

### Chapter 3: Criteria of Dissimilarity (CDD,CDC,CDJ)

The criteria of dissimilarity is used by a number of scholars in a variety of different forms, from the writings of Bultmann and Kasemann to contemporary scholars such as Meier<sup>1</sup>, Ludemann<sup>2</sup> and E.P Sanders<sup>3</sup>. The 'criteria of dissimilarity' is essentially contains two different criteria, that of the 'criteria of distinction from Judaism'(CDJ ) and 'Criteria of distinction from Christianity'(CDC). CDJ and CDC can be used simultaneously as the criteria of double dissimilarity (CDD).

Bultmann, one of the earliest users of CDD gives us the following definition.

'We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety[CDJ] and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterised the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features[CDC]'.<sup>4</sup>

#### 'Hard' and 'Soft' Forms of the Criteria of Dissimilarity

The criterion of dissimilarity (CDD, CDJ, CDC) appear in both a hard and a soft form. The 'hard form' or negative application of this method seriously stunts the growth and development of a 'bedrock' of Jesus tradition for it *only* finds authentic material in that which is dissimilar. As Gager rightly points out.

Implied in this assumption is the view that the Gospels contain only two types of material: authentic saying of Jesus and inauthentic creations of the early church. But it would be foolish to suppose that Jesus' views did not overlap at numerous points both with contemporary Judaism and with Christian beliefs. The amount of overlap is uncertain, but its existence seems undeniable except on dogmatic grounds.<sup>5</sup>

1 Meier, John P.: *A Marginal Jew Vol 1* 171-172

2 Lüdemann, Gerd *Jesus After Two Thousand Years : What He Really Said and Did* 4-5

3 Sanders, E. P. ; Davies, Margaret: *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*. 316 -317 'Material can be safely attributed to Jesus if it agrees neither with the early church nor with the Judaism contemporary to Jesus.'

4 Bultmann *History of the Synoptic Tradition* 205 also Kasemann *Essays on New Testament Themes* 'We can only sketch in a few bold strokes the embarrassment of critical research. it lies in this; while the historical credibility of the Synoptic tradition has become doubtful all along the line, yet at the same time we are still short of one essential requisite for the identification of the authentic Jesus material, namely, a conspectus of the very earliest stage of primitive Christian history; and also there is an almost complete lack of satisfactory and water tight criteria for this material. In only one case do we have more or less ground under our feet, when there are no grounds either for deriving a tradition from Judaism or for ascribing it to primitive Christianity" 36-37 . As cited in Porter *Criteria of Authenticity* 71-72

5 John G Gager *The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts about Method* 258 Also Dunn *Jesus*

Norman Perrin follows the 'hard' approach.

[Authentic Jesus material will] by definition ... exclude all teaching in which Jesus may have been at one with Judaism or the early church at one with him. But the brutal fact of the matter is that we have no choice. There simply is no other starting point that takes seriously enough the radical view of the nature of the sources which results of contemporary research are forcing upon us'.<sup>6</sup>

The soft form or 'positive application' of the method allows material which is not dissimilar to be possibly authentic. Most scholars favour the 'soft' or positive method. Sometimes though criticisms are held of CDD which fail to distinguish 'hard' and 'soft' approaches.

### Critique

Theissen and Winter have provided the 'historical Jesus' community with a valuable resource in their *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus*. This book traces the development of the criteria of dissimilarity from Renaissance Humanism through to the Third Quest<sup>7</sup> whilst simultaneously offering a 5 fold critique<sup>8</sup> and suggesting a replacement criteria--that of the criteria of historical plausibility<sup>9</sup>. The five fold critique, which I will summarise, is that of

- (a) The term difference is not clear.
- (b) Burdened with the idea of unique personality,
- (c) The 'Jesus Tradition' is a Christian tradition therefore the CDJ cannot be made plausible',
- (d) Lack of Knowledge of Judaism and early Christianity.

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*Remembered* 82 'If the criterion of dissimilarity is applied consistently, and only that material is added which coheres [Criteria of Coherency] with the limited findings of the first trawl through the Jesus tradition, then the historical Jesus who emerges is bound to be a strange creature, with anything which links him to the religion of his people or to the teaching of his followers automatically ruled out of court, 'a unique Jesus in a vacuum.'

<sup>6</sup> Perrin, Norman: *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* 43. 'Thus we reach the fundamental criterion for authenticity upon which all reconstructions of the teaching of Jesus must be built, which we propose to call the 'criterion of dissimilarity'. Recognising that it follows an attempt to write a history of the tradition concerned, we may formulate it as follows: the earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church, and this will particularly be the case where Christian tradition orientated towards Judaism can be shown to have modified the saying away from its original emphasis'. 39

<sup>7</sup> Theissen & Winter *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* pp27-71

<sup>8</sup> This 5 fold critique is found in summary form *ibid.* 135-136. This in turn has come from long detailed argumentation found on *ibid.* 76-136

<sup>9</sup> This is discussed later on in the paper.

- (e) Conflicts with the double demand of locating ‘*Jesus within the Judaism of his day and locating and for locating the effects of his life within the history of the beginning of Christianity.*’

A) The term ‘difference/dissimilarity’ is not clear.

This method appears at first glance to provide a method which easily be used by one and all, which if its assumptions are correct, lead us to authentic Jesus tradition. The problem is that this method, on closer analysis, offers a number of different methods.

Does dissimilarity mean

- That sayings of Jesus are not found in that *exact* form elsewhere in early Church or Judaism
- That sayings of Jesus are not found in *similar* form elsewhere in early Church or Judaism
- That sayings of Jesus are *not* derived from either a Judaic or Christian background
- That sayings of Jesus *can be* derived from Judaism and have been developed by Jesus.
- That sayings of Jesus are dissimilar to early church’s teaching but do represent similar ideas which are less developed than the teaching of the early Church.

Each could well be described as the ‘criteria of dissimilarity’ and its illustrates the point that ‘dissimilarity’ without further clarification is indeed a slippery methodological fish, and that what appears like an objective method for catching ‘authentic tradition’ is in fact an illusion.

‘This spectrum of variations not only reflects a divided mind with regard to form. It is also a matter of material ‘dissimilarities’ about which there is likewise considerable lack of clarity’<sup>10</sup>

This criticism does not bring the criteria crashing to the sand, but it does raise the question as to whether, unless further clarified, there has ever been scholarly consensus on either its application or results.

B) Burdened with the idea of Unique Personality<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 21

<sup>11</sup> This section is in essence a summary of *ibid.* 44-60

When approaching historical research of any historical figure it is likely that we want to place that figure within existing known categories. In historical Jesus studies these categories include, although not exhaustively so, Scripture Prophet (McKnight), Mediterranean peasant (Crossan) and Sage (Witherington).

The criteria of dissimilarity '*can be understood as an expression of the concept of the role of the individual in history*'<sup>12</sup>. The idea of individuality suffused the historical method of the nineteenth century to such an extent that attention was turned, particularly in German scholarship, to understanding that a history of the world can be written simply as the biography of heroes<sup>13</sup>. Heroes being those who achieve, through their own power, and fulfil their own inner call. As Schleiermacher comments, 'Wherever there is a new historical development, wherever a new or renewed common life is generated, there and there alone is a great man'<sup>14</sup>

As sociological analysis in the last thirty years has reminded us the role of culture, politics, industry and socio-economic factors are not to be downplayed. It is reductionistic to see all new historical developments as revolving solely around a great man. A look at the development of technology which has so shifted society, or global warnings impact on history, illustrates that not '*all new historical developments*' are the product of a great man. In fact all 'great man', however, unique are also products of their own culture. If we approach the sources with a view of the 'heroic individual' we may be more persuaded by the CDJ.

The nineteenth century saw a rise in the 'heroic individual' but also, and this is connected, an attraction to the role of genius. A genius can be understood as i) the creative inventive, ii) the irrelevancy of rules or superiority over being bound by rules, iii) the natural, native.<sup>15</sup> This tendency towards the 'heroic' and the 'genius' which was characteristic of historiography at large was in turn unproblematically

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12 *Ibid.* 44

13 The heroic understanding of history is often linked with the book Carlyle, Thomas: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship the Heroic in History* (1841). An example of the dominance of the heroic view of history is found in Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911) which contains a plethora of biographies of 'heroic' men but little in the way of general or social histories. Hegel, Nietzsche and Spengler endorsed the heroic view of history. One needs only think of the concept of 'Übermensch' in the works of Nietzsche. A critique of heroic history/great man theory is found in Leo Tolstoy *War and Peace* who devotes the beginning of his third volume to critiquing it.

14 As cited in Theissen and Winter *Quest for the Plausible Jesus* 45

15 *Ibid.* 46-48

adopted by 'Old Questers' who looked for a Jesus who was a Genius (Weiss, D.F Strauss), who 'transcends Judaism' (Julicher) , a transitional figure (Meineke) and founder of a new religion (F.C. Baur.). In looking for appropriate criterion for historical Jesus research the philosophical-historical concept of 'heroic' and 'genius' feeds into the formation of the criterion of dissimilarity.

I) Creative Inventive: The creative element to an individual allows the CDJ to develop. Emphasis is placed on Jesus as the inventor of new beliefs and therefore connections between Jesus and Judaism must be on the wrong path. The earliest Christians would want to revert to pre-creative days, thus the CDC is needed.

II) The genius is not bound by the rules and conventions of the day, therefore we must look at Jesus, as a genius, who was not bound by the cultural and religious norms of Judaism(CDJ). Judaism being understood as legalistic and the Hero seen as breaking with this. The early church take up dogma and rules which Jesus as the creative-genius would not have adopted. Therefore the CDC is needed.

III) The church has taken the natural genius of Jesus and has complicated it. The early church burdened it with dogma and it become necessary to find authentic Jesus tradition which is distinct from this later complicated development of Jesus' simple creative message (CDC)<sup>16</sup>The genius of Jesus is to be seen in contrast to sterile and complicated Judaism. Therefore the CDJ is needed.

Jesus was no doubt a 'unique' and 'heroic individual'. Yet uniqueness, in contrast to the heroic histories of the nineteenth century, is not to be seen as divorcing Jesus from his cultural and religious heritage as the CDJ does.

### C: Anti-Judaism in Historical Jesus Research

Theological Anti-Judaism was present within the earlier quest for the historical Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> 'The closer we come to Jesus in the traditional material, the more everything that is dogmatic and theological recedes from view' P. Wernle, Die Quellen des Lebens Jesu as cited in Theissen & Winter *Quest for the Plausible Jesus* 59

Theological anti-Judaism is to be distinguished from anti-Semitism as it is possible to be against Judaism theologically whilst simultaneously rejecting racial anti-Semitism. Theological anti-Judaism gives us *'theologically negative images of the Jewish religion (especially ancient Judaism) as legalism or as essentially a matter of rituals.'*<sup>17</sup> Early proponents of the CDJ inherited this anti-Judaic bias, and thus wanted to find a figure of Jesus who bore little resemblance to the Judaism of his day. This is illustrated in stark form by Renan.

From this time he appears no more as a Jewish reformer, but as a destroyer of Judaism...The pride of blood appeared to him the great enemy which was to be combated. In other words, Jesus was no longer a Jew. He was in the highest degree revolutionary; he called all men to a worship founded solely on the fact of their being children of God. He proclaimed the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew; the religion of man, not the religion of the Jew; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew<sup>18</sup>

The apparent legalism of Judaism is matched, according to the protestant myth, by the legalism of the early church. Jesus, as this theory goes, is to be found in that which distinguishes him from Judaism or the early papacy Thus CDJ and CDC come together when a presupposition of anti-Judaism, anti-legalism and anti-papacy abound. Remairus, as an example, makes the link between *'papal religion'* and *'Judaism'* for they *'generally have the same kind of defects and abuses, so far they deviate from the religion of reason.'*<sup>19</sup>

Linked in with this strain of anti-Judaism is the Hegelian view of the development of history as chronologically through stages of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. According to Theissen and Winter a Hegelian approach to history became prevalent amongst scholars within biblical studies. They trace this development through the works of Tatke, Wellhausen and Gunkel. In Wellhausen we can observe

‘a strongly progressive scheme of development that results in differentiating Judaism(degeneration)[Antithesis] from Christianity (which attached itself not to Judaism but to the highest in the religion of Israel)[synthesis]’<sup>20</sup>

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17 Theissen and Winter 68 Within Pauline scholarship the issue of legalism is under debate in the New Perspective on Paul. Covenantal Nomism is disguised by Sanders, Wright and Dunn from medieval catholic legalism.

18 Renan, Ernest: *The Life of Jesus*. Ch. XXIII

19 as cited in Winter&Theissen 70

20 Winter & Theissen 72

Thesis: Israel

Antithesis: Judaism

Synthesis: Jesus & Early Church

With this schema of history the distinction between Judaism and Jesus is exaggerated and the CDJ is eagerly embraced as a method which can bring us closer to authentic Jesus tradition.

#### D) Lack of Knowledge of Judaism and early Christianity

The CDJ and CDC seek to compare the Jesus tradition with that of Judaism and the Early Church. This raises a number of historiographical concerns.

a) What do we mean by Judaism? What do we mean by Christianity? When looking for a distinction between Jesus and Judaism and Christianity we need to be aware that even to use the word 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' is to impose unity and coherence onto a range of often diverse and contradictory material.

b) Despite recent advances in access to Judaic and Christian sources we do not have a clear unified vision of what the theology and praxis of these communities were. The CDJ and CDC are in no way objective as they both proceed from an argument of silence- the problem being that so much of Judaism and Christianity remains hidden from our 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. The same point is made, amongst others, in recent years by Stanley Porter

'Another point is that this criterion depends upon a highly, and, in fact, exhaustive detailed knowledge of both Judaism and the early Church. This is a knowledge that scholars arguably still does not possess to the degree that is required to make sure pronouncements using this criteria.'<sup>21</sup>

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21 Porter, Stanley E.: *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research : Previous Discussion and New Proposals*. 74 See also M.D. Hooker, *Christology and Methodology*' NTS 17 (1970-1971) 480-487 As with John G. Gager *The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts about Method* 259

To put the same problem in somewhat different terms, our knowledge of Christian communities before A.D. 70-90 is severely limited. Thus even when we can affirm that a saying differs from what we know, there is no assurance that it differs from the views of a community about which we know nothing. It may well be the case, in the words of Hooker, that "if we knew the whole truth about Judaism and the early Church, our small quantity of 'distinctive' teaching would wither away altogether."

e) Conflicts with the double demand of locating 'Jesus within the Judaism of his day and locating and for locating the effects of his life within the history of the beginning of Christianity.

N.T. Wright who coined the phrase 'third quest' states that the third quest, in contrast to the new quest which '*often seemed concerned to keep Jesus at arm's length from anything to obviously Jewish*', seeks to highlighted the Jewishness of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Some third quest scholars reject at a basic level the criterion of dissimilarity, but others, such as Sanders and Meier, continue to use it, albeit in a modified 'soft from'--for their respective portraits of Jesus are drawn on the canvas of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism.

Dunn and Wright, amongst others, in a recorded evening conversation at Durham university describe negatively CDJ and CDC and the rise of third quest scholarship.

**Dunn:** I think so. For me the key characteristic of the "third quest" is setting Jesus in the context of Judaism rather than seeking to find that which distinguishes him from Judaism – a whole strategy, we might almost say, driven by what in effect has been the embarrassment that Jesus was too Jewish for Christians.

**Wright:** Yes.

**Dunn:** This was always a problem. The second quest didn't really resolve that because it was looking for a dissimilar Jesus.

**Wright:** That's one of the things which I think is very interesting: The so-called "criterion of dissimilarity" which appears so neutral and objective when you line it up – let's see what we can find in the tradition which is different from Judaism and different from the early church, and then we'll be quite sure that neither of them made it up – that in fact carries with it both a sense of a de-Judaized Jesus and a kind of ultra-Protestant sense that anything the church made up it also muddled up, and we've got to get right back to the beginning.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus needs to be set into the context of Judaism but it also needs to be appreciated that Jesus did inspire the early Church. To look for a Jesus who didn't inspire or set a benchmark for the early church is to seek a Jesus who is divorced from any form of historical 'cause' and 'effect'.

This point will be amplified in the discussion of the 'criterion of Plausibility'.

### Conclusion to CDJ and CDC

Quite simply this criterion does not deliver what it sets out to do. The hard from of this criterion produces a Jesus who does not fit with Judaism, yet the Jewishness of Jesus is something which quite simply needs to be taken as a given. Craig Evans

<sup>22</sup> Neill, Stephen ; Wright, N. T.: *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986.* 397

<sup>23</sup> Dunn, Wright *An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul*

rightly points out that this criterion is *dubious* and has few followers.

Such a method—known as the criterion of dissimilarity—could hardly accommodate a portrait of Jesus that takes into account his Jewish context and the Jewish dimensions of his teaching and activities. Fortunately, this dubious criterion has received the trenchant criticism it deserves. Almost no one today is guided by it.<sup>24</sup>

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