

HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THE EVANGELICAL: ANOTHER VIEW

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Throughout the centuries of the Church's history since the earliest written records, leaders of orthodox Christianity have championed a view of Gospel origins that conceives the Synoptics in terms of literary (inter) dependence. Without exception,¹ they have reported that the three Synoptic Gospels were literarily independent of each of other. In other words, no author copied from the work of another Gospel author, nor did any two of the Synoptic Gospels depend on a common written source.

The perspective in the Church for 1800 years was that Matthew, an apostle of Jesus Christ and an eyewitness to much that he reported, wrote the first Gospel. It held that Mark, a close disciple of Peter the apostle, wrote the second Gospel, and in so doing, reproduced the preaching of Peter. The continuing tradition said that Luke wrote his Gospel in dependence on the apostle Paul with whom he was closely associated. Advocates of the independence view from the recent past include such evangelical scholars as Louis Berkhof,² Henry Clarence Thiessen,³ and Merrill C. Tenney.⁴

This view of Gospel origins prevailed in the church until scholars during the Enlightenment began to question the literary independence of those three Gospels.⁵ Being of a philosophical bent driven by questionable hypotheses and viewpoints, these scholars could not explain the close similarities in wording and sequence of events in the three without resorting to some type of copying among the authors. That was the beginning of theories of literary dependence.

The independence viewpoint explains the similarities among the Synoptic Gospels by recalling that the sources of the accounts were eyewitnesses whose sharp memories in many cases reproduced the exact wording of dialogues and sermons. Their memories received additional stimulation

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¹ Sometimes Augustine has been suggested as an exception to this generalization, but a closer look at Augustine's relevant statements reveals that this was not the case. See Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 71–72.

² L. Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1915) 33–42.

³ H. C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943) 104–129.

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Genius of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 19–37, 41–42; idem, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 133–139.

⁵ *Ibid.* 85–131.

through the Holy Spirit's inspiration of their writings in accord with Jesus' promise (John 14:26). Literary independence theory accounts for the differences between the Gospels by allowing that different eyewitnesses reported the same events in different but not contradictory ways. This created a diversified, non-homogeneous body of tradition without definable limits from which the writers were able to draw. Coupled with this were the opportunities that the writers had to exchange information on an interpersonal basis. The Gospels simply recorded the versions of the events drawn from these sources that suited the writers' individual purposes. The inability of theories of literary dependence to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the Synoptic Problem has further confirmed the accuracy of the traditional independence view.⁶ The combinations of agreements and disagreements in wording and sequence in the three Gospels are randomly scattered and cannot be accounted for unless the writers worked independently without referring to one another's works.

In brief, that is a description of the view of independence. Rather than pursuing further details in describing the position, I have opted to clarify it further by responding to various issues raised by Professor Osborne's recent article.⁷

I. PAST REACTIONS

Professor Osborne begins with several pages tracing past reactions to Historical Criticism (HC). Regarding an earlier generation of scholars including Warfield and Machen, he writes, "[I]n none of these conservative scholars do we find a wholesale rejection of critical tools" (193).⁸ I view matters otherwise. Warfield stated, "And in general, no form of criticism is more uncertain than that, now so diligently prosecuted, which seeks to explain the several forms of narratives in the Synoptics as modifications of one another."⁹ If that is not wholesale rejection, it is very close to it.

Machen wrote, "Must we really wait until the historians have finished disputing about the value of sources and the like before we can have peace with God? . . . A gospel independent of history is a contradiction in terms."¹⁰ Like Warfield, Machen had no room for raising questions about the historical accuracy of the Gospels. Osborne also notes, "It was then [i.e. 1920s to the 1940s] that wholesale rejection of critical methodology became standard in fundamentalist scholarship" (193). Machen's era falls well within the period of "wholesale rejection of critical methodology." He died in 1937, having written such classic works as *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1923 and

⁶ *Ibid.* 233–244.

⁷ "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *JETS* 42 (1999) 193–210.

⁸ Numbers in parenthesis indicate page numbers in Professor Osborne's article.

⁹ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Christology and Criticism* (New York: Oxford, 1929) 115; for the Warfield quotation, see also *The Jesus Crisis* 14, 24.

¹⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923) 121; for the Machen quotation, see also *The Jesus Crisis* 384.

The Virgin Birth of Christ in 1930, in both of which he insisted on absolute historical accuracy that rules out the slightest concessions to HC.

II. THE RECENT DEBATE

Osborne writes regarding ETS, "I remember co-chairing the final forum on the issue [i.e. the issue of HC] with Robert Thomas in 1985. There it was decided to 'agree to disagree' and to allow the society to explore further the possibility of a nuanced use of critical methodology" (194). My recollection of the 1985 meeting is quite different. In 1985 the Annual Meeting of ETS was on the campus of Talbot Theological Seminary, my institution at the time. Gleason Archer was program chair that year and asked me to assist him in planning the plenary sessions of the meeting. I was also in charge of local arrangements for the meeting. The "final forum" to which Osborne apparently refers was one of a number of parallel sessions meeting simultaneously, not a plenary session of the Society. To help with open discussion, Osborne asked me to moderate the period after his paper on "Round Four—The Redaction Criticism Debate Continues," and I accepted. However, the meeting was in no sense "the final forum" involving the ETS as a whole, as some might surmise from Osborne's statement. He and I never co-chaired such a meeting, nor was there a public consensus or conclusion reached about allowing "the society to explore further the possibility of a nuanced use of critical methodology."

In his historical sketch of the years 1975–1985 Osborne conspicuously omitted an important HC incident connected with ETS. At its 1983 Annual Meeting in Dallas, Texas, the following official actions transpired. "George W. Knight presented a supported motion that 'ETS go on record as rejecting any position that states that either Matthew or any other Scripture writer materially altered and embellished tradition or departed from the actual events.'"¹¹ The motion carried. At the same meeting "Roger Nicole introduced a supported motion that 'the Evangelical Theological Society officially request Dr. Robert Gundry to submit his resignation from membership in this Society, unless he acknowledges that he has erred in his detraction from the historical trustworthiness of the gospel of Matthew in his recent commentary.'"¹² That motion also carried. An approximately three-to-one margin carried the latter motion. The issue that prompted the Society's call for Professor Gundry's resignation related to his use of historical-critical tools.

From all I have been able to learn, since its founding in 1948 the Evangelical Theological Society has been favorably inclined toward the independence position regarding the Synoptic Gospels.

Since *The Jesus Crisis* compares the methodology of evangelical historical critics to that of the Jesus Seminar, Osborne lists five differences between the two groups (196). Two of these seem significant enough for comment in clarifying the independence position. "The Seminar considers a saying guilty

¹¹ Report of Simon J. Kistemaker, ETS Secretary-Treasurer, *JETS* 27/1 (March 1984): 125.

¹² *Ibid.*

until proven innocent, exactly the opposite of evangelical approaches” (196). I take issue with this alleged difference. In his own review Osborne assumes the impossibility of harmonizing the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John (202). In that regard his position resembles that of the Jesus Seminar by assuming non-historicity. Harmonizations of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John have been the rule throughout church history, as the independence view of the Gospels advocates. He supports his assumption of non-harmonization and hence non-historicity by noting that John mentions several trips by Jesus to Jerusalem, but the Synoptics mention only one. Yet Luke 10:38–42 mentions at least a second visit to Bethany near Jerusalem, and Luke 13:34 implies frequent visits to Jerusalem. Besides, why base an assumption of non-harmonization on the failure of the Synoptics to mention Jesus’ visits to Jerusalem unless one assumes guilt instead of innocence? John wrote his Gospel with a knowledge of the other three Gospels and sought to fill in gaps they failed to cover.¹³ I do not see the non-assumption of guilt as a clear difference between evangelical HCs and the Jesus Seminar.

Another of Osborne’s distinctions notes, “There is little room for the supernatural in the Seminar, while there are constant articles on the validity of miracles among evangelicals” (96). This distinction is valid, as *The Jesus Crisis* specifically agrees. On page 16 the book states our belief that evangelicals whose writings the book examines are free from “antisupernaturalistic presuppositions.” That is one of at least five statements in the volume’s introduction in which it comments on differences between the conclusions reached by the Jesus Seminar and those of evangelical HCs. The independence view does not question the theological motives of those evangelicals who differ with it.

III. THE TWO-SOURCE THEORY

In his discussion of the Two-Source Theory Osborne reviews church history and concludes, “Historically, views regarding the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels have not always centered upon literary issues. For 1700 years the discussion was on the order of the Gospels and their historical reliability. . . . It must also be stated that there were never any probing studies of the issue” (197). This analysis of history is not fair to leaders of other eras. What is more “probing” than the conclusion of the Fathers that the three Synoptic Gospels were literarily independent or that apparent discrepancies among them were capable of full harmonization?¹⁴ During this period the greatest minds in the Church of all times accomplished plenty of “probing studies of the issues,” but they all led to the conclusion of literary independence. One can hardly use the church’s 1700-year avoidance of a belief in literary

¹³ Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposesis* 6; idem, cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.7; 6.14.7; cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 49–50, 234. See also Jakob van Bruggen for a fuller reconciliation of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John regarding Jesus’ presence in Jerusalem and Galilee (*Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998] 98–101).

¹⁴ See Chapter 1 of *The Jesus Crisis*.

interdependence as grounds for classifying their studies as non-probing. It is, furthermore, not accurate to speak of the independence view as “developing” alongside the dependence views of Markan priority and Matthean priority (197). The independence view has been in the church from her beginning and did not “develop” when the other two views did, i.e. in the nineteenth century. Still, Osborne deserves credit for including the independence view as a viable option (198). These days, most scholars follow the pattern of Stein and McKnight in completely ignoring the possibility of independence.

In continuing his defense of the Two-Source Theory, Osborne defends the historicity of attributing words to Jesus that he spoke on occasions other than those on which the writer places them, such as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 and the mission discourse in Matthew 10. He writes, “Jesus did give these messages, but under the leading of the Holy Spirit Matthew or Luke were also free to attach other sayings on the same topic. This does not impugn the historicity of the sayings” (198). It does affect the historicity, however, when one remembers that with grammatical-historical interpretation the meaning of a statement depends in a significant way on its historical setting. Take, for instance, Jesus’ illustration about settling with an opponent to avoid being brought before a judge and cast into prison. Its use in connection with a reprimand to hypocrites for being unable to discern the times in Luke 12:58–59 means something quite different from what it means in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:24–26) where it illustrates Jesus’ command against hatred. In one case it illustrates the penalty for hypocrisy and in the other the penalty for hatred. Both are sins, but faithfulness to the historical situations in which Jesus used the examples requires distinguishing what Jesus meant on each occasion.

Or, if Matthew represents Jesus as giving a model prayer to the multitudes along with the disciples (Matt 6:10–13) that he actually gave only to the disciples (Luke 11:2–4),¹⁵ that is historically misleading. In one case that model prayer is a prescription against hypocrisy; in the other it is a recommendation to his disciples on how to pray. Using the “pearl stringing” analogy of the rabbis, one could observe that taking a pearl from one necklace and attaching it to another necklace results in the unmatched pearl marring the appearance of both its new necklace and the pearl itself. Placing a statement in other than its original historical setting mars both the historical setting and the statement itself. The independence view insists on placing each statement in the historical context in which it is found in the Gospels.

Besides this is the matter of the introductory and concluding formulas for the Sermon in Matthew. Even D. A. Carson who, like Osborne, uses redaction criticism, objects to calling these formulas “artistic, compositional devices” that have no historical meaning.¹⁶ Carson reasons that no such ancient

¹⁵ Osborne speaks of “the considerable differences in wording” in the Lord’s prayer in his case to prove the existence of Q (200). Apparently his view is that Jesus gave the prayer only once and the Gospel writers put the prayer in two separate historical locations.

¹⁶ “Matthew,” in *Expositors’ Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 124; see *The Jesus Crisis* 32 n. 42.

precedent existed either in secular literature or in the early church's understanding of the Sermon, but rather that "Matthew intended to present real, historical settings for his discourses. . . ." ¹⁷

In further words about the Two-Source Theory Osborne adds,

Moreover, if Matthew and Luke were to use Mark and alter in some fashion Mark's wording, they were not "creating" new material that Jesus had not said. Rather, they were bringing in other nuances that Jesus had stated but Mark had not included. All three versions of a saying are historically accurate and go back to Jesus' original message; each simply highlights a different aspect of the original saying. This is true whether one holds to independence or literary dependence. Differences remain differences and need explanation whether they originated via redaction or independence. Relative to the question of the exact nature of the historical event and historicity, differences still need to be assessed and evaluated. Independence does not remove them or explain them on its own (198; cf. a similar line of reasoning on 207).

Osborne's equating of historicity via independence with historicity via literary dependence is startling and calls for a twofold response. First, if literary dependence theories were following the same pattern as literary independence in advocating eyewitness reports, no need for literary dependence theories would have arisen. But they did arise, and they did so to allow for editorial embellishments, furnishing reasons for differences in the Gospel accounts. Those embellishments diminish the degree of historical accuracy in various Gospel accounts. Explaining the differences by redaction and doing so by independence are not the same. The latter traces the differences to apostolic eyewitness reports. The former traces them to redactional changes made by editors trying to meet a theological need of churches in the late first century.

Second, the fact is that literary dependence theories *do* advocate that writers were "creating" new material." The following examples attest this. Hagner, Gundry, Stein, and Bruner all see the origin of the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 as someone other than Jesus. ¹⁸ Jesus did not utter them, rather an early community or the Gospel writer put the words into his mouth. Another obvious instance where evangelical redaction critics have created new material from nothing relates to the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Guelich understood Jesus to have spoken only three of the Beatitudes, Gundry allows him four, and Hagner attributes eight out of nine to him. ¹⁹ The rest came from other people, not Jesus. One could easily multiply cases in which evangelicals have created sayings of Jesus *ex nihilo*. Osborne himself has to resort to a special explanation of his own position to avoid being blamed for creating something from nothing in the Great Commission

¹⁷ Ibid. 125.

¹⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993) 123; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 90; Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (NAC 24; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 152; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook, A Historical/Theological Commentary: Matthew 1-12* (Dallas: Word, 1987) 191; cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 23.

¹⁹ Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Dallas: Word, 1982) 17; Gundry, *Matthew* 67-70; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* 1-13, 90; cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 26-27.

(207).²⁰ His view that historical critics explain the differences in the Gospels in the same way as those holding literary independence falters. The latter say that Jesus *did* utter the exception clauses, *all* the Beatitudes, not part of them, and the trinitarian formula as Matthew records it. A remarkable dissonance exists here. Marshall is more forthright than Osborne regarding the results of HC: "It is certainly impossible to practise the historical method without concluding that on occasion the correct solution to a difficulty lies in the unhistorical character of a particular narrative."²¹ An assumption of literary independence could never lead to a statement like that.

Regarding the first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3) and "Blessed are the poor" (Luke 6:20), Osborne attributes the difference to Matthew's emphasis on the spiritual side and Luke's emphasis on the economic side of the same original saying, but he does not indicate what Jesus' original saying was (198–199). He never mentions the possibility that Jesus, rather than Matthew and Luke, may have originated those emphases as we suggest in *The Jesus Crisis*, i.e. that he spoke the beatitude in both forms.²² From the independence perspective that explanation does greatest justice to the historicity of Jesus' ministry.

I am gratified by Professor Osborne's openness to the independence view (199). Yet I still find his explanation for why he rejects it and favors literary dependence and Markan priority (199) mystifying. Regarding "remarkable verbal similarities" in the Synoptics, Osborne indicates, "Frequently these parallels exist especially between Mark and Matthew and between Mark and Luke but rarely between Matthew and Luke" (199). How can he say "rarely between Matthew and Luke" when Matthew and Luke agree verbally 230 times against Mark's wording in what they include, and seemingly countless times the two agree with one another in what they omit from Mark.²³ In the very passage cited by Professor Osborne (Mark 2:10–11 = Matt 9:6 = Luke 5:24) Matthew and Luke agree against Mark in word order (*epi tēs gēs aphienai hamartias* in Matthew and Luke versus *aphienai hamartias epi tēs gēs* in Mark). Furthermore, in the verse just before each of the passages cited, Matthew 9:5 and Luke 5:23 agree in omitting two words that Mark includes (*tō paralytikō* in Mark 2:9), and in the verse immediately following the passage cited, Matt 9:7 and Luke 5:25 agree in a five-word sequence against the one word used in Mark 2:12, a word not included in Matthew and Luke (*apēlthen eis ton oikon autou* in Matthew and Luke against *exēlthen* in Mark). Osborne's own illustration favors more of a random combination of agreements and

²⁰ Osborne's words of explanation are still an enigma: Matthew gave "the true meaning of Jesus' message for his [i.e. Matthew's] own day," "the intent and meaning of what Jesus said," and "the trinitarian background behind the entire speech" (206). If Jesus did not give the trinitarian formula for baptism as traditionally understood, how could Matthew "elucidate the trinitarian background behind the entire speech" without allowing that Jesus at some point spoke of baptism in the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit as well as baptism in the name of the Son?

²¹ I. Howard Marshall, "Historical Criticism," in *New Testament Interpretation* (ed. I. Howard Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 126–127; cf. also *The Jesus Crisis* 34 n. 96.

²² *The Jesus Crisis* 370.

²³ Cf. *ibid.* 241–244.

disagreements that characterizes independence rather than the dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark.²⁴

A similar observation pertains to his discussion of side comments in Mark 13:14 = Matt 24:15 and Mark 5:8 = Luke 8:29 (199). In the former case Osborne has committed the same oversight as that committed by Robert Stein.²⁵ The words “let the reader understand” in the former case are not a side comment of the writers but are the words of Jesus referring to the reader of Daniel’s prophecy. They prove nothing in favor of literary dependence.²⁶ The other side comment he refers to is Mark 5:8 = Luke 8:29, explaining the demons’ plea that Jesus not torment them: “For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man,” as Osborne renders the side comment. Yet this furnishes no grounds for literary dependence. The wording is radically different in the two accounts, with six words out of the eleven in each of the Gospels differing from the parallel passage in either form or lexical origin. In his rendering Osborne has cited Luke’s side comment. Mark’s comment reads, “For he had said to him, ‘Unclean spirit, come out of the man.’” Even the English translation reflects how different the statements are. With that much disagreement, how can either of these side comments demonstrate literary dependence? The nature of the side comments incline decidedly in favor of literary independence.

IV. HARMONIZATION

Osborne’s comments on “Harmonization” are puzzling for several reasons. First, he defends his own chronological harmonization of the resurrection accounts, but he also fails to acknowledge his allowance for differences in details accounted for by redactional activities of the Gospel writers (200–201). He even lists John Wenham among those evangelical historical critics who propose harmonizations (201 n. 28), but Wenham’s reconstruction of the resurrection accounts differs markedly from Osborne’s. He treats them as independent of each other and as free from the redactional embellishments that characterize Osborne’s explanation.²⁷

A second puzzle: Osborne has highest praise for Blomberg’s discussions of harmonization (201),²⁸ but in his brief mention of Blomberg he does not reflect the clear distinction that Blomberg makes between traditional (i.e. “additive” according to Blomberg) harmonization and harmonization using

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* 245.

²⁵ Cf. Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 37–38; cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 17.

²⁶ Even fellow redaction critic Robert Gundry agrees that the words were spoken by Jesus, not inserted by Matthew and Mark (*Matthew* 481); cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 17.

²⁷ John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 8, 90–94; cf. *The Jesus Crisis* 362.

²⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, “The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 135–174; *idem*, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987).

historical-critical tools.²⁹ Thus his criticism of *The Jesus Crisis* on this point misses the same distinction between the two types made in our book.³⁰

Thirdly, he is puzzling in his brief discussion of Mark 10:17–18 = Matt 19:16–17 = Luke 18:18–19. Grant Osborne describes Kelly Osborne’s reconstruction of that dialogue between Jesus and the rich man “in which she [*sic*] conflates the two into one” (201). [Kelly is the same gender as Grant.] Grant eschews the possibility of such “repetitive conflation” as unnecessary. In so doing, however, he also distances himself from such scholars as B. B. Warfield, E. J. Young, and D. A. Carson, the last of whom, like Osborne, practices redaction criticism.³¹ Yet he does not criticize them in his remarks.

Those three puzzles raise questions about how to understand Osborne’s statement, “In short, evangelical critics are not only open to harmonizing, but exemplify it constantly” (201). Apparently he refers to redactional harmonization coupled with traditional harmonization, not traditional harmonization alone. The independence view makes a clear distinction between the two types of harmonization and limits itself to traditional harmonization.

V. CHRONOLOGY AND ORDER OF EVENTS

In discussing “Chronology and Order of Events,” Osborne cites the impossibility of “a strictly chronological narration of the life of Jesus” (202). I have already responded to his distinction between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John regarding Jerusalem visits. In harmonizing Jesus’ Jerusalem visits in John with his activities in the Synoptics, I see no chronological problems for which feasible solutions have not been proposed.

He also uses Matthew 8–9, a passage universally acknowledged as being topically arranged,³² to prove his point that one cannot assume chronological sequence in the Gospels except “when the text explicitly makes such a connection” (202). The passage proves nothing regarding the larger issue of how chronologically sequential the Gospels are. Had he chosen to examine comparable passages in Mark and Luke, he would have found a close chronological agreement between those two Gospels.

His last illustration to disprove chronological arrangement and order of events points to the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4:5–10 and Luke 4:5–12. Again, this is a poor choice to prove his point. His reason for citing the temptations is the difference in order of the second and third temptations, an obvious fact. The point to be made, however, is that Luke does not profess to cite the temptations in chronological order; Matthew does. To connect the second temptation with the first, Matthew uses a temporal conjunction (τότε, 4:5), one that indicates chronological sequence. Also, the τότε and the terminal indicators in Matt 4:10 indicate that the third temptation in Matthew was the last, consequently confirming the chronological nature of Matthew’s

²⁹ See Blomberg, “Legitimacy and Limits” 161 and *The Jesus Crisis* 324.

³⁰ *The Jesus Crisis* 324.

³¹ See *ibid.* 358–360, 374 n. 12.

³² See *ibid.* 236, 257.

description. Both accounts of the temptation are correct, but in Matthew's account the Spirit inspired the chronologically sequential order. The independence view insists on chronological sequence only when the text of the Gospels supports it.

VI. *IPSISSIMA VERBA* AND *IPSISSIMA VOX*

In his discussion of "*Ipsissima Verba* and *Ipsissima Vox*" Osborne argues for the latter position. That is his prerogative, and I respect him and all others who hold that position. Some who have held the independence position in the past have supported an *ipsissima vox* view. Osborne agrees with them on this point when he says it is sufficient that we have the gist of what Jesus said, not necessarily the exact words. Yet his discussion of the approach I presented illustrates the very point I tried to make in defending the *ipsissima verba* position. The tone of my discussion was tentative because of the difficulty of the issue under discussion and concluded that how a person resolves the difficulty depends on "Presuppositional Probability."³³ Osborne does not reflect that tone in his critique of *The Jesus Crisis*.

This may have been rectified if he had in one instance reported my very words instead of incorporating only a portion of them into his own paraphrase: "There is a big difference between saying Jesus in some cases spoke Greek and in stating that Jesus did so 'most of the time'" (203). That is quite different in tone from what I actually wrote: "On occasions when Jesus used the Greek language—which conceivably could have been most of the time—it is quite possible that His listeners took down what He said in shorthand or retained what He said in their highly trained memories."³⁴ My very words reflect an attitude of wrestling with a difficult issue that Osborne's paraphrase does not. That illustrates the problem I have in accepting a view that holds paraphrases are dominant in the Gospel reports of Jesus' sayings. I think the Holy Spirit is capable of closer historical accuracy than just approximations of what Jesus said.

Osborne remarks toward the conclusion of this section, "Such precision [i.e. *ipsissima verba*] is virtually impossible to demonstrate" (203). Though he fails to note it, that closely coincides with our published conclusion: "Ancient resources are unavailable to prove absolutely one side or the other in this debate. No one has an airtight case for concluding whether they are Jesus' very words or they are only the gist of what Jesus said."³⁵ Presuppositions must govern. In the book I have stated my reasons for preferring an *ipsissima verba* position, but the independence view allows for either.

To bolster his case for *ipsissima vox* further, Osborne cites the rich man passage again, the centurion's cry (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39), and Jesus' promise that the Father would give the "good things"/"the Holy Spirit" to

³³ Ibid. 372–374.

³⁴ Ibid. 368–369.

³⁵ Ibid. 373.

those who ask him (Matt 7:11; Luke 11:13). We have responded to his handling of the rich man passage above. I do not find his reason convincing for concluding the centurion could not have said both “the Son of God” and “a righteous man.” For him to have stopped with just one description of what he witnessed on the cross would have been contrary to what would be expected of a person in that kind of emotional state. Osborne’s paralleling of Matt 7:11 with Luke 11:13 contradicts the placement of these two passages in the Gospels and the life of Christ. In Matthew it is part of the Sermon on the Mount, but in Luke it comes during Christ’s later Judean Ministry about a year after the Sermon on the Mount was preached. According to an independence approach, Christ probably used similar but different wording on the two occasions.

Christian scholars for centuries have allowed for an *ipsissima vox* explanation of parallel accounts, but they did so under the assumption that differences in wording proved literary independence, not redactional alterations.³⁶ The influence of HC now forces evangelicals who hold the *ipsissima vox* position to rethink that position. If the Gospels contain only approximations of what Jesus said, how close must those approximations be to fall within the limits of an inerrantist view of Scripture? That is a question that evangelicals should turn their attention to.

VII. FORM AND TRADITION CRITICISM

In his handling of “Form and Tradition Criticism” Osborne cites Vincent Taylor as an exemplary form critic who rejected the radical premises and conclusions of many German scholars (204). Is he willing to use Taylor’s nuanced view of HC as a model for one’s view of inspiration? In allowing that in some instances form criticism can be used to judge historicity, Taylor could hardly call himself an evangelical if he were alive today. That scholar’s stance as less radical than German form critics does not qualify him as an inerrantist. Regarding the “sayings tradition” in the Gospels, Taylor wrote, “[I]t is impossible to prove inerrancy for the sayings-tradition, and the probabilities are all against it.”³⁷ Further, he states, “It is . . . idle to deny that there are sayings about which we are compelled to hesitate.”³⁸ He denied the nature miracles of Christ such as the raising of Lazarus and the changing of water into wine.³⁹ Taylor is hardly a showpiece for a cautious use of form criticism among evangelicals.

At the conclusion of this section of his article Osborne cites my references to some of the dehistoricizing activity of evangelical historical critics and

³⁶ E.g. John Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886) 58 and F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* (New York: I. K. Funk, 1881) 120.

³⁷ Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1935) 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 113.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 138–140.

concedes the accuracy of such references (207).⁴⁰ He follows this admission with the words, “It is a dangerous generalization to take a few extremes and label an entire movement with the same brush” (207), meaning, I presume, that just because some have dehistoricized, one cannot conclude that all HCs have done so. At this point, I must request from Osborne the same favor I have asked of other evangelicals who practice historical-critical methodology, a request that the church could legitimately make of evangelical scholars: “Please name an evangelical historical critic who has done extensive work in the Synoptic Gospels who has not as a result of that methodology sacrificed historical accuracy at one point or another.” So far, no one has been able to furnish a single name. Are we talking about “a few extremes,” or is dehistoricizing inextricably bound to HC practices? We do not question that these people have defended historicity against liberal theologians, but are suggesting they are doing so on faulty grounds because methodologically, and consequently ideologically, they are too close to those they are defending against.

Osborne’s listing of those who have written in defense of historicity and inerrancy recalls a further request that the Church could legitimately make to evangelical historical critics: “Tell us, to which evangelical should we look as a final authority on what in the Synoptic Gospels is historical and what is not?” Evangelical HCs do not agree among themselves about historicity of various parts of the Gospels. Disagreements among the five whom Osborne lists⁴¹ are multiple. Blomberg and Osborne (201–202) on the one hand and Carson on the other differ among themselves regarding the question(s) of the rich young man and Jesus’ answer(s) (Mark 10:18; Matt 19:17).⁴² They differ on what question the young man asked plus Carson says Jesus gave two separate answers and Osborne agrees with Blomberg who says Matthew interpreted Jesus’ one answer differently from Mark. Stein and Blomberg disagree with one another concerning the historical authenticity of the exception clauses in Matt 5:32 and 19:9, Stein holding Jesus did not utter them and Blomberg saying that he did.⁴³ Bock writes that the parables in Matthew 13 were uttered by Jesus on separate occasions; Blomberg places them all on a single occasion.⁴⁴ Which of the alternatives proposed is historically accurate in each of these situations? The diversity among these critics makes a response to this request impossible, too. No evangelical redaction critic can lay

⁴⁰ But later in a parenthetical remark he denies that evangelicals hold that Matthew, not Jesus, created the Sermon on the Mount. Without further explanation from him we still must interpret statements cited on pages 18–20 of *The Jesus Crisis* as evidence to support evangelical attribution of the Sermon to Matthew, not Jesus.

⁴¹ Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, D. A. Carson, Moisés Silva, and Robert Stein.

⁴² Craig L. Blomberg, “Legitimacy and Limits” 158–159; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC* 422–423.

⁴³ Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem* 152; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 110.

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 718, 742–743; Blomberg, *Matthew* 211.

claim to being a final authority on such matters without excluding his fellow critics. Perhaps evangelicals need to form their own “Jesus Seminar” to vote and settle issues like this.⁴⁵ For those holding the independence view, that kind of vote is unnecessary, because that view holds all the Gospel reports to be historical.

VIII. REDACTION CRITICISM

In the final section of his essay Osborne treats redaction criticism and records in the following way: “Those holding to the independence of the Gospels could still do RC by looking at the differences and the distinctive theological emphases in both books. Both Mark and Matthew would have redacted their tradition differently” (207). The last sentence misrepresents the independence view. Correctly stated, Matthew and Mark reported accurate history from different perspectives. They redacted nothing, rather they reported two lines of tradition, both of which were historically accurate, not editorially slanted. The word “redacted” or “edited” suggests the introduction of subjective elements into something written by or transmitted through someone else, which was not the case. As reporters of facts, they made choices, or more properly speaking, in line with their purposes they reported what they under the inspiration of the Spirit remembered from eyewitness reports.

Osborne says my criticism of the lack of harmonizations in his book on the resurrection narratives is unjustified (208). My observations in this connection stemmed from a comment by I. Howard Marshall in the Foreword to Osborne’s book. Marshall says the book answers the question, “How much is theological interpretation in the Gospels true and how much actually happened?”⁴⁶ How else is one to understand that question? The book distinguishes between theological interpretation and what actually happened. When the book refrains from harmonizing the details that Osborne mentions such as “the time notes, the names of the women and the postresurrection appearances” (208), my conclusion was that some kind of difference separated “theological interpretation” and what “actually happened.” Of course, the independence view would hold that everything reported in the resurrection accounts actually happened.

IX. CONCLUSION

Osborne’s conclusion to his article suggests indirectly what apparently is the greatest failure of *The Jesus Crisis*. That is my failure to convey to him my respect for the views of fellow evangelicals with whom I differ. I consciously tried to avoid a “harsh and grating” tone (209) and an “egregious

⁴⁵ See *The Jesus Crisis* 14–15.

⁴⁶ “Foreword” to Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 7.

approach" (209), but in his opinion I failed. I apologize for this to Professor Osborne and any others whom the book may have offended.

I have encountered only a few others who hold Osborne's opinion about the book. His evaluation is not universal. By far, the vast majority of those who have read the book have expressed a different sentiment regarding the tone of the book.⁴⁷ They have felt that it handles a controversial subject in an objective and constructive manner, without propagandizing or misrepresenting anyone's views. In *The Jesus Crisis* introduction, not to mention the rest of the book, I counted at least six statements acknowledging a belief in the supernatural and in inerrancy by evangelicals whose works we critiqued in the book. The book is about an ideological method, not about people.

Osborne erred in his charge that accused *The Jesus Crisis* of a "complete rejection of critical tools" (210). As an example of the independence view, the book evidences the use of critical tools throughout, and is a study of why not to use one particular critical tool, namely, the *historical-critical* one. A vast gulf separates criticism of other types from Historical Criticism. Some other types of criticism such as textual criticism are free of the ideological presuppositions that pervade Historical Criticism. *The Jesus Crisis* does not convey the slightest hint of a rejection of *all* types of criticism.

Osborne closes with three examples of "the extravagant charges they [i.e. *The Jesus Crisis* writers] make against fellow evangelical inerrantists" (209). (1) He criticizes Farnell for calling evangelicals back to the grammatical-historical approach to the Gospels because, says Osborne, "all evangelical HCs already embrace that method" (209). In so doing, he demonstrates his unwillingness to accept that the grammatical-historical approach as advocated by the independence view and the historical-critical approach are not compatible with each other. Chapter 9 of *The Jesus Crisis* shows this incompatibility. (2) He criticizes Hutchison's call for a warning to all preachers about the dangers of HC (209–210). Yet in this very review Osborne has acknowledged, "[T]he danger of dehistoricizing exists" (207), "[S]ome evangelical RCs go too far at times" (208), and "Evangelicals need continuous reminders regarding the dangers of critical tools" (209) in using HC. If Osborne is not going to warn preachers about the dangers, why should he accuse Hutchison of starting a war by choosing to warn them? (3) He criticizes me for calling on the church to raise "her voice against the enemy who already has his foot in the door" (210). Through a strange bit of interpretive analysis, Osborne concludes that "his" in my use of this well-known metaphor refers to Satan. That is as far as anyone can get from the intention of my statement. I purposely avoided making inflammatory remarks like that. The "enemy" in the metaphor is HC and the personal pronoun "his" is the only consistent way of completing the metaphor that begins by referring to the "enemy."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ E.g. L. Russ Bush, "Book Review of *The Jesus Crisis*," in *Faith & Mission* 16/1 (Fall 1998): 120–121.

⁴⁸ On p. 27 of *The Jesus Crisis* where I use the same metaphor, the focus of discussion is not on Satan but on HC as it is in the passage on p. 383 that Osborne cites. In the earlier instance the same sentence acknowledges the "conservative theological orientation" of those whom I critique in the Introduction to *The Jesus Crisis*.

My goal in helping produce *The Jesus Crisis* was to open dialogue among evangelicals that has lamentably been missing for several decades, dialogue that includes a serious discussion of a view of the Synoptic Gospels that the church held unanimously for eighteen centuries, the view of literary independence. If *The Jesus Crisis* has awakened such an interest among evangelicals, a major purpose of the work has been achieved. Professor Osborne has a right to express his opinions, which he has done through several avenues such as his June 1999 *JETS* article. But so do those who hold a position that coincides most closely with that held unanimously by the church for so long, until the advent of HC. One way of emphasizing the importance of the independence position is to elaborate on the dangers that arise in departing from it. Professor Osborne agrees that independence is a viable option and that going the route of dependence creates dangers. *The Jesus Crisis* has emphasized those dangers.