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Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool

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INTRODUCTION

A British journal recently published a short series of articles under the general title "Slippery Words."¹ Contributors treated such terms as *myth*, *eschatology*, and the like. No doubt the editor could have enlarged the list of entries had he chosen to do so; but for whatever reason, he did not. One expression that could lay large claim to consideration in any expanded list is "redaction criticism."

The ambiguity is partly denotative and partly connotative. At the denotative level, "redaction criticism" can refer to a surprising range of literary activity. It can refer to the study of how an author who depends on an earlier document has used that document—e.g., changing order, editing, polishing, transforming emphases. Elsewhere, when the source document is no longer available, "redaction criticism" can serve as a comprehensive category that includes source criticism and tradition criticism, since it is very difficult to say much about redaction until one has some idea of what is being redacted. Others use the expression in a much weaker sense to refer to the study of an author's particular emphases and tendencies.

The connotative ambiguities are not less diverse. To scholars with antisupernatural presuppositions, the practice of redaction criticism both confirms those presuppositions and serves as a tool for expressing them.² On the other hand, more than one conservative Evangelical has expressed strong (not to say, heated) reservations about the legitimacy of *any* use of redaction criticism.³

Before I can say anything useful about the legitimacy and illegitimacy of this literary tool, therefore, I will have to sketch in a little background. Having done this, I will offer a number of criticisms of the most common kinds of redaction criticism and provide a couple of examples. None of this material is original or comprehensive but it forms the necessary backdrop to the final section, in which I will suggest some guidelines for the use of redaction criticism by those who have a high view of Scripture. In other words, at that point I will offer some programmatic suggestions aimed both at advancing the debate among Evangelicals a little further and at demonstrating to non-Evangelicals that the reservations we maintain concerning redaction criticism are reasonable and that our use of the tool is not necessarily perversely idiosyncratic and inconsistent.

But first, something must be said about the development of the tool.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF REDACTION CRITICISM

The synoptic problem was widely recognized in the early church. The first known systematic attempt at harmonization is that of Tatian (c. 110–172); but for our purposes the fact that he made the attempt is more important than his solutions, for it is evidence of an awareness of some of the problems.

The synoptic problem, however conceived, involves some literary dependence; that is, some New Testament authors are using literary sources. That should not surprise us. Luke (1:1–4) tells us as much, and there is solid evidence of literary dependence elsewhere (e.g., 2 Peter/Jude). Assured that there were literary sources, modern critics of the past one hundred years or so have expended enormous amounts of energy on retrieving literary sources whose independent existence is not attested anywhere. Source criticism became one of the dominant interests of many New Testament critics at the turn of the century; and this, coupled with the prevailing rationalism, prompted many to date the Gospels (especially Matthew and Luke) rather late and to assess their historical trustworthiness as minimal (by conservative standards).

How, then, could very much be said about the historical Jesus? Once having removed the general reliability of the Gospels, scholars could not easily locate the historical Jesus. Based in part on source criticism and in part on a complete restructuring of first-century history, their studies produced highly diverse models of Jesus. Von Harnack constructed the classic liberal Jesus;⁴ and many scholars accepted this Jesus as indeed historical, retrieved from the Gospels by judicious source criticism and post-Enlightenment insight. Schweitzer, however, demonstrated how subjective this historical reconstruction really was. The quest for the historical Jesus was leading down blind alleys. Yet Schweitzer's own reconstruction depended heavily on another selective ordering of the evidence; he thought the historical Jesus was an apocalyptic but misguided itinerant Palestinian preacher.⁵ It all depended on the "sources" retrieved and the nature of the history that had been worked up by the scholar. The general effect of Schweitzer's work on radical criticism was nothing less than the tolling of the death-knell over the quest for the historical Jesus. The quest, hitherto judged difficult, was now deemed impossible.

In this environment, form criticism appeared and began to flourish. Developed in a systematic way by Hermann Gunkel for use in history-of-religions research into the Old Testament,⁶ form criticism was rapidly and rigorously applied to the New Testament, in particular to the Gospels, by K. L. Schmidt,⁷ M. Dibelius,⁸ and Rudolf

Bultmann.⁹ Form criticism was a way of getting behind the written materials to the oral sources. Using the studies of folklorists and anthropologists concerned with the passing on of oral tradition in primitive cultures, the form critics theorized that various kinds of story, each with its technical name ("miracle story," "apophthegm," or whatever)¹⁰ necessarily tended to assume a certain shape or form in the course of being passed on from hearer to hearer. It was thought that if the form of any particular pericope in the Gospel is identical with the ideal form, that is solid evidence for a stable transmission of the story. If it breaks form, there have probably been a number of additions by later transmitters of the tradition or by the final redactor, who was no doubt motivated by theological concerns.

The early form critics went further, especially in two respects. First, they theorized regarding what situations in the early church (i.e., what "life-settings" or *Sitze im Leben*) would generate such stories. The church, then, does not merely pass on stories about Jesus; it creates them to meet various theological needs. Second, in the case of Bultmann in particular, his handling of form criticism was so tied up with his general historical reconstructions regarding pre-Christian Gnosticism and his presuppositional antisupernaturalism that the net effect of his studies was the conclusion that one could know almost nothing about the historical Jesus.

If such form-critical understanding of the formation of the Gospels is even approximately correct, then the Evangelists (i.e., those who put the four Gospels into their present form) were little more than compilers of discrete stories. Careful study of the Gospels, in this view, discovers very little about Jesus and a great deal about the life-settings of the church—or, more precisely, of various churches, since the churches behind the diverse Gospel pericopae were not thought to be much concerned with mutual conformity and consistency. The effect of this theory on Bultmann's two-volume *Theology* is a mere thirty pages devoted to Jesus (and those thirty pages say little that is positive) as compared with one hundred pages devoted to the beliefs of the Hellenistic communities. Many scholars abandoned the quest for the historical Jesus.

If several Gospels preserve the same story, but with changes in emphasis and form, then it becomes theoretically possible to plot the changes in the tradition as the story gets passed along. By this means one can chart a *trajectory* of the form and its changing content. As is well known, the German word *Formgeschichte* is poorly rendered by "form criticism." It might better be translated "form history" or "history of form." Because of adopted convention, I will continue to use the term *form criticism*, but the German term opens a window onto what is entailed when this literary tool is used.

In time, it came to be noticed that the Evangelists (i.e., the final compilers) were not simply collectors of nice stories. Coupling form

criticism with literary dependence, it was argued that the Evangelists shaped the traditions that came to them; that is, they omitted things; added details; and changed emphases, specific utterances, and locale. They were *redactors*; that is, they edited this inherited material to express their own theology and their own view of the materials they were passing on. They were creative theologians in their own right.

Of course, this view of the Evangelists' task introduces a new problem. One must now distinguish between what is redactional and what is traditional—that is, between what the Evangelist has received in the tradition that has come to him and what he has added or changed himself. Discovering this distinction is the task of redaction criticism. Traditionally, if redaction criticism determines that some word or phrase is redactional, then even if it is ascribed to Jesus in the text it cannot possibly be authentic; that is, it cannot possibly derive from the historical Jesus in the days of His flesh. If, on the other hand, redaction criticism determines that some word or phrase is traditional, then at least it stretches back beyond the redactor. This does not guarantee its authenticity; it simply makes authenticity a live option. This slender distinction between redaction and tradition sparked off a new round of interest in the historical Jesus. The resulting pictures were still pretty minimalistic, but they offered more than Bultmann did.

The task of the redaction critic is to distinguish between what is redactional and what is traditional. To do this he establishes a number of criteria (some of which I will briefly consider in the next section). Hence, the validity of this initial distinction turns entirely on the validity of his chosen criteria, and redaction criticism itself turns in part on the validity of form criticism. Moreover, the expression "redaction criticism" came quickly to be used not only in the study of those places in the synoptic Gospels where there are literary parallels, but also in parts of the Gospels where there are no parallels, and in other kinds of documents (e.g., the letters of Paul). At that point redaction criticism is implicitly involved in source criticism and form criticism, because until something is known about the alleged source, not very much can be said about the way it is being redacted. In practice, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism collapse methodologically into one procedure, and the procedure is still called "redaction criticism." But it needs to be pointed out that such redaction criticism is rather different from that practiced on passages that boast close literary parallels.¹¹

This rather potted history of the rise of redaction criticism is fairly well known and is detailed with rigor elsewhere.¹² The only detail I must add is that in the present discussion the expression "redaction criticism" is being used in much broader ways that are rather divorced from these methodological and philosophical roots. The expression is often taken to refer to the study of the particular emphases of the

Evangelist (or other author) in question. For example, Mark characteristically uses *εὐθύς* and *εὐθέως*, whereas John uses *κόσμος*; how much do these linguistic distinctives reflect not *Jesus'* usage but the respective *Evangelists'* usage? How does the topical ordering of material and the selection of *this* pericope over *that* affect the thrust of each Evangelist's message? Such questions begin to do justice to the contribution made by each Evangelist without necessarily bringing along the radical skepticism of the pioneering form critics and redaction critics. Moreover, methodologically the attempt to wrestle with such concerns was already well demonstrated in the careful and thought-provoking work of Ned B. Stonehouse.¹³ Although he never used the expression "redaction criticism," he pioneered in developing what is in fact a rather conservative redaction criticism.

What should be clear at this point is that to comment on the legitimacy and illegitimacy of this particular literary tool raises a host of problems of definition. Osborne, for instance, aware of these problems, wants to use redaction criticism to distinguish between "tradition" and "redaction," but in his use of the terms, the question of historicity does not arise. Both redactional material and traditional material are authentic, but the former refers to what the Evangelist added or changed or reworded, whereas the latter refers to the form of the tradition he received.¹⁴ The distinction that Osborne maintains assists him in detecting peculiar emphases and interests on the part of the Evangelists; but Osborne, especially in his most recent essay, attempts to distance himself from using redaction criticism to determine authenticity.

Between this conservative use of redaction criticism and the radical one, which developed the tool, stand a number of middle-of-the-road positions.¹⁵ Whatever their individual merits or demerits, one cannot escape two facts: redaction criticism is here to stay and it means different things to different people. Especially the latter fact must be borne in mind when we attempt to synthesize an evangelical position.

COMMON CRITICISMS LEVELED AGAINST REDACTION CRITICISM

Before attempting to synthesize an evangelical position, I will note some of the charges against various kinds of redaction criticism. This list is neither exhaustive nor, for the most part, original; and the entries are not in any particular order. But if we are to assess the legitimacy and illegitimacy of this literary tool, we must take rapid note of some of its widely acknowledged weaknesses.

1. A majority of New Testament scholars still hold that the most likely solution to the synoptic problem is the two-source hypothesis. If it is correct, then one may legitimately speak of the ways in which

Matthew has changed, added to, or omitted something from Mark. With increasing frequency, however, the old Griesbach hypothesis has been dusted off and set up as an alternative option.¹⁶ For those who hold it to be the correct solution, it is illegitimate to speak of Matthew changing Mark; one must speak of Mark changing Matthew. In my view, both solutions are too simple: there is more probably a certain amount of *interdependency*. Perhaps Mark relied on an early (Aramaic?) Matthew, and Matthew relied on a finished Mark; I am uncertain. But certain parallel accounts can be more readily accounted for by assuming Mark borrowed from Matthew than vice-versa (e.g., the parable of the sower),¹⁷ even if, taken as a whole, the two-source hypothesis is more believable. If the situation is complex, one may legitimately speak of the differences and emphases peculiar to Matthew, Mark, or some other Evangelist; but only with some hesitation may one speak of one Evangelist changing or modifying the work of another.

2. It is common knowledge that the comparative studies of oral tradition (e.g., on the Maori civilization) deal with periods of three hundred years or longer. By contrast, the Gospels were written within at most sixty years of the events they purport to describe. The effects of this restriction have not been adequately considered. Some dates offered for the Gospels are improbably late; but early or late, the Gospels stand in relation to the life of Christ more or less as we stand in relation to World War II or the Great Depression—*not* as we stand in relation to, say, the Restoration in Britain, the flourishing of the *coureurs de bois* in Canada, or the settling of New Amsterdam. There were *witnesses* still alive when the New Testament documents were written; but the way many form critics write one would think that all witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ had been mysteriously snatched away the moment after the Ascension, and a new group had to begin all over again.¹⁸

3. Gerhardsson and Riesefeld have argued for a stability in the tradition owing to memory patterns in instruction shared by Jesus and the rabbis.¹⁹ Even if they overstate the case, their most eloquent critic concedes there is something to it.²⁰

4. Recent research has argued for *written* records that go back to Jesus' ministry.²¹ Patterns in *oral* tradition have no parallel in *written* tradition. The form-critical hypotheses are beginning to appear increasingly dubious.

5. A good case can still be made for Matthean authorship of the Gospel of Matthew.²² If that were once conceded, even as a possibility, then the first Evangelist, even if he relied on Mark (and why shouldn't he?), was also an eyewitness. The wedge between redaction and tradition would become worthless as far as questions of authenticity are concerned.

6. Radical form criticism assumes we have a much greater knowl-

edge of the life-settings of the church than we do. All we think we know of such settings is derived from speculation based on form-critical theories and fertile imaginations. Of course, such speculations *may* be sound, but they are *at best* nothing more than speculations.²³ As Humphrey Palmer has rather trenchantly remarked, whether or not the early church was adept at thinking up stories about Jesus to fit church settings, the form critics have certainly been adept at thinking up church settings to fit the stories about Jesus.²⁴

7. The radical reconstruction postulates postresurrection believers who cleverly think up a lot of profound sayings and then ascribe them all to Jesus. This is psychologically unconvincing. Worse, it tilts against the evidence, for the Gospel writers claim to be able to distinguish between what Jesus says before the Cross and what the disciples understand after that event (e.g., John 2:20–22).²⁵

8. The criteria that have been established to distinguish between redaction and tradition are for the most part so imprecise as to be not much more than silly. The criterion of dissimilarity is the worst of these; that is, an authentic teaching of Jesus (it is argued) is one that can be paralleled neither in the early church nor in surrounding Judaism. This criterion has been ruthlessly shredded in several essays²⁶ but it is still defended in some circles. *At best* it might produce what is idiosyncratic about Jesus' teaching but it cannot possibly produce what is characteristic about it. Is any method more than silly that requires that a historical person say nothing like what is said around him, and that, granted he is the most influential person of all time, so little influence his followers that no thought of theirs may legitimately be traced to him—even when those same followers deliberately make the connection?

To respond by saying that the criterion of dissimilarity at least has the advantage of affording the critic bedrock certainty regarding the authenticity of a few sayings out of the total complex of difficult material is nevertheless to agree with my point: the criterion is hopelessly inadequate for the task assigned it. Worse, there is an irresistible temptation to reconstruct the teaching of Jesus on the basis of this select material, and the result cannot possibly be other than a massive distortion.

9. The criterion of dissimilarity is doubly ridiculous when placed alongside the criterion of coherence. Unbounded subjectivity must be the result.²⁷ Moreover, the other criteria for distinguishing redaction from tradition do not fare much better.²⁸

10. Redaction criticism hangs far too much *theological* significance on every changed *καί* and *δέ*. Literature is not written that way. In any case, even if we suppose that Matthew used Mark as a source and effected his changes for various reasons, it is illegitimate to conclude (1) that only the changes reflect what Matthew believed, for if he used a source and left it unaltered, then surely he did so because it

expressed what he wanted to say, and therefore one may legitimately deduce what Matthew believed only from his entire work, and not merely from the changes, and (2) that all changes are necessarily prompted by theological interests rather than an entire range of concerns. Redaction critics far too often see the knots on the trees; only occasionally do they see the trees. Rarely indeed do they perceive the forest.²⁹

11. We speak of redaction criticism as a *tool*, a word that somehow conjures up images of scientific precision. In fact, a glance at the available redaction critical works on any Gospel reveals how terribly subjective these literary tools usually are. "Of course," Hooker comments, "NT scholars recognize the inadequacy of their tools; when different people look at one passage, and all get different answers, the inadequacy is obvious, even to NT scholars! But they do not draw the logical deduction from this fact"³⁰—viz., that the tools are incapable of providing an entirely neutral and agreed judgment as to what is authentic.

12. It is methodologically irresponsible to pit history against theology as if the two could not be compatible.³¹ Moreover, the oft-repeated claim that faith is independent of history is reasonable *only if* Christianity is reduced to purely existential categories. If, however, Christianity is grounded in what God in Christ did *in history* and if faith is related in some way to propositions about God's acts *in history*, then even if historical recital or historical evidence is not *sufficient* to call faith to life, yet nevertheless faith under such premises is so bound up with historical events that a historical faith is both nonsensical and heterodox. Paul certainly thought so (see 1 Cor. 15:1–11).

13. It is too often forgotten that whatever else Jesus was, He was an itinerant preacher. As anyone who has done much itinerant preaching knows, minor variations of the same messages or rearrangements of them come out again and again. Form and redaction critics have developed no methodology for distinguishing between, on the one hand, similar sayings in separate Gospels that do reflect a trajectory of interpretation and, on the other, similar sayings in separate Gospels that are actually *both* authentic.³²

14. It is illegitimate to reject a priori as unhistorical all that is abnormal, the more so if the context has prompted the reader to expect the abnormal.³³

15. Individuals, not communities, write books (or chapters of books) and think creatively. No doubt the community is *one* of the factors that help to shape an individual, but that is not what the radical critics are saying. If it were, they would need to distinguish between what the hypothetical community believed and what the writer thought and make suggestions as to the methodological problem involved in distinguishing how much of the writer's content springs from community influence and how much from other sources of influence.

16. Radical form criticism arbitrarily limits the genuine teaching of Jesus to basic simple sentences. The most influential mind in the history of the world was, as France nicely puts it, "apparently incapable of any complexity of thought or care in composition, any word of explanation or development of a theme, all of which are freely credited to his followers."³⁴

17. Form and redaction criticism have not established adequate criteria for distinguishing between elements of a story that break with the theoretical standard form because they are late additions and elements of a story that break with the theoretical standard form because they are *early reminiscences* that have not yet been whipped out of the account by the process of oral transmission. A careful reading of any twenty pages of Bultmann's *History of the Synoptic Tradition* brings to light numerous examples in which the learned Marburger proceeds by way of arbitrary declaration on this point, rather than by way of explanation. But if the distinction is incapable of rigorous justification, the plotting of entire trajectories is nothing more than arbitrary.

18. Similarly, inadequate thought has been given to criteria that might distinguish in the church between a *Sitz im Leben* that *creates* a story and one that *preserves* an authentic story. Unless unambiguous criteria are established to make this distinction, the results are arbitrary.

19. In any case, the suggestion that one can jump from a form to a particular creative setting in the church has been shown to be false. "Judgments about the *Sitz im Leben* of a pericope have often differed considerably. . . . Recent research into oral tradition points to a . . . flexible situation. Almost every 'form' of oral tradition may be used in a wide variety of ways. Similarly, any given situation can utilize very different forms."³⁵

20. Current interest in literary criticism and structuralism is calling into question the validity of any approach that focuses so narrowly on a pericope, a phrase, or a word that the broad literary unit, the Gospel itself, is overlooked. These new critics are far more interested in how each phrase or word or symbol in, say, Mark functions within the context of the entire Gospel of Mark.³⁶ In his recent study of this Gospel, D.H. Juel adopts just such an approach and notes in passing that if we begin to treat Mark as a piece of literature, it is very difficult to distinguish between tradition and redaction.³⁷ The point seems pretty obvious but it is regularly overlooked by the redaction critics. This is not to say that these new literary critics are concerned to maintain the historicity of the Gospels. Quite the contrary: the most influential of them suspect that the redaction critics are finding more bedrock history than is really there.³⁸ But it is to say that other approaches that treat the Gospels in a more unified fashion are available; and they call into question the piecemeal approach of mainstream redaction criticism.

These are some—by no means all—of the criticisms that have been raised against redaction criticism and its necessary progenitor, form criticism. It must not be thought, however, that redaction criticism has been used solely in the service of skepticism. Evangelicals have recently written two massive commentaries that owe much of their volume to a mild form of redaction criticism.³⁹ Other scholars have used the tool to one degree or another to distinguish peculiar emphases in the individual passion narratives,⁴⁰ to argue for the essential unity of the Matthean birth narratives,⁴¹ and much more.

What, then, may be said in a programmatic or methodological way concerning the legitimacy and illegitimacy of redaction criticism? Before turning to such considerations, I would like to illustrate what has been written so far by examining two New Testament passages.

TWO EXAMPLES

I propose to offer a few observations (not thorough redactional studies) on two passages from Matthew. The first wrestles with questions of authenticity, and the second with questions of harmonization and emphasis. I will make no attempt to present in detail the meaning and/or history of the passages. Instead, my focus is exclusively on the italicized words, phrases, and clauses.

A. MATTHEW 5:17–20

¹⁷*Do not think* that I have come to abolish the Law *or the Prophets*; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸*I tell you the truth*, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰*For* I tell you that *unless your righteousness surpasses* that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the *kingdom of heaven*.

I propose to comment briefly on a select few of the redaction critical judgments currently in vogue.

1. Some see the separate verses as originally four discrete sayings that have been put together by the Evangelist.⁴² This does not seem compelling. Did Jesus speak only in one-liners? Despite the contention of Banks,⁴³ the connecting words like *γάρ* and *οὖν* constitute no proof that the sayings were once separate; in fact if they had been joined together, would there not have been a need for connecting particles? What criteria can be offered to distinguish the one case from the other?

2. Some hold that the words “Do not think that” are a late rhetorical device that does not go back to Jesus (so also in a structurally

similar verse, Matthew 10:34).⁴⁴ What external evidence is there that this is a *late* rhetorical device? How does one explain that both here and in 10:34 Matthew ascribes these words to Jesus? *If* it is a late rhetorical device, and Jesus does not say precisely these words (in Aramaic or Greek), how does one methodologically distinguish between the possibility that Matthew made this part up and the possibility that even if the expression is Matthean the essential truth-content is to be traced to Jesus?

3. Several see the words “or the prophets” as a Matthean addition, since the disjunctive “or” occurs in thirteen other instances in this Gospel; and of these, nine are probably due to Matthew’s redactional activity. Moreover, it is agreed that eight of these betray a similar construction, viz., a conjunction followed by a noun.⁴⁵ However, it must be noted that (1) this is not a rare construction in the New Testament; (2) the nine *probable* redactional instances of “or” are not entirely indisputable; (3) “nine out of thirteen” provides a statistical basis with a massive margin for error (or, otherwise put, the ratio is not demonstrably significant); and (4) *even if* Matthew added the term to his tradition (What tradition, precisely, if he was an eyewitness?), the joint expression may mean no more than the simpler expression, since “law” *can* refer to the entire Old Testament Scriptures (e.g., John 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:21).

4. The words “I tell you the truth” are rejected as unauthentic by some⁴⁶ on several grounds: (1) in the parallel saying in Luke 16:17, this clause is missing; (2) the clause might well have arisen in Greek-speaking Judaism, and (3) Matthew is the only New Testament writer to use this particular formula with *γάρ* (*ἀμήν γάρ λέγω ὑμῖν*). But in response we may well ask: (1) Does Luke’s parallel seem to come from the same occasion? Is it certain the utterance was unattached in the tradition and nailed down in one place by Matthew and in another by Luke? How can this hypothesis be distinguished from the more plausible one—that an itinerant preacher says similar things on many occasions? And *if* the two accounts have the same source, how may we know Matthew added it, rather than supposing Luke dropped it? (2) *Perhaps* the clause arose in Greek-speaking Judaism, but *perhaps* not. Note the transliterated word *ἀμήν*. What does that suggest? And *if* the expression arose in such circles, *perhaps* Jesus was trilingual and invented it. And *perhaps* not. What *methodological* control is there to enable one to respond to any of these questions? (3) If Matthew is the only one to associate *γάρ* with the clause, might this not just as easily mean that only *γάρ* was added as that the entire clause is redactional? Is it not remarkable that only Jesus in the New Testament uses *ἀμήν* at the *beginning* of clauses—would this not argue for authenticity? In any case, though it is true that Matthew is the only New Testament writer to use *γάρ* with this expression, he does so in only four of thirty-two occurrences. That means he uses the expression without

γάρ twenty-eight times, but Mark uses the expression (without γάρ) only thirteen times, and Luke a mere six. Perhaps, it may be argued, if Mark or Luke had used the expression more, they too would have slipped in the odd γάρ. In any case, since I am not worried about the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus but only about His *ipsissima vox*, might it be that where γάρ does appear there is simply a Matthean connection that reveals a connection that Jesus Himself made, whether by contextual implication, logic, explicit statement (in Aramaic?), or some other means? How does one methodologically *eliminate* such possibilities?

5. Banks argues that the italicized words, *for*, *unless*, *righteousness*, *surpasses*, and *kingdom of heaven* are probably all unauthentic and that the verse as a whole, though traditional, is probably not authentic. However, he insists that Matthew is nevertheless not imposing something essentially alien to Jesus' intention but is simply drawing out some practical implications from the attitude Jesus maintains.⁴⁷ My problem with this approach is in part akin to my hesitations in all the other passages; but I will press on and ask a broader question. Did Matthew (according to Banks) simply make deductions about Jesus' general *attitude* without ever hearing Jesus deal with this subject? If he *did* hear Jesus deal with it, might he not be giving the gist of what Jesus said (*ipsissima vox*)? And how, methodologically speaking, can Banks (or anyone else) distinguish between these two cases?

I must hasten to add that these reflections in no way *prove* the authenticity of this snippet or that. I am at the moment concerned only with the methodological problems inherent in redaction criticism; and I am trying to demonstrate that at least in this passage redaction criticism is *intrinsically incapable* of dealing believably with questions of authenticity. It is not really a "tool" in any precise sense: it is freighted with subjective judgments; it is based on too many implausible assumptions; and, worst of all, in each judgment it makes it ignores numerous questions that are not only relevant but that expose its fundamental weakness.

It is also fairly clear, in this example at least, that the distinction between redaction and tradition is often not only unhelpful but misleading when it comes to weighing probabilities of authenticity. "Redactional" comments *may* be prompted by purely theological considerations but equally they *may* be prompted by stylistic concerns or even by additional information springing from further research (Luke 1:1-4). This fundamental point is disappointingly overlooked in Jeremias's last book on Luke.⁴⁸ Despite the formal rigor of the work, not only is there some *methodological* weakness in the attempt to distinguish tradition from redaction, but, far worse, Jeremias maintains the *theoretical* distinction between the two, maintaining that Luke is heard only in the redaction and that authenticity is possible only in the tradition. Such bifurcation is without methodological justification.

B. MATTHEW 19:16-21 AND PARALLELS

This is the first part of the parable of the rich fool. It is a particularly difficult example of somewhat divergent synoptic accounts of the same incident:

<i>Matthew 19:16-20</i>	<i>Mark 10:17-21</i>	<i>Luke 18:18-22</i>
16Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"	17As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"	18A certain man asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
17"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."	18"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.	19"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.
18"Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and your mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"	19You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"	20You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"
20"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"	20"Teacher," he declared "all these I have kept since I was a boy."	21"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.
21Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to	21Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go sell every-	22When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything

the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."	thing you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."	you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
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The account of the rich young ruler according to the three synoptic Gospels plays a central role in the history of Gospel criticism. It is often taken as one of the few stories in which doctrinal development is unambiguous, and therefore it functions in much critical thought as a central justification for very elaborate schemes.

The questions raised are too complex for exhaustive treatment here; but the following observations bear directly on the concerns of this chapter:

1. The parallels cited above are from a much larger pericope: Matthew 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; and Luke 18:18–30. Mark's account, with 279 words, is longer than the other two: Luke's has 202, and Matthew's, 270. The last figure is reduced to 225 if we eliminate Matthew 19:28, which has no parallel in the others. These figures are interesting insofar as they suggest that, given Markan priority, Matthew and Luke are not simply gratuitously *expanding* a simple account.

2. There are numerous minor variations from account to account. Only Matthew has *ἰδοὺ* ("behold"; or, in the NIV, "Now . . ."). Matthew refers to the questioner as "one" (*εἷς*), but later tells us he was young (19:20). Mark likewise calls him "one" (*εἷς*; NIV, "a man"); but though he says nothing about this "one's" age, he provides a little detail regarding the encounter: it was *while Jesus was setting out on His way that a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him*. Luke, like Matthew, provides neither of these details, but he mentions that the questioner was "a certain ruler" (*τις ἄρχων*). Mark and Luke have the questioner reply, "All these things I have kept since I was a boy"; but in Matthew the statement is briefer: "All these I have kept." The reference to youth is preserved only in the fact that the man himself is described as "young." In Mark and Luke, it is Jesus who says, "One thing you lack" (with some variation in the words—Mark: *ἔν σοι ὑστερεῖ*; Luke: *ἔτι ἐν σοι λείπει*); But Matthew puts these words as a question on the young man's lips: "What do I still lack?" Farther on (beyond what I have cited), in the resulting interchange with His disciples, Jesus speaks of the one who gives up family and goods "for me and the gospel" (Mark 10:29), or "for my sake" (Matthew 19:24), or "for the sake of the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:29). There are other less significant minor changes in grammar, word order, and the like.

It is difficult to see how some of these changes are anything other than stylistic. There is not much difference between *ἔν σοι ὑστερεῖ* (Mark) and *ἔτι ἐν σοι λείπει* (Luke). The force of *ἰδοὺ* in Hellenistic

Greek is so weakened that its presence changes nothing of substance. It *may* give an impression (in Matthew) that this story happens hard on the heels of the previous one; but this is doubtful. In short, some of these changes are of minimal significance.

Other changes clearly add something or take something away. Mark's statement "ran up to him and fell on his knees before him" has disappeared in Matthew and Luke; but with their shorter accounts, it appears that they are trimming and condensing a little. They certainly are not concerned to *deny* that the questioner ran up to Jesus and fell to his knees before him. Luke's added information that the questioner was "a certain ruler" does not derive from Matthew or Luke. If we may assume the two-source hypothesis, then these words are certainly redactional. However, three points must be noted: (1) Luke himself assures his readers (1:1–4) that his research has included many written and oral sources, including eyewitnesses. It is therefore entirely gratuitous to leap to the conclusion that because the words are redactional they must not refer to what is historically true. Even the suggestion that Luke guesses the man was a ruler because he knows that he was rich is rather simple-minded. Were all synagogue rulers (or members of the Sanhedrin—the expression could mean either) rich? Were they the only ones who were rich? In the light of Luke's description of his approach to writing the third Gospel, it is far more probable that Luke is relying on additional information for this redactional addition. (2) It is very difficult to detect theological significance in the change. It is historiographically responsible to read the three accounts and conclude that the questioner was a young, rich ruler. However, even if Luke had made something of the fact that he was a ruler, it would not necessarily follow that the additional information was not historically based. It might only mean that Matthew and Mark did not know this point, or that if they did, they chose not to make any capital out of it. What *methodological* way is there for distinguishing these options from one another? (3) It can hardly be overlooked that we have detected this redactional addition solely on the basis of the comparative passages and the assumption of the reliability of the two-source hypothesis. If at this point only Luke had preserved the narrative, there would have been no way to detect that *ἄρχων* was redactional; for the usual method, based on determining what words are particularly Lukan, yields false results in this case: Matthew uses the word thirteen times; Mark, twenty-eight; and Luke, thirty-one (which is proportionately fewer than Mark's usage).

The other minor variations from Gospel to Gospel are no more difficult than these, provided we remember that the Evangelists do not purport to give verbatim quotes, that they do summarize, and that they use their own language to provide an accurate impression of the historical substance. It is difficult to justify radical criticism on the basis of the variations "for my sake," "for me and the gospel," and "for the

sake of the kingdom of God," since all of the Synoptists tie together Jesus, the gospel, and the kingdom as the ultimates for which a person must give up everything. Luke's "for the sake of the kingdom of God" (18:29) may be a conscious assimilation to 18:25 in order to promote literary unity in the narrative; and Matthew's brief "for my sake" may reflect the abbreviating of Mark's account characteristic of several other verses. Whether the young man asks, "What do I still lack?" (Matthew), or Jesus says, "One thing you lack," is scarcely a problem at all. It is possible that both the question and the answer were uttered: but if not, it is entirely within the range of reliable reporting to understand that the young man *in fact* was asking this question (with or without the words) by coming to Jesus with his dilemma and subsequent self-justification. He quite clearly thought of himself as perfectly obedient to the law, yet knew he was lacking something. No eyewitness would fail to perceive that he was in fact asking just this question, "What do I still lack?" whether he phrased it this way or not. Similar remarks could be made about Jesus' response. It is difficult to see how any of the three accounts says anything at this point that is not implicit in the other two.

The final minor variation I have mentioned in this section is the contrast between "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (*νεότητος*, Mark and Luke), and Matthew's "All these I have kept," followed by the notice, "the young man [*νεανίσκος*] said." Schweizer says this is a "recasting"⁴⁹ of Mark's account. To what end, he does not suggest. Historically, the questioner would no doubt have put himself under the law in a formal way when he was twelve years old, when Jewish boys assumed the yoke of the commandments and were held responsible for them (Ber. 2:2; cf. Luke 2:42). This is necessary background behind all three synoptic accounts; so it is difficult to perceive any theological reason why it should be omitted, unless Matthew thought either that it was not particularly interesting or relevant, or that it was already well known. It is puzzling that Matthew should add *ὁ νεανίσκος* only if we assume that he had no information of the event other than what he could glean from Mark. If on the other hand we allow for the likelihood that he had other information and for the possibility that he was himself an eyewitness, there is no reason to suppose that his information is not true.

3. Up to this point, I have dealt with the minor variations and avoided the pair of major variations. I must now turn to the latter. In Mark and Luke, the questioner asks, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone." In Matthew, however, the questioner opens the exchange with "Teacher, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good." It is commonly taken for granted that Matthew introduces a change in Mark's wording because

he represents a later stage in the development of the church's doctrine when the church could no longer tolerate even the suggestion that Jesus might be sinful.⁵⁰

The differences between Mark/Luke and Matthew at this point are indeed quite remarkable; but once acknowledged, this christological explanation for the differences must nevertheless not be adopted too hastily. Even if Matthew avoids the suggestion that Jesus was not "good," he nevertheless preserves the saying, "There is only One who is good"—an obvious reference to God. The alteration therefore "implies nothing about Jesus' status in relation to God," as David Hill has put it.⁵¹ Stonehouse has argued at length, and convincingly, that christological concerns are not in this instance at the heart of any of the synoptic accounts.⁵² Rather, in the way the story develops in the ensuing discussion with the disciples, there is a move in all three synoptic Gospels toward recognizing "the indispensability of the sovereign action of divine grace for discipleship as one of the most foundational elements in this story."⁵³ More telling yet, becoming perfect and *following Jesus* (not God) are seen as one act (Matt. 19:21); and farther on, the eschatological blessing is promised to those who have left all for *Jesus' sake* (Matt. 19:29). And it is Matthew alone who describes the session of the Son of Man (19:28). When to these salient points is added the fact that in all of the Synoptics Jesus most frequently is concerned with God's glory, God's kingdom, God's truth, God's will, and God's judgment and presents Himself as the Lord's anointed, then perhaps there is good reason for thinking that the alteration in wording is not motivated by christological concerns. Jesus in the days of His flesh manifested Himself progressively, allowing those around Him to perceive only gradually who He really was, speaking in terms and categories that unveiled His splendor best in the hindsight gleaned after the Cross and the Resurrection.⁵⁴ It is a mark of the fidelity of the Synoptists (Matthew included) to the historical situation that they have preserved this intrinsically more ambiguous self-revelation.

It must also be pointed out that the christological explanation for Matthew's alteration depends on a historical reconstruction that, however popular, takes constant liberties with the only text we have. Fair treatment of the New Testament documents does not support the view that a high christology was invented rather late.⁵⁵ The question is too large to be explored here; but it is surely a point for pause to note that Luke, apparently written *after* Matthew, does not detect any christological difficulty in Mark. Why then must we be so certain that Matthew's alteration is due to anything more than whatever prompted the change that placed the words "What do I still lack?" on the lips of the young man?

In point of fact, several different suggestions for the alteration have been offered.⁵⁶ Harmonization by mere addition ("Good master,

what *good* thing . . . ?” followed by Jesus giving *both* answers), though logically possible, is not very convincing as a historical reconstruction—not least because of the kinds of changes the Evangelists have made elsewhere in the narrative. Pedantic precision and verbatim quotation do not seem to be their goals. Yet those same changes warn us against facile accusations that the writers are introducing errors of fact or substance. Just as a modern writer might condense a lengthy discussion and tell of it in his own idiom and in a fraction of the total number of words actually spoken, without being charged with lies, inventiveness, distortion, or deceit, so the Gospel writers must be allowed the same freedom. This is the nature of reportage, even reportage designed to make theological and historical points.

The question, then, is whether there is a likely reconstruction of the historical event that could have generated *both* Mark/Luke and Matthew on this point. To phrase the problem in this way presupposes that Matthew had access to knowledge regarding the event other than that gleaned from Mark; but I believe that is (to say the least) highly probable. If this assumption is correct, it is historiographically irresponsible *not* to attempt a reconstruction.

Suppose, then, as one possible reconstruction among several that I can think of, that the original question was something like this: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Such a way of addressing a teacher was (as far as we can tell) extraordinary, but both the form of address and the question itself reveal the young ruler had not proper understanding of what absolute goodness, God’s goodness, really involved, nor of the need for divine initiative in order for a person to gain eternal life. If this were the opening remark, the idea of the *good* action or *good* deed is not spelled out, but is certainly bound up with the question as it stands; it is inconceivable that the ruler was asking about what *neutral* thing or *wicked* thing he would have to do to gain eternal life!

Suppose, further, that Jesus’ answer was something like this: “Why do you ask *me* [with *me* emphatic] questions regarding the good? There is only One who is good, namely God.” Such a statement, like many of Jesus’ aphorisms, could purposely be a trifle ambiguous, precisely because it bears on the ruler’s question in several complementary ways. It recognizes that the ruler’s concern is what good thing he must do, even though he has not thought about absolute goodness; and it recognizes that the man is addressing Jesus as good, equally without giving thought to the absolute nature of God’s goodness (cf. 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 5:13; Ps. 106:1; 118:1, 29). The fact that the man did not in any ultimate sense wish to ascribe goodness to Jesus is revealed rather pathetically by the fact he did not wish to obey Him; and the same evidence shows his unconcern for ultimately good deeds. The root of the problem in all three synoptic Gospels is not christological, but an abysmal failure on the part of the ruler to recog-

nize what kind of goodness is required in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus would not allow the fuzzy categories to stand.

If this reconstruction has any plausibility, then the alteration by Matthew is no more theologically significant than the other alterations he offers in this pericope. There is in Matthew a bit more emphasis against the merit theology presupposed by the ruler’s question as recorded in *all* the Synoptics, but the general thrust of the account remains the same in each Gospel. I am not arguing that this must have been what happened, still less that we should preach theoretical reconstructions (my own or anyone else’s). We must preach the Scriptures as they stand, for they, and not my reconstructions, constitute the Word of God written. On the other hand, I am certainly arguing that redaction criticism, which might legitimately find some small change of emphasis from Gospel to Gospel in this account, cannot be thought to have unearthed a major christological development. Such a theory requires the implausible notion that Matthew had no source other than Mark. Even if we accept such an unlikely suggestion, the exegesis of Matthew as the text stands does not encourage this kind of christological explanation, given the specific theological concerns Matthew preserves.

Christians, of course, might detect in Jesus’ response, recorded in Mark and Luke, a tacit identification of Jesus with God. But this is to go beyond what the texts actually say.⁵⁷ I think the response may be part of a pattern of replies by Jesus that betray His own self-consciousness of His true identity; but in relatively few instances do such christological self-affirmations spring unambiguously from Jesus’ lips. The subject is in any case too large to broach here; but it must be admitted that while radical critics have sometimes moved way beyond what the Synoptics actually say in this pericope, conservatives have sometimes done the same, if in an opposite direction.

The point of this lengthy section and its two Matthean examples is that redaction criticism is simply an inadequate tool for establishing authenticity; and although it is adequate for making a contribution to the study of an author’s particular interests, even there it is not a neutral tool. It is used in connection with a broad range of reconstructions, theories, and exegetical decisions. But these observations bring me to the central question of this chapter.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF REDACTION CRITICISM

How legitimate, or illegitimate, is redaction criticism as a literary tool?

If its application to questions of authenticity depends on its roots in radical form criticism, the answer must surely be that redaction criticism is well-nigh useless. It can pick out eccentric bits here and

there; but even then the distorted picture of Jesus thus drawn varies enormously from scholar to scholar. Redaction criticism that ignores the brevity of time between Jesus and the Evangelists, that utilizes comparative studies of oral tradition over centuries when it is dealing with a combination of written and oral tradition over decades at most, that disallows any firm connection between Jesus and Judaism or Jesus and the church, that depends on dogmatic certainties regarding the synoptic problem, and that disallows the *ipsissima vox* just because the idiom is that of the Evangelist is methodologically bankrupt and should be abandoned forthwith by all.

More recently, however, there have been efforts by some, notably Osborne and Stein,⁵⁸ to use the criteria of redaction criticism not so much to disallow the authenticity of certain sayings as to establish the authenticity of at least some of Jesus' sayings. Stein's important essay allows four of the eleven criteria he suggests to function negatively; the rest, he argues, may legitimately function only positively. This means that when a particular saying is not demonstrably authentic according to the criteria Stein lists, it still does not follow that the saying is *not* authentic, because the positive criteria are simply incapable, methodologically speaking, of making a negative judgment. Stein's negative criteria *could* disallow the authenticity of some saying; but in my view, the application of those negative criteria is fraught with extra difficulties he does not discuss (and which, unfortunately, I cannot detail here).

The entire approach of Stein (and other conservatives who operate this way even if they do not spell out their method as clearly as Stein) has much more to be said for it than the radical redaction criticism to which we have become accustomed. Nevertheless, two important cautions must be adopted rather urgently. The first is that even Stein's positive criteria are based, to a rather alarming extent, on a view of the descent of the tradition that still embraces critical orthodoxy but may well be called into question at point after point. If this criticism is basically sound—and my primary motive for including the earlier sections of this chapter was to demonstrate its reasonableness, at least in a preliminary way—then the conservative use of redaction criticism advocated by Stein and practiced by others must tread very cautiously lest it discover to its chagrin and danger that it has a tiger by the tail.

The second caution springs from the first. If conservative Evangelical scholars adopt redaction criticism of the conservative variety and, believing that it is an objective tool, ignore the doubtful historical assumptions that make up at least part of its pedigree, they are likely to find themselves in an intensely embarrassing position. Suppose, for instance, that in the defense of a high view of Scripture they use redaction criticism apologetically to establish the authenticity of this saying or that. What happens when they come to some saying where

there are inadequate grounds to claim authenticity (on the grounds of this conservative redaction criticism) and perhaps some grounds, following Stein's negative criteria, to plead *unauthenticity*? There are but three options:

(1) He may abandon the traditional conservative position. When that happens, the scholar should clearly admit it and not play games with the creeds to which he has hitherto affixed his signature. In my view, he is following current critical orthodoxy on very weak grounds, methodologically speaking; but I respect his integrity if he tells us frankly where he is going. (2) He may call into question his understanding of the power of redaction criticism and become more a critic of the tool than a practitioner—at least as far as the tool's application to questions of authenticity is concerned. (3) He may wind up using redaction criticism only when it supports his high view of Scripture and appeal to other arguments when it seems to go against him. This leaves him open to the trenchant attack of James Barr,⁵⁹ who claims Evangelicals do this regularly and thereby demonstrate a serious want of scholarly integrity. Barr has a point, unless the scholar who is pursuing this option does so for purely apologetic reasons (in which case he has retreated to the second position). However, as long as a scholar feels that the results of redaction criticism are sure and reliable, he does not have the right to discount them because of his other beliefs. He must reconcile his disparate beliefs, abandoning those that engender contradiction,⁶⁰ or else he is open to the charge that he is not playing the redaction critical game with integrity. Embarrassing as it may be, Barr's charge is often valid.

Part of the problem is that redaction criticism has so much come to the fore in questions of authenticity that older methods are ignored or even cursorily dismissed as out of date. The kind of argument developed by Grudem in chapter 1 of this volume is by and large unwelcome in the scholarly world; but it is important nevertheless. The approach that tests an author against outside sources—e.g., archaeology, knowledge of the times, historical details—wherever possible and, finding that author reliable in the testable areas, concludes he is reliable elsewhere is largely passed by in silence. Harmonization of parallel accounts (by which I do *not* necessarily mean the simple addition of both accounts!)⁶¹ is deprecated with the adjective *easy*. But surely only *glib* harmonizations ought to be dismissed; *easy* harmonizations ought to be given the most serious consideration. To adopt *glib* harmonizations is historiographically irresponsible, but refusal to adopt *easy* harmonizations is equally irresponsible.⁶² Of course, when someone dismisses a harmonization as “easy,” what he means is that it is *glib*. Nevertheless, my objection is more than semantic; for the underlying historiographical question—viz., When are harmonizations permissible, or even mandated?—gets buried under the euphemism “easy,” so that somehow harmonization is rejected as

a cop-out, something that scholars who recognize how *difficult* (as opposed to *easy*) the material is will eschew.

Why have these and other tools, for many scholars, become out of date? They are certainly no weaker than radical redaction criticism; indeed, I would judge them much stronger. Like any literary and historical tool, they can be abused; but to fail to use them and give them grades at least as high as redaction criticism betrays a sort of contemporaneity chauvinism. To use a multiplicity of methods, to adopt several competing literary tools, is a necessary safeguard. Part of the problem with redaction criticism rests on the sad fact that, as often used, it disqualifies results from older methods as if those methods were invalid. The use of many tools is cumbersome; but the more qualified and nuanced results that emerge protect the scholar from Barr's charges that the grounds for depending or not depending on redaction criticism are shifting and subjective. Far from it. Our reasons for adopting this or that conclusion turn on a multiplicity of methods and tools that are mutually limiting, and therefore there is *methodological* reason for doubting the results of *one* of these many tools at some particular point.

The one place where redaction criticism may offer considerably more help, and where it may function with some legitimacy, is in aiding us to discern more closely the Evangelists' individual concerns and emphases. In one sense, of course, interpreters have always been interested in such questions. In the broadest sense, therefore, redaction criticism is nothing new. But if the examples in the last section of this chapter are typical, then even here redaction criticism must tread softly. The distinction between what is traditional and what is redactional is not a happy one; it is too fraught with overtones of "authentic" and "unauthentic." And even when some snippet is demonstrably redactional, it does not follow that any particular alteration owes its existence to theological concerns. Moreover, if the method presupposes the entire package of radical form criticism and a simplistic adoption of the two-source hypothesis, then the results will inevitably prove not only slanted but ephemeral: a new scholarly fad is bound to shake one or both of these theories in years to come, jeopardizing a vast amount of current work.

It seems best, then, if redaction criticism as applied to discerning distinctive emphases is to produce work of lasting importance, that it should not take its pedigree too seriously and it should not speak too dogmatically, for instance, of Matthew's change of Mark but rather of the variations between the two.

A brief example may be helpful. A comparison of Matthew 8:18 with Mark 4:35 shows that Matthew departs from Markan sequence: in Mark, the crowd in question surrounds Jesus after His *second* period of ministry in Capernaum, but in Matthew this is still Jesus' *first* period. Matthew does not explicitly rule out Mark's sequence, but one

could not possibly reconstruct it simply by reading Mark. Why, then, does Matthew follow the order he does in chapter 8? The reasons are many, and the literary dependences complex, but one quite certain conclusion is that Matthew at this point is interested in developing the theme of Jesus' authority. Jesus' authoritative teaching is stressed in 7:28–29, and the second of the two healings at the beginning of Matthew 8 lays some emphasis on Jesus' authority as a healer (8:9). Such authority extends to many diseases and to exorcism of demons and stands in fulfillment of the Scriptures (8:16–17). There is personal lowliness attached to Jesus' authority, yet at the same time it brooks no half-hearted followers (8:18–22). It is so embracing that it extends to the realm of nature (8:23–27), the spirit world (8:28–34), the last judgment (8:29), and even to the forgiveness of sins (9:2–8)—a prerogative belonging to God alone. There are other themes holding these pericopae together, but it is clear that Matthew's topical arrangement of his material forges certain themes that some other arrangement would not so explicitly reveal. Redaction criticism devoted to such study can be of genuine service to the interpretation of the Scriptures, provided the reservations already expressed are not ignored.

If redaction criticism is applied with these kinds of reservations to the study of the Gospels, it will certainly help us discern more precisely the distinctive witness of each Evangelist to Jesus Christ and may legitimately take its place along side other literary tools. But precisely because "redaction criticism" is in the category of slippery words, qualifications and reservations are needed to keep us from worshiping before a shrine that has decidedly mixed credentials.

APPENDED NOTE

Like so many other problems in the study of Christianity (or any other topic, for that matter), the role of redaction criticism is bound up with epistemology. Epistemological questions are addressed directly elsewhere in this volume, but perhaps the connection with redaction criticism should be briefly explored here.

At a learned society meeting some months ago, a young and gifted evangelical scholar told me that he uses redaction criticism as a neutral tool and that when he uses it he does not assume the inerrancy of Scripture. Up to that point, he asserted, he had discovered nothing that called his traditional belief into question. My reservations regarding the reliability of redaction criticism have already been expressed; I need not repeat them. But the next question to ask is how many times this scholar needs to find his beliefs taught or reinforced before he can treat them as functional nonnegotiables.⁶³ Everyone develops such nonnegotiables. Would he remain similarly "neutral" regarding certain points in christology or any and every other basic creedal point? Surely not. Then why this one?

Everyone, I have said, develops functional nonnegotiables of various strengths. For finite persons this is both desirable and unavoidable. These nonnegotiables can be overthrown (or else no one could ever change his "position" on anything), but such an overthrow is not easy. Our finiteness and our sinfulness combine to guarantee that our knowledge is always partial and frequently faulty, and therefore we need to walk humbly. But it is as reprehensible not to adopt certain nonnegotiables that are apparently taught again and again as it is to refrain from overthrowing nonnegotiables that do not stand up under close scrutiny.

In the traditional view, the knowledge that God is omniscient and without sin encourages us to believe that what He has revealed, though not exhaustively true, is nevertheless completely true. The person who holds this view thereby establishes an epistemological base of some strength. But how does he come to know this?

I hold (but cannot here defend my view) that such knowledge derives from a mixture of evidence, training, predisposition, and the secret work of the Spirit of God. The latter ingredient should not be taken as being necessarily *apart* from the others, since the Spirit may use any or all of them. The problem as I see it is partly paralleled by the well-known tension between Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer. The former establishes an essentially biblical epistemology but then wrongly demands a presuppositionalist apologetic. The latter often uses a modified evidentialist apologetic, but then comes perilously close (especially in *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*)⁶⁴ to an evidentialist epistemology and unwittingly falls into Lessing's ditch. There is no necessary connection between epistemology and apologetics, for the evidences are surely things that the God of all truth uses to change predispositions. Such evidences *by themselves* do not guarantee that any particular individual will come to the truth, but this does not foreclose on our responsibility to appeal to evidences (as witness the apostles in Acts, or Paul in 1 Cor. 15). So also with respect to the doctrine of Scripture (or any other doctrine): the evidences per se (and there are many) guarantee nothing, just as a well-witnessed resurrection from the dead will not convince everyone of who Jesus is. Nevertheless the display of evidences is important, and the cool analysis of counterarguments not less so. The traditional view of Holy Scripture, which in my view is correct, can withstand the roughest scrutiny; but even so, it must be remembered that this view holds that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, not that our doctrine of the infallibility of the Word of God is infallible.⁶⁵

REDACTION CRITICISM: ON THE LEGITIMACY
AND ILLEGITIMACY OF A LITERARY TOOL

D. A. Carson
pages 119–42

¹The *Expository Times* 89–90 (June–October 1978).

²See, e.g., W. H. Kelber, "Redaction Criticism: On the Nature and Exposition of the Gospels," *Perspectives on Religious Studies* 6 (1979): 4–16.

³E.g., John Warwick Montgomery, "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?" in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 57–65. At the meeting at which Montgomery read his paper (a slightly more trenchant version of his chapter), advocating that we not make use of redaction criticism at all, another conservative rose to his feet in the ensuing discussion and gently warned him about the danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Montgomery replied, "Look, _____, you and I disagree. You think there's a baby in the bathwater, and I think it's all dirty bathwater."

⁴Adolf von Harnack, esp. in his *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas B. Saunders (New York: Putnam, 1902).

⁵Albert Schweitzer's now-famous book was originally entitled *Von Riemarus zu Wrede* (1906) and later *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. The English title is *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: A. and C. Black, 1910).

⁶Cf., among others, Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. T. M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); idem, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1917).

⁷K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1919).

⁸M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1919; later editions to 1959); ET, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. B. L. Woolf, ed. W. Barclay (London: James Clarke, 1971).

⁹The English translation is *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

¹⁰The technical designations vary somewhat from form critic to form critic.

¹¹The distinction is clearly seen in recent discussions on the fourth Gospel. Recent commentators practice "redaction criticism" of the sort that separates out sources, distinguishes redaction from tradition, comments on the trajectory of the tradition, and expounds the significance of the retrieved redaction all in one step. By contrast, R. T. Fortna, in his *Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), restricts himself to source criticism to isolate the principal source he thinks the Evangelist used, and then in later articles he proceeds to redaction criticism by analyzing the changes that have taken place in the (alleged) move from his (reconstructed) source to the Gospel as we have it. Cf. his "Source and Redaction in the Fourth Gospel's Portrayal of Jesus' Signs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 156–65; idem, "From Christology to Soteriology," *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 31–47. On recent source-critical approaches to the Gospel of John, cf. E. Ruckstuhl, "Johannine Language and Style," *L'Evangile de Jean*, ed. M. de Jonge (Leuven: University Press, 1977), pp. 125–47; D. A. Carson, "Current Source Criticism of the Fourth Gospel: Some Methodological Questions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 411–29.

¹²In addition to the standard introductions to the New Testament, cf. in particular the relevant sections of W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1961* (Oxford: University Press, 1966); Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); G. E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); Stephen S. Smalley, "Redaction Criticism," *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 181–95.

¹³Cf. esp. Stonehouse's book *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1979 of two volumes, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* and *The Witness of Luke to Christ*); idem, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963). Cf. also the perceptive pair of essays by M. Silva, "Ned B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism, Part I: The Witness of the Synoptic Evangelists to Christ," and "Part II: The Historicity of the Synoptic Tradition," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1977–78): 77–78, 281–303.

¹⁴G. R. Osborne, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): esp. pp. 311–12.

¹⁵Cf. esp. R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), who, though dependent on the German form critics, actually anticipated the German redaction critics. See also many of the writings of Vincent Taylor, C. H. Dodd, and others.

¹⁶The many who have either moved toward the Griesbach hypothesis or else at the very least called into grave question the adequacy of the two-source hypothesis include E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 9; Cambridge: University Press, 1969); W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (Dillsboro, N.C.: Western North Carolina Press, 1976); idem, "Modern Developments of Griesbach's Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 275–95; T. R. W. Longstaff, *Evidence of Conflation in Mark? A Study of the Synoptic Problem* (SBLDS 28; Missoula: Scholars, 1977);

Bernard Orchard, *Matthew, Luke and Mark* (Manchester: Koinonia, 1976); idem, "J. A. T. Robinson and the Synoptic Problem," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1975–76): 346–52; J. B. Tyson, "Sequential Parallelism in the Synoptic Gospels," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1975–76): 276–305; F. Neiryck, ed., *The Minor Agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark* (Leuven: University Press, 1974); F. Neiryck, "Minor Agreements Matthew–Luke in the Transfiguration Story," in *Orientierung an Jesus (Festschrift für J. Schmid; Freiburg: Herder, 1973)*, pp. 253–66; Roland Mushat Frye, "The Synoptic Problems and Analogies in Other Literatures," in *The Relationships among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. William O. Walker, Jr. (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1978), pp. 261–302. Cf. also the discussions and diverse perspectives presented by B. Orchard and T. L. W. Longstaff, ed., *J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies, 1776–1976* (SNTSMS 34; Cambridge: University Press, 1978). Note, too, that far more complex theories have been advanced: e.g., Tim Schramm, *Der Markus-Stoff bei Lukas* (SNTSMS 14; Cambridge: University Press, 1971) argues that Luke appears to rely on some otherwise unknown source in some passages (e.g., Luke 21). Whether or not this suggestion is correct, Schramm shares the dissatisfaction of others with respect to the simple two-source hypothesis.

¹⁷Cf. esp. D. Wenham, "The Synoptic Problem Revisited: Some New Suggestions About the Composition of Mark 4:1–34," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 3–38; idem, "The Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower," *New Testament Studies* 20 (1974): 299–319.

¹⁸Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Are the New Testament Documents Still Reliable?" in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), p. 55. Cf. the celebrated remark of Vincent Taylor (quoted also by Bruce) to the effect that if certain proponents of form criticism were right, "the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection" in his book *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 41.

¹⁹B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, trans. Eric J. Sharpe (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1964); idem, "Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity" *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* 20 (1964); H. Riesenfeld, "The Gospel Tradition and Its Beginnings: A Study in the Limits of 'Formgeschichte,'" most readily accessible in *The Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), pp. 1–29. Cf. also the more recent work by B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

²⁰Viz., W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), App. XV, pp. 464–80, esp. p. 480: "[Gerhardsson and Riesenfeld] have made it far more historically probable and reasonably credible, over against the scepticism of much form-criticism, that in the gospels we are within hearing of the authentic voice and within sight of the authentic activity of Jesus of Nazareth, however much muffled and obscured these may be by the process of transmission." Cf. also Peter H. Davids, "The Gospels and Jewish Tradition: Twenty Years After Gerhardsson," *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), pp. 75–99.

²¹Cf. esp. H. Schürmann, "Die vorösterlichen Anfänge der Logientradition," in *Der historische Jesu und der kerygmatische Christus*, ed. H. Ristow and K. Matthiae (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961), pp. 342–70; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* (Supplement to NovTest 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967); E. Earle Ellis, "New Directions in Form Criticism," in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie*, ed. G. Strecker (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975), pp. 299–315; cf. Rainer Riesner, "Jüdische Elementarbildung und Evangelienüberlieferung," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), pp. 209–23; and now his dissertation, *Jesus als Lehrer* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981).

²²Cf. esp. Stonehouse, *Origins*, pp. 43–47.

²³Cf. among others, Humphrey Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1968), p. 193; Morna D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81; C. S. Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants* (Glasgow: Collins, 1975), pp. 113–17.

²⁴Palmer, *Logic*, p. 185.

²⁵Cf. Hooker, "Wrong Tool," p. 576; D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 29–61.

²⁶In addition to the essays by Hooker, "Wrong Tool," and Ellis, "Form Criticism," cited above, cf. esp. R. T. France, "The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus," *History, Criticism and Faith*, ed. Colin Brown (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1976), esp. pp. 110–14; David L. Mealand, "The Dissimilarity Test," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 31 (1978): 41–50 (though Mealand gives the test high marks for affirming the trustworthiness of the irreducible minimum).

²⁷Cf. Hooker, "Wrong Tool," p. 577.

²⁸Cf., in addition to the major introductions, n. 26 and the literature cited there.

²⁹For a fine example, cf. H. Conzelmann's redaction critical study, *Die Mitte der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964). On this, cf. Neill, *Interpretation*, pp. 264–65.

³⁰Hooker, "Wrong Tool," p. 578.

³¹Cf. Morna D. Hooker, "In his own Image?" in *What About the New Testament?* ed. Morna Hooker and Colin Hickling (London: SPCK, 1975), pp. 28–44, esp. pp. 36–37, where she criticizes Perrin (see n. 12 above) for pitting history against theology. She charges Perrin with "a revealing comment" that he "makes on a study in Marcan theology written by Ernest Best, which he describes as 'a strange book in that the author combines redaction criticism with the assumption 'that Mark believes that the incidents he uses actually happened'." Now this is really an extraordinary statement. Why should the fact that Mark is a 'theologian' preclude him from writing about events which he thought had happened? Can a 'theologian' write only about imaginary events? This is obviously sheer nonsense. Against Perrin, we must quote Perrin himself: 'Mark has the right to be read on his own terms.' And what is the most obvious thing about Mark's method of writing? It is that he presented his theology in a form which 'misled' generations of scholars into believing that he was writing an historical account! This, says Perrin, 'is mute testimony to the skill of Mark as an author'. Mark may well be more skillful than has sometimes been allowed—but not if he succeeded only in concealing his purpose until the twentieth-century critic uncovered it! Was he perhaps using his skill to do precisely what he seems to be doing? He certainly gives the impression that he is writing *Heilsgeschichte*, and that theology and history are for him inextricably bound together. Is it not unlikely that he has chosen 'to introduce his particular theology of the cross' in narrative form because it is an exposition of what he understands to have actually happened?"

³²Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 145–47.

³³Cf. esp. France, "Authenticity," pp. 106–7.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 117–18 and n. 45.

³⁵Ibid., p. 118.

³⁶Graham Stanton, "Form Criticism Revisited," in *What About the New Testament?* ed. Morna Hooker and Colin Hickling (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 23.

³⁷D. H. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 31; Missoula: Scholars, 1977). Cf. also J. Delorme, "L'intégration des petits unités littéraires dans l'Évangile de Marc du point de vue de la sémiotique structurale," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 469–91.

³⁸Cf. esp. Erhardt Gütgemanns, *Candid Questions Concerning Gospel Form Criticism: A Methodological Sketch of the Fundamental Problematics of Form and Redaction Criticism*, tr. William G. Doty (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979).

³⁹Viz., William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁴⁰G. R. Osborne, "Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narrative," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 51 (1979): 80–96.

⁴¹M. J. Down, "The Matthean Birth Narratives: Matthew 1¹⁸–2²³," *The Expository Times* 90 (1978–79): 51–52.

⁴²E.g., J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1937), p. 53; R. Banks, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law: Authenticity and Interpretation in Matthew 5:17–20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 226–42.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 233, 238.

⁴⁴S. LeGasse, "Jésus: Juif ou non?" *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 86 (1964): 692; W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1964), p. 171.

⁴⁵Banks, "Matthew's Understanding," p. 228.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 232–33. Cf. also E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), p. 104.

⁴⁷Banks, "Matthew's Understanding."

⁴⁸J. Jeremias, *Die Sprache des Lukasevangeliums: Redaktion und Tradition im Nicht-Markusstoff des dritten Evangeliums* (Meyers Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar Sonderband; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980).

⁴⁹E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), p. 388.

⁵⁰E.g., Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (NCB; Greenwood: Attic, 1976), pp. 248–49; G. M. Styler, "Stages in Christology in the Synoptic Gospels," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963–64): 398–409; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 2:138.

⁵¹David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; Greenwood: Attic, 1972), p. 64. Cf. his entire discussion, pp. 64–65.

⁵²Stonehouse, *Origins*, pp. 93–112.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 105, and pp. 176–92 for an excellent discussion. I take this to have been necessary because of the exigencies of the salvation-historical setting.

⁵⁵Cf. among others, H. D. McDonald, *Jesus—Human and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968); C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977); I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976).

⁵⁶Cf. especially Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 424–27. Taylor himself proposes a different solution to the one adopted here.

⁵⁷Marshall, *Commentary*, p. 684. Moreover, I have not here mentioned the text-critical problems.

⁵⁸G. R. Osborne, "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (1978): 117–30; Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), pp. 225–63.

⁵⁹James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), esp. pp. 120–59.

⁶⁰Cf. the excellent discussion by George I. Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion* (New York: Random, 1970), esp. pp. 97–114.

⁶¹Exemplified in an embarrassing way by Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 175–76.

⁶²I cannot here raise other questions that affect authenticity, such as the literary genre of any book or pericope, or the position that posits that the church received words

from the resurrected Christ through Christian prophets and read them back into the historical Jesus—a view that questions the authenticity not of the sayings but of the settings. Nor may I here lay out the epistemological base on which I would build a high view of Scripture.

⁶³I have developed these categories in "Historical Tradition and the Fourth Gospel—After Dodd, What?" *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

⁶⁴(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

⁶⁵I would like to record my gratitude to Dr. David Wenham for offering helpful suggestions while I was preparing this chapter.