

Chapter 2: Method & Criteria: **Meier, Crossan, Sanders and Ludemann**

We have seen how the ‘new quest’ proceeded, within a form critical paradigm, to develop and use a number of criteria to distinguish authentic Jesus tradition from the creative tendency of the early Church. In this part of the essay I will seek to analyse and critique the methodology of a number of contemporary scholars, that of Meier¹, Crossan, Sanders and Ludemann² who each in turn work with the assumption that the gospels are not eyewitness testimony and have been heavily influenced by the creative tendency of the earliest Christian communities.

This part of the paper is more general in scope as extended discussion of individual criteria are offered in subsequent chapters.

J.P. Meier : ‘A Marginal Jew’

Meier seeks to ‘*provide a reasonable sketch of the historical Jesus*’³ By the ‘historical Jesus’ Meier means the Jesus who appears after serious application of the historical-critical method. This ‘Jesus’ is not a Jesus reconstructed from the an uncritical use of all four gospels, for the synoptic gospels ‘*are suffused with the Easter Faith of the early Church and were written forty to seventy years after the events narrated.*’⁴

Meier sets out to find authentic Jesus tradition from within the synoptics by using ‘criteria of authenticity’.

‘the function of the criteria is to pass from the merely possible to the really probable, to inspect various probabilities, and to decide which candidate is most probable. Ordinarily, the criteria cannot hope to do more.’⁵

As this quote shows the method produces probability and not objectivity. Objectivity is aimed for but never achieved. Meier appears to distance himself from the extreme form of an enlightenment historiography which simply sought, as neutral historians, to tell things as they really were, for, as Meier rightly recognises ‘*there is no*

1 Meier, John P.: *A Marginal Jew Vol. 1,2,3* from now on referred to as MJ

2 Gerd Theissen will be discussed later with an analysis of his own specific criteria of Historical Plausibility.

3 Meier *MJ Vol 2* 9

4 Meier *MJ Vol 1* 168

5 *ibid* 168-169

*Switzerland of the mind in the world of Jesus research*⁶.

He presses towards the goal of objectivity by admitting ‘*one’s own standpoint, to try and exclude its influence*’⁷, ‘*knowing one’s sources, having clear criteria for making historical judgements about them, learning from other questers past and present, and inviting the criticism of one’s peers*’.⁸ The question may be asked though as to whether it is actually possible to leave behind ones bias’, epistemological, hermeneutical and metaphysical presuppositions. Meier appears to be attempting to create a ‘neutral Switzerland’ although he himself denies it exists.

Meier offers five primary criteria, which he consistently uses throughout his work, and five secondary criteria which ‘*may at times provide post-factum confirmation of decisions we have already reached on the basis of the five primary criteria*’.⁹

| <i>Primary Criteria</i> | <i>Secondary Criteria</i> |
|--|---|
| A1) Discontinuity: | B1) Traces of Aramaic |
| A2) Multiple Attestation: | B2) Palestinian Environment |
| A3) Coherence: | B3) Vividness of Narration |
| A4) Embarrassment(Movement Against the Redactional Tendency) | B4) Tendencies of the developing synoptic Tradition |
| A5) Rejection and Execution | B5) Historical Presumption |

A1, A2, A3,A4,A5, B1,B2 will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

Little weight is given, by Meier, contra Crossan, to the non-canonical gospel or agraphra. .

‘The four canonical Gospels turn out to be the only large documents containing significant blocks of material relevant to a quest for the historical Jesus’¹⁰ ‘Contrary to some scholars, I do not think that the rabbinic material, the agraphra, the apocryphal gospels, and the Nag Hammandi codices (in particular the Gospel of Thomas) offer us reliable new information or

6 *ibid.* 5, He seeks to distance himself from the scientific historiography of Von Ranke who famously said that in his work he “wants to show only what really happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).”

7 *ibid.* 5

8 *ibid.* 5

9 *ibid.* 168

10 *ibid.* 139

authentic sayings that are independent of the NT'¹¹

Dominic Crossan: *The Historical Jesus 'The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant'*¹²

Dominic Crossan offers us a portrait of Jesus as a Jewish cynic peasant who offered miracles and welcomed the outcasts. Jesus was not, in Crossan's assessment, an apocalyptic prophet but a preacher of an egalitarian kingdom which rejected human hierarchy. When looking at the methodology of Crossan, particularly in regard to his use of 'criteria' the task is made relative simple by the fact that Crossan declares up front his methodological approach and provides in the appendixes of his book the results of this method.

Crossan's methodology involves a 'triple triadic process' which seeks to fuse together social anthropology, Hellenistic and Greco-Roman history with '*literature of specific sayings and doings.*' In other words Crossan reads material which he has judged as authentic through the lens of both anthropology and Greco-Roman history.

Words are judged authentic through a process of

- i) inventory,
- ii) stratification ,
- iii) attestation

i) Inventory: This '*initial step involves a complete declaration of all major sources and texts, both intra canonical and extra canonical*' and placing them '*in their historical situation and literary relationship.*'¹³ This inventory, found in Appendix 1, spans from 1 Thessalonians (50C.E) to Gospel of Peter (middle second century). It includes material from the ante-Nicene fathers, Didache and the Gospel of Thomas.

ii)Stratification: Each source or text is placed into a chronological category of

- First Stratum 30-60C.E,
- Second Stratum 60-80C.E,

11 *ibid.* 140

12 Crossan, John Dominic: *The Historical Jesus : The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*

13 Crossan *The Historical Jesus xxxi*

Third Stratum 80--120C.E

Fourth Stratum 120-150C.E

iii) Attestation: Each unit (complex) within a source is looked at in terms of '*multiplicity of independence*'.

Crossan's methodology is best illustrated through looking at an example of what he has done for all the Jesus tradition.

eg. 20 Kingdom and Children [1/4]

1) *Gos. Thom. 22:1-2*

2) *Mark 10:13-16=Matt 19:13-15=Luke 18:15-17*

3) *Matt 18:3*

4) *John 3:1-10*

This is a complex which is given a name and number. (**20 Kingdom and Children**).

It is found in its earliest form in the first stratum, 30-60C.E (1/4) and is attested in four independent sources(1/4). The independent sources are then listed. (Thomas, Mark, Matthew and John). With this inventory a simple guideline is followed

'My methodological rule thumb is that the lower the number left of that stroke and the higher the number to its right the more seriously the complex must be taken' ¹⁴

It may appear on first sight that Crossan strives and aims for objectivity, for in using a nuanced version of 'Criteria of Multiple Attestation' (CMA)¹⁵ he appears to provide an objective list of authentic Jesus material. Yet this is to misread Crossan for

'my methodology does not claim a spurious objectivity, because almost every step demands a scholarly judgement and an informed decision. I am concerned, not with an unattainable objectivity, but with an attainable honesty' ¹⁶

From this brief survey of Crossan's methodology we can see that he modifies CMA, the modification taking place in his use of extracanonical sources without any preference to the canonical gospels, and his 'sophisticated system' of placing each tradition in a complex which gives the dating of the pericope and its 'attestation'.

¹⁴ Crossan *The Historical Jesus* xxxiii

¹⁵ CMA will be discussed fully later in this paper

¹⁶ Crossan *The Historical Jesus* xxxiv as Wright comments '*the massive inventory of material is bound to look like a thoroughly modernist piece of work, appearing to lay firm, almost positivist, foundations for the main argument of the book.*' *J&VOG* 50 and in a more polemical style Wright *Jesus and the Victory of God* 47-55, also Witherington, Ben: *The Jesus Quest : The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. Ch 3

Critique of Crossan's Methodology

For a full criticism of the 'Criteria of Multiple Attestation'(CMA) see the relevant part of this paper.

A) A quick glance at the Crossan's inventory reveals a number of interesting features, each of which has an impact on the bedrock historical tradition. For instance Crossan assumes an early dating to part of the Gospel of Thomas. Similarly, an earlier version of *The Gospel of Peter* called the *Cross Gospel* is dated to 50AD. Without going into specifics it is to be noted that the dating of these documents is in opposition to scholarly consensus-- not that scholarly consensus in itself guarantees truth but any bucking of the scholarly trend should involve, and this is lacking in *The Historical Jesus*, detail and argument.¹⁷ The same can be said for his late dating of Matthew and Luke.

B) Crossan seeks to distinguish between the different layers of a text, at times placing an earlier form of a second century document, Gospel of Peter/Thomas, into the earliest years of the Church. Witherington rightly asks,

Yet, one may properly ask, how is it possible with any degree of objectivity to accomplish this task when we do not have the texts of the earlier layers of the Gospel tradition?¹⁸

C) Unlike Meier, Crossan is inconsistent with his own methodology, and at times, particularly in regard to miracles, goes against his own 'rule of thumb. He writes,

We have no textual gospel of miracles similar to that textual Gospel of sayings. Furthermore, while we have as high as sixfold independent attestation in the primary stratum of sayings, we never get higher than twofold for that of the miracles. And the closest we get to a triple attestation is in the second stratum (appendix 6). *One might almost conclude that miracles come into the tradition later rather than earlier, as creative confirmation rather than as original data. I think, however, that such a conclusion would be completely wrong. The better explanation is just the opposite. Miracles were, at a very early stage, being washed out of the tradition and, when retained, were being very carefully interpreted.*¹⁹

¹⁷ For a helpful discussion see Meier *A Marginal Jew Voll* 112-166

¹⁸ Witherington, Ben: *The Jesus Quest* . 77

¹⁹ Crossan *The Historical Jesus* 310

It seems then that Crossan has the liberty of going against his methodology when he think it does not lead us to the authentic portrait. His criteria, then, are not autonomous but are subservient to other overarching concerns.

E.P. Sanders: *Jesus and Judaism, The Historical Figure of Jesus, Studying the Synoptic Gospels*

The Jesus of E.P Sanders stands in contrast to the portrait provided by Crossan as Jesus is not a wandering cynic philosophers but, like Schweitzer, an eschatological prophet. Sanders does not discuss methodology at length, unlike Meier, Wright and Crossan, but an overview of his methodology can be achieved by reading the relevant sections of three of his books. *Jesus and Judaism*, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* and in particular the co-authored *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*.

Sanders has little time, again in contrast with Crossan, for the apocryphal gospels and focussing his attention on the synoptic gospels.

“I share the general scholarly view that very, very little in the apocryphal gospels could conceivably go back to the time of Jesus. They are legendary and mythological... only some of the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* are worth consideration” (p. 64)²⁰

Within the synoptic gospels ‘*some aspects of Jesus’ teaching and career are firmly established, some things attributed to him are disproved, and most of the material is placed somewhere in between*²¹ In *Jesus and Judaism* and *The Historical Figure of Jesus* a list of the indisputable material which is firmly established is given.

Sanders Figure 1 (Taken From Witherington *The Jesus Quest*)

HF= *Historical Figure*

JJ= *Jesus and Judaism*

1. Jesus was born about 4 B.C., near the time of the death of Herod the Great (only listed in *HF*).
2. Jesus spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village (only listed specifically in *HF*).
3. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (both *HF* and *JJ*).
4. Jesus called disciples (both *HF* and *JJ*).
5. Jesus spoke of their being twelve (specifically listed in *JJ*).

²⁰ Witherington, Ben: *The Jesus Quest : The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1997

²¹ *Studying the Synoptic Gospel* 304

6. Jesus confined his activity to Israel (specifically listed in *JJ*).
7. Jesus taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not the cities) (*HF*).
8. Jesus preached “the Kingdom of God” (*HF*).
9. About the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover (*HF*).
10. Jesus engaged in a controversy over the temple (*JJ*), and created a disturbance in the temple (*HF*).
11. Jesus had a final meal with his disciples (*HF*).
12. Jesus was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest (*HF*).
13. Jesus was executed by the Romans outside Jerusalem (*JJ*) on the orders of the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate (*HF*).
14. Jesus’ disciples fled (*HF*).
15. Jesus’ disciples “saw” him after his death (in what sense is not certain) (*HF*).
16. As a consequence they believed he would return to found the kingdom (*HF*).
17. They formed a community or identifiable movement (*JJ*) to await his return and sought to win others to faith in him as God’s Messiah (*HF*).
18. At least some Jews persecuted at least some parts of this new movement, a persecution which seems to have lasted until near the end of Paul’s career (*JJ*).²²

This established bedrock is built upon by using a number of criteria against the gospel traditions. The individual pericopes are analysed so that all the synoptic material is placed somewhere on a sliding scale between ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ and ‘unlikely’. These criteria, known as ‘Tests’.

Test 1: Strongly Against the Grain; to much with the Grain: A passage is deemed as historically reliable ‘if it is directly against what the evangelists wished to be so. Conversely, it is historically unlikely if it agrees to closely with what they wished and corresponds to Christian doctrine’.²³ This criteria is similar to the criteria of embarrassment as utilised by Meier, but also includes material which goes to much with the theological concerns of the evangelists, and is therefore related to the criteria of difference to Christianity (CDC). In this sense this criteria is really two criteria.

An example of material ‘going against the grain’ is seen in the virtual certainty which is given to Jesus baptism by John as the early church had a desire to see Jesus as John’s superior²⁴. Other examples include Jesus negative attitude to his family, Jesus befriending sinners and his ‘threat to the temple’. These are all against the redactional tendency of the writers and should be deemed authentic. This is a positive criteria and it seeks to include data from the synoptic.

22 Witherington, Ben: *The Jesus Quest : The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1997, S. 119 These lists can be found in *Jesus and Judaism*, p. 11, and in *Historical Figure*, pp. 10–11.

23 *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* 305

24 *ibid* 312-313

Material which is 'too much with grain' cannot be included in the bedrock of authentic tradition and is therefore a criteria which has a negative function. Jesus' inclusion of gentiles within his mission are judged to be too much in line with the theological concerns of the early Church and therefore are judged to be inauthentic. Sanders using a continuum of probabilities states '*[I]t is virtually certain that Jesus himself conducted no substantial mission to Gentiles, but rather restricted himself to preaching in Israel.*'²⁵

Test 2: Uniqueness. This is essentially Criteria of Double Dissimilarity (CDD) which is discussed at a further point on in this paper. Sanders does warn of the abuse of this criteria as academia is '*not infrequently ignorant about and biased against Judaism*'²⁶ and we should be '*hesitant about talking about early Christianity and what is dissimilar to it*' partly because it is not fully known by us.

Test 3: Multiple Attestation: Sanders uses both forms of CMA, that of CMS and CMF. It is interesting to note that Sanders rejects the Q hypothesis and includes the Pauline letters as '*there are a large number of agreements between the teaching of Paul and that attributed to Jesus*' and Paul provides '*the greatest possible independent attestation of it.*'²⁷

Test 4: Views Common to Friend or Foe. This criteria find reliable '*what friend or foe agreed on*'²⁸ Example of this include Jesus being a miracle worker, for even his enemies do not deny the miraculous but accuse him of performing the miracles under the authority of Beelzebub, and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom as '*friend or foe alike thought that Jesus made claims which could be summarised by using the word king or kingdom*'²⁹ This is a positive criteria as it seeks to include data into the authentic category.

Criteria and Hypothesis

25 ibid. 312

26 ibid 316

27 ibid 323-324

28 ibid 330

29 ibid 332

The gospel data which has been categorised into the probability continuum must be made sense of. ‘ ‘Making sense’ of means developing a hypothesis’³⁰ which makes sense of the data and the historical context. Sanders thus has more in common with the methods of Theissen (‘Historical Plausibility’)³¹ and Wright (Hypothesis/Verification), than Meier who simply lets the data speak for itself.

Gerd Lüdemann: *Jesus after 2000 Years*³²

Gerd Lüdemann is a controversial figure in the world of historical Jesus studies is his forthright rejection of Christianity--as illustrated in his *Letter to Jesus*

Dear Lord Jesus,

You’ve become quite strange to me as a person whom I can address. For you didn’t say or do most of the things which the Bible tells us that you said or did. Moreover you aren’t at all the one depicted by the Bible and the church tradition. You weren’t without sin and you aren’t God’s Son. You didn’t at all want to die for the sins of the world. And what was particularly painful for me, you didn’t institute the Eucharist which for years I celebrated every Sunday in memory of you.³³

In *Jesus after 2000 years* Ludemann ‘*subjects all the Jesus traditions from the first two centuries to an analysis and investigates their authenticity*’³⁴ He adopts a critical method which looks at all Jesus tradition through criteria of inauthenticity and authenticity. In developing ‘criteria for inauthenticity’ Ludeman is making explicit what has become common place in Jesus scholarship, that criteria can be used in a negative sense and can rule material out of the authentic rock bed, as well as being used in a way which establishes the authentic. For Ludemann the Jesus questers ‘*must rigorously strip off everything that has come to lie round the words of Jesus, layer by layer- in the hope of reaching the bedrock of the authentic sayings of Jesus*’³⁵

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A Criteria of Inauthenticity | B Criteria of Authenticity |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

³⁰ ibid 335

³¹ Wright and Theissen will be discussed later in this paper

³² Lüdemann, Gerd *Jesus After Two Thousand Years : What He Really Said and Did*. London

³³ Contained within Lüdemann, Gerd: *The Great Deception : And What Jesus Really Said and Did*. London : SCM Press, 1998

³⁴ Ludemann *Jesus after 2000 years* 1

³⁵ Gerd Ludemann *Jesus after 2000 Years* 5

| | |
|--|--|
| A1) Words of the Risen Lord | B1) Offensiveness (known by others as Embarrassment) |
| A2) Laws of Nature are broken | B2) Difference (known commonly as CDC) |
| A3) Gives answers to Later Community Questions. | B3) Growth |
| A4) Those words that are indebted to the redactional | B4) Rarity (known as CDJ) |
| A5) Words which presuppose a pagan audience | B5) Multiple Attestation |
| | B6) Coherence |

B1, B2, B4, B5 and B6 are discussed more fully later in this paper.

A3, A4, A5 are similar to the negative use of the CDC which is also discussed later.

A1) *'Words and actions are inauthentic in which the risen Lord speaks and acts or is presupposed as the one who speaks and acts.... We cannot exclude the possibility that sayings or actions were attributed to the 'Risen One''*³⁶. Ludemann takes as given that the early church attributed sayings of the 'Risen Jesus', given that Ludemann denies the resurrection he must mean what arose through prophecy which claimed to be from the Risen Christ. A number of criticisms can be made about this.³⁷

1) There is little evidence outside the gospel of the risen Christ speaking directly. It only occurs in Rev 2:1-3:22 but here it is *not* claimed that it is the pre-resurrected Jesus speaking.

2) Prophecy, speaking on behalf of God, occurs in the book of Acts. The name of the prophet (Agabus 11:28, 21:10-11) and it is not thought, by the audience that Jesus is speaking, but a man speaking under the influence of the holy spirit.

3) Where is the evidence to back up the use of this criteria? As David Aune concludes *'the historical evidence of the theory lies largely in the creative imagination of the scholars'*.³⁸

³⁶ Ludemann *Jesus after 2000 Years* 4

³⁷ See Blomberg *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* 31-32

³⁸ Aune, David Edward: *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. 245 as cited in Blomberg *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* 32-33

A2) Ludeman asserts that *'actions are unhistorical which presuppose that the laws of nature are broken'*. Ludemann, following in the footsteps of Strauss, is an heir of the enlightenment as he follows a procedure of methodological naturalism.

Methodological naturalism is an epistemological and metaphysical perspective and is not a neutral position. The results of this criteria are based upon apriori convictions which are not shared by every scholar in the modern world, nor by the sources themselves. It is not a neutral historiographical position but rests itself on unprovable faith assumptions.³⁹

The miracles of Jesus are multiply attested (B5) and are different to the healing stories found in either Judaism (B4) or the Greco-Roman world. Ludeman wants to use these (B5,B4) as 'criteria of authenticity' but this is direct conflict with his methodological naturalism. His criteria are, therefore, based on a apriori portrait of Jesus which fits with his methodological naturalist assumptions.

A5) Ludemann dismisses the *'words and actions which presuppose a pagan (non-Jewish) background.'* This is an entirely appropriate general position to take regarding macro 'portraits of Jesus', yet it is inadequate as a criteria as we simply do not have a total understanding of the worldview of Judaism to allow for such micro decision making. This criteria is the negative use of CDC.

Appendix 1:

Classical Foundationalist Epistemology and Historical Jesus Research⁴⁰

Meier adopts a 'bottoms up' inductive method. Once the criteria are applied, and authentic data is revealed an *'overarching interpretation of Jesus and his work emerge gradually and naturally out of the convergence of the data judged historical.'*⁴¹ This displays a classical foundationalist epistemology which does not

39 From a philosophical point of view I have found the thinking of Roy Clouser *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* particularly helpful along with the writings of Alvin Plantinga *Methodological Naturalism*

40 This criticism of historical Jesus research as being classical foundationalism is based on Joel Wittus *Presuppositions and Procedures*

41 Meier *MJ Vol 2* 14

take seriously the influence of his own subjectivity, for an ‘*overarching interpretation of Jesus appears naturally.*’⁴²

Meier’s epistemology resembles that of the foundationalist assumptions of Locke who ‘*thinks we must make whatever facts we do know our evidential base for determining the probability of our other beliefs. Some of our beliefs may rest on other beliefs [For Meier read ‘interpretation of Jesus ‘], but the total structure of belief must rest on facts that known with certainty [for Meier read ‘authentic Jesus tradition based on use of criteria’] if our epistemological house is to be in order.*’⁴³

The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy offers the following description of Foundationalism.

Foundationalism: The process of giving reasons could be such that not every reason is supported by another reason because there are *basic reasons* which have no need of further reasons supporting them.⁴⁴

Craig Evans, *The Historical Christ and Jesus of Faith*, states that ‘*foundationalism requires at least three things*’⁴⁵

- A) We must have a body of highly certain facts that is sufficient to be the foundation of our beliefs.
- B) We must be able properly to determine what evidential support these facts lend to our other beliefs
- C) We must also have the ability to regulate our beliefs so as to conform to the evidence.

Being aware of a classical foundationalist methodology we may mirror the above points with the methodological procedure of Meier.

- A) Criteria reveal the highly probable facts. The revealed authentic tradition serve as a foundation of our belief

42 Joel Willits *Presuppositions and Procedures* 80-82

43 Evans *Historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith* 209 although Meier is more an heir of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza who see the role or reason as dominant, whereas as Locke assumes an empirical method.

44 Klein, Peter D. (1998). Knowledge, concept of. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. .

45 Evans *Historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith* 210

- B) Authentic tradition reveals ‘naturally’ the life of Jesus, the *Interpretation of Jesus*, This evidence is built upon using the criteria of coherence.
- C) Bias and subjectivity needs to be excluded from the interpretation, so that the evidence simply speaks.

It is not the scope of this essay, nor the expertise of the author, to offer a lengthy critique of a foundationalist epistemology, however I do want to suggest that there are alternatives to the foundationalist position such as the critical realism of Ben Myer and N.T. Wright (discussed later), and that of ‘coherentism’.

In contrast to foundationalism, coherentism claims that every belief derives its justification from inferential relationships to other . All coherentists hold that, like the poles of a tepee, beliefs are mutually reinforcing. Some coherentists, however, assign a special justificatory role to those propositions that are more difficult to dislodge from the web of belief . The set of these special propositions overlaps the set of basic propositions specified by foundationalism.⁴⁶

Coherentism highlights the interdependence of beliefs. These beliefs are coherent within themselves but this does not necessarily make them true. Thus a coherentist understanding of Meier would recognise his method but would stress that the resultant picture is on the basis of method, and not on the truthfulness of his foundation stones. This web of interdependence is quickly discovered when we notice.

- 1) The reliance on Markan priority which in itself is not provable
- 2) The gospels are not eye witness testimony.
- 3) The criteria of authenticity, such as multiple attestation, are dependant on above
- 4) The reconstructed Jesus is dependant on the above
- 5) The criteria of coherence is used to enlarge the bedrock of tradition and to further enlarge the reconstruction of Jesus.

Highlighting the interdependence of Meier’s methodology, could be seen as coherentism. Meier’s methodology and resultant picture (P1) are coherent within itself. Coherence within itself is not the same as objectivity as another scholar could produce another portrait of Jesus (P2) using another coherent, but unprovable,

46 Klein, Peter D. (1998, 2005). Epistemology. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

methodology.⁴⁷ The question then becomes ‘What makes P1 more acceptable than P2?’ with the question of objectivity becoming more marginalised.

It is important though, says Evans who rejects a ‘coherentist’ epistemology⁴⁸ to highlight its ability to lead one away from ontology and reality. A persons beliefs, including that of beliefs in the ‘historical Jesus’ ‘*depend on some relation to the external world, and not simply the coherence of my own beliefs*’⁴⁹

Critical Realism, which will be discussed later, provides an alternative to a classical foundationalist epistemology and coherentism, as it takes both ontology and one’s own subjectivity seriously.

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47 I.e. Matthean Priority, Use of Non-Canonical Gospels, Use of different criteria

48 Evans *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* 224

49 Evans *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* 224

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