

THE EVANGELICAL AND *TRADITIONSGESCHICHTE*

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Traditionsgeschichte is one of two important stepchildren of form criticism, the other being *Redaktionsgeschichte*. The two complement each other in developing the form-critical method, since the first deals with the development of the individual gospel tradition and the second with the use of that tradition in the *Tendenz* of the gospel itself. The German word has been variously translated as "tradition history"¹ and "the history of the transmission of the traditions."² While these are certainly more correct, we will continue to use the more familiar translation, "tradition criticism," since we are primarily concerned with its use as a critical tool.

The method itself seeks to determine the growth of a particular concept or tradition within the history of the early Church. As such it may study the evolution of the term "Lord" from the time of Christ to that of the early Church or it may examine the relationship between the Matthean and Lucan forms of the beatitudes. We may distinguish a positive and a negative pole within this approach. Positively, it helps to clarify the meaning of a concept or the use of a tradition at each stage of its development. With regard to "Lord" it notes the use of the term within Luke, where editorial passages (from the *Sitz im Leben* of Luke's own time) use it in a titular sense (of cosmic lordship) and dialogue passages (from the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus' earthly ministry) use it as a term of respect (= "sir").³ Negatively, it makes judgments on the authenticity of gospel pericopae. For example, it tries to determine how far back the particular tradition goes. Does the exalted sense of "Lord" stem from the immediate post-Easter Palestinian Church (as Moule argues) or does it stem from the later hellenistic Jewish Church (as Hahn and Fuller argue⁴)? In another vein, is the Lucan story of the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11) a different episode from John 21:1-14, as evangelical scholars assert, or is it a post-resur-

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¹See D. R. Catchpole, "Tradition History," *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 165, who speaks of "an ongoing process of development in the form and/or meaning of concepts or words or sayings or blocks of material."

²See W. G. Doty, *Contemporary New Testament Interpretation* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 75, drawing upon a discussion by J. M. Robinson, *Theology as History*, ed. Robinson and Cobb (New York: Harper, 1967) ix-x.

³For a discussion of this as evidence for Luke's historical veracity see C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London, 1967) 56-60.

⁴F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*, tr. H. Knight and G. Ogg (New York: World, 1969) 110 f.; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribners, 1965) 245 f.

rection *wundergeschichtliche Fabel* read back into the life of Jesus? ⁵

As one might surmise, the major battleground for this school is the gospels. As a result, life-of-Jesus research has been given a new impetus as scholars attempt to distinguish between the *ipsissima verba*, the *ipsissima vox*, and the Church sayings read back onto Jesus' lips. Of course, radical critics still remain skeptical toward historical veracity⁶ and by and large neglect the issue. The "new quest," for instance, attempts merely to discover some aspects of Jesus' self-consciousness in the culturally conditioned forms within the gospels.⁷ There is very little attempt to trace the records back to Jesus. Instead, the text as a record of early Church worship is considered valid in itself without recourse to historical accuracy.

I. THE LITERARY CRITERIA

A. *The Negative Criteria*

The quest for authentic traditions is based on a demand for certitude. If any doubt can be assigned to a saying of Jesus it is shunted aside by radical critics as a product of the post-Easter community. Tradition critics basically accept the thesis of form criticism—namely, that the historical nucleus in the earthly Jesus rapidly receded in the memories of the primitive Church. The stories themselves circulated independently and were subject to the vicissitudes of kerygmatic proclamation—i. e., they were changed to fit the needs of the kerygma. History became subservient to theology and had disappeared by the second generation. Therefore it is extremely difficult to trace the second- or third-generation traditions as recorded in the gospels back to the original core. Many of them were created wholesale by the later Church to fit the *Sitz im Leben* of that later time. With this in mind, the critics have evolved four major criteria for authenticity.⁸

1. Distinctiveness/dissimilarity. A saying is positively authentic only if it cannot be paralleled either in Judaism or the early Church; otherwise it may be either a transferral of Judaistic teaching or a kerygmatic interpolation. Needless to say, the amount of material that will pass

⁵See especially R. Pesch, *Der reiche Fischfang* (Düsseldorf, 1969) 119-125. The resemblances seem so convincing to many that the discussion today among nonevangelicals centers only on which represents the more original tradition.

⁶N. Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 70, says that "the burden of proof must lay on the claim to authenticity, and the difficulties of establishing that claim become very great—very great indeed, but not impossible."

⁷Here we might note the connections between the "new quest" and the "new hermeneutic." As Doty, *Interpretation*, pp. 30 f., describes the movement, it sees the text as primary but in an entirely different framework. Rather than interpreting the text, man allows the text to interpret him—i. e., he allows "God to address man through the medium of the text."

⁸The first three are found in R. H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1966) 96-98, and N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper, 1967) 39-47. The title used by Fuller is given first in each instance. It should be added that they were developed for the sayings of Jesus but are applied to all types of tradition.

this test is sparse indeed. One that would be included here would be the "son-of-man" self-designation, since it was not used in the later Church and never attained titular status within Judaism. Bultmann, for instance, believes it was borrowed from the *Similitudes of Enoch* and was used by Jesus to designate a figure yet to appear.⁹ Most today would accept the title as authentic but debate whether Jesus used it with the suffering-vindication motif associated with it in the gospels.¹⁰ An example of a saying rejected outright on the basis of this criterion is the "keys of the kingdom" pericope of Matt 16:18-19, since it looks forward to a later ecclesiology.

2. The cross-section method/criterion of multiple attestation. Authenticity can be achieved if a saying occurs in several or all of the primary sources behind the gospels; otherwise it may be a redactional addition. For example, if a saying occurs in both Q and Mark, or in all or most of the gospels in more than one form (e. g., parable and aphorism), it is acceptable. Perrin uses here Jesus' concern for "tax collectors and sinners," since it spans all the sources.¹¹ We might point out, however, that the criteria must be used in concert rather than individually. For example, Jesus' use of the suffering servant imagery would fit this criterion but would be denied on the basis of the first criterion; critics argue that it is read back onto Jesus' lips as a result of the later eucharist theology.

3. Consistency/coherence. A tradition can be trusted that is consistent with or coheres to passages already authenticated. James Robinson uses this to authorize his claim that Jesus' parables, once allegorical accretions have been removed, contain Jesus' basic teaching. He uses the other formal criteria to authenticate them and then uses them as a basis for judging other sayings.¹²

4. Primitive eschatology. Bultmann makes this a major feature of his own study. In a discussion of "the eschatological message" of Jesus¹³ he notes the Jewish imminent eschatology with its apocalyptic overtones. In terms reminiscent of Schweitzer's "consistent eschatology" he then makes this his major criterion for judging the primitive character of various sayings. This criterion, however, has not attained the stature of the others and has not been widely used. Of course this is not to say that it has no place. The widely differing eschatological

⁹R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1951, 1955), I, 29 f. This, however, has not been widely accepted.

¹⁰For a good survey see I. H. Marshall, "The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 12 (1966) 327-351.

¹¹Perrin, *Redaction*, p. 71.

¹²J. M. Robinson, "The Formal Structure of Jesus' Message," *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder (New York, 1962) 96 f., as cited in R. N. Longenecker, "Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research," *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 221-222.

¹³Bultmann, *Theology*, pp. 7-11.

systems today, however, such as Bultmann's "existential eschatology," Dodd's "realized eschatology" and Cullmann's "inaugurated eschatology," have cast doubts on the viability of this criterion.

B. Critique of the Negative Criteria

As one may well intimate from even a cursory examination of these criteria, they are a direct outgrowth of the positivistic historiography that characterizes Bultmann and his followers. Many have noted the extreme pessimism engendered by these criteria, and a number of criticisms have cast strong doubt on the viability of such a system.

1. The first criterion is much too strict. Morna Hooker points to the two meanings of "distinctive": "unique" (German *verschieden*) and "characteristic" (German *bezeichnend*). This method can lead only to the first, while what is needed is the second.¹⁴ We simply cannot claim that Jesus had no ties with Judaism, the milieu within which his entire ministry was conducted. Nor can we say that there is a dichotomy between Jesus and the early Church. The kerygma did not exist in a vacuum but arose in relation to both the historical milieu and the historical Jesus. Critics, in noting only the former aspect, have produced "an extremely subjective typology and paternalistic interpretation of the Gospel tradition."¹⁵ Also, too little allowance is made for the creative genius of Jesus and too much accent is given to the creative function of the Church. In fact there is good evidence for a radical continuity between the historical Jesus and the Church's proclamation, and we must deny the artificial reconstruction of many scholars.

2. The first criterion not only produces a false dichotomy; it also results in a distorted view of the early Church. Hooker¹⁶ uses the example of three speeches at election time. If one were to eliminate what was common to all three and then take the unique elements as the core of the message, one would find a serious distortion of the actual platforms. The same is true of Jesus. We would naturally suspect that the disciples would emphasize the same basic truths as Jesus, especially if he had as great an impact on them as the evidence suggests. If we negate those very parts we inevitably twist the basic message itself.¹⁷ James G. Williams, a Jewish scholar, has noted Bultmann's fallacy here.

¹⁴M. D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972) 574. See also her "Christology and Methodology," *NTS* 17 (1971) 481 f., for a similar argument.

¹⁵W. D. Davies, "A Quest to be Resumed in New Testament Studies," *USQR* 15 (1960) 89 f. He asserts that scholars since Dodd have realized that the supposedly independent pericopae actually form a unified core built around objective events: the life, death and resurrection of the historical Jesus (cf. pp. 86-89). See also H. Schürmann, "Die vorösterlichen Anfänge der Logientradition," *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den synoptischen Evangelien* (Düsseldorf, 1968) 39-65, who upholds the continuity between the pre-Easter message and the post-Easter community.

¹⁶Hooker, "Tool," p. 574; "Methodology," p. 482.

¹⁷R. S. Barbour, *Traditio-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1972) 20, speaks of the nihilism caused by these negative criteria: "For if all we can know for certain about Jesus is what sets him off from his background as a unique figure, he is in some danger of becoming, as the Baptist claimed to be in the Gospel of John, a voice in the wilderness, an eschatological voice in the wilderness of history." See also Catchpole, "History," p. 175.

According to Williams, he cannot provide a meaningful basis for Christianity because the Christ-event is inadequate for authentic existence when it is separated from cognitive history.¹⁸ However, this picture of a Jesus stripped of cognitive foundation does not fit the NT evidence. Only the fact that Jesus had left an indelible imprint on his disciples can account for the power and message of the Church.

3. The criteria presuppose an advanced knowledge of both Judaism and the early Church. Neither is actually true, for we are forced to make decisions on the basis of extant written materials. For instance, we know little about the various parties within Judaism and even less about the 'am hā'areš. At the same time, we are dependent on Acts and the epistles for our knowledge of the early Church and so know little about the non-Pauline sector of the Church. Because of this, the dogmatism with which these criteria are employed is unwarranted. Clark Pinnock notes the circular reasoning employed so often: "From a Gospel account, a setting in the community is reconstructed, and this is used to explain the origin of the story. The confusion arises from mixing up possible motives for preservation with ultimate origins."¹⁹

4. The use of these tools is highly subjective. This can be seen in the widely disparate pictures that result when several different scholars use these same tools on the same passage(s). This means that too much latitude is allowed in defining the criteria. For example, before one can decide what is dissimilar in Jesus' teachings one has to decide what constituted the themes of Judaism and the early Church. This is seen in the wide acceptance of "abba" as a prayer-invocation on the basis of its inconsistency with Judaism. On that basis, however, it should have been denied because of its consistency with the early Church. This is also true of the fourth criterion. One must decide what was distinctive about Jesus' perspective before one can highlight his eschatology. Even then the use of this to authenticate certain sayings and invalidate certain others becomes highly suspect. The truth is that most scholars end up with conclusions remarkably similar to the presuppositions with which they began their study.

5. The coherence principle tends to magnify one's previous mistakes. For example, Jesus' messianic self-consciousness is ruled out on the basis of the first criterion, and then all the passages related to that (e. g., Peter's Caesarea Philippi confession) are likewise negated. As Barbour concludes: "The issue of coherence or consistency is never easily settled and, as was suggested above, when the test of coherence is applied after the test of dissimilarity as a matter of principle any errors in the results produced by the latter test will be compounded."²⁰ Before one can use Jesus' "central message" as a basis for

¹⁸J. G. Williams, "Possibility in Principle and Possibility in Fact," *JBR* 33 (1965) 323-324.

¹⁹C. H. Pinnock, "The Case Against Form Criticism," *Christianity Today* 9 (July 16, 1965) 12-13.

²⁰Barbour, *Criticism*, p. 26. On p. 23 he notes the widely different conclusions engendered by this method. See also R. S. A. Calvert, "An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus," *NTS* 18 (1972) 209 f.

authentication, one must decide what that core contains.

6. Several have noted that the critics discount the roles of the eye-witnesses without proper evidence. Certainly a tremendous amount of material has been written on the "witness" motif by critics, but most of it deals with the theological nuances and dogmatically concludes that it thereby could not be historical.²¹ However, this becomes impossible to accept when we realize (and most modern critics do) that the gospel genre originated thirty to forty years after the events. As Vincent Taylor has said, "If the form critics are right, the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection."²²

7. As already stated, the criteria themselves have evolved out of a demand for certainty, which itself has developed into a radical skepticism toward the possibility of authentic pericopae. This unwarranted and unrealistic demand for certitude regarding historical events may be called "the theory of the irreducible minimum." Certainty is unattainable, however, and every area of life works on the basis of probability. Some recent philosophers²³ argue for extreme caution when applying the word "certain" to truth-statements, since the doubt element is always present. Instead of certitude we should seek a coherent, justified belief in a truth-statement. With this in mind, we can proceed to a more positive examination of the literary criteria.

C. A Positive Approach

One conclusion that must emerge from the discussion thus far is that pessimism is unwarranted. With this in mind we propose a positive reappraisal of criteria for studying tradition development. The gospel traditions should not be placed in a totalitarian courtroom in which they are guilty until proven innocent. Instead the criteria should build on a positive foundation and seek to authenticate rather than disprove genuineness. To this end we propose certain positive criteria that will help the Christian historian not only to evaluate but also to trace the development of traditions in the NT. We will proceed in a descending order, from the criterion that shows the greatest probability to the one that points to a traditional basis but cannot trace it all the way back to its origin.

1. Pericopae that are not characteristic of either Judaism or the later Church may be regarded as trustworthy. Earlier we pointed out the limitations of this method, but with those in mind this still yields the most certain results from a critical standpoint. An example of this would

²¹See D. E. Nineham, "Eyewitness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition," *JTS* n. s. 9 (1958) 13-25, 243-252; 11 (1960), 253-264. *Contra* Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 139-214.

²²V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, 1933, p. 41, as cited in P. Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*, tr. B. Weatherhead (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 1. 36.

²³See Fuller, *Foundations*, pp. 104-105. *Contra* Catchpole, "History," p. 175; but his criticism is based on Fuller's a priori statement that many of them are secondary rather than on the criterion itself.

be the "amen" form in Jesus' sayings, which has little parallel in other literature.²⁴ Another example would be the "kingdom" teaching, which cannot truly be paralleled in either branch. Few doubt that Jesus taught that the coming of the kingdom was imminent (although individual passages are debated).

2. Features that could not survive in the primitive setting unless they were genuine may well be an indication of authenticity. Longenecker calls this the criterion of "divergent patterns of thought and expression."²⁵ In so doing he draws on the work of C. F. D. Moule, who says, "It would appear that there are certain features in the story of Jesus, the retention of which can scarcely be explained except by their genuineness and durable quality, since everything else was hostile to their survival."²⁶ Moule uses Schmiedel's "pillar sayings"—i. e., sayings foreign to the intentions of the evangelists—as examples. For instance, Schmiedel cites Mark 3:21 (Jesus' relatives think him mad), 10:18 ("Why do you call me good?"), or 13:32 (his ignorance of the time of the *eschaton*). These cast Jesus in a seemingly unfavorable light and, in fact, were excised by the other synoptic evangelists. Their continued presence in later tradition goes against the actual christological development of the early Church and so points to authenticity.

3. If a pericope contains "unintentional" signs of history—i. e., signs that would not appear as such to the author but that clearly belong to the original setting—it may be authentic. The difficulty, of course, comes in distinguishing "intentional" from "unintentional." A good example of this problem comes in the extra details added to the stories by the evangelists. Mark is especially adept at this, and William Barclay concludes that Mark has "the nearest approach to a factual report and an eyewitness account of the earthly life of Jesus."²⁷ As Hugh Anderson points out, however, these could be the result of a master storyteller who naturally adds details to heighten the realism.²⁸ Another example is Luke's use of "Lord," already noted above. The care by which Luke follows his sources helps to verify the proper development of the title in early tradition.

4. If there is no satisfactory *Sitz im Leben* for an episode, it is traditional and perhaps even authentic. For example, the sayings on Jewish particularism (e. g., Matt 10:6; 15:24) would not fit the later Church.²⁹

²⁴J. Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*.

²⁵Longenecker, "Criteria," p. 227.

²⁶Moule, *Phenomenon*, pp. 62 f. Calvert, "Examination," p. 215, also discusses this criterion.

²⁷W. Barclay, *The First Three Gospels* (London: SCM, 1966) 173.

²⁸H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Oliphants, 1976) 22.

²⁹Many might state that they come from Jewish Christianity and fit Matthew's Jewish emphasis. This is not true even for Matthew, however, as one can see in his picture of the Jewish crowds as tools of Satan (11:16; 12:39 f.; 16:4) and his accent on the universal mission (4:15; 13:38; 21:43; 24:14; 26:13; 28:19). Matthew certainly took them from tradition, and a good argument can be made for their authenticity.

This criterion can also be applied to the detection of development within a tradition, as we note strata in purposes in various segments of the story. It can therefore be used to place the pericope in the developing life of the Church. An example of this might be Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, alluded to earlier. Many have argued that it is an ecclesiastical addition from a later time, but they are still finding it difficult to give a *Sitz im Leben* for the central story and especially the "get behind me, Satan."

Of course one difficulty with this criterion is that periods in the early Church overlap, and we must be careful not to differentiate them too rigidly. For example, the universal-mission stress in Matthew and Luke-Acts may stem from the later Gentile period (as critics assert), but it may also have a Jewish proselyte sense. In fact, there is little reason apart from dogmatic grounds for denying that it goes back to Jesus himself.³⁰ The same is true for so-called hellenistic accretions, which may not stem from the later period at all.³¹

5. If given in language and containing emphases not characteristic of the author, the passage is traditional. Of course, this can show no more than that the passage was taken from tradition. It cannot by itself demonstrate authenticity. For instance, we might note the work done by Schweizer, Fortna and Nicol on linguistic criteria for the gospel of John and the application of these to a possible "signs source" for the gospel.³² We might use these very criteria in studying the "doubting Thomas" pericope in John 20:24-29. Many believe this is a Johannine creation due to the similarity of the themes (doubt and seeing-believing) to previous pericopae.³³ However, of the stylistic characteristics developed by the scholars above only four are found here, resulting in a 0.67 average per verse, well within the limit for non-Johannine material (0.75 average) set by Nicol. Another example is Matt 23:2 f.: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe everything they say to you." The view espoused is similar to Pharisaic and rabbinic teaching and as such does not fit the emphasis of Matthew on Jesus' transcending the law (5:17 f.; 9:13; 12:7; 15:3 f., 10 f.). There-

³⁰For a more developed discussion see S. G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge, 1973).

³¹Many recent scholars have argued that we cannot easily separate hellenistic and Jewish traces as rigidly as in the past, since the two had largely become homogeneous in the Jewish world. See I. H. Marshall, "Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity: Some Critical Comments," *NTS* 19 (1973) 271-287, and M. Hengel, "Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologie," *Neues Testament und Geschichte*, ed. H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke (Zürich, 1972) 43-76.

³²E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi* (Göttingen, 1939); R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge, 1970); and W. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden, 1972). Schweizer has fifty stylistic and linguistic characteristics, and Nicol adds thirty-two. While the value of these has been strongly debated by D. M. Carson, "Source Criticism in the Fourth Gospel" (paper delivered at the ETS conference, San Francisco, December, 1977), the criteria still have some limited value in tracing tradition in John.

³³See C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1963) 145-146, as well as the commentaries by Bultmann, Brown and Lindars.

fore it probably stems from tradition and may well be authentic.³⁴

6. Aramaic or Palestinian features may well indicate an early origin. This has been the central feature of the remarkable work of Joachim Jeremias and Matthew Black,³⁵ who believe that Semitic phrasing or loan words are keys to the reliability of traditions. Of course this has been misused, as exemplified by C. C. Torrey's restructuring of Aramaic originals behind the gospels.³⁶ Also there has recently been a fair amount of material on Septuagintalism as the basis of some Semitic phrasing.³⁷ Therefore, we must modify the thesis of Black and Jeremias: This criterion can show no more than that it comes from the Palestinian Church; it cannot prove authenticity. Nevertheless it is a useful tool and, if used with an open mind to the possibility of Septuagintal influence,³⁸ becomes a beneficial aid for the scholar.

To this Barbour would add "poetic form and parallelism within the logia Jesu"³⁹ as a development of the Semitism criterion. This becomes valuable also in deciding the existence and provenance of creedal and hymnic material in the NT. For example, one might note Martin's discussion of the Palestinian origin of the Philippian hymn (2:6-11). He argues that the Greek can be easily translated back into Aramaic, which gives the text "a rhythm and evenness of flow that may well be the mark of an authentic composition"⁴⁰—i. e., an early creation of the primitive Church.

7. One may compare the theology of the episode(s) with the unfolding tradition as evidenced in the epistles and note where it stands in comparison with the developing theology of the early Church. In this light it is especially important to note the preliterate stages of the tradition as evidenced in the creeds and hymns of the primitive Church. One can then search for any sign of influence in either direction. Does the episode seem to be more (or less) developed than the theology in the catechetical portions? Do the episodes in the gospels shed any light

³⁴Catchpole, "History," p. 168, argues for its late provenance because Jesus did not adopt "so conservative an attitude to either tradition or law." On the basis of the criterion of dissimilarity, however, this could be an argument in favor of its authenticity. Catchpole's dogmatic decision regarding Jesus' true attitude to the law cannot be stated so simply. The complex of factors surrounding it probably make Matthew's picture the true one: Jesus upheld the validity of the law as religious experience but both fulfilled and transcended its legalistic implications.

³⁵See Jeremias, *Theology*, 1. 3-8 for a good discussion of this principle, which permeates all of his works. See also M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford, 1967) *passim*.

³⁶C. C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels* (New York, 1933).

³⁷See E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (London, 1969) 197 f., as noted in Longenecker, "Criteria," 223.

³⁸As Catchpole, "History," p. 173, notes, neither the use of the LXX nor the absence of Semitisms actually points to "a non-semitic or non-Jesus point of origin." The writer chooses the idiom he wishes to imply. At the same time, however, it serves as a pointer to help decide traditional origin.

³⁹Barbour, *Criticism*, p. 4. He notes the use of this in deciding the authenticity of sayings in *Gos. Thom.*

⁴⁰R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge, 1971) 40 f. *Contra* Fuller, *Christology*, 204 f.

on the development of the tradition? This criterion is employed in the study of the titles of Jesus as well as the sacramental imagery. For example, there is intensive debate on the relation between the eucharist passages in the gospels and the eucharistic imagery in epistles like 1 Corinthians or 1 Peter. Many critics believe the developed theology of the synoptic portions or John 6 was added by the later Church. Evangelicals argue that the influence was the other way around.

8. Features that occur in more than one independent tradition may also be trustworthy. Of course, the difficulty here is to know what is dependent and what is not. Many scholars, for example, held to the traditional origin of the Spirit-mission pericope of Luke 24:44-49 and John 20:19-23 on the grounds that John did not know Luke's work. Barrett and Bailey,⁴¹ however, show that linguistic parallels may well indicate that John knew Luke, especially in the passion narratives. Therefore this criterion would not work here. As Calvert states, "The criterion is most useful when the saying occurs in more than one form (e. g. parable and aphorism) whether in the same tradition or not. This is because the lack of certainty about the relationship between the synoptic gospels makes the more general use of the test rather suspect."⁴²

9. If an episode/saying is coherent with other traditions that have proven authentic on the basis of the other criteria, it is probably also trustworthy. As already said this cannot be a major test, for it depends on the accuracy of the other criteria. It can be useful, however, as evidenced by Marshall, who employs it effectively in studying the synoptic "son-of-man" sayings.⁴³ He shows that in several cases every element of a saying except the "son-of-man" title itself is authentic; he then argues that the saying itself must be authentic.

D. Conclusion

The judicious use of these criteria should aid the scholar in making historical decisions. Once again, however, we must urge caution with regard to value judgments. The criteria can do no more than show probability; in fact, some have despaired of any positive value, since conclusions are so tentative.⁴⁴ However, this is just as much an unwarranted pessimism as the skepticism discussed above. We must keep in mind that the documents are first-rate,⁴⁵ and so we may be optimistic in appraising them.

⁴¹C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (London, 1955) 136-137; J. A. Bailey, *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John* (Leiden, 1963) *passim*.

⁴²Calvert, "Examination," p. 217.

⁴³I. H. Marshall, "The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 12 (1966) 327-351.

⁴⁴E. g. Hooker, who in her two articles believes the abuses outweigh the successes and so takes a negative approach to the problem.

⁴⁵A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford, 1963) 186 f., asserts that the NT scholar has far better documentary evidence with which to work than does the secular historian. As an historian he says there is no excuse for skepticism when approaching the data.

In addition to the criteria already enumerated, certain other keys might help in evaluating the evidence. In a positive rather than negative approach one might ask what sort of impression the author seeks to convey. Do the language and style indicate that he is attempting to write history? For instance, one might compare the language with pagan mythology (the *religionsgeschichtliche* approach) and note whether the style is more subdued. Does it employ apocalyptic forms? One can also look at such common items as geographical and topical data—i. e., whether or not the details fit Jesus' own era. This latter approach was influential in changing William Ramsay's opinion regarding the historical worth of Luke-Acts.⁴⁶ In conclusion, we might state that the positive appraisal of NT traditions has important relevance for our knowledge of the early Church.

II. THE EVANGELICAL AND TRADITION CRITICISM

We are justified at this stage to ask what relationship the evangelical might have to this approach. On the positive side, the value is obvious. Any tool that enhances our understanding of the growth of theology/tradition in the early Church must be welcomed. The study of the transmission of traditions can provide valuable assistance for a better realization of the meaning of such concepts as the lordship of Christ, the development of table fellowship and the eucharist, and so forth. By using these criteria we can isolate the stages in that growth and can note places where the motif is interwoven into the thought-development of the passage.⁴⁷ By doing this we realize the true importance of a doctrine for the early Church and can determine peripheral implications of those themes (e. g., the application of lordship to the universal mission, or the relationship between soteriology and eschatology in the epistle to the Hebrews).

The true battleground for this approach, however, must be the gospels themselves. Here the negative side comes into play—i. e., the decision regarding the historical Jesus and the implications of such for inerrancy. In another article⁴⁸ we stated that the gospels were written by men who selected and shaped the traditions to present a certain theological theme. The selection and shaping process, however, did not involve creating or changing the historical data. Therefore there is no danger in a positive approach to redaction or tradition criticism.

Inerrancy is based on inspiration, and the latter covers both fact (the original event) and interpretation (the explanation of the ramifica-

⁴⁶W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962; originally 1908).

⁴⁷A good example here is the discussion of baptismal liturgy in the epistles by G. R. Beasley-Murray in *Baptism in the New Testament* (Exeter, 1962).

⁴⁸"Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *JETS* 19/2 (1976) 73-85. In it I say, "The critic should take cognizance of the possibility that a passage is traditional but has been reconstructed to provide a particular theological interpretation of the evangelist (while remaining true to the event itself)" (p. 85).

tions of the event for the readers). There is no dichotomy between the two, and there is no "error" in the latter aspect. For example, when we say that Matthew interpreted the beatitudes along spiritual lines and Luke along economic/social lines, we are not saying that Luke is original and Matthew is not.⁴⁹ In fact, a study of the concept *ptōchoi* in Scripture shows that it includes both aspects. Matthew and Luke simply interpreted Jesus' teaching along the two lines. We have good grounds for arguing that Jesus taught both nuances. The permeation of both aspects throughout parable and didactic sections makes their authenticity likely (Criterion 8).

Of course there are limitations to and controls on this method. We believe that Catchpole is incorrect when he assumes that divergences in the wording of Peter's confession (Matthew adds "the Son of the living God" and Luke "of God" to Mark's basic "you are the Messiah") lead to the conclusion that the additions are necessarily "unhistorical."⁵⁰ Instead, each evangelist stresses a different aspect of what we believe was originally "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Of course, we are not saying that a harmonizing approach always provides the answer (although here it may). Indeed, that method often causes more problems than it solves. Rather the key is the concept "interpretation," which often involves a "paraphrase" of the original saying (as was the case in the great commission; cf. n. 48). With this in mind, the controls are the following.

1. The interpretation must be based on the original words and meaning imparted by Jesus. This is evidenced in John 14:26: "The Holy Spirit . . . will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." The early Church believed it was imparting the actual teaching of Jesus.⁵¹ This was an internal control that the Church placed on itself: It was not to teach anything that contradicted or went beyond Jesus' teaching. The NT doctrines that evolved had their foundation in the *logia Jesu*, and the gospel traditions refused to go beyond them.⁵² Here we might note also 2 Pet 1:16, which denies that the kerygma employed "cleverly devised myths" in proclaiming the gospel message. If we accept the theory that the early Church employed gospel stories in their preaching, it has special relevance. The early Church argued that the pericopes were not "myths" but "eyewitness" accounts⁵³ (see further above).

⁴⁹*Contra Jeremias, Theology*, 1. 109 f.

⁵⁰Catchpole, "History," p. 167.

⁵¹While many commentators believe it was added by a later editor, that does not concern us here (I myself believe it is authentic). It is evidence for the belief of the early Church regarding its own teaching.

⁵²A parallel idea is seen in Rev 22:18-19, which denies to anyone the right to add or detract from "the prophecy of this book."

⁵³Critics who deny the interpretation here normally state that this verse is talking against gnostic heresy and not arguing on behalf of gospel historicity. This is not a proper line of demarcation, however, for it actually refers to both aspects. The heresy is refuted on the basis of historical events that were witnessed.

2. There was no wholesale creation of stories in the early Church. The link between *Geschichte* and *Historie* in the gospel accounts is based partly on the above references but also on the allusions to history in Luke and John. The prologue to Luke's gospel (Luke 1:1-4) establishes his historiography—i. e., his approach as an historian to the events he discusses. Critics note that the prologue is written in excellent Greek (in contrast with the Semitic phrasing of the following section) and that it is a typical hellenistic introduction. From this they argue that it merely compiles phrases without claiming to represent accurate history.⁵⁴ When we look closer at the language, however, Luke claims to do just that. Marshall points to several characteristics in the passage:⁵⁵ (1) He stresses the accuracy of his presentation, as seen in "delivered," "eyewitnesses," "accurately," "in order" and "many proofs"; (2) he notes his own credentials: "followed all things accurately" (which means he investigated his data very carefully) and "write an orderly account" (which notes high standards for his work); and (3) he bases his work on predecessors "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of his word," which shows Luke was definitely dependent on eyewitness accounts.

John's "witness" motif functions in much the same way. It occurs in 15:27, where the Lord calls the disciples "witnesses," and in 19:35; 21:24, where the "witness" and "testimony" are declared to be "true." Naturally, the exact meaning of the statements is debated. Bultmann believes the references are additions to the text by the final redactor.⁵⁶ Others argue that "true" refers in a theological sense to God's authentication rather than to historical accuracy. We would assert, however, that both are inherent in the theme. John is authenticating both event and interpretation in his "witness" motif.⁵⁷

The evidence shows that the evangelists were not writing an imaginative theological creation but were interpreting historical events. They sought to reproduce the event and its significance for their readers. Their controls should be ours. We must respect the internal limitations on the creative input of the evangelists. This means that we refuse to view them as playwrights who construct scenes to fit a later theological emphasis that Christ never intended. Instead, they apply the data from Christ's life and teaching to their later *Sitz im Leben*. Their con-

⁵⁴See H. T. Cadbury, *Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (London, 1920-33), 2. 489 f. et al. I. H. Marshall, *Luke; Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 39, notes the thesis of U. Luck that Luke meant "to show that the life of Jesus was a series of divine acts rather than to affirm the factual certainty of those acts."

⁵⁵Marshall, *Luke*, pp. 37-41.

⁵⁶R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, tr. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford, 1971) 678-679.

⁵⁷The verb *martyreō* is found 33 times in his gospel and 14 times in his other works versus one each in Matthew and Luke. The noun *martyria* occurs 14 times in his gospel and 16 times in his other works versus once in Luke and three times in Mark. Clearly, it is a major Johannine theme; and as H. Strathman, "martyrs," *TDNT* 5, pp. 497 f., states, it applies entirely to the person and work of Jesus.

struction is faithful to the *Historie* and yet functions as *Geschichte*, speaking to the needs of their own time.⁵⁸

In conclusion, there is no reason to ignore or repudiate *Traditions-geschichte* as a positive tool for investigating the life and unfolding theology of the early Church. When we control the negative dangers and wield the tools with honesty and sensitivity, the results will magnify the Word of God and continue the exciting discovery of ultimate truth for our time.

⁵⁸For a good discussion of this see Marshall, *Luke*, pp. 21-52; R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972) *passim*.