

in the wilderness and planted in Canaan.
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C H A



**POSITIVE
APPROACH
TO THE
GOSPELS**

13 Howbeit, when the spirit of truth shall come, he will testify of himself; but when he shall be glorified, then shall he testify of all things which he hath heard and seen. And he will glorify me: for all things which the Father hath given me, I have declared unto the world. And he shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall declare unto the world.

GERVAIS ANGEL

A Positive Approach To The Gospels

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THE NATURE AND VALUE OF THE GOSPELS

Three lectures given at the TSF Conference 1975/76 by the Revd Gervais Angel, Dean of Studies at Trinity College, Bristol.

Chapter 1

CLARIFYING ONE'S AIM

My brief for these lectures is three-fold. I am to look at the methods of Gospel criticism, not just a negative criticism of these, but to give a positive study of the gospel in the Gospels. I am to cover the subject of 'History and the Gospels', 'Principles of interpretation of the Gospels' and 'The relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel'. And thirdly I am to refer to some critical problems faced by conservatives, especially in liberal faculties. Now on any reckoning that is quite a big task, but I think it a task worth attempting. My reaction to that task could take several forms.

1. One technique would be that sometimes used in certain evangelical churches of fighting a rearguard action against liberal scholarship. If you like, a kind of evangelical guerrilla warfare, where the troops are the scholars and the professors, and the guerrillas with their masks and their flat caps are the evangelicals poking out of corners here and there taking a pot shot. Sometimes they will hit and sometimes they won't. I don't want to do that because I don't think it's going to get us anywhere.

2. A second way of reacting to this is to recount the glories of evangelical scholarship, and there are several of these, so that we'd all go away with a nice feeling in our tummies. I won't do this because I haven't got the kind of encyclopaedic knowledge required for this, though I must say you'd have a pretty good idea of some of these things if you were to look at Guthrie's New Testament Introduction (London: IVP 1970 £6.15) and at other various bits of literature that are current at the moment. One of the best things I have seen, although it's very brief indeed, is in the introductory remarks by Dick France in his Jesus and the Old Testament (London: IVP 1971 £3.50). There's a lot of good stuff there in about four or five pages.

3. Another way in which I could react is to face up to the fact that many people live on a tight-rope between evangelical piety and going along with the critics. Perhaps I could suggest to you an emotional *modus vivendi*, that is, how you could possibly go along with this and live with yourself and hold these two things in tension. I am not going to do this because I think all of us are involved in it already to a certain degree and it's a most embarrassing exercise!

4. What I do intend to do (and I've stated these other things to clear them out of the way) is this. I want to deal with the wider issues in the lectures and I want to deal with the particular critical approaches in the seminars. In the lectures I want to lecture to evangelicals from an evangelical standpoint.

In other words we are adopting an a priori standpoint. We are beginning with a hypothesis and we shall seek to test it in the light of the evidence we have to deal with. If you are a non-evangelical you might say that this is an illegitimate way for an evangelical to behave, and you will say 'Ah, you see you are starting with your blinkers on and you are refusing to take them off'. Well in my naive way I will say there is no difference between that and Rutherford, who, when he tried to split the atom, started off in the same way with a hypothesis and had to go to see if it worked. It happened to come off. So we likewise, beginning with the hypothesis, will test it in the light of what evidence we have got.

AN EVANGELICAL A PRIORI

What is the a priori? It is quite simply the belief that scripture is God's revelation of how He sees things in a final way. It presupposes that there is a God and it presupposes that there is a particular kind of God. I am aware of this and you can look at Dr Packer's article 'Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority' (in Themelios vol 1 no 1 1975) for the arguments. To argue for this is not within my brief, as this is not a dogmatics lecture.

The actual theory is that, given you believe in the Judaeo-Christian God, the Bible is how He sees things in a final way, a way on which He will not go back and on which we have no right to go back. It is a take-it-or-leave-it basis. This is what God has given us to show us how He sees things and it is up to us to accept it or to reject it and to accept the consequences of doing either.

Perhaps I could give you some indication that this is not a 'Angel' theory by quoting from a respectable article by the late Ned Stonehouse. 'That special and direct revelation in history which found its centre and goal in the history of Jesus Christ possesses an objective final character of permanent validity and significance for men. The inscripturation of that revelation through the agency of the Holy Spirit was due precisely to the need that a permanent and trustworthy record should be provided of the fact and the meaning of the divine action in history'. (From 'The Authority of the New Testament' in The Infallible Word, ed N.B. Stonehouse, Philadelphia: PRFC, 1946 p.100.)

The charge is often made that this view of revelation involves a static conception of God which does not leave Him free to act when and how He pleases. The objection might be valid if God were conceived as being or becoming a part of a historical process. But such is not the case because the world and history belong to Him and are under His control. He can make Himself known directly in history. To set aside that direct revelation as irrelevant is to declare one's own independence from God. That defence of the divine freedom turns out to be merely an assertion of the autonomy of the human spirit. Such then is our basic a priori. The scripture is what God tells us of how He sees things in a final way, a way which demands our assent.

TWO COROLLARIES OF THE EVANGELICAL A PRIORI

1. Given that we hold to this a priori position, what is our reaction to it? If I divide what I can find in scripture into two categories: descriptions and prescriptions, then my reactions are as follows.

a. Where there is a description in scripture then I accept it. That is if there is a description in scripture of a particular state of affairs, eg Jesus talking to the woman of Samaria, then I say that took place.

b. Where scripture has a prescription, eg 'gird up the loins of your minds', then I will follow it.

So the answer to this question is given in the popular chorus which begins, 'When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word' and ends 'if we only will trust and obey'.

2. The second corollary of this particular position is this. That I accept it as it is. Now behind this there is a massive problem, a very complex problem. The way in which it is as far as most of us are concerned is in a critical edited edition. It may be the TEV, or the AV if you are of a different vintage, or something of this nature. Therefore when we poke fun at people who say that scripture was originally given in AV form, because we are all RSV readers, we are in fact skating over a very real problem. The problem is that scripture as it is, for that person, is the AV, despite the fact that the work of Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort had not been done when the thing was composed.

For us in general, as it is will be in the hosts of manuscripts and bits of paper that are lying around in various museums throughout the world. As it is will be to take a critical edition (we shall accept that the textual critics have been reasonably reliable in what they've done) as a document that came out of a certain first century milieu. There, we shall say, it is.

We are presented with a letter written by Paul to a congregation at Thessalonica; a letter written to Corinth; a gospel written by Mark or something like this. The point is that if I as an evangelical believe that scripture is God's revelation of how He sees things in a way which requires my acceptance and obedience then there has to be a particular point at which I say, 'This is scripture, this is the context in which the revelation was given.' I believe, though there are plenty who disagree with me, that that point is the point of writing. It will not always be easy to determine the exact context of writing but if we believe that God chose to reveal Himself to His people in the testimony given in the scripture, then the point of revelation for us will be the scripture itself.

If I wanted to sell this point, I could ask you what alternatives there are.

One would be to say it's really the point at which I become aware of Jesus Christ, to which scripture helps me. Very soon that becomes 'to which scripture helps me or may not help me, as the case may be.'

Another alternative might be to say the point of revelation was those events to which the scripture testifies. Those were points of revelation to certain characters, the twelve in particular. But if in fact those events are the point of revelation to me in the twentieth century then I am basically still in the dark, because most of the people who have claimed over the years to be detecting that information for me have yet failed, on their own confession. If you want to see how wonderful the results of critical scholarship are in this area of discovering the origins of Christianity, look at the introductory chapter to Hickling and Hooker's book What is the New Testament? (London: OUP 1975) and you will find there an essay of unrelieved gloom about the results of critical scholarship. That we have very little to show for 150 years work is basically what is said in that introductory chapter.

I would therefore want to urge that the point of revelation, the point at which God declares to me what He wants to say is the piece of literature which I have in my hands within the situation in which it was revealed as far as I am able to detect that.

The doctrine: God reveals to men in scripture. The corollary: first, my reaction to God, acceptance and obedience; secondly 'as it is', which I have now defined as the document in its life situation as a document.

DISCOVERING THE STRUCTURE AND THE ROLE OF THE DOCUMENT

As I approach the document, what is it that I am seeking to discover? Bearing in mind that the a priori is simply what God wants to show me, these are the things I shall want to discover.

What is it? What is its form?

What is it doing? What is its function?

Now I want to stress that this approach comes from our a priori understanding of the nature of scripture. I believe that God is seeking to show me how He sees things through this; therefore I ask what it is that God has given me and what it is intended to do.

One could say that the function of the Pentateuch is to produce epic films! There is no doubt that the Pentateuch has been highly successful as a tool for this; and we can of course with lesser projects than epic films approach the Bible in the same way, but the value in so doing is no more than the kick we get out of it. So we have to be very careful in approaching the gospels to ask the right questions. I want to refer to the form and the function of the document in these two terms: the structure in its context and the role in its context.

Chapter 2

Here is a gospel, eg the Gospel of Matthew, and I ask, what is its structure? My answer to that question can go along two distinct lines:

1. Let me see what I can make of the document.
2. Let the document speak for itself.

1. Let me see what I can make of the document.

Let me take, for example, Mark's gospel. There was a belief towards the end of the last century that Mark's gospel for certain reasons was as reliable an historical account as you'll get of the life and times of Jesus Christ. This was held partly on the testimony of Papias that behind Mark lies the testimony of Peter and it partly rested on the belief that something which is older or nearer to the event is bound to be more reliable, for people were persuaded that Mark was a document used by Matthew and Luke and was therefore nearer to the event and therefore intrinsically more reliable as reflecting the state of affairs. Now there are fallacies in both these two things but that is the way it was regarded. Mark was understood as a document giving as near biographical detail as is available.

In trying to see what they could make of the document scholars have also taken the approach of saying 'I am going to disregard what the document says about itself because the writer was clearly a con-man. I am going to look at the details of the document and from those details I am going to construct what the document is all about'. This is basically what is called the analytic method. This is generally the dominant attitude and the approach among scholars, particularly those of a German vintage, at the moment. This policy is deliberately presupposing that evidence which the document has about itself cannot be right. Any testimony given by members of the early church cannot be right. This is a deliberate policy of rejection of evidence that might be helpful.

2. Let the document speak for itself.

Recent study of Mark has partly said, 'Look at what it says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God". So what we have got here is a gospel.' Now this latter approach is in a naive way saying 'Let's listen to what the document says. It calls itself a gospel, so let's not call it a biography. It calls itself a gospel so let's find out what a gospel is'.

This distinction I am making between these two approaches presupposes that people can come along and say that the only conclusions they are going to reach are those which are inherently in the document itself and that they will not accept or recognise any other. This policy is I believe a good policy but it cannot be followed through thoroughly as a method, though it has more humility than the first approach and is certainly more likely to get the culture of the age right.

Why is it not a method? All observation is to a certain extent parasitic on the predispositions of the observer. Let me give you three areas in which this operates.

a. If I draw a distinction, it is a distinction which I am drawing. Eg. if I say that the relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke to one another is closer than the relationship between them and the Fourth Gospel I am drawing a distinction. A lot of people have said it's there in the evidence. There are verbal similarities and the structure does cover an area which is more alike than in the fourth gospel. But if we ask the simple question which of these documents gives us a truer perspective of what the life and times of Jesus Christ was like, we then see that we are drawing a distinction. Scholarship has gone through a revolution in the last fifteen years over this particular question. Gardner-Smith just before the second world war kept on saying that John was much closer to the historical truth than people thought and people just laughed him down. After Dodd's work people have now come round to the opinion that maybe John's work is much more reliable than the other three. So in making distinctions we are doing the distinguishing.

b. When we are trying to build up a picture, the bits of evidence that we pick up to form our picture are bits that we pick up. The selection is ours. Some people believe that forming a picture of say the early church, is a jig-saw puzzle. It is not so. In a jig-saw puzzle the contours are predetermined but in critical scholarship or in any sort of historical picture the contours are not predetermined, the bits don't just fit like that. We take the bits and form a picture. Indeed the fact that it is not a jig-saw puzzle has been patently obvious from the fact that different historians have produced different pictures of Jesus in the Gospels. If it were a jig-saw puzzle it would always come out the same shape, as a jig-saw puzzle always does. The selections are made by us.

The decisions to relate them in a particular order are also made by us.

Now these observations on method apply to everybody whether you are evangelical or non-evangelical. The difference as I see it lies in your policy, your motivation, the attitude you adopt as you make your distinctions and selections and your decisions to relate in particular ways.

Having said that, let's go forward from our original a priori position, that here is God's truth, I am to observe its descriptions and accept them and observe its prescriptions and follow them as they are, or as they are presented in the context of the document, recognising that like every other human being I am going to make selections, distinctions and decisions to relate. None the less I am going to do my best to see what the thing has got in it, to see what the thing is saying and to try as far as I can to be governed by those observations.

Now some people will of course say that this is impossible. Some people are so governed by the fact that the human mind is the focus of making distinctions and selections and so on that they say 'out there is nothing. Out there is simply a confused mass and the Bible is a confused mass. It's only an agreed policy that gives you any evidence.' Now I think that if minds were as independent as that we wouldn't be able to work as a society. It is an extreme view and therefore I want to reject that. I do believe that we can open up a book and see what it says, rather than simply find out how I react to it.

THE STRUCTURE IN ITS CONTEXT - ACCORDING TO THE DETAILS PRESENTED

What do these four documents say about themselves? These are very simple points but I do believe that they are starting points for evangelicals. Let's listen to what the book itself says.

1. Matthew for example. Whatever theories may have been put on Matthew, Matthew begins like this: 'A book of the origin of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham'. We seem to have gone a long way down the road of neglecting this and saying to ourselves that the gospel of Matthew was a hand-book for the teachers in the early church, or it is in fact a Christian Pentateuch, or it is a hand-book of instruction for pupils in the confirmation class, or it was written to follow a liturgical calendar. The book says 'A book of the origin of Jesus Christ...' Now I can't here go any further on this and there's a lot of work to be done on it. But I do believe that we ought to see just what it says and start from there.

2. Let's go to Mark, to whom I have already referred. 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it was written in Isaiah the prophet...'. This document is a gospel. Now the fact that the early church called all four gospels, let's ignore that. They might have been right, they might have been wrong. Let's just look at the text. This is what God has given us. God put far more emphasis on this than He did on Irenaeus' views (see his Adv. Haer III.11.11 in J. Stevenson: A new Eusebius, London: SPCK, 1957 no.98).

3. Luke Chapter 1:13 'It seemed good to me also having followed everything from the top carefully, to write to you excellent Theophilus in order that you might know about the truth about the words in which you were bred.' 'In order' ... 'the truth of the words'. This is essentially a report. That's what it states itself to be. A report of the logoi (whether these are the tales that were going around or the words of Jesus is open to exegetical interpretation), so that the person at the other end may have some understanding.

4. Let's look at the fourth. Its beginning isn't really helpful if we hold to the principle that we are trying to follow through at this particular point, if we are asking what does the document say about itself, about its own structure, about its own nature. It begins 'In the beginning was the word....' Now you can say 'But that's the prologue', but at this stage I don't know it's the prologue. I am simply asking what the document says about itself. We have to turn of course to the end of chapter 20 to get some indication of what chapters 1-20 (and this is what I think it refers to, though of course this again is open to exegetical interpretation) are all about. 'These things were written in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name'. In this book things were written with a soteriological as well as a christological motive.

On the face of it you have got four different types of literature. I believe the first call on the evangelical is to look at the evidence as it is, before we jump into the arms of the second century with the four gospels being there to indicate north south east and west as Irenaeus tell us so carefully. We want to look and see what we make of what they say because we are at the receiving end of what God has given us and the way He wants to give it to us. This is what is meant by describing them, seeing their structure and their nature according to the details as they are presented.

THE STRUCTURE IN ITS CONTEXT - ACCORDING TO DETAILS OBSERVED

We can see their structure and their nature not only according to the details as they are presented but according to the details that we ourselves observe. Let me give you some examples of what has been observed in the first three gospels.

1. It has been observed in these three gospels that one of the books has 661 verses, 600 of which are shared with one gospel and 350 with the other.

It has been observed that Matthew shares 235 verses with Luke which it doesn't share with Mark. Matthew has 350 verses not found elsewhere. Luke has 548 verses not found elsewhere (that's if the verse divisions are correct). That is an observation, a description which we make.

2. Here's another observation. A lot of the stories have a similar structure eg an indication of place, or need, of Jesus meeting the need and a declaration of wonder on the part of the bystanders. There is a structure that more or less covers the accounts of Jesus' works; that is, those works which we would claim were done by supernatural power.

3. There is another structure to be found. There is a question or problem and Jesus makes a pronouncement, or an observation on the problem. Sometimes there is a reaction, sometimes there is not.

4. Here's another observation that we make. The tenses of the accounts of Jesus' preaching and healing ministry in the gospel according to Mark sometimes go something like this: and Jesus used to teach and Jesus used to heal, slightly different from Jesus taught or Jesus healed. It is quite conceivable of course that if you put together all the bits that have tenses about things He used to do as a regular thing or a matter of course, then we might get a complete picture. But we observe these things.

5. Another example of an observation we make is to be found in taking Luke's gospel. Once you've got rid of the birth narratives the style is much the same all the way through. You couldn't really say that more than one person wrote it.

Now I want to demonstrate to you by these things (and you will no doubt have noticed that the first set of evidences lies behind the synoptic problem, the second set behind form-criticism and the third behind redaction criticism), that these are observations that we make from looking at the text.

TWO IMPLICATIONS

At this stage I want to add two implications of the position we have reached.

1. The historical acceptance of the culture to which the document belongs. In other words if we are going to look at the document 'as it is', we have to look at it in its own times as well as on its own terms. This can be contrasted with the approach which looks at the document itself but nothing else. This is one of the things that annoyed C.S. Lewis when he wrote an essay called 'Fern-seed and Elephants' (ed W Hooper, Fern-seed and Elephants, London: 1975). He writes 'the idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages is in my opinion preposterous' (p.112).

When Dick France discusses this in his article in Themelios (vol 1, no.1) he points out that he believes that the evangelical who follows through this principle of looking at scripture 'as it is' (and as I have defined this now 'in its own times') should make the fullest possible use of linguistic, literary, historical, archaeological and other data bearing on that author's environment. He illustrates this point by saying that, if you want to sort out the passage in 1 Peter 3:19 about Jesus going down to the spirits in prison, then you have to look at the book of Enoch in order to be able to understand it. So that's the first implication: if we're going to look at a document on its own terms we must look at a document in its own times.

2. The principle of harmony. The second implication is that if we believe that scripture as a whole is what God wants to show us of how He sees things, then one of our guidelines in interpreting a particular NT passage would be to see the way in which it illuminates and supports other passages, rather than contradicts them. This is what Dr Packer calls the 'principle of harmony'. If you hold to this principle you have an unshakeable faith that everything the Bible says is going to end up in a series of positive affirmations none of which is irreconcilable the one with the other. There are of course several scholars who would deny this situation and would say that in fact if you follow the Biblical writers through on their own terms you'll find that they do end up with the opposite conclusions. Sometimes of course, Biblical scholars have written these into the situation. For example there was in the hey-day of higher criticism and OT study a tendency when looking at prophecies which contained both judgment and joy to say that either one or the other belonged to the editor, because no prophet could be both judgmental and joyful at the same time. Cheyne was a particularly keen man for this sort of approach, and of course we are familiar with the notion that the synoptists teach one gospel and that John teaches another and that the two are irreconcilable. We are also familiar with the belief that Paul's teaching that a man is justified by grace through faith is denied explicitly and deliberately by James who says, 'You show me your faith and I'll show you my works' (2:18). All of these points of tension are used to illustrate as a fact that different Biblical writers contradict themselves, or at least one another.

Now if you believe that the scripture is in fact a document that is God's view of how He sees things and how He wants us to know things as He sees them, then we assume that God is one and that God does not contain any internal contradictions; therefore what He Himself declares all fits in to one picture. This is the principle of harmony.

Dick France does qualify the principle and I would go along with him on this. He says that we need also to take note of the Biblical writer's particular intention when he is saying something. His particular emphasis over against the emphasis of others must be taken into account. This particular emphasis may come out in the following ways: in presenting a particular story for a different reason from another person who presents the same story; using different word forms in presenting what is substantially the same story and even in using a different order. This point comes out not only in Dick France but in another evangelical scholar, Everett Harrison. Harrison puts it like this: 'Generally speaking there is no such thing as an inspired order of narration' (E F Harrison 'The Phenomena of Scripture' in Carl F H Henry (ed.), Revelation and the Bible, London: Tyndale Press, 1959, p245). Harrison would go so far as to suggest that the emphasis of the evangelist can be the reason for chronological differences. For example, Matthew puts the cleansing of the temple on the same day as the entry into Jerusalem whereas Mark puts it twenty-four hours afterwards. Matthew does not feel himself bound here by chronological considerations but is rather more concerned to get across his point, that when Jesus cursed the fig-tree the fig-tree just fell down flat. He wanted to indicate Jesus' power.

So then the evangelical view of scripture leads to a policy on our part of describing the document 'as it is', on its own terms which involves 'in its own times' and also means 'in the light of and in company with the rest of scripture'. On then to the second issue I want to explore.

Chapter 3

What is the role of the gospels? What is their intended function? We're going to seek to answer this question in exactly the same way as we dealt with the question of structure. Firstly looking at what the gospels themselves say and secondly to see what the scholarly academic world has made of their role.

THE ROLE IN ITS CONTEXT - ACCORDING TO THE DETAILS PRESENTED

1. In Matthew there is no deliberate indication apart of course from the words 'book of origin', whatever that may mean, unless one does take a clue from the so-called formula quotations, eg. 2:17-18 'And this then was fulfilled that was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet as he said "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and bitter moaning; Rachel crying for her children and she did not want to be comforted because they are not."' We might argue from this passage (and other similar ones), which picks up OT verses and says that the story of the innocents illustrates them, that Matthew was here trying to indicate how it is that OT prophecies are fulfilled in the origin of Jesus.

2. What about Mark? Again there is no deliberate expression of his role, unless or until one expands or expounds the notion of euaggelion in a performative way. In other words, we can say that 'gospel' is quite simply a title for what we've got. On the other hand we might say the word gospel is used because it's intended to mean something; it is intended to indicate a function or purpose. The most modern popular exponent of this view is Willi Marxsen in his book Mark the Evangelist (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969). He claims that Mark alone produces a gospel. There is only one gospel and that is Mark. Before you write this off as a load of rubbish remember what I said earlier. If we look at the internal claims of all the four so-called gospels, their claims about themselves are all different. Marxsen is simply emphasising this point. He says Mark is the only one called a gospel and he means by gospel a sermon to readers in which Christ is saying 'I am coming soon. Wait for me in Galilee'. Well this is a theory. It may be right, it may be wrong. However, the general point I am making is that there is no indication of the role apart from this word euaggelion which we need to define in some way or other in order to determine the role, the function of Mark. Marxsen's theory is just one possible account of the meaning of euaggelion, of the role of this particular document we call Mark's gospel.

3. When we come to Luke we have in fact got more information. Luke claims to be giving us an account 'in order', kathexes (1:3). The point of this is to give this excellent Theophilus security on the logoi, on the accounts. He also helps us to see something of his own approach to the enterprise. It is a traditional account in the sense that he follows the example of others who attempted narratives or expositions (however you understand diegesis) of deeds fulfilled in the Christian community on the basis of what had been handed down by people who had been eyewitnesses from the beginning and who were ministers of the word (1:1). It's very tempting here to follow Everett Harrison (E F Harrison, 'Tradition of the Sayings of Jesus' in D F Wells and C H Pinnock (eds) Towards a Theology of the Future, Illinois: Creation House 1971) in saying that because we are told the eyewitnesses saw the deeds and the ministers of the word gave the gospel, therefore we have the words and works of Jesus all accounted for. That's a very neat package. It may be right. It may be wrong. I think it's over-systematising it. The basic point is that Luke's own attitude to his task is not one of cutting loose from what others have been doing but of taking account of what others have been doing, taking account of the information other have been using and seeking to set down an account in the style of others. In other words his approach is traditional rather than creatively original. That is not to say he hasn't got his own purpose or outline but it does mean that his attitude is not tearaway. His attitude is conformist.

4. What of the role of John's gospel? We have already seen its twofold aim. Firstly its aim is christological, in that it seeks to show that Christ is the Son of God and secondly, soteriological, 'seeking to encourage that 'you', whoever the readers are, 'in believing might have life in His name' (20:31). It's open to exegesis whether that means 'you people that don't believe when you come to believe might have life', or 'you believers might have life'. We're not quite sure. Maybe we don't have to make a distinction. But the point of the document is christological. To show that the claims made about Jesus are genuine claims which can be validated. Also to indicate and encourage people to believe in Christ and so find life. It is if you like what we would call a tract. Its purpose is a response of reverence for and trust in Jesus.

Now that is the information as far as we are given it of the role of the gospels.

THE ROLE IN ITS CONTEXT - ACCORDING TO THE DETAILS OBSERVED

As far as I am concerned, in seeking to follow through my a priori understanding of scripture, I have seen what the documents say about themselves and I am quite happy to follow up that lead, since that is the way in which God has presented them to me.

We might possibly be inclined to say that what John says about his gospel goes for the other three. We have no real reason for doing so, since John doesn't include the other three in his statement. But if I do, bear in mind that I am beginning to speculate.

I am content that John's purpose should explain John and Luke's purpose explain Luke. I'm a little more lost on Mark, though there's some hope that the use of the word euaggelion elsewhere in the NT will help me here. I'm even more lost on Matthew, for a 'book of origin' is, I think, unique. But that is the starting point of my research into the role, the function, the purpose, the intended aim of this particular document. However, this evidence which I am content to make the starting point of my research into the nature and value of the gospels, is felt to be inadequate by the general body of the scholarly world.

For example Merrill Tenney, an evangelical scholar from America, (M C Tenney, 'Reversals of New Testament Criticism' in Carl F H Henry, Op.cit. p354), feels that a scholar is required by the paucity of the evidence to search out all the minute points that bear on the case, and to formulate from them some coherent conclusions about the document he is studying. This he regards as a legitimate task. To put the point another way, Humphrey Palmer in his book The Logic of Gospel Criticism (London: Macmillan, 1968, p195) says that we will ask further questions and seek answers to these further questions as they affect our faith. That is, if we believe it is important that we gain a picture of the historical Jesus, in order that we might believe in Him as presented in that picture, then we have to get that picture willy nilly. If our faith depends on the truth about Jesus, that is the abstracted truth from the picture I've gained of Jesus from working on the documents, then I have got to get that picture or I have no one to believe in. Here are two genuine motives for going further. By further I mean imposing on the gospel material roles which are not explicitly claimed by the gospels themselves. Before I expound this thesis I want to just summarise the roles as I see them.

1. The gospels are biographical evidence of the subject of the 'book of origin' or the subject of the 'gospel', Jesus Christ.
2. The gospels are evidence of the faith and life of the early Christian communities.

3. The gospels are evidence of the history and the traditions about these communities. This can be subdivided into two ways:

- a) that they are evidence of the history of the traditions in their original context;
- b) that they are evidence of the history of the traditions in subsequent contexts of use.

Take as an example the story of Jesus walking through the cornfields up to the punchline about the Son of Man being Lord of the Sabbath. The situation at the root of this was in fact a dispute between Jesus and the Jews about the Sabbath. The account is also evidence of the history of the traditions, not only in the situations in which they originated or were used, but also they are evidence of the transmission of the traditions. If you want to see some examples of this see Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (London: SCM, 1972, pp63-66).

There you will find that Jeremias analyses at least six different uses to which the parable of the great feast was put, according to his own theory. So that he can trace the way in which it started off as something or other, probably a crisis that Jesus was warning people about and it goes on to be used about something else, and something else is added to it and it's used as something else and so on until it came to be used by Matthew. Now this is a role which is given to the gospels. It is evidence of this, both of the situations in which it was used and of the development of the tradition.

4. The gospels are evidence of the faith of the evangelists themselves as they made their own faith public to the particular communities.

Here are four roles that have been attributed to the gospels.

Now the first thing that I have to say is this. All of these attributed roles are vitally important to the evangelical scholar, who seeks to learn the ways of God, or what God wants to tell him in the descriptions and prescriptions of the NT. Who would not want to know the answer to these questions? What may I learn of my Saviour's life? Of course I want to know the answer to that question. What beliefs and behaviour patterns do I share with my spiritual ancestors? Or another way of putting that is, am I sound? How did the information reach the gospel writers? What am I to submit to as I read the evangelist's presentation? All these questions are vitally important for the evangelical seeking to live the Christian life. But the question is this. Have I a right to assume that the gospels are designed to help me to answer these questions? Now it has been assumed by scholars, liberal, radical and conservative that the role of the gospels is to help you answer such questions. I think it is a fair comment to say that no general agreement is being shown on either the success or failure to answer these questions but I do not think that we can write off the exercise as a mistaken one, simply because the success or failure is not yet clear. If you want to see the notion to see whether in fact it is a success or failure then I refer you again to that opening chapter in Hickling and Hooker, 'What is the New Testament?', where there is a very depressing assessment of the 'assured results of scholarship'. But I don't think that this sort of depression should make us say that the whole thing is a load of eye-wash, so let's ignore it. I do believe that it is an important enterprise. I have shown you the interest that it has for all Christian believing people and therefore I'd like to look in a little bit more detail at each of these roles to see what has become of them, maybe that might even help us to sort out where we stand.

1. The role given to the gospels that we have here, biographical evidence, of Jesus Christ, who is the subject of the 'book of origin' and the subject of the 'gospel'.

(i) The standard approach which attributes this role to the gospels, with which we are familiar, is what is called by Dick France 'Biblical realism'. Professor Turner of Durham calls it the 'historicist approach'. This approach aims and I quote here Eldon Ladd (Jesus and the Kingdom, London: SPCK 1966, pp.xiii-xiv) 'primarily to interpret the gospels as they stand as credible records of Jesus and His preaching'.

The procedure, the method, is to seek to study the gospel in the culture of its age. This follows out as I said earlier, not only the 'as it is' but also 'in its own times'.

We presuppose the reliability of the documents or any information in the documents unless they are shown wrong, and we use critical tools in the interest of positive results.

Dick France, again going back to that article, stresses in this approach both a concern for use of external data and also for taking careful note of the writer's intention.

So nowadays the approach of those who are interested in attributing to the gospels the role of being biographical evidence of Jesus Christ, or shall we say conservative scholarship, is dubbed Biblical realism or the historicist approach. It is marked basically by a desire to see the gospels within the culture of the age, and exclusively by presupposing a reliability in the gospels unless they are shown to be wrong. It is also marked by a motivation of using critical tools in order to get positive results.

(ii) Going back 100 years or so there were others who sought to provide a biographical evidence of Jesus Christ, who saw in the gospels this kind of evidence. One group sought to make an historical analysis of the evidence and used as their major tool (though they weren't exactly conscious of it) psychological and cosmological models. They came to the gospels, having in the back of their minds a picture of the kind of person that Jesus could or could not have been and this psychological model of Jesus acted as a yardstick by which they accepted or rejected bits of evidence. We are familiar with this, so there's no point in going on any more. Any standard work on the history of the gospels from the 19th century onwards will tell you about Ernest Renan, Strauss and the crew who came to an almighty crash, according to the text-books. I say according to the text-books because we've still got people who do it today. When Albert Schweitzer produced his new *Quest for the Historical Jesus* it was said that Jesus thought all the time that He was a prophet who was going to usher in the end and when He died He got an awful big shock, and that was the end of that! Now that was one way of tackling the desire to attribute to the gospels the role of giving biographical evidence of Jesus Christ.

(iii) Another way of seeking to answer the same question was by a literary theory, which went like this. If we find the most reliable evidence first, then on the basis of this we shall be able to determine the facts, as it were, about Jesus Christ. Those who approached it in this way were consciously aware of the sort of information I gave you earlier about Mark's 661 verses, 600 of which are in Matthew and 353 in Luke, and so on. As they compared particularly the first three gospels they were conscious not only of similarities in order and in wording but they were also conscious of divergencies - eg. the story of the Gadarene demoniac. Mark (5:1-13) has one demoniac and Matthew (8:28-34) has two. There are all sorts of divergencies cropping up if you assume as you put these stories together that we have here two accounts of the same incident, divergencies not only in wording but also in points of detail. So the scholars said they had the evidence which purported to be about the life and times of Jesus, because that after all was the role they were imposing on the evidence, and they had the divergencies. Out of this observation they produced the following formula: what we have got here (and these are my words) are 'core' and 'tendency'. In other words somewhere in all this material we have got the basic facts and elsewhere we have got the skewing of the facts by particular evangelists or by particular handers down of the tradition. So the task had to be to distinguish between the core and the tendency. For example you find that Matthew plays down the stupidity of the apostles, at least so the claim is made. Now the answer these scholars said lay in finding which of the three gospels contained the core and where in the other two one finds the skewing or the tendency. This is, if you like, the historical motivation for the synoptic problem as we know it. And some people came up with the theory that Mark was prior (and therefore the 'core') and both Matthew and Luke were dependent on him.

(iv) Then Streeter (B H Streeter The Four Gospels, London: Macmillan, 1924) came up with the idea that Matthew had his own material, Luke had his own material and both Matthew and Luke had Q. So you have got Streeter's basic theory that there are four basic sources Mark, M, L, Q. And that those four sources are 'core'. In other words they are inherently more reliable than use made of them by Matthew or Luke. So if you have got access to them you have access to more reliable material than we find in Matthew or Luke. But there are problems in this enterprise. Let me briefly tell you what those problems are. I think it is very important to be aware of this subject because redaction critics very often assume that Mark and Q are 'core' over against 'tendency' in Matthew and Luke. They assume that, though of course they don't always read it in that way! They do in fact operate backwards and forwards.

The problems:

(i) There is no agreement on identifying the core. If you want to read a hard and difficult book, but one which demonstrates this conclusively, look at Humphrey Palmer's The Logic of Gospel Criticism. One of Palmer's arguments is this. Matthew, Mark and Luke share a certain amount of material. 600 verses of Mark are covered in Matthew and a considerable amount of that is also covered in Luke. Therefore Mark is the common denominator of Matthew and Luke. In the 19th century a couple of German scholars got the idea that if Mark was the common denominator, the other two were dependent on it. But Palmer points out quite clearly that a common denominator is not necessarily the original. It is a mediator. But it is not necessarily the thing that they are both dependent on. To put the point another way: when Griesbach worked on this (and he's followed by W R Farmer in his book The Synoptic Problem, London: Macmillan, 1964) he made the following observation: Mark might very well have been summarising both Matthew and Luke. That still accounts for the common denominator.

Now the point I want to draw out is that the relationship between the three gospels is not defined conclusively. The logic of dependency does not make it at all clear that one of them is prior to the others. Even looking at the correspondence between Matthew and Luke you cannot argue conclusively that the movement was either from Luke to Matthew or from Matthew to Luke or from both to a common source. The interrelationships do not flow in one clear direction. Therefore, we do not yet know what the core was. If we do not yet know what the core was, we cannot know where the tendency lies. And if we do not know that then we have failed in our attempt to define what is the most reliable evidence.

(ii) Even if we had discovered that Mark was written before Matthew and Luke and used by them it would not thereby imply that Mark was more reliable. Matthew could possibly have been correcting Mark's mistakes. What's wrong with that? Every teacher does it when he takes home marking from school. So priority does not mean reliability either in an absolute sense - ie. Mark is prior, therefore it's all true, or in a relative sense - ie. Mark is prior, therefore it's more true than the other two.

(iii) There is no agreement on how many documents were core. Most scholars who want a working hypothesis (I mean those who don't want to think a lot about the problem but just want to use the problem for other researches like redaction critics) will generally take a two source theory, ie. Mark and Q. So Q has been going around for a long time. Sanday for example in 1911 was sold on Q (Studies in the Synoptic Problem, Oxford: Clarendon Press). E F Harrison, whom I have mentioned already, is also sold on Q. Here are some of their grounds.

1. We have unearthed over the last 100 years or so certain collections of sayings of Jesus. For example the Fragment of an Unknown Gospel (Bell and Skeat 1935), or the Logia of Jesus (Grenfell and Hunt 1897). But none of these collections of sayings seems to bear any resemblance to what we think Q ought to have contained. If in fact there was a document Q we would have expected that these bits of evidence that have come up as collections of sayings might possibly have hit on Q.

2. If in fact we believe that Luke read Matthew then there is no real need to believe in Q at all. This is Austin Farrer's argument (in 'On Dispensing with Q' in D E Nineham ed. Studies in the Gospels Oxford: Blackwell 1955, pp55-86).

3. It is quite possible that Matthew and Luke weren't dependent on one particular source but on lots of little tracts that were floating around.

So we do not know whether Q was a core and even if we did believe there was a Q floating around we have not got access to Q, so we can't in fact use the core. Proto-Luke is another example of this, but I want to say no more about it.

Well here are some attempts to attribute to the gospels the role of giving biographical evidence of Jesus Christ. At the moment I have indicated one school of critical scholarship that is using this in a productive way with which I am obviously in sympathy. That is the school of Biblical realism. Earlier ages have tried and have failed. Certainly the ones using psychological and cosmological models have had their day and have gone. Still there is the attempt by literary theory to get the most reliable evidence from the existing evidence and to use that. That I believe at the moment still has not succeeded.

(iv) There is one other way which is used again in modern times in order to determine not the whole of the gospel as biographical evidence but to determine that some of the things Jesus said were in fact said by Him. This is tradition - critical studies which we associate particularly with people like Jeremias.

The search is for the ipsissima vox, or the very words of Jesus, via the criteria for authentic sayings. The basic technique involved is what is called the criterion of dissimilarity. It is expressed by Bultmann in the following words: 'We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus, where on the one hand expression is given to the contrasts between Jewish morality and piety, and a distinctive eschatological temper which characterised the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features'. (The History of the Synoptic Tradition, Oxford: Blackwell 1963 p.205) The technique is as follows. If a saying is paralleled in Judaism it is not by Jesus. If a saying is paralleled by dogmatic assertion in the church it is not by Jesus. If it is neither of these two things there are good grounds for attributing it to Jesus. Add to this the criterion of coherence, that is if a saying fits in with the picture of Jesus we've got already by using the criterion of dissimilarity then all well and good. For example we noted that Pultmann referred to the eschatological temper of Jesus; he would expect any saying to fit in with the eschatological temper of Jesus on the criterion of coherence.

This approach is a reflection of an approach attempted many years ago by Schneidell (see article on 'Gospels' in Encyclopaedia Biblica Vol 2, London, 1899-1903, paras 139-140). Basically he said that any saying in the gospels which the church would not have been likely to compose is probably true, eg Jesus rebuking Peter.

Apart from the general scepticism of this approach and its limited appeal to those who sympathise with the criteria it leads to the following conclusions.

First, Jesus was an eccentric reactionary Jew whose words were never followed by His disciples.

Secondly, the only sayings of Jesus of which posterity can be aware are the ones that no one else is known to have taken any notice of.

These two conclusions vitiate the approach, since first they are inconsistent with the sayings themselves and secondly are historically improbable. Further it is questionable whether the criteria can themselves be profitably applied. Let me take each of these three judgements in turn.

(1) First the tradition of sayings. Could the disciples both disregard the sayings of Jesus and also record the following statements: 'Do not be called Rabbi for one is your teacher and you are all brothers' (Matt 23:8); 'Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away' (Matt 24:35); 'The person who writes me off and does not receive my words has the one who judges him (John 12:48); 'If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what you will and it shall be given you (John 15:7)? Could the disciples both record those sayings and at the same time adopt a policy of disregarding those sayings?

Could the disciples record the following attitudes? The attitude we saw in Luke's prologue where he is consciously aware of the work of other people and seeks to follow their example (Luke 1:1-4). Or the attitude of Peter when he says 'We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20)

Or again could the following claims be reported? The great commission 'Go baptise and teach them to observe all I have commanded you' (Matt 28:20); or the promise of the Holy Spirit 'These things have I said to you while I was with you. But the paraclete He will teach you everything and will put into your memory all that I said to you'. (John 14:26). In contradiction to the criterion of dissimilarity the recording of these sayings implies a continuity of sayings between Jesus and the early church.

J A Baird comes to the opposite conclusion from the followers of the criterion of dissimilarity and argues that such consistency 'demands either a theory of apostolic agreement and deliberate concurrence beyond belief or a theory of verbal inspiration that outdoes the literalists. The law of parsimony would seem to demand a simpler answer. Behind this unity stands Jesus of Nazareth whose authentic mind has come through the exigencies of gospel formation reasonably intact'. (J A Baird, The Justice of God in the teaching of Jesus, London: SCM 1963, pp 30-32.)

First then, in answer to this use of the criterion of dissimilarity, we would say that the notion that the genuine sayings of Jesus (ie the ones we are able to accept as genuinely from Jesus) are the ones which the church does not parallel suggests that the church was embarked on a policy of disregarding the sayings of Jesus. This seems contradicted by the evidence I have just quoted.

(2) On the notion of historical probability let us take the hardest sayings of all: the predictions. Here are two scholarly views.

First one by Goppelt (Jesus, Paul and Judaism E Schroeder (ed) New York; Nelson 1964 pp 91-92). Take the passion prediction that Jesus must suffer and must be raised. Goppelt argues that the stress on the necessity of His suffering makes sense of the passion narrative. But if you take the necessity of His suffering away it does not make sense of the passion narrative. In particular it does not make sense of the garden of Gethsemane.

Secondly, Johannes Munck makes this observation, and it is a telling one on Jesus predicting for example the fall of Jerusalem (Pauline Research Since Schweitzer, James Philip (ed), The Bible in Modern Scholarship, Nashville: Abingdon, 1965, p177). He says that if you are an OT critic and you see a prediction of the fall of Jerusalem you will tend to date it before the fall. If you are a NT critic you will tend to date it after the fall.

(3) Can the technique be consistently applied?

Two of the greatest results of the use of the criterion of dissimilarity are the works of Jeremias on the words 'amen' and 'abba'. His thesis is that the use of 'abba' was unique to Jesus in His prayer life, because if we look at the prayers of Palestinian Judaism we do not find a parallel for it. But does this in fact pass the test of the criterion of dissimilarity? The answer is no, because we find that both the Roman church and also the Galatian churches were using 'abba' (Romans 8:15, Gal 4:6). So here is a use in the church of something that is attributed to Jesus and on that basis according to the criterion it could not be in fact by Jesus Himself.

So the question I ask again is 'Can you consistently use this criterion?' The conclusion to which I come is that the exercise of the criterion of dissimilarity is an unproductive procedure for testing the attributed role of the gospels as evidence of the biographical details of Jesus Christ. It is not the cast iron way the critics seem to think it is of finding out something Jesus genuinely said.

2. The attributed role of the gospels as evidence of the faith and life of the church, that is, the role that the gospels tell us what the church believed and how the church behaved.

(a) What are the basic grounds for attributing this role?

(i) A scepticism about the reality of the picture painted of Jesus and scepticism about the church's concern with it. Is Jesus could not have been that sort of person. What we have of Jesus is an impersonal Jesus. Or again the church was not interested in the historical details of Jesus. This is of course Bultmann's great beef. He interprets the verse in 2 Corinthians 5:16 'though we once knew Jesus after the flesh we know Him thus no longer' as meaning that we no longer have any interest or concern in any details that there may have been circulating about Jesus prior to our conversion as the new creation. So there is the scepticism.

(ii) There is a claimed gap between what the historical Jesus did and said and what the church thought about Him.

(iii) The fact that the synoptic gospel sayings are not quoted elsewhere in the NT and that there are few allusions to them.

(iv) An observation which makes people say that this is evidence of the faith and life of the church rather than of Jesus is the bias and the tendency which we find in the records.

All these grounds lead to the thesis that the records are interpretations and not transmissions of data on Jesus. To quote: 'the tradition has been so largely determined by the interests and needs of the Christian community that the gospels actually reflect the faith and life of the church to a greater extent than they do the teaching of our Lord.....a distinction between the earthly Jesus speaking to His contemporaries and that of the heavenly Lord speaking to His people through the Spirit was hardly felt nor insisted upon' (E F Harrison, 'Tradition of the sayings of Jesus', loc.cit. p41). So the claim here is that the accounts are shot through with interpretation and that the early church would not have known how to make a distinction between the earthly Jesus and the risen Lord whom they were proclaiming in their preaching.

Now the form critics who share this scepticism (and in some sense are the fathers of this scepticism), make the following claim. Within the gospel tradition they say stories and sayings can be split up: they can be taken out of the context that they now have. And that if we look at the stories of healings, we will find that those stories have a similar shape. If we look at the sayings of Jesus they have a similar shape. The basic thesis is this: form is an indicator of function. That is, if you look at the shape of a thing, that will give you the clue to the way in which it was used. What is more (and here this is going into Bultmann's theory of form criticism, although not every critic agrees with this) not only is form an indicator of function but it is also an indicator of the origin in which it arose. To take an example, if you look at the early conflict stories in Mark's gospel, eg arguments about the sabbath (2:23-3:6) the argument goes that these were not only used by the early church in debate with the Jews, but they were also constructed because the church wanted something to use in debate. If we take this theory through carefully we come to the conclusion that the elements in the gospels are evidence of what the early Christians believed and how they used what they believed and, if we go along with Bultmann, how they in fact created these vehicles of their faith. All they had was the gospel and they constructed these stories in order to be able to convey certain aspects of the gospel.

(b) Now will this thesis stand? I'd like to make the following observations. They're all old hat but I think they're worth repeating.

(i) The relationship set up between form and function is methodologically fallacious in this context. Let me quote again from Palmer (The Logic of Gospel Criticism): 'to affect our grading of those paragraphs as historical evidence such a classification would need to be dovetailed with independent knowledge of groups producing, preserving and altering the stories cast in one or another form. We have no such knowledge', (p193). The books say we do. They point to the Homeric cycle, the Odyssey and the Iliad, or to the Old Testament tradition. But the trouble is that these are not genuine parallels because the time gap allowed for the development of the traditions in the case of the Homeric cycle and the OT traditions is so vastly different from the 30 year gap that we've got for the development of all the tradition in the NT.

(ii) What about the scepticism concerning the reality of the picture presented of Jesus? This is open to question.

(1) Very simply, the equation of 'miraculous' with 'unhistorical' is a product of modern cultural values. That is, it is our prior disbelief in the possibility of miracles which is the major contribution to that judgment. If we were to shake that belief, then the ground for the equation of 'miraculous' with 'unhistorical', falls to the ground.

(2) Some of the literary criticism involved in assessing the reality of the portrait of Jesus is mistaken. I'll give you one example. It's a beauty which is picked up from C S Lewis. Bultmann argues that the picture of Jesus in the fourth gospel lacks personality. It's a cameo, a remote picture, not one of a real man. Lewis says this (mind you, it's only his judgment against Bultmann's, nothing absolute about this): 'even those passages in the New Testament which superficially and in intention were most concerned with the divine and least with human nature, bring us face to face with the personality...' For example the passage about the woman of Samaria where Jesus speaks extremely cryptically about worship and things of this nature, none the less is extremely human 'give me something to drink'. Lewis goes on: 'I begin to fear that by personality Dr Bultmann means what I should call impersonality: what you'd get in a Dictionary of National Biography article or an obituary or a Victorian life and letters of Yeshua bar Yoseph in three volumes with photographs' (C S Lewis, op.cit. p111).

(iii) Thirdly we come to the point about the so-called paucity of the gospel sayings, ie, that Paul doesn't seem to give any direct quotes of the gospel tradition. Other people have reacted to this in different ways.

(1) Riesenfeld (in eg H Riesenfeld, The Gospel Tradition and its beginnings, London: Mowbray, 1957) and Gerhardsson have argued that the reason why direct quotations are not made is that in fact the tradition was carefully preserved and was widely known. For this reason it only needed to be alluded to, it didn't need to be quoted.

Now there has been some criticism of this argument, for example from Professor W D Davies, but he still says 'They 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'. (Neotestamentica et Patristica, Leiden: Brill, 1962, p34). Now Davies isn't saying enough. The interesting thing is that the effect of Riesenfeld and Gehardsson has been to tip him in their direction, the direction of saying that these sayings have been preserved more carefully than they have given credit for.

(2) A second reaction to the paucity of sayings comes from Everett Harrison (loc.cit.passim). He reviews the incidence of allusions to the sayings of Jesus or the word of the Lord or things like this in the NT and he shows that there are quite a number of these. He concludes that these allusions reflect the existence of the tradition even if they don't quote it. He gives a very interesting picture of looking, I suppose, through a piece of greaseproof paper with pin-pricks in it, at a light bulb. You can see the little bits of light coming through the pin-pricks and although you can't see the full light at least you have some indication there is something there. This is the kind of picture he has drawn of the state of the evidence.

(iv) What of the idea that the evangelists have misrepresented or skewed the tradition? To be able to make that claim thoroughly one would have to have prior knowledge of the tradition. This we do not have. Similarly the claim made by these people that they know the way in which the tradition came down: again we'd have to have prior knowledge of the origin of the tradition otherwise we have to plead ignorance. Lewis makes this point very tellingly in Fernseed and Elephants (pp113-117). He tells how he and friends of his have been misrepresented by reviewers, where reviewers of their articles have given some indication of how the article must have been written. He shows how completely wrong the reviewers were and asks if contemporary reviewers who themselves write articles and books can be wrong about the origins, what kind of chance has a chap living 1600 years after what he's trying to account for.

(v) Next their claim is that it is the needs and interests of the church which have led to the creation of the tradition. The problem with this is that some of the needs of the church did not call for originality. If you look at the behaviour of Paul the apostle you will find that some of the teaching needs of the church called not for originality but for adherence to tradition. Take his reaction to those who were denying the resurrection in 1 Corinthians. He begins by saying 'I passed on to you that which I also received how that Christ died according to the scripture, how that He was buried and how that He was alive on the third day according to the scriptures' (15:1-3). Again, when he is seeking to sort out the worship of the church in 1 Corinthians 11, he repeats what he had passed on to them. Namely how 'the Lord on the night that He was betrayed took bread.....' (11:23).

So the needs and the interests of the early church were not necessarily met by originality but by an appeal to tradition.

(vi) A final point in criticising the thesis that the gospels in fact show us the faith and life of the early church is this. One of the basic axioms of its advocates is that the community created the traditions. There are others on the other side who are prepared to be equally axiomatic in saying communities tend to fossilise and ultimately degenerate the traditions and that it is people as individuals who create them. I think there's nothing either way on that but it is a point that's regularly made.

Our conclusion is then that there are no grounds for using the gospels as evidence of the faith and life of the early church in contradistinction to how Jesus may have been presumed to have believed and taught. The continuity rather suggests the opposite.

3. The attributed role of the gospels as evidence not of the use made by the church of the tradition but the handling of the tradition, that is, of the situations in which it was handled and the development of the situations in which it was handled. I want to comment very briefly on this because I am more concerned with the final role. This role draws entirely on form-critical presuppositions. This I have already suggested is to be called into question. The notion that the gospels are evidence of the successive use of a piece of tradition, (eg the saying 'the first shall be last and the last first' and that here we can trace the different ways in which this one saying was used) has a basic presupposition which is that when Jesus said something once, He never said it again. So the appearance in different places of a particular saying in the gospel tradition is not evidence of Jesus using it on more than one occasion, but is evidence of more than one use of the saying by the early church during the process of transmission. Human nature being what it is, it is highly improbable that Jesus would have confined all His sayings to unique statements, or at least unique sentences. Let us then move on to the final role which is attributed to the gospels.

4. The role of the gospels as evidence of the faith of the evangelist as he expresses this faith publicly in a particular situation. This role has been attributed as a matter of course by expositors over the years. In other words if somebody is going to give you an exposition of something in Mark's gospel he will generally look at it, unless he is absolutely screwball, from the point of view of Mark. By screwball I mean he'd just be picking out proof texts and thumping them home as dogmatic affirmations. I think that's a misuse of scripture.

In recent times this role has been given a stricter definition by redaction critics, who in conjunction with the exponents of the new quest for the historical Jesus seek to reach a definition of Jesus prior to the cross and the resurrection, via the faith of the evangelists and not despite them. The 19th century boys, Reran, Strauss and co, said we had to get rid of the faith of the evangelists and see what was left and that is what Jesus is. These fellows say you can't do that: you can't take the faith out of the sources. So let's work through the faith if we can and through it reach a picture of Jesus. In point of fact they never get further than the faith of the evangelists.

(i) Now what are the grounds for the redaction critics attributing this role to the gospels?

First, even if a particular tradition has a context in the life of Jesus; even if we were able to plot, for example, when, why and where Jesus said 'the first shall be last and the last first'; even if a tradition has a context in the life of the early church or even if we were to discover how the early church used this saying, there is still the context of use in the evangelist's situation. There was a reason why the evangelist produced what he produced. There was an audience for whom he produced it.

Secondly, the integrated presentation, that is the integrated style and structure of each gospel, reveals a single creative personality in the way in which a well edited book will show a fair amount of heavy editing on the part of the editor despite what the contributors may have written.

Thirdly, even if a tradition prior to its use by the evangelists is shot through with the faith of the church, the faith to which that piece of evidence now testifies is the faith of the evangelists. This cannot be abstracted from the tradition as it now stands.

(ii) What are the working presuppositions of the redaction critical school?

First, the evangelist, perhaps speaking for the community, shapes, uses and interprets the tradition for his own purposes. He the evangelist is the centre of the initiative in composition.

Secondly, the evangelist's interest is entirely theological not historical. What he aims to get across is his theology not any historical facts on which it might be based. He, as he hammers out his theology, is the one who relates the tradition to Jesus.

Thirdly, the total image of Jesus given by the evangelist is presupposed by every piece of material in his gospel. As an illustration of this you can take Bornkamm's stilling of the storm which was hailed as the first piece of redaction criticism. It only redacts the one incident of the stilling of the storm, but here in this Bornkamm seeks to show there is a total view of Jesus (G Bornkamm 'The Stilling of the storm', in G Bornkamm, G Barth and H J Held, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, London: SCM, 1953, pp 52-57).

(iii) Given their presuppositions, how do they go about their work?

First they adopt the analytic method, that is inferences from the gospel itself are taken as the only clues to the situation in which the gospel was delivered. They are the only clues to the author's intention, to the nature of the audience and the locality in which the thing was produced.

Secondly, special emphases of the evangelists are revealed by distinguishing the ideas and vocabulary of the evangelist in passages that are covered by others. So if we wanted to compare an incident reported by Matthew, Mark and Luke, it is those divergencies both in idea and in vocabulary which are taken as the clue to the particular emphasis of the evangelist.

Thirdly, the whole of the gospel, not just a particular section of the gospel, is significant for revealing his theology. By this method we can discover what in particular an evangelist believed about Jesus. This as far as their work is concerned is as near as we could get to the historical Jesus. The theology of the evangelist is as close as we shall get to the historical Jesus.

Now what critical observations can we make on this?

(i) This presupposes a psychological model of the evangelist as a person whose only interest is in theology as distinct from history and as one who is motivated by the desire to be original rather than traditional. In the minds of the scholars or the critics there is this model.

(ii) This approach presents the eccentric emphases as significant emphases, but they might not in fact be the central emphases of an evangelist's teaching. That is, if you compare three accounts where all three of them are commenting and you note there the peculiar language which is characteristic of Matthew and the ideas which are original to him and from this you deduce that they indicate Matthew's interests and concerns, they might be fringe concerns and not his main concerns at all. So to concentrate on the divergencies as an indicator of special emphasis might end you up in the eccentricities of the evangelist rather than his central concerns.

(iii) The location of the formation of the gospel tradition at the faith of the evangelist without seeking to account for where that faith might have come from is the next point we would want to criticise. If we say that the tradition which the evangelist used may or may not have had faith built into it, what we have got here in point of fact is the faith of the evangelist and that's all. If we make this dogmatic assertion then what we have got is a chap writing in AD 75 presenting a faith, but we have no account at all from where that faith may have come. It might have descended on him suddenly in AD 75, full stop!

(iv) This method also gives no room for a distinction between a Christian message and its homiletic use. In other words the redaction critic says the faith of the church equals the faith of the evangelist seen in this particular passage, written in this particular way. That is the faith. It means that the faith of the church is always context bound. In other words the use of this particular tradition for a particular homiletic purpose to serve a need of the church is in fact built into the faith of the church. There is no way of saying this is the faith of the church and this is the way it was used, because the way it was used is bound up with the faith of the church.

Now let me give you a quotation from Dick France. He claims that 'the evangelical, with his doctrine of inspiration, should be in the forefront of those who try by a careful study of the wording of a Gospel to bring out the particular emphases of each inspired writer. In other words, he has every reason to welcome redaction-criticism as an exegetical tool, however much he may deplore the critical assumptions which have motivated some of its best-known practitioners' (Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis', Themelios I 1, 1975 p18). The question we have to ask at this point in time (and this is a hard question for evangelicals) is whether we agree with Dick France's claim that we welcome redaction criticism as a critical tool.

Now let us return to the central thesis of these lectures: that an evangelical view of scripture commits us to take a document 'as it is', 'in its own times', bearing in mind the author's emphasis and still preserving harmony. I would suggest the following emphases in an evangelical exegetical approach. You will note carefully a slight diversion from the redaction critical approach

Chapter 4 EMPHASES IN AN EVANGELICAL EXEGETICAL APPROACH

1. On the psychology of the evangelist.

An evangelist is seen to have special emphases within a consciousness of a traditional core of faith. This is clear in Luke's prologue. Whatever contribution Luke may have made to his gospel he is conscious of the work of those who have gone before. It is seen again in Paul's attitude towards the problem of disbelief in the resurrection. Whatever contributions Paul may have made (and they are great: eg, he spends as many words on his own testimony as he does on the faith of the church) none the less his own testimony comes in the context of the faith of the church. Thus traditional consciousness is seen in verbal similarity and his creative instinct is seen in divergencies.

There will always be hard cases - eg, trying to determine whether the story in Matthew with two demoniacs is an account of the same incident as is reported in the story in Mark with one demoniac. But as far as the psychology of the evangelist is concerned his own creative contribution is made within a traditional consciousness of the faith of the church.

2. The teaching of the evangelist

The central teachings of the evangelist are seen in the whole of his work not simply in his eccentric divergencies.

3. The gospel origins.

The faith of the evangelist marks for us the focal point of the revelation to us. It is not necessarily the point of the origin of the gospel faith. This is a very important distinction but one that I don't think I've seen made before. We say as I said originally in my first lecture, that what God has given us is the gospel as it stands; that is the focal point of revelation. But let us not say at the same time that the focal point of revelation is at the same time the origin of the gospel. Yet this is exactly what the redaction critics are forced to say.

4. The distinction between the message and its use.

The focal point of revelation in this particular gospel is not the entire vehicle of revelation. Therefore a teaching can be desituationalised. Although it is revealed in this situation, there is a place for relating teaching with teaching outside the situation, whereas on redactional critical grounds it is always context bound.

5. The distinction between theology and history.

Redaction critics say the evangelist's concern is theology, whether or not he is concerned with history. They do not say he isn't concerned with history, though some people misrepresent them in that way. They just say the evangelist is only concerned with theology whether or not he is concerned with history. The evangelical a priori requires us first to take a document seriously as an historical phenomenon. To take a document as it is, in its own times, means to treat the history of the document seriously. But, further, the principle of harmony (whereby our exegesis of a thing is to be supported by and is to support other teachings of scripture) would suggest that we should share Paul's concern for an historical basis to Christian doctrine. This comes out very clearly to my mind in 1 Corinthians 15:14 where Paul says 'if Christ be not raised from the dead your faith is in vain and our preaching is in vain'.

6. The life situation in which the document arose.

For those of us who believe in the evangelical a priori, the Sitz im Leben may be determined by external as well as internal evidence. But the redaction critic like the form critic has confined himself to the details of the gospel as alone being relevant in determining the Sitz im Leben of the gospel. We on the other hand say that there is a point in using external evidence.

Here then are some guidelines in proceeding in the same direction as the redaction critics, taking the message of the evangelists seriously, looking at his emphases but also being aware that there are certain points where the evangelical exegete may diverge from the redaction critic.

Now let me come to the thing that I was originally hired for when I was asked to give these lectures.

ON WHAT TERMS MAY WE CLAIM AS EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE IN GOSPEL CRITICISM?

I apologise for the remainder of the lecture being a series of dos and don'ts but that's all we've got time for.

1. Our general approach.

Begin from an evangelical a priori and test it in the light of the text. Rather than begin from a non-evangelical a priori and hope that it will lead to conservative conclusions. I stick my neck out here deliberately because I believe that so many people do the latter thing. Begin with an evangelical a priori. Don't be afraid to be an evangelical. And test your thesis in the light of the texts.

2. Take the Bible as it is.

On the ground of the evangelical a priori, take the Bible as it is. For example look at 2 Timothy 3:16 and see the purposes there described for which scripture was given. Presumably that's the OT scripture. Look at its different literary categories. Observe its historical milieu. Look at its limitations. Look at it thoroughly as it is instead of foisting on it some role that is of our making.

3. Recognise that we all make our own contribution to any intellectual activity.

Try to be conscious of our own distinct presuppositions; the ones that we ourselves have. Let me give you three examples as they bear on evangelical involvement in criticism.

a) There is the contrast between the old world view of what was possible versus the modern criteria of logical consistency, tests for truth and falsity; models of the human mind, and models of cosmological events. There is a tension (and Bultmann has brought this out and we have to thank him for it) between the old world views of what was possible and these modern criteria. Let us be conscious of them and be self-critical.

b) Another example of this presupposition is the notion of unique event. David Hume philosophically sought to show that this could not occur. It was a logical impossibility. Many people have sought support from Hume in order to deny that the resurrection could have taken place, for the whole notion of resurrection is a unique event. If you cannot have a unique event then there can be no resurrection. Let us bear in mind again this tension between the old world view and modern philosophical ideas, particularly on this notion of unique event.

c) Let us be conscious of a divergence of approach between those who have the tendency to accept something as true until it is shown false versus those who begin with initial scepticism and have to be persuaded of the truth of anything.

4. Recognise a common interest in critical pursuits for the academic and ecclesiastical communities in general. On what grounds do I say this? I base it on the following observations.

a) We have common concerns. We are concerned to get evidence about what the Lord said and what the Lord did.

b) We have common public data. The evidence is there for anyone who wants to look at it.

c) We have the common gift of reason. (I'm sticking my neck out here and taking a strict reformed line in asserting that man's got reason at all. But I do believe that we all have a common gift of reason as something to be used).

d) We have I believe a desire to build up the church by using critical tools with precision. As Christians we have a responsibility to the ecclesiastical community at large and this is discharged by using critical tools with precision.

Now from this general approach with its four points I want to go further to tips and observations on method.

TIPS AND OBSERVATIONS ON METHOD

1. Start with the texts or documents as the focal point of revelation. Make exegesis your interest, concentrate on what God said here as your first step. I'm not saying don't be interested in dogmatic theology at all but I am saying make your first step the point of revelation as God has put it on the plate.
 2. Cultivate an empathy with the documents in their culture, pursuing the policy that I outlined earlier of trying to see them as they are as far as is possible from the inside. Now I've admitted that you cannot be completely detached and you cannot immediately hurtle yourself by means of some time-machine into the mentality of past cultures. But at least have a good go at it as far as you can.
 3. Recognise the theoretical nature of our conclusions. I think that lots of evangelicals get strung up on this one. Be content for the sake of integrity to construct a theory or counter-observation based in principle on the documents as they are in their times even if others disagree with you. I think we are all pressurised socially in this matter and that a lot of our tensions arise from the fact that we think we are out of step. Now you could be up the gum tree, you could be irrational in the positions you adopt, therefore I say make sure the positions you do adopt are based on the documents as they are in their times. Adopt your positions on a matter of principle, but having done so don't be ashamed of them if other people don't happen to see them from your point of view.
 4. Take care that you are defending the right thing.
Defend the internal integrity not the external accretions. The gospel of Matthew is an example of this. Who knows whether it was written by Matthew? The title is not built into the text. We've got to be very careful that we know what we're defending.
 5. Finally don't be afraid to plead ignorance where there is nothing to know, and don't be afraid to admit inability to solve a problem where it seems insoluble.
- May I skew a text? I know I'm skewing it but I think it may give you some comfort, 'For now we know in part, but then we shall know even as we were known' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

This name : make known his deeds among
people.

nepe cydoe bepa

2 Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him:
of all his wondrous works.

3 Glory ye in his holy name, and
rejoice that seek the LORD.

4 Seek the LORD and his strength
face for face.

... It a man ... me ...
... and my Father will love him, and we will come
... with him.

CUUM which you hear, is not mine

T INQUID These things

CIYDI I send in

STAGNU Peace

TANIES

DISCENDE

RETA come to

INUNAO

F

ERRA

QUO I AM

SAS

Loqui

EXRECTIA

AO

ION

loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings : and
the Father's which sent me

These things which I say, I do not say
of myself, whom I know not, and bring

Peace be upon you :

world give thanks

unto you

come to me

ride

3: B

Father

hence

I AM

2 E

every

more fruit,

3 Now

4 Abide in me,

1, except it abide in me

I am the vine, ye are the branches : He
I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit

do nothing