

Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," R.T. France & David Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives*, Vol. 1, *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980. pp.225-263.

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## ***The “Criteria” for Authenticity***

**Robert H. Stein**

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It is evident from even a cursory reading of the literature that scholarly attitudes toward the historicity of the gospel materials vary drastically. On the one side we have those scholars who possess a positive attitude toward the gospel materials and state 'In the synoptic tradition it is the inauthenticity, and not the authenticity, of the sayings of Jesus that must be demonstrated'.<sup>1</sup> On the other side we have those who possess an equally negative attitude toward the materials

...clearly, we have to ask ourselves the question as to whether this saying should now be attributed to the early Church or to the historical Jesus, *and the nature of the synoptic tradition is such that the burden of proof will be upon the claim to authenticity.*<sup>2</sup>

The latter view clearly presumes that the gospel traditions are "guilty," i.e. historically not true, unless they can be proven "innocent."

### **The Burden of Proof**

The question of the historicity of the gospel materials has been dealt with in a number of ways in the past. One popular method was to evaluate the general historicity of the gospel materials by comparing those historical portions of the gospel materials which have parallels in secular or non-Christian historical records and see whether these records support or tend to deny the historicity of the gospel parallels. By this means perhaps some general attitude might develop toward the accuracy or inaccuracy of the gospel accounts as a whole. Another attempt has been to establish if a gospel writer was an eyewitness to the accounts he records in his Gospel. If he was an eyewitness, then this would lend credence to the historicity of his account. The problems with this approach, however, are two-fold. For one, only two of our

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are associated traditionally with eyewitnesses and it is a much debated question as to whether any of them actually were written, as we now find them, by an eyewitness. Secondly, even if they were written by eyewitnesses, this does not in itself demonstrate that what they wrote are accurate historical accounts of the life of Jesus. It does not of necessity follow that eyewitness accounts of historical events are *a priori* accurate historical accounts! Such accounts are of course, all other things being equal, better historical records than non-eyewitness accounts. We cannot, however, assume that we have proven the historicity of the gospel accounts if we can demonstrate that behind them stands the testimony of an eyewitness. On the other hand it seems logical to assume that, if eyewitness testimony of the gospel materials could be established, then the burden of proof should rest upon those who would deny the historicity of the events reported.

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<sup>1</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. by John Bowden (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 39.

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A final example that shall be mentioned with regard to the attempt to establish a general attitude toward the question of historicity and our Gospels is to evaluate the process by which the tradition was preserved and passed on. In this method, sometimes called Form Criticism and sometimes Tradition Criticism,<sup>3</sup> various arguments are frequently raised in support of the substantive accuracy of the gospel accounts. Some of those mentioned most frequently are:

1. The existence of the eyewitnesses during this period would have had the effect of seeing that those traditions would be faithfully preserved and that non-historical traditions would not be added.<sup>4</sup>
2. The existence of a center of leadership (the Jerusalem Church) would have caused the traditions to be passed down carefully and accurately.<sup>5</sup>
3. The high view found in the New Testament toward the traditions (cf. Romans 6:17—the church does not preserve the traditions but the traditions preserve the church; 1 Corinthians 7:10 and 12—note how Paul carefully distinguishes between what Jesus has said about divorce and what he has not said) indicates that during the oral period the traditions were carefully preserved and safeguarded.

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4. The faithfulness of the early church in transmitting various difficult sayings of Jesus (cf. Mark 9:2; 10:18; 13:32; Matthew 10:5) witnesses to the reliable transmission of the gospel materials.
5. The view that much of the gospel material was simply created by the early church *de novo* to meet its religious needs and solve various religious problems is difficult to accept in the light of the fact that several of the major problems that the early church encountered never show up in the gospel materials. Since the first and most important issue that the early church faced was the question of whether Gentile Christians had to be circumcised, one would expect to find some saying of Jesus that dealt with this issue, if the church were creating material to solve certain problems.
6. We must also not forget that the ability to remember traditions and pass them on faithfully is not limited by our present-day inability to do this or to conceive of this. The introduction of cheap writing materials into the world has had a negative impact in that it has paralyzed our abilities to memorize and to use the mind, rather than notebooks and files, as a data-bank.

Although the above-mentioned attempts to establish the historicity of the Gospels are worthwhile and provide a general attitude toward the Gospel materials, when we seek to discover what the resultant general attitude is, we find no consensus at all. The present writer believes that the arguments listed above are sufficient to establish that the burden of proof

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<sup>3</sup> Technically these terms are not synonymous but in practice they essentially are.

<sup>4</sup> For the contrary view see: D. E. Nineham, "Eye-witness Tradition and the Gospel Tradition," *JTS*, 9 (1958), pp. 13-25, 143-152, and 11 (1960), pp. 253-260.

<sup>5</sup> For this view see: Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings* (A. R. Mowbray, 1957) and Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961).

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ought to be with those scholars who deny the historicity of the gospel materials. To assume the inauthenticity of the gospel materials, unless proven otherwise, appears to be an extreme skepticism unwarranted both in the light of the various arguments listed above and a violation of a common courtesy every witness deserves.<sup>6</sup> A witness should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Of course, if through the investigation of an account one arrives at a "general attitude" toward its historical veracity which is negative, then one cannot help but change the burden of proof, so that the historicity rather than the unhistorical nature of the accounts must be demonstrated. For this writer, however, this has in no way been demonstrated with regard to the gospel materials.

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Besides these general arguments which are primarily helpful in establishing a general attitude toward the gospel material, there exist certain tools which can be used to ascertain the historicity, or at least the historical probability, of a specific saying, teaching, or action of Jesus found in the Gospels. These 'tools' or 'rules of thumb' have been referred to as 'criteria' by which the authenticity (or unauthenticity) of certain material can be established. Before we investigate these criteria, however, we must discuss briefly what is meant by the term 'authentic.'

### The 'Authenticity' of Jesus' Sayings

At first glance it would appear somewhat superfluous to discuss what is meant by an "'authentic' saying of Jesus," but because of the particular way in which this term has been defined by James M. Robinson such a discussion is mandatory. In contrast to the more traditional way of defining 'authentic' as 'being actually and exactly what the thing in question is said to be,'<sup>7</sup> so that an 'authentic saying of Jesus' would mean 'an actual saying of the historical Jesus,' Robinson has defined the term according to his own existential concepts of historiography. Robinson states

One may however observe that material regarded as wholly 'unauthentic' in terms of positivistic historiography may not seem nearly as 'unauthentic' in terms of modern [read-existential] historiography. For a saying which Jesus never spoke may well reflect accurately his historical significance, and in this sense be more 'historical' [or authentic] than many irrelevant things Jesus actually said.<sup>8</sup>

In so redefining the "hopelessly ambiguous term 'authentic'" Robinson, however, has not contributed anything to clarity. To claim that a saying which was created by the early church and was therefore not uttered by the historical Jesus is an 'authentic saying of Jesus' whereas

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<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, "The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus" in *History, Criticism & Faith*, edited by Colin Brown (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), p. 107, states 'Earlier generations of scholars assumed in their simplicity that the tradition is innocent until proven guilty, but now we are assured on every hand that it must be reckoned guilty until proven innocent.'

<sup>7</sup> *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (G. & C. Merriam, 1965).

<sup>8</sup> *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (SCM, 1959), p. 99 n. 3. A good example of this way of thinking is found in Plutarch, *Solon*, 27.1. Here Plutarch accepts "historically" the meeting of Solon and Croesus even though they lived at different times because the meeting is so true to the characters of both men that he will not reject it upon such trivial grounds as the "so-called canons of chronology." I am indebted for this example to C. J. Hemer, "Luke the Historian," *BJRL*, 60 (1977), p. 30.

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an actual saying which the historical Jesus uttered is not an ‘authentic saying’ can only lead to more confusion rather than clarification. We shall therefore define an ‘authentic saying of Jesus’ as an actual saying which was uttered by the historical Jesus before his death. We shall leave out of the question entirely the issue of whether such a saying reveals ‘Jesus’ existential selfhood.<sup>9</sup> All such existential

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considerations will be ignored, for the clearest way to avoid all ambiguity is to reserve the term “authentic” for only those words which the Jesus of history actually spoke.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the terms *ipsissima verba* (the exact/very words of Jesus) or *ipsissima vox* (the very voice of Jesus) are used to distinguish between the degree of exactness which is assumed. The latter expression would be used in a saying when the words of that saying are not necessarily the exact words Jesus, himself, used but nevertheless accurately express his intention and meaning.

It needs to be pointed out that the term “authentic” is not to be construed as synonymous with the term “authoritative.” Evangelicals would, of course, maintain that “authentic” material in the Gospels are “authoritative,” for Jesus’ words were, are, and will remain authoritative (Mark 13:31). Yet, if a saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were inauthentic, its authoritative quality would remain, for the Evangelists not only recalled what the historical Jesus said and did but were taught by the Spirit and empowered by Him to interpret what the historical Jesus said and did (John 14:26; 16:14). Thus in the Gospels the risen Christ also speaks through his Spirit by means of his prophets and apostles. These words are also authoritative even if not authentic. As a result if the inauthenticity of a saying should be demonstrated this should not be taken to mean that this saying lacks authority.

## The Criteria for Authenticity

The criteria discussed below are not new or unique, and some are of more value than others in seeking to establish the authenticity of the gospel materials. The order in which they are presented should furthermore not be interpreted as implying any judgment as to their respective value. They are discussed in this particular order simply because in general they have been suggested in this order.

### **1. The Criterion of Multiple Attestation on the Cross-Section Approach.**

One of the earliest criteria suggested for ascertaining the authenticity of a gospel tradition was the criterion of multiple attestation. The basic idea behind the use of this criterion is that a word is ‘confirmed by the evidence of two

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson, p. 100 n. 3; cf. also pp. 107-111.

<sup>10</sup> So D. G. A. Calvert, “An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus,” *NTS*, 18 (1972), p. 209.

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or three witnesses (Matt. 18:16).’ Essentially this criterion involves the use of literary criticism. Building upon the generally accepted solution of the synoptic problem, this view assumes that behind our Synoptic Gospels lie various sources—Mark, “Q,” “M,” and “L”.<sup>11</sup> To these can be added the Gospel of John. Since each source is essentially an historical witness, if a particular teaching or activity of Jesus is witnessed to in Mark, “Q,” “M,” “L,” and John then the authenticity of this teaching or activity is “confirmed by the evidence of five witnesses.”

One of the earliest scholars who advocated the use of this criterion was F. C. Burkitt. Burkitt stated

It appeared to me that the starting-point we require may be found in those Sayings which have a real double attestation. The main documents out of which the Synoptic Gospels are compiled are (1) the Gospel of Mark, and (2) the lost common origin of the non-Markan portions of Matthew and Luke, i.e. the source called Q. Where Q and Mark appear to report the same saying, we have the nearest approach that we can hope to get to the common tradition of the earliest Christian society about our Lord’s words.<sup>12</sup>

Burkitt then went on to list thirty-one of these ‘doubly attested sayings.’<sup>13</sup> An example of the application of this criterion might be the attempt to establish whether Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was realized in his own ministry. Witnesses that would support the view that the realized eschatology of the Gospels was authentic would be: Mark 2:21-22; “Q” (Luke 11:20); “M” (Matt. 5:17); “L” (Luke 17:20-21); and John 12:31. In general this criterion would appear to be more helpful in determining the authenticity of general motifs in Jesus’ teaching rather than in establishing the authenticity of a particular saying.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “M” and “L” are symbols used to refer to the special material in Matthew and Luke not found anywhere else in the Synoptic Gospels. Whether “M” and “L” were written documents is of no major consequence, because whether written or oral they represent a different and separate tradition than Mark and “Q”.

<sup>12</sup> *The Gospel History and Its Transmission* (T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> Some others who make reference to this criterion are: C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961:), pp. 26-27; T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge University Press, 1935), pp. 10-11; Nils Alstrup Dahl, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” *Kerygma and History*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Roy Harrisville (Abingdon, 1962), pp. 153-154; Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, trans. by John Bowden (Alec. R. Allenson, 1967), p. 115; Harvey K. McArthur, “Basic Issues: A Survey of Recent Gospel Research,” *INTERP*, 18 (1964), pp. 47-48; “The Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research,” *ExpT*, 82 (1971), p. 118; Reginald H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1966), pp. 97-98; William O. Walker, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology,” *Angl. Theol. Rev.*, 51 (1969), pp. 41-42; Calvert, p. 217; R. S. Barbour, *Tradition-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (SPCK, 1972), pp. 3-4; N. L. McEleney, “Authenticating Criteria and Mark 7:1-23,” *CBQ*, 34 (1972), pp. 433-435; John G. Gager, “The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts about Method,” *Journal of Religion*, 54 (1974), p. 260; C. Leslie Mitton, *Jesus: The Fact Behind the Faith* (Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 80-83; Rene Latourelle, “Criteres d’authenticite historique des Evangiles,” *Gregorianum*, 55 (1974), pp. 619-621; Richard N. Longnecker, “Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research: An Evaluation and Proposal,” *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 219-220; Perrin, pp. 45-47; France, pp. 108-110, David R. Catehpole, “Tradition History,” *New Testament Interpretation*, edited by I. Howard Marshall (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 176; K. Grayston, “Jesus: The Historical Question,” *Downside Review*, 95 (1977), pp. 264-265; Grant R. Osborne, “The Evangelical and *Traditions geschichte*,” *JETS*, 21 (1978), pp. 119, 126; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (SCM Press, 1979), p. 87.

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Of all the criteria to be discussed this criterion has the advantage of being ‘the most objective of the proposed criteria.’<sup>15</sup> A number of criticisms, however, have been raised with regard to its use. It is obvious from the start that the usual application of this criterion is based upon a particular solution of the synoptic Problem. Recently this solution, that of Lachmann and Streeter, (Matthew used Mark, “Q,” “M;” Luke used Mark, “Q,” “L”) has been challenged and

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in the minds of some scholars “refuted.”<sup>16</sup> If the “traditional” solution to the Synoptic Problem is not acceptable any longer, this will, of course, bring about a major revision of what sources lie behind the Synoptic Gospels. If the Griesbach hypothesis (Luke used Matthew; Mark used Matthew and Luke) is correct, this would mean that we have essentially only the following sources for the Synoptic Gospel: Matthew<sup>17</sup> and “L” (the material in Luke not found in Matthew), for Mark’s contribution would be minimal since 95% of Mark is found in Matthew or Luke. The criterion of multiple attestation would still be usable but would be of lesser value since we shall have lost entirely one witness—“M” and due to size (the 5% of Mark not obtained from Matthew) for all real purposes have lost another—Mark! On the other hand the question must be raised as to whether the appearance of the same tradition in Matthew-Mark-Luke should be considered as only *one* witness, whether mark (à la Lachmann and Streeter) or Matthew (à la Griesbach and Farmer). Does not the fact that two Gospel writers chose to incorporate the account of another Gospel writer into their works witness to a three-fold testimony to that tradition? Unless we assume that the later Evangelists were totally unfamiliar with the traditions found in Mark (or Matthew), then we must grant additional credence to the testimony of an account found in the triple tradition, for in their acceptance of the traditions in their source they give corroborative testimony to the primitiveness of those traditions.

Another criticism of this criterion is that all that one ultimately can be sure of is that, if a tradition is found in all or most of the various sources laying behind our Gospels, that tradition is deeply embedded in the earliest traditions of the early church. Multiple attestation does not prove *absolutely* that the tradition is authentic! On the other hand the criterion of multiple attestation can, if we are able to establish the existence of various sources lying behind the Gospels, establish the probability that such a motif is authentic. McArthur states in this regard

My own proposal would be that the order of priority should be reversed so that the criterion of multiple attestation is given first place, at least in order or procedure [instead of the criterion of dissimilarity]. Furthermore I would propose that when three or four of the synoptic sources concur in providing evidence for a

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<sup>15</sup> McArthur, “Basic Issues,” p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> The man most responsible for this challenge and the revival of the Griesbach hypothesis (Matthew was first and was used by Luke; Mark used Matthew and Luke) is William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (MacMillan, 1964).

<sup>17</sup> It is, of course, true that behind Matthew there would be sources that could serve as witnesses; but it would be for all practical purpose impossible to ascertain just what these sources were even as it is “impossible,” assuming the Lachmann-Streeter thesis, to ascertain the sources used by Mark.

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given motif in the ministry of Jesus then the burden of proof should be regarded as having shifted to those who deny the historicity of that motif.<sup>18</sup>

McArthur's point would appear to be valid. The multiple attestation of a motif in the Gospels should place the burden of proof upon those who would deny the authenticity of that motif, for the tradition has been "confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses." On the other hand C. F. D. Moule has argued that the negative use of this criterion is illegitimate.<sup>19</sup> There is no reason or need to deny the authenticity of a tradition simply because it is found in only one source. The most that can be and should be said about such a tradition is that it is difficult or impossible to establish the authenticity or inauthenticity of such a tradition on this basis alone. To assume the inauthenticity of such a witness is to assume that anyone who testifies to any event without corroborating evidence is to be assumed a "false witness." Historical research may not be able to assume that the witness of a single source is true, but it has no right to assume that it is false. The wisest course in such an instance is to withhold judgment unless other evidence is available. This, interestingly enough, is what the Old Testament does.<sup>20</sup>

It would appear then that despite various objections, the criterion of multiple attestation is a helpful tool for ascertaining the authenticity of a gospel tradition. It is, of course, not conclusive in and of itself, but its value cannot be denied. Surely the multiple attestation of a tradition places the burden of proof upon those who would argue against the authenticity of such a tradition or motif. Furthermore, if other criteria are found to support the historicity of such a tradition, then the historian *as historian* should assume that such a tradition is indeed authentic.

## **2. The Criterion of Multiple Forms**

Closely related to the criterion of multiple attestation is the criterion of multiple forms. This criterion was first suggested as a tool for authenticity by C. H. Dodd who listed six gospel motifs as authentic because they appeared in multiple forms, i.e. in different form-critical categories.<sup>21</sup> Surprisingly this criterion does not appear to have received

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much attention in the literature.<sup>22</sup> The basic assumption of this criterion is that the various forms of the gospel materials, such as pronouncement stories, miracle stories, stories about Jesus, parables, sayings, etc., centered in different contexts and spheres of interest in the early

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<sup>18</sup> The Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research," p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1967), p. 71. Cf. also Burkitt, pp. 167-168.

<sup>20</sup> See Deut. 19:15.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Ernst William Turner, *History and the Gospel*, (A. R. Mowbray, 1963), pp. 91-102. Some others who discuss the use of this criterion are: McArthur, "Basic Issues," pp. 49-50; Walker, pp. 42-43; James M. Robinson, "The Formal Structure of Jesus' Message," in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, edited by William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (Harper & Brothers, 1962), pp. 96-97; McElenery, pp. 435-436; Calvert, p. 217; Grayston, pp. 264-265; Meyer, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> See, however, Etienne Trocmé, *Jesus as Seen by His Contemporaries*, trans. by R. A. Wilson, (Westminster, 1973) who seeks to arrive at a coherent picture of Jesus from the "Dominical Sayings," "Apophthegms," "Biographical Narratives," "Parables," and "Miracles Stories."

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church and were therefore preserved and passed down through different channels. As a result if a motif is found in multiple literary forms, that motif came from a broad section of the early church and was deeply embedded in the earliest church traditions.

An example of the use of this criterion might be to see if Jesus' teaching that the kingdom of God was realized in his ministry meets the criterion of multiple forms. Thus we shall see how broadly based such a teaching was in the gospel traditions. In this instance it is evident that this motif is found in: pronouncement stories (Mark 2:18-20; Luke 11:14-22); miracle stories (Luke 5:36-39); and sayings (Matt. 5:17; 13: 16-17). It is evident from the above that the various forms of the gospel materials portray Jesus as teaching that the kingdom of God came in his ministry. Does this, however, "prove" that this is an authentic motif of Jesus' teachings? Again we must answer in the negative. The appearance of this motif in multiple literary forms of the materials does not "prove" conclusively its authenticity, but at least 'the criterion has some value in distinguishing comparatively early from comparatively late traditions, but it is not as decisive as that of multiple attestation by a number of sources'.<sup>23</sup> Assuming that the establishment of the early date of a tradition is a positive factor in the establishment of its authenticity, it would appear reasonable to suppose that the appearance of a tradition or motif in multiple forms is supportive, even if not conclusive, evidence for its authenticity. Furthermore if these different oral forms were passed on via different routes of transmission,<sup>24</sup> then a common motif in these various forms assures us not only of the primitiveness of that motif but possesses a "multiple attestation" not unlike that discussed under our previous criterion.

### **3. The Criterion of Aramaic Linguistic Phenomena**

Another tool for authenticity that has been suggested involves the presence of Aramaisms in the gospel materials. Since it seems certain that the mother tongue of Jesus was Aramaic, and in particular a Galilean dialect of Aramaic.<sup>25</sup>

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the presence of Aramaic linguistic characteristics in our Greek gospel materials argues in favor of the primitiveness of those particular traditions and the more primitive a tradition is, the more likely it is that it stems from Jesus. As a result the Aramaic background of a saying '...is of great significance for the question of the reliability of the gospel tradition',<sup>26</sup> and '...the closer the approximation of a passage in the Gospels to the style and idiom of contemporary Aramaic, the greater the presumption of authenticity'.<sup>27</sup> Some of the earliest pioneering work done in this area was done by Gustav Dalman,<sup>28</sup> C. F. Burney,<sup>29</sup> and C. C. Torrey,<sup>30</sup> but the two people who have done the most work in this are Matthew Black<sup>31</sup> and Joachim Jeremias.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>23</sup> McArthur, "Basic Issues," p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Trocmé, p. 110, who states 'As we have seen, all the strata of oral tradition have come to us by way of particular and limited groups.'

<sup>25</sup> See Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus Teachings* (Westminster, 1978), pp. 4-6.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, pp. 77-78.

<sup>28</sup> *Jesus-Jeshua* (MacMillan, 1929).

<sup>29</sup> *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Clarendon press, 1925).

<sup>30</sup> *Our Translated Gospels* (Harper, 1936).

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This criterion has been applied in a number of ways to the gospel materials. Through the work of Burney, Black, Jeremias, and others it is now evident that one form which Jesus frequently used in his teachings was antithetical parallelism. Jeremias lists over 138 examples of this form in the Synoptic Gospels alone,<sup>33</sup> and whereas some of these may be inauthentic, it is impossible to deny that many of these examples of antithetical parallelism come from Jesus, himself. As a result, although no one would argue *a priori* that every example of such parallelism in the Gospels is authentic, there is good reason to believe that the probability of any example of antithetical parallelism being authentic is greater than that of other sayings not found in this form. (This, of course, must be qualified by an "all other things being equal.") 'By the use of this parallelism it may even be possible to arrive at the more primitive form of a saying by retranslating that saying back into a more perfect parallelism. Thus the original form of Mark 8:35 may possibly be obtained by the elimination of those words which disturb the parallelism. Note how much more balanced the antithetical parallelism becomes by omitting the words in parenthesis. 'For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life (FOR MY SAKE AND THE GOSPEL'S) will save it.'

Another way in which this tool is used is to note the presence of certain puns which are only puns in Aramaic but not in Greek. There are some puns which are puns in both Greek and Aramaic such as Matt. 16:18 and John 3:8, and puns based upon different meanings of the same word frequently carry over into other languages. (Compare: Luke 9:59-60; Mark 1:17; 4:9.) An example of a pun which is only a pun in Aramaic is Matt.

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23:23-24.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

In the Greek New Testament this does not appear as a pun, but when retranslated back into Aramaic the pun is evident because the term for gnat is *galma* and for camel is *gamla*. Thus we have this pun: 'You blind guides, straining out a *galma* and swallowing a *gamla*.' The possibility that this saying arose in a Greek environment and by chance is converted into a pun when translated into Aramaic is minimal. It seems quite reasonable to conclude that Matt. 23:23-24 arose in an Aramaic-speaking environment. One of the most intensive attempts to use this linguistic criterion in order to arrive at the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus is Joachim Jeremias' work on the Lord's Supper. Jeremias<sup>34</sup> has sought to argue for the authenticity of

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<sup>31</sup> *An Aramaic Appaoach to the Gospels and Acts* (Clarendon Press, 1946).

<sup>32</sup> *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. by S. H. Hooke (SCM, 1963); *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (MacMillan, 1955); *New Testament Theology*; etc. Some additional references for the discussion of this criterion are: Walker, pp. 43-44; Fuller, p. 97; Perrin, pp. 37-38; McEleney, pp. 438-440; Calvert, p. 216; Barbour, p. 4; Longenecker, pp. 220, 223; France, p. 109; Osborne, p. 125; Gager, pp. 260-261; T. W. Manson, pp. 45-86; E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 190-209; Latourelle, pp. 630-632; Meyer, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>34</sup> *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pp. 118-126.

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the Markan Account of the Lord's Supper on the basis of some twenty Semiticisms, i.e. Aramaisms, which he finds in the Markan account.

A number of criticisms have been raised, however, against this criterion. It has been objected that the presence of such Aramaic linguistic phenomena in a tradition establishes only that the tradition arose in an Aramaic-speaking context, but that context could be the Aramaic-speaking church rather than the historical Jesus, and such Aramaisms may not even be therefore a sign of a saying's antiquity.<sup>35</sup> Another criticism is that the presence of Aramaisms in the gospel materials may be due to Septuagintal influence on the part of the Greek church or the Gospel writers.<sup>36</sup> Whether this influence was conscious or unconscious is beside the point. Still another criticism of this criterion is that the assumption that the gospel materials can be accurately retranslated into Aramaic is itself questionable. It would be overly negative to argue that this cannot be done, but on the other hand it may be that Black and Jeremias are a bit overly optimistic about this.

As a result of these criticisms some scholars have minimized the importance of this criterion or see it as possessing only a negative function,<sup>37</sup> i.e. if a tradition

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contains non-Aramaic features then it (or at least those features) cannot be authentic. Such criticism is unwarranted, however, for at least two reasons. For one this criterion can serve a negative function only if we can assume that Jesus did not speak Greek and there is good reason to believe that he did.<sup>38</sup> As a result we cannot conclude with Fuller that "...any saying of Jesus, if it is authentic, should exhibit Aramaic features...,"<sup>39</sup> in that this precludes that at times Jesus may have taught in Greek. Secondly such minimizing of the value of this criterion is unnecessary. Certainly it must be admitted that the mere presence of Aramaisms does not prove that a tradition is authentic. Even Jeremias acknowledges this.<sup>40</sup> Yet if we can establish due to the presence of Aramaisms (allowing, of course, for the possibility of Septuagintal influence on the formation of the gospel tradition in the Greek-speaking church) that a tradition must go back at least to the Aramaic-speaking church, then we can use this criterion as supportive testimony for the possibility/probability that this tradition may have come from Jesus, himself. Clearly the presence of such Aramaisms increases the probability of such material being authentic, for to have been translated from Aramaic into Greek and to have been used in Mark and/or "Q" argues at the very least for the primitiveness of such traditional material. Although the criterion of Aramaic linguistic phenomena cannot alone establish the authenticity of a saying or tradition, when used in conjunction with other criteria this criterion becomes a valuable tool and provides supportive testimony to the possible authenticity of the saying or tradition.

#### **4. The Criterion of Palestinian Environmental Phenomena**

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<sup>35</sup> So Reginald H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 33-34; Walker, p. 44; Perrin, p. 37; Calvert, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> Longenecker, p. 223; Walker, p. 44; Sanders, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> Gager, pp. 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> See Stein, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *The New Testament in Current Study*, pp. 33-34; author's italics.

<sup>40</sup> *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, trans. by Norman Perrin (Fortress, 1964), p. 18.

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Closely related to the previous tool is the criterion of Palestinian environmental phenomena. According to this criterion if a tradition betrays Palestinian social, domestic, agricultural, religious, etc. customs, this argues that the tradition originated in a Palestinian environment and cannot be a later creation of the Greek, i.e. non-Palestinian church. Again the argument here is that the closer we can trace a tradition to the time and environment of Jesus, the more likely it is that that tradition is authentic.<sup>41</sup> Probably no writer has used this tool more fully than Jeremias in his work *The Parables of Jesus*. Jeremias argues, for instance, that

the pictorial element of the parables is drawn from the  
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daily life of Palestine. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the sower in Mark 4:3-8 sows so clumsily that much of the seed is wasted; one might have expected a description of the regular method of sowing, and that, in fact is what we have here. This is easily understood when we remember that in Palestine sowing precedes ploughing... What appears in the western mind as had farming is simply customary usage under Palestinian conditions.<sup>42</sup>

It has been pointed out, however, that Palestinian environmental phenomena may not be as useful a tool as originally presumed, for not all of the teachings of Jesus or incidents in his life are so narrowly "Palestinian" that they could not have arisen outside of Palestine. Furthermore Jesus, himself, may have said things that betray a Greek environment more than a Palestinian one. An example of this is the following saying of Jesus on divorce. 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (Mark 10:11-12.)' Frequently the authenticity of this saying is denied on the grounds that it betrays a non-Palestinian social and religious environment, for in the saying there is the assumption that wives can divorce their husbands and this was not permissible in Judaism. This assumption has been challenged of late by some of the material associated with the Bar Cochba revolt,<sup>43</sup> but it seems reasonable to assume that a Jewish wife divorcing her husband would certainly have been an extremely rare incident whereas among the Greeks this was not uncommon. Yet there is a realistic *Sitz im Leben* in the ministry of Jesus for just such a saying, since the ruler of Galilee had a wife who had done just that and John the Baptist had been executed at least in part for having denounced this divorce and the subsequent marriage. Downing's statement that 'A Palestinian first-century background is a necessary but not sufficient condition for acceptance as authentic; if it were Palestinian Gentile, the critic should be worried but not dismayed'<sup>44</sup> should be carefully noted. Whether Mark 10:11-12 is authentic or not is not the issue at hand, however. What is important is to note that it is conceivable and quite probable that Jesus could have said things that reflect a non-Palestinian environment, if we assume that

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of this criterion see: Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 11-12 in particular; Dahl, p. 154; Charles Edwin Carlson, "A Positive Criterion of Authenticity?" *Biblical Research*, 7 (1962), p. 34; Walker, p. 44; Calvert, p. 216; F. Gerald Downing, *The Church and Jesus* (Alec R. Allenson, 1968), p. 113; Rene Latourelle, "Authenticity Historique des miracles de Jesus," *Gregorianum*, 54 (1973), p. 238.

<sup>42</sup> *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 11-12. Cf. b. Sabb. 73 b; Jub. 11:23.

<sup>43</sup> See J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1970), p. 382.

<sup>44</sup> Downing, p. 113.

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Palestinian means non-Gentile or non-Greek. Thus this criterion, like any criterion, is limited in its application.

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The main criticism against this criterion is that at best it can only root the tradition in question in Palestinian Christianity. It cannot demonstrate that the tradition goes back even further to the historical Jesus. This is, of course, true, but the presence of such Palestinian environmental phenomena does nevertheless increase the likelihood that a tradition possessing such phenomena stems from Jesus, himself.

### **5. The Criteria of the Tendencies of the Developing Tradition**

Whereas the previous criteria serve a positive function, this proposed criterion serves a primarily negative function. It is a negative tool which has been proposed by the form-critics. According to form-critical theory the passing on of the tradition during the oral period proceeded according to certain "laws" and by understanding these "laws" we can determine what aspects of the tradition are late, i.e. inauthentic. Bultmann states

... the study of the laws which govern literary transmission, can be approached by observing the manner in which the Marcan material was altered by Matthew and Luke; and also how Matthew and Luke worked over what they took from the *Logia*. Here we observe a certain regular procedure which becomes still more evident when we carry the investigation to a later tradition, particularly to the apocryphal gospels, and see how in these the gospel material received further literary development... The ability to make the necessary distinctions can be developed by studying the general laws which govern popular transmission of stories and traditions in other instances, for example, in the case of folk-tales, anecdotes, and folk-songs.<sup>45</sup>

This criterion then serves as a negative scalpel to remove the later accretions and modifications of the early tradition, but in so doing it serves also a positive function by helping in the recovery of the earlier form of the tradition, and the earlier the form the greater the possibility that we have an authentic saying or incident in the life of Jesus.

A possible example of how this criterion may be applied to the gospel materials is the parable of the lost sheep which is found in Matt. 18:12-14 and Luke 15:4-7. It is generally

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agreed that "Matthew" wrote his Gospel to Jewish Christians. On the other hand it is clear that certain parables of Jesus were originally addressed not to believers but to his opponents. In Luke 15:1-2 Luke describes the following parables as having been used apologetically by Jesus to defend himself against those who murmured that he received sinners and ate with them. The parable of the lost sheep, at least according to Luke, is therefore a defense of Jesus'

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<sup>45</sup> "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem," *Journal of Religion*, 6 (1926), p. 345. For additional discussion of this criterion see: Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, *Form Criticism*, trans. by Frederick C. Grant (Harper, 1962), pp. 32-35; McArthur, "Basic Issues," pp. 48-49; Walker, pp. 44-46; Calvert, p. 213; McEleney, pp. 436-437.

behavior in eating with the outcasts of Jewish society. That this is the correct setting of the parable is evident from the fact that this seems to have been a frequent charge leveled against Jesus (see Mark 2:16-17; Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:39; 19:7). Furthermore there would appear to be no real reason why Luke might have changed the audience from the "Church" to Jesus' opponents (if the parable was originally addressed to the "Church" as we find in Matthew) whereas there is good reason why Matthew might have changed the audience from Jesus' opponents to the "Church" (if it was originally addressed to Jesus' Jewish opponents as we find in Luke). It would appear therefore that whereas Luke seems more authentic in his setting of this parable, Matthew seeks to apply its teachings to his own audience which does not consist of opponents of Jesus but rather of his followers! As a result, whereas originally this parable of Jesus was primarily a defense of his actions in associating with publicans and sinners, for Matthew and his readers there is no great need for such a defense of Jesus' behavior, and so the emphasis lies most heavily upon the content of that defense: God's great love for the outcasts of society and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God by God's visiting the rejected of Israel.<sup>46</sup> Matthew applies this great truth to his own *Sitz im Leben* by addressing the parable to the disciples (Matt 18:1), i.e. the leaders of the church, in order that they may exercise loving pastoral leadership to those in the church community that have made themselves outcasts and apostates. Even as Jesus sought the outcasts of Judaism, so the leaders of the church should seek to restore to the kingdom of God its own outcasts.<sup>47</sup> From the above it is evident that if we recognize certain of the "laws" which the tradition experienced during the oral period, such as the changing of the audience in the first and the second/third *Sitz im Leben*, we shall be better able to ascertain what is authentic.

The main criticism of this criterion involves the establishment of these "laws" by which the tradition was

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passed on. It must be pointed out that Bultmann and the form-critics arrived at these "laws" based on a particular view of the relationship of Matthew-Mark-Luke. If this traditional view is untenable, much of their argument and their results will have to be changed, for the "laws" obtained on the premise that Matthew used mark will be quite different from the "laws" obtained on the premise that Mark used Matthew and Luke! Recently E. P. Sanders has raised some very serious questions about the whole matter of the "laws" of the tradition.<sup>48</sup> Although it would be overly pessimistic to conclude that we know nothing about the tendencies present in the passing on of the gospel materials during the oral period, it seems clear that no such "laws" ruled with an iron hand over the traditions. Tendencies during this period indeed existed, but "laws" did not! As a result we need to exercise much more care and reserve in determining what could or could not have taken place and not speak of what must have taken place. Furthermore we must also note that whereas we may ascertain certain general tendencies or rules which were operative and worked on the tradition, this does not tell us what happened in any single specific instance.

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<sup>46</sup> Stein, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> For the present writer this redactional interpretation of Jesus' parable by "Matthew," should be understood in the light of John 14:25-26 which speaks of the Holy Spirit not only bringing the words of Jesus, i.e. the *ipsissima verba*, into remembrance but "teaching" their significance as well. Cf. also John 15:26; 16:14.

<sup>48</sup> Sanders, pp. 272-275.

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The value of this criterion has been criticized of late and rightfully so, but if it can be shown, by a careful application of these tendencies, that certain aspects of the gospel traditions seem to be later additions or modifications, then the burden of proof would be upon those who argue that these additions and modifications are authentic. In stating this it is of course self-evident that we must have a clear understanding of what these tendencies in fact were, and Sanders’ criticisms must be given serious consideration.

## **6. The Criterion of Dissimilarity on Discontinuity**

Of all the criteria suggested for ascertaining the authenticity of the gospel materials, the criterion of dissimilarity (or distinctiveness) has been heralded as the most useful. The exact origin of this criterion is uncertain, but the most important reference to this tool was clearly Ernst Käsemann’s famous address to the “Old Marburgers.” Käsemann suggested that

In only one case do we have more or less safe ground under our feet [in seeking authentic material]; when there are no grounds either for deriving a tradition from Judaism or

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for ascribing it to primitive Christianity....<sup>49</sup>

Earlier Schmiedel had made use of something similar to this criterion for obtaining his seven “Pillar Passages” which could not have arisen out of the early church,<sup>50</sup> and Bultmann had also said,

We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features.<sup>51</sup>

Although this criterion is usually treated as a single tool, it consists essentially of two different parts which could be and have been separated into two different criteria.<sup>52</sup> The first “part” involves whether we can find in the Jewish thought of Jesus’ day elements similar to

<sup>49</sup> “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays On New Testaments Themes*, trans. by W. J. Montague (Alec R. Allenson, 1964), p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Paul W. Schmiedel, “Gospels,” *Encyclopedia Biblica*, edited by T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (Adam and Charles Black, 1914), col. 1881-1883.

<sup>51</sup> *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 205. Some other scholars who discuss this criterion are: Walker, pp. 4647; Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. by Sidney G. Sowers (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 189; Perrin, pp. 39-43; Gager, pp. 256-259; Moule, p. 62; M. D. Hooker, “An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus,” *NTS*, 18 (1972), p. 209 and “On Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology*, 75 (1972), pp. 570-581; Calvert, pp. 215-216; McEleney, pp. 440-442; Barbour, pp. 5-27; Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 96-97; Longenecker, pp. 221-225; Osborne, pp. 118-119; Catchpole, pp. 174-176; Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, trans. by J. Raymond Lord (Fortress, 1973), p. 16; Turner, pp. 73-74; Mitton, pp. 84-85; McArthur, “Basic Issues,” pp. 5051; Heinz Zahrnt, *The Historical Jesus*, trans. by J. S. Bowden (Harper & Row, 1963), p. 107; F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Zondervan, 1970), pp. 47-49; Helmut Koester, “The Historical Jesus: Some Comments and Thoughts on Norman Perrin’s *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*,” in *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage*, edited by Hans Dieter Betz (Claremont: New Testament Colloquium, 1971), pp. 124-136; France, pp. 108, 110; Latourelle, “Criteres d’authenticite,” pp. 622-625; Grayston, p. 264; and David L. Mealand, “The Dissimilarity Test,” *Scot J Theol*, 31 (1978), pp. 41-50; Meyer, pp. 81-87.

<sup>52</sup> See Calvert, pp. 214-215.

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the particular teaching or motif in question. If we cannot, the assumption is then made that the said material could not have arisen out of Judaism and later have been attributed to Jesus. An example of how this works is Jeremias' investigations involving the term "Abba" in the Gospels. Where did this designation for God in prayer arise? Could it have arisen in Judaism and then have been read back upon the lips of the historical Jesus? To this Jeremias gives a vehement "No."

There is something quite new, absolutely new—the word *abba*. With the help of my assistants I have examined the whole later Jewish literature of prayer, and the result was that in no place in this immense literature is this invocation of God to be found... Abba was a homely family word, the tender address of the babe to its father; O dear father—a secular word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. Late Judaism never addressed God as *abba* - Jesus did it always....<sup>53</sup>

The use of "Abba" as a designation for God in the Gospels therefore satisfies, according to Jeremias, the first part of the criterion of dissimilarity. Other expressions frequently suggested as meeting this part of the criterion are: the use of "Amen" as an introductory expression; Jesus' offer of salvation to the outcastes of Israel; Jesus' particular use of parables; and Jesus' use of the title "Son of man."<sup>54</sup>

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The second part of this criterion involves the question of whether we can find in the early Christian church elements similar to the particular teaching or motif in question. If we cannot, the assumption is then made that the material in question could not have arisen out of the early church and then read back upon the lips of the historical Jesus. Meyer has suggested that this part of the criterion alone established the authenticity of any gospel saying. For him "...the requirement of simultaneous discontinuity with Judaism and the post-paschal church errs by excess"<sup>55</sup> in that 'Discontinuity with the post-paschal church is sufficient by itself to establish historicity'.<sup>56</sup> Turner<sup>57</sup> has also sought to modify this criterion somewhat by claiming that total discontinuity with the teachings of the early church is not necessary for even if they overlap somewhat with the gospel materials the criterion is met as long as there exists a marked difference between the church's teaching and the sayings in question. According to this modification there need not be an absolute qualitative difference to satisfy this criterion. Although Turner's suggestion seems reasonable, for the sake of argument we shall deal with those examples which do not even overlap. An example of this would be the use of "Amen" as an introductory expression. Since this is not found in the New Testament outside of our Gospels, this demonstrates its authenticity, for it meets both parts of the criterion of

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<sup>53</sup> "The Lord's Prayer in Modern Research," in *New Testament Issues*, edited by Richard Batey (Harper & Row, 1970), p. 95. See however, Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Fortana, 1976), p. 211.

<sup>54</sup> It is quite possible that outside of Dan. 7:13 we do not possess a single pre-Christian apocalyptic Son of man reference, for 2 Esdras 13 is clearly late first-century and although the book of Enoch is pre-Christian, the Similitudes (chapters 37-71) probably are post-Christian. See J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch* (Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 89-107.

<sup>55</sup> Meyer, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Meyer, p. 86.

<sup>57</sup> *History and the Gospels*, pp. 73-74.

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dissimilarity!<sup>58</sup> Other teachings or motifs that would appear to meet this requirement are: the "Pillar Passages" of Schmiedel; Jesus' use of the parables; and the apocalyptic title "Son of man" which is found only in Acts 7:56 outside of the Gospels.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the great optimism with which this tool was embraced, there has recently been a heavy barrage of criticism leveled at this tool. The most detailed and vigorous criticism has come from Hooker.<sup>60</sup> Some of these criticisms, however, are not so much criticisms of the criterion, itself, but of the misuse of the criterion. It has been objected that the criterion assumes the inauthenticity of a tradition if that tradition does not meet its standard.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, some scholars have argued in this manner and are incorrect in so doing, but the criterion does not demand this conclusion! The criterion used as a *positive tool* does not deserve this criticism. A more serious objection is that this criterion eliminates the great majority of gospel materials, because most of this material does not conflict with both the Judaism

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of Jesus' day and the theology of the early church. This criticism, of course, is true, for there is little material that really qualifies as authentic via this criterion. But again this criticism does not in any way impugn upon the validity of the criterion for the material that meets its standards. It only points out that the criterion is limited, perhaps extremely limited, in its application. For the limited amount of material which qualifies under this criterion, however, the criterion of dissimilarity would appear to be an extremely valuable tool with regard to the question of authenticity.

A more substantial criticism of this criterion is that it presumes that we possess a sufficient knowledge of the Judaism of Jesus' day and the primitive Christian community to determine if a particular gospel tradition could not have arisen out of these environments. Is our understanding of first-century Judaism and the early church, however, complete enough for concluding what could have and what could not have arisen out of Judaism and the primitive church?<sup>62</sup> It is certainly true that our knowledge of both these areas of history is incomplete, so that to a certain extent this lack of knowledge makes our use of this tool an argument based on silence.<sup>63</sup> The discovery of additional data no doubt may modify our present picture of both, but it would certainly be overly pessimistic and negative to assume that we are entirely ignorant of Palestinian Judaism in Jesus' day and of the early church or that future knowledge would change completely our present portrait of them. Certain modifications and refinements can and no doubt will take place, but when and if our understanding changes we shall then

<sup>58</sup> The question of whether "Amen" as an introductory formula is found in pre-Christian Judaism has been greatly debated of late. For a succinct discussion of the more recent debate see Bruce Chilton "'Amen': an Approach through Syriac Gospels," ZNW, 69 (1978), pp. 203-211.

<sup>59</sup> There are, of course, critics who deny the authenticity of certain "Pillar Passages," certain parables, and all the Son of man sayings. There have been and still are critics who deny that Jesus ever lived! To this writer, however, an objective use of the criterion of dissimilarity as suggested on p. 21 below, argues for the authenticity of this material.

<sup>60</sup> "On Using the Wrong Tool," pp. 570-581, but see Mealand, pp. 41-50, for a corrective.

<sup>61</sup> See Fuller, p. 96, France, p. 107, and Gagner, p. 258 who states 'The proper use of the criterion cannot allow the claim that such a story [which does not meet the standards of this criterion] is inauthentic, merely that we can never be confident of, its authenticity under the circumstances.'

<sup>62</sup> See Hooker, p. 575.

<sup>63</sup> Hooker, p. 575.

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simply incorporate this in our use of the criterion. Again the validity of the tool is not in question in this criticism as long as we are cautious and exercise care in the use of the data available for our understanding of first-century Judaism and the early church.

Another cogent criticism of the criterion of dissimilarity is that what is distinct in Jesus' teaching may not necessarily be characteristic of it. Hooker points out that

the English word "distinctive" can have two senses—as usual, the Germans use two words: "distinctive" can mean "unique" (what makes it distinct from other things, the German *verschieden*), or it can mean "characteristic" (the German *bezeichnend*). In which sense is it being used

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here? Clearly the method is able only to give us the former—but what we really want is the latter; and the two are by no means necessarily the same.<sup>64</sup>

Hooker is clearly correct! A movement arising in some way or other from the life and teachings of Jesus which did not have much in common with Jesus' actual teachings would be impossible to conceive. It would be like trying to conceive of late sixteenth-century Lutheranism which was totally or even primarily "distinct" from the teachings of Luther. On the contrary one would expect that what was "characteristic" of Jesus' and Luther's teaching would be "characteristic" of early Christianity and early Lutheranism respectively.<sup>65</sup> Again we must be careful, however, not to assume that a valid criticism of the misuse of this tool is in reality a valid criticism of the tool, itself. The tool does not claim to be able to arrive at what is "characteristic" of Jesus' teaching, even if some scholars have falsely assured that what was distinct was in fact the essence of his teaching. The tool is primarily concerned with ascertaining "a critically assured *minimum*."<sup>66</sup> If we take into consideration the limited aim of this tool, it is possible to question how useful such a tool is since so much of the gospel materials simply do not qualify under this tool, but this in no way negates the value of this tool for ascertaining the authenticity of those gospel materials which meet the standards of this criterion.<sup>67</sup>

In concluding our discussion of this tool, it would appear that despite many of the criticisms raised of late, when used correctly in conjunction with its innate limitations, the criterion of dissimilarity is nevertheless a most valuable tool in the quest for the *ipsissima verba* or *vox* of Jesus. It may in fact be the single most valuable tool for authenticity, for if a saying or action of Jesus in the gospel tradition meets the demands of this criterion, the likelihood of it being authentic is extremely good.<sup>68</sup> It is true that this tool cannot necessarily deliver to us that

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<sup>64</sup> Hooker, p. 574. Cf. also Catchpole, p. 174, and Walker, p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Longenecker, pp. 224-225.

<sup>66</sup> Dahl, p. 156; cf. also Barbour, p. 26.

<sup>67</sup> Thus the criticism that the Jesus of this criterion must by definition be "anti-Jewish" and "anti-Christian" is true only with regard to those scholars who deny the authenticity of any material which does not meet the criterion of dissimilarity. On such a basis the portrait of Jesus must by definition be "anti-Jewish" and "anti-Christian" and ultimately docetic. On the other hand if we accept the fact that this criterion can only produce a solid core of authentic material, the problem this criticism is directed at is greatly diminished.

<sup>68</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. by H. M. Wright (Aldine, 1965), p. 107, states concerning African historical traditions.

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which is characteristic in Jesus’ teachings or even to produce “an adequate historical *core*,”<sup>69</sup> but it does give us a “critically assured minimum” to which other material can be added via other criteria. Care must be taken, however, to apply this tool more objectively than in the past, for McArthur has pointed out that some ‘advocates of the criterion relax its

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its rigors when, on general grounds, they are convinced material is authentic, but that they tighten it on the other occasions.<sup>70</sup> It may be that the most objective way in which we can make use of this tool is to exclude from our sources for the theology of the early church all the gospel materials and seek to arrive at our understanding of what the early church believed only from Acts-Revelation and from any non-canonical materials which may be relevant. In so doing we would avoid the kind of circular reasoning which concludes that certain sayings or motifs in the Gospels are the creation of the early church even though these sayings or motifs appear nowhere outside the Gospels. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the total rejection of the authenticity of any of the Son of man sayings by some scholars on the basis that these Son of man sayings originated in the early church. Yet the proof that the early church possessed a Son of man theology is based upon the very Son of man sayings under discussion. Without denying that the Gospels are a valuable source of information for the history and theology of the early church, it would nevertheless appear that caution would suggest that for the particular saying or motif in question we should exclude the gospel materials from serving as sources for the theology of the early church. Such caution will ultimately bring even greater objectivity to the use of this tool.

## **7. The Criterion of Modification by Jewish Christianity**

This particular criterion is frequently associated with the criterion of dissimilarity. Käsemann has even given the impression that this criterion functions primarily as a third part of the criterion of dissimilarity.

In only one case do we have more or less safe ground under our feet; when there are no grounds either for deriving a tradition from Judaism or for ascribing it to primitive Christianity, *and especially when Jewish Christianity has mitigated or modified the received tradition, as having found it too bold for its taste.*<sup>71</sup>

One example frequently given of how Jewish Christianity allegedly modified the original teachings of Jesus in order to fit better with its own situation is the famous “exception clause” found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. In contrast to the Markan parallel in Mark 10:11-12 which reads, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery

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When features which do not correspond [i.e. are dissimilar] to those commonly attributed to an ideal type nevertheless persist in a tradition, they may usually be regarded as trustworthy.

Cf. also Schmiedel, col. 1872. It should be noted that Vansina combines the criterion of dissimilarity with a form of multiple attestation (“features which... persist in the tradition”).

<sup>69</sup> Barbour, p. 26.

<sup>70</sup> McArthur, “The Burden of Proof,” p. 117; cf. Catchpole, p. 175; Hooker, pp. 576-577.

<sup>71</sup> Käsemann, p. 37; author’s italics. Cf. also McEleney, pp. 442-443, and Perrin, p. 39, who adds to the criterion of dissimilarity the following: ‘and this will particularly be the case where Christian tradition oriented towards Judaism can be shown to have modified the saying away from its original emphasis.’

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against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery’ and the “Q” parallel in Luke 16:18 which reads, ‘Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery,’ Matthew has in both of these sayings the exception ‘except on the ground of unchastity (Matt. 5:32)’ or ‘except for unchastity (Matt. 19:9).’ In light of this two-fold agreement in Mark and as well as the parallel in 1 Cor. 7:10-11 which also lacks an exception clause, it seems reasonable to conclude that the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus lacked this exception.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that as a tool the criterion of modification will serve both a negative and a positive function. The presence of a demonstrated modification will of course serve in a negative way by demonstrating that the modification is not authentic, so that whereas the absence of modification by early Jewish Christianity does not prove the authenticity of a particular saying, the presence of a modification indicates at least that the modification is not authentic. Yet Walker has rightly pointed out that it is not easy to distinguish ‘whether, when, and by whom the traditions in question were modified’,<sup>73</sup> and points out that some early Christians no doubt were more “radical-rigid-bold” in certain respects than Jesus, himself, so that it is conceivable (although in the case of the “exception clause” not very likely) that at times the “harder reading” may not be authentic. Is it not conceivable that certain groups in the early church, like the Judaizers of Galatians 2 and Acts 15, may have taken an even harder, more restricted line on certain issues than Jesus, himself, did? Such criticisms do raise doubts over the applicability of this criterion, but in theory, at least, it is of course true that if we can demonstrate that a particular tradition has been modified by the early church this not only witnesses negatively to the authenticity of the modification but also positively toward the authenticity of the tradition. The fact that the early church modified such a tradition witnesses to the probability that the tradition had such an authority and ancient pedigree that the church or Evangelist could not ignore the tradition but had to deal with it in the only other way possible—by modifying it to suit the present context. The modification of a tradition which the early Jewish church “found too bold for its taste” therefore serves as a positive testimony to the antiquity of the tradition and to its dominical lineage.

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## **8. The Criterion of Divergent Patterns From the Redaction**

This criterion is essentially the second part of the criterion of dissimilarity applied to the third *Sitz im Leben*. Whereas in the criterion of dissimilarity we assume that dissimilarity between the theology of the early Jewish church and the gospel materials demonstrates that the material in question could not have arisen out of the early church and therefore is likely to be authentic, this criterion argues that such dissimilarity between the gospel materials and the

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<sup>72</sup> Although Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series - 28; Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 152-153, acknowledges the exception clause as being Matthean, he does not see this addition as a weakening or lessening of the intensity of Jesus’ words. He suggests the following translation on p. 156. ‘I say to you, whoever dismisses his wife—the permission in Deut. 24.1 notwithstanding—and marries another, commits adultery.’

<sup>73</sup> Walker, p. 49.

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redaction of the Evangelists argues in favor of such material (1) not having originated from the Evangelist and (2) being of such lineage that the Evangelist did not feel free to omit it. As Calvert says

...the inclusion of material which does not especially serve his [the Evangelist's] purpose may very well be taken as a testimony to the authenticity of that material, or at least to the inclusion of it in the tradition of the Church in such a clear and consistent way that the evangelist was loath to omit it.<sup>74</sup>

The inclusion by the Evangelist of material that does not fit his theological scheme serves therefore as a non-intentional witness to the antiquity and authenticity of such material. Calvert lists as an example of this such kinds of material: positive statements about the disciples in Mark and negative statements about them in Matthew. Perhaps a better example of the inclusion of material by an Evangelist which seems to conflict with his main thrust would be the statement in Matt. 11:13 'For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John....' This seems to conflict with Matthew's heavy emphasis on the permanent validity of the law found elsewhere in his Gospel—Matt. 3:15; 5:17-20; 7:12; 12:5—note the Markan parallel here; 23:1-3, 23. This "despite the author" kind of evidence is furthermore the very kind of evidence that historians often find most valuable.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that, in the course of its development, historical research has gradually been led to place more and more confidence in the second category of evidence, in the evidence of witnesses in spite of themselves.<sup>75</sup>

An example of this kind of testimony is found in the Acts of

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Paul and Thecla. Whereas the work is clearly one in which the Apostle Paul is eulogized, we find the following rather negative description of the physical make-up of the Apostle.

And he saw Paul coming, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness....<sup>76</sup>

This "despite the author" negative description of the hero of the work is surely of such a nature that it deserves serious consideration.

It must be pointed out that this criterion does not and cannot demonstrate the authenticity of any of the material which meets the criterion. All this criterion demonstrates is that the Evangelist was "loath" to omit such material and that this material had therefore a firm place

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<sup>74</sup> Calvert, p. 219; cf. also Moule, pp. 62, 67; Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition*, trans. by E. Margaret Rowley and Robert A. Kraft (Fortress, 1970), p. 72; Osborne, p. 123; Andre Bareau, *Recherches sur la Biographie du Bouddha* (Paris: Ecole Francaise, 1963), p. 380, who applies this principle to the "quest for the historical Buddha"; Schmiedel, cols. 18721873; and Longenecker, pp. 225-229.

<sup>75</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. by Joseph R. Strayer (Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 61.

<sup>76</sup> Acts of Paul and Thecla, 3, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. by R. McL. Wilson (Westminster, 1965), II, p. 354.

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in the tradition of the church.<sup>77</sup> The assumption seems legitimate, however, that the more firm the place that a tradition had in the church, the more likely it is that such a tradition was old and well-known, and the older and better known a tradition, the greater the probability that it is authentic. This criterion therefore, while not providing "proof" of authenticity, does provide corroborative testimony to other criteria that such a tradition possesses the "likelihood" of being authentic and may serve as a link in a chain of arguments which seeks to demonstrate the authenticity of the tradition. On the other hand the criterion cannot be used negatively, for if a tradition is in support of the theme of theology of an Evangelist, this does not prove its inauthenticity unless it can be demonstrated that such a theme or theology contradicts the situation of Jesus, and if this is true it would be primarily the concern of The Criterion of Contradiction of Authentic Sayings.<sup>78</sup>

### **9. The Criterion of Environmental Contradiction**

This criterion serves a negative function and argues that if a saying or motif in the gospel materials presupposes a situation in the life of Jesus which was impossible, then the saying or motif must be inauthentic.<sup>79</sup> There would seem to be little debate over this criterion, for if a saying was not possible, by definition it could not have occurred! In effect this criterion is simply a tautology which states 'If a saying

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or motif could not have been taught by Jesus, Jesus could not have taught that saying or motif.' The basic problem with this criterion is that 'It is difficult to assess what would be unthinkable to Jesus, and the decision must often be that of individual judgement.'<sup>80</sup> Calvert gives as an example of this problem Matt. 22:7 which supposedly reflects a post-A.D. 70 situation. Yet he points out Beasley-Murray's argument that such a view depends upon the position one takes concerning the possibility of prophetic prediction. J. A. T. Robinson has furthermore argued, not without weight, that

the wording of Matt. 22.7 represents a fixed description of ancient expeditions of punishment and is such an established *topos* of Near Eastern, Old Testament and rabbinic literature that it is precarious to infer that it must reflect a particular occurrence.<sup>81</sup>

It must nevertheless be acknowledged that the presence of non-Palestinian environmental characteristics do argue against the authenticity of such a saying.<sup>82</sup> The problem is that it is not easy to determine what could not have arisen in the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus. For some the statement found in mark 10:12 is impossible in the first *Sitz im Leben* because Jewish women could not divorce their husbands, but we have already pointed out<sup>83</sup> that John the Baptist was beheaded for condemning just such a divorce, so that it is clearly not impossible for Jesus to have uttered such a statement. This criterion is therefore a valid negative tool for determining

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<sup>77</sup> Hooker, p. 579.

<sup>78</sup> See below pp. 25-26.

<sup>79</sup> Calvert, p. 212.

<sup>80</sup> Calvert, p..212.

<sup>81</sup> *Redating the New Testament* (Westminster, 1976), p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> See above pp. 12-14.

<sup>83</sup> See above p. 13.

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inauthenticity, but possesses a very serious handicap in that it is extremely difficult to determine what Jesus could not have said in the first *Sitz im Leben*.

## **10. The Criterion of Contradiction of Authentic Sayings**

Like the previous criterion this one also serves a negative function 'A saying is unauthentic if it contradicts a recognized authentic saying.'<sup>84</sup> Calvert admits that this criterion is very limited in its application, for there are few instances when one can say with certainty that two sayings are contradictory. Furthermore the very nature of Jesus' teaching which frequently used Overstatement, Paradox and Hyperbole<sup>85</sup> means that we must be extremely careful that such a contradiction is not merely formal but actual, i.e. that the contradiction of the two statements consists in the meaning of the statements. Are, for instance, the

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following two statements contradictory?

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26)

You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die' ... (Mark 7:9-10; cf. also Luke 6:27).

or is the command 'Judge not, that you be not judged (Matt. 7:1)' in contradiction with 'Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine... (Matt. 7:6)' which demands that one "Judge" between "swine" and "non-swine" and "dogs" and "non-dogs."<sup>86</sup> We must exercise extreme care therefore before we conclude that a real contradiction exists between an authentic saying of Jesus and the saying that is being compared with it.

Yet we must raise several other questions. Can we assume *a priori* that Jesus did not make contradictory statements? On what grounds? And can we assume that what we consider contradictory could not have been seen by Jesus as standing in a certain harmonious relationship? Is it possible that the apparent contradiction between Jesus' teachings on reward and grace<sup>87</sup> may be more of a problem for western minds than for the oriental mind of Jesus? Such considerations should cause us to move with great caution before we say that Jesus could not have said "A" because it conflicts (*in our way of thinking*) with "B" which we know is an authentic saying of Jesus. On the other hand this criterion does increase the probability that any saying or motif which seems to contradict an authentic saying or motif in Jesus' teaching is inauthentic.

## **11. The Criterion of Coherence (or Consistency)**

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<sup>84</sup> Calvert, p. 213.

<sup>85</sup> See Stein, pp. 8-12, 19-20.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. also Luke 12:57 in this regard.

<sup>87</sup> See Stein, pp. 105-106.

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This particular criterion has been placed last because it is the last tool that should be applied in the quest for the authentic sayings of Jesus. Its validity is dependent on the presupposition that by wise and judicious use of the previously listed criteria historical research can arrive at

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authentic material, so that this "critically assured minimum" can now function as a template by which other material may be judged to be more or less authentic. According to Perrin 'material from the earliest strata of the tradition may be accepted as authentic if it can be shown to cohere with material established as authentic by means of the criterion of dissimilarity.'<sup>88</sup> A good example of how this criterion has been used is provided by Carlston. Upon having concluded that Jesus' message was one of repentance in the light of the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God, he states concerning the parables 'An 'authentic' parable will fit reasonably well into the eschatologically based demand for repentance that was characteristic of Jesus' message....'<sup>89</sup>

On purely logical grounds it would appear that the criterion of coherence is a valid tool, for if we can ascertain that certain sayings of Jesus are authentic, then other sayings claiming to be uttered by Jesus which are in harmony with the ideas and motifs of the authentic material are more likely to be authentic than those which are not in harmony with such ideas and motifs. Certainly coherence does not prove that the materials being considered are authentic, for the early church could have created material which "cohered" with Jesus' authentic teachings. As a result the criterion of coherence cannot serve as an absolute proof of authenticity. It must also be acknowledged that this criterion will tend to magnify any previous mistakes that might have been made in establishing certain sayings as authentic, for if the template is in error, then any product of the template will contain the same error.<sup>90</sup> Again, however, whereas this latter criticism is a valid one, it is not a criticism of the validity of the criterion but rather a criticism of the incorrect use of the criterion, i.e. using, as our standard material that is not authentic. If we can in fact ascertain authentic material in the Gospels, then this criterion is a valid one. On the other hand we must be quick to acknowledge that the criterion cannot prove absolutely that consistent material is authentic or that non-consistent material is inauthentic. What this tool can do is to provide for the historian a greater likelihood that material which coheres with authentic material is also authentic, and this in turn can become one additional argument in the chain of arguments that must be brought to bear on the material in question.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Perrin, p. 43. Cf. also: Fuller, p. 98; Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 105; Joachim Jeremias, *Unknown Sayings of Jesus*, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller (SPCK, 1964), p. 71; Catchpole, pp. 176-177; Calvert, pp. 217-218; McEleney, pp. 443-444; Longenecker, p. 221-222; Barbour, pp. 9, 26; Gager, pp. 259-260; Grayston, p. 264; Walker, pp. 49-50; Osborne, pp. 119, 121; Schmiedel, col. 1873; Latourelle, "Criteres d'authenticite," pp. 625-627; France, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Carlston, p. 34. Cf. also Rudolf Bultmann's similar use of this approach in *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 4-11, and the approach of James M. Robinson, "The Formal Structure," p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> So Hooker, p. 577; Barbour, p. 26; Osborne, p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, "Prophetic 'I'-Sayings and the Jesus Tradition: The Importance of Testing Prophetic Utterances Within Early Christianity," *NTS*, 24 (1978), pp. 193-196, for an interesting discussion of the importance of the criterion of coherence for testing prophetic 'I' sayings in the early church.

## Conclusion

Having investigated the most commonly suggested criteria of authenticity, we need now to come to some general conclusions as to the value of these criteria. How useful are they for arriving at our hoped for goal of ascertaining authentic sayings of Jesus? it would appear that taken alone no one criterion can "prove" that a saying in the Gospels is authentic, although one, the criterion of dissimilarity, is sufficiently functional so as to place a heavy burden of proof upon anyone denying the authenticity of any saying which meets its standards. Only the strongest kinds of negative evidence can hope to disprove the authenticity of a saying or motif that satisfies the criterion of dissimilarity. It is nevertheless the cumulative evidence of the various criteria which serves to demonstrate a saying's authenticity. If a particular saying or teaching of Jesus meets most (or ideally all) of the positive criteria listed above, then we can claim with reasonable certainty that this teaching is authentic. Each criterion serves as an individual chain in the investigative process. Some are stronger, i.e. of more value, than others in establishing the probability of authenticity, and whereas no one criterion, with the possible exception of the criterion of dissimilarity, is strong enough to tie a gospel saying or motif absolutely to the historical Jesus, the cumulative effect of the various "chains" can bring the historian to the place that he 'has to acknowledge [this material] as authentic if he wishes to remain an historian at all.'<sup>92</sup>

Even if, however, the weight of evidence is not sufficient to demonstrate the authenticity of a saying beyond a reasonable doubt, it may well be that there needs to be an acknowledgement of where the burden of proof lies. McArthur suggests that if a saying or motif meets the criterion of multiple attestation, then 'the burden of proof shifts to those who deny the authenticity of that particular motif.'<sup>93</sup> It may be debated whether this one criterion alone can bring about such a shift in the burden of proof for some scholars, but we must acknowledge that there is also a middle ground between the two extremes of a gospel tradition being clearly authentic or clearly inauthentic.<sup>94</sup> In such instances if a saying satisfies several criteria the probability of the saying being authentic will be increased and any burden of proof will surely be on those who hold a negative view towards its

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authenticity. On the other hand, it must be pointed out once again that the failure of a saying or motif to satisfy the criteria of: multiple attestation, multiple forms, Aramaic linguistic phenomena, Palestinian environmental phenomena, dissimilarity divergent patterns from the redaction, says nothing for or against its authenticity. This simply indicates that the case for authenticity cannot be established because of the inadequacy of our tools. only four criteria can be used to argue for the inauthenticity of a saying: the criterion of the tendencies of the developing tradition, the criterion of modification by Jewish Christianity, the criterion of environmental contradiction, and the criterion of contradiction of authentic sayings. Yet these

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<sup>92</sup> Käsemann, p. 46.

<sup>93</sup> McArthur, "The Burden of Proof," p. 119. It is, of course, a matter of debate as to whether one should *a priori* assume the inauthenticity of any saying in the Gospels before the investigative process begins.

<sup>94</sup> See Meyer, p. 84, who states, 'In the first place, there will be three columns for historicity judgments on the material: yes, no, and question mark.'

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criteria must be used carefully with the important qualifications mentioned in the discussion above.<sup>95</sup>

Finally it should be pointed out that if by the use of these various criteria, certain sayings in our Gospels can in fact be demonstrated as being authentic and this in turn can establish a continuity between the historical Jesus and kerygmatic Christ, there is then no *a priori* reason to be skeptical about the general portrait of Jesus found in our Gospels. On the contrary it would then be clear that the burden of proof lies with those who would reject the authenticity of the gospel materials rather than with those who accept their authenticity.<sup>96</sup> We can say this in another way using the terminology of the law court. If by the criteria discussed above, the authenticity of certain sayings and motifs in the Gospels can be demonstrated which establish a continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, then we should assume that the other sayings and motifs in the Gospels are "innocent until proven guilty," i.e. a saying in the Gospels purporting to come from Jesus is true (authentic) until proven false (inauthentic).

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<sup>95</sup> See pp. 16, 22, 25-26.

<sup>96</sup> See Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 37.