

## SEVEN THESES ON THE SO-CALLED CRITERIA OF AUTHENTICITY OF HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH

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As a Lutheran, I have always found a special appeal in nailing up theses as a means of communication. Even in modern scholarly discourse, I think this can be a highly effective way of raising the very issues most in need of attention at the present time. This essay is my attempt to address in a practical way the current state of historical Jesus research from the point of view of methodology, in particular from the viewpoint of the so-called criteria of authenticity.<sup>1</sup> I have limited myself to seven theses.

### 1. SCHOLARLY INQUIRY MUST HAVE GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW

I start with a seemingly easy case. For is this not actually quite self-evident? It should be, yet one surprisingly often hears voices demanding the abolishment of the authenticity criteria. Such a demand is in principle understandable if, as a result of the abolishment (and perhaps for some other reason(s))

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1. By the criteria of authenticity I mean the tools of methodology specifically designed for providing arguments for or against the historicity of the Jesus tradition or a particular instance of it. The standard criteria are the criterion of dissimilarity, the criterion of multiple attestation, and the criterion of coherence. These are also the most traditional of the criteria and are still today employed by scholars, although several variations of them appear. For my previous accounts of the criteria, see in particular T. HOLMÉN, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, Leiden: Brill 2001, 24-36; Id., «Knowing about Q and Knowing about Jesus: Mutually Exclusive Undertakings?», in A. LINDEMANN (ed.), *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus*, Leuven: Peeters 2001, 497-514; Id., «Authenticity Criteria», in C. A. EVANS (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, New York: Routledge, 2008, 43-54.

too), one also regards the inquiry that seeks to reach back beyond the sources to the historical person of Jesus as entirely futile or impossible.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, however, the criteria are discarded while still holding onto historical Jesus research as a valid pursuit. The criteria are seen as too problematic to be useful, as too complex,<sup>3</sup> or then again, as too simplistic<sup>4</sup> for descriptions of the real world to be based on them. Accordingly, it is demanded that the historical Jesus should be studied but not by means of the authenticity criteria.<sup>5</sup>

How ought this kind of standpoint to be explained? Indeed, it seems as if for some scholars Jesus research would be better off without the methodological guidelines<sup>6</sup> that apply to its central aspect: the historicity of the historical Jesus. Hence, the need for the thesis presented in this section! As far as I can see, the dilemma mentioned results substantially from confusion about concepts and terms. While the first point to be observed here, *a*), has to do with the system and hierarchy of concepts, the second one, *b*), concerns impressions and images that certain terms tend to create. In the following, it should be allowed that *a*) will not be fully capable of untangling the knot until light is brought by the insights presented in *b*).<sup>7</sup>

*a*) For some scholars, «criteria of authenticity» appears to be a subordinate or narrower concept of the superordinate/broader concept of «methodological guidelines for assessing the historicity of Jesus» (or something like that). According to this way of speaking, the authenticity criteria represent but one possible solution to the overarching task of somehow dealing with the problem of historicity of the statements encountered or put forward about Jesus. In principle, and in practice too, this line of reasoning holds that one or more other

2. See B. L. MACK, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy*, New York: Continuum 2003, 25-40.

3. N. T. WRIGHT, *Jesus and The Victory of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996, 133.

4. D. C. ALLISON, *The Luminous Dusk: Finding God in the Deep, Still Places*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, 100.

5. See, for instance, S. FREYNE, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, 12-13; A. P. WINTON, *The Proverbs of Jesus: Issues of History and Rhetoric*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990, 122; L. E. VAAGE, «Recent Concerns: The Scholar as Engagé», in W. E. ARNAL – M. DESJARDINGS (eds.), *Whose Historical Jesus?*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1997, 181-186, p. 181; D. C. ALLISON, «Jesus», in D. E. GOWAN (ed.), *Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, Louisville: Westminster, 2003, 235-255, p. 235. Similarly Wright, *Jesus and The Victory of God*, 87-89. This is also the upshot of Dunn's long discussion in J. D. G. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003, 139-336.

6. J. D. CROSSAN, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999, 143-146, is correct in stating that criteria as such do not constitute a method. For this reason I am calling the criteria «methodological guidelines». For the rudiments of an authenticity method, see HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 45-47, 53-54.

7. This is still the best order and way to present the observations.

ways to solve the task exist. On the basis of this thinking, then, it becomes understandable how rejection of the authenticity criteria still does not need to mean abandonment of historical Jesus research as such. In other words, it seems probable that for those who wish to discard the authenticity criteria but still think one can uphold historical Jesus research as a relevant pursuit, there are some other tools that can serve as «methodological guidelines for assessing the historicity of Jesus».<sup>8</sup> The idea then, is either that since the authenticity criteria have failed something else simply has to be found instead, or that since the criteria have proven so problematic anything else should be preferred.

For other scholars, the concept «authenticity criteria» is not subordinate to «methodological guidelines for assessing the historicity of Jesus» (or the like) but equal to it, its paraphrase in some way. According to this way of construing the concepts, the means to be applied when dealing with the problem of historicity are to be called «authenticity criteria» whatever they are or will be – that is, whatever means one finds that could be useful in dealing with the problem of the historicity of the statements made about Jesus, whatever methodological guidelines one develops that could serve in assessing the historicity of Jesus, these will always be called «authenticity criteria». Why? Because it is essentially authenticity that is at issue here!<sup>9</sup> In other words, it is not that one would, for example, not wish to find alternatives to the authenticity criteria currently in use but that whatever alternatives one finds, these would also be called authenticity criteria because their purpose would be in any case to solve the problem of the historicity of the statements made about Jesus. Once again: it is not that there would not be the possibility of alternative tools or means, but that there is no reasonable alternative way to name them, for there is no reason to use diverging designations for tools, means and so on essentially serving one and the same purpose. The idea sustained here is that if the authenticity criteria currently in use have failed, better criteria should be found. Additionally, one can always seek to find ways to employ the criteria, old or new ones, better.<sup>10</sup>

A solution to this confusion could perhaps be that one chooses freely between the different systems or hierarchies of concepts while at the same time striving for a more enlightened discussion by realizing the differences in the ways of speaking. For my part, a need for tools that are properly called authenticity criteria exists as long as it remains true that there is in historical Jesus

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8. This is clearly the case with, for example, E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, New York: Continuum 2001, 51, 80-81.

9. For «authenticity», observe point *b*) below.

10. So, for instance, W. R. TELFORD, «Major Trends and Interpretative Issues in the Study of Jesus», in B. CHILTON – C. A. EVANS (eds), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, Leiden: Brill 1994, 33-74, 59.

research a problem of historicity concerning statements about Jesus encountered or made and that in order to pursue the research that problem somehow has to be dealt with.

b) In addition, there are also certain impressions or images created by the phrase «authenticity criteria» that contribute to the dilemma outlined above. Clearly for some people, the words «authenticity» and «criterion/a» seem to evoke the idea that the tools that the words taken together, according to the convention, refer to are used as a kind of litmus paper test providing mechanical on-off solutions and, furthermore, applied in order to ferret out the *ipsissima verba Jesu*, that is, the precise words Jesus used in a given occasion.<sup>11</sup> Except for some rare and individual cases, however, this does not hold true of today's scholarship. On the contrary, scholars have long acknowledged that by employing the authenticity criteria one is only dealing with grades of probability, not with certainties.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, scholars who today use the criteria recognize that they are not particularly suited to identifying the *ipsissima verba Jesu*.<sup>13</sup> The pursuit of Jesus' exact words is not really in focus anymore, and even if it was in some separate enterprises, that is not how the criteria are meant to be employed. Instead, it is the gist or main/general message of the tradition materials that the criteria seek to capture and evaluate.<sup>14</sup> That is how they are also utilized by the overwhelming majority of scholars nowadays.

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11. Cf., for example, H. W. HOLLANDER, «The Words of Jesus: From Oral Traditions to Written Record in Paul and Q», *NT* 42 (2000) 340-357, p. 354; A. KIRK – T. THATCHER «Jesus Tradition as Social Memory», in A. KIRK – T. THATCHER (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005, 25-42, p. 28; T. C. MOURNETT, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 72.

12. See HOLMÉN, *Covenant Thinking*, 27. For what «proof» regarding historical texts can mean, see G. THEISSEN – D. WINTER, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, Louisville: Westminster 2002, 191-201. The characterization «litmus paper» comes, in fact, from M. D. Hooker who in her famous articles resisted the quasi-scientific outlook strived at by some analyses. The following almost prophetic statement is worth quoting: «He [the radical scholar] looks for some kind of scientific verification – a litmus paper test which can be applied to the sayings of Jesus, which turns either pink or blue, according to whether they are or are not authentic, so that he may sort his material into neat piles»: M. D. HOOKER, «On Using the Wrong Tool», *Theology* 75 (1972) 570-581, p. 580. Thus, these words express Hooker's criticism.

13. D. L. BOCK, «The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?», in M. J. WILKINS – J. P. MORELAND (eds.), *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 73-100, 90; HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 45.

14. Besides the traditional *ipsissima vox* (J. Jeremias), scholars speak of *ipsissima intentio* (THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 129-130) and *ipsissima agenda* (J. M. FOLEY, «Oral Ancestor, Textual Precedent, or Ideological Creation?», in R. A. HORSLEY (ed.), *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2006, 129-140, p. 139s. See also below on «authenticity».

«Authenticity» is, I believe, a major source of problems. Throughout the Jesus quests there has been discussion about exactly how the concept should be understood.<sup>15</sup> (Whatever else, it should not be taken as carrying theological significance, akin to «authoritative», or as leading to the idea of *ipsissima verba*).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, most recently, new tradition-historical views and expressions such as «impact» or «abiding impression»<sup>17</sup> as well as the blurring of the difference between authentic reminiscence and traditional growth<sup>18</sup> have put the concept under strain. In response to this development, I would like to emphasize a pragmatic point of view. Whoever studies the historical Jesus, his or her picture of Jesus will always consist of a selection made from the totality of information available in the sources for Jesus. Even in approaches that seek to include as much data as possible, something must be left out.<sup>19</sup> In respect to this, in my view, it does not count for much —if at all— how one labels the material included, whether authentic, containing the abiding impression or memory, or whatever. Irrespective of such labels, this is material by which a scholarly presentation of Jesus is supported. In other words, I think it is undeniable that whichever scholar portrays whatever picture of the historical Jesus, he or she will be making a claim regarding the material that is included in the picture (and, indirectly, regarding the material that is excluded as well), and that the most elementary form of the claim is that the included material has been deemed useable in a scholarly reconstruction of the historical Jesus.<sup>20</sup> As to the labels, then, my preference for that kind of material is «authentic», if for no other reason than that it belongs to the traditional grammar of historical Jesus research.<sup>21</sup> True, it also takes full responsibility for the claim made by way of portraying a scholarly picture of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

And finally, if the word «criterion» is the problem, for example by conveying a sense of perfect certainty, there need be no hesitation in substituting it

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15. See again THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 191-201.

16. See J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* London: SPCK, 1989, 20, and his remark on the *authentic viewpoint* which has a sense comparable to the «gist or main/general message» spoken of above. Cf. also *ipsissima agenda* and *intentio*.

17. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*, 333.

18. KIRK – THATCHER, «Jesus Tradition» *passim*.

19. See N. T. WRIGHT, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress 1992, 99-100.

20. See T. HOLMÉN, «A Metalanguage for the Historical Jesus Methods: An Experiment», in T. HOLMÉN – S. E. PORTER (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, forthcoming.

21. M. F. BIRD, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, London: T&T Clark 2007, 25. Bird is also attracted to pragmatism but to a lesser degree than I am here.

22. I think no discussion about concepts of tradition history however sound and justified should detract from this responsibility.

with some other expression. B. F. Meyer, for instance, prefers «index».<sup>23</sup> Still, it is perhaps also reasonable to argue that the term «criterion» is traditional and, as long as it is emphasized that we are dealing with a range of probabilities, no change of terminology needs to be undertaken.

Admittedly, the issues that this thesis has dealt with concern only the most elementary confusions that bedevil the discussion about the authenticity criteria. It is clear that more serious problems exist. Nonetheless, my point in the thesis has been to show that the criteria should not be dispensed with altogether lightly. There must be guidelines for scholarly work and if one thinks that the criteria of authenticity cannot form (part of) them, it needs to be carefully considered and articulated what that would mean within the overall pursuit of historical Jesus research. Obviously, a sweeping statement that an alternative is to be preferred supported by reference to the plainest misuses and misconceptions of the criteria is not enough. I think the following conclusion will stand its ground under all circumstances:

The criteria of authenticity are and remain problematic and incomplete. At any event, however, if one is to assess authenticity, this will always be more sensibly done with the help of some explicitly stated tools and guidelines than without them.<sup>24</sup>

The following theses penetrate deeper into the question and problem of the criteria.

## 2. NO TOOL OF AUTHENTICITY CAN BEAT SCEPTICISM: THERE IS NO METHODOLOGY GOOD ENOUGH TO MAKE BAD SOURCES USEABLE

Those who doubt the usefulness of the criteria of authenticity sometimes level the charge that those who, in contrast, do rely on the criteria are in fact investing them with too high hopes.<sup>25</sup> The criteria are not a magician's equipment, one at times can read between the lines. This puts the users of the criteria in an uneasy position of defence. Do we really look as if we were wishing to resort to otherworldly forces?

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23. B. F. MEYER, «Objectivity and Subjectivity in Historical Criticism of the Gospels», in D. L. DUNGAN (ed.), *The Interrelations of the Gospels*, Leuven: Leuven University Press 1990, 546-565, 547.

24. HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 54.

25. E.g., WINTON, *Proverbs of Jesus*, 124-125; D. L. DENTON, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies: An Examination of the Work of John Dominic Crossan and Ben F. Meyer*, London: T&T Clark 2004, 200, 207.

I have a different theory. It may also be that distrust in the authenticity criteria results from a disappointment originally experienced precisely because of the fact that the criteria do not correspond to a magic wand and that, conversely, confidence comes with expectations with regard to the criteria having had a more realistic, that is, modest basis. Indeed, I would claim that the state of affairs is exactly the opposite from how it is sometimes depicted. Those who use the criteria usually realize the limitations of these tools<sup>26</sup> while those who wish to reject or replace them have probably approached them with too high hopes. By their search for something else that could reassure them (and others?) of firmer results than the criteria can provide, they merely seek to keep alive the unrealistic basic idea of theirs: firm results.

This theory, however, provokes a further question. Why, then, does it suffice for some people that the criteria even at their best can only yield suggestions while others deem them dismissible for this very reason? The answer lies not in the criteria but in the sources the criteria are applied to, or to be more accurate, in how those who use or refuse to use the criteria regard the sources. Indeed, it is of utmost importance to recognize the impact of this framework within which the criteria of authenticity are viewed: the general assessment of the historical value of the sources intended to be used in studying the historical Jesus. At two opposite ends of the scale, a source can be deemed as basically unreliable or basically reliable historically speaking. Shifting towards either end of the scale, then, the assessment has crucial corollaries to viewing the authenticity criteria. The more unreliable the sources are deemed, the greater demands are placed on the criteria and the less persuasive they will appear. The more reliable the sources are deemed, again, the more cogency the authenticity criteria can be invested with.

For this reason, before engaging in extensive criticism of the criteria of authenticity or, in general, any earnest debate over them, one's assessment of the sources for Jesus should be spelt out. Essentially differing judgments about the historical value of the sources necessarily result in viewing the criteria and their cogency very differently. In consequence, it is useless to argue about the criteria, but instead the question about the sources should be laid on the table. One great shortcoming of the current discussion about historical Jesus research and the methodological challenges it entails is precisely that scholars' assessments of the sources are not explicitly connected with the criteria problem.

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26. This statement should apply to mainline study of Jesus today. When Hooker in the beginning of the 1970's stated that «the tools which are used in an attempt to uncover the authentic teaching of Jesus cannot do what is required of them», HOOKER, «Wrong Tool», 570, she was no doubt correctly addressing the situation prevailing then. To be sure, Hooker's articles are one major reason why prudent Jesus scholars no more understand the criteria in such absolute terms.

This silence effectively dispels hopes for scholarship coming to terms with the divergent views about the criteria. To break the silence on my part, I see only one possibility (which in my view is the lesson of a century of Jesus research employing criteria of authenticity), viz. that at least on one of the following points scholars need to have trust. They should –to a certain degree– trust either the sources themselves or else the tools they use to probe the sources for authentic material. To my mind, the criteria that have been developed in Jesus research work well on the assumption that the sources they are applied to are to be characterized as reliable rather than unreliable. What is questionable, however, is if any set of criteria can ever be developed that could suffice to revert the speculations and scepticism appropriately arising when the sources are regarded as unreliable rather than reliable. In my view, prospects of finding authenticity criteria that could make bad sources yield good results are either nil or unrealistic. Accordingly, it is but logical that those who do not find the sources reliable enough also find the pursuit of Jesus research irrelevant.

Hence, scepticism about the criteria ultimately derives from scepticism about the sources. Involved also here is the question of the burden of proof. Scholars seeing the sources in a dubious light regarding their historicity would place the burden of proof on showing authenticity. However, the burden of proof emerging from a full-blown scepticism about the sources cannot be borne by any single criterion, not even by all of them together. For there is no method that could completely exclude the possibility of inauthenticity.<sup>27</sup> There will always be room for speculation whether one relies on the authenticity criteria or seeks for alternatives to them, whatever these could be. On the other hand, if the sources can instead be endowed with some credibility, the criteria can identify the relatively best options regarding where to find material useable in a scholarly portrait of the historical Jesus.

The theory does not always apply. The approach of the North-American Jesus Seminar discloses a serious methodological hubris.<sup>28</sup> Man has gone to the moon and is heading for Mars, but in order to get to know the history of earth he still requires good sources. However, if more than 80 % of the source mate-

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27. Following the usual procedure of his time, N. Perrin, for instance, demands that authenticity is proven; N. PERRIN, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: Harper and Row 1967, 39. This demand made in the methodological discussion is, however, not consistently sustained in the concrete analysis, where Perrin is often forced to place the burden of proof on showing inauthenticity. The problem is indicative of the dilemma underlying the methodological thinking of Perrin and his contemporaries: overconfidence in the criteria of authenticity necessitated, in a way, by the lack of confidence in the sources.

28. See R. W. FUNK and R. W. HOOVER, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, New York: Scribner, 1996; R. W. FUNK and The Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1998.



rial is disinformation, not even a theologically disinterested (or disillusioned) scholar can pull it off.<sup>29</sup> Bad sources would indeed need magician's tools. With relatively good sources, however, we can manage with the ordinary earthly means at our disposal.

### 3. THE CRITERIA OF AUTHENTICITY ARE NOT DEPENDENT ON THE TRADITIONAL TRADITION OR FORM CRITICISMS

The traditional, and Bultmannian, tradition and form criticisms are in crisis.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, it is claimed, so are the criteria of authenticity. Different models for depicting afresh the formation of the gospel tradition have recently been (re)introduced and become a staple part of the discussion. Besides questioning the uncontrolled informal nature of the tradition process, they emphasize the role orality has had in the process. As to the authenticity criteria, a central concern is the questioning of the ideas that, *a*), the gospel tradition should be conceived of as consisting of small pericopes with histories of their own as separate entities, as well as, *b*), these entities could (always) be assumed to be derivable from single original forms. Since, then, the utilization of the authenticity criteria precisely rests on dealing with small independent units and the need to address their original form, it is concluded that the criteria themselves have been rendered inappropriate.<sup>31</sup>

The logic of the suggested conclusion is quite impeccable. The premises it builds on, however, do not hold true. The criteria of authenticity do not necessarily presuppose traditional tradition and form critical solutions. The most easily rehearsed decisive proof of this is the fact that the central criteria were

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29. FUNK, *Acts of Jesus*, 1, gives the estimate that only 16 % of the deeds/events and 18 % of the sayings of Jesus reported in the sources are historical. Cf. T. HOLMÉN, «A Theologically Disinterested Quest? On the Origins of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus», *ST* 55 (2001) 175-197; and Funk's remark, «critical scholars –those whose evaluations are not predetermined by theological considerations»; FUNK, *Acts of Jesus*, 1.

30. See, for instance, WRIGHT, *Jesus*; W. KELBER, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1997; S. BYRSKOG, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000; DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*; A. KIRK – T. THATCHER (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2005; R. BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2006; R. A. HORSLEY, *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2006.

31. KELBER, *Oral and the Written Gospel*, 67; KIRK – THATCHER, «Jesus Tradition», *passim*; MOURNETT, *Oral Tradition*, 72, 80, 183-184.

born before tradition and form criticisms saw the light of day.<sup>32</sup> P. W. Schmiedel anticipated the criterion of dissimilarity as well as the criterion of coherence.<sup>33</sup> F. C. Burkitt and B. H. Streeter developed principles that formed the basis of the criterion of multiple attestation.<sup>34</sup> It was only when the traditional tradition and form criticisms began to be more generally accepted that the criteria were adapted to them. That this happened was natural and understandable and does not mean that the criteria could not, quite as naturally, be readapted to the needs of a new situation.<sup>35</sup> Of course, this implies work and problems cannot be overcome overnight (or in one thesis). Nevertheless, the attempt can be made.

In fact, it would be best to develop a methodological language, concepts and terms that could make the criteria independent of any tradition-critical solution. A key position is clearly held by the idea of pericopes as small independent tradition units with histories of their own. If the language of the criteria could be distanced from this idea much would already have been accomplished.

a) My suggestion is that we, on the basic level, speak about «a piece of information» (sc. regarding the historical Jesus) the authenticity or inauthenticity of which should be determined with the help of the criteria. As an English expression, «piece» denotes singularity and here also implies integrity and even limits for the item in question. So «piece» can be seen as referring to a separate tradition unit, such as are distinguished in the traditional tradition and form criticisms. The «limits» of the «piece» would then be warranted by the usual tradition- and form-critical arguments. However, «piece» does not have to be perceived this way alone. It can also be understood to point to something that is separable on the grounds of informational contents. For instance, that Jesus was a Jew, that he engaged public activity, that he taught about the kingdom of God, etc., are all such «pieces of information» the authenticity of which can be inspected by the criteria, and it can be seen that they have noth-

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32. S. E. PORTER, «The Criteria of Authenticity», in T. HOLMÉN – S. E. PORTER (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Leiden: Brill 2009, forthcoming. As Porter also remarks, however, their development took place during the heyday of form criticism. See further in thesis 7 below.

33. P. W. SCHMIEDEL, «Gospels», in T. K. CHEYNE – J. S. BLACK (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Biblica II*; London: A. & C. Black 1901, 1761-1898, 1881-1883, 1889.

34. F. C. BURKITT, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1906, 147; B. H. STREETER, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*, London: Macmillan and Co. 1924, 270.

35. Already D. G. A. CALVERT, «An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus», *NTS* 18 (1971-1972) 209-219, p. 218 complained against form criticism's «exclusive... role both in determining the criteria and in their application» and called for a new approach to them.

ing to do with the form-critical division of the tradition material into small independent pericopal units.

On the other hand, there are also pieces of information that are tied to certain passages of text. For instance, that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist is a piece of information that can be found specifically in Mark 1,9, Matt 3,15 and Luke 3,21. Obviously, that this is stated and this piece of information studied by means of the criteria cannot be seen as resorting to the tradition- and form-critical scheme, even though some pericopes, i.e. traditional form-critical units, could be identified here.<sup>36</sup> The concept «piece of information» and how it is used now is not dependent on the correctness of the traditional tradition- and form-critical concept of pericope denoting an independent, separate tradition unit with a history of its own, but the passages of text in question are distinguishable on the basis of the information they contain, viz. they speak about Jesus' baptism by John.

Some further concepts are clearly required. A piece of information can be found in a passage of text meaning simply a section of text distinguished on the grounds of its informational contents, that is, it envelops the given piece of information. My suggestion here is «passage of tradition» or «tradition passage», which represents an embodiment of a «piece of information» in a certain text. An example besides the baptism theme could be the tradition passage about the relation between Jesus' exorcisms and the kingdom of God in Matt 12,28 and Luke 11,20. That these texts represent an embodiment of the piece of information mentioned can be established on informational grounds, meaning simply that the texts are concerned with the relation between Jesus' exorcisms and the kingdom of God. No traditional tradition- or form-critical arguments are needed.

However, a piece of information can, as was seen, take on another form still. It can appear as a «motif» (/theme): Jesus was a Jew, he engaged public activity, he taught about the kingdom of God, etc.<sup>37</sup> While an individual passage of tradition is tied with some certain words and shape, a particular motif can in principle be expressed through several different, individual tradition passages. For example, the overall, basic motif of the kingdom of God can be found in numerous and highly diverse individual tradition passages. Obviously, then, motifs usually consist of a more general kind of information compared with tradition passages. Nonetheless, motifs can be more specific than this. Luke 17,20-21 and Matt 12,28 and Luke 11,20, for instance, which display dif-

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36. Mark 1,9-11; Matt 3,13-17; Luke 3,21-22; cf. John 1,29-34.

37. «Motif» is of course not a new concept but it needs to take its place beside the idea of «tradition passage» and, in fact, thus serves rather well.

ferent tradition passages, share not only the overall motif of the kingdom but also the more particular motif of Jesus speaking of the kingdom as present.

Hence, in this way, I suggest, by concentrating on pieces of information distinguishable on the basis of informational contents rather than traditional tradition- or form-critical arguments, and then applying the criteria of authenticity to them, the criteria can work irrespectively of the chosen overarching tradition-critical solution. What, however, about the need to apply the criteria to the earliest form of a tradition?

*b)* This is clearly more difficult a problem. What has to be done becomes, however, obvious when we ask why this goal has been adopted in the first place.

Usually, or should we say formerly, a measure that was required to be taken prior to using the criteria of authenticity was a tradition-critical analysis by means of which secondary elements of a tradition were identified and discarded in order to reach towards the earliest form of the tradition. While performing the tradition-critical analysis always meant difficulties, not performing it was, in most cases, not an option at all, at least with the usual/former view of the sources: if the traditions of the sources are seen as containing later amendments resulting from the adaptation of earlier forms of the traditions to the various situations of the early Christian communities, refraining from a tradition-critical analysis risks getting misleading signals from the authenticity criteria. Understandably, when tools designed for identifying Jesuanic material are applied to later amendments they can produce a negative result. The presence of later elements in a tradition would not, however, mean that the whole tradition is secondary. Therefore, in order to be able to use the criteria in a proper way, one had to become aware of these later amendments, and the only means by which even to attempt this was the tradition-critical analysis.

How should the language of the criteria be distanced from the problem raised? Or does it have to be distanced and, if so, by how much? Could not the concept «piece of information» and what has come up in *a)* already be seen to facilitate the handling of *b)*? Or does the problematique arise at all when changing to another tradition-historical view? I shall start from the last question.

The difficulty exists even when assuming an alternative to the traditional and Bultmannian tradition and form criticisms. Adaptation of the tradition by and for the Christian communities did take place, be it that this process is pictured (in many ways) differently by the alternative tradition-historical views. Accordingly, whatever their means of entering the tradition, whatever the form of their existence therein,<sup>38</sup> features resulting from this adaptation are present in the

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38. See BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 248.

gospel tradition. The most crucial difference with respect to the problem raised above lies in that pursuing the alternative views, one cannot propose to be able to distinguish adaptation from the original core in the same way as before when one almost could imagine these as distinct layers placed on the top of another. Thus, the same problem is there and has in a way even become more intricate. It cannot be bypassed by anyone who wants to study the historical Jesus.

Fortunately, the concepts introduced in *a)* allow us to deal with the problem by means of the authenticity criteria instead of the traditional tradition-critical analysis. All that needs to be added is the concept of integrality. For instance, a piece of information can display features implausible with respect to Jesus' environment and time.<sup>39</sup> The methodical question that then needs to be posed is whether the piece of information as such should be deemed as inauthentic or just the implausible features of it. Answering the question depends on whether the given features are to be seen as *integral* to the piece of information or not. If the piece of information cannot go without all of the implausible features, the piece itself can be labelled implausible and, accordingly, its authenticity is in jeopardy.<sup>40</sup>

Naturally, the usefulness of the concept of integrality will be the next bone of contention. I will provide just one short example to illustrate how the criteria of authenticity could make the concept worthwhile. The piece of information regarding the fasting of Jesus' disciples is dealt with in the tradition passage of Mark 2,18-20.<sup>41</sup> Scholars have usually seen the statement in v. 20, «the days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day», as a comment resulting from a later situation of the Church where regular voluntary fast was indeed practiced. The comment was needed to accommodate the message of vv. 18-19, namely that Jesus' disciples did not fast, to the later practice of the church. Thus, the statement represents an anachronistic feature and, if deemed integral to the tradition passage, would suggest its inauthenticity. However, scholars have generally regarded the feature as not integral. Why? Because it is unlikely that anyone would put forward the non-fasting of Jesus' disciples only to be able to argue for fasting later in the church. Clearly, the anachronistic feature results from the adaptation of the tradition by the Christian communities while the same cannot be said about the rest of the information embodied by the tradition passage. The criteria operative here are implausibility and dissimilarity to Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

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39. As far as I can see, no tradition-critical model implies that the Jesus tradition cannot, due to the nature of the tradition process, contain mislocations and anachronisms.

40. For this kind of negative criterion of implausibility, see theses 5 and 7 below.

41. On what follows, see HOLMÉN, *Covenant Thinking*, 134-155.

42. See HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47-49, 51-52; see also theses 4 and 7 below.

Clearly, as to *b*), the problem the traditional tradition-critical analysis sought to confront persists irrespective of the chosen tradition-critical model. Likewise, it will obviously not disappear should the criteria of authenticity be dispensed with. On the contrary, the criteria can offer a solution to the persisting problem. At any rate, the idea of systematically striving at a reconstruction of the original form of a tradition has hereby been left behind. Much, however, remains to be said.

#### 4. THE CRITERION OF DISSIMILARITY IS A VALID TOOL OF AUTHENTICITY AND HAS NO MORE OR NO GREATER ODDS AGAINST IT THAN THE OTHER STANDARD TOOLS HAVE

Does it not seem very probable that Jesus indeed received John's «baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins»?<sup>43</sup> Would we not believe that sometime during Jesus' ministry his closest relatives sought to seize him as he seemed to have «gone out of his mind»?<sup>44</sup> Is it not true that Jesus' crucifixion can be considered a most assured historical fact?<sup>45</sup>

What persuades us about the basic accuracy of these evaluations? It is the realization that the early Christians would probably not have been interested in fabricating the notions on which the evaluations are founded. In other words, what persuades us about the probable basic historicity of the above three notions is the criterion of dissimilarity in its application to early Christianity.<sup>46</sup>

43. Mark 1,4; Luke 3,3; cf. Matt 3,2.6.

44. Mark 3,21; no parallels.

45. Scholars share the opinion of G. BARTH, *Der Tod Jesu Christi im Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1992, 1: «Nichts ist am Leben Jesu historisch so sicher wie sein Tod am Kreuz». See also, for instance, N. A. DAHL, «Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus», in J. H. CHARLESWORTH *et al.* (eds.), *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 382–403, p. 382.

46. The so-called criterion of dissimilarity is still one of the most frequently applied methodological devices of current historical Jesus research. Though often put forward with a supply of critical remarks, the criterion has, in one form or another, been accepted for the use of research by scholars across the spectrum. Among scholars who discard the dissimilarity to Judaism aspect and support what could be called the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity are, for example, B. F. MEYER, *The Aims of Jesus*, London: SCM, 1979, 86; ID., «Objectivity and Subjectivity», 547–548; A. F. SEGAL, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, 68–69; C. A. EVANS, «Authenticity Criteria in Life of Jesus Research», *CSR* 19 (1989) 6–31, p. 24–27; J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries*, London: SPCK, 1990, 5–6; S.-O. BACK, *Jesus of Nazareth and the Sabbath Commandment*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1995, 18; G. THEISSEN – A. MERZ, *Der historische Jesus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996, 118–120; S. E. PORTER, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previ-*

The early Christians (i.e., the people behind the sources for Jesus) would probably not have devised notions about Jesus that they were not interested in or that they could expect to lead to trouble.

Hence, if a tradition passage or a motif can be seen to be in this way dissimilar to early Christian interests, its gain, success, views, practices and/or theological tendencies etc., it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity.

Here we have the rationale and the resultant rule of application of the *criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity*.<sup>47</sup> This is the form of the dissimilarity criterion that has survived the criticisms that have arisen at the final stages of the New Quest (M. D. Hooker) and on the route to maturation of the Third Quest (G. Theissen and D. Winter). Contrary to what has sometimes been alleged, Hooker did not wish to discard the dissimilarity criterion for good but wanted to underline the relativity of the results arrived at by means of any of the criteria. «And what tools should he [the scholar] use in this task? He must, alas, use the tools we have been discussing, for there are no others, and there are unlikely to be any better ones discovered.»<sup>48</sup> The criteria she had been discussing were dissimilarity, coherence and multiple attestation. And again contrary to common belief, Theissen and Winter do not discard the entire dissimilarity criterion but only the double dissimilarity version. «The two aspects of the criterion of the plausibility of historical effects take up two traditional criteria (or three, depending on one's categories): on the one hand, the "criterion of dissimilarity" in its application to early Christianity..., and, on the other hand, aspects of the criteria of "coherence" and "multiple attestation"».<sup>49</sup> Consequently, we meet these scholars appealing to the dissimilarity criterion (that is, using the principle that underlies the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity), although one repeatedly finds statements claiming that they have rejected and abolished it:

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*ous Discussion and New Proposals*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 70–76; C. TUCKETT, «Sources and Methods», in M. BOCKMUEHL (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 121–137, p. 132–133; THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 169, 179. Those who uphold the so-called criterion of embarrassment can also be included in this group of scholars; see, for instance, J. BREECH, *The Silence of Jesus: The Authentic Voice of the Historical Man*, Philadelphia: Fortress 1983, 22–26, and J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, New York: Doubleday 1991, 168–171. Embarrassment is, in fact, a special case of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity; see T. HOLMÉN, «Doubts about Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the main criterion of Jesus-of-history research», in B. CHILTON – C. A. EVANS (eds.), *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* Leiden: Brill, 1999, 47–80, p. 75–76; THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 156.

47. On the rationale and rule of application, see HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47. See also in thesis 6 below.

48. HOOKER, «Wrong Tool», 580–581.

49. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 179.

Here, incidentally, is the real answer to those who from time to time have attempted to argue that Jesus never existed: men might have made up a story about a preacher and a healer, but never would they have invented such a crazy gospel as this. The cross was a symbol of weakness—of total impotence. ... In proclaiming a crucified Messiah as «good news», the first Christians clearly faced problems.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, early Christianity developed a positive ethos with regard to the family. Contrary to this tendency, however, it preserved the memory of a conflict between Jesus and his family. According to Mark 3:21, Jesus' «own» come to Jesus and want to seize him as though he were out of his mind. This can not possibly have been invented!<sup>51</sup>

And in order to cover all three examples given above, let us have a quotation of yet another critic of the dissimilarity criterion:

Für die Glaubwürdigkeit dieser Nachricht [i.e., Jesus' baptism by John] spricht der doppelte Anstoß, den sie nach Ausweis der Quellen der Urkirche bot. Einerseits stieß man sich daran, daß Jesus sich dem Täufer unterordnete, indem er sich von ihm taufen ließ (Matt 3,14f.), andererseits empfand man es als schwierig, daß Jesus sich einer Taufe «zur Vergebung der Sünden» unterzog. So ärgerniserregende Nachrichten hat man nicht erfunden.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, tradition passages and motifs that allow reference be made to the dissimilarity to Christianity criterion almost teem in the Jesus tradition and scholars frequently make use of this characteristic. Although their character of dissimilarity is not always as evident as is the case with the three examples already given,<sup>53</sup> in the following it is still quite obvious: Jesus' dubious birth; his table-fellowship with sinners; the strenuous prohibition of divorce and remarriage early Christians had to struggle with; Jesus' impious and impudent words to a man who wanted to bury his father; the betrayal of Jesus by one of his closest followers whom Jesus himself had chosen.<sup>54</sup> Studies on these

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50. M. D. HOOKER, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994, 9.

51. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 175.

52. J. JEREMIAS, *Neutestamentliche Theologie. Erster Teil: Die Verkündigung Jesu*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1971, 52. On p. 14, Jeremias takes up the «criterion of dissimilarity». While he accepts the criterion, he also comes up with some critical remarks against it. Further, it is the *double* dissimilarity criterion that Jeremias discusses on p. 14. The above quotation, however, portrays him applying the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity.

53. Moreover, whatever passages one presents, further discussion would naturally be in order.

54. A proper verdict on authenticity would, of course, require a detailed analysis of the texts, but some further instances and the arguments they yield can be briefly expressed as follows: Mark 11,17: the nations did not gather to Jerusalem, but the Christians engaged in Gentile mission outside the Holy Land; Mark 14,25: the logion is at variance with the Christological, soteri-



themes addressing the historicity question just need to be consulted to find scholars appealing to the principle behind the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity.

Indeed, as Theissen and Winter state, the Third Quest has generally endorsed the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity while rejecting the double dissimilarity version. However, the statement by Theissen and Winter on this matter contains an important point:

In the Third Quest, the CDJ [*sc.* criterion of dissimilarity to Judaism] is fundamentally rejected – with the help of a critical perception of the anti-Jewish element in the history of Christian theology, and the CDC [*sc.* criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity] is applied *in a controlled manner*.<sup>55</sup>

What does it mean to apply «CDC», that is, the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity, «in a controlled manner»? It means paying attention to the difficulties encountered in the actual use of this criterion without however dismissing the criterion as such. The difficulties demand that, *a*), one is aware of them and that, *b*), one involves certain counter measures. But they do not demand or justify rejection of the criterion, as if using other criteria instead (not in addition!) would solve something. For, as will be seen shortly, the other criteria have hazards of their own.

Hence, let us impose some control over the dissimilarity to Christianity criterion.<sup>56</sup> First, *a*), one should be aware that the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity does not work negatively suggesting that those tradition passages or motifs that do not display dissimilarity to Christianity are inauthentic.<sup>57</sup>

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ological and eschatological ideas of early Christianity; Matt 8,11-12 / Luke 13,28-29: the logion is difficult to combine with the Christian mission to the Gentiles; Matt 11,3-6 / Luke 7,20-23: John's hesitation puts Jesus on the defensive; Matt 11,16-19 / Luke 7,31-35: the pejorative characterization of Jesus furnishes the opponents with arguments; Matt 12,28 / Luke 11,20: the key concepts are foreign to the early Christian writings; Matt 19,28 / Luke 22,28-30: Jesus promises rulership to the twelve, thus including even Judas; Luke 8,2: the chief witness to the empty tomb is presented as a former demoniac. A careful combing through, for instance, the studies mentioned in footnote 46 above will easily multiply the number of these samples.

55. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 169 (emphasis added).

56. I will only discuss here some central difficulties of the standard criteria. For a treatment of all, real or alleged, difficulties that have been attached to the dissimilarity criterion, see my forthcoming «The Criterion of Dissimilarity: FAQ».

57. See, for example, M. D. HOOKER, «Christology and Methodology», *NTS* 17 (1970-1971) 480-487 p. 486; CALVERT, «An Examination of the Criteria», 211-213; D. L. MEALAND, «The Dissimilarity Test», *SJT* 31 (1978) 41-50, p. 47; MEYER, «Objectivity and Subjectivity», 548; C. A. EVANS, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, 21; C. S. EVANS, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The International Narrative as History*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996, 328-330; P. M. CASEY, «Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple», *CBQ* 59 (1997) 306-332, p. 329-331; DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*, 82.

There is no «criterion of similarity» suggesting that when a piece of information parallels the teachings of the early Church it should be regarded as inauthentic. While it is reasonable to think that the early Christians would not invent things about Jesus uninteresting or disadvantageous to themselves, it cannot be conversely presumed that they just could not find in him anything interesting or advantageous, for why would they then have chosen to follow him? Therefore, the criterion either supports or fails to support a given piece of information. It cannot rule it out.

Consequently, *b*), one should not use the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity in its negative mode! Instead, in cases where dissimilarity cannot be established one should turn to other criteria. However, as shown in thesis 5 below, fulfilling the *b*) part of this difficulty in applying the criterion seems to present an almost insurmountable task even for today's scholarship.

Secondly, *a*), it is necessary to be aware that since the criterion is able to identify as authentic such material only where Jesus differs from early Christian views, it cumulatively results in a biased picture of Jesus. The functionality of the criterion is restricted to a particular kind of material and, consequently, what it inevitably produces is a particular selection of authentic information.<sup>58</sup>

For this reason, *b*), when seeking to gather together authentic information about Jesus, this criterion should not be the only tool of authenticity applied. Criteria capable of probing the authenticity of such tradition passages or motifs, too, where Jesus appears to accord with early Christian views ought to accompany the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity, so balancing its results.<sup>59</sup> Let it be observed that the negative use of the criterion effectively precludes this balancing pursuit. So even here, in encountering this difficulty of application of the criterion, it would be important to act upon the awareness of the first difficulty.

So far so good. Nevertheless, some might object, even though the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity (or the principle it relies on) is approved and used very widely, including by many leading scholars engaged in this branch of research, should not other tools of authenticity be preferred? For, indeed, the dissimilarity criterion has its problems, as becomes obvious from the above discussion. The critical question here is, of course, whether other tools are any

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58. HOOKER, «Christology», 482. See also R. H. STEIN, «The "Criteria" for Authenticity», in R. T. FRANCE – D. WENHAM (eds.), *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983, 225-263, p. 242-243.

59. Cf. MEIER, *Marginal Jew I*, 173: «Especially with this criterion, complementary and balancing insights from other criteria are vital». See also, for instance, J. SCHRÖTER, «Markus, Q und der historische Jesus: Methodische und exegetische Erwägungen zu den Anfängen der Rezeption der Verkündigung Jesu», *ZNW* 89 (1998) 173-200, p. 200.

less problematic. I shall now limit myself to the two remaining standard criteria of authenticity.

The criterion of multiple attestation has it that if a tradition passage or a motif appears in two or more independent sources, it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity. A corresponding principle is commonly used as a tool of the inner criticism of general historiography and is considered to be sound. When applied to the gospels, however, the conclusiveness of the principle is considerably reduced. Here all the sources have too much in common to be characterized as «independent» in the sense that they might cherish different, maybe even opposite opinions, or have substantially conflicting interests, and so on. It is, then, only literary independence that is aimed at: Luke did not know Matthew (or vice versa), Mark did not utilize Q (or vice versa). Thus, the strongly persuasive sense of «accepted by friend and foe» is gone (though not perhaps completely), and what the existence of a tradition passage or a motif in, for example, both Q and Mark factually attests to is that the tradition or motif in question antedates these two sources. The rationale that upholds this criterion is clearly weaker than that of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity.<sup>60</sup> One can also observe that the functionality of the criterion is to an important degree dependent on source-critical solutions. As can be deduced, the most favourable solution from the point of view of the usability of the criterion, is the synoptic four-source hypothesis. Choosing the Griesbach hypothesis or the like greatly disempowers the criterion.

According to the criterion of coherence, if a tradition passage or a motif is coherent with what has already been deemed as authentic, it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity. The applicability of this criterion is limited by the demand that the tradition passage or motif to be tested should be compared with material the authenticity of which has already been determined. Thus, the criterion cannot be applied until some authentic material has already been identified. By the same token, the criterion is contingent upon the usability and cogency of the criteria by means of which the required authentic material is determined. Hence, if we discard the dissimilarity criterion, the criterion of coherence is bound to rely upon material singled out on the basis of the criterion of multiple attestation which, as we saw, is not a particularly forceful criterion.

Hence, the other standard criteria do not promise anything better which would justify a claim to supplant the dissimilarity criterion. Naturally, criteria

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60. The rationale that upholds the criterion of multiple attestation can be expressed as follows: An attestation in two or more independent sources means that the tradition passage or motif in question is earlier than these sources. An early tradition or motif, again, has on average a greater probability of authenticity than a later one. See further in thesis 6 below.

besides these standard ones could be brought into the discussion.<sup>61</sup> Further, somebody could come with a whole new set of criteria,<sup>62</sup> others, again, could demand that a completely new breed of tools should be developed.<sup>63</sup> However, the way scholarship more generally has sought to solve the difficulty that all criteria have problems of their own has not been to discard the criteria found flawed, as if there would be hope of discovering one completely flawless tool, but to use the criteria jointly so that they can complement each other. This is also what the controlled application of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity leads to. In fact, the observation that the difficulties of the dissimilarity criterion should be faced, not by dismissing the criterion but by using it in company with others, can be related to all of the criteria. While each individual criterion is insufficient as the sole basis of the analysis, the criteria taken all together can be expected to provide some relevant results. In this good company even the criterion of dissimilarity of Christianity has its place: «The first place is held by the quest for elements that resist the tendencies of the tradition».<sup>64</sup> Likewise, every new criterion that can contribute to this pursuit is welcome.

##### 5. THE NEGATIVE APPLICATION OF THE DISSIMILARITY CRITERION SHOULD BE ABANDONED – EVEN IN PRACTICE

When introducing the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity to a group of students or to a lecture audience or the like, it regularly happens that someone gets up and voices his or her disbelief in the functionality of the criterion: reasoning like this seems to exclude all such material where early Christians would have agreed with Jesus. And that cannot be right! One then needs to point out that the criterion does not seek to exclude any material, but that it only serves to supply arguments *for* authenticity when material displaying dissimilarity to Christianity is at hand. As regards material that can be considered similar (or not dissimilar) to Christianity the criterion has no say. In other words, there is no negative usage for the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity. Recognition of this usually proves faith restoring.

Indeed, the negative use of the criterion has long been refuted by scholars.<sup>65</sup> No one wants to put forward the peculiar claim that the first Christians did not

61. Cf. the repertoire introduced in HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47-52.

62. The best recent example of this is Porter, *Historical-Jesus Research*.

63. Cf. the discussion on thesis 1 above.

64. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 211. «Resisting the tendencies of the tradition» is one of their characterizations of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity.

65. See the discussion on the previous thesis.

find anything agreeable in Jesus' proclamation that they would have deemed worth preserving and that, instead, they preserved such things alone with which they disagreed or in which they were uninterested. On the contrary, it is concluded, the first Christians must have willingly accepted at least some aspects of Jesus' message. Similarly, they must have passed on at least some such aspects. For this very reason, similarity to Christianity of a tradition passage or a motif cannot suggest inauthenticity.

However, although in principle rejected by scholars, actually refraining from using the negative application of the criterion has proven to be surprisingly difficult. Not seldom does one encounter the thought that a piece of information corresponds «too closely» to early Christian interests to be regarded as authentic. Especially liable to such reasoning appear to be instances where the piece of information serves the aims of the evangelist-redactor relating it. Nonetheless, unless one thinks that the evangelists cannot have fully agreed with Jesus in anything, one has to stick to the rule: the criterion either supports authenticity or fails to support it; not being found dissimilar does not justify questioning a tradition passage's or a motif's authenticity. The evaluation of authenticity naturally changes if the tradition passage or motif cannot be plausibly pictured within Jesus' surroundings. However, it is not then the criterion of dissimilarity that is applicable. Instead, one should more properly speak of the implausibility of the piece of information with respect to Jesus' context, time and place. Hence, the criterion of implausibility has come into play.<sup>66</sup>

This line of thought might lie behind, for example, the criterion of Sanders and Davies according to which «a passage or a theme is shown to be historically reliable if it is directly against what the evangelist wished to be so. Conversely, it is historically unlikely if it agrees too closely with what they wished and corresponds to Christian doctrine».<sup>67</sup> While the first part of this criterion in a way paraphrases the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity, as regards the

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66. What I here call the criterion of implausibility is more generally known as the criterion of Palestinian environment (or the like; see, for example, EVANS, *Jesus*, 22-23) in its negative fashion: that which does not fit Jesus' environment (the pre- AD 70 Jewish Palestine) is probably inauthentic. Or as defined by Meier: «A saying that reflects social, political, economic, or religious conditions that existed only outside Palestine or only after the death of Jesus is to be considered inauthentic», MEIER, *Marginal Jew I*, 180. This also forms an integral part of the criterion of contextual plausibility of Theissen and Winter: being appropriate with respect to Jesus' context forms the *prerequisite* to which all tradition passages and motifs should acquiesce to be considered authentic. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 180. See further HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 51-52.

67. E. P. SANDERS – M. DAVIES, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, London: SCM 1989, 304-305. The following for instance argues in keeping with the latter part of the statement: R. J. MILLER, «Historical Method and the Deeds of Jesus: The Test Case of the Temple Demonstration», *Forum* 8 (1992) 5-22, p. 22.

last part one is bound to ask: do the writers really mean that Jesus' followers could never quite agree with him or that even if they sometimes could agree with him fully, they would not pass on those points of clear agreement (while many points of disagreement would have been preserved)? Or is it not in fact so that the writers actually mean to speak of things that would have emerged only together with early Christian developments of Jesuanic ideas and that, because of this, appear implausible when assessed against Jesus' time and context? Such things, however, should not be linked to the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity in any way but rather should be specified as relevant to another tool of authenticity, viz. the criterion of implausibility. Elsewhere Sanders and Davies reject the negative application,<sup>68</sup> but by the «with the grain», criterion they assume it.

What could merely be suspected in the above example is clearly the case with the rule put forward by Funk. He first states: «Features of stories that serve Christian convictions directly are likely to be the product of the Christian imagination».<sup>69</sup> This represents a negative application of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity and as such the rule is invalid. For it cannot be assumed that Christians would never have found the teachings of Jesus serving their interests «directly» but that they always deemed it necessary to adapt them somehow before they could adopt them. However, almost right after this Funk brings in an idea that, as it were, clarifies the first statement: «Traces of later Christian orthodoxy attributed to Jesus or his first followers are anachronistic».<sup>70</sup> This, however, is a completely different matter! Now Funk is speaking of features that did not emerge until later and that are therefore rightfully to be considered implausible with respect to Jesus' time and context.<sup>71</sup> Funk, nonetheless, clearly relates both ideas to the dissimilarity criterion since he paraphrases the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity in what follows (now correctly in its positive fashion).<sup>72</sup> Such mixing of two clearly different principles is always unfortunate when encountered in a methodology. Regrettably, too, this particular mix-up is tantamount to arguing for the negative application of the dissimilarity criterion.

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68. Their rejection is not, however, marked. It happens when they discuss the criterion of double dissimilarity (under the name «Uniqueness»); see SANDERS – DAVIES, *Studying*, 316-323. «“Non-unique” does not prove “inauthentic”», SANDERS – DAVIES, *Studying*, 322.

69. FUNK, *Acts of Jesus*, 35.

70. FUNK, *Acts of Jesus*, 35.

71. J. P. Meier, for one, would concur with Funk here. See his definition of the negative environmental criterion quoted in footnote 66 above.

72. Data that has survived in spite of being unfavorable to the Christian cause has «a greater claim to historicity». He gives the example of Jesus' baptism by John, FUNK, *Acts of Jesus*, 35.

Indeed, the negative application of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity many times interferes with methodological reasoning even after having been explicitly rejected. D. Allison, for example, acknowledges that eliminating items from the corpus of authentic materials by means of the criterion, that is, applying it negatively, represents its misuse.<sup>73</sup> Still, he can claim that the criteria of dissimilarity and multiple attestation contradict each other in this particular way:

The more frequently a complex is attested, the more congenial, one naturally infers, it was to early Christians. But the more congenial a complex was to early Christians, surely the less likely it is, for the critical, skeptical historian, that Jesus composed it. Conversely, the less congenial a tradition, the more likely its origin with Jesus and the less likely its multiple attestation. Here the criterion of multiple attestation is in a tug-of-war with the criterion of dissimilarity: they pull the same unit in opposite directions.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, what suggests that a «unit» that is multiply attested, and thus «congenial to early Christians», is inauthentic, is not the version of the dissimilarity criterion accepted by Allison himself. Rather, it is the negative application of the criterion. As just remarked, Allison labels elimination of material by means of the dissimilarity criterion as its misuse. In the «tug-of-war» described above, however, misuse is taken as the proper usage, so creating the contradiction with the criterion of multiple attestation.

In other words, it does indeed hold true that much of the material singled out by the criterion of multiple attestation does not clearly display any dissimilarity. Focusing largely on such kind of material, however, the criterion of multiple attestation still does not contradict the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity but only the negative version thereof. On the other hand, when using the dissimilarity criterion correctly, that is, refraining from conclusions as regards authenticity where dissimilarity is not detected, multiple attestation nicely works as one of the balancing criteria spoken of above: it counteracts the bias cumulatively caused by the dissimilarity criterion.<sup>75</sup>

Let us take one more example illustrating what abandoning the negative application of the dissimilarity to Christianity criterion should mean in practice. A most conspicuous case would, as remarked, deal with a tradition pas-

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73. «All too often, however, dissimilarity has been misused as a means of separating the authentic from the unauthentic, that is, a way of eliminating items from the corpus of authentic materials»: D. ALLISON, «How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity», in T. HOLMÉN – S. E. PORTER (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, forthcoming.

74. ALLISON, «Traditional Criteria», forthcoming.

75. See the previous thesis.

sage or a motif expressly serving the aims of the evangelist-redactor who relates it. It is only by chance that the instance below comes from R. Gundry's commentary. Many other works paying attention to historical questions could have equally been consulted.

Gundry observes how the pericope Matt 16,17-19 abounds in expressions and motifs typical of Matthew.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, he considers the pericope to be a Matthean composition in Greek.<sup>77</sup> This is using the dissimilarity criterion to exclude material as inauthentic, purely and simply: since Matt 16,17-19 is so similar to Christianity, specifically to Matthew's own theology, it is deemed secondary.

Let us pause to reflect. How often do we indeed encounter precisely this kind of reasoning and, simply, let it pass while perhaps even thinking it is making sense. Nevertheless, accepting such reasoning means accepting the negative application of the dissimilarity criterion. This we cannot do, can we?<sup>78</sup> Therefore, in order to avoid a situation where we reject something in principle while accepting it in practice, we need to know exactly how to deal with concrete cases that realize the principle.

So, what should we do with the deeply Matthean (according to Gundry) pericope of Matt 16,17-19 and with all others like it in order not to resort to applying the dissimilarity criterion negatively? The first observation is that despite the fact that the language and some expressions of the text may result from Matthew's editing, it is in principle still quite possible that it builds on tradition: *in a most natural way, Matthew would have seized and passed on the tradition passage precisely because he found it presenting so many ideas important to himself.* In this way, two equally possible provenances of the material central to Matt 16,17-19 are acknowledged, viz. Matthean and pre-Matthean. The second step is to recognize that the only way to decide between these two provenances is to consider whether the ideas found in the text can indeed have had a pre-Matthean existence. In particular, trying to reach the historical Jesus, *it must be asked whether the ideas embodied by the text emerge as plausible when viewed in Jesus' context, time and place.* If then plausibility,

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76. R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 330-336.

77. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 333, 335.

78. Sometimes reassurance is in order: Is it so that the first Christians did not find anything agreeable in Jesus' proclamation that they would have deemed worth preserving but that, instead, they preserved such things alone that they disagreed with or were disinterested in? Or is it the case, on the contrary, that the first Christians must have willingly accepted at least some aspects of Jesus' message and that they must have passed on at least some of such aspects? And how can we tell that we are not looking at one such aspect right now in Matt 16,17-19? This last question is pursued immediately below in the text of the article.



rather than implausibility (hence, it is the criterion of implausibility that is being assessed here), can be established with respect to Jesus' context, Matthew's eager endorsement of the ideas can in no way be taken as an argument for their inauthenticity. Still, neither do we have any argument for authenticity at hand, but we are simply left with the two possible alternatives of provenance.<sup>79</sup>

Now, to accept this state of indecisiveness is a matter on which a great deal hangs. For by so doing the possibility is retained of continuing to argue for the authenticity of the piece of information in question instead of just dumping it as inauthentic because of its obvious similarity to Christianity. And so an escape from resorting to the negative application of the criterion of dissimilarity is found! Just in case I may seem to be getting my resistance to the negative application of the criterion out of all proportion, allow me to point out what is at stake here: this is the only way to take seriously the need to accommodate continuity, besides discontinuity, between Jesus and his followers. Indeed, it is not so much the criterion of dissimilarity proper that causes Jesus to be detached from his followers but the negative application of it, which may in fact be the most frequently employed «tool» in scholarship. Sometimes even those who in principle completely reject the whole dissimilarity criterion use it in the negative fashion.

## 6. THE SO-CALLED CRITERION OF MULTIPLE ATTESTATION SHOULD BE *DE-LUMPED*

The criteria are best explicated by describing their application and stating the reason and ground –the rationale– on which the criterion and its application rely. For instance, the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity can be explicated thus:

Rule of application: If a piece of information can be seen to be dissimilar to early Christianity (its gain, success, interests, views, practices and/or theological tendencies, and so on), it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity.

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79. What is crucially lacking in Gundry's handling of Matt 16,17-19 is thus that he is not interested in considering the question of the pre-Matthean plausibility of the central ideas of the tradition passage. Their similarity to Matthew's emphases suffices for him as an indication of their secondary character, i.e., of their inauthenticity. *Ergo*: Gundry is using the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity negatively to label the piece of information as inauthentic while, instead, the possible applicability of the criterion of implausibility should have been studied.

Rationale: The early Christians (i.e., the people behind the sources for Jesus) would probably not have devised notions about Jesus in which they were not interested or that they could expect to lead to trouble.

An unwritten law implicitly followed by those who develop and deal with the criteria is that one should not have two or more paraphrases of one and the same criterion, or better, of one and the same rationale on which a criterion can be based, but that one should avoid repetition of the same underlying principles. Similarly, none of the criteria should be part of, or overlap with, another. The aim herewith is that each and every one of the various criteria should be based on a rationale of its own. In this way, too, one can ensure that, basically, the probability of authenticity increases alongside the number of criteria suggesting authenticity. So for example D. Polkow in his important article, after cataloguing 25 proposed criteria combines and reorders them according to the underlying principles so that he is left at the end with six different criteria.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, it also stands to reason that no one criterion should build on two or more different and distinct rationales. In other words, the rationale to the criterion ratio should be one to one. It could, then, be asked whether, for instance, the rationale of the dissimilarity to Christianity criterion stated above is in fact a compound of two slightly different ideas: a piece of information can be characterized as *being of no interest* to early Christians or as predictably *causing trouble* to them. If it is deemed it better to divide the rationale this way, two different criteria instead of only one can be upheld. Retaining the names of criteria already in use, we could call them the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity (disinterest) and the criterion of embarrassment (trouble). For my part, I have elsewhere argued that the rationale cannot be divided in this way,<sup>81</sup> and, in my view, anyone who begs to differ should correspondingly argue his or her case. That is, it should be demonstrated that «being of no interest» and «causing trouble» do not overlap and that, on the contrary, if only one criterion is built on them it would mean lumping together two different rationales.

Be this as it may in this instance (although I believe I am well justified in my case), there is one traditional criterion that I think is indeed based on two different rationales simply being lumped together. This is the criterion known by the name *multiple attestation*. A representative description is that put forward by J. P. Meier:

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80. D. POLKOW, «Method and Criteria for Historical Jesus Research», in K. H. RICHARDS (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, 336-356. p. 337-342.

81. HOLMÉN, «Doubts about Double Dissimilarity», 75-76; ID., «Criteria», 49.

The criterion of multiple attestation ... focuses on those sayings or deeds of Jesus that are attested in more than one independent literary source.<sup>82</sup>

It is telling that scholars do not often spell out the reason (the rationale) why this criterion should be seen to provide an argument for authenticity. As seen above in the discussion concerning thesis 4, what it factually attests to is merely that the piece of information found in, say, two independent sources is earlier than either of these sources. The discussion of B. F. Meyer is one of the most explicit concerning the multiple attestation criterion in this respect. The strongest ground that he can adduce for the cogency of the criterion is that «“multiple” points to “early” and “early” to “historical”». <sup>83</sup> Even so, Meyer warns that these links should not be regarded as guaranteed in individual cases.<sup>84</sup> Rather, they hold only with statistical generality. Hence, the rationale of the criterion of multiple attestation could look like this:

An attestation in two or more independent sources means that the tradition passage or motif in question is earlier than these sources. An early tradition or motif, again, has on average a greater probability of authenticity than a later one.

Interestingly, then, the way scholars usually support their use of the criterion of multiple attestation is not by stating this, nor a corresponding rationale or explication, but by referring to examples such as the kingdom of God proclamation by Jesus or Jesus' exorcisms, concerning the historicity of which all today's Jesus questers feel confident. Admittedly, these motifs can also be said to be «attested in more than one independent literary source». However, the reason why we feel convinced about their historicity is not because of their proven existence prior to the sources in question. Rather, we think that the broad and diffuse attestation of the motifs mentioned must mean that they existed from the very beginning and were generally recognized as Jesuanic. In principle, a tradition passage witnessed in two independent sources could be explained away by referring to a common source that lies behind the passages. The question of authenticity would then merely be transferred one step backwards and posed with respect to the tradition passage in that source. This is in

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82. MEIER, *Marginal Jew I*, 174. I omit the addition «and/or in more than one literary form or genre» (p. 174), for it does not really form part of the problem at issue now and could merely confuse things. I have addressed this question in HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 49.

83. MEYER, «Objectivity and Subjectivity», 551.

84. I have spelled out Meyer's argument for the criterion in HOLMÉN, *Covenant Thinking*, 33. For some reason, E. EVE, «Meier, Miracle and Multiple Attestation», *JSHJ* 3 (2005) 23-45, p. 29, after quoting some statements of mine about the multiple attestation criterion in that study, claims that I do not at all explain the statements. My explanation follows immediately after the words quoted by Eve. In general, Eve ignores Meyer's remarks on multiple attestation.

fact how Q-material is dealt with. Although virtually all Q-material can be found attested independently by Matthew and Luke, this is not deemed to justify an appeal to the criterion of multiple attestation but, instead, arguments for authenticity are sought starting from the Q-material itself. Not so with motifs attested recurrently throughout the Jesus tradition. They can never be reduced to manifestations of but one single source, which is then made responsible for answering the question of authenticity. Furthermore, they cannot be dismissed as secondary even if entire sources should be disclosed to be fictitious through and through.

What these considerations reveal is that such *recurrently* attested motifs, in fact, build on a rationale clearly different from the one discernible behind ordinary multiple attestations.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the leap from individual pieces of information attested in two or three tradition passages to general motifs appearing scattered throughout the Jesus tradition means a difference in kind. It is a different principle and rationale that is operative behind the recurrent attestations. Consequently, we should refer to two different criteria to be labelled, for example, «the criterion of multiple attestation» and «the criterion of recurrent attestation».<sup>86</sup> Yet, the two principles have been lumped together from McArthur and Perrin to Meier and Porter,<sup>87</sup> sometimes even being supported by examples that exclusively give expression to recurrent attestation (e.g. the already mentioned kingdom proclamation). This is probably also the reason for Allison's observation that scholars have, in fact, made frequent use of the recurrent attestation principle he now puts forward as an alternative to the standard criteria of authenticity:<sup>88</sup> the principle has been in use because it has formed part of the standard criterion of multiple attestation (which Allison all but denounces).<sup>89</sup> However, that Allison, Dunn and others<sup>90</sup> can consider the recurrent attestation principle a tool of historicity of its own is further proof of its independency of the criterion of multiple attestation. A rationale for it can be formulated:

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85. EVE, «Multiple Attestation», 45, incorrectly believes this is a combination of multiple attestation and criterion of coherence. For the boundary between these two criteria, see HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 50.

86. For the designation «recurrent attestation», see ALLISON, «Traditional Criteria», forthcoming. I have adopted Allison's designation and used it alongside the traditional «multiple attestation», in HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47, 49.

87. H. K. MCARTHUR, «Basic Issues: A Survey of Recent Gospel Research», *Int* 18 (1964) 39-55, p. 48; PERRIN, *Rediscovering*, 46; MEIER, *Marginal Jew I*, 174-175; PORTER, *Historical-Jesus Research*, 86.

88. ALLISON, «Traditional Criteria», forthcoming: «It is in favor of what I am saying that scholars often conduct business as though what I am saying is true».

89. Allison also seems not to be aware of that the recurrent attestation principle has been included in the criterion of multiple attestation.

90. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*, 330-335; THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 177.

A greater dispersion of a motif suggests that the motif has landed in the Jesus tradition very early and through several tradents. It further suggests that already then the motif had been widely accepted and experienced as central. There are no better options for finding historically accurate reminiscences of Jesus.<sup>91</sup>

All in all, the traditional criterion of multiple attestation should be delumped! In addition to the actual criterion of multiple attestation (rule of application: «if a tradition passage or a motif appears in two or more independent sources, it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity»), producing an argument for authenticity to be considered weak to mediocre, we now have the criterion of recurrent attestation (rule of application: «if a motif has gathered numerous, recurrent attestations across the sources, it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity»), resulting in an argument for authenticity to be deemed good to strong. Hence, the number of criteria is increased by one very prominent criterion.<sup>92</sup> This is good news.

## 7. WHAT THE CURRENT JESUS RESEARCH IS DESPERATELY IN NEED OF IS NEGATIVE CRITERIA

Combing through various lists of authenticity criteria one observes that there are, in fact, two basic types of criteria: positive and negative. Positive criteria are those appeal to which can provide arguments *for* authenticity. When appeal can be made to negative criteria, arguments *against* authenticity or for *inauthenticity* are available.

The lists of criteria also yield an observation which, though remarkable, has been given very little consideration so far: quite regularly, the majority of the criteria appearing in the lists, many times all of them, are positive ones. Only a few negative criteria seem to exist and they are often referred to in passing only. What are the reasons for this? What are the consequences?

As remarked when discussing thesis 3 above, the *topos* of authenticity criteria was introduced and included in the discussion of the historical Jesus already at the beginning of the twentieth century. A more common awareness of the need for such methodological tools, however, did not emerge until the commencement of the New Quest in the 1950's. A reason for the increase of the awareness at this point in time was that the revived interest in the historical figure of Jesus then had to face scepticism about the historical reliability of the gospels, which, mainly in the wake of form criticism, had affected scholarship rather broadly.

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91. HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47.

92. For the evaluations good to strong (criterion of recurrent attestation) and weak to mediocre (criterion of multiple attestation), see HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 47, 49.

The usual methodological starting point, appropriate in view of the scepticism, was to place the burden of proof on showing authenticity: the analysis should seek to prove the historicity of a Jesus tradition; without any proofs to that end, in contrast, the tradition would be assumed to be inauthentic.<sup>93</sup>

These scholarly outlooks have been formative for the development of the authenticity criteria. As a result, the discussion about the criteria has concentrated on finding tools that can provide arguments for authenticity, not against it or for inauthenticity.<sup>94</sup> All deeper reflection, consideration of problems, refining of definitions, and so on has concerned the positive criteria while, passively, scepticism about the sources has been left to counterbalance the one-sidedness of the pursuits. It was the scepticism that created the need for the positive criteria, justified concentration of the scholarly discussion on them, and at the same time fended off contemplation of the negative criteria.

However, the views of the gospels as sources for historical information about Jesus have changed since the heyday of form criticism. The predominant position has clearly moved in a more trusting direction.<sup>95</sup> As one unailing sign of this, the burden of proof is no more squarely placed on showing authenticity. One mainly encounters the middle position, that is, the burden of proof is claimed to lie on the one who wants to prove something, whether authenticity or inauthenticity.<sup>96</sup> And increasingly, one can also find studies where the burden is placed on showing inauthenticity.<sup>97</sup> There has, in other words, been a change in the basic attitudes towards the sources. The kind of scepticism that once, in a way, adopted the role of the negative criteria in that inauthenticity was assumed if not proven otherwise, is there no more!

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93. «We no longer have to prove the unauthenticity, but (and this is far harder) their authenticity»; H. ZÄHRNT, *The Historical Jesus*, New York: Harper, 1960, 107-108; «The obligation now laid upon us is to investigate and make credible not the possible unauthenticity of the individual unit of material but, on the contrary, its genuineness»; E. KÄSEMANN, «The Problem of the Historical Jesus», in *Essays on New Testament Themes* London: SCM Press, 1964, 15-47, 34. See also, for instance, Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 39.

94. As another result, also noted when discussing thesis 3 above, the criteria became intimately adapted to work in tandem with tradition- and form-critical principles, such as seeing the gospel tradition as consisting of small units with histories of their own as separate entities.

95. See E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, London: SCM, 1985, 2; C. A. EVANS, «Reconstructing Jesus' Teaching: Problems and Possibilities», in J. H. CHARLESWORTH – L. L. JOHNS (eds.), *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997, 397-426, p. 397-398; HOLMÉN, «Criteria», 45.

96. Proposed already by HOOKER, «Wrong Tool», 580. More recently by MEYER, *Aims*, 81-87; SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 13; MEIER, *Marginal Jew I*, 183; THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 204.

97. S. C. GOETZ – C. L. BLOMBERG, «The Burden of Proof», *JSNT* 11 (1981) 39-63, p. 51-52; D. R. A. HARE, *The Son of Man Tradition*, Minneapolis: Fortress 1990, 257. As noted in footnote 27 above, even Perrin in practice sometimes placed the burden of proof in this way.

This should necessarily call for reconsideration of previous decisions. Surprisingly enough, however, in focusing almost exclusively on positive criteria today's scholarship still tends to reflect the old situation. There is virtually no discernible interest in discussing the negative criteria. Yet, merely thinking of the burden of proof question and the different solutions to it that today can be regarded as relevant, such recalcitrance is unsustainable. If one accepts the middle position as a valid scheme for the placement of the burden of proof, how can one think inauthenticity could be proven if there are no, or not cogent enough, criteria for that purpose? Preoccupied with positive criteria alone, scholarship is in reality well equipped only to argue *for* authenticity, and so the middle position remains a dead principle. However, the obligation to present working negative criteria is particularly urgent when given the idea that the burden of proof lies on showing inauthenticity. Failing then to state clearly the criteria by means of which inauthenticity could be shown, effectively invalidates one's analysis of authenticity.

With respect to these considerations, an obvious obstacle is constituted by the fact that, at the present time, only two negative criteria seem to be warranted. The first, and most important, one is the criterion of implausibility:

Rule of application: If a tradition passage or a motif involves features integral to it that are incapable of being plausibly situated in the Palestine of Jesus' time, inauthenticity of the tradition or motif is suggested.

Rationale: Such features are by definition mislocations and/or anachronisms, and tradition passages or motifs that integrally depend on them can be deemed as mislocated and/or anachronistic traditions and motifs.

There have been attempts to sustain a positive variation of this criterion, suggesting authenticity of tradition passages or motifs well at home in first-century Palestine.<sup>98</sup> Suitability with respect to the Jesuanic context should, however, be seen as the precondition to which any piece of information should conform in order not to be disqualified as inauthentic (the underlying fundamental question at issue here is the endeavour, emphasized by the Third Quest, to view Jesus within the Judaism of his time). This is precisely how Theissen and Winter present their criterion of contextual appropriateness: being appropriate with respect to Jesus' context forms the prerequisite to which all traditions and motifs to be considered authentic should acquiesce.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, although taking a positive form, contextual appropriateness according to Theissen and Winter works like the negative criterion of implausibility. Understand-

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98. See footnote 66 above.

99. THEISSEN – WINTER, *Plausible Jesus*, 180.

ably, to be found implausible with respect to Jesus' Jewish context is equivalent to not fulfilling the precondition of being always plausible with respect to the context. Since the other positive criteria cannot be regarded as preconditions (for this would mean applying them negatively, which must not be done), a «criterion of *implausibility*» is to be preferred over against a «criterion of *plausibility*». Then all the criteria, both positive and negative ones, can be regarded as yielding an argument –for or against authenticity respectively– *when applicable*, but where they cannot be applied they do not suggest otherwise. That is, when the positive criteria are inapplicable they do not suggest inauthenticity and, again, the negative criteria when inapplicable do not suggest authenticity.<sup>100</sup>

Another valid negative criterion is that of incoherence. However, this criterion remains rather far from the strength and decisiveness of argument of the implausibility criterion.

Rule of application: If a tradition passage or a motif is incoherent with what has already been deemed as authentic, inauthenticity of the tradition passage or motif is suggested.

Rationale: On the basis of what we already know about Jesus, this is what we would not expect him to say or do.

The support for inauthenticity provided by this negative criterion is relatively weak, mainly because the concept of incoherence serves as a rather feeble basis for inferences: *a)* people tend to be inconsistent; *b)* the ancient Semitic thought differs from ours, for example, by being more attracted to paradoxes and tensions; *c)* when preaching on various occasions and for various people, Jesus probably did not aim at, and could hardly accomplish, a body of teaching that would resemble a systematic presentation.<sup>101</sup>

These two negative criteria are not in constant, let alone consistent, use in today's scholarship, and I greatly doubt that upholding them more often would

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100. Let it be noted, further, that the negative use of the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity actually represents an incomplete form of the criterion of implausibility: traditions or motifs similar to early Christianity are, without further ado, treated as if they were mislocations or anachronisms. Naturally, mislocations and anachronisms do display similarity to early Christian views from which they derive, but above all they are, at the same time, incapable of being situated within the Palestine of Jesus' time. The fallacious negative «criterion of similarity to Christianity» thus errs in not paying attention to whether the traditions or motifs deemed similar to Christianity could still also be seen as plausible with respect to Jesus' context. Cf. also the discussion on thesis 5 above, in particular the treatment of Gundry.

101. The criterion of incoherence cannot actually be equated with a negative use of the criterion of coherence (see in thesis 4 above). For besides being mutually coherent or incoherent, two issues can also be irrelevant to each other.



suffice to put the authenticity method in better order. Let therefore a call for papers entertaining additional negative criteria be issued.

In the light of the predominantly sceptical view of the sources during the New Quest, the required tools were naturally those capable of identifying authentic material. The situation is now better in that the dilemma formed by overconfidence in the criteria of authenticity resulting from a lack of confidence in the sources is usually avoided.<sup>102</sup> Most Third Quest scholars can accept that a probability of authenticity suffices to make a piece of information provided by the sources useable for historical Jesus study. As the flip side, however, an exclusive use of tools suited to identifying authentic material can no longer count as an adequate authenticity method. The two more widely known negative criteria, again, may not be able to greatly improve on the situation even if they were introduced into the list of more regularly employed criteria. Hence, the need for serious discussion, inquiry and development of new negative criteria is obvious.

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Having nailed up my theses, I wish to congratulate the *Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya* on the occasion of its 40th anniversary.

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## Sumari

La discussió sobre els anomenats criteris d'autenticitat no és precisament una poma de la discòrdia dintre la recerca del Jesús històric. Mentre s'originava en el moment del darrer alè de la *First Quest* (*die Leben Jesu Forschung*) no havia estat pròpiament incorporada en l'agenda de la recerca sobre Jesús fins als dies d'auge de la *Second/New Quest*. En diverses branques de la *Third Quest*, novament, aquests criteris es consideren com a centrals i necessaris, tot i que també és una eina problemàtica

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102. Cf. the discussion on thesis 2 above.

per a la recerca. No obstant això, van sorgir perspectives més crítiques i pessimistes. A més d'ordenar les diferents tesis, aquest article intenta d'intervenir en la discussió d'alguns d'aquests criteris i en la majoria dels seus punts més crítics. Aquestes tesis ens remeten a qüestions plantejades sobre aquests criteris durant molt de temps, així com a algunes de noves que esperonen, *inter alia*, els plantejaments actuals i obliguen a refer la tradició històrica dels evangelis (sinòptics) en la investigació actual.