BETWEEN FREEDOM AND GIVENNESS

(A STUDY OF THE HERMENEUTICAL
CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONCEPT OF CANON
FOR THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE)

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to arrive at an understanding of the
authority of scripture that is able to accommodate both a faith
perspective and the fruits of the historical-critical approach to the
New Testament. Put differently, the aim of this thesis is the pursuit
of a specifically christian, faith-promoting, reading of the New
Testament whilst still enjoying the benefit, in an as uncompromised a
form as possible, of the historical-critical approach. In a sense it
may be said that this task, given that the roots of both the
historical-critical approach and modern Western culture are deeply
imbedded in Rationalism, is equivalent to the basic hermeneutical
question of whether it is possible to interpret scripture relevantly
from within a cultural web of meaning that does not readily
accommodate that embodied in the New Testament. In section one of
this dissertation we present a characteristic depiction, based on the
historical-critical theory of literature, of the authority of the New
Testament. This is followed by a brief assessment that makes explicit
why the historical-critical approach is not conducive to the adoption
of a faith perspective on these writings. In section two, still and
inevitably based on critical foundations, we adopt a perspective that
is more sympathetic to faith and that seeks to discover in the
concerns evidenced in the canonical process, when traditions about
Jesus gradually took on more complex and stable forms, culminating in
the canon of the New Testament, guidelines in helping us to deal with
the problem with which this study is concerned. In the specific
example of the rather ordinary concerns underlying the unusual history
of the pericope **de adultera** (John 7:53-8:11), examined against the

background of the interests underlying the canonical process, it becomes clear that christians from the very beginning faced a dilemma not unlike that with which the historical-critical approach confronts us. They had to interpret afresh, and faithfully, the traditions in order to meet the demands of situations that had never been foreseen by earlier tradents. In this respect, therefore, the history of the pericope **de adultera** presents us with an ongoing struggle to hold in tension the demands of new contexts with the imperative of strict continuity with Jesus. In section three, on the basis of the foundation of the authority of scripture in strict continuity with Jesus combined with the contextual reinterpretation of the tradition, the social sciences are employed. Using the social sciences, it is discovered that the two contradictory approaches that we wish to reconcile form part of two different models for interpreting reality. It is on this basis, and made possible by the common culture underlying these opposing models and by the common contact with an unspecified common core of concrete reality, that a solution is proposed in terms of a complex 'fusion of horizons', promoted by a 'precipitative environment'. In the conclusion our solution is decisively aligned with the concerns evidenced in the canonical process.

Contents

Section 1

The Task

Section 2

A Guideline

Section 3

A Possible Solution

'In the face of some inescapable facts you
must try to imagine many general laws,
whose connections with your facts escapes
you. Then suddenly, in the unexpected
connection of a result, a specific
situation, and one of those laws, you
perceive a line of reasoning that seems
more convincing than the others. You try
applying it to all similar cases, to use it
for making predictions, and you discover
that your intuition was right. But until
you reach the end you will never know which
predicate to introduce into your reasoning
and which to omit. And this is what I am
doing now. I line up so many disjointed
elements and I venture some hypotheses. I
have to venture many, and many of them are
so absurd that I would be ashamed to tell
them to you.'

(William of Baskerville
The name of the rose)

Section One

The Task

1.

Introduction

In which the task that this thesis sets out to perform is outlined, and an historical-critical understanding of the authority of the New Testament is characterised.

1.1   The task defined

The focus of this study is the authority of the New Testament - and in particular, how to retain it as existentially relevant and 'authoritative' for the christian who seeks guidance in it while yet recognizing the value of the critical approaches to it. The aim of this thesis is to arrive at an understanding of the authority of scripture that is able to do justice to it as a document of both the university and the christian community. The university approaches scripture and puts to it questions that lead it to speak of the authority of these writings in a way that tends to be different from the way in which the community of faith, having asked different questions, addresses this issue. There can be little doubt that the historical-critical approach to scripture, which until recently has been the almost exclusive perspective adopted by the university in its examination of this material, has produced invaluable insights into the nature and meaning of the biblical writings.[1] At the same time, however, there has been a growing awareness of the inadequacy - from the perspective of the community of faith that is - of this approach, which has seemed to many to be unable to do justice to the unique claims of these writings (or, in a closely related manner, to their place in the christian community).[2] This thesis stands firmly on the foundation of the historical-critical approach, but at the same time

acknowledges that the exclusive employment of this perspective will lead to a truncated understanding of the authority of the New Testament. An 'objective' view 'from outside' has to be held in tension with a faith perspective 'from inside' if we wish to do justice to the total dimension of scripture as one which simultaneously and properly may be viewed both with detachment, as one religious phenomenon among many others, and with faithful anticipation, as occupying a unique position in one's own religion of conviction. As such, therefore, this study, which is particularly concerned with the authority of the New Testament, forms part of a rising tide of scholarship that seeks to do justice to the theological nature, so called, of scripture - while still acknowledging the import of critical investigation.

> 'Since the New Testament is both historical source and scripture, we must take proper account of both aspects. Of course there is a potential tension between these two aspects - seen at its most extreme in the contrast between the academic scholar with narrow historical interests on the one hand, and the "simple believer" on the other reading the Bible as God's voice speaking directly to him in the here and now. But the task of New Testament interpretation is precisely to handle that tension and to ensure that it is a creative rather than a destructive tension.' (Dunn 1987:5,6)

We shall begin, therefore, by giving a brief introduction to the perspective of the historical-critical approach in its evaluation of the authority of scripture - which will pave the way for an appraisal of the limitations of this way of viewing the authority of the New Testament. This will be followed, in section two, by a perspective, still based on critical foundations, but more sympathetic to the claims of faith, that seeks to do justice to the unique role of scripture within the life of the christian community. This will take the form of an investigation of the way in which the pericope de adultera (John 7:53-8:11) has concretely and historically functioned as authoritative for the community of faith. In the third section we shall offer a way of holding these two views - one detached 'from outside' and the other involved 'from inside' - together, on the basis

of an analysis, by the social sciences and psychology, of the way in which differing, even contradictory, perspectives co-exist within the sphere of corporate human life - in that way attempting to do for our time and special circumstances what the biblical tradents themselves did in labouring to ensure that scripture continued to function as authoritative for their times. In that way, therefore, our task may be perceived of as not 'merely' that of reconciling two abstract notions, but that of reconciling two opposed perceptions of the nature of reality - that, in fact, of being able to live as a christian within a cultural web of meaning that may frequently be at odds with the basic patterns of meaning underlying scripture (which wider task arises directly from the roots of the historical-critical approach in Rationalism, as we shall see in the next subsection, and the extent of the basis of contemporary 'Western' culture in the same intellectual tide - so that an attempted reconciliation with the historical-critical methods would inevitably, to whatever degree, result in closer connections between the thought-world of scripture and the more predominant trends in viewing the world today).

1.2   The historical-critical approach and the authority of the New Testament

The origins of the historical-critical approach go back to the interest exhibited in the historical sense of the Bible during the Reformation.

> '... I remain convinced that the Reformation legacy of concern for the historical sense of the Bible marked a decisive turn that culminated in historical-critical methods of interpretation.' (Krentz 1975:87)

Prior to that the emphasis had largely been on allegorical interpretation - which thought of the text as containing, principally hidden, spiritual meanings. The value of the Bible lay in the spiritual teachings that lay hidden beneath the deceptive, common sense meaning of the text.[3] The important essence of the Bible was

its teachings about spiritual topics - history and the historical were
unimportant since they were transitory and could never be inseparably
connected to God's timeless, indestructable, spiritual revelation of
himself.[4]   During the Reformation, by contrast, there was an
awakening of historical consciousness.   The context of God's
revelation of himself was history.   God was no longer thought of as
addressing his timeless word to immortal souls.   The Word of God
addressed people, it was said, in a way that took account of their
situations - their 'time-boundness'.   The rise of historical
consciousness was evidenced by a concern for the common-sense,
grammatical meaning of the Bible.[5]   This insight gained by the
Reformers should not be exaggerated however.   A major breakthrough
had been made, but it was no more than a beginning.[6] One can only
begin to speak of historical criticism of scripture, in a coherent,
intentioned form, in the age of the Enlightenment, under the influence
of the contributions chiefly of J.D. Michaelis and J.S. Semler.[7]

> 'The interest of historical criticism is reconstructive;
> it uses the text in an attempt to reconstruct: a) the
> intention of the author, or the understanding of the
> original readers; b) [in the case of the New Testament]
> the early church situation out of which the text comes or
> to which it is addressed; c) [in the case of the
> gospels] the life of Jesus.   These three attempts at
> reconstruction correspond to the three disciplines of
> redaction criticism, form criticism, and "the quest for
> the historical Jesus".'   (Brown 1955:232,233)[8]

In order to arrive at this, ideally objective, reconstruction (cf.
Krentz 1975:56, although he shows an emphasis on empiricism rather
than on the earlier more idealistic aspirations to objectivity as
such) of the events to which the documents testify, certain
appropriate questions have to be asked[9] that take account of the
evolutionary nature of historical records.   These questions
correspond, within the confines of the more recent history of the
discipline, against the background of which this task is undertaken,
to the branches of form criticism and redaction criticism.

> 'Essential to the historical-critical theory of biblical
> literature is the evolutionary model upon which it is
> constructed. An evolutionary model requires at least
> four components: (1) something which evolves; (2)
> sequential stages through which it evolves; (3) a source
> of power residing in it and by which its evolution is
> motivated; and (4) an environment in relation to which
> the thing evolves by adaptation. Form criticism is the
> principle contributor to the historical-critical theory
> because it supplies all four of these components.'
> (Petersen 1978:12)

Historical criticism shows a concern for both the events to which the
text refers and those surrounding its creation.[10] Form criticism is
able to deal, primarily, with the questions concerning the earliest
and best evidence for the seminal events leading to the growth of the
tradition, as well as to the growth of the tradition itself; while
redaction criticism is best able to deal with questions surrounding
the final composition of the text.
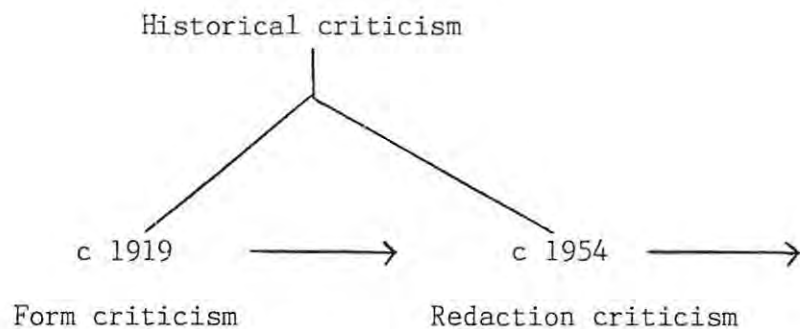
Reconstruction} early church situation + intention of the author

Let us begin our investigation by examining, with due attention to
historical priority, form criticism. Form criticism is a way of
interpreting the text of the New Testament based on methods and
principles first developed by Old Testament scholars.

> 'Gunkel's method of recovering the original traditions and
> discovering the spiritual presuppositions of the formation
> of these traditions ... a method applied especially to the

Old Testament legends of the patriarchs and to Old Testament songs – prepared the way in a decisive fashion for the investigation of the gospel traditions by K.L. Schmidt and other form-critics.'   (Kümmel 1972:330)

The pioneering works of form criticism were written independently in the period imediately following the First World War.   Bultmann completed his work first – towards the end of 1918 – although it was only published in 1921.   The pioneering contributions were: Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu (K.L. Schmidt, 1919); Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums (M. Dibelius, 1919); Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition (R.Bultmann, 1921).   The aim of this method was (in a manner that may be thought of, rather freely, as an effort to swim back up the stream charted by Traditionsgeschichte) to get back to the earliest preaching about Jesus, or possibly back to Jesus' own preaching.[11]   It would seem, however, as if, in practice, a skepticism, in varying degrees, existed among form critics that the latter goal could be achieved.

'And further, right at the beginning of the history of primitive Christian literature, there stood a tradition of an unliterary nature, consisting of short narratives and striking sayings, which were repeated for practical purposes. Those who gather them gradually try not only to give their context, but also to interpret them and, indeed, to make their point of view explicit.   Thus it comes about at length that the mythological element takes charge of the entire material of evangelical history. But this also corresponds to the general development of primitive Christianity which passes from a historical person to his formal worship and finally to the cosmic mythological Christ of Gnosis, and to ecclesiastical Christology.'   (Dibelius 1982:288)

Given individual differences in the extent to which practitioners of the discipline of form criticism believed they could work their way back to christian origins, how did form critics expect to arrive at, most often, the earliest preaching about Jesus, or, less frequently, at the preaching of Jesus himself?   Form critics work on the principle that there are certain fixed forms of communication appropriate to particular situations.[12]   (In this regard we may

refer in passing to one or two of the forms, isolated by Dibelius, as examples illustrative of form-critical categories and the life situations out of which they arose.   Paradigms [1982:37ff] are stories about Jesus that were told in the context of preaching. They have a didactic purpose and consequently usually end with a thought useful for their homiletic end. Examples of this would be Mark 2:1-2,18-22,23-28.   Tales [1982:70ff] on the other hand, are miracle stories [like Mark 1:40-45] that were told colourfully by story-tellers or teachers. One of the differences between paradigms and tales would be, therefore, an emphasis on the theological elements in the former, while in the latter the emphasis would be on the details that make a story appealing and compelling, as story, to the audience. Legends [1982:104ff] are stories that were told primarily to satisfy curiosity by giving information about Jesus [Luke 2:41-49, for example].)The form critic would have the task of dismantling the structure by isolating the different units and ascribing them to a particular life setting.[13] In this case, therefore, the critic's interest is not in the final form of the text, but in the relation that existed between the pre-existent units of which it is composed and the situations out of which they arose,[14] and the way in which this relation gave rise to further literary developments˙

> 'In examining the ingredient genres of a biblical book or stratum, one is looking both for instances of pre-existent oral or written units taken into the larger work <u>and</u> also for the way genre elements have functioned as models for fresh literary composition.'   (Gottwald 1985:97)

As time progressed, and scholars began to realise the shortcomings of form criticism, a number of serious cracks began to develop in the form critical edifice. Perhaps the most serious of these was the hitherto uncontested view that a natural, evolutionary process had led to the all but completed gospel, without any individual will playing a significant part towards that end.[15]

> 'Form criticism had made it a matter of principle to

regard the gospels from an anti-individualistic point of view. Hence it traced back to the anonymous community not only the tradition but also the formulation, the shaping and even the re-shaping, and it considered the stabilization in writing merely as the completion and conclusion of the anonymous stage of the tradition. Marxsen was right in emphasizing, contrary to form criticism, that this anonymous verbal transmission would necessarily have led gradually to the "disintegration" of the tradition. Therefore it must be ascribed to an author in his own right who pursued a definite object in his labours.' (Rohde 1968:18)

Redaction criticism came into being as a deliberate and conscious method of gospel study in the middle of the fifth decade of this century. The seminal works in this field were: Die Mitte der Zeit (H. Conzelmann, 1954); Der Evangelist Markus (W. Marxsen, 1959); Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium (G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H.J. Held, 1960). What these writers were proposing, and executing, was not in itself particularly new in principle.[16] In 1901 W. Wrede published a book called das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien. In this work he set out to examine the image of Jesus conveyed by the gospel of Mark - where Jesus appears constantly to be hiding his true identity. Jesus appears there as an enigmatic figure who attempts to heighten the mystery and misunderstanding that surround him. From his studies of the gospel Wrede concluded that the writer of Mark's gospel had in fact been responsible for this slant which was otherwise missing from the gospel tradition. Wrede was, therefore, attributing a creative capacity to the gospel writers. It was this insight which was taken by the redaction critics and applied to the gospels as an interpretive principle.

'... it [redaction criticism], refers to the whole range of creative activities which we can detect in an evangelist, an author, a transmitter of tradition, and in which and by means of which we can learn something of that author's ... theology.' (Perrin 1970:66)

Redaction criticism does not deny the results of form criticism completely. It accepts many of the premises and results of that

method, but steps in where it sees weaknesses. Redaction criticism does not believe that the oral units gradually evolved into close-to-complete gospels. Individual human intentionality played a greater role than that allocated by form criticism.[17]

> '...[a redactor is] one who senses the latent possibilities within a tradition.' (Best 1983:9)

It is true that oral units were preserved and passed on and that very often within communities numbers of these oral units clustered together in an unplannned way to produce a sensible, more complex, whole. This is not sufficient, however, to explain the origin and nature of the gospels. Chunks of fused oral units are not gospels. What was needed to create a gospel was a consciously creative author who took the traditional units available to him and combined them in a carefully conceived way.

> 'The form critics had been well aware of the elements of theology in the Gospel but since they were concerned with the material as it was used by the early church they eliminated it in so far as they regarded it as Markan so they could examine the individual pericopae without their Markan overtones. What they eliminated became the centre of discussion for the redaction critics.' (Best 1983:10)

It would not be accurate to overemphasize the discontinuity between form criticism and redaction criticism, but, then again, it would be inaccurate to speak as if there were perfect, harmonious continuity between these two disciplines. At the epicentre of the form critical approach, where form criticism applies itself to the individual units of tradition, and to loose collections of these, redaction criticism accepts its approach and findings as valid. In extremis, however, where form criticism tries to apply principles applicable to the collection into loose clusters of tradition to the final forms of the gospels, redaction criticism rejects its approach as inapplicable. It is by means of these disciplines, in combination, that the historical critical approach explains the origins of the gospels - the

form critic has his eyes fixed on the ancient traditions, while the redaction critic has his eyes fixed on the seams holding the pieces together.[18] Both the form critic and the redaction critic are concerned to discover the relation between the tradition and its historical context - so that both are bound together in their belief that an understanding of the gospels depends on determining the situation to which the gospel message, at its various stages, was addressed. (The aim and scope of redaction criticism, in its emphasis on the relation between the written product and the historical milieu, of the final redactor, out of which it arose, is further defined and illumined by reference to the development, in redaction criticism, termed 'composition criticism' - and the relation of this to the more recent trend in gospel criticism termed literary criticism, or reader-response criticism. Reader-response criticism will occupy us in chapter 3, but at this point its mention will serve to illustrate the particular character of redaction criticism by showing how it differs from reader-response criticism. Both composition criticism and reader-response criticism are concerned with the final form of the gospel.

> 'J.M. Robinson has shown that redaction criticism cannot restrict itself to examination of an author's detailed revision of older materials but must also consider his work as a whole, and specifically he must ask what kind of a book the redaction has produced ....' [Fortna 1975:498]

Composition criticism, however, as distinct from reader-response criticism, may be regarded, with certain qualifications, as falling under the historical critical paradigm in that it is still concerned with the relation of the text, albeit the gospel in its final form, and its historical context. It is precisely this that Kingsbury [1986a:IX], for example, undertakes in his essentially redaction-critical approach to Matthew's gospel. Since redaction criticism is associated with the historical paradigm, the identification of composition criticism with redaction criticism clearly shows that composition criticism, in Kingsbury's quote, is also associated with the historical paradigm:

> 'The present book is a study in that form of redaction criticism often called composition criticism. The intention is to ascertain what is characteristically Matthean not by attempting to distingish between tradition and redaction but by examining the First Gospel as a unified whole.'

In contrast to this, however, reader-response criticism may be said, rather loosely, to involve a shift in paradigm from historical to literary. Meaning here is no longer sought primarily in the correspondence between text and history, but in the meanings produced by the internal dynamics of the completed work.)

Our examination of the historical-critical approach to scripture (and we have mentioned specifically only form criticism and redaction criticism because it is against the immediate background of these that a general discontentment with that approach has so strongly emerged) has revealed certain assumptions and tendencies which we would expect to impact on an evaluation of the authority of scripture. Historical criticism assumes that the most productive and useful way of approaching scripture is to treat it in the same way in which all other writings are treated - which, according to this view, is the interpretation of these by relating them to the background against which they were written, or the circumstances out of which they arose. Since the biblical writings were produced under certain specific conditions and in response to the demands of those situations, the faithful interpretation of scripture would depend on ascertaining the connection between the situation out of which the writings had emerged and the details of the writings themselves. Out of this complex of basic assumptions one would expect that there would arise direct implications for any assessment of the authority of scripture: one would expect that the presupposition that scripture should be treated like any other writing would impact directly on this question; one would also expect the fragmentation, in varying degrees, that would arise from the attempt to situate units of various sizes in their original contexts, with the attendant break-up of the larger wholes (whether the individual books of the New Testament, or the canon as a whole), to result in the overlooking of significant areas of the interconnecting interpretation - with direct implications for the question of authority.[19] In addition to this, the historical

approach brings out very clearly the distance that separates the modern interpreter from the writings of scripture by stressing the connection between written product and historical context. This distancing of the interpreter from scripture would also, one would expect, affect assessments of the authority of the New Testament. In addition to all of this, or arising directly from it, one would expect that a certain uneasiness, even suspicion, would be generated, by this approach, that the christian communities had, in some sense, shaped the biblical tradition without any particular concern about Jesus, except in so far as it suited their ends (and this is the background against which the quests for the historical Jesus should be seen). Whether one would be inclined to such an extreme assessment, or even if one were simply struck by the realisation that scripture was not quite what one might initially have assumed, there would be a certain circumspection generated by this approach that would have a direct impact on any assessment of the authority of the New Testament.[20]

It will be our task in the following subsection to present an understanding of the authority of scripture based on the historical-critical approach. Having done this, we shall evaluate this understanding, showing why it is necessary to advance beyond that position.

1.3   Authoritative scripture?

The question that we seek to answer here is, what would a typical historical-critical understanding of the authority of the Bible be like? In this we will make frequent recourse to the work of J. Barr because he expresses very eloquently many of the positions usually associated with the historical-critical approach to scripture (even though this does not necessarily mean that we would be justified in labelling his understanding of authority as purely historical-critical as such; which is a point of caution that has to be borne in mind in the case of most of the authors quoted here in views that show a certain dependence on that approach.) As Nineham (1977b:74) points

out, the question of the authority of scripture is not a simple one to answer:

> '... it is always a temptation to assume that a question which can be simply formulated must have answers capable of equally simple formulation .... And in this case the very amorphous and heterogenous character of the biblical material might suggest that it is not meant to yield up its secret in any one easily formulable way.'

It would perhaps be wisest to begin our investigation, which will form a skeletal foundation for a more theological elaboration in section two, by noting that terms like 'authority', 'authoritative', 'norm', 'normative' and the like are all relational concepts.   This means simply that the Bible may only be considered authoritative or normative, in whatever sense we understand these terms, in relation both to something else and to someone.   Barr (1973:23) gives a brief outline of these relations:

> '"Authority" and "norm" thus define relations.   They define (i) the relation between the Bible and ourselves, so that the Bible may be seen as something binding upon us, something to which we have to submit ourselves; and (ii) the relation between the Bible and other documents or sources of knowledge which might also influence our minds or actions at the same time.' [21]

This means that something comes to be regarded as authoritative by a person or a group of people, and that this acknowledged source of authority exists in relations of dominance over, and competition with, other possible sources of authority open to this person or group. This situation provides us with a convenient structure for our preliminary investigation of authority.   We shall begin by examining the relation between scripture and the believing community.   We shall then examine the relation between scripture and other possible sources of authority.

The relation between the Bible and the believing community is itself a complex question to answer. Let us begin by discussing the issue of the way in which the New Testament, and the gospels in particular, was formed.

> 'It can indeed be argued that, if there is to be authority, there must be a ground for this authority; and this brings us back to the matter of origins, of inspiration, of accuracy and inerrancy.' (Barr 1973:24)

In order to bring out clearly the way in which the scriptures were formed and the relation between this and the issue of scriptural authority, let us, again, use the outline suggested by Barr (1980:48).

$$\text{God} \longrightarrow \text{Church} \longrightarrow \text{Tradition} \longrightarrow \text{Scripture}$$

Any discussion of authority, in connection with scripture, would have to begin with some mention of God - since both the community and its book are claimed to be the product of God's initiatory action. Since, for practical reasons, it is not possible to speak of God in his isolation, apart from the people who claim to be the recipients of revelation, the discussion should commence with God's communication of himself - his revelation, so called. This initial revelation of God should not be confused with the scriptures of the community, because it lies prior to both the community and its inspired writings.

> 'In one very central sense I would say that the basic revelation of God, in the sense of the initiation of communication between God and man, is not in the Bible, nor narrated in the Bible, but is presupposed by the Bible.' (Barr 1980:16)

The first step of the process that led, eventually, to the formation of the New Testament was the establishment of a community that believed that it had been brought into existence by the revelation of God. These christian communities existed long before the existence

of any specifically christian scripture.[22]   In christianity it was the 'resurrection' principally that was the 'event' that had the revelatory power to bring into existence the community.[23]

> 'In spite of all the diverse witnesses of primitive Christianity, the common judgement is that revelation, in its fundamentally theological conception, has a very common point in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus from the dead, which is the event by which God ushered in the new age.' (Wilkens 1968:110,111)

To be sure, there had existed, before the crucifixion and resurrection, a community of faith - for what was believed to be the revelation in Christ had brought it into being.   At the same time, however, the crucifixion had cast a shadow of doubt over that revelation.   The community was threatened with disintegration.   The 'resurrection', on the other hand, seemed to the earliest christian community to confirm the previous revelation and give it a cosmic perspective - the overcoming of an invincible power, death, spoke of a significance that stretched beyond the limited area of Palestine, and beyond the limited sphere of the this-worldly.   This seminal revelatory 'event' was not, however, of a different order from that in which we presently experience God's revelation - in the sense that revelation was even then, as now, not of such an unequivocal nature as to dispense with faith and preclude the possibility of disbelief.   To be sure a 'unique' 'event'[24] had unfolded, but its unfolding was not unique (and although it would be impossible to overlook the idiosyncratic nature of Bultmann's solution in such representative studies as for example Jesus Christ and mythology [1958] and New Testament and mythology [1964], it would certainly be true to say that they very clearly reflect the difficult position in which historical criticism finds itself at this point).   The possibility of doubt was ever present and faith was always necessary.

> '"Inspiration" would ... mean that the God whom we worship was also likewise in contact with his people in ancient times and that in their particular circumstances, in the

> stage in which they existed, he was present in the formation
> of their tradition and in the crystallization of that
> tradition as Scripture; but that the mode of this contact
> was no different from the mode in which God has continued to
> make himself known to man.' (Barr 1973:18)

The first step in the formation of the New Testament was the formation
of a believing community brought into existence by revelation – not
unequivocal revelation, but revelation requiring faith and attracting
only those who could see the true significance of what might appear to
others to be everyday.[25] We have spoken about the formation of the
communities of faith. We shall now speak about the traditions of
these communities. The christian communities believed that somehow
in Jesus Christ they were able to catch a glimpse of the divine plan.
There is a tendency for us to speak of finding the meaning of our
lives and the purpose of our existence in Jesus Christ. We
frequently ask questions of a broadly existential nature. Perhaps the
first christian communities phrased their questions differently (cf.,
for example, Nickle 1981:12ff), but whatever the case, they believed
that in Jesus Christ they had encountered, in the flesh, the God to
whom their earlier, Jewish, traditions referred (cf., for example,
Dibelius 1982:29f). This encounter reshaped their understanding of
themselves and the world in which they lived. It shaped the way they
viewed the past, what they did in the present, and what they hoped for
in the future.

> 'To the eyes of faith history had become transparent to the
> divine presence.' (Hick 1983:56)

In Jesus Christ the muddled opacity had become transparent. Bearing
in mind the events that had led to the formation of these christian
communities, we should not be surprised to find there traditions about
these seminal events circulating. These traditions would have
included carefully remembered and treasured teaching from the lips of
Jesus himself (Dibelius [1982] does not have a special form-critical
sayings category that corresponds to Bultmann's 'Dominical sayings',

but mentions them in his other sections as part of the particular 'form' under discussion), as well as remembered events from the life of Jesus, both seminal for the community as well as a host of other more personal, less significant memories.[26] At the same time, however, the communities had not been formed on the understanding that God's activity was confined to bygone events. As the book of Acts makes clear, the mighty deeds of God in and through Jesus Christ were thought of as a continuing, transforming reality in the ongoing lives of the christian communities. God had intervened decisively and miraculously – but the nature of that intervention had been such that it was believed that it would continue in the life of the community. This meant that the community felt quite justified in combining the Jesus traditions with elements of its own later experience of the risen Christ (cf. Nickle's [1981:47ff] so-called 'post-ascension tradition'). The traditions that circulated in these communities were, therefore, a blend of historical reminiscence and the later experience of faith. Initially the communities lived in faithful confidence. Christ was their guide and their helper. As time passed, however, there was probably a growing concern that new generations would no longer have at their disposal traditions of their spiritual roots. Perhaps decades and decades of retelling would distort the traditions to such an extent that people would have ceased to know the reason for, and the meaning of, what they considered to be their unique existence as christians. In addition to the fear that time would bring erosion, there may have been the fear that struggles within the church would lead to deliberate, partisan modification of the traditions. Perhaps the 'historical Jesus' would be lost completely to distorted understandings of the risen Christ.[27] The church, therefore, became anxious that its worshipful remembrance of the great events that it considered to justify its existence would cease – leading to a dying out of the community (this becomes one of the major foci in section two – where a more detailed examination of this occupies us) .

'...Lightfoot ... once shared with me his uncertainty whether the production of the first gospel may not have been "the first serious failure of nerve on the part of the

infant church."'   (Nineham 1977:110)

The church perhaps feared that her ability to discern the leading of the ascended Christ was being gradually eroded.   She had somehow to be assured of relatively pristine traditions about Jesus to which she could refer in the struggle to determine what she viewed as a legitimately christian course of belief and action.   The community had, therefore, to ensure its identity and its survival by having relatively stable collections of reliable traditions.   The time had come for the birth of the gospel as christian genre.

> 'But the discoveries at Nag Hammadi reopen fundamental questions.   They suggest that Christianity might have developed in very different directions — or that Christianity as we know it might not have survived at all. Had Christianity remained multiform, it might well have disapeared from history, along with dozens of rival religious cults of antiquity.' (Pagels 1979:147)

The early church was not a peaceful, cohesive whole.   One may not necessarily agree with the extent and degree of conflict, but it does seem certain that, at the very least, there was disagreement over some of the important points of the faith in the early church.[28] Depending on one's assessment of the theologies of the different gospels, both canonical and apocryphal, one could arrive at a number of reasons for the variety of the gospels (see, for example, Metzger 1987:166ff, or the exciting interpretation in this regard by Pagels [1979] of the Nag Hammadi finds). At the very least, for example, one group might have felt that, without severe conflict being involved, more could have been said, or that what had been said could have been given a different slant.   Another group might have felt that its unique situation was not being given due attention in the gospel's creative blend of remembrance of the past and situation in the present (and it is particularly in this connection that redaction criticism is able to illuminate these differences).[29]   Yet another group might have felt outraged at the distortion of the slant given to the life and teaching of Jesus (and, at the risk of oversimplifying

the matter, one may mention here the apocryphal gospels). One gospel
would have led, to put it rather simplistically, to the creation of
more gospels (and we do not, at this point, need to be more specific
than this because the mere fact of multiplicity is itself evidence of
perceived inadequacies) - each attempting to do justice to the seminal
events leading to the formation of the community (out of which this
gospel emerged), and each attempting to do justice to the perception
of the situation of the group responsible for the work.[30]

Clearly, at this level, it would not do to speak of authority as if it
resided in the text of the gospel alone, or even primarily. The
gospels had authority because they embodied the values and principles
of the communities which led to their production. These writings
were attributed with authority because they contained the distilled
essence of the vision and values to which the group adhered. These
communities did not, however, regard the meaning by which they were
driven and the traditions, in terms of which they explained their
lives and the world, as originating in themselves. They believed
that they were under the control of an insight introduced by God in
and through Jesus. The authority of the gospels, therefore, derived
directly from the acceptance by the community - which authority, in
turn, was believed to derive directly from God. If it is misleading
to speak, in isolation, of the authority of scripture, it is as
misleading to speak of authority purely in terms of the community.
The authority was always considered to be that of Jesus Christ,
mediated through the community of faith in which his words and deeds
were remembered and regarded, in some sense, as binding. It was in
these communities that Christ was believed to speak in a way that
moved people to obedience (cf. Bloesch 1979:459).

> 'It [the authority] lies in the people - ancient Israel and
> the earliest church - from whom these texts came, in their
> life and their history; but also functioning in another
> way, it lies in the text they developed out of their own
> tradition and eventually left to us as their official
> written communication.' (Barr 1980:51)

We have seen that initially the gospels were accepted as authoritative by the groups that had produced them (just as, similarly, initially the epistles were only regarded as authoritative by those to whom they had been addressed). In order to preserve their vision of Jesus, the one in whom they believed that they had seen, and continued to see, the divine purpose for the world, the early communities wrote their gospels and sent each other letters of support, information and admonishment (in addition to the canonical writings, one may, for example, refer to the writings of the 'Apostolic Fathers' as illustrative of this trend). Lucidly and faithfully in their opinion the communities interpreted their lives in terms of what they knew of Jesus, both by tradition and experience, and produced writings that were recognized as commanding respect and obedience.

> 'The New Testament documents spring from the believing and worshipping church. They fix the faith and adoration of the church in words, according to certain specific literary forms ... and, at the time of their writing, according to the needs and conceptions of certain specific circumstances .... But once they have come into existence, they begin to acquire authority, at first only locally and in small degree. From that moment, these fixed forms of words not only express faith but also mould it.' (Houlden 1978:7)

Soon other christian communities began to feel that certain writings, not written by them, bore faithful testimony to Jesus Christ. These writings were included in their collections that may already, in addition to their own creations (where applicable), have contained collections of epistles from Paul and other respected teachers.[31] Soon christian communities had collections of writings of various sorts regarded by them as authoritative because of their faithful witness to the earthly and ascended Lord. As time passed, however, these communities were swamped with a flood of doubtful, even dangerous, literature. Even more insidious than the flood itself was the fact that it was often extremely difficult to tell the difference between the authoritative writings and subversive works. The communities, therefore, over the next few centuries set themselves the

task of compiling a list of sanctioned, authoritative works (cf., for example, Metzger 1987:305ff). Generally, what decided whether or not a work was included in this canonical list was the esteem with which it was regarded by the majority of the recognized christian communities. It would be an error to say that councils decided the shape of the canon — it was decided largely by the extent to which works had commended themselves and had won acceptance in local congregations over a period of some time, until by the mid second century the final shape of the canon had largely been fixed by popular usage although, as, for example, Eusebius' classification shows, the outer limits had not yet at this early stage been set. Usage, more than content (although, of course, these are not separate, watertight compartments) was the determining factor, as Barr (1983:44) points out:

> 'But this is not because of the intrinsic merits or demerits of the book: it is because the books are canonical and uncanonical respectively.'

Again, the authority of Christ was the authority of God. The sphere in which this authority was regarded as uniquely realised was in the church, in which the words and deeds of the earthly Jesus were remembered in anticipation of the working of the risen Christ. By extension, the church received authority by virtue of its obedient witness to Christ and his demands. The writings which she sanctioned as embodying her faith were likewise imbued with this delegated authority.

So far we have introduced the question of the term 'authority', as it is applied to the New Testament, by outlining the first of its defining relations — its relation to the people who recognize the authority. We have said that the New Testament is authoritative because groups of people regard it as being, in some sense, a uniquely true and valid interpretation of the meaning and demands of life in the world — which interpretation can be traced back to Jesus and the

earliest communities of faith with whom a strong sense of continuity is felt. We shall move on now to discuss the second of the defining relations - that to other, possibly competing, sources of knowledge and meaning.

> 'Why should this collection of old books have any more influence over us than another lot of books, and why should it have more importance than all sorts of perceptions which we gain from other sources, both ancient and modern, written and unwritten?' (Barr 1973:9)

To lead us into the complexities of the debate initiated by Barr above, let us begin by speaking of the relation between scripture and contemporary christian life. As we have intimated earlier, it would appear to be an unsound approach to ground the authority of scripture for contemporary believers in an untouched-by-man infallibility. In this view man is a pen in the hand of God, so to speak. Man has no say in the end product. The failure of limited human faith, vision and ability are eliminated.

> 'As advocates of inerrancy hone their formulations in response to growing defections, they reveal that the fight is really over a series of theological claims: that biblical authority (and issues like canon) depend on a strong doctrine of inspiration; that in inspiration the divine action is so determinative as to insure a flawless product; that human language is capable of conveying diverse revelation unqualified by either finitude or human sin; that revelation is primarily propositional; that the Scriptures are a collection of propositions awaiting systematization; that the Bible is so directly a product of a single divine mind that any form of inconsistency is precluded.' (Dayton 1980:81)

The approach to scripture outlined (or rather, analyzed) by Dayton is open to severe criticism at every point. The question of authority is really the question of the relation between scripture and contemporary life. The objection that can be raised against the view outlined by Dayton is that it leads to an inadequate understanding of authority because it misunderstands both the complexity of the Word of

God in a human vessel and the nature and possibilities of human life (when viewed from the perspective which has come to be embodied in the historical-critical approach, that is - also see endnote 25).

> 'For evengelical theology, belief in biblical inerrancy and belief in biblical authority have been closely connected, and therefore the inerrancy debate touches upon what many people feel is the basis of authority and religious certainty.' (Pinnock 1978:65)

Scripture is authoritative not because, primarily, its authoritativeness can be proven by means of a consecutive series of propositions showing a direct communication between God and man. It is authoritative because it has come to be, for whatever reason, regarded as reliable and worthwhile as a guide to belief and action.[32]

> 'We no longer accept things because they were accepted all the time. On the contrary, only if we see their value for today do we accept them. So the quality we look for is no longer tradition but function. It is no longer traditional values which have a chance, rather it is the things that prove their value today which have a chance to be used by us.' (Hertzsch 1982:60)

For the Bible to come to be regarded as authoritative there has to be some point of contact between the content of the writings and the experience of the individual. This does not yet mean that scripture has become authoritative. It simply means that a point of entry has been achieved. This may or may not lead to the classification of the Bible as authoritative.

> 'The substance of the Bible will only be discovered by us if we add our own life to it, and this happens as soon as each of us has understood, "This is my life which is discussed here. It may take different forms with other names, but still it is my own story."' (Hertzsch 1982:66)

Once one has reached the point of being able to believe that in some

sense one's existence is being spoken of in the text, one has then to decide whether anything worthwhile is being said. Does the text measure with one's experience of life? Are the real problems of human existence taken into account? Are the possibilities opened to one realistic, worthwhile and desirable?

> 'The particular experiences within a religious community may be taken as contributing to an understanding of one's being in the world, but will do so ultimately only as they are systematically related to the interpretations of the general dimensions of our experience .... In this way the theist recognizes that God is both being in whom he finds fulfilment and that which accounts for things being the way they are.' (Long 1981:506,507)

Once the Bible is regarded as having the ability to explain why things are the way they are, and once it comes to be regarded as offering a plausible, profound vision of the possibilities open to humanity, it becomes revelational - it brings the same awed awareness evoked by Jesus himself among the earliest believers.

> 'The overall conclusion is that revelation may plausibly be interpreted as the concept of divine inspirational activity effective in promoting understanding of, and lived movement towards, a given form of salvation. Where such activity for whatever reason is especially effective, there one finds individual or communal foci of revelation.' (Shephard 1980:437)

The Bible has become authoritative once the vision it evokes takes on the power to convince me to shape my life in accordance with it.

> 'To say that Scripture is authoritative is to say that its perspective tests our other perspectives and is not simply tested by them.' (Bartlett 1983:4)

The Bible is the yardstick against which the community constantly checks its experience, even as the yardstick itself comes under

pressure in the measuring. It is the sole record, and regarded as a faithful interpretation, of the life of Jesus[33] - the authorized collection of life-experiences believed to be faithful to the call of Jesus. Through this work Jesus's call is believed to be mediated to christians - even as his authoritative vision is directed to them. At the same time, however, scripture is authoritative, as we have seen, when it enters into dialogue with experience. The present experience of the believer, with the view of the past, present and future that it gives rise to, has to be compared with the views expressed in scripture. The experience of the believer, his perception of the world, is shaped by a great many forces, all of which enter into the equation involving scripture and the authority attributed to it. Everyday information, gained from newspapers, television, books, and so on, is blended with insights gained in conversation, all under the guidance of certain innate values, sensibilities and capacities. All of these forces enter into a complex interaction that involves each one's being shaped by the others even as it shapes the others. Scripture also enters into this equation. Clearly, however, scripture must occupy a slightly different position, at the very least, from all these other forces if it is regarded as authoritative. Once scripture has demonstrated its unique validity, authority, however, it always enters into the dialogue as the yardstick against which experience is measured - even as it itself is measured. Scripture remains authoritative as long as the equation balances in such a way that scripture provides the rationale and incentive, in some sense, for belief and action. Scripture, according to this understanding, would cease to retain its authoritative position once the equation balanced on the side of a view that no longer held scripture - again, in some sense - as the guiding principle.

As a preliminary to concluding this section on an historical-critical description of the authority of scripture, it should once again be mentioned that the goal of this section has been to provide a preliminary understanding of the subject. As such it denies any claim to exhaustiveness, desiring only to provide a working understanding of the subject that would enable us to begin the task at

hand, which is intended to lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning of authority as it is applied to scripture. To conclude then, the authority of scripture is grounded in the belief that God is active in history, though certainly not in an unequivocal manner.[34] He is believed to have acted uniquely and decisively in the events surrounding the life, death, and 'resurrection' of Jesus Christ, even as he continues to act in the world, but in such a way as to refer to, and take cognizance of, that 'unique' historical 'event'. Belief in the authority of scripture is, therefore, belief in the pivotal and continuing importance of the events, that marked the life of Jesus.

> 'The activity of God, then, takes place at two levels. First, he has acted in the great redemptive acts described in the Bible; second, he continues to act in contemporary events.' (Weir 1982:345)

The scriptures, however, bear witness not only to those historical, significant events, but also to the ongoing life of the believing community in its attempt to live the consequences of its faith in Jesus, in the knowledge that God continued his action in the world. As a testimony, to obedient and faithful lives, scripture is not a blueprint for action and belief in the present however. It is not a list of what should be done under any given circumstances. It is a series of accounts of what was done, never to be repeated, by people who shared the belief in the authority of Jesus Christ. In the process of canonization the church approvingly commended these faithful responses and set them up as examples to guide the church in the future. This means that belief in biblical authority does not in any sense rob life of its spontaneity. In fact, it encourages spontaneity and freedom.[35]

> '... authoritative teaching and free initiative pervade the Christian enterprise in all its stages.' (Milavec 1976:233)

> 'The New Testament gives the inestimable benefit of what

we may regard as a set of "worked examples" of faithful
and authentic response...' (Houlden 1978:21)

But belief in the authority of the Bible is not something that can be
rationally justified in a way that would convince everybody. Some
people regard it as authoritative, others do not. Even as Jesus
himself was open to misunderstanding, so too is scripture open to
diverse reckonings of its worth.

'Jesus' authority was hidden except to faith. It was
invisible, intangible and contestable.' (Smart 1970:100)

Belief in the authority of scripture is belief that somehow we find
there guidelines to living with the Elusive Presence (cf. Terrien
1978) which measures and defines human existence.

'In biblical faith, human beings discern that presence as
a surging which soon vanishes and leaves in its
disappearance an absence that has been overcome. It is
neither absolute nor eternal but elusive and fragile, even
and especially when human beings seek to prolong it in the
form of a cultus.' (Terrien 1978:476)

The example of an historical-critical approach to the authority of
scripture (constructed upon the foundation of the historical-critical
approach to literature outlined in subsection 1.2) that we have
sketched here develops in two stages. It begins with an examination
of the past and then seeks to find an application in the present in
the light of that past. This development is not in itself prejudicial
since, as we shall see in section two, a similar path may be followed
to a largely different conclusion. What is prejudicial in this case
is the set of presuppositions with which the past is examined, and
which consequently has decisive significance for the question of
authority. In the case of the historical-critical methods the
intention underlying the initial phase has been purely descriptive -
to describe what happened and why (according to the range of

possibilities to which this approach is open) that happened. The description that it produces is one of a religious group, like any other, which produced a religious writing, like (in essence if not necessarily in extent or scope perhaps) any other, which held a special position in the ongoing life of that group. This group regarded itself and its writing as unique - which was a self-assessment shared by many other similar groups. On the basis of these results, then, the historical-critical approach may be thought of as, from the point of view of the faith itself, severely limiting the possibility of arriving at a favourable assessment of the authority of scripture. This is so because it relativises the unique claims made by and for the christian community and its writings on an a priori set of assumptions, (which it does by, among other things, seeking to place a critical distance between itself and the claims of these writings) and also because its emphasis is to such an extent descriptive that, even if the former hurdle is overcome, the stress on the historical remove seriously calls into question the possibility of present-day application of anything found in scripture - with negative consequences for an assessment of the authority of scripture, upon which such application depends.

> 'According to them [those who pursue scientific investigation of scripture], the Scripture is only the human record of divine revelation or a human witness to revelation. Scripture as such does not have any revelatory quality, and so in spite of the sublime nature of the subject matter, biblical writings are thought to be no different from ordinary human literature. Therefore the Bible is to be investigated and judged by the same standards that we apply to all other human documents.'
> (Ridderbos 1988:vii)

It is necessary both if we wish to do justice to the special claims made by scripture for its subject matter and, by extension, for itself and if we wish to retain the insights gained by the historical-critical approach (against the charge of arbitrariness - which would arise inevitably in the light of what has come to be seen as the relativity, almost arbitrariness, of historical presuppositions [cf

endnote 9] that we approach scripture in a way, and with presuppositions, that is more in keeping with its peculiar character. The difficult task that then awaits us is to determine whether these two ways of speaking of the authority of scripture can be held in fruitful tension for the christian.

Endnotes

1. In this regard one may refer, for example, to: Brown 1985:24ff; Childs 1979:40; Clements 1983 (a book that has, as one of its main concerns, to show how the Old Testament has been brilliantly illuminated by this approach); Dunn 1987:10ff; Hahn 1983:19ff; Hanson 1988:32ff; Ladd 1967:173ff; Teeple 1982:147ff, 288ff.

2. In this connection one may mention the following representative specimens of opinion: Childs 1979:40f; Clements 1983:175; Du Plessis 1975:12ff; Hahn 1983:27ff; Käsemann 1969:9f; Ladd 1967:183ff; Marxsen 1972:2; Wainwright 1982:14ff.

3. cf., for example, Origen (De principiis iv.1.9.) who maintains that a concentration on the obvious, literal meaning of scripture often results in misconceptions about God, whereas a concentration on the spiritual, allegorical, meaning introduces one into the holy mysteries of God (also cf. De principiis iv.1.11.).

4. cf., for example, Origen (De principiis iv.1.7.), who speaks of the embodiment of eternal, spiritual essences in earthen vessels.

5. cf., for example, Luther (1878:328):

>'Now I have shaken off all these follies
>[allegorical interpretation], and my best art is to
>deliver the Scripture in the simple sense; therein
>is life, strength, and doctrine; all other methods
>are foolishness, let them shine how they will.'

6. See, for example, Kümmel (1972:51) [cf. Du Plessis 1975:9]
who adequately conveys the complexity of the causes behind
the emergence of the historical-critical approach:

>'Accordingly, both in the presuppositions of
>Wettstein's text criticism and in his exegesis a
>move in the direction of a fundamentally historical
>examination of the New Testament began to manifest
>itself. Nevertheless, all these impulses toward a
>comprehensive historical consideration of the New
>Testament could only come into effective play when
>man had learned to look at the New Testament
>entirely free of all dogmatic bias and, in
>consequence, as a witness out of the past to the
>process of historical development. This attitude
>emerged for the first time during the course of the
>critical study of religion by English Deism. As a
>result of the confluence of humanistic thought, of
>the free theological points of view of the Dutch
>Arminians, and of the English Latitudinarians,
>together with the latitudinarian debate against the
>orthodoxy of the English state church, a theological
>school of thought came into being. It was fostered
>by the inherently rational mode of thought of
>English theology, by the English Revolution of 1688,
>and by the Toleration Act of 1689, which tried to
>unify the various theological and ecclesiastical
>schools by a return to "natural religion" and which
>declared war on all supernaturalism, even that
>involved in the consideration of the New Testament.'

7. cf. for example, Kümmel 1972:120 and Du Plessis 1975:9.

Also cf. Hasel (1985:19):

>'In the age of Enlightenment (Aufklärung) a totally
>new approach to the study of the Bible was developed
>under several influences. First and foremost was
>rationalism's reaction against any form of
>supernaturalism. Human reason was set up as the
>final criterion and chief source of knowledge, which
>meant that the authority of the Bible as the
>infallible record of divine revelation was rejected.

> The second major departure of the period of the
> Enlightenment was the development of a new
> hermeneutic, the historical-critical method ....'

8.   cf. Petersen (1978:9):

> 'Historical criticism is concerned with the value of
> biblical texts as evidence for reconstructing the
> history to which they refer or of which they are
> documents.'

9.   cf. Krentz (1975:37):

> 'The goals of the biblical student are those of the
> historians in general, a corpus of facts arranged in
> narrative to give an explanation of the past. He
> tries to answer the question "What actually
> happened?" and "Why?" about events in the Bible.'

Alhough this issue will be brought more sharply into focus
shortly, it should be noted that it is precisely at this
point at which decisive weaknesses have been discovered in
the effort to approach scripture solely in terms of the
historical-critical methods. As soon as it is realised
that historical criticism cannot provide an 'objective'
analysis of scripture it becomes increasingly difficult to
justify an exclusive emphasis on it. This comes out
clearly in Walsh's (1960:34) introduction to the
philosophy of history:

> 'A science, whatever it is, is a body of knowledge
> acquired as the result of an attempt to study a
> certain subject matter in a methodological way,
> following a determinate set of guiding principles
> .... The fundamental point here is that we are
> asking questions from a definite set of
> presuppositions, and our answers are connected just
> because of that.'

This point of the presuppositions underlying the
historical-critical approach - and by which the
'objective' fallacy is unmasked - is strikingly
illustrated in Jung's example of the man-eating crocodile
(n.d. 132) in his essay entitled Archaic man:

'It is our assumption, amounting to a positive conviction, that everthing has causes which we call natural and which we at least suppose to be perceptible. Primitive man, on the other hand, assumes that everything is brought about by invisible, arbitrary powers in other words, that everything is chance. Only he does not call it chance, but intention. Natural causation is to him a mere semblance and not worthy of mention. If three women go to the river to draw water, and a crocodile seizes the one in the centre and pulls her under, our view of things leads us to the verdict that it was pure chance that that particular woman was seized. The fact that the crocodile seized her seems to us natural enough, for these beasts occasionally do eat human beings. For primitive man such an explanation completely obliterates the facts, and accounts for no aspect of the whole exciting story. Archaic man is right in holding our view of the matter to be superficial or even absurd, for the accident might not have happened and still the same interpretation would fit the case. The prejudice of the European does not allow him to see how little he really explains things in such a way.

Primitive man expects more of an explanation. What we call chance is to him arbitrary power. It was therefore the intention of the crocodiles — as everyone could observe — to seize the woman who stood between the other two. If it had not had this intention it would have taken one of the others. But why did the crocodile have this intention? These animals do not ordinarily eat human beings. This assertion is correct — quite as correct as the statement that there is no rainfall in the Sahara. Crocodiles are really timid animals, and are easily frightened. Considering their numbers, they kill astonishingly few people, and it is an unexpected and unnatural event when they devour a man. Such an event calls for an explanation. Of his own accord the crocodile would not take a human life. By whom, then, was he ordered to do so?'

[Though it is not of immediate relevance to our discussion at this stage, it might be mentioned in passing that Jung's conception of the integration of the conscious and unconscious seems to share a not completely dissimilar goal to that of the task we are pursuing in this dissertation — though we are not qualified to pursue the labyrinthine course of that comparison.] Also see

endnote 24.

10.   cf. Petersen's (1978:15) two analytical principles fundamental to the historical critical paradigm: 1. 'every text is first and foremost evidence for the circumstances in and for which it was composed, and in this respect texts serve as documentary evidence for the time of writing'; 2. 'seek the earliest and the best evidence for the events referred to in the text'.

11.   It would seem as if there was a certain ambivalence regarding whether or not the latter was really part of the form-critical intention. In the case of Bultmann, it would certainly seem as if he did not believe that form criticism would yield any significant insight into the historical Jesus.

> 'The Christ who is preached is not the historic Jesus, but the Christ of faith and the cult. Hence in the foreground of the preaching of Christ stands the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the saving acts which are known by faith and become effective for the believer in Baptism and Lord's Supper. Thus the kerygma of Christ is cultic legend and the Gospels are expanded cult legends.' (Bultmann 1963:370,371)

[In this regard one may also refer to Bultmann's oft-cited opening sentence to his Theology of the New Testament (1952:3) in which he states that 'The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself.']

In the case of Dibelius, however, despite McKnight's confident assertion (1969:33) that Dibelius was as sceptical of the possibility of learning anything significant about the historical Jesus as Bultmann was, it should be pointed out that in his conclusion to From tradition to gospel (1982:287ff) he seemed to entertain the guarded hope of gains in this area (see endnote 23).

From the writings of the pioneering form critics it is not at all certain, however, whether varying degrees of skepticism concerning the possibility of discovering anything about the historical Jesus arose from the discovery of the advanced shaping of the Jesus traditions by the early christian communities (whether a desire to get back to Jesus had been thwarted) or whether it was simply the coincidental product of a methodological a priori that was only interested in the way in which the communities had shaped the tradition.

[But cf. Gerhardsson (1977) and Riesenfeld (1970), who present a view more predominant in the second half of this century — that tradition extends directly back to Jesus because Jesus is thought of as having instructed his disciples in rabbinic manner, with careful attention to memorization.

> 'At this point it is illuminating to take note of the simple mechanisms which functioned among the rabbis. If a person wanted to know what a given teacher, no longer living, actually taught, he would go to the teacher's disciples... those who had heard him teach.' (Gerhardsson 1977:63)

Despite the caution that has come to be adopted in using Gerhardsson's material, however, his thesis of strict continuity between Jesus and the tradition about him is in line with the growing trend that questions Bultmann's hiatus between Jesus and the tradition about him. Two excellent examples of this tendency are Dunn (1987) and Ridderbos (1988).]

12.   cf. Bultmann (1963:4):

> 'The proper understanding of form criticism rests upon the judgement that the literature in which the life of a given community, even the primitive Christian community, has taken shape, springs out of quite definite conditions and wants of life from which grows up a quite definite style and quite

specific forms and categories.'

Also cf. Gottwald (1985:95):

> 'Form criticism works on the widely demonstrated
> axiom that in the everyday culture of people there
> are relatively fixed forms of oral communication
> appropriate to particular settings in life.'

13.   cf. Gottwald (1985:96):

> 'These oral forms had characteristic structures and
> verbal formulas, treated a customary set of topics,
> and were recited in specific life settings.'

But cf. Bultmann (1963:4):

> 'The <u>Sitz im Leben</u> is not, however, an individual
> historical event, but a typical situation or
> occupation in the life of a community.'

14.   Form criticism opens up the possibility of being able to
swim back, against the stream, so to speak, to the origins
of the gospel traditions. In this regard it might be
worthwhile to include an overview of the six assumptions
that Redlich (1939) sees as underlying form criticism.'

1)   'Before The Gospels Were Written There Was A Period
of Oral Tradition.'(35)

> The gospels did not come into being
> instantaneously; significant events were not
> followed immediately by written gospels. There was
> a period of time, between these events and the
> written gospels, during which stories, based in
> varying degrees and senses on the original event,
> and sayings were passed on by word of mouth.

2)   'During the Oral Period, the Narratives and Sayings,
With the Exception Of The Passion Narrative,
Circulated Mainly As Simple And Self-Contained

Detached Units, Each Complete In Itself.' (37)

This oral tradition was not a cohesive whole. The passion narrative alone, it would seem, was passed on in a flowing, story-like form. The rest of the tradition was passed on in brief, insular packages. It is predominantly at this point that historical skepticism arises, because these largely independent and self-sufficient oral units appear to combine something of the historical events and sayings with later additions and 'fabrications'. As the stories were passed on, the communities doing so added touches of local colour and modified them to address the situations to which they were now being applied.

'In the stories of Jesus which have been preserved ... in the Gospels, there is an intermingling of valued remembrances with the impact of the situation of the community which has remembered the stories for specific purposes. The result is an original blend of recollection and witness, of narrative and confession.' (Nickle 1981:29)

'In the process and development of the oral tradition it was neither practical, possible, or appropriate for the first Christians to maintain careful distinctions between Spirit-inspired community constructions and authentic historical reminiscence.' (Nickle 1981:48)

3) 'The Materials In The Gospels Can Be Classified According To Their Form.' (50)

It is possible to get back to the original building blocks from which the gospels were constructed - the oral units. It is also possible to classify these units according to the religio-sociological environments out of which they arose and the needs which they were expected to fulfil.

4) 'The Vital Factors Which Gave Rise To And Preserved These Forms Are To Be Found In The Practical Interests Of The Christian Community.' (55)

Oral traditions were preserved precisely because they served a purpose in the community. Sometimes, for example, stories might be told for missionary purposes - to lead people to faith; sometimes stories of a different kind might be told to encourage the faithful; other stories, of yet another type, might be told because they provide practical guidelines for christian living. With the unit of tradition in hand, and knowing the ties that exist between units and their backgrounds, the form critic tries to determine the life setting of the unit by asking why it was preserved.

'The fundamental question which the form-critic asks is "Why was the story told?" or "What is the point of the story?"' (Gardner 1959:105)

5) 'The Material Of The Tradition Has No Biographical Or Chronological Or Geographical Value.' (62)

As we noted in passing previously, the gospels are not regarded as reliable historical records of the life and ministry of Jesus. This is the case for two reasons. Firstly, the units of tradition were changed, by usage, to take due cognizance of the situations which they were being used to address - so that it is no longer always possible to distinguish between historical veracity, in the purely material sense, and secondary elaboration. Secondly, the isolated, individual nature of the unit of tradition makes the ordering within the gospels largely speculative - where the order is determined more by narrative interests than by the knowledge of the details of the course of the life of Jesus. This does not mean that the gospels do not contain reliable historical testimony to the life of Jesus - it simply means that one can no longer tell with ease, if at all, what is historical and what is not.

Judgment has to be based on the individual peculiarities of the passage under examination. Form criticism examines the traditions skeptically in the hope of being able to separate the earliest traditions from their later elaboration.

6) 'The Original Form Of The Tradtion May Be Recovered And Its History Traced, Before Being Written Down, By Discovering The Laws Of The Tradition.' (73)

The key to unlocking the secrets of the text, if by secrets one understands images of shadowy historical realities behind the traditional elements, is a knowledge of the rules and factors which governed the formation of the units.

15.   'The position taken by the evangelists in forming the literary character of synoptic tradition is limited. It is concerned with the choice, the limitation, and the final shaping of material, but not with the original moulding. The form in which we hear of the words and deeds of Jesus is due only in a certain degree to the personal work of the evangelist ... [but] we ourselves have become accustomed to ascribe to the authors and their prejudices a large responsibility for the tradition as a whole, just as if we were dealing with Belles Lettres. This error is ancient.' (Dibelius 1982:3)

16.   cf. Tuckett (1987:117):

'In fact an awareness that each evangelist had his own individuality, and had to a certain extent imposed his own ideas on the tradition, is by no means new. During the last century F.C. Baur argued that all the Gospels were governed by an individual Tendenz, and in many respects the so-called Tendenzkritik of Baur and other members of the Tübingen school in the nineteenth centure is very similar to modern redaction criticism.'

17.   'Unquestionably the evangelists worked to a large extent simply as collectors and often arranged the individual portions of the tradition according to relatively superficial points of view .... This makes all the more significant the proof of definite

theological intentions such as the evangelist
Matthew shows in the passage under consideration [Mt
8:23-27] by the surprising combination of sayings
about discipleship, the localisation of which in the
context of the miracle stories has no other possible
motive.' (Bornkamm 1982:57)

Also see Conzelmann (1960:9):

'We must make plain that ... our aim is to elucidate
Luke's work in its present form, not to enquire into
possible sources or into the historical facts which
provide the material. A variety of sources does not
necessarily imply a similar variety in the thought
and composition of the author.'

18. cf. Petersen (1978:20):

'Redaction criticism ... has attempted to
reconstruct from the seams between the fragmented
pieces not Humpty Dumpty but his theology.'

19. cf. Hahn (1983:28,29):

'In addition to emphasizing distance, historical
criticism carries with it a tendency toward
isolation ... the specific incident or the
individual text being dealt with is narrowed down to
its determinative elements and described in these
terms. Correspondingly, when a comprehensive
presentation is made, the recognizable and possible
causal connections between individual events or
texts are pointed out. But transcendent points of
reference are systematically excluded by this
approach.'

20. It would seem as if it is precisely against this type of
background, arising from the historical-critical approach
to scripture, that the quest for the historical Jesus may
be understood - as an endeavour, similar in principle to
the one that we have undertaken, to do justice to the
uniqueness of scripture against the background of the
historical approach to the Bible. It is for this reason
too that we shall describe the quest for the historical
Jesus in some detail, since it will help to delineate our
approach by showing why it is not possible from strictly
within the confines of this method to achieve this end.

'In my judgement, it needs to be made increasingly
clear that the deepest issue in the present conflict
about the significance of the kerygma concerns the
way in which New Testament Scripture is involved in

the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ.'
(Ridderbos 1988:56)

Any investigation of the origins of the quest for the
historical Jesus soon reveals that it did not arise simply
as a result of the isolated interests of biblical
scholars. The quest had its origins in the broader
context of the emerging movement popularly known as
Rationalism.

> 'About the time of the American Revolution, a
> leading intellectual doctrine called Rationalism
> emerged in Western thinking. The movement, which
> exalted man's reason and common sense and looked
> askance at the supernatural and miraculous, has
> persisted as a dominant trend into recent times.
> It was under the impact of Rationalism that the
> beginning was made in the historical study of the
> Gospels.' (Sandmel 1974:193)

Tillich (1967:17) traces the rise of Rationalism back to
the developing consequences of the Reformation —
consequences that impacted not only upon religious
scholarly circles, but upon the entire intellectual
atmosphere of the day:

> 'This was one of the points on which the Reformation
> erupted, for in place of the fides implicata the
> Reformers taught that everyone must have an
> experience of grace in faith. Each individual must
> be able to confess his sins, to experience the
> meaning of repentance, and to become certain of his
> salvation through Christ. This became a problem in
> Protestantism. It meant that everyone would have
> to have some basic knowledge of the fundamental
> doctrines of the Christian Church. In teaching
> these doctrines, you could not carry on the
> instruction of ordinary people in the same way as
> future professors of theology are taught .... How
> can you teach everybody? By making the teaching
> extremely simple. This simplification became more
> and more a rationalization. You must teach what is
> understandable by reason in your religious education
> .... The consequence of this was that the
> doctrines had to be made more reasonable to become
> more understandable. This was one of the ways in
> which religious education served as a preparation
> for the Enlightenment.'

The name most often associated with the impetus to the quest for the historical Jesus is Reimarus,whose fragment, entitled Vom Zwecke Jesu und seiner Junger, was published posthumously by Lessing in 1778 (cf. for example, Keck 1971:8 and Du Toit 1983:259). It would be incorrect to say, without qualification, that Reimarus 'caused' the quest for the historical Jesus. In one sense he did – because after the publication of his work there was a flurry of activity that set out to refute his theory by demonstrating that the historical Jesus was identical with the Jesus presented in the gospels. It would be truer to say, however, that he was among the first of those to be immersed by the incoming tide that was to change the course of intellectual history. Before the publication of his fragment, the historical Jesus had almost universally been regarded as coinciding with the picture presented in the gospels.

> 'For those early writers the problem was the differences among the written gospels. Where the gospels agreed, they had no hesitation in equating the Jesus of the text with the historical Jesus. It has only been since the publication of Reimarus' critical fragments that there has been a search for the Jesus behind the gospels. From then on the premise has been that the historical Jesus and the Christ of the gospels are not necessarily the same – rather that they simply are not the same.' (Du Toit 1983:258,259)

> ['The quest of the historical Jesus was originally the quest after "The Jesus of Nazareth who actually lived in first century Palestine", unrestricted by the doctrinal presentations of him in Bible, creed and Church.' (Robinson 1959:28)]

Reimarus contended that the historical Jesus was not the same as the Christ depicted in the gospels. Jesus himself had expected an earthly, political messianic kingdom – as had his disciples. It was only once the crucifixion had dashed their hopes that they had to set

about fabricating a previously non existent spiritual
dimension to the life and teaching of Jesus. The
disciples furthermore, Reimarus argued, stole Jesus'
corpse to lend substance to the illusion they had created.

> 'Thus the existing history of Jesus enlightens us
> more and more upon the object of his conduct and
> teaching, which entirely corresponds with the first
> idea entertained of him by his apostles, that is
> that he was a worldly deliverer. It enlightens us
> also regarding the fact that they had good reason to
> believe in him as such as long as he lived. It also
> shows that the master, and how much more his
> disciples, found themselves mistaken and deceived by
> the condemnation and death, and that the new system
> of a suffering spiritual savior, which no one had
> ever known or thought of before, was invented after
> the death of Jesus, and invented only because the
> first hopes had failed.' (Reimarus 1970:151)

The motive that led to the fabrication of this tale was,
according to Reimarus, simply the drive to obtain wealth
and power. The entire story of Jesus presented in the
gospels was, therefore, a distortion based on greed.
Both Jesus and the disciples had deluded themselves. The
crucifixion had put an end to their hopes. On the off
chance of being able to benefit from the caper, even
though it appeared to be over, they had invented the
gospel stories.

> 'As, then, the new doctrine of the apostles was an
> undoubted fabrication, they must have invented it
> with a preconceived motive in their mind and will.
> Now as the former motives of the apostles,
> invariably and up to the time of the fabrication,
> had been aimed at worldly wealth and power, it
> follows with all moral certainty that the possession
> of worldly wealth and power was also the object of
> the apostles in the fabrication of their new
> doctrine. Nor can we doubt that all the
> circumstances attending their conduct will verify
> this conclusion.' (Reimarus 1970:243)

Clearly, therefore, there were two factors leading up to
the first quest for the historical Jesus. The one, and
certainly the more important of the two, was the general

intellectual atmosphere that was beginning to permeate Western thought. There was an interest in rational explanation and, correspondingly, a general shunning of supernaturalism. There was a newfound confidence in the power of the mind to explain the workings of the world - and it comes as no surprise that men began to pit their minds against the figure of Jesus, who seemed to be so enveloped in the supernatural. The other factor leading to the quest for the historical Jesus, its immediate cause in fact, was the publication of the Reimarus fragment. As we have noted, this was in itself no more than symptomatic of a wider trend - but at the same time it brought into focus the problems that this new Zeitgeist posed for christianity. It provoked a storm of response - all of a sudden it was of the utmost importance to discover what had actually happened. This brings us directly to the first quest, the aim of which was to get behind the biblical picture of Jesus to ascertain what he had actually been like, and what he had actually said and done. Inherent in the first quest was the suspicion, raised by Reimarus, that Jesus had been misrepresented to some extent by the evangelists. D.F. Strauss, whose work we shall discuss in more detail shortly, may be regarded as having given 'the decisive impulse' (Conzelmann 1973:5) to the rational investigation of the gospels. He wanted to make up his own mind about Jesus by stripping away all the christian interpretation that had built up around Jesus - so that, by seeing Jesus as he actually had been, faith could be based on historically sound facts. It was precisely this remorseless application of radical historical criticism to the gospels that shocked so many christians and itself gave renewed vigour to the drive to establish the veracity of the gospels (cf. Harris 1973:41).

'In the liberal "historical Jesus" quest, it was thought that we could make a portrait of the real

Jesus by means of historical science, and this was
thought to be the only way of getting at the truth
of the matter.' (Berkouwer 1977:124)

The first questers were not content to unearth isolated
facts about Jesus. What they attempted to do was to
write biographies of Jesus - complete with historically
verifiable chronologies and with particular attention to
his psychological development.

'... we may summarise the nineteeth century quest of
the historical Jesus, apart from Kähler, as a search
based on the feasibility of a history and life of
Jesus or a psychological reconstruction and
interpretation of the character of Jesus from the
Gospels or their literary sources.' (Cahill
1964:157)

The writers of the lives of Jesus believed that the
gospels provided them with all the information they needed
for their reconstructions. The evangelists, it had by
then become clear, had not been historians in the
nineteenth century sense. They had taken subjective
liberties in their stories about Jesus, but this did not
preclude the possibility of recovering the historical
Jesus, as the first questers understood this term. It
meant, simply, that the historian would have to dig
beneath the layers of interpretation to arrive at the
historical facts. Initially the writers of the lives of
Jesus drew on all the gospels in a random fashion for
evidence to be used in their constructions. The work of
Strauss, however, proved to be something of a watershed
that largely ensured that in the future lives of Jesus
would be based on the synoptics (cf. Goguel 1953:49).

'But since D.F. Strauss in his famous <u>Leben Jesu</u>
(Life of Jesus; 1835/36) first called attention to
the advanced character of the reshaping of the Jesus
tradition by the Christian faith in the fourth
gospel in comparison with the first three gospels,
it has become increasingly clear that the Jesus of
the fourth gospel not only shows the influence of
the belief in the resurrection of Jesus

significantly more strongly than the first three
gospels, but also religio-historically stands in
another context. From this arose the necessity,
widely acknowledged today, of refraining from the
use of all four gospels as sources for the
presentation of the historical Jesus and, instead,
for this presentation in principle to use as sources
only the first three gospels, and to adduce the
fourth gospel as a source at most in a supplementary
way in individual cases, where it would have to be
justified.' (Kümmel 1973:22, 23)

We have undertaken a brief discussion of the aims of the
first quest and the sources upon which it operated. We
need now to investigate the objective, positivistic
conception of history that undergirded the endeavour.

'The term "historical Jesus" is not simply identical
with "Jesus" or "Jesus of Nazareth", as if the
adjective "historical" were a meaningless addition.
Rather the adjective is used in a technical sense,
and makes a specific contribution to the total
meaning of the expression. "Historical" is used in
the sense of "things in the past which have been
established by objective scholarship." Consequent-
ly the expression "historical Jesus" comes to mean:
"What can be known of Jesus of Nazareth by means of
the scientific methods of the historian".'
(Robinson 1959:26)

[cf. Sykes (1960:10):

'In 1903 the Regius Professor of Modern History at
Cambridge, J.B. Bury, in his inaugural lecture
insisted tout court that "history is a science, no
less and no more". By this orientation history was
"really enthroned and ensphered among the sciences",
and had forsaken its old alliance with the arts
where "the sanctions of truth and accuracy could not
be severe". Instead, "girded with new strength she
has definitely come out from among her old
associates, moral philosophy and rhetoric ... and
has begun to enter into closer relations with the
sciences which deal objectively with the facts of
the universe".']

The notion that history was an exact science underlay the
first quest for the historical Jesus. The facts of
history, it was believed, could be ascertained

unequivocally if rigorous, objective, scientific historical methods and procedures were adopted. Strauss' Das Leben Jesu is an excellent example of the application of positivistic historical criticism to the gospel narratives. This approach ensured that the historical picture of Jesus coincided with what was believed about the nature of reality and human abilities – producing a history of a Jesus who had only 'normal' abilities and lived in a 'normal' world, by nineteenth century standards at any rate.

> 'The presupposition upon which the whole Life of Jesus was written was a denial of the miraculous and supernatural in the world. The traditional supernatural interpretations of the events narrated in the gospels had no place in Strauss' view of the world, and God's activity was possible only indirectly through the laws of nature.' (Harris 1973:42)

Strauss believed that the 'history-like narrative' (Kee 1977:17) was mythical. The figure of Jesus was embroidered with supernatural images reminiscent of Old Testament events and expectations. To get at the historical Jesus, one had to cast the mythical element aside. Jesus was a man, like other men, about whom implausible stories were told in order to convey eternal religious truths. One had to strip away these additions to arrive at the otherwise normal, human Jesus who had developed normally within the bounds of what was known about psychology.

> 'Hence is derived the following rule. Where not merely the particular nature and manner of an occurrence is critically suspicious, its external circumstances represented as miraculous and the like; but where likewise the essential substance and groundwork is either inconceivable in itself, or is in striking harmony with some messianic idea of the Jews of that age, then not the particular alleged course and mode of the transaction only, but the entire occurrence must be regarded as unhistorical. Where on the contrary, the form only, and not the general contents of the narration,

exhibits the characteristics of the unhistorical, it
is at least possible to suppose a kernel of
historical fact, although we can never confidently
decide whether this kernel of fact actually exists,
or in what it consists; unless, indeed, it be
discoverable from other sources. In legendary
narratives, or narratives embellished by the writer,
it is less difficult, - by divesting them of all
that betrays itself as fictitious imagery,
exaggeration, etc. - by endeavouring to abstract
from them every extraneous adjunct and to fill up
every hiatus - to succeed, proximately at least, in
separating the historical groundwork.' (Strauss
1913:91)

In summarising our outline of the concerns and approach of
the first quest for the historical Jesus, a number of
comments may be made. It had become increasingly clear
that the evangelists were not mere reporters of the facts
of the historical Jesus in an objective sense. Their
narratives were written specifically to convince others of
the writers' opinions of Jesus. The scholars involved in
the first quest wanted to get at the historical facts
without the fabricated, mythical extras. Using
imagination, the methods of scientific history, and what
was known of psychology, these scholars delved into the
synoptic gospels in particular in order to create
developmental portraits of Jesus that accorded with
contempory views on the nature of reality and human
possibilities. This brings us directly to the decline of
the first quest. Towards the close of the nineteenth
century the entire quest for the historical Jesus began to
be called into question. The progress of biblical
scholarship had been such that efforts to get back behind
the gospels to Jesus were becoming increasingly difficult
to justify.

It began to be realised that 'history survived only as
kerygma' (Robinson 1959:37). It was not possible to
strip away a veneer of interpretation and to arrive at a
core of hard facts, which fact was being impressed ever-
more clearly by the emergence of the discipline that would

later, in its mature form, be known as form criticism.

> 'The possibility of the original quest resided
> primarily in its view of the oldest sources as the
> same kind of objective, positivistic historiography
> which the nineteenth century itself aspired to
> write. The basic reorientation consisted in the
> discovery that the Gospels are the devotional
> literature of the primitive Church, rather than the
> products of scholarship.' (Robinson 1959:35)

The fact that the gospels were turning out to be, in their
very essence, of a kerygmatic nature invalidated the
application of positivistic historical methods (cf. Cairns
1976:337). At the same time the legitimacy of the desire
to go behind the testimony of the writers began to be
condemned as an attempt 'to avoid the risk of faith by
supplying objectively verified proof for its "faith"'
(Robinson 1959:44). Martin Kähler and Albert Schweitzer
are the names generally associated with the end of the
historical quest for Jesus in the nineteenth century. Of
the two it would appear to be beyond doubt that Kähler saw
more clearly the failures of the first quest than did
Schweitzer. He, in his book Der sogenannte historische
Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus, over and
above the oft-quoted criticism of the error of seeking to
base faith on certain historical facts and of seeking to
apply the methods of scientific history to kerygma,
challenged the wisdom of basing faith on the unsure ground
of ever-changing scientific trends (cf. Kümmel 1973:24)
and objected to the a piori principle that Jesus had to be
shown to be a normal man like other men in every respect.
For Kähler the desire to go behind the expressions of
faith in the gospels in an attempt to arrive at faith
independently was an abstraction. The Christ depicted in
the gospels is the historical Jesus because the gospels
are the products of an encounter with him.

> 'Let us take a good look at this matter. What is
> the life of Jesus research really searching for? In
> going behind Jesus Christ as he is portrayed in the

church's tradition - and this means also behind the
New Testament picture of Christ - it wants to get at
the real Jesus, as he actually existed in all those
respects that all, or some, might consider important
or indispensable, or often only desirable or
titillating....' (Kähler 1964:57, 58)

['... the "historical Jesus" was nothing less than
an illicit Christology bootlegged into the theology
under the guise of history, since it reduced the
biblical, preached Christ to the dimensions of a
historical person to whom the laws of historical
causation and psychological development apply as to
any other person, whereas the Gospels present us
with the sinless Son of God.' (Keck 1971:19)]

Many of the criticisms of the liberal historical Jesus
quest made by Kähler were repeated by Schweitzer in his
book Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forshung (cf. Anderson
1960:113) although, ironically, he himself proved to be
one of the last first questers. What was new and
characteristic of Schweitzer's criticism of the lives of
Jesus, however, was his emphasis on the eschatological
aspect of the gospels. The writers of the liberal lives
of Jesus were not able, given the rationalism of the time,
to make any sense of eschatology - the concepts involved
defied any attempt at making relevant sense of them using
the methods of scientific history. Eschatology had come,
of necessity, to be overlooked, in spite of the prominent
place accorded it in the New Testament witness to Christ.
Schweitzer was convinced that this had led to a grave
distortion in the picture of Jesus painted by the
liberals.

'There is this in common between rationalism and the
liberal critical method, that each had followed out
a theory to its ultimate consequences. The liberal
critical school had carried to its limit the
explanation of the connection of the actions of
Jesus, and of the events of His life, by a "natural"
psychology; and the conclusions to which they had
been driven had prepared the way for the recognition
that the natural psychology is not here the
historical psychology, but that the latter must be
deduced from certain historical data. Thus through

the meritorious and magnificently sincere work of the liberal critical school the a priori "natural psychology" gave way to the eschatological.' (Schweitzer 1948:221)

In addition to the pioneering work of Kähler and Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann too opposed historical investigation of the gospels in the hope of securing a reliable picture of Jesus, and it is testimony to his influential contribution to biblical studies that the virtual absence of historical studies of the life of Jesus in the first half of this century is associated with his influence (cf. Robinson 1959:12), although it should be pointed out that, as McKnight (1969:57) has noted, there were scholars like C.H. Dodd, T.W. Manson, and V. Taylor, who pursued sober and persistent efforts at learning about the historical Jesus at that time. Bultmann, although his position was somewhat ambivalent (it would seem that Brown, 1964:6, is correct in seeing 'an inconsistency between Bultmann the exegete and Bultmann the kerygmatic theologian'), condemned any attempt to base faith on reason. Faith could only be faith in the absence of any definite, provable basis for belief. What he aimed at was 'destabilization' (Cairns 1976:349) — a rejection of anything that would jeopardise faith by providing a clear and indisputable basis for belief.

> 'More precisely, de-mythologizing is the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought.... There is no difference between security based on good works and security built on objectifying knowledge. The man who desires to believe in God must know that he has nothing at his own disposal on which to build this faith, that he is, so to speak, in a vacuum.' (Bultmann 1958:84)

Beyond this moral objection to historical investigation into the life of Jesus, Bultmann also had practical grounds for objecting to such an endeavour (Kee et al, 1973:91, trace this back to the disillusionment brought

about by the findings of form criticism). The
evangelists, and before them those who had encountered the
earthly Jesus and passed on the traditions, realised that
the only way of adequately conveying the true meaning and
impact of Jesus was to use mythological concepts and
images (cf. Bultmann 1964:35). Since, therefore, the
gospels were not historical, but mythological, it was
meaningless and inappropriate to try to extract a history
of Jesus out of them (as Ladd, 1967:185, has noted,
Bultmann believed that the categories of scientific
history were hopelessly inadequate to the task of dealing
with the evangelical images of Jesus). Mythology could
not be stripped off like a sheath, as Strauss and the
other first questers had attempted to do. It penetrated
to the very heart of the gospels, therefore rendering them
beyond the powers of historical investigation.

> 'The facts which historical criticism can verify,
> cannot exhaust, indeed they cannot adequately
> indicate, all that Jesus means to me.' (Bultmann
> 1964:35)

> ['For what God has done in Jesus Christ is not an
> historical fact which is capable of historical
> proof. The objectifying historian as such cannot
> see that an historical person ... is the eternal
> Logos, the Word. It is precisely the mythological
> description of Jesus Christ in the New Testament
> which makes clear that the figure and the work of
> Jesus Christ must be understood in a manner which is
> beyond the categories by which the objective
> historian understands world history ....' (Bultmann
> 1958:80)]

It is difficult to say, in concluding our discussion of
the decline of the first quest, whether events create
great men or whether great men create events. We have
associated the decline of the first quest with Kähler,
Schweitzer and Bultmann. Certainly Kähler appears to
have been ahead of his time. The stand which he took
does not seem to have been widely felt or appreciated
until the time of Schweitzer's writing, when the

atmosphere was right for a change of direction. Bultmann, on the other hand, was of the second generation and is regarded as having given definitive form to the objections against the lives of Jesus. The first heterodox mutterings against the liberal quest had consolidated and become the new orthodoxy.

This brings us directly to the new quest for the historical Jesus. It is perhaps a tribute to Bultmann that the reaction to his generally negative view of the history of Jesus should have come about among those who had studied under him. The date normally associated with the beginning of the new quest for the historical Jesus is October 20, 1953 (see, for example, McKnight 1969:58). It was then that Ernst Käsemann delivered a lecture, to a reunion of Bultmann students, on 'The problem of the historical Jesus'. Käsemann reiterated that no biography of Jesus could be written - it was not possible to outline his psychological development or map out the 'exterior-chronological' (Cook 1981:13) progression of his life - but that this did not mean that nothing at all could be known about the historical Jesus. In spite of the way in which the early church had written its accounts of Jesus, with the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ intertwined, one had an obligation to investigate the sources in order to discover the little that could be discovered about the historical Jesus.

> 'The community neither could not would separate this life history from its own history. Therefore it neither could nor would abstract from its Easter faith and distinguish between the earthly and exalted Lord. By maintaining the identity of the two, it demonstrated that any question directed only towards the historical Jesus seemed to it to be pure abstraction.' (Käsemann 1964:24)

> 'For the decision taken by primitive Christianity obviously does not permit us to choke off the question about the Jesus of history, in spite of its dubious status when raised in isolation and in spite

of the difficulty of finding an answer to it.'
(ibid. 24)

['The nature of the sources does not permit us to
paint a biographical picture of the life of Jesus
against the background of the history of his people
and his age. Nevertheless, what the sources do
yield as regards the historical facts concerning the
person and career of Jesus is not so little after
all, and demands careful attention.' (Bornkamm
1960:53)]

The new quest, clearly, was a reaction against the ideas
proposed by Bultmann. Bultmann had said that a great
divide lay between the Jesus of history and the image of
him in the gospels. The existential enlightenment
brought about by the resurrection had been so powerful
that when the earliest disciples spoke of Jesus they were
actually speaking of the change brought about in their
awareness of the meaning of life in the world - so that,
in effect, the historical Jesus had disappeared under the
weight of the impact of the risen Christ.

'If the purpose of the old quest was to get behind
the kerygmatic Christ to the historical Jesus, the
new quest may be characterized as an attempt to show
that the kerygmatic portrait is a faithful
representation of the historical Jesus.' (Brown
1964:8)

The new quest was an attempt to confirm that the Jesus of
history was in fact, as the church had always maintained,
the Christ of faith (cf. Barbour 1972:36). Bultmann's
existentialism had led to the point where a decision for
Christ had to be made in a vacuum-like abstraction. The
new quest sought to ground faith in the action of God in
history.

'I completely fail to understand how it is possible,
within the field of the historical, to maintain the
existence of material continuity without immediately
thinking at the same time of historical continuity;
the latter may be buried over certain stretches and

taking, as it were, an underground course, but nevertheless it will remain relevant.' (Käsemann 1969:36)

For the inter-related disciplines of theology and biblical studies the first half of the twentieth century had been a period of confident and rapid growth and progress.As time passed, however, this confidence began to be eroded and to be replaced by a growing sense of uncertainty. Was theology still being true to its mandate, or had it gone astray and shifted off course? The new quest for the historical Jesus corresponds to this desire to ensure that the foundations are still firm (cf. Keck 1971:20). In setting itself this task, and in the successful attainment of its goal, scholarship had the benefit of a new way of viewing history, without which very little gain could have been added to the failure of the first quest.

['But academic fashions change with remarkable rapidity, and nowhere has the revolution been more notable that in the field of historiography: where Professor Harold Temperley ... in his own inaugural lecture in Cambridge in 1930 could avow that "in my own memory the idea that history is a science has perished".' (Sykes 1960:11)]

'The nineteenth century saw the reality of the "historical facts" as consisting largely in names, places, dates, occurrences, sequences, causes effects – things that fall far short of being the actuality of history, if one understands by history the distinctively human, creative, unique purposeful, which distinguishes man from nature. The dimension in which man actually exists, his "world", the stance or outlook from which he acts, his understanding of his existence behind what he does, the way he meets his basic problems and the answer his life implies to the human dilemma, the significance he had as the environment of those who knew him, the continuing history his life produces, the possibility of existence which his life presents to me as an alternative – such matters as these have become central in an attempt to understand history.' (Robinson 1959:28, 29)

The new quest for the historical Jesus began by

establishing certain isolated historical facts about Jesus
(as Barr, 1960:395 has noted, a shift in emphasis had
occurred - so that now the establishing of concrete
historical facts took on more of a preparatory role than
it had in the first quest, where there had been a greater
tendency to regard these almost as ends in themselves).
It noted that these facts seemed to be consistent
throughout the gospels (cf. Dahl 1960:395 and Aulén
1976:158). There certainly was not enough information to
write a biography of Jesus - but no one had expected any
longer that there would be. The discovery of a core of
historical facts and historically reliable traits,
however, was the prerequisite for establishing continuity
between Jesus and the church's proclamation. The new
existential understanding of history made it possible to
demonstrate the desired continuity. Those who had
encountered the earthly Jesus had been affectd by the
experience. It had been in the encounter with Jesus that
they had been led to new realizations about their lives
and about the world (and in this regard, despite having
moved on significantly from Bultmann's position, the new
quest also exhibited a striking continuity with Bultmann's
position - cf. for example, Bultmann 1934:3). The nature
of the reaction corresponded directly to the nature of the
catalyst, just as the realization about the meaning and
possibilities of human life found in the gospels
correspond with the historical snippets of information
that can be extracted from the gospels.

> 'Existentialism made this line of attack possible
> because it sees in Jesus' message an understanding
> of man's existence before God which is also found in
> the Christian Gospel about Jesus, even though Jesus'
> own ideas were different from those of Paul, John,
> or other parts of early Christianity. The
> continuity between Jesus and the gospel, then lies
> not in the claim that the church believed what Jesus
> believed but in the fact that common to both is the
> same grasp of man's existence, however this may be
> conceptualized. Making Jesus himself central to
> Christian preaching simply brought to the surface

> what was latent in Jesus' own message, even if the
> church did so with a mythological outlook that was
> strange to Jesus and to us as well.' (Keck
> 1971:20)

We may say, in conclusion, that the new quest for the historical Jesus was an expression of the renewed conviction that christianity had to remain firmly connected to its historical roots – or else lose its true identity. The achievement was both confessional and practical – the need for continuity was expressed and the reality of this highly prized continuity was demonstrated.

Now that we have completed our outline of the quest for the historical Jesus in its various primary forms and states of flux, we may note the following about it in its relation to our quest to deal appropriately with the element of the unique in scripture. Firstly, the first quest for the historical Jesus was manifestly unsuccessful in its bid to find anything indisputably authoritative in scripture – in that its rather mundane representations of Jesus only served to highlight the fears raised by the application of the historical-critical approach to scripture, in that even the uniqueness of Jesus had been drained away, rather than clearly shown. The emergence of Barth's dialectical theology at about the same time as the publication of the first form-critical studies should not come as any surprise therefore.

Secondly, as far as the new quest for the historical Jesus is concerned, a more mature approach to the concept of history as such had made it possible to ascertain something of Jesus' character, and his uniqueness, with obvious consequences for any estimation of the authority of scripture, which was now seen to embody and communicate something of the special character of Jesus. It had become possible, in other words, to come closer to approaching scripture on its own terms as a greater appreciation of Jesus' character was possible and the

connection of this with scripture – so that it was no longer as easy, despite the continued strength of the historical-critical approach to scripture, simply glibly to speak in general of scripture as if it were exactly like any writing, without attempting to do justice to its special character (special, that is, purely methodologically at the least, without necessarily acknowledging the truth of its claims). At the same time, however, more recent developments in biblical studies, especially the rise of canonical criticism and the dialogue with the social sciences, have offered the promise of fresh insights into, and new perspectives on, scripture itself and the nature of meaning and authority in human life in general. Using new approaches, therefore, we may build on, and move beyond, the findings of the 'new quest. In a sense, while the goal of our endeavour (and many others like it in recent years) may parallel that of the quest for the historical Jesus, it may be said that, building on the findings of the new quest, more recent endeavours have been more keenly aware of the limitations of the historical approach and have been eager to find a broader basis in human experience and knowledge – which also accounts for the rise of the social sciences in more recent investigations of scripture, and which also accounts for the necessity of moving beyond the position reached by the new quest for the historical Jesus. This recent emphasis in biblical studies on the social sciences comes out clearly in the preface to Malina's book <u>Christian origins and cultural anthropology</u> (1986:iii):

> 'Since the book is about meanings, it must deal with social science perspectives because meanings are always rooted in social systems.'

> '... it [this book] presupposes that the meaning communicated in the texts is to be found in the social system common to the social context and the texts.' (iv)

21.   Also, cf.

> 'The authority of the Bible is inextricably
> connected with other authorities – the authority of
> the church, of the saints, of the liturgy, the
> conscience, and the reason.'   (Nineham 1977:75)

22.   It is just this stage of the development of the New Testament
writings that form criticism sought to investigate, so that
this largely historical-critical understanding of authority
has to draw heavily on the work of the form critics in order
to mould accurately this portrayal.   In this regard one may
refer to the Dibelius quotation on p. 151.

23.   See, for example, Nickle (1981:13)

Also cf. Bultmann (1963:371)

> '1 Cor. 11^{23-26} (Lord's Supper) and 15^{3-7}
> (resurrection) show that the motifs of the Kerygma
> required more illustration; Acts $10^{37f.}$, $13^{24f.}$
> show how the ministry of the Baptist and the Baptism
> of Jesus served as a starting-point of the expanded
> kerygma, and by this means the earthly life of Jesus
> was at one and the same time removed from the sphere
> of secular events and brought into the context of
> the divine plan of salvation; finally Acts 2^{22},10^{38}
> evidence the need to see the earthly life of Jesus
> illustrated as proof of the divine equipment of the
> Lord. Which all amounts to this. The tradition had
> to be presented as a unity from the point of view
> that in it he who spoke and was spoken of was he who
> had lived on earth as the Son of God, had suffered,
> died, risen and been exalted to heavenly glory. And
> inevitably the centre of gravity had to be the end
> of the story, the Passion and Resurrection.'

It is also clearly at this point that skepticism concerning the historical reliability of the tradition arises. The early christians retold the stories of Jesus in such a way that the resurrection perceptions would be reflected clearly in these – in so doing, they selected only material that was capable of bearing this stamp, and then they used it in a way that from a purely historical perspective would be greatly distorted (cf., for example, Bultmann 1963:369ff and Dibelius 1982:295).

[Although in this connection we may refer to Dibelius (1982:293) where an emphasis on the importance of eye-witnesses introduces the element of ambiguity we alluded to in endnote 11 and also paves the way for developments such as those represented by, for example, Ridderbos (1988).]

24. According to the historical-critical conception one is forced to put the qualifications or descriptions of the resurrection as 'unique' and an 'event' in inverted commas (even as one has to with the thus qualified 'resurrection' too) because the discipline of history is not formulated upon presuppositions that are able to accommodate these claims. To begin with, history does not recognise unqualified 'uniqueness'. To be sure, no two events are identical in every detail – so that in that sense history is able to address the unique. On the other hand, however, the unique peculiarities of a given example are always regarded as resting on a firm foundation of established relations – so that while the details of an event may be unique (invariably they are unique), the event per se is not unique because it agrees with what we know of events in general or, more particularly, with patterns we have seen in other events which we regard as being similar to the one under investigation. History is able, therefore, to deal with qualified uniqueness – not unmitigated peculiarity. Our use of 'unique' in relation to the claim concerning a resurrection event cannot be accommodated therefore.

> 'Observed regular relations provide the basis of all
> our general knowledge. If two variables are found
> to be regularly related in a large variety of cases,
> we infer that such a relation generally holds
> between such variables, even when we do not know all
> the cases to which such a generalization refers.
> There is a leap of faith involved here, which
> empiricists happily make, assuming regularity in
> nature.' (McCullagh 1984:169)

> 'We hope to demonstrate (1) that an explanation of
> even a particular event commits a historian to some
> general theory about human behaviour, (2) that to
> explain why something happened is to explain why
> something else did not happen, and (3) that the
> probable truth of an explanation depends upon the
> probable truth and applicability of a general theory
> as well as the probable truth of the historical
> reports that constitute the cause and effect in
> question.' (Lichtman and French 1978:45)

Clearly, therefore, the historical-critical approach cannot
accept the resurrection as an event because if it were it
would be completely without precedent or parallel, which is
unacceptable to an empirical endeavour, and also because, in
a closely related manner, while the notion that a group of
people believed that God had acted in resurrecting Jesus is
acceptable to history it is completely unacceptable for the
historian to work as if he himself were trying to incorporate
into his reconstruction God as the actual causal agent.
Historical criticism has no choice, therefore, given its
basic assumptions, other than to dismiss a resurrection event
as event and to seek an explanation for this claim in other
factors which it is able to accommodate. Also see endnote
9.

25. It would serve the purpose of clarifying the historical-
critical understanding of authority by referring here to the
well-known position of B.B. Warfield of Princeton:

> 'Such a Word of God, each of us knows he needs - not
> a Word of God that speaks to us only through the
> medium of our fellow-men, men of like passions and
> weaknesses with ourselves, so that we have to feel

our way back to God's Word through the Church,
through tradition, or the apostles, standing between
us and God; but a Word of God in which God speaks
directly to each of our souls. Such a Word of God,
Christ and his apostles offer us, when they give us
the Scriptures, not as man's report to us of what
God says, but the very Word of God itself, spoken by
God himself through human lips and pens. Of such a
precious possession, given to her by such hands, the
church will not lightly permit herself to be
deprived. Thus the church's sense of her need of
an absolutely infallible Bible, has co-operated with
her reverence for the teaching of the Bible to keep
her true, in all ages, to the Bible doctrine of
plenary inspiration.' (Warfield 1959:124,125)

In reponse to this notion, which is of the following kind:
God ⟶ revelation ⟶ Scripture (Barr 1980:48),
two points need to be made. Firstly, the Bible seems to
reflect a number of different types of struggle, which fact
appears to undermine this stately theory. These conflicting
theologies would undermine Warfield's idea of direct, one
might almost say 'supernatural', inspiration.

'The canon, then, testifies to the diversity –
theological, cultural, personal – of the minds that
brought it into being.' (Vawter 1972:3)

'The New Testament is a "historic" document ... not
in an archival sense, however, but only in the sense
of its being the primal proclamation, the original
and fundamental appeal to faith. It also possesses
a "binding" character, not in the sense of imposing
a legal obligation to some uniform system of
doctrine, however, but only in the sense that it
sets forth the many varied expressions and effects
of early Christian faith in such a way as to involve
the reader in the ongoing struggle between faith and
knowledge, the personal battle between truth and
error.' (Bornkamm 1974:8)

'Minimal possibilities aside, however, it would be
difficult indeed to find traces of ecstatic
influences in the shaping of the biblical traditions
and the minds of their authors.' (Vawter 1972:9)

The second point that needs to be made has the character of a
warning. A stress on too supernaturalistic an understanding

of the origins of scripture endangers both the scriptures and its readers. To place too supernaturalistic an emphasis on scripture may mean that for many people it comes to lose much of its credibility (since, as Bultmann argued, modern man does not necessarily feel at home, nor is necessarily able to relate to, unmitigated supernaturalism). As dangerous, however, is the threat this notion poses to lived christian life. The danger lies in oversimplification. Life becomes deceptively simple to those who have the divine instructions of the type envisaged by Warfield. No human creativity was involved, by this reckoning, in the formation of the Bible and there does not appear to be the need for any creativity at any subsequent stage. The result is a rather wooden approach to life that makes it difficult to respond spontaneously to the continually changing challenges and situations of life.

> 'The successes of supernaturalism, however, have so blocked our access to (and distorted our sense of) the natural origins of the Scriptures and the natural skills necessary to interpret them, that the Christian's best weapon is rapidly working for his own self destruction.' (Milavec 1976:215)

26. The various form-critical classifications of these elements are extremely difficult to correlate, both because the different critics have their own set of criteria for determining the classifications and also because, consequently, the names given to these classifications cannot be standardized.

27. cf. for example, Nickle (1981:56ff). It is principally at this point that the disagreement arises between the form critic and the redaction critic — even as, in a similar way, canonical criticism (as we shall see in section 2) thinks that redaction criticism (and reader-response criticism) has failed to do justice to the sense of the whole, this time with the canon as the focus.

28. cf. Brown (1965:19)

'Modern biblical study, by ascertaining clearly what the Bible has to say for itself, has pinpointed how many of the traditional divisons among Christians really flow from the Bible and how many are the product of post-biblical theological development.'

Also cf. Käsemann (1964:102):

'There can no longer be any ground for surprise when opposing doctrinal viewpoints are found in violent collision in other parts of the New Testament.'

29.   This comes out in Crane's (1982) discussion of the relation between the synoptic gospels:

'... we do a grave disservice to these evangelists, and to ourselves as well, if we fail to appreciate the special individual touches which each has brought to the Gospel tradition in applying it to the life-situation of his own contemporaries.' (197)

30.   This point is often illustrated more clearly by reference to the apocryphal gospels where the frequent strangeness is able to call attention to similar forces at work in the canonical gospels, where their very familiarity frequently leads one to overlook their own peculiarity. An example of this would be the Gospel of the Egyptians in which, among other things, there comes across distinctly the community's emphasis on (probably on the basis of a gnostic foundation [cf. Metzger 1987:171]) sexual asceticism and the elimination of any regard for sexual differences – which strangeness quickly calls to question the basis of such a judgment, and brings out clearly the peculiarities of the forces underlying the canonical gospels (which, as we shall see, according to the historical-critical approach, may be deemed different only on the basis of a somewhat arbitrary and partisan judgment – having no basis in any absolute, material content or worth).

31.   In illustration of this, and also in illustration of the differences in estimation among the christian communities, one may refer to the examples of the Muratorian Canon and

Eusebius' classifications (although we shall not refer to the difficulties raised by particularly the latter).

The Muratorian canon is a fragment discussing, or introducing, writings accepted as authoritative by the church, probably in Rome at about the end of the second century (cf. Farkasfalvy 1983:161 and Johnson 1986:536). The writings are arranged under four classifications: First, there are the writings which are accepted without qualification (four gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul [1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy], Jude, 1 and 2 John, Wisdom of Solomon, Apocalypse of John). Second, there is the Apocalypse of Peter – about the reading of which in public worship there is much controversy. Third, although the Shepherd of Hermas ought not to be read in public, it is suitable for private devotions. Finally, the writings of Arsinous, Valentinus, Miltiades and Basilides are utterly rejected.

Eusebius of Caesarea (writing at about the beginning of the fourth century) divided the writings into three classes. First, there were the writings which all agreed were authoritative, the so-called homolegomena (four gospels, Acts, an undisclosed number of Pauline epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, and the Apocalypse of John which, although there is some dispute, should be included in this category). Second, the disputed books – the so-called antilegomenoi (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John). Lastly, the spurious writings (Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Teachings of the apostles, Gospel according to the Hebrews, and the Apocalypse of John [!]). Rather unsystematically, Eusebius concludes his list by mentioning a number of pseudonymous writings that claim to have been written by the apostles, but which should be avoided (for example, the gospels of Matthias, Peter, and Thomas).

32.   cf.   'The uniqueness of the Bible is not that it contains

a special kind of literature but that God uses this
literature through the activity of the Spirit in the
community of faith.'   (Anderson 1980:5)

33.   cf. Mitchell (Mitchell and Wiles 1980:104)

> 'The Christian theologian, whether radical or
> traditional, is necessarily committed to crediting
> biblical writers ... with a high degree of religious
> insight. Unless he does so, he has no warrant for
> attaching supreme importance to the event whose
> almost sole witnesses and interpreters they are.'

34.   cf.   'Of course, for the sake of certainty, if we
> identified God with the whole of the course of human
> drama, this would assure us greater access to and
> control over God. Selecting rare events as
> divinely revelatory dooms us to constant uncertainty
> over whether we have located the right ones, but
> that of course is why believing in God requires
> "faith".'   (Sontag 1979:380)

35.   cf. Anderson (1973:270) who, in a tribute to J.A. Heschel,
says the following:

> 'Perhaps Heschel would have agreed that the Bible is
> something like the Commèdia dell Arte', or
> improvising comedy, which flourished in seventeenth
> and eighteenth century Italy .... To be sure it
> was not a free improvisation, for there were some
> given elements .... Within the framework of these
> given elements, the players spoke and acted ad lib.'

Section 2

A Guideline

In which a perspective that is more sympathetic to the claims of faith
is adopted in an approach that seeks to discover how scripture has
concretely and historically functioned as authoritative for christian
communities.

2.

Prolegomenon

In which, as a preparatory step, an insight is gained into the history
of the pericope de adultera by examining the manuscript evidence; and
in which this history is set against the background of developments
within the process of New Testament canonization.

2.1   The pericope **de adultera**

The second section of this study seeks to examine the question
of the authority of scripture in a way that does justice to the way in
which scripture has actually functioned in precisely this way for
christian communities (so that, in section three, we will be able to
use insights gained here as guidelines to arriving at a solution to

our problem). We shall pursue this end by examining the history of the relation of the pericope de adultera (John 7:53-8:11) to John's gospel – thereby gaining an insight, by means of an unusual case, into the factors that need to be borne in mind when speaking of the authority of scripture from a christian perspective. We shall begin, therefore, by looking at the manuscript evidence regarding the pericope de adultera. (We shall do this in order to accomplish two ends. In the first place, the manuscript evidence will provide the outlines of the delimited area of investigation that will occupy us in section two. In other words, it will serve the purpose of defining the bounds both textually [in relation to John's gospel in particular] and historically of the area of investigation in section two. Secondly, the investigation of the manuscript evidence right at the beginning of section two will serve to bring to mind the questions that will demand our attention in the rest of the section. These will lead to answers that will enable us, in section three, to arrive at a solution to the problem raised in section one.) This will enable us to draw certain conclusions concerning the history of its relation to John's gospel. The second part of this chapter will consist in a brief outline of the developments within the growth of the canon against which the insights gained by means of the manuscript evidence should be seen. It is this preparatory work that will enable us to pursue an investigation of the authority of scripture by means of a concrete example, the irregularity of which is able to draw attention to the regularity of the concerns underlying it, which gains greater powers of illumination when viewed against the background of the quest of christian communities for authoritative testimony to Jesus Christ and his significance. (Closely related to the unfolding of the canonical process, to which we allude here, is the quest of the historical Jesus, and the relation of this quest for continuity with the peculiarities of the pericope de adultera in its relation to John's gospel. This will occupy us in chapter four. Before we do this,

however, it is important that we should, after we have outlined the manuscript evidence, give an introduction to the canonical process. This is important because it provides us with the background against which the textual evidence may be interpreted and evaluated.)

Let us begin by outlining the manuscript evidence relevant to a consideration of the relation of the pericope de adultera to John's gospel. Although the presentation of the evidence is conducted in such way as to show that the pericope was a later addition to the gospel, we shall leave our analysis of the evidence until after the listing of the readings. Let us begin with the manuscript evidence which supports the positioning of the story after John 7:52.

The earliest evidence of the inclusion of the story of the adulteress in its customary position in John derives from D (codex Bezae-C^5-Western) and several Old Latin manuscripts (b [codex Veronesis-C^5]; c [codex Colbertinus-$C^{12,13}$]; e [codex Palatinus-C^5]; ff^2 [codex Corbiensis-C^5]; j [C^6] – all Western). Subsequently it was included in E (codex Basiliensis-C^8-Byzantine) – with an asterisk denoting its doubtful character; F (codex Boreelianus-C^9-Byzantine); G (codex Wolfii A/codex Harleianus-C^9-Byzantine); H (codex Wolfii B-C^9-Byzantine); K (codex Cyprius-C^9-Byzantine); M (codex Campianus-C^9-Byzantine with Caesarean readings) – with an asterisk denoting its doubtful character; S (C^{10}-Byzantine) – with an obelus denoting its doubtful character; U (C^9-Byzantine); Γ (C^{10}-Byzantine); Λ (codex Tischendorfianus III-C^9-Byzantine principally) – with an asterisk denoting its doubtful character; Π (codex Petropolitanus-C^9-Byzantine); 28 (C^{11}-Caesarean); 579 (C^{13}-Alexandrian); 700 (C^{11}-Caesarean) and a few others. In addition to this the Latin Fathers Ambrose (Milan-C^4), Ambrosiaster (Rome-C^4) and Augustine (Hippo-C^5)

show a knowledge of this pericope in this position (Lindars 1972:306).

(It is also worth noting that the story is inserted after John 7:36 by 225 [C^{12}-Caesarean?]; after John 21:24 by family 1 [among others 1(C^{12}); 118(C^{13}); 131(C^{14}); 209(C^{14}) – all Caesarean] and a few others; after John 7:44 by George the Athonite in his revision of the Old Georgian version [C^{11}] – Metzger 1981:224; and after Luke 21:38 by the Ferrar group [among others 230(C^{11}); 543(C^{12}); 788(C^{11}); 826(C^{12}); 828(C^{12}); 983(C^{12}) – all with Caesarean affinities].)

On the other hand, the pericope de adultera is notably absent from the following important manuscripts: P^{66}(C^3 – mixed Alexandrian and Western); P^{75} (Bodmer papyri XIV–XV–C^3–Alexandrian); ℵ (codex Sinaiticus–C^4–Alexanderian with Western readings); B (codex Vaticanus–C^4–Alexandrian); L (codex Regius–C^8–Alexandrian); N (codex Purpureus Petropolinatus–C^6–Byzantine [Metzger 1981;55]; Caesarean [Greenlee 1964:117]); T (codex Borgianus–C^5–Alexandrian); W (codex Washingtonianus–C^5 – in John a mixed text of Alexandrian and Western readings); X (codex Monacensis–C^{10}–Byzantine with some Alexandrian readings); Δ (codex Sangallensis–C^9–Byzantine); Θ (codex Koridethi–C^9–Byzantine in John); Ψ (codex Athous Laurae–$C^{8/9}$–Byzantine with Alexandrian readings); 33 (C^9–Alexandrian); 157 (C^{12}–Caesarean); 565 (C^9–Caesarean); 892 (C^9–Alexandrian); 1241 (C^{12}–Alexandrian); family 1424 (1424[$C^{9/10}$]; M [codex Campianus–C^9 – incorporating Byzantine readings]; 7 [C^{11}] – and a few others – Caesarean). A (codex Alexandrinus–C^5–Alexandrian) and C (codex Ephraemi–C^5 – most frequently Byzantine) have lacunae at John 6:50–8:52 and 7:3–8:34 respectively, although the relation between the missing sections of the gospel and the extent of the damage to the codices seems to indicate that the pericope de adultera was absent from these manuscripts from the beginning.

Among the ancient versions of the New Testament there is also little support for the inclusion of the story after John 7:52: the Old Syriac (Syr^c[C^5] and Syr^s[C^4] – Western) makes no mention of it, nor

does the Arabic form of Tatian's Diatessaron (Metzger 1981:223). The best manuscripts of the Peshita (Syr^P — was prepared at the beginning of C^5 and, in the gospels, is mainly Byzantine) show no knowledge of it. It is also absent from the Coptic versions of the New Testament — the Sahidic (the earliest translations of the gospels date to C^4 and are generally Alexandrian, with some Western readings), sub-Achmimic (the most significant representative of this dates from C^4 and is Alexandrian [Metzger 1981:81]), and earlier Bohairic witnesses (for example, Bodmer papyrus III-C^4-Alexandrian). Some of the Armenian witnesses (the earliest dates from C^9 and is mixed Caesarean and Byzantine) and the Old Georgian version (for example, the Opiza manuscript [C^{10}], the Tbet' manuscript [C^{10}] and the Adysh manuscript [C^9] — all Caesarean) do not include it. The Gothic version (of which only about six manuscripts survive — C$^{5/6}$-Byzantine) and several Old Latin witnesses (a [codex Vercellensis-C^4-Western]; f [codex Brixianus-C^6-Western]; 1 [codex Rehdigeranus-C^8-Western]; q [codex Frisigensia-C$^{6/7}$-Western]) also show no knowledge of it.

In addition to this no Greek Father before the twelfth-century commented on this story (cf. Lindars:1972:306), in spite of the fact that some, like Origen (Alexandria and Caesarea —C^{2,3}) and John Chrysostom (C^{4,5}-Constantinople), for example (cf. Metzger 1981:223), undertook verse by verse interpretations of John's gospel. (It should be noted here that Ehrman [1988] has recently come across what may be the earliest, if oblique, allusion to a story very much like this; which story, in addition, seems to have been known in the present context of the pericope de adultera in John. If this is a reference to this pericope in the commentary of Didymus the Blind [C^4-Alexandria], then, as Ehrman has pointed out [1988:24], it predates by about eight centuries the mention by Euthymius Zigabenus — which has more often been regarded as the first. We shall discuss this further in chapter four however.)

From the textual evidence that we have examined (the 'stylistic' evidence will be mentioned in chapters four and five) there seems to

be little doubt that the pericope de adultera was not originally part of John's gospel. The earliest witnesses to this reading are from the fifth century - D and several Old Latin manuscripts. The former is regarded as the principal representative of the Western text, so called, while the latter also represent that tradition. The Western text, although it can be traced back to the second century (cf., for example Thierry 1982:98 and Greenlee 1964:80), is a tradition that is characterised by its free approach and its additions.

> 'De teksvorm is zeer apart en wijkt sterk af van wat gewoonlijk als de normale nieuwtestamentische tekst wordt beschouwd. Er zijn grote verschillen met de Alexandrijnse en Byzantijnse tekst. Men noemt dit tekst-type de Westerse tekst, waarvan D de voornaamste vertegenwoordiger is. De D-tekst kenmerkt zich enerzijds door a. een groot aantal veranderingen in de bewoording, anderzijds door b. allerlei toevoegingen (van woorden, zinnen en zelfs gebeurtenissen).' (Thierry 1982:35)

Thus, although there can be little justification for dismissing out of hand Western readings simply because they are Western (cf., for example, Greenlee 1964:88 - who refers to the disconcerting rendering of a number of shorter readings), it would seem as if the wisest course of action to follow here would be to begin from the point of skepticism that the story was originally part of the gospel - which initial stance is justified both by the generally questionable character of the Western text-type, as a means of pursuing the autograph at any rate (we shall comment on the historical import of the Western text shortly), and by the fact that there is a growing tendency among text critics to view the text-type represented by D (and by implication the Old Latin manuscripts) as deriving only indirectly from a second century predecessor (cf. Aland 1979b:43).

The pericope de adultera is also found in a number of relatively late manuscripts (the earliest being the eighth century codex Basiliensis) that are generally Byzantine in character. Again, although the fact that a reading is Byzantine, so called, does not qualify it for a

priori dismissal, a great deal of caution has to be adopted since, generally, Byzantine readings are regarded as inferior.

> '... the general impression given by readings which are characteristically Byzantine is that they are inferior and not likely to be original.
>
> Byzantine readings are characteristically smooth, clear, and full.' (Greenlee 1964:91)[1]

In addition to the fact that the major witnesses to the inclusion of the story of the adulteress after John 7:52 are relatively late and are of text-types usually approached with caution, there are other reasons for doubting the authenticity of that reading. Among these reasons may be counted the fact that the earliest manuscripts of John, especially, but by no means exclusively, those of the Alexandrian type (which is widely regarded as the type most closely approximating the autograph), exhibit no knowledge of that reading.

> 'Wanneer de tekstcriticus een keus moet doen uit variante lezingen zal hij zeker in de eerste plaats grote betekenis hechten aan het getuigenis van de Alexandrijnse tekst ....' (Thierry 1982:115)[2]

In addition to the evidence of the versions, further grounds for suspicion concerning the secondary character of the pericope as originally part of John's gospel after 7:52 are the various positions at which it was included in the gospels. The fact that the pericope was inserted in a number of different locations[3] suggests rather an attempt to include something which was thought to be important, but which had not originally been included, than the removal of an original part of a universally acknowledged gospel and the attempt to reinsert it elsewhere. Furthermore, the virtually total absence of any mention of this story of the adulteress by the Eastern Fathers (and if one is unconvinced by Ehrman [1988] then the absence is total) is further support for our position.

In addition to the conclusion that the pericope de adultera was a later insertion into John, we may also draw a number of other conclusions from the textual evidence. By the fifth century, from which the earliest evidence of the inclusion of the story after John 7:52 dates, the christian written tradition had, as we shall see in the following subsection where we discuss canonization, attained an essentially fixed form. In this tradition the gospel of John would, by then, have had a long history of unquestioned acceptance as authoritative scripture. How would it have been possible to insert a story like the one of the woman caught in adultery in this long-cherished gospel without the most calamitous consequences for both those who wished to insert the story and for the continued existence of the story itself? There must surely have been something about the story (and it is this that will, in chapter four, lead us to examine again the nature of the Western text-type) and, consequently, something about the way in which it was regarded among the christian communities in which, ultimately, it was inserted in John, to have made such a step possible. How were the gospels, in particular, regarded in the first five centuries of the christian communities – and why? How did the story of the adulteress arise and why would it have been held in high regard? Why would the pericope have found its way into John, in the West initially, in the location to which we have grown accustomed? It is by means of these questions, in relation to John's gospel and the story of the adulteress, that we shall gain a point of entry into the question of the authority of scripture from a perspective that does more justice to the position of the christian communities in relation to scripture.[4]

First, however, we shall undertake a brief examination of the process of canonization, so that in that way our investigation may be thoroughly grounded in what we know of the concerns of the christian communities for authoritative tradition in the first five centuries.

2.2   Behind the canon of the New Testament

The aim of this subsection is to provide a brief outline of some of

the more important developments and trends in the development of the
canon of the New Testament so that, in our interpretation of the
relation between the pericope de adultera and John's gospel, we may be
informed as to the concerns which weighed on the early christian
communities.   (Although we have mentioned the development of the
canon in subsection 1.3, it should be remembered here that in
subsection 1.3 we approached the issue of canon from a more detached,
historical-critical position than we do here.   In this section, in
agreement with the basic structure of the dissertation, outlined on
pages two and three, we attempt to discuss the development of the
canon from a perspective that is open, indeed eager to perceive, the
guiding hand of God in the process of the development of the canon.
Although there is common ground covered in 1.3 and 2.2, the important
difference between these two subsections is the different perspective
adopted in each case.   The one is a more critical approach;   the other
an approach that seeks to find their sustenance for faith in the most
direct sense.   It is a difference that produces a different perception
of what should be the focus of the study of the process of
cononization.)

The approach that we will adopt to the development of the canon (and
to the acceptance by the christian communities of John, the pericope
de adultera, and, finally, to the new synthesis of the two) will be
one that is considerably indebted to, and dependent upon, the
relatively recent development, in biblical studies, usually termed
'canonical criticism'.   Canonical criticism is a way of approaching
the Bible associated principally with the work of two American
scholars: Brevard Childs and James Sanders.   Initially it was
restricted to the Old Testament, although more recently it has been
applied to the New Testament as well.   One should not, however,
expect canonical criticism to mean the same thing to different
scholars - it is an umbrella term covering a range of similar, yet
diverse, undertakings. Our analysis will largely be restricted to the
common ground on which both Childs and Sanders stand - although
mention of the differences will also have to be made.

> 'If Sanders takes an existential approach to the canon
> Childs' approach may be seen as a more theological and
> somewhat deeper analysis of the idea of biblical
> interpretation within the canon.' (Carroll 1980:74)

Canonical criticism seeks to press the Bible into service in helping
the church deal with the problem of what it means to be the church in
the world today.[5]

> 'Canonical criticism might be viewed as a confession on
> the part of biblical criticism that it now recognizes that
> the true Sitz im Leben today of the Bible is in the
> believing communities .... '   (Sanders 1984:19)[6]

Canonical criticism is a reaction against the sort of biblical
scholarship that is not at all concerned to deal with the problems of
the communities of faith.   Too often scholars have sought to remove
the Bible from the church and to create the impression that only the
specialist has any right to interpret it.[7]   Canonical criticism does
not reject critical approaches to the Bible.   It takes seriously the
nature of the Bible – which is, at heart, its faith-creating and
faith-sustaining character – and attempts to put critical tools to use
in a way appropriate to this.

> 'Is it possible to understand the Old Testament as
> canonical scripture and yet to make full and consistent
> use of the historical critical tools?'   (Childs 1979:45)

> '... the issue at stake is the nature of the Bible's
> historicality and the search for a historical approach
> commensurate with it.'   (ibid. 71)[8]

The structure of our detailed discussion of canonical criticism is
based on the analysis by Sanders of what is involved in this
discipline.[9]   We shall undertake here an examination of what we are
dealing with when we speak of the canon – the canonical process.

> 'Canonical criticism focuses on the function of
> authoritative traditions in the believing communities.'
> (Sanders 1984:24)

Canonical criticism is interested in the way in which communities
experienced traditions, what use they found in them (cf. Grant
1963:25).   In consequence, it is also concerned with the way in which
the traditions were transmitted.   Clearly these two aspects are
interrelated – the purpose for which the tradition was employed would
dictate, to a large degree, the way in which it was passed on, so that
its value could again be realised.   So the fundamental question that
needs to be asked concerns the value found in the traditions by the
believing communities.

> 'Whatever else the canon does it serves to engage the two
> questions: who am I, or we, and what are we to do?'
> (Sanders 1976:537)[10]

Canonical criticism is, therefore, intensely interested in the relation of traditions to life:

> 'Life, therefore, is the supreme character of canon. It
> has it and it gives it.' (Sanders 1976:540) [cf. endnote
> 4]

These life-giving, meaning-giving traditions were concerned to enlighten christian quests for meaning – the question which they sought to answer was not: what I am to do in this situation? It was: what am I, who claim to see the meaning of my life in Christ, to do in this situation? This tradition aimed at establishing continuity without, ideally, intending to provide a collection of stock answers to any possible situation in which communities might find themselves. It was of such a nature as to encourage a delicate balance between continuity and discontinuity – as the communities tried to balance and reconcile realistic attention to the needs of the moment with the actions, under different circumstances, of their christian predecessors. Tradition encouraged the christian communities to live boldly and fully while still retaining that elusive continuity, or 'christianness'.

> 'It [canon] can provide continuity within discontinuity
> because it offers the community an essential identity
> which permits the people to adapt.' (Sanders 1976:540)

These continuity-giving, life-giving traditions were not retained unchanged. As the communities responded with integrity to the life situations, they gradually altered the traditions which they had received. They shaped and modified what they had received to

incorporate their own unique and authentically christian experience of life.

> 'The authoritative Word gave the community its form and content in obedience to the divine imperative, yet conversely the reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through a historical and theological process of selecting, collecting and ordering.' (Childs 1979:59) [11]

We have spoken of the fact that communities modified and shaped the traditions in such a way as to reflect their lived christian experience. The fact that they were able to find their identity in these traditions - that they were able to put them to use - is a vital part of the canonical process. It provides the basic realization which is fundamental to the phenomenon which Childs has called 'canonical intentionality'.

> 'If one reflects on the basic idea of canon, what he must probe is the fact of repetition - a priori, the first time an idea was taken up again. It passed the immense barrier from a first telling to a second. One must dwell on that phenomenon above all others.' (Sanders 1976:537)

As the communities of faith discovered that they were able to find their identity by means of these traditions, they realised that their traditions - the crystallizations of their own life experiences - could provide the same enlightenment to others. This realization lies behind the canon - for behind the canon lies the desire to pass on the traditions in such a way that they are able to transcend their specific historical limitations. [12] The earlier stages of the formation of the New Testament canon, the collection by congregations of the Pauline letters, both those addressed to them and those intended for others, illustrates this well. Because they had found meaning in Paul's letters to them, they also collected many of his letters not addressed to them. They were able to find meaning appropriate to their situations in these too. Just as their

collections had been freed to a large degree from their original settings (so that they were able to find sustenance in words not written to them), so too the collection of writings that we know as the New Testament, or the whole Bible for that matter, grew out of the realisation that somehow what was contained in it could transcend the original settings of its individual components.

> 'But irrespective of [the author's] intentionality the effect of the canonical process was to render the tradition accessible to the future generation by means of a "canonical intentionality", which is co-extensive with the meaning of the biblical text.' (Childs 1979:79)

The writings of the canon were taken out of their original setting and gathered together into a collection that, it was believed on the strength of previous experience, would be able to function as a medium for providing continuity to christian communities. This 'canonical intentionality' was not in operation only in the final stages of the formation of the canon - it had been there from the earliest stages of the transmission of the tradition.

> 'I am including under the term not only the final stages of setting limits on the scope of the sacred writings - canonization proper - but also that process by which authoritative tradition was collected, ordered, and transmitted in such a way as to enable it to function as sacred Scripture for a community of faith and practice.' (Childs 1984:25)

We have outlined the canonical process as the procedure of finding meaning in traditions and then handing them on in such a way that they reflect both their origin and the more immediate experience of the community passing them on. The canonical process is powered by the belief, born from experience, that what was once meaningful can be so again.

What canonical criticism has brought out very clearly, therefore, is the quest on the part of the christian communities for a trustworthy

guide to belief and action. Behind the formation of the canon there was, in other words, a driving need among christian communities to discover relevant ways of understanding the meaning and the outworking of the christian life under the peculiar demands of the contexts in which they found themselves. As we have seen, behind the formation of the canon - a line of development called the canonical process - there was a desire to discover continuity within discontinuity - a drive to discover what christian faith consisted in under circumstances about which the traditions had little or nothing of direct relevance to say. The way in which we shall present our introduction to the canonical process is, therefore, in such a way as to bring out this tension between continuity and discontinuity.

> 'At first Jesus' teachings circulated orally from hearer to hearer, becoming, so to speak, the nucleus of the new christian canon.' (Metzger 1987:3) [13]

It would seem quite likely that Jesus himself had attached great importance to the preservation of his teaching - that he had foreseen the necessity of witnesses who would be able to interpret faithfully the significance of his words and actions (cf., for example, the choosing of the twelve in Mark 3:13ff). [14] At the same time, the earliest christian communities held these earliest accredited witnesses in high esteem because it was they who would be able to give reliable testimony to Jesus - so that those who felt that their lives had been changed by an experience of Christ would be able to interpret this new status and the changed demands of behaviour in a way consistent with the insight that had come to those who had actually lived with Jesus. In a very real sense, it was on the testimony of these first accredited witnesses that faithfulness to the legacy of Jesus depended (cf., for example, Matthew 10:40 and John 13:20 - he who receives the apostles receives Jesus; John 20:21 - even as Jesus was sent, so too were the apostles; John 14:26 and 15:26,27 - the Holy Spirit brings back to mind, among those who had lived with Jesus, all that they had witnessed; Matthew 16:18 - Peter as the rock upon whom the church will be built; Acts 1:22,26 - the importance of

replacing the loss of an accredited witness; Acts 10:41 - the importance of the testimony of those who had eaten and drunk with Jesus; Ephesians 2:20 - the faithful testimony of the witnesses to the earthly Jesus as a vital part of the existence of the church [and, although it is a little premature, we may point here to Jude 17,20 as an illustration of how even a long time after these first witnesses had died - the author of Jude appears here to be referring back to something which is no longer a continuing possibility - they were still regarded with this high esteem (Kümmel, 1975:429, dates this document to about the beginning of the second century)]). The reality of new life that the first christians associated with an experience of Christ was, therefore, from the beginning, inextricably connected with the reality of Jesus' earthly life - so that the tradition of, and about, Jesus was a vital part of this new quality of life, because the source of this life arose directly from Jesus' historical existence (cf., for example, John 1:14). Among the first christian communities, then, the testimony of the apostles formed the tradition that ensured the desired continuity between the communities and the seminal events to which they traced their origin.[15]

At first this tradition would have been oral but then, perhaps because christian communities were springing up extremely rapidly, it would have become necessary, as in the case of the epistles of Paul, for example, to inform communities of the tradition without necessarily being able to travel there physically oneself (cf. Farmer 1983:54).[16] In cases like these, therefore, a written form of the apostolic tradition would have arisen side by side with the oral form - to ensure that the element of continuity predominated over the rise of the potentially discontinuous:

> 'The only documents we possess coming directly from the first generation of the Church are the Epistles of the apostle Paul. We certainly may not generalise from their evidence without further investigation; but they do warn us against over-estimating the universal importance of the original tradition in the life of the Gentile Christian congregations. The Pauline churches plainly did not live by the mere appropriation and preservation of traditional

teaching material. On the contrary, they were proud of
their own "knowledge" and "freedom" and the abundance of
miraculous "gifts" with which they knew themselves
endowed, and by which they were enlightened and guided.
Paul himself defends this freedom ... [but even] Paul
acknowledges an older tradition, deriving from Christ and
relating to him. This for him is authoritative and
demands recognition, even though its scope, from the point
of view of subject matter, is small enough.' (Von
Campenhausen 1972:105)

Initially this oral and written form of the christian tradition would
have had equal weight as authoriative testimony to Christ (cf., for
example, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 [Luke 1:1-4; Jude 3]).[17] The concern
was to preserve the vital and characteristic element of the faith,
while yet being open to the legitimate courses of action to which this
would give rise under circumstances never envisioned by the tradents
intially - and in order for this accommodation to take place there had
to be a sound knowledge of the tradition, which was regarded as
equivalent to the word of God (cf., for example, Romans 6:17;
Colossians 2:6ff; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1
Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2; Hebrews 2:1; 2 Peter 2:21; 3:2).
As christianity spread geographically and as time passed, so that the
traditions themselves had to be applied more and more obliquely and
with correspondingly greater skill (and in this regard 1 Corinthians
7, particularly verses 12 and 25, is an excellent example of the way
in which these accredited witnesses had to reinterpret the tradition -
always careful to remain true to what they had witnessed), there was
an increased tendency for the traditions to coalesce in written form
to preserve the continuity in the face of the growing situation of
discontinuity.

The cause of continuity would also have been promoted by the gathering
of these written traditions by christian communities into collections.
Although the details of this process of collection are not known,
since our sources are silent on the early stages of this development
(cf., for example, Kümmel 1975:480,482; Metzger 1987:5ff), it is
likely that the epistles of Paul would have formed the centre of this

developing trend (cf. Farmer 1983:54). At first the christian
communities would probably only have read in their worship the
correspondence addressed specifically to them (cf., for example,
Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27) – wherever they would have
been fortunate enough to have had any to supplement their christian
traditions. As the value of these written apostolic traditions became
clear to them they would have made a point of collecting copies of
other similar correspondence addressed to other communities; even as
those to whom no specific correspondence had been addressed would have
come to learn the value of those traditions and to collect them
wherever they were able to acquire them. Although particularly little
is known of the earliest gathering of the written gospels, they too
began to circulate and to be collected by communities. At this
relatively early stage, therefore, before the turn of the first
century, the written traditions would have served to ensure the
stability of the apostolic tradition. As the christian faith
continued to spread, however, and once the first accredited witnesses
had died, there arose new situations about which the previous
tradition itself had said little or nothing – and it would seem as if
it was out of developments in this early post-apostolic period that
the decisive impetus to the development of a canon as such was
generated.[18]

> 'The fundamental problem of the Pastorals is one that is
> met with in every piece of pseudonymous literature we have
> discussed so far: how to actualize a tradition after the
> (perceived) founder of that tradition is gone. But there
> are unique features of the Pastorals that are due to the
> unique personalization of that tradition by Paul himself.
> It is not enough to have a restatement of Pauline
> tradition. What is needed is an extension of the
> apostolic presence itself into the post-apostolic period.'
> (Meade 1986:137)

It was in this environment, where there was no longer any direct
access to the accredited witnesses (only to their utterance on matters
that did not bear directly on the needs of christians at that time),
but where there was a need for the type of reinterpretation of the

tradition that they had been able to achieve, that the conditions were conducive to the rapid spread of the type of writings of which the pseudonymous works are representative. It was in this environment that, in the process of the demands of reinterpreting the tradition (without the accompanying authoritative status of accredited witness to the events of the life of the earthly Jesus), a point of access was given to the tendency that would result in the association of the elements of threatened discontinuity with the written traditions, and the transference of the association of continuity from these to the concept of a bounded canon. In this regard we may point to the relation between the pseudonymous New Testament writings, which are generally earlier (Kümmel 1975 dates them from about 80-90 [Ephesians (366); Hebrews (403)] to well into the second century [2 Peter (434)] – with the mean falling at about the turn of the first century [1 and 2 Timothy (387); 1 Peter (425); Jude (429); 1, 2 and 3 John (445,452); Revelation (469)]), and the apocryphal writings which, as a rule, tend to have flourished from about the middle of the second century and onwards (although, as Farkasfalvy [1983:123] has pointed out, it is extremely difficult to date these writings). In this connection we may refer, for example, to the Gospel of Peter (middle of the second century – Metzger 1987:172), the Acts of Paul (170 – ibid 174), the Acts of John (the turn of the second century – ibid 177), the Acts of Peter (late second century – ibid 178), the Epistle of the Apostles (180 – ibid 180), the Epistle to the Laodiceans (late third century – ibid 183), the Apocalypse of Peter (125-150 – ibid 184), the Apocalypse of Paul (250 – ibid 186).[19] This would seem to indicate that once the authorised witnesses had died there was a trend to interpret the traditions in the same sort of way as they themselves had, frequently with the implicit claim, in pseudepigraphal works, to be doing it in a way that faithfully embodied the tradition of the leading apostolic figure to whom the community had been exposed.[20] Once the authoritative tradition had been loosened to some degree from its personal link with the accredited witnesses, and once this tradition had itself become the subject of this secondary reinterpretation and appropriation, the door had been opened to the presentation of all sorts of heterodox notions under the guise of orthodox, authoritative tradition about Jesus. In that environment

the written traditions, which had been responsible for preserving continuity initially, threatened to promote discontinuity without an authoritative guide to their reliability. The time had come, at that point in the ongoing canonical process, to demarcate the reliable writings. [21]

The process of development that we have outlined here is one that would incline us to believe that by about the mid second century already the majority of the authoritative writings had largely been fixed by customary use. By the time that the flood of heterodox writings had been unleashed, christian communities, particularly the older, more established ones, would have been using the apostolic traditions for so long as to have become largely immune to the claims of the more recent heterodox works.

> 'The church never knew anything else than that these gospels and these letters of Paul, among others, were what it could trust and what had been delivered to it as its foundation. The church was ignorant of any other foundation because ... it never had any foundation other than this tradition concerning Jesus and this teaching of the apostles.' (Ridderbos 1988:41)

This is the background against which the contributions of Marcion and the gnostics are to be seen. To begin with, in the case of the former, and in so far as his ideas impacted on the writings of the emergent New Testament canon, it would seem as if there would be little justification for thinking that his ideas would seriously have endangered the continued use of writings other than truncated forms of Luke's gospel and Paul's epistles (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians [Laodiceans], Colossions, Philemon, Philippians). The conceptual importance of the marcionite canon, on the other hand, cannot be underestimated. It compelled the christian communities to re-examine their traditions and to decide which were really authentic 'witnesses to the original gospel, which were to provide the standard of all later tradition and the norm for the preaching of the Church' (Von Campenhausen 1972:164,165). The

flood of gnostic writings served to bring about this end too, but in a way that served as a foil to the reductionistic marcionite tendencies. Christian communities were being compelled to define their identity against tendencies (that had come to a head in them) that sought to reduce the traditions to a rigid core, and also against currents which would, in the face of contextual demands,[22] largely free christian communities from their connection, continuity, with the life of Jesus and the testimony of those who had been with him.

> 'As a permanent arrangement, however, this [the fluid boundaries between canonical and apocryphal writings] simply cannot continue. In view of the growing flood of gospels of a gnostic character, and in face of the Marcionite claim to be the sole possessors of the few genuine and orignal documents, the catholic churches in their turn could not evade the necessity of laying down which texts were to be acknowledged as authentic and normative – "documents of the Lord" – and which not.'
> (Von Campenhausen 1972:170)

It is against this background which the more formalized attempts to set the limits of the christian canon should be seen. It is also against this background that the criteria for determining canonicity within the early christian communities should be seen. Apostolicity, conformity with the rule of faith, and consensus as to its acceptance among the church at large (cf. Meade 1986:203ff) were all ways of defining and describing the ways in which, in a situation that demanded formalization and an analysis of the 'sense of itself' (Johnson 1986:541), authoritative, continuity-preserving tradition, could be characterized.[23] In the end, however, as Ridderbos (1988:46) has argued, it was largely the majority of the writings, which had never been contested, that determined this 'sense of itself' and the final form of the canon:

> '... besides ecumenical contact,[24] the factor that caused the church to reject or to accept a particular document was above all its content. In that connection we must always take into account the tremendous influence that the original canon [the core of writings that had never been

seriously questioned] must have had in shaping the
judgements of the church and its leading figures.'

In this subsection we have brought to light the concern of the
christian communities to preserve the essence and character of their
faith by having it constantly grounded in the testimony of the
accredited and trustworthy witnesses to the life of the earthly Jesus.
(In this regard, as stated at the very beginning of the study, the
difference between the more critically founded views of someone like
Barr and the more 'conservative' position of someone like Ridderbos,
are marked – thereby confirming the essential structure of this study
as reflecting the endeavour to reconcile or hold in fruitful tension,
the broader bases of belief of which the two scholars we have
mentioned here serve to a certain extent as representative examples.)
We have also shown how new situations demanded a reinterpretation of
the apostolic tradition in such a way as to mediate the desired
continuity. We have presented the character of the canonical process
as one which sees authority in terms of continuity with Jesus through
the guidance of apostolic tradition. For the canonizing christian
communities, therefore, the question of authority was none other than
the question of reliability – so that the canonical process is nothing
other than the endeavour to balance reliability and the need to adapt,
all in the interests of creating a new stability on an apostolic
foundation.   It is in this context, therefore, that the various
stages in the relation between de adultera and John's gospel should be
viewed, and should be construed as being able to shed light on the
question of the authority of scripture from a perspective which seeks
to do justice to the way in which it has concretely and historically
served as authoritative for the christian community.

Endnotes

1.   But cf. Van Bruggen (1976:28):

> '<u>Samenvattend</u> moet geconcludeerd dat de codicologie
> en de geschiedenis van tekstbederf en tekstbewaring
> pleiten ten gunste van de ouderdom van het teksttype
> dat byzantijns of kerkelijk wordt genoemd en dat het
> ontbreken van dit type in de oudere majuskels en bij
> enkele egyptische kerkvaders vóór Nicea niets als
> argument tegen deze ouderdom kan worden aangevoerd.'

Van Bruggen (<u>ibid</u> 35) goes on to say that the stereotyping
of the Byzantine text-type as inferior is based on
misleading generalizations:

> '... de wijd verbreide mening dat de byzantijnse
> tekst een secundair karakter heeft, berust op de
> suggestieve kracht van geselecteerde illustraties,
> maar is in strijd met het geheel van de feiten.
> Hetgeen als "typerend" wordt aangevoerd is niet
> distinctief en is niet algemeen.'

Also cf. Thierry 1982:115ff.

2.   cf. Metzger (1981:216)

> 'Though most scholars have abandoned Hort's
> optimistic view that codex Vaticanus (B) contains
> the original text almost unchanged except for slips
> of the pen, they are still inclined to regard the
> Alexandrian text as on the whole the best ancient
> recension and the one most nearly approximating the

original.'

3.   Although it is of little immediate relevance to our study
to refer in great detail to these other occurrences, since
they, while representing a similar process of dynamic
development of tradition, are not able to cast as much
light on the issue as is the occurrence of de adultera
after John 7:52, we may briefly refer to them in passing.
f[1] manuscripts include the pericope de adultera at the end
of John's gospel. The manuscripts of the f[1] family tend
to be late in date - dating from about the twelfth to the
fourteenth centuries (Aland 1979b:702ff.) - although they
do appear to derive from a common, possibly Caesarean
(Metzger 1981:61), ancestor of a much earlier date. The
manuscripts that support the inclusion of de adultera
after Luke 21:38 belong to f[13] , and date from about the
eleventh to the fifteenth centuries (Aland 1979b:704ff.)
and also appear to derive from a Caesarean ancestor
(Metzger 1981:61). As far as getting back to an autograph
is concerned, these two readings are almost certainly not
reliable because, in each of the two cases, support for
the reading can only be gained from manuscripts which
have very definite affinities, or 'family' relations.
Beyond these there is no other support, known to us at
this stage, for these readings.

4.   Clearly, this approach is posited on the assumption
(equivalent in essence to the sociological axiom that all
human actions are problem-solving mechanisms [cf.
Johnstone 1975:8]) that the traditions about Jesus,
whether oral or written, remained in circulation only in
so far as they fulfilled a function in the christian
communities - and it is precisely this continued
perception of relevance that would inevitably form the
basis of the ongoing operation of scripture as

authoritative for these communities.

> ' ... those communities found value in these several literary traditions or we would not have them: that is its authority. It gave life, at crucial junctures in its transmission from generation to generation, to the believing communities which read it and sought answers to their existential needs in it. For them it is the book of life ....' (Sanders 1977:162)

It is by examining the concerns evidenced at the various stages of the process that culminated in the inclusion of the pericope in John by some of the Western christian communities that we will arrive at an understanding of authority that takes greater cognizance of what christian communities themselves have seen as important/authoritative in scripture.

5.   cf. Stroup (1964:142):

> 'Yet the Bible is the church's book and one might expect any critical approach to the text to be concerned at least in part with the question of what it means to interpret the text in the context of the community that uses it to understand and interpret reality.'

It should perhaps be noted at the outset, however, that not all would agree that canonical criticism has been successful in the task which it has set itself, on the level of the interpretation of the biblical text (on the level of the clarification of the forces behind the development of the canon there is reason for a less circumspect sense of achievement):

> 'What is not clear is whether canonical criticism will illumine the church's understanding of the content of the biblical narrative and therein the substance of its faith.' (Stroup 1964:83)

> ' ... it must be said that, however much is claimed for the value of the new approach, the results are often rather meagre. It is not always very clear how much difference, or at what level, Childs' approach makes to the actual interpretation of the

detailed wording of the text.' (Tuckett 1987:170)

6.   cf. Moberly (1988:105):

       'What Childs is concerned for is a context of interpretation within which biblical studies should be carried out.'

7.   cf. Sanders (1984:3):

       'The attitude or posture of biblical criticism has been to devalue pursuit of the meanings the biblical text may have for believing communities today.'

Also cf. Sanders (1977:159):

       '... the Bible has been reduced to the status of a tell which only the trained expert with hard-earned tools can dig.'

8.   cf. Kittel (1980:2):

       'The concern of the canonical approach is to find a way to exegete biblical texts that will allow the historical critical method to be used correctly and that will also take full account of the affirmation of scripture as authoritative for the community of faith.'

But cf. Stroup (1964:277)

       'One ambiguity that remains unresolved in canonical criticism, particularly Childs' formulation of it, is the precise relation between a historical critical analysis of the text and what Childs calls "theological reflection".'

Also see Carroll (1980:77):

       'The theological pursuit of canonical interpretation may have to decide the degree to which it will abandon the historical method in order to meet the demands of its confessional stance.'

Also see Tuckett 1987:174; Landes 1980:36.

(Also see endnote 5.)

It is at precisely this point where our thesis seeks to build upon the solid historical-critical foundation upon which canonical criticism rests - using the social sciences and psychology in an effort to lead to a dynamic and 'true to life' integration of the two.

9.   Sanders (1972:xx):

    'Canonical criticism, therefore, cannot begin where most discussions of canon in the handbooks begin. The question of the structure of canon can only follow upon the question of the function of the canon. The question of what is in (canon) and what is out (apocrypha) can only follow upon the question of the origins and function of canon.'

Also see Sanders (1984:21):

    'Canonical criticism has two major foci: The one may be called the canonical process and the other canonical hermeneutics.'

Our discussion here of the development of the canon corresponds to the former, while the following chapters - especially chapter five, correspond to the latter.

10.   cf. Sanders (1984:28):

    'But all along that line was a quest, by the believing communities, put to the traditions - whether oral, written, fluid, or stable - in constantly changing circumstances. And that quest was for the most part of two major sorts. As history changed and the fortunes of the people, even their habitats and customs changed, they needed to know ever anew who they were and what they should do.'

11.   cf. Sanders (1977:162):

    'It [canonical criticism] takes seriously the authoritative function, of the traditions which compose the Bible, in the believing communities which shaped its various literary units, compiled and arranged its several parts in the conditions received, and continue to adapt its traditions to their ongoing lives.'

Aside:

Since canonical criticism is greatly concerned with the
traditions and the communities of faith, it is hardly
surprising that Sanders has traced the academic lineage of
canonical criticism back to form criticism and its
progeny, tradition criticism:

> 'One of the results of form criticism was a special
> type of investigation of the appearance of certain
> crucial traditions in the works of more than one
> early biblical author, editor, prophet, or psalmist.
> The name given such exercises is tradition
> criticism. It compares and relates the several
> interpretations or understandings of that tradition.
> By taking the crossing of the Red Sea tradition and
> tracing its formulations and functions at several
> junctures of biblical letters, for example, one
> might sketch a history of the interpretations or
> understandings given to that early episode of the
> epic story of ancient Israel.'   (Sanders 1972:xii,
> xiii)

Tradition criticism developed into Midrash:

> 'Midrash is a difficult term to define ... but it at
> least means the function of an ancient or canonical
> tradition in the ongoing life of the community which
> preserves those traditions and in some sense finds
> identity in them. When one studies how ancient
> tradition functions in relation to the needs of the
> community, he is studying midrash.' (ibid. xiv)

> 'The difference between tradition criticism and
> comparative midrash may be described as the
> difference between the function of early
> authoritative traditions in the period before the
> structural concept of canon arose and the later
> authoritative tradition we call "canon".' (ibid.
> xv)

12.   cf. Childs (1984:23):

> '... the function of canonical shaping was often
> precisely to loosen the text from any one given
> historical setting, and to transcend the original
> addressee.'

Childs (1979:79):

> 'Rather, it is constitutive of the canon to seek to transmit the tradition in such a way as to prevent its being moored to the past.'

13.   Also cf., for example, Farmer (1983:48f). It would seem, however, as if a distinct weakness in the type of approach embodied by Metzger and, to a lesser extent, by Farmer is that they initiate the discussion of the canon without much attention to developments in the canonical process within the New Testament itself – without following through in detail the developments stemming directly from the earliest stages and processes of the tradition. By beginning only outside (or even largely 'after') the New Testament writings the danger is that the New Testament itself might almost appear to be conceived of as having arisen in a supernatural type of way – apart from the everyday concerns of christians with continuity within discontinuity. The impression is created that the canonical writings were simply there and awaiting recognition, without realising that the concerns that led to the canonization of scripture through regular and relevant use are of the same type that led to the crystallization of the earlier traditions into the individual canonical writings (cf. Johnson 1986:532). As a result, the type of approach embodied by Metzger and, to a lesser extent, by Farmer, which pays only the scantest attention, almost in passing, to the words of Jesus and the memories of his actions, is in danger of appearing to have chosen a somewhat arbitrary starting point (cf. Metzger's third chapter entitled 'Period of preparation: the Apostolic Fathers' [preceded by chapters on the investigation of the canon prior to the twentieth century, and on the literature dealing with the canon in the twentieth century, respectively] – 1987:40) – and it is also potentially the poorer for not being able to place

later developments within the context of the light of the similar quest that christians had undertaken from the very beginning. The type of approach adopted by Ridderbos (1988), on the other hand, is able to provide a more rounded understanding of the canonical process in that it pays a great deal of attention to the important area neglected by Metzger - although a certain degree of caution should be adopted in using Ridderbos since he seems to be in danger of largely overlooking the element of discontinuity in his emphasis on continuity (and, interestingly, it may quite possibly be a similar, though unmentioned, notion that leads Metzger to remain silent on this area - because, perhaps with the benefit of canonical hindsight, continuity is so strongly affirmed that the discontinuity has faded from mind?).

14.   cf., for example, Ridderbos (1988:18)

> 'Thus the tradition of which the New Testament speaks is not an unchanneled stream that originates in great redemptive events and is then perpetuated as the faith or the theology of the church. Rather, it is nothing else than the authoritative proclamation that was entrusted to the apostles as Christ's witnesses and as the foundation of His church.'

15.   Also of relevance, at this point, to the argument being developed in the body of the study is the mention of the relation of these earliest developments in the canonical process and the writings of what came to be known as the Old Testament:

> '... the first Christian congregations ... retained "the Law and the Prophets" as sacred Scripture and divine revelation .... They consisted of Jews, who remained Jews, and whose desire it was to constitute the true Israel of the final age of salvation. It was to this that they knew themselves called in the name of Jesus, and for this reason that they appealed to the Scriptures. It is true that faith in Christ did not derive from the ancient writings; it was rooted in direct encounter with Jesus, and arose from the experience of his resurrection. But

an understanding of what it meant that Jesus was
Messiah or Son of Man or the present and future
Lord, a theological interpretation of his nature,
could be arrived at only in the context of earlier
prophetic and apocalyptic hopes, through the ever
valid testimony of "the Scripture".'   (Von
Campenhausen 1972:21)

'This   new   spiritual   self-awareness   has   ...
profoundly altered the function which the Old
Testament had in Judaism, because the centre of
gravity of faith itself has been shifted. Neverthe-
less, the ancient Bible is still held in honour
....'   (ibid 63)

16.   In distinction from the epistles one may at this stage,
rather prematurely from the point of view of the
historical details of the canonical process, also refer to
the production of the gospels. As we shall see shortly,
the epistles presuppose an environment in which there is a
need to balance a relatively new and 'unschooled'
experience of the faith by reference to the traditions, to
which, up to now, there has been little explicit exposure.
On the other hand, it may, as a rough rule of thumb, be
said that one would expect the gospels to have arisen in
an environment where traditions of the historical Jesus
would have been circulating extensively and where there
would have been the perceived need to protect the
particular community's interpretation of these traditions
against   influences   that   threatened   the   established
continuity (in this case largely by protecting the
memories of Jesus against the danger of their becoming
irrelevant relics - cf. Von Campenhausen 1972:122).

'The aim of the gospels is not recollection about
Jesus nor glorification of his miracles - these form
only one aspect among others of the gospel's content
- but the main concern is rather to evoke faith and
to strengthen it. Jesus' words and deeds are
brought together from out of his life and reproduced
in the form of a simple narrative in order to show
to the early Christian church the ground of its
faith and to provide firm support in its mission for
preaching,   instruction,   and   debate   with   its
opponents.'   (Kümmel 1975:37)

17.   Although it should be noted, contra Papias (Eusebius
       Historiae ecclesiasticae III 39), that, in the face of the
       spread of the faith and the inability to control the
       spread of tradition that was not apostolic, the emphasis
       would soon change in such a way as to give preference to
       written tradition, which is really analogous to the
       stabilizing relation between writings and canon.

> 'But every one of these – the canon of Scripture,
> the creed, and the institutional structure – emerged
> in its present form only toward the end of the
> second century. Before that time, as Irenaeus and
> others attest, numerous gospels circulated among
> various Christian groups, ranging from those of the
> New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, to
> such writings as the the Gospel of Thomas, the
> Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Truth, as well
> as many other secret teachings, myths, and poems
> attributed to Jesus or his disciples. Some of
> these, apparently, were discovered at Nag Hammadi;
> many others are lost to us. Those who identified
> themselves as Christians entertaine many – and
> radically differing – religious beliefs and
> practices. And the communities scattered throughout
> the known world organized themselves in ways that
> differed widely from one group to another.' (Pagels
> 1979:xxiii)

[Although we have characterized the evolution that led
from oral tradition to written tradition as analogous to
the one that led from written tradition to canon, this
does not mean that we automatically insinuate that
gnosticism played the same catalytic role in the former
that it may have in the latter (in fact, Tuckett's [1986]
research on the relation between the synoptic tradition
and parallels in the Nag Hammadi finds suggests that, in
so far as the Nag Hammadi documents are a reliable guide,
the threat of a fully fledged gnostic distortion arose
only after the crystallization of the christian traditions
– cf. especially page 9). Whether the threat was posed
by an incipient gnosticism or not, however, is immaterial
since the point is the same: the community of the
tradition had to be protected against overwhelming

discontinuity – which protection began to take the form more frequently of written tradition, which was a great deal more difficult to misconstrue or misrepresent than were oral traditions.]

18.   cf.   'For the development of the New Testament canon, the most crucial period is the first half of the second century.' (Farkasfalvy 1983:123)

19.   Although the dates assigned to these writings in, for example, Hennecke (1963) do not always coincide with those assigned by Metzger, it does nevertheless remain true that the apocryphal writings do appear to postdate the majority of the pseudepigraphal New Testament writings.

20.   cf. Meade (1986:193):

> 'The pseudonymous epistles, then, are simply different members of the same family that we found in the "anonymous" gospels and various literary genres of the prophetic, wisdom, and apocalyptic traditions. In other words by now quite familiar, attribution in the pseudonymous Pauline and Petrine epistles must be regarded primarily as an assertion of authoritative tradition, not of literary origins.'

In this connection Tertullian's comment in Adversus Marcionem iv.5.4 is particularly interesting (particularly in the connection between the acceptance of pseudonymous writings and their association with old and respected christian congregations):

> 'Capit magistrorum videri quae discipuli promulgarint.'

21.   The very specific way in which we have approached the question of the canonical process should not, however, lead us to overlook elements in the process that are not of direct relevance to our particular approach. In this connection we may refer to the part that persecution may also have played in the formation of the canon. It would, more than likely, have encouraged christians to ascertain,

if they had not already begun to do so, what writings were worth suffering for. It would also have given a greater sense of reverence for writings for which others had already suffered a great deal.

> 'When the imperial police knocked at the door and demanded of Christians that they surrender their sacred books, it became a matter of conscience in deciding whether one could hand over the Gospel of John as well as, say, the Gospel of Thomas without incurring the guilt of sacrilege. In such an existential moment most Christians would naturally be careful to determine on solid grounds precisely which were the books for adherence to which they were prepared to suffer. The persecution under Diocletian may almost be said to have given the touch by which previously somewhat unsettled elements of the canon were further crystallized and fixed.' (Metzger 1987:106,107)

> 'For Churches having experienced persecution, these Scriptures would be known as sacrosanct books — books of God, books that make the difference between life and death. These are books that Churches will cherish and hand down with love and affection. They will be holy books, consecretated by the blood of martyrs.' (Farmer 1983:41)

22. In illustration of this contextual nature of the reality of discontinuity out of which arose the gnostic threat to the continuity of the characteristically apostolic tradition, we may point to the following example presented by Pagels (1979:144). The situation in which the gnostic christians found themselves, and to which they, because of their own outlook, gave a specific interpretation, had no satisfactory antecedent in the christian tradition. This led to an attempted reinterpretation of the tradition — and one which would come to be rejected as a gross distortion of the apostolic testimony.

> 'Since such experiences, especially the fear of death and dissolution, are located, in the first place, in the body, the gnostic tended to mistrust the body, regarding it as a saboteur that inevitably engaged him in suffering. Nor did the gnostic trust the blind forces that prevail in the universe;

after all, these are the forces that constitute the
body. What can bring release? Gnostics came to
the conviction that the only way out of suffering
was to realise the truth about humanity's place and
destiny in the universe. Convinced that the only
answers were to be found within, the gnostic engaged
on an intensely private interior journey.'

23. An interesting example of this is to be found in
Tetullian's <u>Adversus Marcionem</u> iv.5.1.

> '<u>In summa, si constat id verius quod prius, id prius
> quod et ab initio, id ab initio quod ab apostolis,
> pariter utique constabit id esse ab apostolis
> traditum quod apud ecclesias apostolorum fuerit
> sacrosanctum.</u>'

24. 'The <u>first</u> factor was the growth of ecumenical ties
between the various parts of the world church.
Those ties made it increasingly evident that the
rejection of some writings was confined to certain
parts of the church and that the objections from an
"orthodox" viewpoint to specific writings (e.g.,
Hebrews and Revelation) contradicted what had
apparently been generally accepted in the larger
church context for a long time.' (Ridderbos
1988:45)

3.

The Gospel of John

In which, corresponding to the first stage of the relation between John's gospel and the pericope de adultera (when they existed independently), through the medium of a literary-critical analysis of John, an insight is gained into the way in which scripture functioned as authoritative for the early christian communities.

3.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to determine what can be learned about the way in which scripture concretely and historically functioned as authoritative for christian communities, on the basis of the acceptance by them of John's gospel. It is widely held that John's gospel was probably written in the last decade of the first centry (cf., for example, the results of Kümmel's overview of scholarship in this regard - 1975:246). It did not, as we shall explain shortly, immediately receive the sort of recognition that appears to have come to the synoptics at an earlier stage. Its very difference from them, as well as the fact that the gnostics found it particularly congenial, served to ensure that its passage to general acceptance as authoritative was stormy.

> 'The recognition that the difference between John and the synoptics constitute a difficulty to be explained is not a discovery of modern scholarship. The problem of John, or the Fourth Gospel, among the Gospels was recognized as such in the second century. There is evidence that John's gospel was rejected by some Christians at that time, perhaps because it was being used by other Christians who were deemed heretical, but in part because it was different from, and seemed irreconcilable with, the synoptic Gospels, which were gaining universal acceptance among Christians.' (Smith 1986:5)

It was only towards the end of the second century that John began to
be widely recognized as authoritative scripture (Smith 1986:9) –
probably because, under the influence of such leading figures as,
among others, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, the
conformity with the core of apostolic tradition began to be
increasingly recognized and, where recognized earlier, to be
confirmed.

> 'At Ioannes omnium postremus, quum videret in aliorum
> evangeliis ea quae ad corpus Christi pertinent tradita
> esse, ipse divino Spiritu afflatus spiritale evangelium
> familiarum suorum rogatu conscripsit. Hactenus Clemens.'
> (Eusebius Historiae Ecclesiasticae vi.14.7)

It is also conceivable that the general acceptance of John's gospel
may have been the direct result of the growing confidence which a
rapidly stabilizing canon gave to christian communities. Before
Marcion's precipitative influence, when the demarcation between
accepted, authoritative traditions and ones of uncertain authority had
been fluid, it may have been felt that such a potentially influential
work would have had the power to transform very subtly but decisively
the delicate balance of the traditions in a way that might have been
harmful to the continuity between the communities and Jesus. Once,
after Marcion, and under the influence of the rapid growth of gnostic
literature, the fixed canon of the New Testament had began to be
formally fixed – or at least, to have entered irreversably upon such a
course – it may have been felt that John could, indeed should, be
included because it did in fact reflect an important current in
apostolic testimony – and one which could be appreciated fully within
the context of a relatively clear conception as to what was
authoritative and what was not, so that the potentially distorting
impression which it might have gained in a less stable environment,
and upon which the gnostics had played, could be harnessed to give
invaluable insight into the meaning and consequences of the life of
Jesus.[1]   In a sense this is an extension of the theory that John only
found acceptance in the light of the qualifying Johannine epistles.
While it is true that acceptance of John depended upon its association

with a qualifying or balancing influence, there does not appear, however, to be a great deal of justification for associating this influence primarily with the Johannine epistles as Hartin (1985:47,48) does:

> 'Because of the use of the Gospel of John by those outside the universal church, the church was hesitant to actually embrace this gospel. However, with John's epistles as a guide to its correct interpretation, the universal church eventually did accept the Gospel of John and became the defender of its orthodox interpretation as opposed to those with gnostic tendencies.'

There can be little doubt that the epistles of John do serve as a guide to the interpretation of John's gospel. It should be remembered, however, that both the gospel and the epistles were in circulation from about the same time (as we observed in the previous chapter, the epistles of John are generally considered to date from about the turn of the first century - only very shortly after the composition of the gospel). This did not ensure that the gospel of John received the type of general acceptance from an early date that the theory, of which Hartin is an exponent, would seem to imply (this difficulty would be even further exacerbated if one agrees with Robinson's extremely early, by the usual reckonings, dating [1976:307] of the epistles between 60 and 65 and the gospel to shortly after 65). While we do agree that the general acceptance of John depended upon a compensatory context of interpretation, we disagree in locating this in the epistles - instead we would locate this in the early post-Marcionite crystallization of the concept of a canon (with which theory the chronological details of what we know of the growing acceptance of John coincide).

Now that we have given a brief outline of the background to the general acceptance of John's gospel by christian communities, we need to attempt to ascertain just what it was about this gospel that commended itself to them. Reader-response criticism, to which we shall refer hereafter simply as 'literary criticism', will be the

method that we will use to arrive at an understanding of the way in which the gospel as a whole, without the overriding concern to establish historical context and veracity (see, for example, the brief discussion in parenthesis on page 11), functions in its communication with its readers - which is equivalent to an attempt, on the literary level, to place this gospel in the context of the concerns, which we outlined in the previous chapter, evidenced by christian communities in the unfolding of the canonical process.

> 'Literary criticism, in its broadest sense, means that effort to understand literature.'   (Beardslee 1969:1)

Furthermore, what Ricoeur states in the following passage is equally true of literary criticism as it is of the linguistic analysis of texts:

> 'What is specifically different about the semiotic study of texts is that it does not ask about the history of redaction of a text or to what setting the successive authors of their respective audience might have belonged. Instead it asks how a text functions as a text in its current state.'   (Ricoeur 1981:53)

Literary criticism would, therefore, appear to be a 'literary' way of looking at literature - a way that corresponds particularly appropriately to the essential nature of a work of literature; this being undertaken without particular attention to the history of the text itself, since this is regarded as secondary to the essence of literature.   Inevitably the question arises, what is this 'literature' to which the approach under discussion so closely corresponds?

> 'Literary criticism, like all sciences is defined by the nature of the object it studies....   Perhaps imaginative literature's most distinguishing characteristic is that it does not claim to describe reality itself but rather is a secondary reconstruction, an imitation of reality.   Or, put another way, a work of imaginative literature creates another or alternative reality, analogous to the everyday world we live in, but not identical to it.'   (Robertson

1977:5)[2]

Literature, by this reckoning, would appear to be a writing that in some way imitates reality. It is a metaphoric reality that resembles the world in which we live, without actually being that world. The literary world lies parallel to the world in which we live.[3] This metaphoric reality inherent in literature is not a haphazard, or chance, outcome of otherwise directionless efforts on the part of the author. The author, even though the end product is more replete with meaning than even he purposed, set about his task with a conscious, purposeful intent.[4]

> '... any question about the meaning of a literary work
> must begin with what the author set out to accomplish.'
> (Reese 1984:40)

The author consciously sets about winning the intended reader over to his view of the world. He does this by manipulating the reader, by means of the carefully structured dynamics of the work, in such a way that the reader acknowledges the author's metaphorical depiction of reality as the right way of viewing the situation.[5]

> 'Meaning is produced in the experience of reading a text
> as a whole and making the mental moves the text calls for
> it readers to make, quite apart from questions concerning
> its sources and origin.' (Culpepper 1983:4)[6]

By way of a provisional definition, literary criticism would be the analysis of the techniques used by the author to create and sustain his metaphoric world. It would include an investigation of the way in which the reader is guided to an encounter with the world view, presented in the work[7] and encouraged to adopt it and make it his own.[8] What Gardner (1959:75) says in the following extract on the subject of poetry is as true when applied to prose.

> 'He may not know all that he meant to say when he began;
> but some conception either clearly formed before he began
> to write, or growing as he wrote, governed his creation,
> so that the final poem had unity of thought, feeling,
> rhythm, and diction. The power to recognize this
> conception, which is the source of the poems life in all
> its parts, and to read the poem in its light, is what I
> mean by true judgement in a critic.'

Given the nature of literature, it should be noted that literary criticism is more of an art than a science. In addition to the historical relativity of all human endeavours, which places conclusive, final answers beyond reach in more areas than only the one under discussion, the elusive nature of literature renders meaningless any attempt at final, compartmentalized understandings of a literary work.
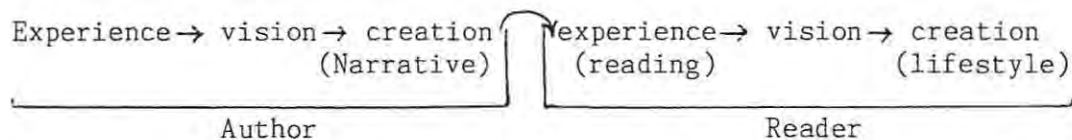
> 'That the answers we find are conditioned by our own
> circumstances does not destroy their value. Hamlet is not
> a problem to which a final solution exists. It is a work
> of art about which questions can always be asked.'
> (Gardner 1959:51)

Before we pursue a more detailed analysis of literature and literary criticism, we should justify the application of literary criticism to the gospels in the first place. The reason that we are able to scrutinize the Bible, and in this case the gospels particularly, using the tools of literary criticism, is that the Bible is no longer regarded as a unique entity, sui generis, without parallel in the sphere of human literary endeavour. This does not mean that the Bible is in any way downgraded - it simply means that when the people responsible for the biblical books made public their vision, they did so speaking everyday language and using the speech forms and literary categories they normally used as fully integrated members of their societies (cf. Talbert 1979:361).

> 'The interpretation of biblical writings is not subject to

conditions different from those applying to all other
kinds of literature.'   (Bultmann 1955:256)

Let us now proceed to undertake a more detailed study of literary
criticism, which we will do along the lines suggested by the following
progression: the creation of the literary work, the purpose which it
serves, and the way in which it achieves this end.

Experience→ vision→ creation experience→ vision→ creation
                (Narrative)   (reading)   (lifestyle)

                     Author   Reader

To begin with, the writer has an experience, or series of experiences,
which triggers a vision or understanding of the sort that may broadly
be described as interpretative of the human situation or of an aspect
of it.   This vision may be either broad and all-embracing, or it may
be an insight into a more limited aspect of human life – whatever the
case, it may be broadly thought of as of an existential type dealing
with the meaning of life within its physical and social limits.

'How does the artistic mind differ from the more prosaic
kind? One clear indication is what can happen when an
artist comes across a striking photograph, an intriguing
anecdote or a quirkely suggestive newspaper story. Where
another person might pause to ponder the knowns and the
unknowns in a literal way, the creative thinker typically
explores events by reinventing them in his own head. Thus
what starts out as unexplainable frequently evolves into
the artists's central insight.   What begins as an
eccentric glimpse of others may become archetypally
instructive about the human condition....   Playwright
David Henry Hwang epitomizes precisely this imaginative
process in his brilliant M. Butterfly which opened on
broadway last week.   Hwang was beguiled by news reports
of a 1986 espionage case involving a French diplomat and
his glamorous Chinese lover of 20 years, who to the
diplomat's professed astonishment, turned out to be not
only a foreign agent but a man.'   (Henry 1988:51)

In the case of the gospels it is the encounter with Christ or, since the gospel writers may never actually have encountered Christ himself physically, an encounter of an indirect kind through the traditions and common life of the community, that provides the central insight into the meaning of life. Creative talents responsible for literature of all types, including the gospels, very often extract from their situations personally relevant elements which they combine with portions of their own creation to produce a work of wider appeal by means of which the driving insight may be made available to others.

'In reading the gospel, one is drawn into a literary world created by the author from materials drawn from life and history as well as imagination and reflection.' (Culpepper 1983:231)

It is this imaginative blend of experience and consideration that comprises the metaphoric world of the narrative. It is an entity that is largely independent of the real world although it does draw on human experience in the world and is expressed with, or by means of, the language of this world. It is for this reason that the narrative world has to be interpreted largely independently of the real world, though it is not possible to treat it in complete isolation precisely because of a certain degree of correspondence to the real world.

'Consequently the referential _function_ in narrative is to be located in the world created by the narrative, and the referential _fallacy_ consists of thinking about this world as though it were a direct representation of the real world, overlooking the conceptual autonomy of the narrative world.' (Petersen 1978:40)[9]

The fact that the narrative world is an independent reality calls for an approach that is sensitive to its nature and the type of yields that may reasonably be expected. Overagainst the historical positivist approach to the gospels, which is largely inadequate since it is oblivious to the literary nature of the gospels, a fresh angle of engagement is required which takes cognizance of these latest

literary developments.

> 'But the gospels are also story, and the way in which we read and respond to story is imaginative rather than critical. We believe the story in a different way from which we believe in the veracity of history: it is the appropriateness of the narrative to the whole experience which it conveys that lies behind our sense of its reality. What Coleridge calls the willing suspension of disbelief is present in the act of reading literature, as it is in the act of creating it.' (Trickett 1981:34)

Having spoken of the creation of the largely autonomous narrative world and the special nature of the approach appropriate to it, let us continue our task by enquiring into the purpose of this artistic, imaginative creation. Why did the author go to the trouble of writing his narrative? The reason would probably be that he thought the insight he had gained at some point was particularly important in casting light on the human condition - or some narrower aspect of it. He would have thought that it would be particularly beneficial for others to share his insight, and so he set about presenting it in the most readily understandable and convincing way. The simple recounting of the original events which had brought the revelation, or mediated it, would more often than not probably not lead readers to any particularly profound insight, least of all that gained by the writer. To gain maximum effect, therefore, the writer would have to recreate the pivotal revelatory incident or series of events, blending history and imagination in such a way as to make his vision available to his envisaged readership.

> '... it must be said that the aesthetically organized form or pattern of connections itself contains implicitly a perspective on life or understanding of existence.' (Via 1967:82)[10]

The vision of the author is the driving force behind his literary creativity. He has himself gained new insight into the possibilities, or limitations, of human life and he wishes to make

this available to others (cf. Cox and Dyson 1972:462). Thus, this literary activity is really an attempt on the part of the author to reshape society in such a way that it accords with his understanding of its true nature and potentiality, in correspondence to his vision of the existential (not necessarily, if at all, existentialist) possibilities of human life.[11]

> 'A major battle is now being waged between those who value literature for its power to extend consciousness and freedom, and those who in their hearts hate it for the same reason.' (Cox and Dyson 1972:462)[12]

Whether or not the author is successful in his bid to convince others, to get them to take as their own his vision, depends to a large degree on his level of artistry. The reader has to be made to feel so at home in the narrative that he assimilates its perspective almost without realising it (cf. Iser 1971:44). An artless creation will often fail to achieve its end because the world which the reader is being asked to enter is so unfamiliar, or unappealing, as to be unable to achieve a point of entry into the readers imagination by means of a correspondence to his experience. For the communication of the author's vision to succeed, the narrative world needs to be of such a nature as to convince the reader that it is a faithful representation of the world in which he lives - only in this way will the reader be induced to move from the familiar to the unexpectd and unfamiliar. This comes out particularly in the assessment of W.J. Harvey (as it is noted by Culpepper 1983:230):

> 'Sartre is perhaps as good as any novelist can be without achieving real greatness; when we read his novels we say, "Yes, this is the Sartrean world", but when we read one of the great masters we say, simply, "Yes, this is the world." The difference in our response may perhaps seem slight; in fact, it is crucial.'

The way in which the author accomplishes his end is by carefully mapping out a path for the reader to follow. In order to do this he

has to have some idea of the identity of the reader he expects to
follow this path.   Only in this way will he be able to go out and
meet the approaching reader and give him the personalized invitation
to follow him that is necessary.   He constructs his route, therefore,
and designs the route markers in such a way that they will appeal to
the reader he anticipates his work will attract.[13]

> '... the approach of literary criticism is to accept the
> form of the work, and the reader's participation in the
> form, as an intrinsic part of entry into the imaginative
> world of the work.'   (Beardslee 1969:13)

We have emphasized the path that the author has created for the reader
to follow.   We have spoken of carefully encoded instructions and
signposts placed along this route to guide the reader.   We have not,
however, made any mention of the gaps within the text - the spaces
between the encoded signs in which the reader is given the freedom
necessary for him to include his own story in the text, without which
entry into the narrative world could not be accomplished.

> '... the indeterminate elements of literary prose -
> perhaps even of all literature - represents the most
> important link between text and reader. It is the switch
> that activates the reader in using his own ideas in order
> to fulfil the intention of the text.   This means that it
> is the basis of a textural structure in which the reader's
> part is already incorporated.'   (Iser 1971:43)[14]

Literary criticism is, therefore, the study of the inner dynamics, to
which we have alluded above, within the gospels.   It seeks to
determine and understand the author's vision (purely on the level of
literary dynamics, without seeking historical information to that end)
- which it does by finding out why (again, only in terms of the
dynamic logic of the text itself) he gave the narrative the form he
did and how its inner workings and dimensions operate to lead the
reader to the desired conclusion. Literary criticism aims at arriving
at an understanding of how the phenomenon that Kingsbury (1986a:2)
outlines in the following quote is orchestrated:

'To approach Matthew's Gospel as a unified narrative, however, is to concentrate on the very story it tells. When one reads the Matthean narrative, one temporarily takes leave of one's familiar world of reality and enters into another world that is autonomous in its own right. This world, which possesses its own time and space, is peopled by characters and marked by events that, in varying degrees, are extolled or decried in accordance with this world's own system of values. By inhabiting this world one experiences it, and having experienced it, one leaves and returns, perhaps changed, to one's own world.'

Literary criticism can, therefore, never be a completely, or even wholly, scientific endeavour because it treats a subject that is at every step concerned with, and produced by, the imagination. Imagination lifts events out of their otherwise flat background and makes them into events with specific import. It is precisely this point which is brought out by Gray (1988:57) in the extract he has lifted from a work of J.G. Ballard in a review of the latter's work:

'"I believe in the power of the imagination to remake the world." That power needs to be pitted against Shepperton and its calm environs: "The wave of the future breaks here in the suburbs. This and all places like it are becoming a geography of concrete and credit cards. My fear is that the exercise of the imagination, an intensely private act, may die out. People may live in an eventless world, where nothing new will ever occur."'

The imagination is responsible for transforming the dull and everyday into events of far reaching significance. Imagination sees the need to communicate this significance, while it develops a way of doing so. Imagination allows the reader to participate in the text, and it allows him to believe in events and possibilities once the book has been closed - driving him to aspire to the realisation of his vision.

We have discussed literary criticism in rather broad terms - precisely because it is an approach that consciously avoids the sort of rigidity

that is easy to describe in precise and exhaustive propositional
statements. It is by means of this way of interpreting the gospels
that we shall be able to describe the acceptance of John, and describe
it in such a way as to shed light on the authoritative operation of
scripture in christian communities.

3.2   The appeal of John's gospel

In this subsection it is our aim to demonstrate the results of a
literary-critical analysis of John's gospel - thereby bringing to light
the peculiarities of John's narrative - so as to provide an insight
into its appeal to the christian communities.   We shall present the
findings of a representative literary critical study of John's gospel
in the form of a somewhat protracted, but necessary, summary of
Culpepper's (1983) book entitled Anatomy of the fourth gospel.

Culpepper begins his analysis of John's gospel, in chapter two, by
discussing the narrator of the story. In chapters three to six he
examines various aspects of the story, including the questions of
time, plot, and character. In chapter seven he examines the
anticipated reader of the gospel.

In chapter two, having discussed the difference between the real
author and the implied author - which is not of direct relevance to
our present task - Culpepper proceeds to discuss the narrator of the
gospel.[15]   In John the narrator is undramatized (16).   He is aware
that he is speaking to an audience (17), whom he introduces to the
narrative world and the characters who inhabit it.   He continually
provides the proper perspective with which to view the action in the
gospel (17), sometimes even interrupting the flow of the narrative to
introduce comments to the reader (17).[16]

          'As the narrator tells the story, and because of the way
          he tells it, we soon accept him as a reliable guide to the

meaning of Jesus' life and death.'(17)

[It is in this particular connection, as we shall see, that literary criticism of John is able to shed light on the relation between John and the question of the operation of scripture as authoritative.]

The point of view which the narrator adopts may be subdivided into different areas to which the title 'point of view' may be applied. The first of these points of view Culpepper calls the psychological point of view.

> 'A narrator's psychological point of view is determined by whether or not he is able to provide inside views of what a character is thinking, feeling, or intending. Narrators are omniscient to the degree that they are able to give the reader inside views which no observer could have.'(21)

In the case of the narrator of John's gospel, he is omniscient with regard to Jesus, providing the reader with an inside view of Jesus' mind (22), and also with regard to the disciples viewed collectively (23), although he seldom comments on the thoughts of individual disciples (23). Minor characters, 'the Jews' and 'the crowd' are also exposed to the narrator's omniscience (24, 25).[17] The narrator's spatial point of view may be described as onmipresent - he is able to move around freely, unhindered by time or space, to provide the reader with information he needs to come to a decision about Jesus.[18] The narrator, in addition to the two points of view already mentioned, also has a temporal point of view - and in this case it is retrospective:

> 'In this sense, the Johannine narrator, who presumably expresses the perspective of the author, tells the story from a point of view which in its retrospection is informed by memory, interpretation of scripture, the coalescing of traditions with the post-Easter experience of the early church, conscious of the presence of the

> Spirit, a reading of the glory of the risen Christ back
> into the days of his ministry, and an acute sensitivity to
> the history and struggles of the Johannine community.'(30)

The fourth point of view by which the activity of the narrator may be described is the ideological point of view.[19] This encompasses both the reliability and stereoscopic vision of the narrator. In John's gospel the narrator does not attempt to occupy a neutral position, but actively seeks to promote the implied author's evaluation of Jesus to the reader (32). His ability to achieve this end is facilitated by his reliabiliy - his comments and evaluations are supported by the unfolding of events - and by his stereoscopic vision - the impression created that he knows how to interpret Jesus' life correctly because he knows the truth about where Jesus came from and where he would return to (32). In addition to the various points of view by which the narrator may be identified, he may also be identified by the way in which he relates to other figures in the narrative context (34). He knows who Jesus is, and even knows what Jesus knows.[20] In this way he establishes himself as the authoritative interpreter of Jesus (34). It is in this way that the narrator is established as or shown to be, a reliable guide to interpreting the meaning and significance of Jesus.

> 'All these devices incline the reader toward accepting the
> author's understanding of Jesus. In fact, the gospel
> makes use of virtually all the devices available for
> heightening the credibility and authority of a narrative:
> appeal to tradition, a reliable narrator, inspiration (the
> Paraclete), eyewitness testimony, the authority of an
> esteemed figure (the Beloved Disciple), and the approval
> of a community.'(48)

In chapter three, Culpepper discusses the question of narrative time, which he distinguishes from historical time and story time respectively. Historical time is the period of time that Jesus' ministry actually historically and originally occupied. Story time, on the other hand, is the period of time, some two and a half years, that Jesus' ministry occupies in John's story about Jesus,

irrespective of historical time. Narrative time, as distinct from historical and story time, refers to the text itself, the time taken to read it and the various devices used to demarcate and structure it (54). Under narrative time Culpepper mentions order, duration, and frequency. By order he means the complex interaction of time periods and sequential relations that exists between the narrator and the events to which he refers and between the narrator and the intended reader and the events referred to in the gospel, as well as to the relation between the events from the narrator's perspective.[21] Duration refers to the relation between the length of the narrative and the length of the story[22] - and, viewed in terms of this relation, it may be said that John's gospel, despite considerable fluctuation in the speed of the narrative (71), slows noticeably in chapter twelve as, from then on, Jesus' 'hour' of glorification approaches with inevitability (71). The final aspect of Culpepper's discussion of narrative time refers to frequency.

> 'It is immediately apparent that John moves in a relatively straight forward manner, and does not narrate repeatedly (i.e., repetitiously) events that happened once. This does not mean... that he does not frequently employ repeating analepses and prolepses to call to the readers' attention again the events he narrates in detail only once.'(73)

The author creates the impression that he has told as much of the story of Jesus as possible - certainly enough for the reader to base a decision on (75). The gaps, which exist between the narrative sections in which Jesus performs some miraculous action or speaks in a deeply revelatory way, are carefully disguised by the inclusion of repetitive summaries - calling attention to numerous related activities on Jesus' part (74) - or the mention that nothing of any particular significance happened between the main events recorded in the gospel (74). In this way the impression is created that a complete story of the ministry of Jesus has been told - which again leads to an even deeper faith in the reliability of the narrator (with, again as we shall see, decisive consequences for the question

of authority).

In chapter four of his book, Culpepper examines the issue of plot.
Plot may be understod as the sequencing of events in such a way as to
produce in them a meaning which, when taken together, is responsible
for the significance of the story (85).   It is by means of the plot
of his gospel that John is able to convey his understanding of Jesus
by giving his interpretation of the relation between the significant
events of his ministry (86).

> 'To establish internal coherence and convey the
> significance of the story, the evangelist selected,
> shaped, and arranged material so that its sequence
> established a certain progression and causality.   Action
> and dialogue were used to establish various themes and
> motifs which recur throughout the gospels, and the
> narrator and characters were made to cooperate in
> conveying the meaning of the story.' (85)

The conscious plotting of John's gospel is particularly striking (86).
He begins with a prologue in which the reader is introduced, right
from the start, to the truth about Jesus' identity – and it is against
this background that the episodes that make up the gospel have their
meaning.[23]   These episodes are concerned with the conflict between
faith and unbelief as the possible reactions to Jesus (97).   In this
respect, all of the episodes that comprise the gospel are a microcosm
of the gospel, as a whole, itself (88, 89) – while there is a gradual,
progressive revelation of Jesus by the repetitive signs and discourses
of which the gospel is composed.

> 'The effect of this narrative structure, with its prologue
> followed by episodic repetition of the conflict between
> belief and unbelief, is to enclose the reader in the
> company of faith.   The gospel's plot, therefore, is
> controlled by thematic development and a strategy of
> wooing readers to accept its interpretation of Jesus.'
> (98)

In chapter five, Culpepper speaks of the characters that populate the fourth gospel. All of the characters who appear in the narrative contribute to the attainment of the purpose of the gospel (145) by, with the exception of Jesus himself, drawing out various aspects of Jesus' character and providing colourful and vitalizing responses (148) to Jesus that serve the purpose of showing the appropriateness and correctness of John's interpretation of, and response to, Jesus against all misunderstandings.[24] John gives no attention to describing characters in terms of their ages or physical characteristics, but describes them simply by introducing them with a few words and telling what they say or do and how others respond to them (106, 145). Jesus is the central character of the gospel. He does not undergo any change, but is revealed to be, throughout the gospel, the same as he was - as described initially (103). Jesus is the incarnate Logos, who retains his power over nature and human beings (107). While he is aloof and often appears to be distant, he is not completely lacking in human emotions (109,110).

> 'Like most good plots and all good characters, John and its Jesus retain areas of shadow and mystery it will not illuminate for the reader. That is part of its power and its fascination.' (112)

The Father may also be classified as a character in the gospel. He is not characterized so much by what he himself says (for the only words he actually utters occur in 12:28) as by what Jesus, his fully authorized emissary, says about him (113). The Father is transcendent, but loves the world and seeks a believing response to his love from human beings (114). The revelation that Jesus brings has precisely the function of enabling others to share his relationship with the Father (115). It is precisely the disciples who exemplify responses of recognition and belief in the claims that Jesus makes. The disciples, however, are not so much perfect examplars of faith as examples of positive responses (and, sometimes, typical misunderstandings) to Jesus (115). In John's characterization, some (seven in fact) of the disciples are singled out for more

detailed description (119).   Andrew always remains in Peter's shadow.
He responds to each new situation in which he features by introducing
others to Jesus, and in this way demonstrates the fruitful nature of
his discipleship (119).   Andrew is paired with Philip, who although
he is less perceptive and does not understand how the Father is
revealed in Jesus, nevertheless responds to Jesus with belief (120).
Peter, on the other hand, is the most complex character (120), who is
being prepared as a shepherd and a martyr.   The Beloved disciple
always appears with Jesus in the climactic scenes of the gospel.   He
alone, of the Johannine characters, is the perfect disciple - one who
understands everything (121).   Nathaniel represents the true Israel.
In contrast to the Jews he overcomes his natural skepticism about
Jesus' origins and hails him as 'King of Israel' (123).   Thomas
serves as a foil to John's characterization of Peter as one who, so
filled with a vision of Jesus' glory, cannot accept his suffering.
Thomas too follows Jesus, but he is so aware of Jesus' humanity that
he fails to grasp his glory (123).   Judas is the embodiment of the
cosmic forces of evil, he has no excuse for betraying Jesus and shows
no remorse for having done so (124).   He is the supreme embodiment of
defection (125).

In addition to the collective character we have just discussed, John
also introduces us to other representative groups - the Jews, the
Pharisees and the crowd.   The role of the Jews is representative of
an attitude that is the direct opposite of that embodied by the
disciples - they reject Jesus - and in direct opposition to Jesus they
know nothing of the Father whom Jesus represents (129).   As the
representatives of unblief, the misunderstandings of the Jews touch
upon all the central issues of the gospel (129, 130) - which tension
is resolved to some extent by the recognition that faith is a gift
that is given by God, and that some Jews do come to belief (130).

> 'We have already noted that the Jews are closely
> associated with the response of unbelief, and therefore
> they are integrally related to the advancement of the
> plot.   We have also seen that the gospel is episodic.
> When each of the episodes is examined, some of the

> diversity in John's references to the Jews is clarified;
> for development in each episode is apparent and there is
> generally an escalation of hostility from one episode to
> another.' (126)

This brings us directly to the Pharisees, who are portrayed as the leaders of the Jews (130). The Jews are hostile to Jesus largely because their leaders have stirred up this hostility in them (131). The crowd, on the other hand, does not embody the hostility epitomised by the Jews. The crowd is open to belief, it is the world that God loves, and yet even the scriptures and the signs fail to lead it to true faith (132).

In addition to the various collective characters which we have discussed, John also has a whole host of minor characters that populate his narrative. There is John the Baptist, who believes and leads others to belief.[25] Jesus' mother appears unintroduced and unnamed (133), and her role is rather vague - at the cross it would seem as if she, with the Beloved Disciple, is called upon to form the nucleus of the new family of the children of God (134). Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea represent those who believe, but who, out of fear, refuse to confess their faith - so that despite their closeness, they are not children of God (136). The Samaritan woman is a model of the female disciple and, possibly, of the Samaritan believer (137). The royal official represents those who came to authentic faith through the signs and are ready to believe the words of Jesus (137). In contrast to the royal official, the lame man does not come to faith even with the benefit of signs (138). The brothers of Jesus also fail to come to faith (139). The blind man represents those who are led to a faith, that they do not yet fully comprehend, by the signs they experience. In spite of their incomplete understanding, they leave behind the synagogue to embrace salvation (140). Martha represents the epitomy of discerning faith, coupled with service, while Mary embodies unlimited love and devotion and Lazarus, the hope of the resurrection (142). Pilate shows the impossibility of compromise - Jesus calls for a decision that cannot be escaped, and the options have consequences (143). For Mary

Magdalene it is only the words of Jesus, not the empty tomb or vision, that brings faith.

In chapter six, Culpepper investigates what he terms 'implicit commentary':

> 'In John, the reader finds that the evangelist says a great deal without actually saying it. Having drawn readers to his side by means of the prologue, the evangelist trusts them to pick up the overtones of his language, the irony of conversations and events, the implications of the misunderstandings into which various characters blunder and the symbolism of the places, things and abstractions which serve as more than stage props for his story.' (151)

Culpepper begins his analysis of the 'sub-surface signals' (151) by looking at the subject of misunderstanding. He maintains that a distinctive feature of John's gospel is the frequency with which Jesus is misunderstood by secondary characters (152). John uses this device to explain the meaning of what Jesus says and to elaborate theological themes (152) - thus ensuring that there are not, or should not be, any misconceptions concerning the main points of John's theology (164). Misunderstanding also serves the purpose of promoting the writer's point of view by ensuring that the reader is always included in the circle of those who know the truth about Jesus (164) - to reject the writer's point of view would be to move from the group of insiders, those who know the truth, to join those who patently have understood nothing.

> 'The most significant function of the misunderstandings ... is to teach readers how to read the gospel. The misunderstandings call attention to the gospel's metaphors, double-entendres, and pluri signations.' (165)

The second of the sub-surface signals that is investigated is irony.[26] Usually the ironies in John go unexplained, and they function in such

a way as to correct each other, continually shifting the focus so as to remain true to the truth of the deceptively mundane events unfolding in Jesus (168). The reader is never the intended victim of the irony - because it functions in such a way as to include the reader in the group of those who understand the truth about Jesus (179, 180).[27] Symbolism is also very apparent in John's gospel - he uses symbols to evoke the reality of the world above - emphasizing its truths and mysteries (181). He has a foundation of core symbols - like light, bread, and water for example - which simultaneously create a complex web of interrelating secondary symbols that define what is known and what is unknown, or only hinted at, in the revelation brought by Jesus (190).

> 'Often, concrete objects evoke images which are themselves symbols of abstract ideas. The result is "a peculiar mixture of abstraction and imagery." Concrete objects in the visible world evoke the core symbols or presiding metaphors which point to the nature of the invisible reality. The core symbols are not static, fixed, or defined. They are rather what Edward K. Brown has called "expanding symbols".' (189)[28]

John takes objects and images from the everyday world and uses them in a new and unfamiliar way (199), which many of the characters do not understand, thinking instead that the object or image conveys only its normal, mundane meaning. The way in which the symbols are understood by the characters is a convenient way of dividing those who understand Jesus from those who fail to because they belong to the realm of darkness (200). It is, in fact, this delicate balance, and the continually shifting tidal eddies of meaning, that opens to the reader the possibilities, and the nature of these possibilities, that are opened to him by the elusive nature of Jesus Christ.

> 'By proper reading of John as symbolic narrative, the reader is called to no less than the conviction that man and God can be united and that from this union new life is born in man, and specifically in the reader.' (202)

In chapter seven Culpepper speaks about the implied reader, by which he means the readers for whom John's gospel was written.[29] The author structures his work in such a way that the reader, whom he imagines will read his gospel, will arrive at the understanding he himself holds - and in order to achieve this goal he allows the anticipated reader easy access to the narrative by accommodating it to the position of this reader and by structuring the narrative in such a way that the only conclusion that the ideal reader can come to is the one held by the author.[30] Based on the assumption that the narratee knows about subjects that are not introduced or explained, and conversely, that he knows nothing, or very little, about things that are explained (212), Culpepper produces the following identity sketch of the implied reader of John's gospel; the reader is familiar with most of the characters, with the exception of the Beloved Disciple, Lazarus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Caiaphas, and Annas (216). The reason that these have to be introduced may be either that the narratee is completely unfamiliar with them, or that they have been more fictionalized than the narratee is accustomed to (216). Furthermore, it would seem as if the implied reader has, unlike the narrator, only a vague knowledge of Palestinian geography, knowing general regions but not specific locations (218). In addition, the narratee knows only Greek, so that even simple words like 'Rabbi' need translation (218). Judging by the narrator's comments on the Old Testament and Jewish festivals, beliefs and customs, it would seem as if the reader is not Jewish, but is familiar with the Old Testament, while also understanding a fair amount about Jewish groups and beliefs (222). The intended audience, whether or not explicitly christian, is certainly familiar with christian beliefs and the origins of the faith (223) - although the ironies, symbols and images of the gospel do suggest an appreciative christian audience with a 'shared, common idiom' (225).

> 'When art and history, fiction and truth, are again reconciled we will again be able to read the gospel as the author's original audience read it. Original readers are now more vital to the accuracy of the text than original

manuscripts.' (237)

Our investigation of literary criticism, which has included both the
theoretical foundation undergirding it as well as a summary of a
representative example of the application of this approach to John's
gospel, has brought out an intense interest in the final form of the
text – as it left the pen of the author, so to speak – as the area to
which its application is applicable. What has also been drawn most
forcefully to our attention is the carefully structured and delicate
nature of the gospel form.

This returns us directly to the issue of the insight that can be
gained, from the acceptance of John, into the way in which scripture
actually functioned as authoritative for christian communities.
According to literary criticism the writer wrote his gospel precisely
to win the reader over to his understanding of life – and more
particularly, to get the reader to accept his view of the impact of
Jesus on the way in which life is to be understood. He, the writer,
believed that Jesus Christ had significantly altered his perception of
the meaning of life, and he wanted to share this insight with others.
Accordingly, he structured his account meticulously so that it would
promote this end – with everything in its position precisely because
the writer thought that it would aid in achieving this goal. What the
church was doing, therefore, in the process of canonization, was to
place its stamp of approval on the understanding of the author. It
was an acknowledgement that the writer was a faithful interpreter of
Christ – both in his representation of the life of Jesus, and in his
understanding of the ongoing work of the risen Christ in the community
of faith in the world – and that his work promoted the living of
faithful christian life. In effect, the community was simply
acknowledging the authoritative nature of the author's vision.

The writer of John's gospel, and it is of little importance in our
particular endeavour to discover just who that might have been, took
the traditions which he had received, and this complex issue need not

detain us here either, and reworked them in such a way as to produce a narrative in which his perception of the meaning and consequences of the christian life was embodied. What he himself was doing, therefore, was to reinterpret the traditions in order to arrive at a new synthesis that faithfully embodied continuity with the life and meaning of Jesus. His narrative was an attempt to put across in a convincing way what he considered to be a valid and continuous understanding of the meaning of the christian life in his own particular context, to which the earlier traditions were not of direct and immediate relevance. It is clear, furthermore, from what we know of the concern of the christian communities with continuity, and also from what we know of the specific details of John in the early stages of the canonical process, that this narrative of John, which offered the possibility of seeing the meaning of the christian life in a powerful new way, only gained acceptance by the christian communities because it was deemed to be a valid interpretation of the apostolic tradition. In its canonical context beside the synoptic gospels it enriched and deepened their meaning, even as if itself gained a proper perspective from this association, and thereby was shown, beyond the earlier doubts, to be a contextual reinterpretation of the tradition that was authoritative because it faithfully embodied the guidance to the meaning of the life of faith transmitted from Jesus, through the accredited witnesses, to the christian communities. It had shown itself, in the wholeness of its vision, to provide a continuous and faithful link with Jesus.

What have we discovered, from the acceptance of John by the christian communities, concerning the authoritative operation of scripture? Perhaps the most important insight that has come across is that the christian communities determined worth or value - authority - by means of the relation between the reinterpretation of the tradition and the basic 'sense of itself' that resided in, or arose from, its central core of established tradition (which came to be embodied in the early undisputed core of writings), which had from the beginning, under the direct supervision of the accredited witnesses, been regarded as a faithful testimony to Jesus and his requirements. In this sense the

authority of a writing is nothing other than the judgement that it preserves, even in the radical and unexpected totality of its vision – or especially in it, perhaps – continuity with Jesus, from whom is traced directly the specific quality of the christian life, as this property is recognized in a definite, though not necessarily unequivocally transparent, relation of continuity with the historically preserved testimony to Jesus by the first accredited witnesses in their earliest shaping of the tradition.

Endnotes

1.   cf. Smith (1986:9,10):

> 'When at the end of the second century John began to
> be accepted by Christians generally as authoritative
> scripture, its Christology and ethics were
> reconciled with the synoptics, as well as with other
> Christian tradition, and vice versa. Nevertheless
> the tensions remained and they remain still.
> Perhaps ironically, the Fourth Gospel played a large
> role in the later development of Christian doctrine.
> The deliberations and credal formulations of the
> great ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth
> centuries are virtually inconceivable apart from the
> Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel became the great
> pillar and biblical source of the forces of
> developing orthodoxy expressed in the creeds. That
> is exactly where the irony lies. John's Gospel was
> itself questioned because it was used by parties
> whose doctrine was suspect, gave rise to charismatic
> excesses, and differed sharply from the other,
> accepted, Gospels. Yet in time it became the very
> basis and standard of orthodoxy for the catholic
> church.'

2.   But cf. Petersen (1978:31):

> '... it seems wisest to conclude with many literary
> critics that the label of "literature" is
> arbitrarily attributed to verbal works by cultures
> or critics on the basis of their own values rather
> than of universal essences.'

Robertson's definition, which we have chosen, provides us
with a point of entry into the issue of literary criticism
that, without being too specific, sets the investigation
in motion while allowing for later modification.

3.   cf. Professor J.N. Suggit's comment on this point:

> '...literature enables the reader to come to a new
> understanding of reality, and see things which were
> there all along waiting to be discovered.'

4.   cf. Reese (1984:40):

'Each author works with a set of signs developed by a language group for mutual communication. What the author does is to choose and arrange the language resources available in a way appropriate to represent a new situation.'

5. This inevitably raises the question of determinacy in texts - does a text really have a meaning that readers, with their manifold individual differences, could be expected to 'get'? The answer to that question that is presupposed by this study is the one, proposed by Lafargue (1988), which may be summarized by the following three extracts:

'...I want to define very carefully a version of textual determinacy I will be defending. In particular, I think it is useful to drop the phrase "the meaning of the text", because it is too ambiguous. I will speak instead of the determinate "substantive content" of a given text. What I mean can be illustrated by the case of a joke: "Did you hear the one about the Texan who was involved in a ten-car accident before he left his garage?"' (341)

'The substantive content is not something one can extract from the joke, something one can tell instead of telling the joke. The only reason for distinguishing the substantive content from the words themselves is that (in the case of a foreigner, say) someone can hear and understand these same words individually and still not "get" the joke. My thesis is that any given biblical text has a determinate substantive content, which ought to be the primary focus of biblical research.' (342)

'This formulation avoids one of the most frequent objections to the thesis of textual determinacy: the implication that we can capture a text's meaning in a neat formulation which invites no more thought. The above formulation of determinacy contains no such implications. It accepts the fact that the best texts have an endless depth of meaning. It then attributes the thought-provoking property of a text to the very particular character of its substantive content - not capturable in paraphrase - rather than to its mere vagueness.' (342)

6.   There can be little doubt that, particularly in the case of ancient documents like the biblical writings, the interpretation of the writings is considerably promoted by the sort of information to which historical investigation has given rise. The point here is simply that the literary approach grants these only the preliminary importance of facilitating the interpretation of the text on its own terms (cf. Via 1967:79):

> 'I think that it is beyond question that a work of literary art, as contrasted with propositional discourse, has primarily an "in-meaning" ... rather than a "through-meaning" or pointing meaning.'

Also see endnote 9.

7.   Kort (1988:20) has lucidly shown how the four basic elements constitutive of narrative function together to produce the 'world view' of the text, and it is worth quoting extensively from this work in this regard.

> 'Narrative ... is an articulated belief structure.'

> 'Taking the four elements together, a definition of the narrative form appears. Narrative draws attention to four kinds of force or meaning in discourse: subjects (character) involved in processes (plot) under certain limits or conditions (atmosphere) and in relation to a teller (tone). Narrative as a form spreads out these four foci of discourse as ends in themselves, allowing them to generate force and meaning appropriate to each. Any one of the four is sufficiently complex and effective in force and meaning to dominate a particular narrative and to deform the other three towards itself.' (17)

> 'Atmosphere ... is that element of narrative that describes the boundaries and sets the conditions of the narrative world. It determines what is possible and what cannot be expected to occur .... The boundaries of a narrative world can be either more inclusive or more restricted than what we take the limits of our experience to be, and the conditions can be like or unlike what we generally believe to be the case in our world.' (19)

'An analysis of the element of character reveals a similar situation. Whether human nature is mean or worthy, whether it is in a state of decline or assent, whether or not it is transformable, whether it is principally individual and communal - such questions as these, fundamental and unavoidable as they are, cannot be answered with certainty.' (19,20)

'Plot addresses beliefs because it is meaningful movement. Differences in belief appear in evaluations of the processes in which we are involved.' (20)

'Tone, because it arises from or addresses questions of value inherent to relationships, also always involves beliefs.' (20)

8.   cf. Beavis (1987:581):

'A Promising New Approach To Gospel Studies recently adopted by a number of scholars is the literary-critical method sometimes called "reader response criticism", a method which describes the literary techniques by which an author shapes the reader's experience of a text.

Also cf. Culpepper's (1983:14) mention of a statement made by Sheldon Sacks:

'The more precise our knowledge of how a writer has accomplished the artistic end of his work, the more accurate will be the inferences we make about his ethical beliefs, notions, prejudices.'

9.   cf. Achtemeier (1986:43):

'A narrative has its own "world", and its meaning is therefore not exhausted by its coherence with the "real"-world, that is, its exact correspondence to historical events.'

Also cf. Via (1967:86):

'...it has been argued that a work of literary art means both in and through itself but that the inner, non referential meaning is dominant.'

10.   cf. Bultmann (1955:247) although, of course, implicit in

Bultmann's position is a strong dependence upon the categories of existentialist philosophy (which is certainly not true for literary criticism as such):

> '... it holds good to say that interpretation is intended to bring comprehension of the <u>possibilities</u> of <u>man's being</u>, revealed in poetry and also in art.'

11.   cf. Culpepper (1983:4):

> 'The implicit purpose of the gospel is to alter irrevocably the reader's perception of the real world.'

12.   cf. Sheppard (1989:61):

> 'Published 50 years ago, <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u> has taken its place among the handful of American novels (<u>Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Jungle</u>) that changed public attitudes and policy.'

Also cf. Nineham (1976:197):

> 'If all this talk of story seems very thin as compared with the traditional view ... do not underestimate the power of story. Read Edward Muir's <u>Autobiography</u>, consider what it means to a child to have been brought up on Hans Andersen; consider the impact on the modern world of the story Marx told, with the help of Hegel; think of what Sophocles, and with his help, Freud, made of the story of Oedipus. It is a grave mistake to underestimate the story.'

13.   cf., for example, Beavis's (1987) work on the reader in Mark's gospel – where he states that a sound historical picture of Mark's intended readers will be of inestimable value in understanding the gospel.

> 'This approach to the reconstruction of the social setting of Mark's reader/audience should serve to counteract the tendency of reader-oriented criticism to view the reader ahistorically. The concrete historical circumstances of ancient readers and literary critics are well-known and should be taken into account in Gospel interpretation.' (594)

14.   cf. Iser (1971:45):

> '... Literature ... by its very indeterminancy ... is able to transcend the restrictions of time and written word and to give to people of all ages and backgrounds the chance to enter other worlds and so enrich their own lives.'

15.   'The voice that tells the story and speaks to the reader is a rhetorical device. Narrators may be dramatized as a character in the story or left undramatized. They may serve as the implied author's voice or the voice of a character whose perspective differs from the implied author's. The narrator may also be more or less present and audible in the narrative. The more overt the address to the reader, the stronger is our sense of the narrator's presence.' (Culpepper 1983:16)

16.   cf.   'John's strategy conforms closely to the norm of chronological, preliminary, concentrated exposition. The narrator gives the reader a concentrated, more or less chronologically arranged, block of exposition in the prologue, which proves to be reliable as the work progresses. Comments by the narrator are also distributed throughout the narrative and generally serve as introductions or conclusions to scenes, or whole sections, of the gospel, or as transitional or explanatory notes.' (ibid. 19)

17.   'In general ... it should be said that the narrator's point of view is external but that he frequently provides a brief inside view of one of the characters. These inside views tend to be limited rather than detailed and shallow rather than profound. The evangelist shows no interest in exploring the more complex psychological motivations ....' (ibid 26)

18.   'The Johannine narrator is not confined to a particular locale or group of characters but is free to move about from place to place to provide the reader with an unhampered view of the action. The narrator is at the well when only Jesus and the woman are present, in the Samaritan village when she announces Jesus, and simultaneously (4:31) at the well to report Jesus' conversation with the disciples. He travels towards Capernaum with the official (4:51ff) and goes with the lame man to report to the Jews (5:15).' (ibid. 26)

19.   'No narrator can be absolutely impartial; inevitably a narrator, especially an omniscient, omnipresent, omnicommunicative, and intrusive one, will prejudice the reader toward or away from certain characters, claims, or events and their implications.' (ibid. 32)

20.   '... Jesus' point of view ... corresponds remarkably to that of the narrator. Both Jesus and the narrator are omniscient, retrospective, and ideologically and phraseologically indistinguishable.' (ibid. 36)

'It is ... not a matter of the narrator's speech being conformed to Jesus', but of both reflecting the author's speech patterns and expressing his ideological point of view.' (ibid. 43)

21.   cf.   '... external analepses refer to events in both the prehistorical and historical pasts. Mixed analepses serve the yeoman function of providing narrative flow, clarity, emphasis, and subsequent interpretation; while internal prolepses have the more exciting task of heightening dramatic intensity by anticipating coming events. Internal anachronies may also fill gaps in the narrative, but they seldom have this function in John. Mixed prolepses link the ministry of Jesus to the intended readers and vice versa. Finally a few of the external prolepses are eschatological.... More numerous are the external prolepses which allude to events which had probably already occurred by the time the gospel was written. The narrator, who probably speaks for the author, stands between the experience of the gospel's readers and the eschatological future and tells the story from his temporal perspective.' (ibid. 69, 70)

22.   cf.   'Genette defines the speed of a narrative "by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and pages)."' (ibid. 71)

23.   'The prologue gives each of these episodes an ironic background in that the reader has already been taken into the confidence of the narrator and knows who Jesus is .... For us to question this understanding would mean that we would have to give up our privileged position and be no more perceptive than the characters .... This literary dynamic pushes

the reader to embrace the ideological point of view
of the author.' (ibid. 89)

24.   'In John's narrative world the individuality of all
       the characters except Jesus is determined by their
       encounter with Jesus. The characters represent a
       continuum of responses to Jesus which exemplify
       misunderstandings the reader may share and responses
       one might make to the depiction of Jesus in the
       gospel. The characters are, therefore, particular
       sorts of choosers. Given the pervasive dualism of
       the Fourth Gospel, the choice is either/or. All
       situations   are   reduced   to   two   clear-cut
       alternatives, and all the characters eventually make
       their choice. So must the reader. The evangelist,
       who stands entrenched within one perspective, uses
       all the powers at his disposal to coax the reader to
       his side.' (ibid. 104)

25.   'If he has representational value in John it is as a
       model of what his followers should do. In contrast
       to both the individual disciples and most of the
       other minor characters, John the Baptist has no
       deficiencies in his faith.... He bears witness so
       that all may believe.' (ibid. 133)

26.   Culpepper (ibid. 167) abides by Muecke's definition of
       irony:

           'We have now presented, as basic features of all
           irony, (i) a contrast of appearance and reality,
           (ii) a confident unawareness (pretended in the
           ironist, real in the victim of the irony) that the
           appearance is only an appearance, and (iii) the
           comic effect of this unawareness of a contrasting
           appearance and reality.'

27.   'The gospel's purposes could not be achieved if the
       reader did not trust him [the narrator] implicitly.
       The gospel's use of irony therefore sweetens and
       spices the fellowship between reader and narrator.'
       (ibid. 180)

28.   cf. 'Concrete objects and symbolic metaphors point to
            abstract realities or concepts. As the core symbols
            expand and by repetition become pervasive motifs,
            more allusions to them cast their light on new
            scenes and amplify their echoes in the reader's
            memory.' (ibid. 199)

29.   'Just as the implied author is distinguishable from

the real author, the narratee or implied reader is internal, created by the text, and not to be confused with the actual, historical or contemporary readers.' (ibid. 205)

30.   'Every narrative exerts some control over its readers. It sets up the mental moves required to experience and understand the text. Specifically, it hides and reveals in a sequence, it moves the reader about, it controls the reader's clarity and confusion and his or her interest and emotional responses.' (ibid. 206)

cf.   'In John the ideal narrative audience adopts the narrator's ideological point of view, penetrates the misunderstandings, appreciates the irony, and is moved to fresh appreciations of transcendent mystery through the gospel's symbolism. The gospel is, ostensibly at least, entirely realistic. The narrative audience merges with the authorial audience, but the authorial audience is culturally, historically, and philosophically distant from the contemporary actual audience. We can concentrate, therefore, on the gospel's definition of its authorial audience and the work of the contemporary reader is adopting the perspective of that audience.' (ibid. 208)

4.

The pericope de adultera

In which, in the second part of our examination of the relation between the story of the adulteress and John's gospel, when they were still unconnected, that is, the continued existence of the pericope enables us to gain an insight into the way tradition functioned as authoritative for christian communities.

4.1   Jesus and an adulteress?

In chapter two we noted that the story of the adulteress is first found in a fifth century manuscript. In the absence of any concrete manuscript evidence to support an earlier inclusion we shall have to assume, provisionally perhaps, that the pericope of the adulteress gained entry into John's gospel in the West in the fifth century, or even late in the fourth century – or else we would be hard pressed to explain the utter silence of the manuscript evidence before then. There are two factors which make this particularly interesting: the first is that in the Western church, under the direct influence of Augustine, the issue of the canon of the New Testament was all but decided at the three provincial synods of Hippo (393), Carthage (397) and Carthage again in 419 (cf. Johnson 1986:536ff; Metzger 1987:238). Secondly, in the East there had not been the same driving concern to establish fixed canonical parameters as there had in the West.

> 'The Latin Church had, in general, a stronger feeling than the Greek for the necessity of making a sharp delineation with regard to the canon. It was less conscious than the Greek Church of the gradation of spiritual quality among the books that it accepted, and therefore was more often disposed to assert that the books which it rejected possessed no spiritual quality whatever.' (Metzger 1987:229)

What is particularly interesting, therefore, is not only that this story found its way into one of the canonical books at a time that these were clearly defined, but also that it should have happened in the West where a generally more rigid attitude to the canonical parameters prevailed.[1]   What is it about this particular story that permitted it to be used in this way? What insight does this give us into the basis of the understanding of authority held by christian

communities? (At this stage we are concerned mainly with the pericope itself - in the next chapter we shall concern ourselves with the issues raised by the synthesis of John and the story of the adulteress.)

What will concern us in the rest of this subsection is the quest to discover just what it might have been about this story that permitted its late access to a canonical book.[2] (As will become evident, we shall use the criteria, for authenticity, of the historical quest for Jesus in our approach. This does not imply that the specific preconceptions and methodological assumptions associated with this approach were shared by those responsible for the inclusion of the pericope in John's gospel in the fifth century. This simply indicates, using the tools and conceptual framework available to us, the way in which we delineate a concern common to us and to those involved in the canonical process - the concern to preserve continuity, in as concentrated a form as possible, with Jesus. In a sense it may rather loosely be said that the quest for the historical Jesus, in our use here of its criteria for authenticity, is the attempt to investigate carefully what may in the fifth century have been felt instinctively.) The hunch that we will follow up, arising directly from our knowledge of the importance of continuity with Jesus that is evidenced in the canonical process, is that what may have been conceived of as a definite dominical character was responsible for the access that it obtained to the canonical gospel. In order to ascertain whether there is any justification for our thinking that this story embodies an incident, in relatively unmodified form, from the life of Jesus, we shall employ the criteria, for judging authenticity, given by Stein (1983).

The first criterion is the <u>criterion of multiple attestation</u>. The principle on which this is based is the assumption that one may have better reason to believe that an incident reported by multiple witnesses is historical than a report carried by only one witness. Like most of the other criterea which we shall examine this is open to serious objection, but it does provide a useful working rule. In the case of <u>de adultera</u> it is beyond doubt that John 7:53-8:11 is the only reference we have to any such incident in the canonical gospels. There are, however, other possible witnesses to it outside the New Testament canon. Let us begin by quoting Eusebius' oft-cited cryptic comment in his <u>Ecclesiastical history</u> III 39.

ἐκτέθειται δὲ καὶ ἄλλην ἱστορίαν περὶ γυναικὸς ἐπὶ πολλαῖς ἁμαρτίαις διαβληθείσης ἐπὶ τοῦ κυρίου, ἣν τὸ καθ' Ἑβραίους εὐαγγέλιον περιέχει.

Here we have a reference to a story told by Papias about a woman accused of many wrong-doings. It matters little whether Papias had found it in the gospel according to the Hebrews, or whether it had reminded Eusebius of a similar story in that gospel. One thing is manifestly clear - that there is no mention of adultery. The woman brought to Jesus in John 7:53–8:11 is accused of nothing but adultery. The woman in Papias' story is accused of many sins – with no particular mention of adultery. In itself this passage is, at best, inconclusive with regard to establishing multiple attestation.

The third century Didascalia apostolorum (VIII, ii, 24) is the only 'other exposition of the PA [pericope de adultera] in a source that predates its incorporation into an extant MS of John.' (Ehrman 1988:32)

> 'But if you do not receive him who repents, because you are without mercy, you shall sin against the Lord God. For you do not obey our Saviour and our God, to do even as He did with her who had sinned, whom the elders placed before Him, leaving the judgement in His hands, and departed. But He, the searcher of hearts, asked her and said to her: "Have the elders condemned you, my daughter?" She says to him: "Nay, Lord". And he said unto her: "Go, neither do I condemn you."'

The differences between this passage and the story told in John are great,[3] and yet one is left with the impression that they are in some way related. We shall investigate this possible relation after we have examined the new discovery of a possible mention of de adultera

in a commentary of Didymus the Blind.[4] The relevant passage occurs
in Didymus' interpretation of Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22. He says that a
master should not concern himself with a slave's attitude, but with
whether or not he is doing his work. A master is not entitled to
judge a slave, except in so far as he does not perform his tasks to
his master's satisfaction. Actions may be judged, people may not.
It is in this context that a possible reference to de adultera occurs
(Eccl T 223.6b-13a).

φέρομεν οὖν ἔν τιων εὐαγγελίοις· γυνή, φησίν, κατεκρίθη ὑπὸ τῶν
Ἰουδαίων ἐπὶ ἁμαρτίᾳ καὶ ἀπεστέλλετο λιθοβοληθῆναι εἰς
τὸν τόπον, ὅπου εἰώθει γίνεσθαι. ὁ σωτήρ, φησίν, ἑωρακὼς
αὐτὴν καὶ θεωρήσας ὅτι ἕτοιμοί εἰσιν πρὸς τὸ λιθοβολῆσαι αὐτήν,
τοῖς μέλλουσιν αὐτὴν καταβαλεῖν λίθοις εἶπεν· ὃς οὐκ ἥμαρτεν, αἰρέτω
λίθον καὶ βαλέτω αὐτόν. εἴ τις σύνοιδεν ἑαυτῷ τὸ μὴ ἡμαρτηκέναι,
λαβὼν λίθον παισάτω αὐτήν. καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμησεν. ἐπιστήσαντες
ἑαυτοῖς καὶ γνόντες, ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπεύθυνα εἰσίν τιοιν, οὐκ ἐτόλ-
μησαν καταπταῖσαι ἐκείνην.

Here, again, we have an incident which is both similar and dissimilar
to the one in John's gospel.[5] What does one make of these extra-
canonical attestations? Do they refer to the same incident - a common
core event? If so, how do they relate to each other? Do they
refer to the same incident as the one recorded in John 7:53-8:11?
How do the extra-canonical stories relate to John's account? Is this
a case of multiple attestation? Ehrman (1988:37) appears to arrive at
a sound conclusion:

> 'To sum up: by the fourth century there were actually
> three extant versions of the PA: (1) the entrapment
> story in which Jesus freely pardons a sinful woman, known
> to Papias and the author of the Didascalia, (2) the
> story of Jesus' intervention in an execution proceeding,
> preserved in the Gospel according to the Hebrews and
> retold by Didymus in his Ecclesiastes commentary, and (3)
> the popular version found in MSS of the Gospel of John, a
> version which represents a conflation of the two earlier
> stories. There is no evidence that either of the
> unconflated accounts found its way into any MS of the

> Fourth Gospel. Consequently, the conflated version must have appeared before Didymus's day: as we have seen, he tells the story as it was apparently recounted in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, yet seems also to have known it in its Johannine context.'

From this, it would seem that we are not in fact dealing with a case of multiple attestation. The extra-canonical sources do not attest to the same incident spoken of in John's gospel. John has taken what appear to be two separate incidents (about which we do not know enough to be able to venture an opinion concerning the historicity) and combined them. This undermines, or seriously calls into question, the historicity of the pericope de adultera.

The second criterion for authenticity is the criterion of multiple forms. This criterion refers to form critical categories.[6] It may be regarded as pointing to the historicity of an incident if it appears in different 'forms' in the gospels. The fact that there is no other reference at all to de adultera in the gospels renders this test inapplicable in this case.

The criterion of Aramaic linguistic phenomena is based on the assumption that, since Jesus himself most likely spoke Aramaic, the presence of Aramaic linguistic phenomena would be, at the very least, indicative of an early origin - perhaps even going back directly to Jesus himself. In the case of John 7:53-8:11 there seems to be a distinct lack of these linguistic phenomena (but cf. the exegesis in chapter 5). About the only possible evidence seems to be:

> '"Teacher" (Greek didaskale, vocative) no doubt translates the Hebrew Rabbi....'   (Bruce 1983:415)

This is, however, a very isolated and tenuous example. It does not necessarily indicate a Hebrew or Aramaic original since didaskale, as a translation of the authentic-sounding Rabbi, was certainly widely

known and could, in a fabricated story, be used without difficulty, and without causing offence to gentile christians, to lend a touch of authenticity to the story. The marked absence of Aramaic linguistic phenomena does not necessarily mean that we are dealing with a late, or fabricated, story. All that it means is that, linguistically, there is nothing to suggest that it is an 'authentic' story.

The criterion of Palestinian environmental phenomena is based on the reasoning that a passage containing a concentration of characteristically Palestinian interests is more likely to have originated in Palestine, and is therefore earlier, than in a later Hellenistic environment. John 7:53-8:11 discusses an issue that was very much a Palestinian one and speaks of it in a way that betrays social and religious customs appropriate to that location. John 8:4,5 takes for granted the Jewish law, based on Leviticus 20:10, in which clear provision is made for the execution of those caught in adultery, both the man and the woman. No mention is made of the way in which the execution should be carried out, however. In Deuteronomy 22:23,24 explicit mention is made of stoning as a penalty for adultery (cf. Schackenburg 1980:164). From this it is clear that the nature of the punishment that faces the woman in the pericope in question is Palestinian. Furthermore, the nature of the trap that was being set for Jesus is intelligible against a Palestinian background. The question of the meaning of the law would probably not have been a pressing issue in a Hellenistic environment.

> 'The question put to Jesus was not, then, whether or not the woman was liable to be stoned as contrasted with some other penalty, but whether, in view of Moses' provision, she could lawfully in the circumstances be stoned. The questioners expected an interpretation of the relevant passages of the law, a midrash. The bare text admitted of doubts, and here was a perfect test-case.' (Derrett 1964:16)

Furthermore, the two stones between which his enemies might have hoped to crush Jesus, the Law and Roman Rule (but see the interpretation of

John 8:6 in chapter five), would most likely be found to co-exist in
Palestine.

> 'He must either take a stand against Jewish justice or
> assuming that the Jews did not at that time have the right
> to carry out the death penalty (cf. Jn 18:31) - seem to be
> an anti-Roman revolutionary.' (Schnackenburg 1980:164)

In addition to all of this, John 8:7 finds an echo in Deuteronomy 17:7
where the witnesses to the act of adultery are themselves instructed
to begin the stoning. The 'scribes and Pharisees' may also point to
a Palestinian environment, but it is as likely that these well-known
Jewish functionaries could have been used simply as a device to lend
authenticity to the story.

To conclude this discussion of the criterion of Palestinian
environmental phenomena, it may be said that we have succeeded in
establishing, with a fair degree of probability, that the pericope de
adultera originated at an early date on Palestinian soil. If it were
a later ecclesiastical creation it would be difficult to explain why
recourse had been made to such a seemingly inappropriate example that
presented an issue that would, by that time, have been largely, if not
completely resolved, and why an example so filled with foreign customs
should have been chosen. This finding takes us back closer to the
historical Jesus, but it by no means indicates that we are necessarily
brought face to face with him.

The criterion of tendencies of the developing tradition is based on
the form critical tenet that oral tradition develops according to
certain rules - that its development follows a predictable pattern. A
knowledge of the way in which tradition develops enables one to
ascertain when it is that one is confronted by a really early stage of
the tradition - possibly originating directly from Jesus himself.
According to Taylor (1935:207,208), the following principles govern
the growth of oral tradition:

1.   'It is obvious that in successive accounts of the story, many points of an explanatory or inferential character are added.'

2.   'Very remarkable is the tendency, in spite of the additions, for the accounts to become shorter ... the exceptions to this process are few.'

3.   'Direct speech is replaced by indirect, though not entirely.'

4.   'Personal names and place names tend to disappear.'

5.   'The form of the later versions becomes rounded and less detailed.'

6.   'In spite of the various changes, the story remains in large measure the same in substance.'

To this list may be added the tendency to emphasize the miraculous and heighten the sense of the divine (Lindars 1972:306).

The question that needs to be asked is: does _de adultera_ show the signs of considerable modification by the process of oral transmission? Have points of an explanatory or inferential nature been added? It would seem that there are few explanatory additions — v6 is perhaps the only explicit one (and it is interesting to note that D _pc_ lack this verse). Furthermore, opportunities calling for these additions are not exploited — in vv6 and 8, for example, Jesus' mysterious writing on the ground is left unexplained and in v11 no qualification is added. Does it seem as if the story has become shorter in the telling? This is a very difficult question to answer, but it would appear that the story could have been more streamlined — unimportant, or apparently unimportant, details could have been omitted (perhaps, for example, the writing on the ground in v8, to which no special meaning is attributed, could have been left out). Has the direct speech given way to indirect speech? It is interesting to observe that direct speech features prominently in this passage. Have personal or place names been replaced? There is a decided

absence of personal and place names, but, on the face of it, there is
little in the story that one could imagine to have been given a
special name in some possible original story. Is the story rounded
and lacking in detail? It is certainly not replete with unnecessary
detail, but at the same time it is not particularly well rounded. So
from this it is hard to tell whether we are dealing with an early or a
late form. Is there a tendency to emphasize the miraculous or the
divine? There does not appear to be, but, since this is not the kind
of passage which would lend itself to that kind of elaboration, the
findings are inconclusive.

In the light of the cumulative weight of the various tests performed
here it may cautiously be stated that the criterion of the tendencies
of developing tradition seems to suggest an early form of the
tradition – and hence an earlier date, and hence closer to the
historical Jesus.

The criterion of dissimilarity or discontinuity is based on the
assumption that anything which cannot be explained in terms of Judaism
or early christianity must be attributed to the historical Jesus.
Obviously this test produces a very isolated and idiosyncratic Jesus,
but at the same time, provided that the limitations are borne in mind,
this method does serve a useful function.

To begin with: can the pericope de adultera be explained in terms of
the Judaism of Jesus' day? The answer to this question depends
largely on how one interprets what Jesus does in the story. Many
interpreters have taken this passage to mean that Jesus is simply
calling into question the right of one man to judge another – since
before God all are guilty of sin. It is not a matter of interpreting
the law – since the woman brought before Jesus is obviously guilty –
the issue at hand is that no man, however justified by the law, is
entitled to condemn the adulteress, because all men have sinned,
though not necessarily in the same way as the accused woman has.

'The pericope wonderfully illustrates the teaching of Jesus that no man is qualified by his own righteousness to condemn another (e.g. Matt. 7:3-5); judged by the standard of God's absolute holiness every man is an adulterer and worthy of death....' (Richardson 1959:115)[7]

Against this should be set the interpretation of Derrett (1964), who views this not so much as a rejection of Law as a question of the validity of the application of the Law in this particular case. According to Derrett the woman may not legally be stoned since the stipulations of the law have been contravened in her entrapment. The witnesses were party to a plot to catch the woman in the act and they therefore did not caution her or try to prevent the sin from being committed. As such they were guilty under the Law for not having tried to intervene. As such the witnesses were not qualified to testify against the woman since they too had contravened the Law - and without witnesses there could be no case against the woman. Jesus' answer 'does not deny that she may be stoned, but insists upon the innocency and therefore competence of whoever stands forth against her as accuser and witness' (Derrett 1964:22).

In deciding between these two interpretations of the significance of Jesus' pronouncements - whether he was abolishing the Law altogether, by denying anyone the right to judge a fellow man as dictated by the Law, or insisting on the scrupulous adherence to the Law - one has to resort to the circularity that characterises so much of New Testament research. We are trying to determine whether the actions of Jesus in the pericope are attributable to Judaism or to christianity or whether, instead, they originated in Jesus' own uniqueness. To ascertain this, however, we first have to begin with certain assumptions about Jesus - to what extent he exhibited continuity with Judaism and to what extent he was uniquely different. The advantage of Derrett's explanation seems to lie in the fact that it anchors Jesus firmly in a Jewish environment - whereas the explanations of Richardson, Schnackenburg and Kysar appear to create

too great a discontinuity between Jesus and Judaism, almost inclining one to think of this pericope as a product of the early church - except that it would be difficult to explain why the Jewish Law would have been a contentious issue among the later more gentile early church.   If we are confronted by the historical Jesus here it is easier to imagine his taking the law seriously (as Derrett suggests - although perhaps he down-plays the discontinuity introduced by Jesus) than it is to imagine his almost offhanded dismissal of the legal issue (Schnackenburg et al.).   If Schnackenburg et al. are correct, then it is difficult to see how this passage could have come from Judaism[8]; if Derrett is correct, then there is every reason to imagine that Judaism could have produced this passage.

Could this pericope have arisen in the early church?   Although it is by no means impossible to do so, it would be difficult to argue that the church produced this passage - because its late appearance in manuscripts, together with the 'Jewishness' of its character, is taken to be indicative of an early tradition associated with an effort to avoid its circulation.

> 'Evidently the story about Jesus and the adulteress was handed down orally in the Church; but, because its teaching seemed to encourage lax treatment of sinners, it failed to win a place in the canonical scriptures.'
> (Hunter 1965:200)[9]

We have succeeded in demonstrating that the balance of probability seems to favour an early date for the pericope de adultera.   This is suggested by the flavour of the pericope (and its subject matter) in conjunction with the late appearance of the story in manscripts, and the presence of a reason why the early church might have wanted the story suppressed - which suggests that the church was probably not responsible for the story.   The fact that the story could well have originated in Jewish circles is also indicative of an early date - although we cannot tell whether we are in fact confronted by the historical Jesus.   The criterion of dissimilarity or discontinuity

has not succeeded in isolating this pericope from a Jewish milieu, although it largely has from a christian one, but it has shown us that we are dealing, most likely, with an early story of Jesus, even if we cannot necessarily trace it back to Jesus himself.

The criterion of modification by Jewish christianity is a negative criterion - by this is meant that it is able to refute a passage's being adduced as presenting the historical Jesus, without being able, on the other hand, to prove the opposite. This test, very similar to the previous one, works on the assumption that if a passage shows a marked tendency to emphasize features dear to Judaism then, more likely than not, it is secondary in nature. Has anything been modified in this way in de adultera? What, given the details of the story, would be the most likely candidate for modification? The topic that suggests itself as most likely to have been amended by Jewish christians is Jesus' attitude to the Law. It is at this very point where evidence of tampering is absent. Evidence for this lack of modification is the fact that interpreters are able to feel themselves justified in attributing an anti-legalistic meaning to Jesus' words. It is true, of course, that, as Derrett (1964:22) has said, this pericope may be interpreted as a dispute about the meaning of the Law and its application, without any antinomianism intended, but the absence of features that demand this particular interpretation alone is telling.

It may, from the above, be assumed that this story is not the product of Jewish christianity. So far, many of our tests have pointed to an early date for this story, but we have not been able to say with certainty whether or not they point to Jesus or to the early Jewish christian church. This criterion of modification by Jewish christianity has brought us closer to the resolution of the problem by suggesting why the story did not come from the early church.

According to the criterion of divergent patterns of redaction, the relationship between the historical content of a passage and the

evidence of redaction is governed by the law of inverse proportion. The greater the evidence of the redactor's hand, the less likely we are to be dealing with the historical Jesus, and vice versa. Other than the convincing textual evidence, there are a number of reasons for doubting that we have before us the work of the writer of John's gospel. First of all, it has been argued that the style of the pericope differs from that of the rest of John's gospel. Stylistic evidence should always be viewed with a certain amount of circumspection – for it is by no means certain that the author's style remains forever identifiable – but, when the results are seen in the context of the rest of the evidence, a clear picture begins to emerge.

> 'Apart from the evidence of manuscripts the style of the section is strongly suggestive of another writer than that of the gospel. The Greek particle de appears in this short section ten times; it is not a word characteristic of John (it occurs only 202 times in the rest of the gospel), who uses oun almost as frequently (195 times). John uses the word ochlos for "crowd"; but in this section the word used is laos. The scribes are mentioned in this passage, but not in the rest of the gospel, where the Lord's opponents are called simply "the Jews". The Greek word for "early" in this section (orthrou) is not the one otherwise used by John (18:28; 20:1; 21:4) where the word is proi. These are the chief stylistic indications that sufficiently indicate, in what is after all a very short passage, that the writer is not the same as he who wrote the gospel.' (Marsh 1968:682)[10]

In addition to the stylistic argument (cf. Hunter 1965:200), the fact that de adultera interrupts the sequential progression of John's narrative (which subject will occupy us in some detail in chapter five) also suggests that it is not from the pen of the writer of the fourth gospel.[11]

> '... the story of the adultress does not belong in the New Testament and specifically does not belong here, where its presence divides one day's action into two and interrupts the narrator's development of 7.37-8.20.' (Michaels 1976:132)

We have shown why it is that the pericope in question does not appear
to have been produced by the author of the fourth gospel. According
to the principle of inverse proportion this is indicative of the
possible presence of an historical Jesus tradition.   Certainly those
who inserted this passage in the fourth gospel must have felt a
compelling reason to do so, since by the time of the late insertion
John's gospel would already have commanded respect as authoritative
and no one would, without good reason for doing so, have dared to add
to it. What could have been more compelling than the belief that in
this story the historical Jesus himself was to be seen? The criterion
of divergent patterns of redaction has led us to conclude that scribes
may have inserted the free floating tradition here in John's gospel
because it was thought to be too important to ignore (cf. Morris
1971:883; Tasker 1960:110), possibly because of a connection with the
historical Jesus, and because John provided a context in which it
could convincingly be included (cf. Lindars 1972:306).

The criterion of environmental contradiction works on the assumption
that if a story situates Jesus in any context that there is serious
reason to doubt, then we are probably not dealing with a passage that
portrays the historical Jesus.   This, again, is a negative test that
is only able to indicate that we are not dealing with the historical
Jesus, without being able to prove the contrary.   Is there anything
in this story that places Jesus in an 'impossible' environment? There
is nothing of this nature in this passage; on the contrary, it seems
to fit in very well with what the other gospels tell us about the last
week of Jesus' ministry.

> 'Its more appropriate historical setting is that described
> in Luke 21:37-38, in which Jesus, during the last week of
> his ministry, spent his nights on the Mount of Olives and
> his days teaching in the temple (cf. vv 1-2), answering
> questions from the Pharisees and chief priests about the
> Law.'   (Michaels 1976:132) [12]

To the extent that we have discovered a very plausible historical

context for the pericope - in the broad outline of synoptic events that pertain to this, which there is very little reason, beyond unnecessary skepticism, to doubt - we have succeeded in eliminating the possible objections to the historicity of this account by the criterion of environmental contradiction.

The criterion of the contradiction of authentic sayings and the criterion of coherence (or consistency) achieve the same end by approaching the problem from opposite sides. The best way of dealing with this is to adopt a phenomenological approach. This means that we will not attempt to delve into the historicity of passages that are adduced to be consistent in some sense with de adultera. The fact that examples of consistency may be found in all four gospels suggests that we are faced with a Jesus who is in agreement with the general christian tradition, rather than with partisan press. Furthermore, since the new quest for the historical Jesus has shown that the gospel tradition about Jesus is continuous with the historical Jesus, [13] the final objection to the historicity of the passage may be dismissed. (The fact of the relation of continuity between Jesus and the Christ of faith and kerygma does not, of course, imply that the christian tradents may be thought of as historians in any modern sense. The winding course of the quest for the historical Jesus, in all its various stages, has shown the impossibility of that position. The extremely complex relation between the Jesus of history, so called, and the Christ of faith, so called, may be thought of as having been forged in the dynamic and creative environment of the preliterary life of the traditions - without, of course, denying the presence of dynamic, 'individual theological contributions like those evidenced in, for example, the final forms of the gospels.

'The company of unlettered people which expected the end
of the world any day had neither the capacity nor the
inclination for the production of books, and we must not
predicate a true literary activity in the Christian Church
of the first two or three decades. The materials which
have been handed down to us in the Gospels lived in these
decades an unliterary life or had indeed as yet no life at
all.' [Dibelius 1982:9]

In this sense, therefore, the continuity between the picture of Jesus
in the gospels and the historical Jesus 'as he actually was', in
whatever sense, may be confirmed - with the precondition that this
position is adopted on the basis of a thorough and careful
consideration of the implications of the difficulties revealed by the
tortuous course of the quest for the historical Jesus in its various
diverse phases.) It could still, despite the cumulative evidence of
the other tests, be possible to deny the historicity of this passage
if Jesus could be shown to be speaking with an unrecognizable voice.
If the Jesus of this pericope were totally at odds with the
evangelical pictures of him, then there would be serious reason to
question its authenticity. Is the Jesus of John 7:53-8:11
recognizably the same as the subject of the gospels? Let us begin by
looking at Matthew's gospel.

Both Kysar (1986) and Richardson (1959) find a number of compatible
passages in Matthew. In 9:10-13 (Kysar 1986:133) Jesus is shown to be
a friend of sinners. One should beware of overemphasizing this
correspondence, however, since in Matthew 9:10-13 Jesus freely
associates with sinners, whereas in John 7:53ff Jesus and the
adulteress are brought together by those who seek to trap Jesus. The
subject of the story is not necessarily Jesus' friendship with sinners
- he may, for example, simply be giving a legal judgment on the

unsuitability of the witnesses, without necessarily aligning himself with the woman. At the most, we may be able to say that the fact that Jesus does not come across as particularly eager to condemn the woman may be reminiscent of his friendship with sinners in the relevant Matthew passage. Kysar (1986:134) also sees an essential harmony between John 7:53ff and Matthew 19:1-9, which has as its subject Jesus' opposition to laws discriminating against women. If this is true, then it is so only indirectly and in a secondary way. Jesus nowhere makes direct mention of the gender of the accused in any way affecting his judgment. It could be speculated that Jesus might have been affronted by a male conspiracy to trap a woman, but his words certainly make no specific mention of this. Again, in a way similar to the previous case, it can be stated that Jesus' words in de adultera do not contradict Matthew 19:1-9, without necessarily supporting them. Richardson (1959:115) sees a similarity to de adultera in Matthew 5:27f - which he takes to mean that every man is an adulterer and worthy of death. The objection to this comparison is twofold - it is by no means clear that that is what de adultera means, nor is it certain that that is the intention of Matthew 5:27f. To deal with the latter first, Matthew does not necessarily speak, in the passage in question, of the guilt of all mankind - he refers to the enhanced demands of the Law in the messianic age. He is speaking about the stricter requirements for righteousness in the messianic age (cf. Hill 1972:119f) - without necessarily saying that they are impossible to attain, so that universal guilt is not necessarily the subject of Matthew's story in 5:27f. Nor is the guilt of all mankind necessarily the subject of John 7:53-8:11, as we have seen. Richardson also suggests Matthew 7:1, 3-5 (1959:115) as a possible parallel in meaning. In these verses Jesus cautions those who judge to make sure that they are themselves blameless. John 7:53-8:11 is in substantial agreement with this since, no matter how it is interpreted, it demands the innocence of the accusers as a prerequisite for any judgment.

In the case of Mark's gospel, Kysar (1986:134) again sees a similarity between Jesus in the de adultera passage and the Jesus who is against

the laws discriminating against women in Mark 10:2-9 (as he does in the Lukan parallel, 16:18). As we have said in the case of the Matthean parallel (19:1-9), it may be possible to discover something of this women's liberation theme in John 7:53-8:11, but this is only a secondary feature at best. Schnackenburg (1980:168) sees a distinct similarity between what Jesus does for the woman caught in adultery and his purpose in seeking out the lost and despised. Given the fact that the woman was brought to Jesus, and that he did not specifically seek her out, it would certainly be true to say that here Jesus was upholding the despised and outcast woman against those who would judge her, in whatever sense one understands the story. Similarly, Lindars 1972:306) perceives in de adultera a theme characteristic of Luke's gospel - a deep concern for the outcast and rejected (cf. Luke 7:36-50; 8:2; 15:f; 19:1-10). Bruce (1983:417) notes an echo of John 12:47 (and 3:17) in the story of the accused woman; which parallel depends, again, on how one construes the meaning of the de adultera pericope. Of interest too is the fact that Jesus dismisses the woman with the same injunction that he uses to discharge the man at Bethesda in John 5:14.

What has been accomplished? Are we able to reach a judgment as to whether or not we are dealing with a characteristic Jesus in the story of the accused woman? We have noted some of the sections believed to reflect the same impression of Jesus in the gospels. Although we have questioned some of these parallels, we have not encountered any assertion along the lines that we have here to do with an unrecognizable or alien Jesus, who is totally at odds with the other evangelical images of him.[14] We have succeeded, therefore, in removing another possible objection to the historicity of this passage, by showing that Jesus acts here in a way that is not in contradiction with his character as reflected in the gospels.

In conclusion: it may be said that the balance of probability arrived at, when all the results of the tests for historicity are weighed together, is that it is quite likely that in the pericope de adultera

we encounter the historical Jesus, even if we would not state quite as categorically as Hunter (1965:200) that 'few stories are more authentically stamped with "Christ's touch".'[15] (Although Hunter does not appear to differentiate adequately between the conventional usage of 'Jesus' and 'Christ' respectively, it remains clear that he is referring to a definite dominical character of this passage.) It would appear that the pericope de adultera had survived for a considerable length of time, perhaps in isolation, or perhaps as part of a larger collection of extra-evangelical tradition (we shall discuss this again, paying greater attention to the exact nature of this preservation, in chapter five), prior to its inclusion in John's gospel.[16] We have also discovered that there are good and solid grounds for thinking that this story may well accurately record an incident from the life of Jesus himself. It is almost certain, given the concern exhibited by the early christian communities with faithful tradition and continuity with Jesus, that the latter explains the peculiarities of the former. The continued existence of the pericope of the adulteress prior to its inclusion in John, therefore, brings home forcefully a similar insight into the authoritative operation of tradition to the one gained in the previous chapter. For the christian communities authority was equivalent to the faithful representation of Jesus by a tradition - a representation which bound the communities to Jesus. In the previous chapter we observed that the reinterpretation, or contextualization, of the tradition had to be deemed to be consistent with the force and substance of the earlier apostolic reinterpretations if it were to be accepted by the communities as authoritative. In this chapter we have discovered a passage which shows comparatively little reshaping by the tradents. This would appear to evidence the same interest in continuity with Jesus - except that this takes the form of a largely isolated and unmodified incident from the life of Jesus. As such, it would perhaps have fulfilled a similar function to the establishing of historical facts about Jesus undertaken by the new quest for the historical Jesus - as a way of affirming the reliability of the gospels - except that for the early christian communities it is extremely doubtful whether the question would have been so put (and in this regard it is, as we shall, again, see in chapter five, perhaps not surprising that the story was inserted into John's gospel).

Endnotes

1.   Even though, even there, a certain degree of flexibility prevailed until the conciliar decree at Trent in 1546 settled the issue of canonical writings finally for most of the West, the practice of which had been formally recognised in the decree.

> 'Si quis autem libros ipsos integres cum omnibus suis partibus, prout in Ecclesia catholica logi consueverunt et in veteri vulgata Latina editione habentur, pro sacris et canonicis non susceperit, et traditiones praedictos sciens et prudens contempserit: A.S.' (Conc. Tridentinum Session iv:784)

2.   In subsection 5.1 we are again concerned with the pericope de adultera. There, however, we are chiefly concerned with its meaning, and not so much with its 'historicity' as such. Normally one would expect the question discussed in 5.1 to follow naturally upon 4.1. In this case, however, it is of great importance that the investigation of the meaning of the pericope de adultera follows upon the introductory discussion of canonical hermeneutics. It should also precede the assessment of the change in meaning, introduced by the insertion of the pericope in the Johannine context of the passage itself, and of John's gospel. At the same time, the introduction of historical considerations like those dealt with in subsection 4.1 would only serve to obscure the development of the

examination in chapter five.

3.   cf. Ehrman (1988:33):

> '... the Didascalia does not supply a time or setting for the story (contrast John 7.53-8.2). The antagonists here are called the "elders" rather than the "scribes and Pharisees". The woman's particular sin is not mentioned, nor have her opponents pronounced judgement upon her. They bring her to Jesus for justice and then leave. No trap is set here for Jesus, not a word is said about execution by stoning, and Jesus does not write on the ground. A particularly glaring omission is Jesus' dialogue with the woman's accusers, his challenge to them to consider their own sins before condemning her, and their shameful departure from the scene. In this version of the story, Jesus speaks only with the woman.'

4.   cf. Ehrman (1988:24):

> 'We now have the good fortune to state that a new discovery has been made which may shed considerable light on the textual history and preliterary form of the pericope _de adultera_ .... The new evidence derives from a recently discovered Biblical commentary of Didymus the Blind, the renowned exegete and educator of fourth-century Alexandria. The value of this new source of knowledge cannot be exaggerated: prior to the discovery of Didymus's writings, no Greek Father before the twelfth century comments on the PA, and no Alexandrian text of the NT includes it in the Gospel of John before the ninth century.'

5.   cf. Ehrman (1988:32):

>'Didymus does not give an opening statement regarding the time or setting of the event (cf. John 7.53-8.2). In his version, the antagonists are simply "the Jews" rather than the "scribes and Pharisees" (John 8.3). The woman is not accused of adultery but, as in some MSS of John 8.3, is simply guilty of a "sin". This woman is not merely deserving of death here, as in the traditional story: she has already been tried and sentenced (κατεκρίθη) and has been brought to the place of execution to be stoned. Thus this story is not about a legal "trap" set for Jesus by his opponents while he teaches in the Temple. Instead, Jesus happens to witness the beginning stages of an execution and, unsolicited, interposes himself in the proceedings....'

6.   'In form-critical terms, the story belongs rather to the "biographical apopthegms". These are not mere episodes from the life and activity of Jesus, but are told with a kerygmatic and pedagogic purpose. Jesus' behaviour becomes a lesson or admonition to the community.' (Schnackenburg 1971:169).

But:

'Possibly our schematic form-critical categories are too rigid for this type of material in the gospel tradition.' (ibid. 169)

7.   cf. Schnackenburg (1980:166):

>'... Jesus refers them to the judgement of God, before whom all men are sinners.'

Also cf. Kysar (1986:134):

>'In its setting in early Christianity it was perhaps a warning against the strict imposition of the law and suggests the radicality of forgiveness as it was evidenced in the attitude of the historical Jesus.'

8.   But cf. Prof. J.N. Suggit's comment:

>'In view of Mt 7:1f de adultera may be taken as a prophetic interpretation of the Torah, in line with Amos and Isaiah.'

9.   cf. Morris (1971:884):

          'The reason probably is that in a day when the
          punishment of sexual sin was very severe among the
          Christians this story was thought to be too easily
          misinterpreted as countenancing unchastity.'

          Also cf. Riesenfeld (1970:105):

          'Against the background of the growing institution
          of penance it is understandable to us that the
          account of Jesus and the adultress could not very
          well be used as an example in the preaching and
          parenesis of the early church.'

10.   Professor J.N. Suggit has added to this list ἐπιμένειν
          + present participle, which nowhere else occurs in John's
          gospel.

11.   Although here, again, one should not jump to conclusions
          too quickly, cf. Kysar (1984:12):

          'There is no denying that John's story of Jesus is
          rough at points. One may at times feel that
          something has been left out or that something has
          been inserted to spoil the flow of the narrative.'

12.   Also cf. Mark 11:11f, 19f. (Barrett 1978:591)

13.   In support of this claimed continuity between Jesus and
          the gospel tradition, we may briefly cite two
          representative quotations:

          'Thus, the new quest has proved ... that the kerygma
          is faithful to Jesus.' (Brown 1964:11)

          'Bultmann's pupils and others have rightly
          emphasized the link between the Jesus of history and
          the Christ of faith.' (Evans 1988:61)

14.   The criterion under discussion, that of congruity, is of
          course open to the severe criticism that an unrecognizable

Jesus would never have found his way into the New Testament in any event.

15.   Which suggests that we are dealing with a similar, if somewhat longer, case than the one (D's conclusion to Luke 6:10) mentioned by Tuckett (1987:38):

> 'On text critical grounds it cannot claim to be part of the "original" text of Lk's Gospel. But is perhaps a good example of a primitive tradition (possibly dominical) resurfacing relatively late in the textual tradition in an isolated place.'

It is, furthermore, not without significance that both these longer readings, for the 'historical reliability' – in the material sense and not purely in the sense of continuity – of which there seems to be some justification, derive from the Western text (and D in particular). Not only is there evidence that the Western text may preserve the original reading in some places, (cf., for example, Boismard [1981] and Wikgren [1981]) but it also seems as if, on occasion, a Western reading may reflect an interest in reliable historical details and facts (see for example Wikgren's study on Acts 16:12). While the former aspect of the Western text is not of particular relevance to us, the latter may contribute considerably to our thesis in this chapter by providing a plausible context out of which an historically reliable story such as this may have emerged.

16.   As is indicated in John 21:25, and as is clear from the relatively short extent of the canonical gospels and the highly selective nature of the processes and concerns underlying them, not everything that Jesus said and did has come to be included in the canonical gospels. As Jeremias's short introduction to what he terms 'isolated sayings of the Lord' (1963) indicates, tradition about Jesus and deriving directly from remembrance of his actual words and deeds (although Jeremias is in this particular

case concerned with his sayings only) continued to coexist, side by side, with the canonical gospels (even though we are not in a position to be able to say with any certainty the extent of this tradition or the relation of it to the canonical writings in the life and worship of early christian communities, particularly as the canon began to assume a more rigid and fixed form).

5.

<u>John's story of the adulteress</u>

In which an interpretation of the Johannine inclusion of the pericope <u>de adultera</u> leads to an insight into the authoritative operation of scripture in christian communities.

5.1   <u>Canonical hermeneutics and the inclusion of the pericope de adultera in John's gospel</u>

In chapter two, as the background to our introduction to the development of the canon, we spoke of the canonical process as the reshaping of tradition in order to meet the demands of new situations, while all the while preserving continuity. In this chapter we shall make explicit what has been implicit in our discussion of the canonical process – that the products of this canonical process require a manner of interpretation that does justice to the totality of the new synthesis[1] (and in this regard canonical criticism can be seen as an outgrowth or extension of the literary critical approach [cf. Coggins 1984:11; Sanders 1984:1], which seeks to interpret the individual writings in such a way so as to bring out the meanings that arise from the final, completed form of the work, except that canonical criticism tends to focus on the final, canonical form, of the Bible as the context within which interpretation should take place).

> 'It is not the process which is to function as the normative interpretation (or even as paradigm), but the product of the process, its deposit.' (Kittel 1980:3)

In this connection, canonical hermeneutics, so called, will provide us with a way of interpreting the meaning and significance of the new

synthesis of John and the pericope _de adultera_ - so that we may, through the illumination of the synthesis, gain an insight into how scripture was regarded as operating authoritatively among christian communities.   Let us begin therefore with an introduction to canonical hermeneutics as it arises directly from the understandings of canonical criticism of Childs and Sanders.[2]

> 'How did she depolytheize, monotheize, Yahwize and Israeletize, or Christianize the wisdom received from the past, whether homegrown traditions or international wisdom? How did they do it?   The answers are lying there awaiting valid sober uses of biblical literary and historical criticism to recover them.   How did Israel and the church find the value needed in a tradition without absolutizing the cultural trappings in which they were received, and without being bound by the cultural mores and givens of the past?   The Bible is a veritable text book of unrecorded hermeneutics, of the way in their time our predecessors, the biblical tradents themselves, did what it is we ourselves struggle to do.'   (Sanders 1979:29)

At the heart of canonical hermeneutics is the desire to resolve various kinds of tensions.[3]   It is doubtful whether these tensions can ever be completely resolved, but their partial - or temporary - resolution releases energy for growth and action in the community of faith.   These tensions revolve primarily around identity and action - tensions within the canon, tensions within the community of faith, tensions between communities, tensions between traditions and perceptions - what are we, in essence?   What should we be doing? What happens when scripture itself is in disagreement, or when our perception of scripture clashes with our experience of life?   The final form of the text, or canon, contributes considerably to the creation of these tensions because it places, side by side, often disparate elements that by virtue of their proximity, within the bounds of an exclusive collection, clamour for clarification and resolution - which resolution proves to be temporary as it disintegrates in the face of new tension, only to lead to new synthesis and so on.

'The really significant elements in biblical narrative are

the contradictions.' (Leach 1983:24)

The energy that sets the delicate canonical ecosystem in motion and that sustains its life is generated by the forces that come into being when traditions of such varied kinds are bonded together.

> 'The whole dimension of resonance within the Bible which issues from a collection with fixed parameters and which affects both the language and its imagery is lost by discarding the peculiar function of canonical literature.' (Childs 1979:40)[4]

The diversity of the views that have been bonded into one canon requires closer investigation. The earliest communities did not attempt to do away with different perspectives in all cases. Within the acceptable different emphases they were able to discover the fulness of the gospel – since no one view of what it meant to be a christian seemed adequate (cf. Childs 1984:30). It was only within the web of competing perceptions and claims that they felt they could find the true freedom and limits of the faith.

> 'Canonical criticism elaborates the <u>pluralism</u> of the Bible and stresses its self-critical dimension in the varied thrusts and statements it records.' (Sanders 1984:37)[5]

In addition to encouraging toleration and self-examination, canonical criticism also offers the hope, under the guise of canonical hermeneutics, of being able to discover the key to contemporizing the biblical traditions – since that is exactly what the biblical tradents themselves had to do, there are within the canon clues as to how they were able to appropriate the tradition.[6]

> 'By reading the Bible correctly the believing community sees itself on a pilgrimage that Israel too was making from one to the other, from enslavement to its freedom. Canonical criticism asks how and why this is the case.' (Sanders 1972:xvi)

The writers of the individual books of the Bible had themselves
uprooted traditions and transferred them successfully into new
situations. The collectors of these books did the same thing when
they began their collections. Latent in the canon is, therefore, a
record of how this highly sought after transition was made.
Canonical criticism claims to be able to uncode this process.

> 'It may be that the most basic authority of the canon is
> perceived and asserts itself when the believing community
> is forced by its own current history to ask the sorts of
> questions put to the old traditions when Judaism was born,
> that is, when the canon first began to take shape.'
> (Sanders 1984:119)

Ultimately in this connection, however, canonical criticism seeks the
boundaries, or parameters, within which christian life may be pursued
with boldness. The mere fact of the diversity within the canon is
perhaps the most important hermeneutical key of all. It is perhaps
the most telling clue to the way in which the tradents understood the
nature of the lived faith. This very multiplicity and variety of
witnesses denies any dogmatic attempt to give rigid guidelines to the
meaning sought by the community of faith.

> 'It [canonical criticism] stresses the ontology of the
> Bible as a paradigm of God's work from creation through
> re-creation out of which we may construct paradigms for
> our own works, rather than as a jewel box of ancient
> wisdom to be perpetuated.' (Sanders 1977:164)

The great diversity within the Bible is an indication that the
biblical tradents themselves did not feel rigidly bound by the
tradition which they had received. The canon is really a clue to
their understanding of the meaning of the christian life. The nature
of the canon suggests that the christian life should be one of bold
re-creation. It suggests that the Bible should not be used as an
instruction book in a mechanical way that denies the importance of
initiative. Canonization indicates that the various different

experiences and expressions of the christian life in the canon were all recognised by the community of faith as valid. Any individual interpretation of the faith was rejected as too narrow – or rather, accepted with the qualification that it was an expression of only a part of the broad spectrum of legitimate christian experience. Canon, therefore, creates space within which the christian life may be lived boldly – with the only restriction being that, if this life is to be christian, it should confine itself to the range of expressions acknowledged in the canon. [7]

Canonical hermeneutics, in its interest in the interpretation of pieces in their wider contexts, offers the possibility, by means of the framework in which it employs the customary exegetical techniques, of being able to place the interpretation of John 7:53-8:11 within the gospel, and canonical, context as well as being able to provide a rationale for its original inclusion. On the basis of the findings that this will yield, we shall be able to make certain deductions concerning the authoritative operation of scripture.

Let us begin by interpreting the passage as if removed from its Johannine context. We are dealing here with what we may loosely term an "entrapment story", not unlike the series of stories found in Mark 2:1-3:6, and Luke 20:21ff. It is not at all certain whether this story circulated in oral or written form prior to its inclusion in John's gospel – the proliferation of variant readings, out of all proportion to the length of the passage, seems to indicate that various versions of the story were circulating orally, while the inconsequential nature of the two introductory verses, which are never absent entirely from any existing manuscript containing the pericope de adultera, seem unnecessary in an orally circulating, integral story, and seem to point to a possible written source from which the story was drawn – but it does appear relatively certain, as we have seen, that we are presented with a story that reflects an actual event or encounter in the ministry of Jesus.

7:53-8:1]   The story begins with the comment that ἐπορεύθησαν ἕκασ-
τος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ , while Jesus went to the hill known for its
olives, the so-called Mount of Olives (which, although well-known from
the synoptic gospels, is never mentioned in John).   There is
absolutely no unequivocal indication as to who those were who returned
to their houses – they could have been the people who had come to
listen to Jesus (in a scenario like that sketched in Luke 21:37f), or
they could have been opponents who, after efforts to trap him, were
returning home in preparation for the renewal of the confrontation on
the following day.   The resolution of this question would revolve
around the due consideration of the fact that stories about Jesus that
circulated without concern for the historical context out of which
they had arisen would usually have been stripped of extraneous
details;   and it would also depend, for its resolution, on due
consideration of the overall symmetry of the story.   With due
consideration of these factors, it would seem as if the people who
returned home the evening prior to this confrontation were Jesus'
opponents.   In this integral story the focus is the resolution of a
particular instance of conflict between Jesus and his opponents.   The
people who come to listen to Jesus in 8:2 play no role in the story
except as part of the background against which the story unfolds.
They are completely passive and are taught by Jesus.   They in no way
contribute, except as an initial backdrop, to the development of the
story itself.   Little would be gained, therefore, by mentioning that
characters who play no significant part in the story went each to his
own house the evening before the incident recounted in the story.   The
story itself would, however, on the other hand, gain significantly
from the suggestion that the plot to trap Jesus was part of an ongoing
attempt by Jesus' opponents, who returned with fanatical vigour again
and again in their efforts to destroy him.   This identification of
those who returned home with Jesus' opponents would benefit the story
by showing that the incident involving the adulteress was only one
incident in the ongoing attacks on Jesus, thus grounding the story in
the wider christian tradition;   it would also, if one assumes that
this was an early account circulated – at first anyway – mainly among
Jewish christians, provide an interpretative prologue to the story by

suggesting that Jesus' interpretation of the law was the divinely sanctioned one. (Notice that Jesus' opponents return at night to rest, while Jesus himself returns to a hill – which may be a reference to the place of theophany and also even to the original giving of the Law. If we accept this interpretation of the opposition between the house and the hill, it may even be legitimate to see in this passage an incipient form of the characteristic division between the natural and the divine, with the complete misunderstanding of the divine by the natural, in John's gospel.) This interpretation would, however, grammatically depend on the strength of the contrast usually associated with the employment of δὲ , since this interpretation would introduce into these verses powerful and opposing forces that would find a focus in this word.

8:2] Against the background of the lull in the conflict suggested by the preceding verses, there arises a sense of anticipation, perhaps even trepidation, at the possibility of renewed efforts to trap Jesus. In this verse the reader is led to feel that perhaps his fears or hopes of renewed conflict were mistaken. The tension created by the previous verses is released in the unexpected calm and serenity of the new day without any sign of Jesus' opponents. In a sentence that may evidence an Aramaic background (δὲ πάλιν ...καὶ ... καὶ cf. Newman and Nida 1979:258) Jesus returned early in the morning (other than here, ὄρθρου occurs in the New Testament only in Luke 24:1 and Acts 5:21) to the temple area, or precincts (and in the light of the interpretation so far given, this would mean a return to the place of the previous day's conflict – with the implication of a renewal of the hostilities), and sat down and began to teach the crowd that had gathered there to listen to him. (It is interesting to observe that in John Jesus usually stands while teaching, cf., for example, 7:37 [but note 6:3]; in Luke, on the other hand, Jesus is usually seated while addressing the crowd, cf., for example, 4:20; 5:3.)

8:3] All of a sudden the calm pleasantness of the new day is shattered by the return of Jesus' opponents – which return had begun to seem unlikely as the morning wore on. Although the reader expects

to find scribes and Pharisees in the temple area, he has become so absorbed in Jesus' teaching that the unannounced intrusion comes as a shock. οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι (although this is a common expression in the synoptics it is not found in John; in addition, the scribes are never mentioned in John while they are mentioned twenty-two times in Matthew, twenty-one in Mark and fourteen in Luke [Morris 1971:884]) had brought with them a woman who had been caught in coitu with someone other than her husband (or the one to whom she was to be married).

> 'In the ancient world the woman was looked upon as the property of her husband, and so originally the basic sin in adultery was the sin against the woman's husband.' (Newman and Nida 1979:259)

(It is interesting to observe that some manuscripts, including codex Bezae, simply mention ἁμαρτία - almost certainly as a result of Jesus' injunction in v11.) One is surprised that the learned copiers of the law and the devout Pharisees had brought only the woman, despite the unequivocal injunctions in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. Those who sought to test Jesus placed the woman before him, so that she awaited trial before her accusers in front of all who had gathered to listen to Jesus (καὶ στήσαντες αὐτὴν ἐν μέσῳ cf. Acts 4:7 καὶ στήσαντες αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ μέσῳ).

8:4] The spokesmen of the woman's accusers then addressed Jesus (it is interesting to observe that in John's gospel it is usually only the disciples who address Jesus as διδάσκαλος , for example in 1:38 and 20:16; 3:2 is not entirely exceptional either, because of Nicodemus's liminal status in John) and presented the background to the question that they were about to pose. They had caught the woman in the very act of sexual infidelity (αὐτόφωρος usually means 'caught in the very act of stealing', but clearly its original application only to the stem φώρ, the 'thief', had been transcended to include all manner of illegal activities).

8:5]   The reader has come to expect treachery from the scribes and Pharisees and so he has a feeling that the question which they pose is not sincere.   At the same time, however, Jesus' interrogators ask their question in such a way that the reader is no longer at all sure that their intentions are bad.   In the following verse, in fact, the writer quickly has to caution the readers not to be deceived by the treachery of the scribes and Pharisees. (Tension, and expectation, is built to a fever pitch by this strategy of creating progressively higher levels of tension only to have them released, until the climax of the story is reached.   In 7:53-8:1, as we have seen, tension is created in the possibility that is suggested of further conflict - only for this to be released in the calm of the following morning [8:2]; in 8:3 the arrival of the scribes and Pharisees heralds the return of the tension, at a greater intensity this time, because the faceless opponents hinted at in 7:53 turn out to be Jesus' well known enemies.   This tension is released, though not as completely as earlier, when the reader hears what at first appears to be their innocent, honest question in this verse; in 8:6 the tension within the story reaches a climax as all the reader's earlier suspicions are confirmed in the writer's warning.)   According to the Jewish Law the woman had to be put to death (Leviticus 20:10 does not actually mention how the execution is to be performed; Deuteronomy 22:22ff does, however, make provision for stoning as the method of execution). The scribes and Pharisees then asked Jesus (notice the emphatic σὺ) what his judgement was. The way in which the scribes phrased their question automatically predisposed the conversation, so they thought, to follow a course that would show how little was Jesus' regard for the law.

8:6]   In this verse the confrontation between Jesus and his opponents again becomes explicit.   The motives of those who questioned Jesus had become clear.   They were attempting to trap Jesus, ἵνα ἔχωσιν κατηγορεῖν αὐτοῦ .   It is possible that they were merely attempting to show Jesus' blatant disregard for the Jewish Law.   It is also possible that they were attempting to trap him

between the Jewish Law and Roman occupation policy - so that they would be able to charge him either with inciting the people to lynch the woman or with having shown no regard for Jewish Law. Since there is absolutely no mention of Roman law, however, we should beware of allowing this to feature too strongly in an interpretation of this passage. Taken on its own terms, the passage is concerned with Jesus' relation to the Jewish Law - so that the trap of the scribes and Pharisees would have consisted in showing Jesus' lack of regard for the Jewish Law, without any concern for the Roman law or trapping Jesus in its web (given the complete absence of any mention of the Roman authorities in this passage, there should be a corresponding diminution in their role in the interpretation of this passage - even if some would object to their total removal). It is interesting to observe that at precisely the moment when the evil forces opposed to Jesus reach a new climax, Jesus is shown to be calm and in control. Jesus bent down and either wrote something in the loose sand with his finger, or else simply drew on the ground with his finger while his opponents pressed him for an answer (the imperfect tense here denotes a continuous action; κατέγραφεν could mean to draw, while the uncompounded form έγραφεν usually means to write). The mere fact that absolutely no mention is made, or indication given, of what Jesus might have written counts heavily against Derrett's (1964) elaborate interpretation of the writing activity. It would seem more realistic to assume that the scant information given, simply that Jesus wrote or drew on the ground with his finger, alone should suffice to provide a clue as to what we should make of this activity. In this regard the simplicity of the description could be taken more naturally to indicate either that Jesus drew on the ground with his finger, thereby indicating his lack of interest in the type of futile dispute with which he was being confronted; or it could be taken as a reference to Jeremiah 17:13, which would characterize his opponents as precisely those who had turned decisively away from God, like those referred to by Jeremiah. Both those alternatives point, in their different ways, to Jesus' reluctance to involve himself in the fruitless debate.

8:7]   Eventually, under the pressure of the persistent agitation

(ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες αὐτόν), Jesus stood up, possibly to give added solemnity to his pronouncement or perhaps simply as a way of indicating that he wanted silence so that he could speak, and told the accusers that those among them who were ἀναμάρτητοι could condemn and execute the woman.   The meaning of this, the climax of the story in fact, revolves around the meaning of ὁ ἀναμάρτητος , which is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Broadly speaking, two possibilities are feasible - either Jesus was disallowing any judgement of one person by another, since all were as guilty before God (Schnackenburg 1980, for example), cf. Matthew 7:1,3-5; 5:27f; or else he was ruling that illegal irregularities in the circumstances surrounding the arrest of the woman had invalidated the legal support of the accusers (for example, Derrett, 1964, argues that it looks suspiciously as if a trap had been set for the woman, without any interest in warning her of her offence and its grave consequences, or even of trying to prevent her from doing what the accusers might have suspected beforehand; also, for example, Bruce, 1984, argues that the presence of only the woman indicates a blatant bias, in the application of the law, against women - a bias of such import that it disqualifies the accusers as entitled to play the legal role they desire).   These alternatives correspond to the question concerning the extent to which Jesus was consistent with his Jewish context and the extent to which he differed from his contemporaries in a decisive way.   There are two reasons for assuming that Jesus was in fact commenting on the faithful interpretation of the Law, rather than invalidating the whole Law with his utter dismissal of any human judgement.   Firstly, since the Law itself dealt with not only remote religious topics but with the whole ordering of Jewish society, it is unlikely that Jesus, no matter to what extent we conceive of his having differed from his Jewish heritage, would simply out of hand have dismissed any and all legal judgement - because the entire ordered arrangement of his society depended on the integrity of the Law and of human powers of punishment and judgement along the lines that were thought of as having originated with God.   It is instructive at this point to refer to Sanders' (1981:111) discussion of the Rabbinic halakah:

'The Rabbinic halakah is analagous to modern law in that it aimed at providing regulations for all areas of life. It thus presented no particular burden for its adherents, but only the obligation to know and observe laws which is common in human societies. The Rabbinic laws, to be sure, had the force and sanction of divine commandments, and in that way are totally unlike modern bodies of law .... The Bible, and consequently the Rabbis, brought many things under the head of divine commandments which we should consider part of a civil or criminal code or simply advice on good manners.'

The second reason for interpreting Jesus' reply as a call for scrupulous application of the Law, and not as a condemnation of all human judgement, is that those who sought to trap Jesus on a point of the Law eventually left quietly – which, if one recalls their original purpose, they would have been less likely to do if Jesus had simply off-handedly dismissed the legally sanctioned act of judgement per se! (Since Jesus was meeting the specific demands of a particular situation here, it would be wrong to assume automatically that this would imply a consistent and complete correspondence between Jesus and his Jewish background. If anything, the testimony of the gospels and of history points to a decisive discontinuity – but one should caution against automatically reading that discontinuity into every passage, where, as here, it might fit very poorly the particularities of that passage.)

One must assume, therefore, that Jesus' answer was a challenge to the woman's accusers to consider whether their behaviour (either in the arrest of the woman or in the partisan use to which they were putting the Law and on which they were staking the woman's fate) corresponded to the high standards and origin of the Law.

8:8]   Having stood up to answer his interrogators, Jesus once more resumed his sitting position and once again wrote (and here the uncompounded ἔγραφεν suggests, as we have said, writing as opposed to drawing) in the loose sand. Again there is absolutely no

indication as to what he might have written, and little justification for assuming, from the word employed, especially when the compounded form appears pointedly to have given way to the uncompounded, that he was merely drawing or scratching in the loose dust. (There is weak manuscript support, U 700 and a few others, for a reading which, in conflict with our overall interpretation, has it that Jesus was engaged in writing down the sins of the woman's accusers.) The reader waits with bated breath to discover whether Jesus' opponents are satisfied with his reply, or whether a fresh outburst of questions will follow.

8:9]   Those who had come to trap Jesus began to leave, one by one. It is not made explicit whether the accusers left because they were deeply convicted by their consciences for their part in the unedifying incident, or because it had become clear to them, as it had to the people, that it was no longer possible to pursue the matter without losing face further. If anything, the mention that the accusers left one by one (and it is possible that the fact that the elders left first is indicative of the fact that Jesus' words were fully appreciated first by the wisest in the group) would be indicative of the former alternative - they had arrived as an aggressive group and now were leaving as humbled individuals. Jesus had imposed his serenity, and control, on his disruptive opponents. The uncertain quiet and peacefulness with which the morning had started had now returned, but this time with the reassuring conviction that the object of earlier fears and disquiet had been overcome (7:53-8:1, however, still indicates that the threat has only receded, though very markedly now, but not disappeared altogether). Only the accused woman, whose fate had also depended on the outcome of the confrontation, remained in front of Jesus - presumably with the listening crowd still in attendance.

8:10]   Jesus looked up from his writing in the dust and asked the woman where her accusers were (γύναι is not, in Greek, a disrespectful form of address - John uses it in his gospel regularly

in Jesus' addresses to women; see, for example, 2:4,19:26). Had no
one stayed — had all her accusers acknowledged their own guilt before
the Law in the matter on hand?

8:11]   This is the first time that the woman has spoken throughout
the proceedings that are potentially of great bearing on the course of
her life.   She addressed Jesus respectfully (κύριε   probably is
indicative of an attitude of respect without necessarily being replete
with christological import), informing him that no one had remained to
condemn her. Jesus then replied that he would not condemn her either.
Much has been made of the fact that Jesus did not demand repentence
from the woman before setting her free — it would seem, however, on
the legal level that we have been speaking on, that no other outcome
was really possible. Without witnesses there could be no case
(without this necessarily implying that even if witnesses had remained
the outcome would have been vastly different — the story is too brief
and vague to be able to build up from it a systematic description of
Jesus' attitude to the breaking of the Law in each and every instance,
even assuming that he himself had such a rigid conception) — which is
why references at this point, at the level of the stabilization of
tradition to which we restrict ourselves here, to Romans 8:33f, 2
Corinthians 5:21 and Hebrews 4:15 are not at all applicable. It is
only once the story has lost its particular flavour as a debate about
the scrupulous application of the Law and has become, as we shall see,
through use in an environment in which the application of the Law is
no longer a pressing issue, a matter of the guilt, in a moral sense,
of all mankind that these references to the perfection of Jesus and
his authority to judge become relevant — as they do once the story is
included in John. Jesus let the woman go with the caution that she
not sin again — the reference here is probably specifically to
adultery, but almost certainly also has the implication of a generally
changed way of life.

Latent within this passage is the suggestion, which dawns almost
subliminally on the reader, and which dawns despite the limited,

particular nature of this passage, that Jesus alone has shown himself
to be a competent interpreter of the Law in more than just this
peculiar instance. It is precisely this, among other related factors,
that would have contributed to the later placement of the story in
John, since in John the Law itself has ceased to be of any
significance as Christ has replaced it as the complete revelation of
the will of God.   In the synoptic gospels the Law is still something
of a living issue and so, while the pericope de adultera is actually
concerned about a living legal issue, despite our initial preference
for synoptic placement of the story, the Johannine position more
readily accommodates the subliminal impression, which would have been
more congenial to later non-Jewish christians, that this story is
really about the elimination of the Law as such, despite the fact that
its original is really all about the Law.   In other words, the wider
meanings that could be drawn from the specific meaning of this
passage, together with a certain ambiguity within the passage itself,
allowed it to remain particularly attractive to christians even after
the Law was no longer a living issue and allowed them to fill it with
a new meaning that would have been most easily accommodated by the
gospel of John, with its themes of the old supplanted by the new in
Christ (this comes across, for example, very clearly in chapter two).
In its new setting in John, therefore, this passage would undergo a
complete transformation in meaning - leading to a new meaning that is
blatently in contradiction to Jesus' original intention in the story,
but which is nevertheless congruent with orthodox meditation on the
total meaning and significance of the life, death and resurrection of
Jesus.

When the original redactor(s) inserted the pericope into John's gospel
(possibly to echo John 5:14, and probably to provide a smoother, more
logical, transition from 7:52-8:12 and to expand in the process on the
theme of judgement in 7:24 and 8:15, and possibly even to prepare the
reader for what to expect from those who wished to judge Jesus in
terms of the Law - cf. 7:50-52) it is quite possible that he foresaw
to some extent the way in which this new context would alter the mean-
ing of the story (unless, of course, which is also quite likely,

centuries of use in an environment which had no interest in the Jewish Law as such had already altered the actual meaning of the story to such an extent that it could be included in John without any awareness even that a significant hermeneutical step was being taken). (We have mentioned the most obvious change that this would introduce - there would be many others - how, for example, would the characterization of Jesus throughout John's gospel impact on our assessment of Jesus in the story - would the Jesus of this pericope, who shows signs of sympathy and tenderness, not undergo a marked shift in character, given the flexibility allowed by this passage, until he appeared visibly more aloof and distant? And how would this influence our interpretation of his writing or drawing in the dust? How, by way of another example, would the idea of the relentlessness and implacability of Jesus' foes in John generally, and particularly after chapter six, affect our interpretation of verse nine?) It is only more recently, under the impact of literary criticism, that we have become aware of the way in which the inclusion of this passage would also, but to a lesser extent obviously, influence our interpretation of the rest of John as well, in a dialogical process that involves the reshaping of the gospel, simultaneously with the reshaping of the story, in interaction. From now on any interpretation of the whole of John, or of a part of the gospel in the light of the overall meaning of the whole, would have to take cognizance of the imbalance, introduced into the author's balance, by this pericope. We may illustrate this by reference to a few aspects of our earlier summary of Culpepper's (1983) literary critical analysis of John: Would one still, for example, be able to view the narrator as always providing the proper perspective for viewing the action, or as providing an inside view of Jesus' mind, in the absence of so much that calls for precisely this sort of enlightenment in the pericope? Does this impact in any way on our assessment of the reliability of the narrator, or on his ability to discern the true meaning of the action? How, on another level, does the inclusion of an extra day into John's narrative affect the narrative time of the gospel? How, on another level again, would the woman's central position in the story, combined with her almost complete inactivity and silence, change our overall assessment of the characters in John as, among other things, demonstrating various

attitudes, those both desired and those inappropriate, that guide the reader to an appropriate response to Jesus? In addition to the myriad of other possible questions that ·the inclusion of the pericope de adultera raises concerning Culpepper's analysis of the totality of the final form of John, we may also point to another question suggested by Kysar's (1984:39ff) analysis of the development of hostility as an integral part of the plot of John, particularly in and following chapter six: How would the seeming acknowledgement of their faults by Jesus' opponents in 8:9 affect the assessment that the plot is driven more and more after chapter six by the naked hostility of his enemies? On another, more local level, how would the pericope de adultera shape the immediate interpretation of the sections both preceding and following it - as it inevitably would as part of the immediate context in which they are to be interpreted?

We have shown that the inclusion of the pericope de adultera in John's gospel would have decisive significance for the interpretation of the meaning of the passage itself. We have also shown, by way of a few random questions which highlight only some of the many issues raised, that its inclusion impacts on the interpretation of the gospel itself too - to some extent in the assessment of the meaning of the whole, to some extent in the way in which the whole impacts on the meaning of the specific, and to some extent on the sections of the gospel in more immediate contact with the story. In this way the initial tensions between the gospel and this pericope are largely resolved in the binding process that distorts each in the direction of the other, in the whole of the pericope and in the gospel most markedly in the regions most proximate to it - with ripples spreading out throughout the gospel.

We have discovered that the inclusion of the pericope de adultera in John's gospel has a decisive impact on the way in which the story itself is to be understood (in a very real sense, the continued survival of the story would probably have depended on its being understood in terms of a general disqualification of judgement in a

universal sense rather than in a rigidly Jewish legal context [even as this would have led to its initial suppression – in this case, however, the Johannine context would have entrenched this, as well as adding other nuances which may not have been there before.) In addition to this, we have also discovered that the inclusion of this pericope would in varying ways and to varying degrees, influence an interpretation of the rest of John's gospel itself. In the end, however, in addition to the reasons already cited on p. 175, perhaps there were also other factors that made the inclusion conceivable. In addition to the gap in the text after John (after 7:52) or the possibilities of illuminating the gospel in the more immediate environs of the inclusion, perhaps there were, underlying the reasons cited on p. 175, two other factors of a broader nature – two facilitating factors that made it possible to contemplate the possibility of inclusion in the first place. Perhaps it was possible to include the story in John because it appeared, when cut off from its original Jewish environment, to have certain similarities with John (cf. exegesis on pp. 166ff.) and because there, not overlooking what has been said on p. 175, it served the same function in relation to John that the synoptics did, where it reminded the reader of the way in which John should be understood, even as its own meaning was broadened and deepened.

In addition to this, one must assume – both from what we know of the canonical process, as well as from the extraordinary acceptance that this late addition found – that the step that was taken to include this pericope in John must have served to fulfil a particular need in christian communities. There seems to be no indication that such a step could have been undertaken lightly, and so we must assume that there was a very good reason, on the level of the concrete, day to day needs of the community responsible for the inclusion of the pericope in John's gospel, for taking advantage of the possibilities for inclusion on the textual level (even though we are prevented, through lack of information, from being able to specify what that might have been) – which brings us back directly to the question of the way in which scripture actually concretely functioned as authoritative for christian communities.

5.2   Authoritative scripture

The examination of the inclusion of the pericope de adultera in John

has direct implications for the way in which scripture may be construed as having functioned as authoritative for christians. It seems to indicate that, if there was suitable justification, both in terms of a community need as well as in terms of a suitable tradition to hand, even at a relatively late stage it was possible to mould the shape of authoritative scripture (or tradition) - in a way analagous, if considerably reduced in scope, to the reinterpretation that had been initiated by the accredited witnesses and which had grown into the individual writings of the New Testament and then, ultimately (as far as the fixing of the traditions in a form that established them as fixed reference points is concerned), into the canon.[8] From this it becomes apparent that contextualization was a very important part of the authoritative operation of scripture. Even though the time when contextualization took the form of shaping the seminal writings had largely passed (and now it more frequently took the form that had already begun to emerge in the writings of the Apostlic Fathers - that of actually referring to the apostolic writings as fixed reference points), the interest in contextualization emerges clearly in this somewhat extraordinary example. At the same time, it is also evident that this contextualization has taken place under the influence of a powerful desire to preserve continuity with Jesus. This agrees substantially with our findings in the previous two chapters - John's thorough-going reinterpretation gained general acceptance only after an environment had been created in which its apostolic character could be recognized unequivocally; the unusual longevity of the story of the adulteress appears to have been directly attributable to its close connection, materially, with Jesus. Furthermore, the contintuity of the synthesis of John and de adultera appears, by virtue of the reliability of both as testimonty to Jesus (and by virtue of the fact that the contextualization took the form simply of inserting the story into John, without major modification to either of the initially separate parts - in the structural sense), to have been regarded as assured.

In section one we discussed the authority of the New Testament from an historical-critical perspective. On the basis of the assumptions underlying this approach we overlooked the special claims of christianity and treated it and its scriptures as yet another religious phenomenon like any other. We set about describing the authority of scripture, in other words, from a position of detachment. We treated claims concerning the authority of scripture with a great

deal of circumspection. In the end the conclusion that we arrived at was that one could either accept or reject the claims for authoritative scripture - as one might accept or reject the claims of any other religious group. The historical-critical approach started with the _a priori_ assumption that christianity was just another religion like any other (or should be approached as if it were), the claims of which had to be tested against cold facts wherever possible. In this way, while still as a matter of principle leaving the matter of belief open to the individual's choice, it actually created an environment in which it would be extremely difficult to take the specific claims of christianity seriously. And yet, it would be difficult to overlook the contribution of this approach to the illumination of the New Testament.

In section two we have attempted to approach the question of the authority of the New Testament from the 'inside', so to speak. How has scripture actually functioned to provide people with the meaning in terms of which they have shaped their lives? Our study of the relation between the pericope _de adultera_ and John's gospel has revealed that christians, from the beginning, associated their new quality of life with events initiated in the life of Jesus. From the beginning they sought to preserve this continuity with historical events which had the power to transform people's lives. The christian traditions underwent repeated reinterpretation - so that they might remain truly meaningful and relevant to the needs of the christian communities. At the same time, however, they were always extremely careful to preserve the continuity with Jesus, so that their experiences and actions might be rooted not in fanciful imaginings, but in the direct consequences of events to which there had been witnesses who had been careful to testify faithfully to what they had seen. In this sense the authority of scripture is really an affirmation that these writings have faithfully preserved the testimony of the witnesses to the unique and peculiarly repercussive events of the life of Jesus - from which testimony may be derived, by its apostolic connection with Jesus, unique insights into the meaning of life and the way in which it should be lived.

We are presented here with two strongly opposed positions. The one takes the view that the claims of scripture may be pretty much taken or left, as might the claims for any other religious perception or tradition. The other claims that scripture is uniquely significant because it is the sole reliable testimony to unique and unprecedented events in the life of Jesus – the consequences of which have been, and are, of decisive significance not only for the destiny of mankind, but of the whole universe.

It shall be our task in section three to attempt to hold these two views in fruitful tension – to do for our time, and special circumstances, what christians have done in the past, as revealed especially, in our study, in the illuminating example of John and the pericope de adultera.

Endnotes

1. Usually one would expect the discussion of canonical
    hermeneutics that we undertake here to follow immediately
    upon the discussion of the canonical process (conducted in
    subsection 2.2 of this study).   In this case, however,
    canonical hermeneutics is considered precisely because of
    the light it is able to cast on the new complex of the
    story of the adulteress in its position in John after
    7:52. For this reason its discussion should be undertaken
    in as close proximity as possible to the issue of the
    inclusion of the pericope in John. This follows naturally
    upon the consideration of the individual elements (the
    story of the adulteress; and John's gospel) that combined
    to form the new complex. In response to the demands of
    the subject under scrutiny, therefore, it would be more
    appropriate to separate the discussion of canonical
    hermeneutics from that of the canonical process.

2. It should be noted that Childs and Sanders have somewhat
    different emphases. Childs is associated with an emphasis
    on the final form of the text, while Sanders appears to
    avoid too dogmatic an emphasis on the final form (cf. Dunn
    1987:142).

    > 'The effect of taking canon seriously is to
    > establish the level of the biblical literature in
    > accordance with its historical stabilization by the
    > Jewish community and to seek to understand this

received text in the light of its historical
development.' (Childs 1979:106)

'The primary character of canon, or authoritative
tradition ... is its adaptability; its secondary
character is its stability. This is the reason the
writer hesitates to focus as much on the final
"literary text" as does Brevard Childs.' (Sanders
1977:163)

This does not mean that Sanders does not take the 'final
form' seriously. The canonical criticism of both Childs
and Sanders takes the form of the Bible most seriously.
The difference is that Childs is prepared to grant it a
special status, or make it an exceptional case, in the
long history of authoritative tradition. Sanders, on the
other hand, would appear to give it the status of one
example among many others, of the way in which
authoritative tradition functioned and continues to
function. Because it is the clearest and most readily
accessible example of this function, however, it should be
studied with the utmost care.

cf. Best (1978:264):

'The real question can now be isolated; why should
that stage of tradition which we call scripture be
given an authoritative place in the church rather
than some earlier or later stage within the
tradition.'

3.   cf., for example, Blenkinsopp (1977:152):

> 'The canon, then, does not lend itself to a definite
> solution to the problem of religious authority.
> The juxtaposition in it of law and prophecy suggests
> rather an unresolved tension, an unstable equili-
> brium between rational order and the unpredictable
> and disruptive, between the claims of the past and
> those of the present and future.' (also cf. Kort
> 1988:133).

4.   cf. Johnson (1986:544):

> 'It is precisely the way in which these writings
> work together to shape Christian identity that makes
> the canon such an important and delicate organism.'

5.   Also cf. Childs (1984:50):

> 'The discovery of diversity is not the goal of
> exegesis, but its presence remains an important
> factor which has been worked into the texture of the
> canon.'

6.   cf. Petersen (1988:188):

> '... "intertextuality" ... is a function of the
> canonical approach. Intertextuality seems to refer
> to the potential for self-illumination within the
> canonical witness.'

(It is on the basis of the potential for self-illumination
within the canonical process too [even as this potential
exists within the canon as the literary deposit of this
process] that the possibility, and the form, of this
thesis depends. By coming to an understanding, through
the everyday concerns revealed in the special example of
the pericope de adultera, of the considerations that need
to be borne in mind in the authoritative contemporization
of the biblical tradition, guidelines will be established
to help us in our endeavour to reconcile critical

approaches to scripture with its operation as authoritative for christians of our time.)

7.   Which is really another way of stating the importance of continuity within discontinuity of expression. cf. Perrin (1974:19):

> 'The New Testament represents the whole spectrum of possibilities of what it means to be a Christian in the world, and either anticipates or inspires every subsequent development within the Christian churches.'

Also cf. Sanders 1976:551; Sanders 1977;163

> But: 'To its authentic features faith must always be open; it cannot therefore in principle confine itself to a specific body of tradition as its final and complete expression.' (Funk 1982:185)
>
> 'As oral word, the faith that comes to expression anew will appear over against the canon as written. For the imagination that seizes a new canon within the canon and permits the word of faith to occur again will be "secular", it will emerge "outside" the tradition and yet draw upon it, it will claim the tradition for itself yet appear to contradict it. Such is the risk attached to the word of God.' (ibid. 186)

8.   The canon itself performs this reinterpretative function - both in so far as the meaning of the whole is concerned, as well as in the way in which this influences the perceived shape of the parts.

> 'The real issue with which I have sympathy, is the relationship between the literal sense which a book has when it has left the pen of the author (and/or redactor) and the canonical sense which it has when seen in the context of its Testament or of the whole Bible, especially when the change in meaning is substantial.' (Brown 1981:32)

Closer attention, however, reveals that the process of canonization itself has already to some extent modified the meaning of the individual books read in isolation (cf. Perrin 1974:17; Spivey and Smith 1982:489). By

collecting the works of the different writers and placing them in a single collection, the community of faith was already undermining the intention of the author - since it was removing the work from the context into which the author was writing and also since, by placing it in the diverse collection, new meanings and provisions were emerging in the process of interaction within the canon.

> 'They should also recognize that the canon provides not only a text but also a con-text within which the individual texts should be interpreted. This context is not necessarily that of the original author and hence a rather different interpretation may arise; but this context of the canon, should be taken seriously by all those who take canon seriously.' (Tuckett 1987:169)

So canonization itself was an 'adding to' or a modification of the authorial intention - leading in reality to a qualified diversity. In this sense the individual writings had become the property of the community of faith which had used them in a way that expressed the fulness of its faith while, to some extent, modifying the isolated meanings of its parts. The addition of the pericope in question to John's gospel is yet another example of a principle inherent in the very essence of the nature of the canon.

Section Three

A Possible Solution

In which, under the guidance of the social sciences and psychology, a
way of holding the two approaches, which we have outlined, to the
authority of scripture, in fruitful tension, is suggested - a tension
not dissimilar in force to that which faced the biblical tradents and
which called forth their reinterpretations of the tradition.

6.

A Psycho-Social Solution

In which the problem at hand is approached from a perspective that
takes as its starting point the role played by environmental, or
social, cues in coexistence with individual peculiarities in the
process of concept formation.

6.1   Individuality in cognition

The aim of this third section is to arrive at a solution in which the
two conflicting ways of speaking of the authority of the New Testament
may be reconciled in a fruitful tension. Since these differing views
of the authority of scripture (both in extreme forms of opposition and
also in the variuous stages and states of accommodation) are held by
people who live in the same social environment, the same society, it
would seem as if a productive angle of approach would be to discover
how conflict resolution takes place within societies - where
conflicting views, of varying intensities, routinely coexist in the
stable equilibrium of the social order (and where even when the
imbalance may become so great as to upturn a society, a new state of
equilibrium is again established).[1]

We shall begin, therefore, by anchoring the attribution of authority to scripture in its context within the ordered web of human relations within a society.[2] In a sense, this is equivalent to the preparatory explication of the inherent relativity of the concept of 'authority' as it is applied to scripture - and preparatory in the sense that the attempt to hold extreme positions in this regard in fruitful tension will be reliant upon the initial clarification of the range of meanings of the concept under discussion.

Since the attribution of authority to scripture forms part of the individual's overall understanding of reality, we shall examine briefly the factors that shape, or have a bearing or influence upon, his/her cognition, or concept formation. This will enable us to construct a model of the forces at work in the attribution of authority - which will provide the clarification necessary for the fruitful resolution of the tension between the two approaches to the authority of scripture outlined in sections one and two. If it is true, as Garner (1978:131) states, that individuality has been ignored to a large degree in psychology in the area of information processing, it is probably even truer to say this of academic dissertations on the authority of scripture:

> 'Of the classes of factors that influence the form of information processing, the fact of individual differences is becoming accepted; and it is ironic that I should have to say accepted, because the study of individual differences has long been one of the most respected areas of psychology.'[3]

In the discipline of psychology there does not seem, as yet, to be any certainty concerning the specific details of individuality in cognition. We certainly are not qualified to enter the labyrinth of the specifics of the debate. Our task, in attempting to assess the role of individuality in the attribution of authority, is simply to underline the fact of individual differences in cognition, while at the same time speaking in the broadest possible terms as to how this

functions.   Our investigation of cognition will, for the sake of
clarity, be divided into two sections - the way in which social forces
mould the process, and the way in which the individual deals with
his/her environment.   This is an artificial division because clearly,
in reality, these are two simultaneously occurring aspects of a
continuous process.   Evidence of the synthetic nature of the division
will be found in the difficulty that is experienced in treating each
aspect in isolation from the other.   Our division corresponds to the
division that exists between the theories of the learning theorists
and the cognitive theorists respectively, although our schema suggests
that only in combination do they adequately explain the intricacies of
individualized information processing.

> 'Learning theories take a mechanistic and deterministic
> view of human nature. They are based on the belief that
> the environment shapes and molds human behavior in
> accordance with basic principles of learning.' (Craig
> 1980:53,54)

> 'Cognitive theorists see the mind as active, alert and
> equipped with innate structures that process and organize
> information.' (ibid 54)

Perry and Bussey (1984:165) make the point that information processing
takes place in a social environment, because people exist among other
people, that to a significant degree shapes the bounds and the course
of this process:

> 'Children develop the ability to mentally represent and
> process information about their social world. In many
> respects, children's social schemas may be conceptualized
> as mediating links between their social learning
> experiences and their overt social behavior.'

The very title 'information processing', the meaning of which will
become clear as we proceed, suggests something external to the
individual - in addition, of course, to the peculiar psychological
process.   Because the individual exists in the world, and also among

other people, he or she has to learn to survive by adapting to the demands of the physical and social environment. Innate drives and capacities are governed by the peculiarities of the context in which they exist.[4] A useful schema for investigating the contextual influence on cognition is the following: child (most of the studies have been done on children because the influences are more obvious there - but this does not invalidate our wider application) ⟶ observation and experimentation ⟶ socially conditioned link between action and outcome. The child is socialized, learns to live in a specific environment among people, by observation and experimentation. Initially the child can make no connection between the manifold stimuli he/she encounters. Gradually, however, by watching other people and by experiencing the outcome of his/her own experiments, patterns begin to emerge. The child begins to connect action and outcome. Between actions and outcomes, the child constructs mediating links - or rather, mediating links begin to emerge under social pressure.[5]

> 'Representational concepts make it possible for a child to categorize and evaluate different acts along abstract dimensions, which take multiple situational cues into account, and thus to find some integrative structural organization among specific forms of behaviour whose concrete properties may be highly variable. The child's acquisition of concepts enables it to place actions which are overtly very different into the same class.... The mediatorial power of cognitive representation therefore allows the child's conduct to be governed with a certain amount of consistency that could not be produced if its actions were closely bound to immediate situational or behavioral cues.' (Aronfreed 1968:69)

As the child experiences actions and outcomes he or she begins to develop cognitive links that facilitate the more or less consistent interpretation of social dynamics. Gradually these cognitive links multiply and interconnect in complex and diverse ways that reflect the social exposure of the child.[6]

Clearly information processing takes place under the control of social

forces (and physical forces – though that is not of immediate relevance to this discussion), because the child, by observing social dynamics, and by participating more directly, is led to make inescapable, culturally conditioned, connections between events.[7] The image that the child develops of life in the world, its meaning and limitations, is therefore largely beyond his or her individual capacity to make meaning in isolation. In a sense, meaning is thrust upon the child. As we have already noted, this process continues through adult life, but in a less accelerated and overt way. While culturally moulded cognition does impose common beliefs and ways of thinking on people, the diversity within a society should not be overlooked either. Within the society, with its common culture, there may be a great diversity of groups, each with their own 'sub-culture'. In consequence, therefore, cognition will be determined, beyond the influence of the culture of the society, by the complex interactive input of the various groups, with their own sub-cultures, subsumed under that society. Indvidual differences in cognition, therefore, are determined, in addition to differences in individual capacities and preferences, which we shall discuss shortly, by the societies to which the individuals belong and by the diversity, within these societies, to which they are exposed.

'To describe and analyze social organizations, we are forced by the limitations of our perceptual abilities to freeze these ongoing processes into static pictures, but by combining many such observations through time, we learn to see social organization as a dynamic process. Emergent social organizations are exterior to individual personalities and continually constrain or influence the actions of their members. The partial autonomy of social organization is also evident in the fact that organizations display properties of their own that are not inherent in their constituent members. At the same time, individual personalities, patterns of social ordering, and cultural ideas always interpenetrate each other so that none of them can exist entirely apart from the others.' (Olsen 1978:31)

In the previous paragraphs we noted that social forces played a major role in shaping the person's cognitive processes and we also noted

that differences in cognition could arise out of exposure to different sections of a heterogenous society. We shall now investigate the issue from the other end - we shall examine how individuals process the information they receive in the social setting.

> 'We have defined the concept as a stable organization of experience which is brought about through the application of a rule of relation and to which is assigned a particular name.' (Bolton 1977:47)

It would seem as if the individual's information processing, or concept development, is carried out in the state of tension that exists between the broad - the diversity of sense perceptions - and the particular, the pattern that is suggested by individual resolutions of action and outcome. As the person experiences life, he or she begins to construct models for understanding the complexity with which he/she is confronted.[8]   These models often exist in a state of tension with incoming stimuli - which tension is resolved in the two alternatives of overlooking information that does not fit the model, or of restructuring the model to fit the new information, or some other position between these two extremes.[9] This is a continuous, if largely unconscious (cf. Foster 1980:395), lifelong process of tension build-up and resolution.[10]

> 'Thus both sides of the dispute are right; at times we let experiences wash over us until a hypothesis emerges, but at other times we start with a hypothesis and use it as a searchlight with which to illuminate certain kinds of evidence.' (Hunt 1982:189,190)

It is principally, though not exclusively, as we shall see shortly, in the resolution of this tension that individual differences in cognition become evident. Both exposure to a range of stimuli and the formation of interpretative models are elements present in all people, but individuality in cognition lies to a large degree in the way in which these two elements, with the attendant complexity, are

reconciled or balanced.[11]

> 'This theory of the process of concept formation suggests the major dimensions for the study of individual differences. There is in the first place a dimension referring to the width or narrowness of attention deployment; individuals are placed along this dimension according to their openness to new experience and their capacity to accommodate to information which, although useful to them, was not initially perceived as such. But equally important to concept formation is the drive to make the implicit explicit, to develop abstract modes of conceptualization for the ordering of experience, and individuals score along this dimension according to their ability to develop explicit analysis of stimuli.' (Bolton 1977:115)

This leads us directly to the second major area of difference in information processing. If the first is located in the tension between the 'intentional' and the 'attentional' aspects, the second is located in the constitution of the 'intentional' aspect (that is, in the tendency undergirding the formation of the interpretative model – cf. Bolton 1977:119).

> 'If broad attention deployment and analytic ability represent two styles for accommodating to the demands of the environment, concreteness and abstractness are the two major ways in which the person imposes a meaning upon that environment; in the former events are assimilated into an action system and in the latter into a system of abstract categories.' (Bolton 1977:126)

By their very nature objects and events can be understood either concretely or abstractly – there is an inherent ambivalence which can legitimately call forth either interpretation. The second major area of individual difference in cognition lies in the unique and individual way in which concrete and abstract are balanced in the construction of interpretative models. There may be almost exclusive emphasis on either the concrete or the abstract – or an infinite number of positions between these two poles. We may say, in

conclusion, that people have unique and highly individual models for understanding the world in which they live and for calling forth appropriate action in that environment. These models are determined by the environment in which the individual exists and is expected to cope, as well as by innate personality traits that incline him/her to be more 'intentional' or 'attentional' and more, or less 'concrete' or 'abstract'. It is in the convoluted interaction of environmental cues and personality traits that the complex models for making sense of the meaning and possibilities of life in the world are forged.

We have spoken of the models by which people interpret their experience of reality and that lead them to exhibit acceptable forms of behaviour. Our definitions of scriptural authority, both in sections one and two, therefore, coincide with our understanding of the operation of cognition; in other words, the attribution of authority to scripture is intimately bound up with, or forms part of, the individual's model for understanding reality. As such, therefore, it too is subject to the diversity of factors that are involved in the creation of the individual's model. By extension, we may say that 'authority' is a term of relative meaning – so that it may be said that different people mean different things when they speak of the authority of the Bible, because it fits into their own, largely unique, model that is itself qualitatively different from all other models (this issue of similarity and difference will again occupy us in our conclusion).[12]

We may represent this insight into the relativity of scriptural authority by means of the following phenomenological model:
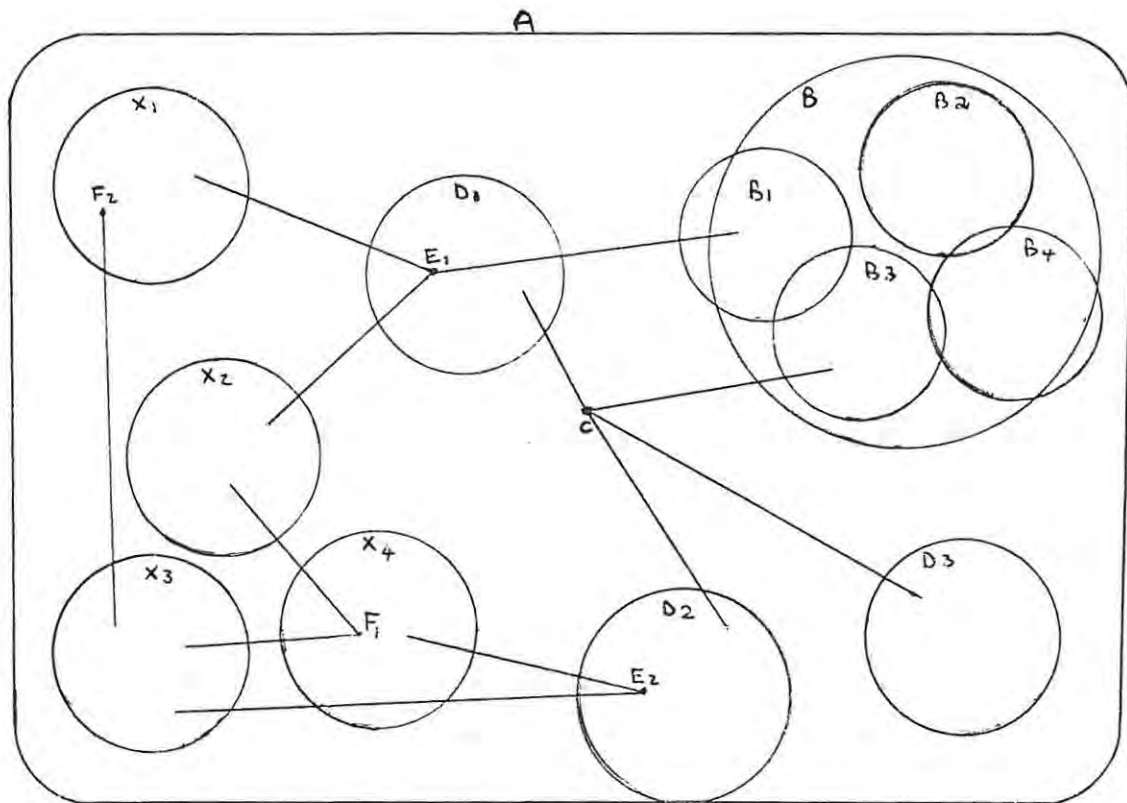
Key to the simplified phenomenological model of the factors involved in the attribution of authority:

A: Society as a whole, under which are subsumed different groups of influence (B[B1,B2,B3,B4],D1,D2,D3,X1,X2, etc.

B: Church; umbrella term under which are included various different christian groups (B1,B2,B3,B4).

C: Individual in question (who processes information uniquely) who attributes authority to scripture.

D: Diverse groups, with different 'sub-cultures', to which C belongs, with one of these being the university (or if not, then the university would have to be one of the X's with whom C comes into contact through the mediation of E).

E: People in the groups to which C belongs (D), which people themselves influence him. Each E processes information uniquely.

F: People who indirectly influence C through their mutual contact with E.

X: Groups that influence C indirectly through his direct
            contact with their members.

In terms of this model, therefore, we may state that the attribution
of authority to scripture is a unique and individual act in both scope
and content.   A number of factors conspire to produce this state of
affairs.   The individual, with his own unique way of processing
information [C], finds himself in a particular society with its own
peculiar culture.   He belongs to one of the christian churches [B3]
with its individual view of scripture.[13]   In addition, he belongs to a
number of other groups [D] with their own sets of values, where he
meets people [E] with their own cognitive styles who mediate to him
the values, to some extent, of the other groups to which they belong
[X], but to which he does not belong.   These people [E] themselves
mediate the indirect influence of other groups and their values and
outlooks through their encounters with people [F] whom they encounter
in the group [X] to which C himself does not belong.   It is this
complex web of interconnected influences that determines how the
individual understands the authority of scripture.   Since these
complex variables differ from person to person, it is not in the least
surprising that notions as to the meaning and scope of the authority
of scripture should differ from person to person - even as people
differ in their understanding and estimation in other areas.

To   conclude   this   subsection;   our   model   claims,   by   its
phenomenological appelation, to describe the elements involved in the
ongoing act of attributing authority to Scripture.   There can be no
doubt that, within a given society, there will be a large degree of
consensus concerning the sense in which the Bible may be regarded as
authoritative, by those who regard it as such (from the shape of our
model, with the act of attributing authority closely associated with
the christian denominations, it is clear that our concern originates
principally   from   the   desire   of   the   christian   to   benefit   from
'scientific' examination of the Bible, rather than from the historians
concern to do justice to the claims of these writings - although

clearly the latter possibility will inevitably be addressed by the aim of servicing the former), but also, given the nature of the forces outlined above, there will also be a great deal of diversity within these broad parameters. It would probably be accurate to describe this phenomenon, by no means unique, as that of bounded diversity. Now that we have drawn attention to the individual and largely unique (and here again, as we have noted, the diversity although considerable is bounded by the common cultural context in our example) understandings of the scope and content of scriptural authority to which diverse backgrounds, experiences and psychological makeup give rise, it is necessary to determine a way for the individual to hold in fruitful tension the two opposing notions of authority examined in sections one and two - even as the individual in other areas of life, regularly has to deal with conflicting data.

6.2   Towards the creation of a precipitative environment

In the previous subsection we observed that the sense that individuals make of the world in which they live is the product of the simultaneous operation of social forces and individual psychological tendencies and capacities. Clearly there is nothing new or unexpected in an observation like that. At the same time, however, the rooting of knowledge, values and understandings of the nature of reality firmly in factors and forces that derive from, and exist in, the everyday realities of the environment in which human beings exist, both social and psychological, is bound to have important implications for the resolution of conflicts involving fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of reality - such as the one, in our particular case, between that underlying the historical-critical approach to scripture and the one underpinning a 'devotional' approach to these writings. What we are proposing here is that by taking steps - ones to which our model in subsection 6.1 gives rise - it will be possible to create a 'precipitative environment'. By 'precipitative environment' we mean an environment which, from what we know of social forces operative in cognition, would be conducive to the resolution of the tensions in question, even if it would not - almost as a

mathematical equation — inevitably and automatically produce the desired outcome. In this environment individuals would be prompted or encouraged to address this problem and to arrive at their own unique solutions to it. It should be noted, prior to our more detailed presentation of the proposal outlined here, that this approach is not intended to exclude the possibility or reality, in principle, of the truth of the church's claims or of the operation of the supernatural in human life — all that we are suggesting is that, in so far as our particular issue is concerned, what is known about the natural forces operative in human life can be gainfully employed to increase the possibility of the christian communities benefitting from the results of the scientific study, so called, of scripture. It should also be pointed out, at the outset, that our approach does not presuppose a mechanistic or deterministic conception of human nature, in an almost Pavlovian sense. We are simply asserting that, in so far as we do know that human actions and perceptions are shaped to a great degree by social stimuli, it would be productive in the resolution of conflict to use what we know of the 'conditionedness' of human behaviour to focus the stimuli in such a way that the likelihood of a creative resolution of the conflict is heightened.

The conflict between the scientific approach to scripture and the more devotional approach should not be underestimated. What is at stake is not the way in which scripture alone should be viewed, but the way in which reality itself should be perceived and interpreted.[14] In this sense, therefore, and in the light of the fundamental differences in presupposition brought to light in sections one and two, we may classify the conflict between the two approaches to scripture as that termed 'veridical conflict' by Deutsch (1973:12):

> 'Veridical conflict. This type of conflict exists objectively and is perceived accurately. It is not contingent upon some easily altered feature of the environment.'[15]

In other words, the conflict between the scientific approach to

scripture and the more devotional approach exists in the presence of carefully considered positions that are, even after careful examination intent on reconciliation, opposed even from the level of basic premises and presuppositions. It is this state of affairs, therefore, that characterizes our approach as an attempt to hold the two approaches in a creative tension, rather than as an effort to resolve the conflict between these two altogether, which, under the circumstances, would simply amount to a return to the position of holding one view of the authority of scripture to the virtual exclusion of the other.

The question that naturally arises from this concerns the details of the way in which we hope, using what is known of the social roots of concept formation, to arrive at a creative solution to the problem that we address. The first step would be to ensure that the individual who wishes to reconcile these two opposing views should be closely involved with the reference groups to which the opposing views may be traced.[16] In this particular case the primary reference groups (and 'primary' is not used in the usual sociological manner [cf. Thio 1986:92ff], but simply denotes here the groups or institutions which quintessentially embody or represent the conflicting perceptions and values in the case at issue) would be the christian community, in whatever specific and institutionalized form, and the institution of learning, like the university, for example. Two points of clarification need to be made here. First, the conflicting notions under discussion here are by no means necessarily restricted to those two institutions - it is quite likely that they occur elsewhere and in varying relations elsewhere in society (precisely because, within a society, no two groups ever exist in isolation but are intimately bound to the society as a whole and its culture). The point here is simply that if one seeks to find the purest and most potentially conflicting forms of the two different approaches to the authority of scripture already outlined, the most likely place to discover them would be, according to our definition, in the christian community and in the university respectively (which does not necessarily and automatically imply that irreconcilable

positions will be found there since, and in this respect our solution shows itself to be largely descriptive, many of those who are intimately caught up in the 'scientific' approach to scripture are also active in the christian community). Second, it should be mentioned that because reference groups conflict with regard to a specific issue does not necessarily mean that they are totally at odds in every respect.

> 'Any specific social conflict is not purely conflicting. The problem is that the word conflict is being used in two different senses. In one sense we refer to a struggle, fight, confrontation, or other opposition between adversaries with what they believe to be incompatible goals. In the other we refer to a quality or aspect of a social relationship. In other words, the relations between any two groups have conflicting, cooperative, accommodative, and many other qualities. We may abstract from that totality those aspects which are conflicting.'
> (Kriesberg 1973:276)

The most basic, preparatory, step upon which the creative resolution of the tension between the critical and the devotional approaches to the authority of scripture depends is therefore the exposure of the individual to the respective subcultures (used in the more general sense alluded to by Leslie et al. 1973:175) of the primary reference groups - in this case the church and the university. In other words, for the individual to appreciate fully the views undergirding the point of conflict there needs to be a socialization into the values and norms of both reference groups. In practice this will mean a preference for the values of one reference group as opposed to the other - for example, one is either attempting to enrich one's christian concept of scriptural authority, or one is attempting, from a perspective of an interest in religious phenomena in general, to gain a deeper insight into the value of religious writings for religious communities. This, given the nature of the conflict, is inevitable.

The creation of a precipitative environment will be further

facilitated by the existence of a cooperative spirit between the two reference groups. If it is true that the individual would be extremely hard-pressed indeed to hold in a fruitful tension the views of two violently opposed groups of people, it is equally true, and follows on naturally from this, that a cooperative environment will contribute a great deal to the goal we desire - even if the cooperation of the reference groups arises out of different notions as to what may be achieved by this cooperation.[17] As Deutsch (1973:363) has noted, a cooperative environment facilitates free access to a wide range of information, highlights relevant issues, encourages an appreciation of the legitimacy of the other's interests, and leads to a trusting attitude which 'stimulates a convergence of beliefs and values.' (In addition to the benefits that the individual will reap from the cooperation between the two major reference groups, in this case, broadly, the church and the university, both the institutions will also benefit from the breadth of vision gained from an openness that has a lasting force, beyond just the demands and personalities of the present conflicts [cf. Deutsch 1973:365].) In order for the positive outcome that we desire to be achieved, therefore, there has to be the desire of the individual and the reference group to accommodate the conflicting views of the other reference group (equivalent in essense to a desire to achieve a combination, with qualification, of Kriesberg's [1973:270] 'compromise' and 'conversion' outcomes).[18] The rich soil out of which the solution that we desire grows, therefore, is the commitment of the individual to an immersion in the subculture of the other group - while still seeking to preserve his/her continuity of identity with the reference group from which the journey of discovery was initiated (without this the danger is heightened that simple defection, instead of accommodation, will result). The growth towards a solution is further hastened and encouraged by cooperation between the primary reference groups, which not only facilitates the quest of the individual but also enables productive, creative solutions to be assimilated into the subculture of the group.

The simple principles that we have outlined indicate that the ideas

that we seek to hold in fruitful tension cannot be reconciled purely, if at all, on the level of arguments, ideas, and abstractions. They have their roots within human experiences and conflicting positions are intelligible precisely because of this and because within a society there is a culture in terms of which subcultures have access to one another.

> 'This area of limited sameness and limited difference is called <u>culture</u>.'   (Malina 1986:6)

The way forward, in holding the 'scientific' and 'devotional' approaches to scripture in a creative tension, is to be sought, therefore, in the experiences and perceptions of the reality of human life undergirding these conflicting models of reality – and in the desire to listen with a deep respect to the crystallizations of these life experiences, even, and perhaps especially, where they conflict with one's own. Furthermore, it is because the two approaches to scripture that we have examined are crystallizations of perceptions of life experiences that no final and systematic solution to the problem at hand is possible. That is why we have sought rather to speak of the conditions conducive to a creative solution – the 'precipitative environment', so called – because more is to be gained by outlining stimuli to solution than by giving one particular, idiosyncratic, solution as such. It is from this environment that creative talents can bring forth the solutions that are particularly relevant to their situations and which can lead to the creative reinterpretation of the christian tradition in a way that is sensitive to modern perceptions of reality, to which christians are always intimately bound (so that, as we intimated earlier, the question of reconciling the two approaches to scripture mentioned previously is none other than that of the meaning and relevance of the christian faith in a world which tends to perceive reality in a way different from the way in which it is viewed in scripture).

> 'Although an unpressured and unthreatening environment

facilitates the restructuring of a problem or conflict
and, by so doing, makes it more amenable to solution, the
ability to reformulate a problem and develop solutions is,
in turn, dependent upon the availability of cognitive
resources. Ideas <u>are</u> important to the creative resolution
of conflict, and any factors that broaden the range of
ideas and alternatives cognitively available to the
participants in a conflict will be useful. Intelligence,
the exposure to diverse experiences, an interest in ideas,
a preference for the novel and complex, a receptivity to
metaphors and analogies, the capacity to make remote
associations, an independence of judgement, and the
ability to play with ideas are some of the personal
factors that characterize creative problem solvers.'
(Deutsch 1973:362)

It may be said, in fact, by way of a conclusion, that the solution
that we propose, to the problem of the fruitful reconciliation between
historical-critical approaches to the New Testament and more
devotional readings of scripture, is posited upon a dynamic and
extremely complex, multi-faceted and multi-storeyed 'fusion of
horizons'[19] – the accomplishment of which is encouraged by the
creation of a precipitative environment.

Endnotes

1.   This does not necessarily indicate an implicit agreement
with Parson's equilibrium theory, so called, since we are
referring here to only the most basic tenets of
sociological theory, with which sociologists in general
agree. We are referring here, for example, to the
mechanisms of socialization whereby the person is
integrated into the society through the taking on of a
certain role or roles. In speaking of the equilibrium in
a society, therefore, we intend to convey nothing more, at
this stage, than the axiomatic position that societies are
able to exert a certain cohesive pressure on groups within
them - so that even groups that hold very different, even
strongly opposed, views may frequently co-exist within the
same society without the society disintegrating under the
pressure of the opposed forces. In a very real sense,
except in the type of extreme situations foreseen by
Marx's conflict theory, so called, society is able to hold
together within its parameters strongly opposed views.
What we shall be doing in this third section is to follow
through the hunch that opposition within a society, except
where it leads to the sudden reshaping of a society (as in
Marx's conflict theory), is really only a qualified
disagreement - one that rests on a broader and more
prevalent culturally based consensus. We shall,
therefore, pursue this theory to see whether there is any
evidence to support it. After this we shall seek an
application for its implications in the opposed views of
authority that we have outlined.

> 'A society is a collection of relationships. These
> relationships are ordered in a vast number of ways.
> Some are rigid and highly structured. Others are
> loose and informal. We have groups that are large.
> Others are small. Some are friendly whereas others
> are impersonal. The sum total of these groups add
> up to a society.' (Denisoff and Wahrman 1975:126)

2.   In order to achieve this end, we shall make use of particularly sociology, anthropology, and social psychology, since the nature, ordering, and operation of societies is their special concern.

> 'Sociology is the study of those aspects of man that result from his being a member of society. In other words, sociologists are interested in the consequences of the fact that people live and die among other people, that they exist in groups.' (Denisoff and Wahrman 1975:9)

Sociology is thus the study of groups – the dynamics within groups and the interrelation between groups. The fact that the churches, where ideas like those expressed in section two are most likely to be held, are religious groups, as opposed to secular groups, does not place them beyond the scope of sociological investigation.

> 'The major point that we are making is that although the subject matter of religion may be unique and although it may claim a unique (namely supernatural) source for its norms and roles, yet as the religious group organizes itself and sets about doing what it feels it should be doing, it exhibits all the features of any and all other groups.' (Johnstone 1975:101)

[Also cf. Johnstone 1975:6, but note that in sociology's attempt to describe religion without speaking of its truth or falsity (ibid 4) it may actually be presenting a presupposition-based truncation (cf., for example, Lowry and Rankin in 1977:26; Dixon 1980:6) that is analagous to the product of the historical-critical approach to scripture outlined in section one. This is a consideration that will have to be worked into the texture of the solution.]

While sociology offers the benefit of scientific method (cf. Johnstone 1975:4) in an area often obscured by devotional fervour, anthropology is able further to illuminate this area by placing the churches within their

broader context in society. Sociology acknowledges that
groups do not occur in isolation and that an investigation
of ·a group is only complete once its interrelations with
other groups within a society have been investigated.
Anthropology, however, which is far broader, is able to
provide unique insights into the role of the churches
within society and the nature of religion as a human
activity.

> 'Anthropology is devoted to the study of human
> beings. It is concerned with the variety of ways
> they live, with the development of those ways over
> time, and with the development of their bodies and
> the ways their bodies influence their lives. Its
> task is to examine all humanity in order to
> contribute to its understanding of itself.'
> (Swartz and Jordan 1976:2)

An essential aspect of human life, in all its various
manifestations, is the central role played by meaning.
Human life is always conducted within a sphere of beliefs
concerning its meaning.

[cf. Swartz and Jordan (1976:3):

> 'All anthropologists agree that "culture" refers to
> shared ways of believing, evaluating, and doing that
> are passed from generation to generation and from
> person to person within a group through the process
> of learning. Each human group has its own
> distinctive culture, which provides the basis for
> the way group members make their living, relate to
> one another and outsiders, deal with the
> supernatural and all other aspects of the group's
> way of life.'

To put it differently:

> 'Belief systems deal with everything human beings
> perceive and with everything they can imagine.
> Indeed, it is through belief systems that human
> beings give meanings to their experiences.'
> (Hunter and Whitten 1976a:211)

> 'Two types of belief are described: Instrumental
> beliefs concern primarily the tasks necessary for

survival; <u>transcendental beliefs</u> involve states and elements of existence inherently beyond the perceptual capacities of human senses - things that cannot be learned about directly from human experience. Both forms of belief systems provide the framework through which human beings give meaning and purpose to their existence.' (<u>ibid</u>. 231)]

A primary concern of anthropology is, therefore, the relation between life and religion (as part of its wider concern with the relation between life and meaning) - it is concerned with the part played by religion in the explanations by people, and societies, of who they are and why they do what they do.

'The key problem in anthropological analysis of religion today is credibility: How is it that people find a given set of ideas about the supernatural compelling and believable? The answer seems to lie in the discovery that patterns of understanding about the supernatural are related to patterns of understanding about other things. The understandings of the supernatural and the understandings of the secular, workaday world, reinforce each other at numerous crucial points, and each gives an increased sense of inevitability to the other.' (Swartz and Jordan 1976:681)

In conjunction, therefore, sociology and anthropology are able to interpret the structure of society as well as the relation of the society to a common culture within which the various dynamics within society are rooted, while also being able to provide an understanding of the role of meaning in human life - which, as we shall see, is the central area of conflict underlying our task of integration. In addition to this social psychology, which is the '<u>scientific study of the personal and situational factors that affect individual social behavior</u>' (Shaver 1981:12), offers the sort of information concerning the way in which individuals adjust to differing perceptions and opinions to those which they hold.

In a sense our effort to reconcile, to whatever degree,

the historical-critical approach to scripture with a more devotional attitude derives directly from what canonical criticism has reinforced - the connection between ideas and human life. Ideas, like those that we seek to reconcile, are grounded, in whatever sense, firmly in the act of coping with the rigours and demands of life in the world. As such, therefore, as we shall make clear in the body of this chapter, the reconciliation, or accommodation, that we desire has to be grounded in the social and experiential roots of human understandings of reality - and not simply in the effort to hold together two expressions or aspects, treated in isolation. If the task that we wish to accomplish is to be really successful, therefore, as we shall show, the conceptual universes, grounded firmly in lived experience, of which the two attitudes to the authority of scripture are representative, need to be brought to reconciliation - and not just two partial aspects of each.

> 'It is a cluster of sacred symbols, woven into some sort of ordered whole, which makes up a religious system.' (Geertz 1975:129)

In this regard, although it is of no immediate relevance to the development of our argument as such, we may, in order further to clarify the rationale undergirding our proposed solution, point to the mathematical development frequently termed 'fuzzy mathematics':

> 'Mathematics has set theory at its foundations, and, similarly, fuzzy mathematics is based upon the concept of a fuzzy set. In classical set theory an object either is or is not a member of a set, but in real life there are seldom such clear-cut, dichotomies ... [and so] fuzzy set theory tries to encode a concept of set membership that acknowledges ambiguity.' (French 1986:361)

3.   cf. Bolton (1977:113):

> 'Within the last few years several investigators

have proposed that individuals differ in the way in which they process information, that these are enduring features of an individual personality, and that such differences have repercussions for cognitive functioning.'

4.   cf. Aronfreed (1968:16)

'It is obvious that the external contingencies of the child's immediate social environment exercise a profound control over its behavior throughout the course of its socialization. The more remarkable consequence of social experience, however, is that it gives the child's acquired behavioral dispositions a stability which shows an increasing independence of external control. The young child's social behavior is initially highly dependent on the affective value of external events which are transmitted through the presence and activity of socializing agents. But its behavior gradually comes to be governed extensively by internal monitors.'

5.   cf. Aronfreed (1968:68):

'The outline of behavior-contingent mechanisms of socialization makes it apparent that much of a child's control over its conduct is mediated by representational and evaluative cognition which intervenes between concrete stimulus events and specific forms of behavior.'

6.   cf. Perry and Bussey (1984:166,167):

'In relation to the development of causal attribution, children acquire schemes that help them to detect the causes of events, to differentiate between accidental and intentional acts, to distinguish among intentional actions on the basis of the actor's motive (e.g. to tell a well-intentioned act from an ill-intentioned act), and to decide whether to hold an actor or the situation responsible for an actor's behavior.'

7.   cf. Downs (1971:37):

'... we have defined culture as a map which each of us has implanted in his mind and body by the society into which he is born. This map defines reality and sets the guidelines for behavior in most situations in which man finds himself. It establishes the

rules for resolving problems or explaining events not normally encountered.'

8.   cf. Hunt (1982:177):

> 'The human mind, as I said earlier, makes order out of its experiences not only by grouping them in categories but by noticing patterns or regularities in the way things happen.'

9.   Interestingly enough, it is precisely this tension that is the subject of Carroll's book When prophecy failed (1979). He applies Festinger's principle of cognitive dissonance to the area of Old Testament prophecy. Prophetic utterences embodied models for interpreting the nature of reality and life in the world. When, however, prophetic predictions did not materialise or were thwarted by the progress of history, a tension was introduced between model and reality that called into question the reality it claimed to mediate.

> 'According to Festinger dissonance is a noxious state that people will attempt to reduce or resolve and his theory is mainly about models of dissonance resolution.' (87)

Carroll's book is concerned with showing the various ways in which this prophetic dissonance was resolved – ranging from a reconsideration of the prophecy to the overlooking of conflicting evidence.

10.   cf. 'Adaptation in the cognitive sphere is a balance between assimilatory and accommodatory activity, it is the fulfilment of an intention through attentional acts which are guided by, but not subordinated to, the intention. The two aspects of cognitive functioning are in reality inseparable, although they may be distinguished conceptually, and it is this fact which is responsible for the essential characteristic of intellectual advance, namely, that every cognitive achievement represents both a development from the implicit (as the intention is fulfilled) and a development in the range of experience subtended by the categories we employ.' (Bolton 1977:115)

11.   The complexity of this tension between 'attention deployment' and 'analytic ability' (Bolton 1977:126) may be seen in the following extract:

> 'There is a vast difference, of course, between the failure to screen out irrelevant stimuli and the ability to make use of incidental cues or between an obsessive focusing upon one aspect of a situation and the ability to articulate part of the perceptual field. The difference between the adaptive and the maladaptive uses of these two kinds of attention deployment is in both cases to be found in the differing relationship between the intentional and the attentional aspects of behaviour. Broad screening is adaptive and useful when guided by an intention which remains tacit in order for new information to be assimilated; without that tacit intention it deteriorates into mere overinclusion; similarly, the focused attention of a field independent orientation results in cognitive gain in so far as it is supported by an organization of experience which, being tacit, is the ground which is as important in the construction of the whole as is the figure, the focus of attention. And without this tacit experience it deteriorates into a rigidly narrow intention.' (<u>ibid</u>. 118, 119)

12.   cf. Pugh (1978:365):

> 'The individual is motivated by an innate value structure that includes the desire for social approval as well as a wide range of other innate values that define his personal preferences ... the individual's objective is to achieve maximum satisfaction in terms of his <u>total</u> complex of innate values. As a consequence he is inevitably involved in a conflict between the objective of social approval and his personal preferences.'

13.   While we are dealing with the relative meaning of the attribution of authority to scripture, and particularly while we are speaking of the impact of ecclesiastical institutions on the attribution of authority to scripture by the individual, let us draw attention to the way in which authority is understood differently (hemmed in by differing qualifications) by different christian denominations.

Let us begin with the most basic of questions — why do people join groups like the churches? What was it that gave impetus to the formation of the group, and why do people continue to join this group (cf. Vander Zanden 1979:177).

Clearly the formation of groups is itself subject to this 'problem solving' motivation attributed to human actions. People join groups, or form them, to achieve specific goals and objectives — even though they may not realise the full import of their actions (cf. Johnstone 1975:15). Goals vary from group to group, but religious groups, broadly speaking, have two interrelated purposes. In fact, it would probably be more accurate to say that religion has a single purpose mediated by two complementary thrusts. In the first place, religion offers the members of the group a sense of meaning and purpose:

> 'Religion can provide at least the illusion of information and practical means of coping.'
> (Swartz and Jordan 1976:670)

This meaning, however, is not an isolated and completely individual one. The individual never exists in isolation, but always in a complex web of relations with other people. In order for there to be this interrelationship, however, there needs to be a certain degree of shared understandng about the world, other people, and so on. This is culture — a broadly common way of viewing the elements of which human life in the world is composed. It follows, therefore, that the meaning which an individual finds in religion is a meaning which will help him or her to cope with life in his or her particular society — so that religion and culture are intimately and reciprocally interrelated.

> 'Religion is viewed by anthropologists as a system of symbolic transformations of chaotic reality

through which human beings provide themselves with conceptions of a general order of existence which they accept as true and real. The moods and convictions which are generated by the symbolic experiences of religion reinforce the general world views of each society and contribute to the motivation of its people. Religion and its associated myths are directed toward stating the meaning of life and why and on what terms human beings should seek fulfilment.' (Hoebel and Weaver 1979:551)

'Culturally molded cognition is the way in which we create order in our world.' (Hunter and Whitten 1976a:210)

The way in which people view the world, events in it, their reasons for doing what they do, and so on, are largely dependent on the way in which the group, society, to which they belong views these concerns. In consequence, as religion offers the individual meaning it does so in terms of the categories of his or her culture, thereby at the same time serving the purpose of integrating him or her into the society. Religious groups therefore act as mechanisms of socialization too (although as Hunter and Whitten [1976b:304] observe, this does not necessarily imply an unquestioning support for the existing social order).

'In this connection we may regard religion as being, like other social institutions, a means of orienting a person in society. It performs the extremely important function of relating any given individual to the remainder of his human community, of showing him the duties and ties by and through which he becomes a member of his group....' (Wells 1970:251) [cf.Wilson 1971:40 - who states that it is precisely because religion sets standards for all believers, no matter what their social status, that it is able to perform this function so effectively.]

In this fact may be found a clue, it would seem, to the diversity of christian churches. The rich cultural diversity out of which the various churches arose and in which they exist would seem to be the primary root of the

division within the christian church. All the churches
share the belief that there is something about Jesus
Christ that is of continuing significance for the ongoing
lives of their members. Since there is great diversity
of culture, and even great diversity within a given
culture, all of the churches interpret Jesus Christ in a
way that is commensurate with the complex but common
elements peculiar to the way in which their members
understand their lives within the world. Arising directly
from this statement is the question of the authority of
the churches and the relation of this ecclesiastical
authority to the authority of scripture. A point of
entry into this question is suggested by the import and
meaning of the institutional nature of the churches:

> 'Our existence as social beings confronts us with a
> variety of perennial problems. Institutions afford
> the established answers to these recurring problems.
> They are the principal instruments whereby the
> essential tasks of social living are organized,
> directed and executed. Each institution is built
> about a standardized solution to a set of problems
> and we classify institutions on this basis.'
> (Vander Zanden 1979:400)

The founders of the individual churches were able to
convince their followers (to put it rather simplistically)
that they had discovered the meaning of life, and that it
had been mediated to them by God, who had opened their
eyes and brought them to the true understanding of Jesus
Christ - who was, in some way or other, the source of this
life. For whatever reason, the vision of the founder
struck a deep chord in some people - who then became his
followers. Initially these breakaway groups would have
been informal and almost indistinguishable from the parent
groups out of which they had arisen and from which they
were becoming increasingly alienated. Initially group
life would have been informal and the rites simple. As
time passed, however, it would have been felt that the
previously informal, less rigid organization of the group

endangered the continuation of the first, powerful, motivating vision. Freedom of action and expression within the group would have been perceived as threatening to overwhelm the special, unique character of the group. The group would have to be structured in such a way as to ensure that everything it did, and the individuals within it, was directed to preserving, intact, the initial vision of the founder. Only in this way could the potentially destructive, devisive tendencies of individual members of the group be contained and kept within acceptable limits.

> 'The intent of formalization procedures is thus to achieve a social order and a degree of stability through the patterned conduct of individuals and social units. As a coordination mechanism, formalization is an attempt to anticipate possible variations and to reduce these to an acceptable range of desired behaviour through the use of guidelines, rules and regulations. Formalization begets formalization, and in time the resulting volume necessitates that the rules be codified in written form to ensure that they are consistent and enduring.' (White 1981:167) [cf. Olsen 1968:69]

Let us examine, briefly, the mechanisms that ensure that the churches continue to function without disintegrating. Johnstone (1975:101ff) has outlined five requirements that have to be satisfied if the group is to continue to function. To begin with, the group has to ensure that there are always members - that there are always people who want to join the group. It must also ensure that these new members have been carefully schooled in the values and practices of the group (cf. Vander Zanden 1979:107). In addition to this, the group must ensure that its members continue to live in accordance with its shared values:

> '...[the] task groups must perform is that of preserving order. Essentially this task involves coordinative roles, but above all it means motivating members to pursue group goals while employing and abiding by group norms.' (Johnstone 1975:105)

If the group is to continue to function, each member must contribute to preserving the vision by ensuring that he or she does exactly what is expected of him or her. As Vander Zanden (1979:213) points out, there are usually three principal factors that ensure individual conformity. The individual internalizes many of the group norms and values - largely unconsciously (cf. Rose and Rose 1969:145; Olsen 1968:124). Secondly, and closely related to the previous factor, socialization has been so effective that the group member is not even aware of 'alternative modes of behaviour'. Thirdly, a system of punishments and rewards is used to reinforce the desired behaviour (cf. Rose and Rose 1969:129). This careful control by the group ensures that the perennial problem, for which the group formed in the first place, continues to be afforded the answer that was initially so helpful. Social control ensures that group members positively promote the solution - or at the least, prevents them from undermining the problem solving ability of the group. Each member promotes the common good by playing out a carefully orchestrated role.

> 'Roles do not exist by themselves in isolation from one another. A role is linked with a number of interdependent, complementary roles termed a role-set. Roles impinge on us as sets of norms that define our rights - the actions that we can legitimately insist that others perform - and duties - the actions that others can legitimately insist we perform. The rights that attach to a role are the duties attached to its reciprocal role or roles, and vice versa. We are locked by life into the same social arena through networks of reciprocal roles - the rights of one end of the relationship being the duties of the other.' (Vander Zanden 1979:142)

This social control - where everyone knows 'who does what, when, and where' (Vander Zanden 1979:142) - provides the co-operative environment in which Johnstone's (1975:104,105) third and fifth prerequisites for the continued existence of the group may be met:

'A third prerequisite for the continued existence of
all groups is the production and distribution of a
level of goods and services that will satisfy at
least the minimal requirements or demands of its
members.'

'The fifth primary prerequisite that groups must
fulfill if they hope to survive is the maintenance
of a sense of purpose among its members.'

In the case of the churches, members must feel that they
are being provided with a sense of purpose and an
understanding of life that helps them to cope with its
demands. This is where the authority of the churches may
be understood to operate. The churches derive their
authority from their ability to convince their members
that they provide an adequate and sustaining view of life.
Members attribute authority to the churches because these
have been able to explain their experiences of life and
grant them a desirable and realistic goal for their lives.
The ongoing authority of the churches is evidenced in
their continued ability to elicit the support of their
members by their explanations and to exact from them a
specified way of life. Each separate church, or
denomination, has this authority - and each attributes to
the others a qualified authority that is commensurate with
its perception of the similarity between them (cf. Mack
and Pease 1973:471). Just as each church has its own
authority, so too will scripture play different roles in
different churches and be interpreted differently. Just
as the authority structure is different in each church -
with various common and peculiar elements arranged in a
unique meaning-giving order - so too will scripture occupy
a unique position, a different position, in all the
churches.

Our provisional conclusion is that it would be inaccurate
to speak of the authority of scripture, except in the most
general terms, without reference to the diversity of

christian churches. It is true that scripture does, to
some degree and in differing ways, inform the self
understanding of all these groups. It would be
misleading, however, to emphasise the continuity in views
at the expense of the discontinuity.

In order to demonstrate that a full understanding of the
authority of scripture depends on careful attention to
denominational peculiarities, let us examine the official
positions, regarding scripture, of the Roman Catholic
Church, the Methodist Church of South Africa and the
Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa - which three
examples will be adequate to illustrate the principle of
denominational relativity. Let us begin with an
examination of the position of scripture in the Roman
Catholic Church.

The source of our information regarding scripture in the
Roman Catholic Church is the Vatican II document entitled
De divina revelatione (Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium
Vaticanum Secundum 1965). A characteristic of the
Vatican II pronouncements on scripture is the close
connection between scripture and tradition. Scripture and
the tradition of the church interact in such a way as to
guide the church to its divinely ordained goal and climax.
Neither scripture nor tradition is able to dominate the
other. Both come from God's divine activity of
revelation and were intended to function, from the
beginning, in co-operation.

> 'Sacra Traditio ergo et Sacra Scriptura arcte inter
> se connectuntur atque communicant. Nam ambae, ex
> eadem divina scaturigine promanantes, in unum
> quodommodo coalescunt et in eundem finem tendunt.
> Etenim Sacra Scriptura est locutio Dei quatenus
> divino afflante Spiritu scripto consignatur; Sacra
> autem Traditio verbum Dei, a Christo Domino et a
> Spiritu Sancto Apostolis concreditum, successoribus
> eorum integre transmittit, ut illud, praelucente
> Spiritu veritatis, praeconio suo fideliter servent,

exponant atque diffundant; quo fit ut Ecclesia
certitudinem suam de omnibus revelatis non per solam
Sacram Scripturam hauriat.' (II 9)

'Sacra Traditio et Sacra Scriptura unum verbi Dei
sacrum depositum constituunt Ecclesiae commissum
....' (II 10) [Also cf. VI 23)

At the same time, however, scripture and tradition can
only carry out their purpose of guiding the church if they
are interpreted correctly (cf. the argument presented by
Tertullian [deriving initially from Hegesippus and
Irenaeus] that the heretics should not be allowed access
to scripture because they do not interpret it according to
the rule of faith - Liber de praescriptionibus adversus
haereticos xv). Only those officially authorised by the
church have the authority to interpret scripture - since
they alone will be guided to its true meaning.

'Munus autem authentice interpretandi verbum Dei
scriptum vel traditum soli vivo Ecclesia Magisterio
concreditum est, cuius auctoritas in nomine Iesu
Christi exercetur. Quod quidem Magisterium non
supra verbum Dei est, sed eidem ministrat, docens
nonnisi quod traditum est, quatenus illud, ex divino
mandato et Spiritu sancto assistente, pie audit,
sancte custoditet fideliter exponit, ad ea omnia ex
hoc uno fidei deposito haurit quae tamquam divinitus
revelata credenda proponit.

Patet igitur Sacram Traditionem, Sacram Scripturam
et Ecclesiae Magisterium, iuxta sapientissimum Dei
consilium, ita inter se connecti et consociari, ut
unum sine aliis non consistat omniaque simul,
singula suo modo sub actione unius Spiritus Sancti,
ad animarum salutem efficaciter conferant.' (II 10)
[Also cf. II 7]

In the Roman Catholic Church scripture is considered only
one of a number of authorities - which authorities
interact in a comlex way. Furthermore, scripture is only
considered authoritative if interpreted in an officially
sanctioned way. In this situation, therefore, scripture
occupies a place and has meaning, and is authoritative,

only within the context of – or in relation to – other specifically Roman Catholic structures.   Let us turn our attention to the Methodist Church of South Africa.   The source of our information in this case is <u>A manual of the laws and discipline of the Methodist Church of South Africa</u>, fourth edition (Methodist Church 1962).   Again we are presented with a situation that is very similar to the one found in the Roman Catholic Church – although the extent to which scripture is subjected to other ecclesiastical factors is not as frankly acknowledged (cf. Marxsen 1972:20; Cahill 1965:330).   Scripture is recognized as the supreme authority in matters of belief and practical living – provided that it is understood within the context of Methodism's protestant heritage and provided that interpretation is carried out with due attention to this church's specifically Methodist character.

> 'The Methodist Church throughout the world confesses the Headship of our Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledges the Divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice, rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic faith, and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic Creeds of the Protestant Reformation.' (2)

> 'The Doctrines of the Evangelical Faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning, and still holds, are based upon the Divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures.   The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice.   These Evangelical Doctrines, to which the Preachers of the Methodist Church, Ministerial and Lay, are pledged, are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.   The notes on the New Testament and the forty-four Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist Preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.' (5)

In the case of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
- our source is the Manual of law, practice and procedure
(Presbyterian Church n.d.) - our previous findings are
again confirmed. Scripture is accorded a central
position - but in the context of a peculiarly Presbyterian
web of interconnections. This may be seen in the
Preamble to the articles of faith:

> 'The Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
> acknowledges as its supreme standard of faith and
> life the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,
> and as its subordinate standard the Twenty-four
> Articles of the Faith adopted by the General
> Assembly in 1897.
>
> The Church recognizes liberty of opinion on such
> points in its subordinate standard as do not enter
> into the substance of faith, while it retains full
> authority in any case which may arise to determine
> what falls within this description and to guard
> against any abuse of this liberty to the injury of
> unity and peace.' (79)

The evidence that we have examined briefly - relating to
three different churches - supports our provisional
conclusion. Authority is a property attributed by the
community of faith to scripture. This attribution is,
however, only one of a number of attributions on the part
of the community of faith. In all the churches scripture
is attributed with essential powers of illumination and
guidance - however, all the churches have it restrained in
different positions in their peculiar understandings of
themselves. In the different communities of faith
scripture is hedged in by generically similar but
substantially different provisional clauses of acceptance.
Each church accepts scripture as authoritative in terms of
its own rule of faith and subject to its own particular
traditions and the provisions stipulated by these.

[This relativity in the meaning poured into the term
'authority' as it is applied to scripture by the churches
is further highlighted by the varying approaches evidenced

by churches to _de adultera_, interestingly enough. It is
hardly surprising that none of the churches has made any
mention of the story of the woman caught in adultery in
connection with their dogmatic positions vis-à-vis
scripture; so that we will have to look elsewhere to
gauge the impact of ecclesiastical diversity on the
question of the adulteress.   Let us, therefore, return
briefly to the discussion of the nature and function of
groups.   It was mentioned that if a group hoped to
continue to function it would have to convince its members
that their needs, that had brought them to the group in
the first place, were being met.   The focal point of this
sense of purpose, and the conviction of needs being met,
would be the meeting together of the group members
conscious of their meeting as a group - and this, for the
religious group, would be the religious ceremony.   The
religious ceremony consists of words and symbolic actions
that express and reinforce the group myth and meet the
needs of the members.   The religious ceremony strengthens
the group - by dramatically, in word and deed, confirming
identity and purpose - and binds it closer to society at
large (although not necessarily, as we mentioned, in a
naïvely affirmative way).   At the very heart of the group
identity is, therefore, the ability to use symbols which,
in the case of the religious group, refers to the pregnant
vessels of supernatural meaning that define the group's
belief about the other-worldly and so stipulate the
relation of that to this world - and in so doing give the
group a rationale for its belief and action.   Because it
is the religious ceremony that is so central to the group
identity, it is that area that must be investigated to
determine the things that are important to the group -
with their inclusion being regarded as an indication that
they are deemed important and authoritative.   It is for
this reason that the religious ceremonies of the churches
will be examined to ascertain whether _de adultera_ is
included or pointedly excluded.

It is hardly surprising, given the pivotal role of the religious ceremony, that formalization should be evidenced in the services of the churches (cf. Moltmann 1977:264). In the face of a great diversity of possible ways of ordering the religious ceremony, with potentially great diversity of meaning, the religious group carefully structures the way in which it conducts its ceremonies – thus preserving the group's identity. The product of this process of formalization in christian worship is the carefully fashioned liturgies of the various churches. To ascertain the importance attributed by the churches to John 7:53-8:11 it is necessary, therefore, to determine whether it features in the liturgies of the churches that show signs of formalization. Since the lectionary is that part of the liturgical apparatus concerned with the allocation of scripture readings for the maintenance of the group, it is to this, more specifically, that we should turn for clues concerning the importance attributed to de adultera by the churches (cf. Sanders 1977:162). Our task, a phenomenological study of lectionaries to gauge whether there is universal acceptance or rejection of the story of the adulteress among the different churches, is considerably simplified by the existence of an ecumenical lectionary (see White 1980:70), to which many of the traditionally 'Western churches', so called, subscribe (the churches included are the: Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed, and the Churches of Christ). As far as the gospels are concerned, the aim of those who produced the lectionary was to make sure that these were read as a whole – so that the writer's line of thought could be followed (cf. Coughlan and Purdue 1970:1). In addition to this, the ecumenical lectionary is structured in such a way as to cover as much of the Bible as possible:

> 'The new lectionary provides the most comprehensive method now available for reading the entire Bible

that can be accomplished in three years.' (White 1980:71)

An examination of this ecumenical lectionary reveals that de adultera is conspicuously absent (see Jasper 1978:62-65). In spite of the determination to include the gospel in toto - evidenced by the rendering of the whole of the rest of John's gospel - it would seem as if the desire to follow the writer's line of reasoning has led to the exclusion of this passage. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that because of this desire, to include the whole of the gospel, this late passage has been omitted. To all intents and purposes this passage has been excluded from playing a continuing role in the life of these churches. On the basis of our sociological and anthropological model, this passage has ceased to be authoritative in the churches that accept the ecumenical lectionary.

Surprisingly, the situation in the Greek Orthodox Church is considerably different. Due to cultural and language barriers limiting access to written sources, the results presented here are the product of an interview with Father Emmanuel of the Hellenic Community in Bloemfontein. The liturgical year begins, for the Greek Orthodox Church, at Easter with the reading of the whole of John's Gospel - included in which is the unquestioned acceptance of the pericope de adultera. This finding is suprising since it was in the West that the story of the woman taken in adultery was first accepted - centuries before it found even limited acceptance in the East. It is ironic that today the story is rejected by many 'Western churches', so called, while it finds a certain degree of unquestioned acceptance in the 'Eastern churches', so called.]

14.   cf. for example, Deutsch (1973:16):

         'Opposition to one's securely held fundamental
         beliefs is a challenge to one's grasp on reality.

> If you cannot have confidence in what you perceive
> and believe, your ability to act rationally is
> undermined.'

It is for this reason, too, that the creative resolution
of the conflict which we are investigating holds open the
possibility of providing a firm support on which may be
constructed a relevant and contextualized biblical
hermeneutic — since our task is essentially that of
reconciling two opposed views of reality.

15.   It should be pointed out that the approach that we shall
outline is not predicated upon the perceived possibility
of an easy solution to this conflict. Furthermore, it
should also be noted that Deutch's opinion concerning
'some easily altered feature of the environment' should
not be interpreted as a denial of the approach that we
propose, but should instead be seen in the context of the
other types of conflict he defines (pp 12ff) — conflicts
to which, by comparison, solutions are more readily
available.

16.   cf. Leslie, et al. (1973:196):

> 'Reference groups are those whose standards the
> individual takes as particularly relevant to use as
> as a basis for evaluating important aspects of his
> own life.'

In this sense, the latent world-view associated with the
concept of reference groups (also cf. Thio 1986:92) makes
it a particularly valuable concept for describing the
tensions between the group origins of the two positions
with which we are dealing.

17.   While it is clearly true that hostility between between
the reference groups would make progress in reconciliation
extremely difficult for the individual, there is more to
the necessity of the involvement of the reference groups
than that alone — or even primarily. The really important

question upon which the involvement of the reference
groups is posited is that of identity. Would the
christian, for example, who sought to reconcile his views
of scripture with an historical-critical approach really
be able to do so if in the process he had to distance
himself from other christians and arrive at a position of
isolation from them? Would a solution, no matter how
ingenious, still be classifiable as a christian solution
if the person seeking the solution found that his answer
had separated him from the rest of the christian
community? More likely than not, the initial separation
from the community would ultimately lead to the inability
to identify with group symbols and myths - so that what
initially might have appeared to be a mediating position
is soon separated from its mooring to the reference group.
This would lead to a loss of continuity with the christian
community in which the peculiar 'christianness' of the
movement exists. This desire that we have articulated is
equivalent in import and impact to the analysis by Ardener
(1980:319) of the difficulties that face the individual
who has ceased to hold, to some degree, to the culturally
inculcated interpretations of events.

> 'The surface registers natural events but generates
> a welter of "events" of its own. A state of the
> surface may well appear such that most events
> individuals contend with in that strange "real
> world" are mere automatisms of the surface. The
> failure of language to discriminate rapidly or even
> ... at all between its own processes and the
> processes of the surface becomes critical at this
> stage. In this condition, individuals may make the
> necessary discriminations, step outside the surface,
> as it were, but lack a common real language for
> their expression.'

It is vital, therefore, that if the solution is to retain
its christian character it must remain firmly connected to
the corporate life of the christian community, where the
christian understandings of reality are reinforced and are
meaningful and affective. A christian solution would

have to, in consequence, be connected to an environment in which christian metaphors held currency:

> 'Metaphor (and metonym) is defined here as the predication of a sign-image upon any of the set of inchoate pronouns - the essential social subjects. The study of metaphor is the study of the way these subjects take objects unto themselves or are assigned them - the way that, in the parlance of G.H. Mead, they "take the other" or "another part of themselves" in the case of metonym). The overall mission of metaphor and metonym is to convert pronouns from their inappropriate and inchoate condition, but seven particular missions are to be identified: (1) the providing of an identity for inchoate subjects; (2) the enabling of movement in these subjects; (3) the optimum positioning of these subjects in quality space; (4) the providing of a plan for ritual movement; (5) the filling of frames of social experience; (6) the enabling of the subject to "return to the whole"; (7) the freeing of the subject from a preoccupation with its parts.' (Fernandez 1986:61,62)

> 'Our argument here has been that in these ... forgotten depths of our experience there is always a plenitude of entities which we can retrieve and with which we can construct an imaginatively integrated set of scenarios for satisfying performance. Such retrieval and such construction is the ultimate and recurrent strategy of the human experience. It is the experience of returning to the depths - that room full of mirrors in which we can see ourselves - in order to return to the whole.' (ibid. 211)

Arising directly from this, of course, is an issue of an ethical nature. If the christian who wishes to reconcile, or hold in a fruitful tension, the perceptions of reality undergirding the two diverse approaches to scripture that we have outlined, cannot effectively do so in isolation, is he entitled to attempt to induce other christians to follow him (although it should be pointed out that this commitment to inducement, if in fact it is made, is equivalent in intent, in principle, and in execution, though on a more detailed scale, to the advice that is frequently offered to wavering seminarians - 'preach faith until you have faith' - or to faltering congregants who

are told not to take their doubts seriously but to immerse themselves in the life of the church)?   Bearing in mind that the one who sets out on an undertaking of this nature is one who frequently is 'lacking something' (cf. Downs 1971:87 – to whom we shall refer at greater length in endnote 18), is he entitled to impose upon others, who may not share his concerns, the uncomfortable position in which he may feel he finds himself? No matter what one may perceive to be the potential hazards connected with complacency, or any of the other limitations by which one may have felt compelled to look further afield, does one really have the right to lead other christians from what they may believe to be firm ground onto a road, the end of which is not necessarily guaranteed? On the other hand, is one entitled to overlook what one perceives to be a growing threat for the sake of preserving peace of mind for as long as possible?

> 'Culture [or 'subculture' in our terminology here], then, is a system of symbols, the result of a process of endowing persons, things, and events with meanings – with definition, delimitation, and situation in space and processes. A cultural group is a group of persons who share such a set of meanings and generally feel strongly about the meanings shared within the group. The system of symbols thus becomes a system of meaning and feeling, a system of meaningfulness. Tampering with the lines that define and delimit leads to confusion and ultimately to meaninglessness.' (Malina 1986:11)

[cf. Ostling (1989:51):

> 'In addition, mainline religion has been undercut by some of its own cultural achievements. The churches persuaded people to embrace tolerance and inclusiveness, says Hartford Seminary's David Roozen, but in doing so lost their internal sense of identity.']

18.   If one, having considered carefully the ethical issues underpinning the attempt to induce other group members to address an issue that is of personal import to one and

which one may believe to be of great significance for the other members too (even though they might not recognize it), decides to induce the other members of the group to turn their attention to the problem of how to interpret the faith in a world which, in general, is not conducive to the adoption of a faith perspective, how does one go about ensuring that one's efforts are afforded the greatest possibility of success?

> 'If language basically realizes or makes present meanings and feelings from a given cultural system and if the texts of the Bible are pieces of language, then to understand the documents of the Bible is to understand the meanings and feelings of an alien culture.' (Malina 1986:12)

Now clearly it would not be true to say that christians were being induced to undertake a task that would, in principle, be without precedent for them, because the continued existence of christian churches and the continued reverence for the authority of scripture, to whatever degree and in whatever sense, is indicative of the fact that successful attempts have been made, and continue to be made, in reconciling, or holding in a productive tension, the competing cultural models. This does not mean, however, that all christians have been able to accomplish this end successfully, or that even those who have been able to arrive at a personal solution have necessarily done full justice to the apostolic testimony in the face of the unique demands of their contexts. What may be gained by inducing the group to reflect consciously on the demands of living authentically christian life in this context therefore (which is equivalent to the task, in the language of the university, of reconciling the historical-critical approach with scripture taken on its own terms, from a perspective of faith) is that the christian community, where the christian symbols hold unique currency, may employ all its resources, both symbolic and human, in an effort to ensure that the

chances of arriving at an optimally faithful contextualized solution, or integration, are heightened.

The task that faces the person who seeks to accomplish this end is a difficult one because, given the nature of the endeavour, the most common attitude, except where a feeling of discontentment is already present (cf., for example, the discussion on aggression in Freedman et al. 1981:387), is to resist change.

> 'In a very real sense this is the heart of the change agent's problem. If we accept the view that most men live in social systems which provide them with the needed psychological support for life and with their own cognitive maps of the world, the innovator's key task is to replace parts of the map without producing so much confusion that the map is no longer useful as a guide. Instead of trying to cope with such change, in many cases, a man prefers to reject innovations which would improve his life and benefit his society.' (Downs 1971:105)

It is in this area, of the factors that promote or retard the change agent's inducements, that social psychology is able to provide useful guidelines. We shall refer to Freedman's et al. (1981) enumeration of these factors because the simple framework provided there facilitates succinct discussion.

> 'There must be a communicator who holds a particular position on some issue and is trying to convince others to hold this position. To do so, he produces a communication designed to persuade people that his position is correct and to induce them to change their own positions in the direction of his. This communication is presented in a given situation. These, then, constitute the attack - the source, the communication, and the surroundings.' (Freedman et al. 1981:362)

Let us begin with the communicator. Since one of the most frequent ways of resisting change is that of undermining its importance or necessity by the derogation of the change agent (ibid. 365), it may be said that any factors which promote the positive evaluation of this agent will

increase the chances of the success of the communication in bringing about change. In this connection we may mention credibility (ibid. 367), trustworthiness (ibid. 369), whether the agent is considered likable (ibid. 373), and the extent to which he is considered to have the support of the reference group for what he is undertaking (ibid. 374).

> 'It is characteristic of the go-between, more often than not, the man who seeks out the foreigner is lacking something from his own community. He is a marginal man who neither represents nor commands the respect of his fellows.' (Downs 1971:87)

As far as the communication itself is concerned, we may say that, as a rule, the greater the change called for, the greater is the amount of change that is produced. This is only a valid rule, however, as long as it is also borne in mind that the greater the discrepancy, the greater the possibility of outright rejection by the target (Freedman et al. 1981:378). It has also been found that the greater the amount of fear that may come to be associated with the rejection of change, the greater is the chance of producing change (ibid. 386). In this connection, however, it must be said that, even though the arousal of fear is often used as a mechanism for preventing or retarding change, fear, in the case of the specific task that we have set ourselves, should not be resorted to except where the communicator feels that there is a real danger – and even there the perceived danger should be communicated with sensitivity. Freedman's third subject under the head of the communication is the 'arousal of aggression' (ibid. 387). Although one would want to avoid aggression at all costs, it may be said, in a minor modification of Freedman's argument, that the greater the correspondence between the communication and perceptions of discontentment among the targets, the greater is the chance of change being produced.

There are also, in addition to the characteristics of the communicator and the communication, characteristics of the target(s) that promote or retard the possibility of change. The first of these is the strength of the commitment to the existing position (ibid. 388). The possibility of change is reduced in inverse proportion to the extent of the actions already undertaken on the basis of the present position; in inverse proportion to the extent of one's public commitment to that position; in inverse proportion to the extent to which the existing position was freely chosen; in inverse proportion to the extent to which the area of change is connected with other areas of belief and action. Furthermore, it has been found that, to the extent that the communication is perceived as a threat, the chances of change are reduced by preparation specifically set on retaining the present position (ibid. 390). In addition to these factors, it has also been found that there are personality factors that render some people more, or less, resistant to change than other people (ibid. 391).

It is evident that social psychology, only some of the relevant aspects of which we have mentioned here, is able to contribute to an awareness of the factors conducive to the creation of a precipitative environment. At the same time, anthropology, with its emphasis on symbols and their role in the preservation of order and group identity – and their role in promoting transition, where applicable – calls attention to the role of what may well be the most affective, and deeply hidden (cf. Foster 1980:381), promoters of change or retardation.

> 'Ritual behavior pervades our lives ... but most
> ritual is performed outside of our awareness ... we
> are aware of most rituals only momentarily, for as
> long as it takes to lay down the neural models
> requisite to their animation. Yet in all human
> societies, there exist (often complex) ritual
> sequences that are particularly salient, cognized by
> actors as signal events, events to be conceptually

> and materially demarcated as discrete units vis-à-
> vis the normal flow of action. These
> conceptualized ritual events we label <u>rituals</u>.
> <u>Rituals</u> are, of course, <u>symbols</u>, or more properly,
> <u>symbol</u> systems ... comprised of forms of symbolic
> action ....' (Laughlin and Stephens 1980:338)

Since people exist within webs of meaning by which, mostly
unconsciously, they interpret the significance of events
in the world - in fact, the nature of reality itself -
perhaps the most effective way of promoting an environment
in which adequate solutions to the problem of living truly
consistent christian life, as an integrated part of one's
historical context, would be through, under the watchful
direction of authorized 'limit-breaking agents' (cf.
Malina 1986:143), the gradual realignment of symbols and
symbolic associations and the careful restructuring, in
consequence, of group rituals. It may well be in this
regard that anthropological interpretations of scripture
may be able to shed light on how the type of symbolic
transformations that we envisage here were, in the light
of our findings on the significance of canon, actually
undertaken by the biblical tradents at all the stages of
the canonical process.

19.   Although a number of interesting parallels could in fact
be drawn between the idea proposed in this thesis and the
ideas expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his <u>Truth and
method</u>, it should be noted that the use of the term
'fusion of horizons' in the conclusion does not reflect a
conscious indebtedness to Gadamer so much as the use, in a
largely new environment, of a suitable and pregnant
summary phrase.

7.

Conclusion

In which the, necessarily general, prescriptive solution arrived at to the problem posed by the two contradictory approaches to the authority of scripture is set within the context of the concerns of the canonical process.

The division of our conclusion into two sections, certainly not separate, corresponds to the conviction that dissonance is essential to the effective operation of scriptural authority; and that this dissonance should not arise from lack of clarity concerning the biblical witnesses, but should, in fact, arise directly from the clarity of scriptural testimony.

Our investigation of the pericope de adultera in the context of the disciplines of literary criticism (chapter three), quest for the historical Jesus (chapter four), and canonical criticism (chapter five predominantly) has revealed three concerns that correspond to three primary, although interrelated, loci of scriptural authority. These differences in the primary locus of authority must be thought of as differences in emphasis more than differences in essence - so that an emphasis on the hard won vision of the individual author as the essential locus of authority of the gospels inevitably also draws on the link of his testimony with the historical Jesus and the sanctioned traditions of the early christian community; an emphasis on the importance of the historical Jesus would also inevitably include a concern for the way in which the traditions have come down to us; an emphasis on the canon would include an interest in the way in which the individual biblical traditions relate to the fount of the life of the church, Jesus.

We noted that the term 'authority' as applied to scripture is a relational concept - so that scripture is regarded as a uniquely binding source of information and action when it is taken as authoritative. If scripture is taken as authoritative it provides a way, that is more compelling than competing sources, of understanding one's life in the world and that provides a rationale that undergirds one's actions. We also noted that authoritative scripture does not function as a blueprint that carefully dictates every thought and action of the christian - instead, we noted that independent thought and action coexists with restraint and injunction. We outlined an idea of the authority of scripture that was based to a considerable degree on space or 'openness' - a concept referring to the need to live life authentically and in response to the unique demands of the context, but at the same time in a 'christian' way; which proviso inevitably demands a return to christian tradition, and, therefore, scripture. It is in precisely this area, where the questions of authority and hermeneutics are especially closely connected, that our thesis sought application and clarification - it sought to determine the various competing dynamics at work in the authoritative functioning of the bounded freedom. It was discovered that we were presented with various tensions, even dissonances, in this bounded space and that the key to the authoritative operation of scripture lay in the resolution of these tensions. In this regard it may be said that our entire venture was based on the notion to which Carroll (1979:110) gives expression in the following extract:

> 'The important principle for this study is <u>dissonance gives rise to hermeneutic</u>.'

Our thesis was an elaboration of the tension between freedom and 'givenness' in the authoritative operation of scripture. We elaborated on the tensions within scripture itself, which corresponds to a clarification of the tension between freedom of interpretation and christian essences in the givenness of scripture (and in this regard we confirm the principle of canonical criticism that the key to

understanding the operation of scripture today is to be found in the resolution of similar issues at the very heart of the process of the formation of scripture). It was found that the dynamic tension in the New Testament arose out of the delicate balance between Jesus and the tradition about him, as well as between this and the way in which communities and writers adapted this to meet the needs of their unique contexts. The third force at work in this dynamic was the tension between these and the collective experience of the canonizing community as a whole (and the division this created between acceptable freedom of interpretation and heterodoxy). At the same time, we noted that the tensions within scripture interacted with elements in daily life and the tensions between these and between these and scripture itself. We outlined the tensions between the contemporary churches and between these churches and scriptural diversity, which both gave rise to much of this diversity among the churches and also called it into question. We also noted the tensions between individual construals of life, scripture, and church, and how these interacted with the various demands of the Bible, churches, society and individual psychological makeup.

It should be noted, in conclusion, however, that the great diversity discovered in the space between givenness and freedom, and the dynamics that exist between these categories of diversity, does not in itself answer the question of the authoritative operation of scripture in daily life. The discovery of tensions that call for resolution is not the goal of investigations into the authority of scripture - it is the precondition for the realization of the uniquely contextual word of God in any given situation. The goal of the investigation into the authority of scripture lies in the resolution of the opposing forces - in a sense it may be said that one should be guided by the contours of the dynamic of tension resolution to the point at which authentic action is produced that is also continuous with the recognised examples of authentic christian belief and behaviour in the Bible. The key to the creative resolution of these tensions appears to be in the clarification of the elements that combine to produce dissonance. It would appear to be true to say that, for creative

resolution, dissonance should not lie in the confusion that arises
from little understood elements interacting, where it is not in fact
dissonance but simply confusion, but in the interaction of elements
that have been investigated as thoroughly as possible.   In a sense
it may be said that our insight into the dynamic of dissonance
resolution is one that may be gained from the very essence of the
story of the woman taken in adultery.

> '"But who was right, who is right, who was wrong?" I
> asked, bewildered.
>
> "They were all right in their way, and all were
> mistaken."'
>
> (Adso and William
> The name of the rose)

In this sense our solution, from the perspective favouring faith,
shows itself to be continuous with the essence of the canonical
process outlined in section two, and with the particular expression of
this in the case of the relation between John and the pericope de
adultera, in that our endeavour, and the solution proposed, is really
nothing other than an attempt to arrive, for our time, at the radical
contextualization of the continuous word of God in Christ. What we
have sought to do is to achieve what the biblical tradents themselves
sought to do.

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