equated with the Word of God (Schutte 2008:10). Schutte classifies himself as a believer within the Christian tradition and as a theologian with a serious interest in the Bible. He emphasises that 'Bible', for him, includes both Old and New Testament. Only by taking the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as starting point can one begin to speak about Christianity, the New Testament being largely the result of Old Testament theology and, for many, the fulfilment of the messianic promises in the Hebrew Bible (Schutte 2008:11).

What renders the collection of texts ordained by the Christian church canonical and therefore enables them to wield authority? Schutte (2008) poses this question, warning off any glib, facile answers by would-be respondents:

The traditional, ecclesial and confessional answers are not satisfactory any more. I considered them – and I have put them under suspicion. My questions need rethinking. A paradigm shift is required, perhaps only my own.

(Schutte 2008:16)

In discussing the work of Schmidt, Dibelius and Bultmann, Schutte (2008:25–38), supports their conclusion that the stories and sayings in the Gospels reveal more about the early church than about Jesus himself, as the oral Jesus tradition 'had filtered through Christian preaching and worship into a Greek world, not as history, but as functional text to play a role in particular social settings' (Schutte 2008:26). The early Church, distinct from Israel, was a new cult formed around the cultic figure of Jesus through proclamation of his death and resurrection as distinguishing feature. This new cult was in need of a foundational myth and narratives to legitimise its existence, a myth which it established through the Easter proclamation and which, in time, was expanded to form the Gospel narratives.

According to Bultmann (in Schutte 2008:42), a distinction needs to be made between '*Historie*' as the past, remaining the past but reconstructed by scholars, and '*Geschichte*' as the past still affecting the present. Similarly, *Historie* is rejected as the basis for faith because it is in the *kerygma* of the Christ event that God spoke and speaks still. Bultmann believes New Testament theology to be centred on the Christ of the proclamation and not the historical Jesus; moreover, the historical Jesus is irrelevant. Paul, for instance, heard the proclamation of Jesus who came, died and was resurrected and, thereupon, decided to acknowledge Christ and proclaim what he had heard, namely the event that was God's saving act, proving that God's judgment and salvation came to humankind. The proclamation of this Gospel is the only way in which Christ confronts humans – this is the inception of Christian theology. It is the Christ of the *kerygma* and not the historical Jesus who is the Christ of faith and the cult. Jesus' teachings, according to these scholars and Schutte, are part of Judaism and not of Christianity.

Bultmann (in Schutte 2008) points out the discrepancies to be found between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul: Jesus had proclaimed the Kingdom of God as a future event, a potential alternative to life in this world. Paul proclaimed it as a past event – the Christ-event – implying that citizenship to the Kingdom of God was available to those who believed in the cross and resurrection.

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 proclamation deals with the that of the cross rather than the what and the how of the circumstances preceding it.

(Bultmann, in Schutte 2008:37)

The resurrection, according to Bultmann (in Schutte 2008:37, 38), was neither historical nor physical – the disciples did indeed

encounter Jesus 'not as an objective event, but in some other way ... it is a truth obtainable only through faith'. Indeed, faith can never be validated by historical research but can only be a contemporary existential encounter in which an individual, 'confronted by the claim of God in the "proclaimed word", decides to acknowledge Christ' (in Schutte 2008:37). Bultmann believes himself to be in line with the thinking of Paul when believing that the cross and resurrection are the saving events, leading to the all-important proclamation that becomes the saving act of God. The saving act of the resurrection, known through faith, becomes effective for the believer through baptism and partaking in the Lord's Supper. But preaching, over and above proclamation, demands narratives and so myth and cult converged to form the Gospel.

Schutte accepts Bultmann's distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. History is over immediately after the event and all that remains is the memory thereof and the way it impacted on those who experienced it. Schutte (2008:39) is convinced that these, the memory and force of impact, are reflected in the proclamation 'I found my peace in Dibelius and Bultmann's premise: First there was the sermon!' (Schutte 2008:40).

With regard to Jesus, the proclamation of his death and resurrection would be *Geschichte* and the historical Jesus *Historie*. Schutte deems the starting point of New Testament theology to be the proclamation about the resurrection of Christ that led to the formation of the Christ cult. This started a chain of events; for it was to the resurrection that the cult looked to reassure itself that its own status quo was both relevant to, and supported by, the past. This proclamation was institutionalised along with the ritual of the breaking of the bread in the circles in which it was delivered. To facilitate proclamation and preaching, narratives developed around the kernel that Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Thus narratives developed as foundational myths of the cult. This proclamation started drawing adherents who became congregates and, as the church started to grow, these myths gained authority and evolved into a body of material awarded canonical status by the Christian church.

What do we really mean by 'canon'? Should the canon be open, shut or flexible? Critical scholars have not allowed themselves to be fenced in by the limitations of the existing canon in their search for a purer image of Christianity. Schutte (2008:11), however, advocates a no-holds-barred redefinition of canonicity, professing to recognise a canon behind or beyond the biblical canon, as well as a canon behind nature, music, conversation and interaction with other people.

Funk (1996:120) argues that our canonical boundaries have to be flexible, for 'the horizons of biblical scholarship have expanded far beyond the limits of the canonical sources'. The canon should be reconsidered and this should be an ecumenical enterprise. He would have the critical scholar expose the process of fencing in correct doctrine and hierarchic practice by which ecclesiastical power is consolidated. 'The power we seek is the power of information that we can share with a literate readership' (Funk 1996:119). Furthermore, he points out that the canon should have both internal and external limits and should strive to include rather than exclude.

According to Dunn (2003:95) postmodernism, by its very nature, undermines the validity of canons, for if meaning is said to be contingent on every individual act of reading, a new meaning is formed by each reader without any criterion to judge the quality, validity and legitimacy of the particular reading. Pluralism is the norm.

The investigation into the origins of the canon is similar to an investigation into the origins of the church (Van Aarde 1995:638). Canon criticism cannot be separated from critique (in solidarity) on the church. The same criteria have to be applied in both cases. The Jesus of history functions, in terms of the questions on canon, as the canon preceding the canon (Van Aarde 1995:638–639). The Easter events, functioning as 'history condensed' with regard to the life and work of the historical Jesus since his birth, link (in

terms both of church and of canon) the Jesus of faith with the Jesus of history (Van Aarde 1995:640).

In Schutte's opinion (2008:44), the Bible is home to mythological texts about the resurrection of Jesus. The Christian church has canonised the Biblical texts and calls them authoritative. Schutte demands to know whether this means that the whole Bible is canon or whether a canon exists beyond the canon. Is it perhaps necessary to decanonise the present canon to gain access to the true canon? He admits to experiencing hermeneutical problems with the canon, for the question still remains: does the authority emanate from the Bible, that is, the canon, or God?

Schutte (2008) confesses his faith in God but denies that the Bible is the only Word of God. What can be found in the Bible is what the authors believed was the Word of God for them, but not every word in the Bible is a word from God.

I therefore decanonise the Bible when I reflect on it for my own existential well-being. I recognize a canon behind or beyond the biblical canon; it is behind nature, literature, music, conversations, and interaction with other people.

(Schutte 2008:177)

The verdict reached on this topic by Schutte (2008) is as follows:

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 experience given in a specific literary form.

(Schutte 2008:174)

When calling the Bible the Word of God, reference is made not to its origin but to its status and function as Scripture within the faith community. He adds that other faith communities such as Islam and Buddhists view other books, which they believe to contain the Word of God, as their canon (*ibid.*).

Schutte (2008:170) agrees with the views of van Aarde (2001:148, 149), who discovers the true canon in the purpose of Jesus or the cause he pleads, namely God, rather than in the Bible. He similarly aligns himself and with the theory of Ter Borg on this subject. Ter Borg (in Schutte 2008:173) believes canons are never completely closed or completely open, adding that '[t]he social function of a canon is that it governs behaviour and belief'. Schutte (2008:182) concludes that he believes in a canon behind the canon, which, or rather who, is for him the God of love behind, beyond, in and through Jesus of Nazareth, the 'mythological figure with historical roots, who has become the observable face of God' behind the texts, inviting us to live in a relationship of trust in and dependency on God.

One of the most powerful tools wielded by Schutte in his quest is that of myth – a double-edged sword. The term 'myth' is rather emotive, having been laden with negative connotation by some, or alternatively lauded as an invaluable aid by others. Schutte (2008:10) is not averse to the idea of myths per se, quite the contrary, but he does oppose a positivistic interpretation of myths as historical facts and data, resulting in occupants of the modern world clinging to a mythical world. He recommends distinguishing between 'myth' as implying a mythological world view and 'myth' as vehicle for verbalising the otherworldly. Funk (1996) comments in similar vein:

The principal deficiency in biblical scholarship currently is its lack of a myth criticism. We have developed historical criticism to a high art, but we have been unable to conceive a critical relation to the stories that undergird our tradition and limit our vision.

(Funk 1996:309)

Jean Houston (2001) says of myth and archetypes:

Non-mythic, non-storied people are always autistic, for they have lost their capacity for communion as well as communication ... So potent are these archetypal dimensions that in order to have any continuity and comprehension ... they often have to be encoded in myth ... [Myth is] something that never was, but is always happening. It's the coded DNA of the human psyche ... Myth waters our every conscious act and is the very sea of our unconscious life.

(Houston, in Kohanov 2001:322, 323)

Kohanov (2001) adds to this:

Mythic messages evolve over time, dressing themselves up in the customs of different eras, drawing attention to destructive patterns of thought and behavior while offering solutions through symbols of transformation.

(Kohanov 2001:323)

Funk's concise definition (1996:44) is that myths are the stories of the activities of a god. Jung (1995:17) wrote, 'Myth is more individual and expresses life more precisely than does science.' Strauss (1864) defines myth as follows:

The Myth, in its original form, is not the conscious and intentional invention of an individual but a production of the common consciousness of a people or a religious circle, which an individual does indeed first enunciate, but which meets with belief for the very reason that such an individual is but the organ of this universal conviction. ... [I]t is only simultaneously with the narrative, nay, in the very form of the narrative which he tells that he becomes conscious of the idea which he is not yet able to apprehend purely as such.

(Strauss 1864:206)

In discussing the interpretation of the miraculous in Biblical narratives, Dunn (2003:32) makes the point that scholars attempting to salvage the history behind the account were actually destroying the text itself. Instead of asking, like some of his contemporaries, how the *event* could have taken place, Strauss (in Dunn 2003:32, 33) asks, rather, from what did the *narrative* of the miraculous event arise? His answer to this question is summed up in the word *myth* and to quote Dunn (2003:32) it was 'the first time the term enters the quest as a major factor'. In brief, Strauss (in Dunn 2003:33) applies 'myth' as the narrative expression or embodiment of an idea. In the Gospels it expresses the first Christians' idea of Christ. Strauss distinguishes between historical myths – mythical element entwined round historical events – and pure myths with no correspondence in historical fact. Dunn (2003:485) warns that 'myth' is not to be understood as 'unhistorical' but rather as denoting that which is *beyond* history.

It is clear just how contentious yet valuable this concept is, both in encoding and decoding narratives that defy historical description.

Schutte (2008:43) likewise judges the Gospel resurrection narratives to be mythological and legendary in character and so devotes a chapter to the topic of myth. He refers to the statement by Karl Jaspers (in Fergusson 1992:114) that myth and message are inseparable for any religious outlook, as the transcendental dimension of human experience can be verbalised solely through the medium of myth.

'Demythologising', according to Schutte (2008: 43), is an important component when addressing the topic of myth, as it does not imply denuding either the text or the understanding thereof of the mythical element but rather suggests a hermeneutical method for interpreting the text. Demythologisation has both a positive and a negative component; the negative acknowledges that the mythological motifs are not 'literally true' and the positive retrieves the original understanding of existence encoded in the myth and reinterprets it in a way that is currently both relevant and compelling.

Schutte (2008) proposes that 'true' or 'false' are inappropriate qualifications with which to evaluate myth. 'Folklore' would be a more appropriate term to apply.

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 postmodern readers and believers share their religious experience by approaching myth hermeneutically in a non-positivistic manner.

(Schutte 2008:183)

Schutte (2008:182, 183) propounds a choice for *tautegorical* instead of *allegorical* interpretation of myth, as proposed by Cassirer (in Schutte 2008:183). He qualifies this by stating:

The dialectical-hermeneutical approach attempts to 'interpret' the earlier communication of an ancient world view in a non-allegorical, 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.

(Schutte 2008:184)

As a manifestation of the archaic archetypal myths that are a legacy of all of humankind, the Christ myth, a creation of the first-century Mediterranean world where the line separating the natural and supernatural blurred or did not exist in the first place, narrated a rendition of cosmos, history and a founding event that, seen from God's perspective, defined its community of origin as a new, divine creation. It comprises stories told in the language, symbols and metaphors of the people of its origin (Schutte 2008:93).

If one wishes to immerse oneself fully in the wealth of meaning of a metaphor,

[o]ne's personal horizon must fuse with the horizon that the text proposes. This happens in the proclamation. The proclamation is understandable as 'kerygma' only when the self-understanding it awakens is recognized to be a possibility of human self-understanding and thereby becomes the call to decision.

(Schutte 2008:93, 94)

Schutte (2008:94) thinks that the church lost this experience, erroneously historicising the Christ myth that was originally intended as a faith experience. Myth, he says (2008:179), never aspires to be history but is, in essence, an experience of faith. Once again he has managed to underscore the value of myth as a vehicle for communicating the transcendent while discerning it from the use of the term as referring to a mythological world view.

Schutte (2008) repeats his mantra, 'First, there was the proclamation!', then summarises the road of the proclamation until it reaches its final destination as foundational myth of the Christ cult. He subsequently explains how the vehicle of myth has brought him to a version of truth with which he can be at ease:

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

(Schutte 2008:95)

Admittedly the Christ myth, as a martyrology, does have the potential for becoming a story (Schutte 2008:92) because, in its inception, historical reminiscence carried no noticeable significance nor did setting the event within any historical context. The focus is exclusively on the figure of Jesus, the indications of his martyrdom and God's involvement therein, as well as the meaning of all of these for the community. 'There is no way of knowing anything about the historical circumstances of Jesus' death ... the passion narratives are not historical' (Schutte 2008:92).

Currently, according to Schutte (2008:94), increasing numbers of readers, scholars and congregants come to realise that the Gospel cannot be interpreted literally, that the text as a whole has a metaphorical twist. Referring to the opinion of Bultmann (in Schutte 2008: 94) that the hidden referential dimension within the Gospel can only be discovered once the whole Gospel is seen as a metaphor, Schutte (2008:94) consents, 'To me, that was the intention of the gospel from the beginning.' Yet Schutte (2008:94–95) believes that, somewhere in the past, the Church lost the experience of faith required to correctly interpret the myth and mistakenly started historicising the Christ myth. He laments, as elsewhere, 'I am not convinced that the members and leaders of

the institutionalized Church are currently willing to accept it.' (This last may be one of the least contentious statements in the book.)

The expression 'autobiographical biblical criticism' is one of the more eminent concepts in Schutte's work, with regard to 'tools'. In examining the text, Schutte (2008:12) opts for an autobiographical reading that he says requires a conscious, voluntary, acknowledged involvement of the reader with the material at hand, an 'autobiographical performance within the act of criticism' (Schutte 2008:11). In a somewhat opaque sentence (Schutte 2008:12), in which there is confusion as to what the 'it' refers to, he describes this kind of biblical criticism as the acceptance of an invitation, extended to the reader by the text, to become engrossed in an ongoing conversation with the subject matter. He writes that autobiographical biblical criticism provides him with a yardstick for measuring the autobiographical swerve in biblical studies and that while it does not claim absolute truth and pure science, it does afford the one wielding it an opportunity to reveal themselves as a scholar.

It creates space for contextualisation, culture, and experience. Autobiographical criticism seeks not the implied reader as much as the impaled reader: a real, flesh-and-blood person pierced by the tenterhooks of history, culture, and personal experience. This implies, as autobiographical scholars have discovered, that it is sometimes hard to tell where the text ends and where the reader, as exegete, begins.

(Schutte 2008:12)

Iser and Fish (in Dunn 2003:95) have engaged in a debate over reader response. Iser states that the text should be 'heard', should be in dialogue with the reader to prevent reader response becoming a manipulation of the text to suit the agenda of the reader. The text has to be allowed to reveal the 'given' that it was created to 'mediate'. This acts as a constraint on its interpretation. Fish recognises that no reading is an isolated, individual experience but is influenced at least to some extent by the interpretive community to which the individual reader belongs.

Schutte (2008:12) is aware of the pitfalls of autobiographical criticism and he agrees that it does not claim absolute truth or pure science. Instead it affords the autobiographical critic the opportunity of self-revelation. Contrary to the premise of the Cartesian philosophy that upheld the 19th-century scientific method, namely that complete objectivity toward what is observed is required for its description and definition, Schutte points out that no writing takes place within a vacuum. Bearing this in mind, autobiographical criticism calls forth the real reader 'impaled by tenterhooks' (Schutte 2008:12) of history, culture and personal experience. He endorses the views of Bullmann (in Schutte 2008:12) who asks whether exegesis without presupposition is possible and, in his answer, leans toward the opposite of the Cartesian philosophy, namely that interpretation can only commence on the basis of a prior understanding of the subject matter and that any text has to be interpreted in the light of some pre-understanding.

Schutte (2008:12) pre-empts any protests by adding that this is not, and must never be or become, the only way to practice biblical criticism. As one amongst other valid and necessary methods of biblical criticism, Schutte (2008:13) values autobiographical criticism as conducive to 'a more rigorously self-reflective and contextualised biblical criticism'. Moreover, autobiographical criticism does not abolish historical criticism, but applies it even more stringently to reconstruct the historical circumstances not only of the practitioner and the interpretive community to which he or she belongs, but also of other times and places (Schutte 2008:12, 13).

The practitioner of autobiographical biblical criticism should be clear at the onset, whether her or his primary interests lie within the text or without. Schutte, himself, proposes for his study a dialectical interaction between historical project and hermeneutical programme (Schutte 2008:14).

Another 'tool' utilised by Schutte in his work is referred to as 'situational discourse'. The enterprise of autobiographical criticism thus requires of the reader to determine whether his or her interest lies within, without or, in Schutte's (2008:14) own case, beyond or behind it. A finger on the jugular of this book is the question formulated by Schutte (2008) in situational discourse with the text of his interest:

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)?

(Schutte 2008:14)

The answer to this question is sought via a dialectical interaction between historical research and a hermeneutical endeavour. Schutte (2008:14) readily admits that the historical route is hazardous because the sources are not historical in nature but were intended as preaching material. '[E]ven the narratives in the Christian Bible are hermeneutical products – written records bearing witness to interpretations of 'salvation history' and its mythical foundations.' To qualify this, he brings William Wrede, Oscar Cullmann and Joachim Jeremias to the table as conversation partners.

The unfolding history of the early Christian religion and theology with its didactics, aims and hopes held the interest of Wrede (1973:69, 72, 84). His ideal was a purely 'historical' and 'objective' theology overreaching the boundaries of the canon and disregarding the doctrine of inspiration. The mission of the historian should be to collect historical knowledge with no other or ulterior motives and in so doing be of service to the interests of the church and/or systematic theology.

From a central, pivotal point, namely the Christ event, Cullmann (1962:59, 117, 126, 134, 104) argues that a line reaches back into the past, through the Old Testament and the history of the people of Israel to creation, all paving the way by means of preparation for the death and resurrection of Christ. The same line extends into the future where the hope of resurrection exists because of the fait accompli of Jesus' resurrection. Every point on the line, whether receding into past or pointing to the future, is validated and given unique significance in the light of events at its central point. Along this line may be found both occurrences that would withstand the test of historicity and elements such as sagas or myths that defy historical teaching. The events recorded in the beginning and end are merely prophecy, while those in the centre can be established historically. In the primitive Christian understanding, history and myth are interwoven into a unity by shared prophecy and the development in time.

Jeremias (1971:104, 250, 311) proposes that Jesus' *kerygma* and actions were intended to be the eschatological saving event, as he believed himself to be the bringer of salvation. The believer, as a new creation, has been separated from a corrupt generation that is doomed to destruction, in order to participate in the birth of God's new world. This experience of renewal and rebirth marked the beginning of the history of the Church. For Jeremias, the preaching and message of Jesus comprises the largest part of the theology of the New Testament, thus the actions and words of Jesus are worthy of attention.

Schutte (2008:16) points out that, in all three of these instances, the focus is on the message conveyed by the text of the New Testament, rather than the New Testament itself. The focus on some aspect of history outside the New Testament necessitates certain hermeneutical presuppositions:

- The text has great value as a source of even more valuable *knowledge* of something that lies outside the text.
- The text is to be looked *through*, rather than *into*.
- Meaning is found in the relationship between the text and what it refers to, with the emphasis on the latter.
- The language of the text functions primarily in a referential way.

The work of Thomas Kuhn (in Schüssler Fiorenza 1999:38) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:34) provides a platform for the

paradigm shift Schutte deems both necessary and long overdue. Kuhn has devised categories of scientific paradigm, providing a theoretical framework for the comprehension of theoretical and practical shifts in individual interpretations of biblical studies. If Kuhn's theoretical framework (in Schutte 2008:16, 17) stipulates that a paradigm constitutes a community of scholars and expresses their common ethos moulded by its institutions and systems of knowledge and that a shift in this paradigm can only take place when the institutional conditions of knowledge production change, Schutte (2008:17) is convinced that enough of these changes have taken place over the last few years to justify a paradigm shift regarding the issues weighing on his mind. It is necessary for Schutte to move (and he quotes) '... 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).

In order to achieve this, Schutte believes postmodernity to be the answer. By postmodernity he means a stance rather than a method, a reaction to modernity – a movement of resistance and opposition over and against modernism, a posture characterised by three broad, encompassing features: it is anti-foundational, anti-totalising and demystifying. Incubated by critique against modernity, postmodernism is, in essence, anti-foundationalist, denying the validity of any claims of absolute unassailable truths or sacred cows as starting point for the establishment of truth.

The anti-totalising essence of postmodernism is elucidated by Van Aarde (2002):

... 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.

(Van Aarde 2002:431)

The characteristic of demystification is explained in a somewhat pessimistic view of the scheme of things, namely that postmodernism wishes to show that ideals are characteristically grounded in ideology that is linked to economic or political self-interest (Schutte 2008:17).

Postmodernism spares nothing and no one in its 'all-pervasiveness'; its onslaught is ubiquitous and non-discriminatory, its reach multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary. In literary criticism this would mean, for instance, reading the relevant documents against their particular backdrop of context and chronological time frame. This method, according to Schutte, may be called 'deconstruction' (2008:19). Defying definition, deconstruction 'simply happens – and works to show that any interpretation, any sort of communication or even thinking, entails serious risks. Risks which we usually avoid recognizing' (Schutte 2008:19). 'Deconstruction demystifies. It separates history from fiction. [D]econstruction shatters totalities by deconstructing the identity, the shadowy presence, which they claim to represent' (Schutte 2008:21).

A THEORY ON RESURRECTION

Norman Perrin (1977:12) puts forward the suggestion that Matthew and Luke translated the 'primordial myth' of the resurrection narratives in Mark into a 'foundational myth' of Christian origins. He understands 'myth' as 'the narrative expression of the deepest realities of human experience'.

Dunn (2003) writes on 'resurrection' as metaphor:

[T]he power of metaphor is the power 'to redescribe a reality inaccessible to direct description' (Ricoeur), 'reality depicting without pretending to be directly descriptive' (Martin Soskice) ... [T]o say that 'the resurrection of Jesus' is a metaphor is to recognize that the phrase is saying something which could not otherwise be said. In consequence, to translate 'resurrection' into something more 'literal' is ... to abandon it. To interpret the first Easter faith into the affirmation that Jesus' significance or message has long outlasted his life (Marxsen) is ... to empty it. To reduce it to an accident of

language or to the mythical expression of deep human experience is to lose the extra nos preserved by metaphorical reference.

(Dunn 2003:878)

Funk (1996) likewise defines myth and comments on how it was applied to the Easter events. He furthermore draws attention to the volatile relationship between myth and history:

The religion about Jesus ... took as its point of departure the fact of Jesus' noble death, in tandem with the vision of him as risen lord. This composite Jesus became ... Christ, rather than Jesus. This Christ, except for his execution as Jesus of Nazareth, is mythic in character. A myth is a story of the activities of a god.

(Funk 1996:44)

He adds that the Christ of confessions of faith has all but obliterated the Jesus of history and calls the traditional elements of death and resurrection a 'curious paradox', juxtaposing the historical and the mythical.

The aim of Schutte is to reach a postmodern understanding of the proclamation of the resurrection, which entails viewing the resurrection not as a historical event and fact within the mythological framework of the texts, but as a mythological event that occurred in an oral narrative that was later written down (Schutte 2008:43, 44).

According to Schutte (2008), narratives about the resurrection of Jesus intend to communicate a foundational event rather than a historical fact. In the primitive community all else, including the identity of Jesus, the meaning of his ministry, his death, his second coming and his birth, were interpreted in the light of his resurrection.

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.

(Schutte 2008:136)

At the heart of the proclamation of the Christ cult, lies the resurrection myth that called it into being, so to speak, and may be seen as its foundational myth (Schutte 2008:44). In order to understand the Easter myth and experience, once again, its intention to facilitate an experience with God, Schutte (2008:184) recommends a *tautegorical* reading. The basic message of this proclamation, mediated through mythological symbolism, is 'that God, who is love, is still today the God of endings and new beginnings' (Schutte 2008:184). However, the early followers of Jesus, who were responsible for these writings enveloped this core message in first-century Mediterranean cultural images, theological concepts of sacrifice and sin derived from the Old Testament and elements of Greek and Roman myth.

DISCUSSION AND CONCERNS

An autobiographical reading of the text

Geyser (1999:827) refers to the 'impasse created by the modernist demand for objectivity and the postmodern resignation to radical relativism', encapsulating, in the last part of this phrase, what may cause concern in an autobiographical reading of the text. For this 'postmodern resignation to radical relativism' raises quite a few questions, one being whether any text can inform or impart new ideas, another whether self-revelation could become self-indulgence, a third whether history ceases to play any part whatsoever, and yet another whether the text is not completely engulfed by this subjectivistic slant.

Having said this, however, it is axiomatic that no writing or research takes place in a vacuum (Schutte 2008:12). Schutte recommends the advice of Sean Freyne (in Schutte 2008:13) who proposes that, in our search for Jesus, we have to determine at the outset what is at stake for us ideologically, personally or academically, for he is 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'.

Meyer (1979:132) points out that in attempting a satisfactory answer to a new historical question, historicity is but one dimension. The judgment of historicity is not guided by indices as to the historicity of data 'but by the argumentation that organizes and illuminates data by giving satisfactory answers to questions about the understanding of data'.

Similarly, Leif E. Vaage (in Geysler 1999:830) writes that the more honest and precise we strive to be about what makes a discussion on the historical Jesus worthwhile and what we gain from 'our "Jesus"', the more likely we are to attain 'not just scholarly smoke but intellectual fire and human warmth'.

Pure objectivity is, therefore, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – an unattainable ideal. Even the way in which history presents itself to us is through the reverberations felt by whoever experienced it; the actual event has come and gone. Geysler (1999:830) emphasises that historical research does not function in the same way as natural sciences; whereas the latter are 'scientific', implying that the practitioner seeks to discover something 'factual' (Geysler 1999:831), the historical researcher deals with a (re)presentation of the data, striving to create an acceptable scenario. This means that he or she inevitably has to make 'subjective decisions about people and their conduct'. According to Patterson (in Geysler 1999:831), historical Jesus research is not a purely scientific enterprise. What the researcher is dealing with in this instance 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)'.

Geysler (1999:831, 832) refers to the distinctions made by scholars, such as Emanuel Hirsch Jr and Gottfried Frege, between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, as well as the distinction, referred to and endorsed by Schutte (2008:42) and originally made by Bultmann, between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, reaching the conclusion that historiography ought to be seen certainly as a discipline, but even more so as a disciplined art, for it requires tremendous insight to bring the data to a useful synthesis and always requires reconstruction. Geysler (1999:832) favours Dilthey's (in Geysler 1999:832) merging of horizons between the world of the text and that of the interpreter and emphasises that '...without the subjective acumen of historical reconstruction, there would be no Bible/New Testament or historical Jesus'.

As pointed out by Geysler (1999:841), the claim of the Christian faith that God is encountered in the life of a human being by its very nature precludes any possibility of knowing God in an objective way. Faith implies a relationship and this relationship in turn implies an unbreakable bond between historicity and theology.

Borg (1995:942–961), commenting on the Nicene Creed, writes that if one of the disciples had responded to Jesus' question in the Gospel of Mark 'Who do the people say that I am?' with the words of this creed, he could well imagine Jesus exclaiming, 'What???' The quest for the historical Jesus called into question some of the most widely accepted and hallowed of Christian beliefs, seeming to threaten the Christian faith. This was one of the reasons why the widespread assumption of the 19th-century that the historical Jesus mattered significantly (Borg emphasises that 'hostile debunkers, orthodox defenders, and liberal revisionists' alike were in agreement upon this) fell into discredit to be replaced by the dominant claim of the 20th century that the historical Jesus matters marginally, if at all.

From the end of the 19th century and throughout much of the 20th century, the historian's Jesus had little or no significance for Christian theology and faith, the credit for this swing from favour going largely to Martin Kähler (1835–1912) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). Their work continued to impact significantly on scholarship far into the 20th century. Thus Bultmann, as referred to by Schutte, contends that only the 'thatness' of Jesus (existence and crucifixion) and not his 'whatness' (Jesus' historical life) matters. Historical Jesus scholarship had come to be viewed as a

fruitless enterprise, the many obstacles rendering it pointless and furthermore without any theological relevance.

The working hypothesis of the so-called 'second Quest' or 'new Quest' for the historical Jesus that originated in the 1950s accepts the prominence of the proclaimed Christ for faith and history, rejecting simultaneously the sharp amputation of the Jesus of history.

In recent scholarship, there are tentative steps toward affirming a 'both-and' position: though Christian faith is to some extent independent of historical research, it is also true that images of Jesus do very much affect images of the Christian life.

(Borg 1995:942)

According to Perrin (1967:243–244), every Christian has a faith image of Jesus, the result of a mixture of a far-off historical reminiscence, myth, legend and idealism. However, the main contributing influence to this image 'will always be the proclamation of the Church, a proclamation rising out of a Christian experience of the risen Lord' (Perrin 1967:244). Perrin agrees with Kähler and Bultmann that supremacy should be granted the proclaimed Christ yet, in contrast to them, assigns the historical Jesus two important roles, namely to provide content to the faith image without becoming the main source of this content as well as to validate the 'claims of the Christs presented in the competing kerygmata to be Jesus Christ'. He adds, 'To this limited extent our historical knowledge of Jesus validates the Christian kerygma; it does not validate it as kerygma, but it validates it as Christian' (*ibid.*).

John Meier (1991:196–201) likewise agrees that the historical Jesus should not be seen as the object of faith. The Christ of faith 'cannot be an idea or scholarly reconstruction'; he 'now lives, risen and glorified, forever in the Father's presence' and is 'accessible to all believers, including all those who will never study history or theology for even a single day in their lives' (Meier 1991:198). However, contemporary theology ('theology', by Meier's definition, meaning faith seeking understanding) has an obligation to seek the historical Jesus in order to 'help theology give greater concrete depth and color to that content' (Meier 1991:199) while recognising that the quest cannot supply the essential content of faith. It furthermore helps to avoid reducing Christ to an ahistorical myth and precludes docetism as well as 'comfortable Christian domestications of Jesus by disclosing his non-conformist aspects, especially on religious issues' (Borg 1995:951 on Meier).

John Dominic Crossan (1991:424–426) defines Christian faith as '(1) an act of faith (2) in the historical Jesus (3) as the manifestation of God' (1991:200). In a dialectic between 'Jesus then' and 'Christ now', the historical construction of Jesus as our only access to the past is central. Crossan warns against deeming historical reconstruction inferior: 'If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in' (Crossan 1991:426).

Borg (1995:942–961) suggests a correlation between images of Jesus and images of 'Christian life that have theological significance at the very practical immediate level of Christian understanding, devotion, and piety' (Borg 1995:955). We can decide whether to let the significance remain to a great extent unrecognised, unconscious and unchallenged or to be conscious and intentional about the relationship. 'In short, because historical scholarship about Jesus affects our image of Jesus and thus our image of the Christian life, it matters' (Borg 1995:955) judges it incorrect to assume that the historical Jesus involves historical reconstruction while the biblical Christ does not. In the words of Tracy (in Borg 1995:956), Borg adds to the advantages of seeking the historical Jesus that it 'helps to keep "the dangerous and subversive memory of Jesus" alive'. The Christian doctrine of incarnation itself implies the importance of a historically reconstructed image of Jesus that provides a glimpse of Jesus, the epiphany of God (Borg 1995:956).

Like Bultmann and Schutte, Walter Schmithals (in Boshoff 1993:708–727) regards the *kerygmatic* Christ, rather than the historical Jesus, as the foundation for Christian theology.

However, he argues convincingly that the historical Jesus tradition and the *kerygma* did not meet up out of some necessity born within the church. New Testament theology is liberated from the task of finding coherence between *kerygma* and the historical Jesus. The Easter events did not give birth to the Jesus tradition but eliminated it. Thus, the relationship between the historical Jesus and the *kerygmatic* Christ is one of discontinuity and opposition. Furthermore, Schmithals argues that no effort was made by the early church in its Christology to accommodate the historical Jesus tradition within its *kerygma*. On the contrary, a sharp distinction was drawn between Jesus' unmessianic earthly life and his dignity as the risen Son of God. Nor was any enquiry into the phenomenon of the historical Jesus stimulated. Yet amidst the discontinuity, Schmithals (in Boshoff 1993:709–712) also finds continuity; for him the discontinuity between the teachings of Jesus and the Christ *kerygma* does not mean a break with Jesus, for the proclaimed Jesus is the same one who walked within history. Jesus himself is the constant factor. The church confesses that God revealed Himself in a unique way in Jesus – the same Jesus who expected the dawning of the Kingdom of God. The Jesus who led an unmessianic life, is confessed to be the Messiah. The Jesus who said to be the offspring of David, is professed to be the Son of God. Schmithals sees continuity in the fact that the *kerygma* announces the realisation of the expectation proclaimed by Jesus. Jesus expected the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God; the church preached its arrival. The concept of expectation and fulfilment underlies the continuity; the realisation exceeds the expectation but is undeniably linked to it.

Although expressing sympathy with Bultmann's (in Geysler 1999:841) conclusion that the Christ *kata sarka* is irrelevant for theology as well as with his emphasis that some degree of continuity has to be established between the historical Jesus and the *kerygmatic* Christ, Geysler (1999:841) presents his own view that the origin of Christology (theology) lies before the Easter events, which is in contrast to that of Bultmann (and Schutte), who propose that it lies with, and only with, the post-Easter *kerygma*.

Schutte (2008:179) believed for years that his faith depended on the historicity of Christ's physical resurrection, which he confessed unbelievably. His insight into and understanding of the 'Christ myth in its context' has liberated him from the 'burden' of having to 'confess *unbelievingly*' the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and the bodily resurrection of all believers at the end of days. It cannot but seem that, in the bliss of liberation, he has heeded only half of Geysler's admonition (in Schutte 2008:40). He has contended with the *kerygmatic* Christ as presented in the New Testament, but pays lip service to, and then discards, the historical Jesus behind the myth he discovered. Schutte's involvement apparently lies more with his own interest, in contrast to that of the interpretive community to which he belongs, than with the text and the historical circumstances of its times and places, which he professes should balance the scales (Schutte 2008:12, 13). Funk (1996:256) points out that the narrative Gospels included in the New Testament counterbalance the mythical Gospel of Paul and that, although they are also a compromise by combining a historical figure with a mythical redeemer, they prevent the figure of Christ being 'conceived as entirely mythical, without any anchor in history'.

That myth is a valuable tool in conveying and deciphering transcendental messages can hardly be disputed. Neither myth nor metaphor has deserved the notoriety gained by the misuse of these terms. To say, however (Schutte 2008:94), that because the texts of the Gospels do not make sense literally, the whole of the text must, therefore, have a metaphorical twist and, as such, is a myth that must be interpreted, is to over-apply and over-appreciate the value and significance of myth. Statements such as the following, with which Schutte overbalances to the other extreme of that to which he is reacting to, undermine the value of his contribution:

Only when one sees the whole of the gospel as a metaphor, the hidden referential dimension becomes apparent. To me, that was the intention of the gospel from the beginning (Schutte 2008:94)

It is here that Schutte fails to heed his own admonition that faith and history should stand in a dialectical relationship to one another.

Furthermore, if we are going to submerge ourselves in the mythical, why be selective? The birth of the Christ has been of lesser, but certainly significant importance, not only in Christianity but universally. If myths are to be the 'old-new vogue' in interpretive tools, can we afford to turn up our scholarly noses at the virgin birth myth?

Second to the concept 'myth', the term 'canon' is one of the theological issues which received serious attention in Schutte's work. Many scholars will agree that the meaning, function and content of 'canon' need to be considered afresh; as Funk feels the need for myth criticism, so canon criticism is also lacking. Similarly, Schutte will find support when he aligns himself with the views of van Aarde (in Schutte 2008:176) who detects a canon behind the canon in the life, death and teachings of Jesus, which, according to him, mediate God's presence to humankind. It is, however, an entirely different matter when he finds the canon behind nature, literature, music, conversation and interaction with other people (Schutte 2008:11, 177). Clearly some kind of consensus has to be found about the meaning of 'canon'.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' resurrection in Joseph's garden bears witness to the attempts by Schutte to trace the relationship between myth, resurrection and canon. He 'rests his case' as follows: 'To understand the gospel is therefore to ... look beyond the story and let your subconscious revive the myth' (Schutte 2008:178). This, in turn, facilitates an entry into an experience with God because myths are not history, but faith experienced.

A sermon on a Sunday (Schutte 2008:179) is intended to be 'an opportunity for the congregation to meet and experience God through the mediation and facilitation of the liturgist'. The preacher has the task of translating the myths into an idiom to which the audience can relate. 'The service is therefore not about knowing facts or sharing information, but about an experience, through song, prayer, myth, bread, wine and baptism, of God in faith' (*ibid.*). Schutte does not believe that the members and leaders of the institutionalised church are currently willing to accept 'such an insight' (*ibid.*). (I am convinced that he is correct on this score.) He claims to be part of the faith community and acknowledges furthermore that God cannot be met in dogmas, creeds or teachings about Him. Myth alone can reveal the subconscious and help one to experience it. Myth, as he explains (*ibid.*), never aspires to be history.

Schutte's (2008:177) final proposal on the 'interlacedness' of the subjects of 'myth' and 'resurrection' is that a literal resurrection of the dead from the grave was never implied. It is, in fact, a metaphor intending to convey the death of self-absorption and the darkness of selfish individualism, the resurrection into, or passing over to, a life of unselfish love and the light of the universal spirit.

Resurrection is ... about the resuscitation of hope against all odds that there is indeed a God that loves us. This is the God of love Christians claim to have met in the life and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

(Schutte 2008:185)

For Schutte, this is the canon behind the canon. It is through Jesus that the proclamation becomes accessible to him, 'the mythological figure with historical roots, who has become the face of God to us' (Schutte 2008:182). The *kerygmatic* narrative extended an invitation to reader and/or hearer to share the mythological experience of an encounter with God, who is the canon in, and behind, the texts that house this *kerygma*.

'First there was the proclamation' is one of Schutte's mantras. What should there be currently, according to his insight? Should

this proclamation be carried through into our enlightened day and age? If the proclamation is to endure, can sufficient substance be found in an experiential reading of it, that is, the self-revelation in one reader's autobiographical criticism to proclaim to another, who, without a doubt, is impaled by a different set of tenterhooks? Maybe the proclamation is meant to cease after that 'First', to have currently petered out to a service-enhancing experience through song (what to sing?), prayer, myth, the ritual of bread and wine and baptism, of God in faith (Schutte 2008:179). This is 'a sermon on a Sunday', yet there is no indication of the dialectic between faith and history that he earlier deemed so necessary. I suspect that Schutte's departure from history is more complete than he realises or otherwise indicates. On the relationship between faith and history, Schutte (2008:37) states that 'faith is never validated by historical research, but is always a contemporary existential encounter in which the individual, confronted by the claim of God in the proclaimed word, decides to acknowledge Christ'. It is fortunate that he does not hold with dogma and creed for, to apply a turn of phrase favoured by him, I do not think that all those who concern themselves with matters dogmatic will be ready to accept the latter part of this statement, despite the validity of its first part.

The role of the Holy Spirit, a definite facet of Christianity, seems not to feature at all in Schutte's reasoning, except for a passing mention in a rather contentious statement on the book's final page (Schutte 2008:186): 'God is the air that we breathe and the Spirit in whom we live. Everything is in God.' (Do we really need to reopen *that* discussion?)

When beginning Schutte's book, the first impression of the reader is that the author focuses on the resurrection, but this gradually fades into another, namely that he has reached the conclusion that the resurrection is an elegant sufficiency and everything else that later concerns Jesus is simply window-dressing to validate the newly formed cult. All that remains is the Christ myth of the death and resurrection of Christ.

In Schutte's tautological reading of this myth, the 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 proclamation that God is love' (Schutte 2008:184). This God of love expiates sin through the sacrificial blood of Jesus, through whose atoning death God gave new life 'when He resurrected from death both Jesus and those who participate spiritually in his death and resurrection through baptism and live according to the vision of Jesus prior to his crucifixion'. This same proclamation, namely that God is love, but without its first-century Mediterranean cultural imagery, Old Testament ideas of sin and sacrifice and Greek and Roman myth, manages, denuded as it is, to convey through mythical symbolism that this God is still the God of endings and new beginnings. If this last statement is to be thought through, a few questions rear their heads, one of these being how myth can be aborted from these wombs and survive.

This brings us to the heart of the answer that provided the author with peace of mind, an answer with a jarring emphasis on the 'I' as subject. If the vision of Jesus prior to his resurrection is merely the literature later added on by the faith community as it grew and became increasingly institutionalised, all that truly remains is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet the resurrection myth, in essence, is 'about the resuscitation of hope against all odds that there is indeed a God that loves us' (Schutte 2008).

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

(Schutte 2008:185)

Few would contradict Schutte (2008:179) when he points out that a sermon on a Sunday is not intended to be a lesson in history, biblical geography, text criticism, literary analysis or first-

century Mediterranean sociology, but an opportunity 'to meet and experience God through the mediation and facilitation of the liturgist'. Instead, a service should be an experience of God in faith through song, prayer, myth, bread, wine and baptism. A problem arises when Schutte deems it the task of the preacher to facilitate the translation of the myths into an idiom to which the audience can relate. A preacher would have to be nimble indeed to accommodate the different idioms of the audience if an autobiographical understanding of said myths is to be attained, especially in the light of the following statement by Schutte (2008:94), namely that the *kerygma* of the myth appears in a form that is shaped by the way in which each individual understands her or his own existence. Furthermore, would the current hymn book suffice? And how often would one partake of communion and baptism?

Given the paucity of the yield after all the stripping and discarding, one wonders, 'Why bother?' If endings and new beginnings are what it is all about and the service on a Sunday serves to remind you to 'pull yourself towards yourself' and start loving afresh, indeed, if the canon is everywhere, including nature, why not create some new mythical symbolism around the pupa and the butterfly (much simpler – same message), or if one is set on the mythical, the rising of the phoenix? No, but God revealed himself in a unique way in Jesus. How do we know this if all that remains is window-dressing and myth of a death and resurrection that was somehow real for the followers of Jesus, but with not a whiff of history to be detected anywhere?

The path Schutte takes to personal liberation is fraught with hazard. A reader choosing to accompany him could get waylaid by any number of skirmishes along the way. Readers should arm themselves for battles likely to ensue on all the principal routes selected by the author – postmodernism, canon, myth and reader-response criticism – and then on a great many secondary routes.

Postmodernism has its advantages, yet its pitfalls, such as the flight from history that Schutte professes should be shunned, but which he himself does not, are evidently and notoriously difficult to avoid if one adopts its stance consistently.

This publication is clearly the result of years of sincere soul-searching and grappling with creed, dogma and the status quo within Christianity and it offers much more to commend than condemn. Having said this, evaluating it is like running blindfolded over a mine-field, for nearly every statement is combustible.

It is the nature of Christianity, bloody wars and massacres in its name notwithstanding, that contentious or painful topics that cause discomfort, or issues that question the status quo, are avoided if possible in church circles, maybe with good reason, considering said bloody wars. If push comes to shove, however, and these issues have to be addressed, it is done in hushed tones, in words carefully selected to smooth over any awkwardness or potential disagreement, to soothe and defuse, accompanied by gestures of bonhomie. When they are aired openly, verbal skirmishes ensue with much labelling, name-calling and emotional casualties as a result. Therefore, the way of peace and of least resistance is normally to carry this dichotomy inside us and to suffer the subsequent soul wrenching and self-flagellation at our own hypocrisy in silence.

Schutte has not necessarily been tactful or verbally selective in airing his views on, and frustrations with, this thorn in his side: the dichotomy within the church. Moreover, he brings these bones of contention very close to home; this book and author have proven that the season of discontent has dawned in our churches, the last bastions and strongholds against 'secular invasion', among theologians, ministers and churchgoers, contemporaries and colleagues, and that it is, or may now become, 'us' and 'them', looking at each other in suspicion and wondering, with a little animosity, to which paradigm someone belongs – earlier or emerging? Let the labelling commence – or is it already a thriving practice?

Airing his grievances, explaining his views and applying his methods seemingly proved cathartic to Schutte and brought him to a conclusion with which he can live. Anyone accompanying him on the journey through this book cannot but be convinced that Schutte offers a rather positivistic solution to the massive problems he addresses, namely that the only way forward seems to be that everyone who has not yet assumed the postmodern stance 'cross the floor' and do so without delay. The protestations of the author are undoubtedly valid, the proposed route seems inviting and if the author can live with the conclusions reached, I am happy for him. Others attempting to join him on his road to liberation may not, however, reach a similar state of bliss.

Borg (2003:16–21) offers suggestions for the way forward. He talks about 'Bridging the Differences' and 'An Unending Conversation' between the earlier and the emerging paradigms. In the enterprise of Christianity, an ongoing construction of what exactly it means to be a Christian is needed.

Maybe the importance of this publication is that it urges us to take seriously the signs of the times, the season of discontent within the Christian church. Maybe it heralds a time in which the great divide between theologians, on the one hand, and ministers and their flocks, on the other, between defenders of the earlier paradigm and the young and not-so-young 'Turks' of the emerging paradigm, is bridged of necessity, in order to be able to search as, a united front, for valid answers to all these niggling questions – solutions with which we can *all* live. Is this at all possible? Maybe the answer lies not in the solutions but in 'unending conversation'.

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