

CHAPTER FOUR

Source Criticism

Source criticism is based on the presupposition that many biblical writings were constructed from earlier sources.¹ The biblical authors for the most part did not invent their narratives but creatively reworked material handed down in the communities of which they were members. The Bible itself provides evidence to support this view. In the Old Testament there are several references to what appear to be earlier sources. Numbers, for example, quotes a passage from the 'Book of the Wars of the Lord' (Num. 21.14–15), while Joshua and 2 Samuel refer to the 'Book of Jashar' (Josh. 10.12b–13a; 2 Sam. 1.18–27). In the New Testament, Paul refers to the tradition which he has received (1 Cor. 11.23; 15.3), while Luke informs us that 'Many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word' (Luke 1.1–2). A further indication that some biblical writings are based on earlier sources is provided by the existence of overlapping narratives. The similarity of Chronicles to Samuel and Kings has led to the view that the author of Chronicles may have used these writings as sources, while the parallels between Matthew, Mark and Luke, and between Jude and 2 Peter, have led scholars to suggest that these writings may have been based on common sources. The close verbal agreement, for example, between such passages as Matt. 21.23–27, Mark 11.27–33 and Luke 20.1–8, or Matt. 8.8–9 and Luke 7.6–7, makes it unlikely that we have here independent witnesses of the same event. The more likely explanation is that there is either a common source for all versions or that one of the Gospels is the source of the others.

The internal evidence of the biblical texts also points to their having been built up from earlier sources. Such evidence is provided by dislocations in the flow of narrative. For example, Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower would flow more smoothly if Mark 4.11–12 were omitted and the text ran from Mark 4.10 to 4.13. The obvious explanation for this disruption in the flow of narrative is that Mark has inserted 4.11–12 into a text unit which originally consisted of 4.10, 13–20.

Further evidence that the final state of a text is the result of a long period of literary growth is provided by variations in the historical background implicit in the text, such as differences in the cultic, political and theological presuppositions within certain passages in the text. A good example of this is provided by Isaiah. The historical background of chapters 1–39 is the late eighth century BCE, the time of the ministry of Isaiah (Isa. 1.1; 6.1; 7.13, etc.).² There is no reference to this period in chapters 40 onwards, where the prophet is clearly living in the period of the Babylonian Exile.³

Source criticism is concerned with identifying the sources used in the composition of the biblical texts. It attempts to recover the building blocks from which the final text was constructed. If these building blocks can be shown to be internally consistent when detached from the wider text in which they were embedded, then the source critic can be confident that he or she has identified one of the sources used in the construction of the final text.

Once these sources have been isolated, then the task is to establish the age, author, context and intention of the sources and to trace the process by which biblical writings have been built up from these earlier sources. Source critics have tended to focus primarily on *written* sources. The identification of *oral* sources is the task of form criticism.

In German scholarship, source criticism has been labelled ‘literary criticism’, a fact which can easily lead to confusion, especially since in the English-speaking world the phrase ‘literary criticism’ tends to be used as the generic term for the study of literature, irrespective of which methods are employed.⁴ In biblical studies, however, the phrase ‘literary criticism’ has been used in a more specialized and technical sense to describe the method of identifying the earlier layers of text that have (allegedly) been combined to produce the final versions of the biblical texts. Barr provides a useful summary of these two different uses of the phrase ‘literary criticism’:

In general literary study we mean by *literary criticism* a study of the structures and the imagery of works, their modes, symbols and myths, their poetic, dramatic and aesthetic effect; but in technical biblical scholarship the same term means the separating out of historically different layers in composite works, the history of the tradition during the period of its development in written form, as distinct from its development in a spoken form before it was written down.⁵

To make matters still more confusing, older commentators described source criticism as ‘higher criticism’ in contrast to ‘lower criticism’, which

is concerned with the text critical task of establishing the most authentic form of the text. For the sake of clarity we shall restrict ourselves to the use of the term ‘source criticism’.

A brief history of source criticism

Source criticism has its origins not in biblical study but in the study of Homer, where it was used to clarify problems concerning the interpretation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. As we saw in Chapter 2, it was also employed by Niebuhr in his study of the history of Rome. The method was then taken up by biblical scholars who wished to establish the authorship, date, context and intention of biblical texts. It was above all the problems presented by the Pentateuch that prompted the employment of source criticism in Old Testament studies. The repetitions, inconsistencies and tensions in the Pentateuch, such as, for example, the presence of two different creation accounts (Gen. 1.1–2.4a, 2.4b–25), caused scholars to raise questions concerning the integrity and unity of the Pentateuch. One answer to these questions was that the Pentateuch was a conflation of earlier sources. The tensions in the text could be accounted for by the failure of the Pentateuch’s editors fully to integrate these sources into the final form of the text.

The pioneer of Old Testament source criticism was the French Roman Catholic physician Jean Astruc (1684–1766). In his *Conjectures on the Reminiscences which Moses Appears to Have Used in Composing the Book of Genesis* (1753) Astruc argued on the basis of the different names used of God in Genesis that Moses had made use of two sources when composing Genesis, which he named the Elohist and Yahwist sources (later known as E and J). Astruc’s work was taken up and developed by the German scholar J. G. Eichhorn. In his *Introduction to the Old Testament* Eichhorn used repetitions, style and terminology as criteria for the identification of sources, and applied these criteria to refine Astruc’s two-source theory.⁶

An important contribution to understanding the composition of the Pentateuch was made by Alexander Geddes (1737–1802), a Scottish Roman Catholic scholar, who, noting that the law codes of the Pentateuch seemed to be placed alongside each other with little attempt to integrate them into a coherent text, argued that the Pentateuch was the result of the compilation of fragments of varying length.⁷ This ‘fragmentary hypothesis’ was taken up by Johann Severin Vater (1771–1826), who argued that the first stage in the construction of the Pentateuch was the law book (re-)discovered during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22.8–9) and which now forms the book of Deuteronomy.⁸

De Wette also made a contribution to the source criticism of the Old Testament. As the rather cumbersome title of his doctoral dissertation indicates, de Wette questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch: *A Critical Dissertation by which is Shown that the Fifth Book of Moses is Different from the Remaining Books of the Pentateuch and is the Work of another, younger Author*.⁹ In the course of his discussion of Deuteronomy, de Wette argues that Genesis consists of two sources and that Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers are the result of the combining of the work of several different authors.

The weakness of the fragmentary hypothesis was that although it was able to account for the tensions and inconsistencies in the Pentateuch, it was unable to do justice to its overall structural unity. That the editors had attempted to impose some sort of structural coherence on their sources is evident from the fact that the Pentateuch is organized chronologically. The presence of a unifying structure in the Pentateuch raised doubts about the validity of the theory that the Pentateuch had come into existence through the loose juxtaposition of fragmentary sources.

As a result of these criticisms, the fragmentary hypothesis gave way to the 'supplementary hypothesis'. This theory seems to have been first advanced by H. Ewald in his review in the journal *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* [Theological Studies and Critiques] of J. J. Stähelin's *Critical Investigation of Genesis*.¹⁰ Ewald proposed that the Pentateuch began life as an Elohist text to which other sources subsequently became attached. It is the underlying Elohist strand that accounts for the Pentateuch's unified structure. By means of this proposal, Ewald was able to account both for the coherence of the Pentateuch and for the diversity of vocabulary, style and theology of certain passages, which he classified as accretions to the original Elohist text.

It was, however, what has come to be known as the 'documentary hypothesis', which came to dominate Old Testament scholarship. The initiator of this theory was Hermann Hupfeld (1796–1866), who argued in his *The Sources of Genesis and the Nature of their Combination* that the Elohist source was itself made up of two sources, namely an earlier and a later source.¹¹ This earlier Elohist source later came to be known as the Priestly source (P).

A further contribution to the documentary hypothesis was made by de Wette, who argued that the Deuteronomistic Code contained in Deuteronomy 12–26 was a distinct source that should be distinguished from the sources identified by his predecessors.¹² De Wette suggested that the Deuteronomistic Code was the book discovered in the Temple during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22–23). This suggestion allowed de Wette to date the composition of the Deuteronomistic Code to the period shortly before its discovery in 621 BCE, a date which provided him with the basis for organizing the

chronology of the other sources. The task of establishing the dates of the sources was taken up by Karl Heinrich Graf (1815–1869), who argued in his *The Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1866) that P was the latest of the four sources to be incorporated in the Pentateuch.¹³ He based this claim on the argument that the ceremonial and ritual codes contained in the Pentateuch could have emerged only in the post-exilic period. As evidence for this claim, he pointed to the fact that Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings contain no allusions to ceremonial and ritual laws. For Graf this indicates that P must have come into existence *after* the composition of the writings from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings.

Graf's argument was supported by Vatke, who argued on Hegelian grounds in his *The Religion of the Old Testament* that ritual and ceremonial laws are the result of a long process of religious development. This insight prompted Vatke to argue that J and E, as well as 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings belong to the earliest stages of Israel's history. This period then gave way to the age of the prophets, who initiated the development of the ethical consciousness that ultimately came to be fixed in the Deuteronomic Code (D). The final source to be incorporated into the Pentateuch was the Priestly source (P), which was the result of the development of ceremonial religion.

Source or 'literary' criticism moved into a new stage with the work of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), who was concerned with not only isolating the various sources underlying the Old Testament, but also identifying the context and purpose that had led to the composition of these sources. Taking up the work of Graf and Vatke, Wellhausen developed what has come to be regarded as the classic form of the documentary hypothesis. According to Wellhausen, the Pentateuch came into existence as the result of the conflation of four different sources. The oldest of these sources is the Yahwistic source (J), which Wellhausen held to have been composed around 950 BCE during the reigns of David and Solomon, probably in Judah. According to Wellhausen, J formed the basis for the narrative of Genesis and Exodus, and also supplied some of the material in Numbers. E originated in the northern kingdom around 850 BCE, and begins with the narrative of Abraham in Gen. 15. The Deuteronomic Code (D) forms the basis of Deuteronomy, namely Deut. 12–26. Wellhausen suggests that D originated in the northern kingdom and was brought to Jerusalem by refugees fleeing the Assyrian conquest in 721 BCE. Alternatively, D may have been written by refugees from the north after they had settled in Judah. The last of the sources of the Pentateuch is the Priestly source (P). This source comprises material concerning ritual, ceremony, shrines and genealogies. According to Wellhausen, it was composed in the postexilic period (c. 550 BCE). Leviticus belongs wholly to P, but other elements of P can be found scattered throughout the Pentateuch.

Wellhausen claimed that the Pentateuch was built up in gradual stages. First J was combined with E, probably after the destruction of the northern kingdom. D was then added sometime after its discovery in the Temple in 621 BCE. After the Babylonian exile J, E, and D were combined with P, the authors of which were probably responsible for the editing and organization of the final version of the Pentateuch.

Although Wellhausen's account of the formation of the Pentateuch has been highly influential in Old Testament studies, various criticisms have been levelled against it. Particularly controversial is the validity of E as an independent source. The difficulties of distinguishing E from J have led some scholars to question the existence of E. Even when E has been separated from other Pentateuchal sources, the 'source' that remains is fragmentary and does not constitute a coherent narrative.¹⁴

Other scholars have accepted the documentary hypothesis and have attempted to refine it still further by identifying modifications and adaptations within the sources. Adherents of this view see the sources not as coherent documents, but as the results of a 'school' that produced multiple documents, which they then adapted to meet new challenges.¹⁵ Other scholars have added to J, E, D and P a series of other sources. Otto Eissfeldt (1887–1973) posited the existence of a Lay source (L), which focused on issues of importance to lay people.¹⁶ Georg Fohrer (1915–2002) suggested the presence in the Pentateuch of a Nomadic source (N), which contained a critique of settled, urban life.¹⁷ Julius Morgenstern (1881–1976) argued for a Kenite source (K), which was concerned with the life of Moses.¹⁸ R. H. Pfeiffer detected a Southern or Seir source (S), which he identified as a source for Genesis.¹⁹ Noth argued for a 'foundational source' or *Grundlage* (G), which he held was the source of J and E.²⁰

These new sources have been accepted by only a minority of scholars. The positing of such new sources, however, indicates the complexity of the structure of the Pentateuch and the difficulty in identifying its sources with any degree of precision and certainty. The 'discovery' of such new sources, moreover, raises questions about the coherence of the documentary hypothesis and the notion that the Pentateuch is based on the combination of coherent, continuous documents.

Wellhausen's dating of Pentateuch has also been challenged. Wellhausen's position is based on a Hegelian notion of development from primitive religion to a more 'advanced' ritualistic form of religious belief. If this evolutionary notion of religion is rejected, however, then so too is the dating system that Wellhausen's theory is based upon. The result of discarding Wellhausen's evolutionary framework has been that several scholars have rejected his dating and organization of the Pentateuchal sources and have suggested alternative ways of dating the composition of the Pentateuch.²¹

Until recently the early date of J was generally accepted, but this view too has now been questioned. John Van Seters shifts the composition of

J from the reigns of David and Solomon to the exilic period.²² He bases this view on the similar vocabulary found in J, the Deuteronomistic History, and Deutero-Isaiah. Hans Heinrich Schmid likewise argues that J was composed in the exilic period on the grounds that J contains evidence of having been influenced by later theological reflection.²³ Schmid bases this claim on the argument that the type of thinking evident in J comes about only when the history of a nation is considered to have come to an end and is thus capable of being understood retrospectively. Erhard Blum is another scholar who argues for an exilic or post-exilic provenance for P and D.²⁴ Indeed, in late twentieth century biblical studies, there has been a general tendency to date Old Testament writings much later than the periods proposed by Wellhausen and his successors. Thus Otto Kaiser argues for a Hellenistic date for sections of Isa. 1–39,²⁵ while E. S. Gerstenberger places the composition of the Psalms in the post-exilic period.²⁶ Another development in the second half of the twentieth century was the attempt to place source criticism on a firmer ‘scientific’ basis. This was the aim of Wolfgang Richter in his influential *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft* (1971), in which he applies a rigorous linguistic method to the analysis of the Old Testament.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, source criticism came under increasing pressure. Arguably the most vigorous critique was that of R. N. Whybray in his *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*.²⁷ Whybray rejects the documentary hypothesis and argues that a single author was responsible for the Pentateuch. The author collected sources, most of which were not ancient, and reworked them according to the historiographical procedures of his day. This author did not eliminate inconsistencies but was intent only on gathering and presenting material concerning the creation of the world and the origins of Israel, possibly, Whybray suggests, as an introduction to the Deuteronomistic History.

Although much scholarly effort has been expended on identifying the sources of the Pentateuch, source criticism has also been applied to other Old Testament works, such as, for example, in the identification of the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2), which has been integrated into the Deuteronomistic History. Source critical methods have also been employed to show that Isa. 11 has been expanded through the addition of vv. 6–9, 10, 11–16 and that Job 32–37 is an interpolation into an earlier text.

Similar source critical work has taken place in relation to the New Testament. There has long been an awareness of the existence of literary relationships between the four canonical Gospels. Augustine placed the Gospels in the order of composition in which they appear in the New Testament, arguing that the later Gospels were aware of the earlier Gospels and that Mark was an abridged version of Matthew. This view dominated thinking on the composition of the Gospels until the

nineteenth century, but the beginnings of its overthrow can be traced to the eighteenth century.

J. D. Michaelis (1717–1791) is significant in being the first to propose the existence of a now lost primal Gospel (*Urevangelium*) from which the four Gospels were derived, and argued for a relationship between the Gospel of John and Gnosticism. Michaelis sees Matthew as a Greek translation of an Aramaic text.²⁸

It was not only his publication of a new edition of the Greek New Testament that made Griesbach a significant figure in the development of biblical criticism, but also his publication in 1776 of the first synopsis of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.²⁹ By laying out Matthew, Mark and Luke in parallel columns, Griesbach facilitated the study of the relation between these three Gospels. Since Griesbach the first three Gospels have come to be known collectively as the Synoptic Gospels.

Griesbach's study of the Synoptic Gospels led him to challenge the traditional theory of the relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke.³⁰ The traditional view was that Matthew was the most original of the Gospels, which had then been used as a source by Mark. Luke, it was argued, had made use of both Matthew and Mark. Griesbach rejected this theory and argued instead that Mark had made use of both Matthew and Luke and had occasionally supplemented them with material drawn from oral tradition. This question of the relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke has come to be known as the 'Synoptic Problem' and has been a major area of scholarly debate since the publication of Griesbach's synopsis.

In the course of his argument for Mark's dependence on Matthew and Luke, Griesbach suggested that the original ending of Mark, which he believed had related Jesus' post-resurrection journey to Galilee, had been lost and that the original version of the Gospel now ended at Mark 16.8, Mark 16.9–20 being a later addition. This question of the 'lost ending' of Mark has been an issue in New Testament scholarship ever since.

It was not long before Griesbach's solution to the Synoptic Problem came under fire. The first to propose what was to become the standard theory was Gottlob Christian Storr (1746–1805), who argued that if Mark were indeed dependent upon Matthew and Luke, then it is very difficult to understand why Mark should have omitted from his Gospel so much contained in the other two Gospels. The relationship between the Synoptic Gospels, he argued, is best explained by the argument that Matthew and Luke are dependent upon Mark.³¹

Storr's was not the only rival to Griesbach's theory, however. Lessing sought to explain the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels by arguing for their mutual dependence upon an Aramaic Gospel, explaining the relative brevity of Mark as due to his having had access only to an incomplete version of this primal Gospel.³² The fact that the evangelists

had employed a common source accounts for the similarities between the Gospels, while the different ways in which the evangelists had adapted this source accounts for their differences. Lessing, however, did not develop his theory in detail, a task which Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), a pupil of Michaelis, decided to undertake. In his book *Über die drey ersten Evangelien* [On the First Three Gospels] (1794),³³ Eichhorn argued that the parallels between the Synoptic Gospels cannot be explained by mutual dependence, because none of the three Gospels can be acknowledged in all respects as more original than the other two. That is, in certain passages one Gospel appears to have the more original text, whereas with regard to other texts another Gospel seems to be more authentic. This view led Eichhorn to posit the existence of a common primal Gospel underlying the three Synoptic Gospels. This common basis in a primal Gospel accounts both for the similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark and Luke. The similarities are due to the fact that each of the Gospels has made use of the same source. The differences are accounted for, firstly, by the fact that the evangelists have made use of different forms of the primal Gospel, and secondly, by the fact that they have edited it according to their own interests. Also significant for the development of source criticism was Eichhorn's attempt to explain the common material in Matthew and Luke that was absent from Mark by arguing that Matthew and Luke had drawn on common literary sources unknown to Mark.

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) followed Lessing and others in arguing for the existence of a primal Gospel. According to Herder, this primal Gospel had been taken up, edited and embellished by each of the evangelists independently of each other. Because of this independence, the interpreter should resist the temptation to harmonize the Gospels, and should instead 'let each retain his special purpose, complexion, time, and locale'.³⁴ Where Herder differed from his predecessors was in his view that the primal Gospel was not a literary document, but was *oral* in character and 'consisted of individual units, narratives, parables, sayings, pericopes'.³⁵ In its very earliest form, he claimed, the Gospel was passed on not as a written text but by word of mouth in the form of oral teaching and confession of Jesus as the Messiah.

Evidence for the origins of the canonical Gospels in oral tradition can be observed in the forms the reader encounters in the Gospels, which frequently possess the same stylized structure, a fact which indicates their having been passed down by word of mouth. It was only at a relatively late date, when the original witness of the Apostles was now in the distant past, that the need was felt to fix the oral Gospel in writing. This process, too, can be observed in the Gospels, where there is often an overlap between the individual units but variation in the order, transitions and

connections of these units. This variation is due to the editorial intervention of the individual evangelist. In his emphasis on the importance of oral tradition and awareness of the different ways oral tradition preserved stylized forms, Herder pointed the way forward to the development of what would later come to be known as form criticism.

Of the Gospels Mark is the most ancient, for, Herder asks, 'Is not the briefer, the unadorned, usually the more primitive, to which, then, other occasions later add explanation, embellishment, rounding out?'³⁶ Herder also holds that Mark has faithfully reproduced the contents of the primal Gospel underlying the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew and Luke have then expanded the more primitive version of the Gospel found in Mark. Matthew, Herder claims, has expanded the primal Gospel in order to show that the longed-for messiah has indeed arrived, whereas Luke, who according to Herder knew Matthew, strove to provide a historical account of Jesus' life according to Hellenistic models. With these insights Herder laid the foundations for the later standard theory of the priority of Mark and the two-document hypothesis, i.e. the theory that Matthew and Luke used as their sources the Gospel of Mark and a now lost source known as Q (named after *Quelle*, the German word for source).

In an article entitled 'The Order of the Narratives in the Synoptic Gospels' (1835),³⁷ Lachmann advanced several grounds to support Markan priority. Firstly, he pointed out that Matthew and Luke have the same order only when they agree with Mark. When Matthew and Luke diverge from Mark's order, they also diverge from each other. Secondly, the presence of shared non-Markan material in Matthew and Luke suggests the existence of a common source used by the two evangelists. Matthew's divergence from Mark can be explained as due to Matthew's insertion of non-Markan material into the framework provided by Mark. What Lachmann has provided, then, are some powerful arguments for the priority of Mark and the two-document hypothesis.

Christian Gottlob Wilke (1786–1854) arrived at a theory of the priority of Mark independently of Lachmann, whose work he does not seem to have known. In his *The First Evangelist or an Exegetical-Critical Investigation of the Affinity between the First Three Gospels* (1838), Wilke rejects the thesis of a common underlying primal gospel and argues that the agreement of the three Synoptic Gospels and the fact that almost all of Mark appears in Matthew and Luke indicate that the latter have made use of Mark in the composition of their Gospels.

In his book *The Synoptic Gospels* Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1832–1910) took up and consolidated the critical work of his predecessors, supporting the theory of Markan priority on the grounds of Mark's more primitive style, and arguing for the existence of an additional source common to Matthew and Luke.³⁸

The English scholar B. H. Streeter refined the two-document hypothesis by expanding it into a *four*-document hypothesis. He suggested that Matthew and Luke supplemented Mark and Q with their own special material, which he labelled M and L respectively and which he believed were written documents. In his *Synoptic Studies* (1925–1931), Wilhelm Bussmann even went so far as to argue for the existence of *eight* sources underlying the Synoptic Gospels.³⁹ Streeter made the further proposal that the Gospel of Luke is the result of the combination of Mark with a document he calls ‘Proto-Luke’, which consisted of Q and Luke’s special material. Matthew is the result of the expansion of Mark with Q and Matthew’s own special source of material. The priority of Mark has been challenged, however, by William Farmer, who in his *The Synoptic Problem* (1976) argued for Matthaean priority,⁴⁰ but his views have found little support among the majority of scholars.

Although the identification of the sources of the Synoptic Gospels has been a major concern of New Testament scholarship, it is not the only problem to which scholars have applied source criticism. There have been attempts to identify a ‘signs source’ in John.⁴¹ Similarly, there have been attempts to identify the sources and traditions upon which Paul may have drawn in the composition of his letters.

While source criticism was until the 1960s one of the major activities of the historical criticism of the Bible, since the 1970s it has been relegated to just one of many other methods of biblical interpretation and has slipped down the list of biblical scholars’ concerns. The influence of ‘New Criticism’ in literary studies has led to the emphasis in biblical studies shifting to the treatment of the text as a literary unit and to considering the biblical writings holistically as works of literature rather than as confluences of sources. This has led to the tensions in the biblical texts being treated not so much as evidence of inadequately integrated sources as dramatic literary devices aimed at evoking rhetorical effects in the reader. The shift in biblical studies to treating texts as literary wholes and thus focusing on the final, canonical form of biblical writings has resulted in source criticism losing the prominence it once had.

The method of source criticism

The presuppositions of source criticism

1. Authors have a consistent style. If there are passages which appear to be written in a different style, then this passage is likely to be by another author and therefore to be a source employed by the final author of the text.

2. Authors do not intentionally contradict themselves. If there are contradictions in the text, then these are due to unsuccessful attempts to weave together different sources.
3. Interruptions in the flow of narrative or argument are evidence of the combination of different sources.

The principles of source criticism

1. Identification of sources: How to spot a source

(a) Comparison of parallel texts

The task of identifying sources is easier if two or more versions of a tradition have come down to us. If parallel documents are available, the source critic examines agreement and disagreement between the different versions of the text, and attempts to find an explanation for the similarities and differences that exist between them. This approach is possible in the Old Testament with Kings and Chronicles, and in the New Testament with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and with the letters of Jude and 2 Peter.

A similar order of material in two texts is a strong indicator that one of the texts may be dependent on the other. The fact that Matthew and Luke generally follow the order of Mark's Gospel, but do not follow the same order in their Q material is arguably evidence that Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark. Mark is unlikely to be dependent on either Matthew or Luke, since it is difficult to envisage why Mark would omit such episodes as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), if he knew Matthew's Gospel or why he would exclude the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30–37), if he were aware of Luke. That Matthew and Luke did not use each other's Gospels as a source would seem to be indicated by the fact that they order their common Q material very differently from each other. Luke places it in two large blocks (Luke 6.20–7.35; 9.57–13.34), whereas Matthew scatters the material throughout his Gospel. It is for this reason unlikely that Luke knew Matthew, for it would be difficult to explain why Luke should have extracted the Q material from Matthew and placed it in two blocks. It makes more sense to argue that Luke made use of Mark as his primary source and framework, and decided to slot the Q material into Mark's structure but without confusing his two sources. If Matthew knew the work of Luke or vice versa, then it is likely that the one evangelist would have followed the order of the other, just as they did with their use of the Gospel of Mark.

(b) Contradictions

Where parallel texts are not available, source critics focus on features within the text that may indicate the presence of an earlier source. Source critics identify the possible presence of a source by searching for contradictions in the text. Lying behind the search for contradictions is the presupposition that authors usually strive for consistency in their writing. Textual tensions and inconsistencies may thus be indications that parts of the text stem not from the author's own pen but are sources which he has taken up and incorporated into his writing. For example, since the presence of John 21 contradicts the conclusion expressed in John 20.30, the final version of the Gospel would seem to be the result of an editor/author combining John 21 with the main part of the Gospel.

(c) Interruptions

Dislocations, disruptions and breaks in the plot, sentence structure or flow of argument may be pointers to the incorporation of a source. Such interruptions may be explained by the writer having slotted material into an existent source. An example is provided by John 14.31, where Jesus says to his disciples, 'Rise, let us be on our way'. The natural understanding of this is that Jesus has finished teaching, as related in chapter 14, and wishes to depart. When we read on from the next verse (John 15.1), however, we find that Jesus continues talking to his disciples for another three chapters. It is only in John 18.1 that he at last concludes his teaching and departs. The text would flow more naturally if John 18.1 ('After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples . . .') immediately followed John 14.31 ('Rise, let us be on our way'). It seems odd for Jesus to command his disciples to depart and then continue to speak for another three chapters. One plausible explanation for this oddity is that John has slotted the teaching material contained in John 15.1–17.26 into the framework provided by an earlier source. On the other hand, it may be that, like all human beings, the biblical writers did not always express themselves with precision. Alleged breaks and interruptions in the text may be due not to the inadequate integration of different sources, but to personal lapses on the part of the author.

(d) Duplications, multiple versions and repetitions

Duplications or 'doublets' are similar, though distinct versions of what appear to be the same story. For example, there are three accounts of Abraham pretending that Sarah is his sister (Gen. 12.10–20; 20.1–18; 26.1–13), two

accounts of David sparing Saul's life (1 Sam. 23.19–24.22; 26.1–25), and two accounts of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude (Matt. 14.13–21; 15.32–39). The presence of doublets or multiple versions of what appear to be the same story may indicate that the biblical writer has made use of two or more different sources. This may be the case with Matt. 9.32–34 and 12.22–24, where we have two reports of what appears to be the same episode, namely the Pharisees attributing Jesus' exorcism of a demoniac to 'the ruler of the demons'. One possible explanation of this duplication is that Matthew is using two sources containing different versions of the same tradition, namely Mark and Q (Mark 3.22; Luke 11.15).

We should be wary of placing too much weight on doublets, however. Firstly, there is the difficulty of establishing whether apparent doublets are really two versions of the same story or simply accounts of two similar, but distinct episodes. Secondly, an author may repeat himself for a variety of reasons, such as, for example, to emphasize a point or simply out of forgetfulness. It is not absolutely necessary to attribute doublets to an author's use of two distinct sources.

(e) *Variations in style, vocabulary and theology*

Source critics assume that the authors of biblical writings possess a consistent style and theology. Consequently, changes in style and vocabulary or a shift in theological position within the text may be evidence of the incorporation of a source. That Job is a conflation of at least two different sources is evident from the fact that the introduction and conclusion are in prose, but the main body of the work is in poetry.

Evidence of the use of an otherwise unknown source may also be provided by testing the coherence of a passage with the remainder of the corpus of an author's writings. This is particularly important in isolating pre-Pauline elements in the letters of Paul. Those passages which do not fully cohere with Paul's theology and style may be due not to Paul himself but to his having taken up and incorporated an earlier source. Thus Bultmann and Käsemann have both argued that Romans 3.25–26 may not have been written by Paul himself but is an earlier source which Paul has taken up and incorporated into his letter.⁴² Their reason for making this claim is that Rom. 3.25–26 employs terms that Paul does not otherwise employ, namely, *hilasterion* ('atonement') and *paresis* ('overlooking' or 'passing over' something). Other examples of what may be pre-Pauline elements which Paul has incorporated into his writings are Phil. 2.6–11 and Col. 1.15–20, which may be early Christian hymns. The argument from variation in style has also been cited in support of the view that Luke may have used sources for his

birth narratives, which in contrast to the Hellenistic character of the rest of the Gospel are Hebraic in style.

There are, however, difficulties in employing the criterion of variations in style, vocabulary, and theology, for it depends on our being able to ascertain what is typical of an author and then showing that a particular passage is uncharacteristic of him. This will in turn depend on establishing which texts are genuine, which is itself a difficult task. Thus establishing what is characteristic of Paul's style and theology will depend on whether we recognize Colossians and Ephesians as genuinely Pauline. There is the further danger of defining what is characteristic of an author so narrowly that what would otherwise be regarded as legitimate variation in an author's style is taken to be an independent source. We simply do not know enough about the style of ancient authors to be sure that they were not capable of changing their style when they believed it to be appropriate. Furthermore, change in style or vocabulary may be due not to a change of source but to a change of subject matter. It may be, for example, that the difference in the style of the Lucan birth narratives is due not to Luke's having drawn on a Hebraic source but to his varying his style according to what he felt was appropriate to the episode he was relating.

2. Establishment of the relationship between sources

Agreement between different texts implies their dependence upon a common source. Once such agreements have been identified, the task of the source critic is then to establish the nature of the common source that has given rise to them. When we have two versions of the same story, A and B, how do we establish which is dependent upon which? Here the *differences* between two otherwise closely related texts play an important role. The fundamental criterion according to which textual dependence is established is the ease of explaining the divergences between the texts. Are the divergences better explained if A has altered B or B has altered A? That is, can we see reasons why the text may have changed from A to B, rather than vice versa? If the development from A to B is more easily and plausibly explained than the development from B to A, then we can conclude (though never with absolute certainty) that A is the earlier, more primitive version, upon which B is dependent. The difficulty with this criterion is that of establishing whether divergences are due to the use of different sources, the influence of oral tradition, or the editorial input of the author or compiler of the text. The most important differences upon which a conclusion about the direction of textual dependence can be made are as follows.

(a) Stylistic improvements

If text B appears to be written in a more sophisticated style than text A, then it is likely that B is dependent on A. A is unlikely to be dependent on B, since it is more probable that an author would have improved his source than that an author should have deliberately worsened the style. Thus one of the arguments that Mark is the source of both Matthew and Luke is that Mark's style is quite simple, even naïve. This can be seen in the way he links together the various episodes of Jesus' ministry by the use of 'and' and 'immediately'. (This is not apparent in many modern English translations, which have 'improved' Mark's style by eliminating his overuse of 'and'.) In Matthew and Luke, however, we find much less frequent use of 'and' and 'immediately' and a much smoother transition between the various sections of the narrative. It is difficult to see why, if Mark were dependent upon Matthew, he should have replaced Matthew's more sophisticated literary style with a simple, naïve style. The differences between Mark, Matthew and Luke are explicable, however, if we hold that Matthew and Luke have used Mark as a source and have improved his style. This argument is not conclusive, however, for it is possible that Mark may have used Matthew as a source, but paraphrased Matthew in his own language rather than following Matthew slavishly.

(b) Amplifications

If text B has provided detail or explanation that is not present in text A, then it is more likely that text B is dependent on text A than vice versa, for it is more probable that detail and explanation have been added than removed. For example, Matthew often includes Old Testament quotations that are absent from Mark. A good example of this is provided by the parallel passages Mark 1.34/Matt. 8.16-17.

Mark 1.32-34 vs. Matt. 8.16-17

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'

It is easier to explain this passage on the basis of Matthew's dependence on Mark rather than vice versa. Matthew has added the quotation from Isa. 53.4 to support his theological aim of showing that Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. It is difficult, however, to understand why Mark should have removed such material from his Gospel if he were dependent upon Matthew. Similarly, if Mark had known and used Matthew as a source, then it is puzzling that Mark should have omitted such passages as the Infancy Narrative, the Sermon on the Mount and many of the parables. It is easier to explain such differences between the two texts as due to Matthew's additions to Mark, rather than to attribute them to Mark's omission of material from Matthew.

(c) *Clarifications*

If text B has clarified a passage that is obscure in text A, then it is likely that text B is dependent on text A. An example of clarification can be seen when we compare Luke 5.29 with Mark 2.15. It is not clear from Mark's version how Jesus came to be in Levi's house. By adding the sentence 'Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house', Luke is able to clarify the passage and show why Jesus was eating with tax-collectors and sinners. It is more likely that Luke has added this verse in order to add clarity to Mark's account than it is that Mark has omitted the passage from his copy of Luke.

(d) *Omissions*

Omissions can also shed light on the relationship between texts. If theologically offensive or stylistically awkward passages that appear in one text are absent from an otherwise parallel text, it may indicate that the theologically difficult text is the source of the less problematic text. It seems likely that the inoffensive text is the result of an author's having 'cleaned up' his source by removing anything that might offend the community for which he was writing. A good example of this can be seen if we compare the accounts of Jesus' return to his home town of Nazareth in Mark 6.5–6 and Matt. 13.58.

Mark 6.5–6

Matt. 13.58

And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief.⁴³

And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

It is easier to explain why Matthew should have altered Mark than vice versa. Mark's version implies that Jesus was *incapable* of performing mighty works. This implication of *incapacity* on Jesus' part is unacceptable to Matthew and he thus adapts Mark to avoid this conclusion. First, he changes 'could' to 'did', and then by linking Jesus' non-performance of miracles to Mark's comment about the unbelief of the people of Nazareth transfers responsibility for the non-occurrence of miracles from Jesus to the Nazarenes. In doing so, the offensive implication that Jesus was *incapable* is removed and a theological point made about the relationship between faith and miracles.

It is, however, far more difficult to defend the hypothesis that Mark is dependent upon and has altered Matthew, for it is hard to explain why Mark should have modified Matthew in the way he supposedly has. On what grounds could Mark have chosen to change Matthew's version so that the *impotence* of Jesus is emphasized? Because it is generally easier in this and many other passages to explain how Matthew might have adapted Mark rather than vice versa, the consensus of opinion in New Testament scholarship is that Matthew is dependent upon Mark.

3. The construction of a hypothesis

The final stage in the work of the source critic is to construct a hypothesis to account for the presence of sources in the text under investigation and to identify their character. A successful hypothesis must be able to explain both points of overlap and divergence, and to take into consideration any relevant external information. Thus, continuing to take the Synoptic Problem as our example, an examination of the parallels between the Synoptic Gospels reveals that Matthew and Luke usually agree with Mark's wording and order, but only very occasionally agree with each other *against* Mark. There are several possible hypotheses to explain this.

- Matthew and Luke used Mark, but not each other.
- Mark has conflated and abbreviated Matthew and Luke.
- Matthew is the source of Mark, and Mark is the source of Luke.

Although these three hypotheses are possible on the basis of the available evidence, the consensus of opinion is that, for the reasons outlined in the previous sections, the theory that fits the evidence best is that of Markan priority. This argument is supplemented by the further argument that Matthew and Luke made use of a common source known as Q. There

remains, however, dispute about the character of Q and uncertainty about whether it was a written document, a collection of oral tradition or one document or several.

Source criticism in action

Gen. 2.4b-3.24

1. Identification of sources

(a) Comparison of parallel texts

No parallel texts to Genesis are available, so we are reliant solely on the criteria appropriate for identifying sources *within* texts. What, then, is the internal evidence that may indicate that Genesis is the result of the conflation of earlier sources? To limit our discussion, we shall focus on the claim that Gen. 2.4b–3.24 provides evidence that Genesis is a composite text by considering the arguments that Gen. 2.4b–3.24 can be detached from the surrounding material.

(b) Contradictions

That Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 2.4b–3.24 are from distinct sources is indicated by the contradictions and inconsistencies that emerge if we assume that the two passages belong to a single, coherent narrative unit. One such inconsistency is the order of God's creation of living creatures, which differs in the two passages. In Gen. 1.1–2.4a, God begins with the creation of animals and concludes with the creation of human beings. In Gen. 2.4b–3.24, however, God first creates man, then animals, before finally creating woman. Another inconsistency between the two passages is that Gen. 1.12–13 tells us that the earth was rich in vegetation, but according to Gen. 2.5, the earth seems to be a barren place devoid of plants until God created the first human being and placed him in a garden 'to till it and keep it' (Gen. 2.15). The conclusion to which these discrepancies force us is that Gen. 1–2 consists of two distinct creation stories that have been placed alongside each other.

(c) Interruptions

Identification of where one source ends and the next begins is provided by the breaks and interruptions present in the text. Thus evidence that a new source begins in Gen. 2.4b is provided by the fact that in this verse God begins to create a second time, which in view of the creation narrative of Gen. 1.1–2.4a would seem to be redundant.⁴⁴ The end of the unit can also be

detected by being attentive to interruptions, breaks and shifts in subject matter. Gen. 4.1–26 continues the story of Adam and Eve, and relates the story of the first human family and the first murder. Its narrative is closely related to the preceding narrative of Gen. 2.4b–3.24 and tells of the first tragic consequence of human beings' disobedience of God, namely Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Gen. 4.1–26 is thus likely to belong to the same source as Gen. 2.4b–3.24. In Gen. 5.1, however, there is a clear break in the narrative, when the scene shifts from the story of the children of Adam and Eve, and turns to a genealogy listing the descendants of Adam. The conclusion we can draw from these interruptions, breaks and shifts in the early chapters of Genesis is that chapters 1.1–5.32 consists of the conflation of at least two sources comprising the first creation story of Gen. 1.1–2.4a, the second creation story and expulsion from Eden (Gen. 2.4b–3.24), the story of the first human family (Gen. 4.1–26), and the genealogy of Gen. 5.1–32.

(d) Duplications, multiple versions, and repetitions

Multiple versions of the same story may indicate that the author or editor of a text has combined several distinct sources. The reduplication of creation narratives would seem to indicate that the editors have drawn on (at least) two distinct sources in compiling the book of Genesis. This view would seem to be corroborated by the fact that the brief genealogy integrated into the story of the first human family (Gen. 4.17–22) is repeated though in different style in Gen. 5.1–32.

(e) Variations in style, vocabulary, and theology

The distinctness of Gen. 2.4b–4.26 from the surrounding material can be seen by comparing the style of this passage with that of Gen. 1.1–2.4a and 5.1–32. The style of Gen. 1.1–2.4a is repetitive. The repetition of the phrase 'And God said . . . Let there be . . . And it was so . . . And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day' gives Gen. 1.1–2.4a a litany-like character. Another characteristic feature of Gen. 1.1–2.4a is that God creates by divine fiat. The style of Gen. 2.4b–4.26, on the other hand, is noticeably different. The repetition that characterizes Gen. 1.1–2.4a is absent and God creates not by simply commanding things to come into existence, but by actually making human beings out of earth and planting a garden. God is like a craftsman in his workshop or a farmer in his field. The style is thus more anthropomorphic than that of Gen. 1.1–2.4a. A further contrast with Gen. 1.1–2.4a is that Gen. 2.4b–4.26 is a narrative that contains characters, plot, action and dialogue. Whereas Gen. 1.1–2.4a consists of a list of God's acts to bring the world into existence, Gen. 2.4b–3.24 provides a motive for God's creation of human beings, namely his need of a man to till the garden and subsequently the man's

need of female companionship. This then lays the basis for the narrative concerning the first human beings' disobedience and expulsion from the garden.

That Gen. 2.4b–3.24 belongs to a unit that also includes Gen. 4.1–26 is indicated by the fact that Gen. 5.1–32 returns to the repetition that characterized Gen. 1.1–2.4a. Gen. 5.1–32 introduces each generation of Adam's descendants with the stereotypical phrase 'When A had lived for X number of years, he became the father of B.' Both Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 5.1–32 show the same repetitive style, a style that does not appear in Gen. 2.4b–4.26. The conclusion that has been drawn from these stylistic differences is that Gen. 1.1–5.32 comprises two different sources.

There are variations in vocabulary between Gen. 2.4b–3.24 and the material which surrounds it. The most obvious difference is the use of different terms for God. Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 5.1–32 use the term 'Elohim', whereas in Gen. 2.4b–4.26 God is called 'Yahweh'. Other differences are that while Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 5.1–32 use the Hebrew word for 'create' to describe God's creation of human beings, the term employed in Gen. 2.4b–4.26 is 'form'. Gen. 2.4b–3.24 also uses a more poetical vocabulary than Gen. 1.1–2.4b. A further difference is that whereas Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 5.1–32 employ the terms 'male and female', Gen. 2.4b–4.26 prefers the terms 'man and woman'.

Theological differences are also evident in the two creation accounts. Gen. 1.1–2.4a portrays God as transcendent, reigning far above the universe and creating the world by divine decree, but in Gen. 2.4b–4.26 he is portrayed as within the world like a human person, creating human beings like a potter moulds clay to make a pot. God is much closer to the world he has created and breathes his spirit into human beings. Furthermore, whereas God in Gen. 1.1–2.4a is completely in control, in Gen. 2.4b–3.24 he is taken by surprise by events. He even seems to make mistakes such as, for example, creating animals as man's companions before realizing that they cannot fulfil his need for companionship. It is only after discovering the inadequacy of the animals to provide the companionship the man needs that God creates woman. Two different theologies thus appear to be at work in the two creation stories. In Gen. 1.1–2.4a God is majestic, transcendent and distant, while in Gen. 2.4b–3.24 he seems to be a very human God who shares such human emotions as anger and disappointment. These different views of God are matched by different conceptions of humanity in the two accounts. In Gen. 1.1–2.4a, humanity seems to be more exalted than in Gen. 2.4b–3.24. In Gen. 1.26–27 we are told that God made human beings in his own image, whereas in Gen. 2.7 we are told that 'The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living creature'.⁴⁵ The dependence of human beings is thus much more

evident in Gen. 2.4b–3.24. Furthermore, the closeness of human beings to the animal kingdom is more apparent in Gen. 2.4b–3.24, for the text describes both human beings and animals by the same term, namely ‘living creature’ (Gen. 2.7, 19). This stands in contrast to Gen. 1.1–2.4a, where human beings are created as the climax of God’s creative activity to exercise dominion over all that he has created (Gen. 1.26–28).

2. The construction of a hypothesis

The conclusion that scholars have drawn on the basis of the considerations described above is that Gen. 1.1–5.32 consists of two different sources. When these two sources are separated from each other, the problems of inconsistency, difference in style, interruptions and duplications vanish. Gen. 1.1–2.4a; 5.1–32 belongs to what has come to be known as the Priestly source or ‘P’. Gen. 2.4b–4.26 belongs to the Yahwist source or ‘J’, so called because of its use of the term Yahweh (German: *Jahweh*) for God. The source Gen. 2.4b–4.26 has been slotted into the framework provided by Gen. 1.1–2.4a and Gen. 5.1–32.

An important question is whether the sources upon which Gen. 2.4b–3.24 has been constructed were literary or oral in character. Von Rad holds that the irregularities in the text are better explained not as the result of the combination of literary sources but through the growth of tradition. The internal contradictions and inconsistencies within the text are due to the shift in inner motivation that takes place in the transmission of oral tradition.⁴⁶ This means that the source critical study of Gen. 2.4b–3.24 must be supplemented by form criticism.

Matt. 15.21-28

1. Identification of sources

Matt. 15.21–28 has a parallel text in Mark 7.24–30, so the first stage in identifying whether Matthew has employed a source is to compare the two texts in order to establish the character of their relationship. An examination of the two passages reveals close verbal agreement between Matt. 15.26–27 and Mark 7.27–28, which would seem to indicate dependence of either Mark upon Matthew or Matthew upon Mark. Furthermore, the episode the text describes occurs in the same order of events in both Matthew and Mark, namely after Jesus’ dispute with the Pharisees concerning tradition and before healing miracles and the feeding of the 4000. The evidence would seem to indicate dependence of one of the Gospels on the other or that another source underlies both accounts.

2. Establishment of the relationship between sources

To establish the relationship between the two Gospels, it is necessary to examine how the two versions differ from each other and whether these differences can shed light on the direction of dependence, i.e. whether Matthew is dependent on Mark or vice versa. This means examining the Gospels for evidence of stylistic improvements, amplifications, clarifications and omissions.

(a) *Stylistic improvements*

In contrast to Mark, Matthew introduces dialogue from almost the beginning of the pericope. Mark does not introduce dialogue until half way through the passage, relying until Mark 7.27 on a third person description of the events. Matthew's structuring of the episode in the form of a dialogue between the Canaanite woman and Jesus has the effect of making the passage more dynamic. The drama of the passage is heightened still further by Matthew's bringing the episode to a climactic conclusion with Jesus' pronouncement: 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish' (Matt. 15.28).

Matthew also introduces terms we know to be typical of him from their use elsewhere in his Gospel. Thus Matthew characteristically introduces the passage with the phrases 'left that place' and 'went away' (Matt. 15.21), which he also employs in Matt. 2.22; 4.12; 12.15; 14.13; 27.5, but which do not appear in Mark and Luke. Furthermore, in contrast to Mark's simple reference to Tyre, Matthew employs the phrase '*Tyre and Sidon*', a combination which he also employs when he refers to Tyre in Matt. 11.21–22. Whereas Mark tells us that the woman 'fell down at his feet' (Mark 7.25), Matthew employs the theologically more significant term 'she worshipped him' (Matt. 15.25).⁴⁷

(b) *Clarifications*

Matthew replaces Mark's second reference to 'children' with the term 'masters', which makes clearer the hierarchy between the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews are not 'children' in relation to the Gentiles, but are their superiors. To eliminate the ambiguity caused by Mark's 'children' and to sharpen the point of the woman's comment, Matthew therefore substitutes 'children' with 'masters'. It is difficult to see why, if Mark were dependent on Matthew, he should have changed Matthew's 'masters' to 'children'.

(c) *Omissions*

Matthew's version omits Mark 7.24b: 'And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid' and Jesus' mitigating

comment to the woman 'let the children be fed first' (Mark 7.27) and includes the verse 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15.24b).

3. The construction of a hypothesis

The relation between Mark 7.24–30 and Matt. 15.21–28 is a complex one. Although there are clear parallels between the two texts, there are some significant differences. If we leave aside the strong parallels between Matt. 15.26–27 and Mark 7.27–28, there is considerable variation in wording between the two versions. Matthew's version contains 140 words, while Mark's contains 130, but the two Gospels have fewer than forty words in common. If Matthew were dependent on Mark, we would expect a closer correspondence between the vocabulary of the two Gospels. A further difference between the two stories is that there are far more Jewish elements in Matthew's account and it appears to be more hostile to Gentiles than Mark's version. Matthew contains more Semitisms than Mark, notably vv. 23, 24 and 28.

The question is how these differences are to be interpreted. Three theories have been advanced.

1. Matthew has inherited a similar but distinct and independent tradition from Mark.

Perhaps two versions of the pericope were in circulation, one (Mark's) more favourable to the Gentile mission, the other (Matthew's) hostile to the Gentile mission. The original episode underlying both versions was then modified to suit the different purposes of the two evangelists. Mark developed his version into an affirmation of the Gentile mission, though recognizing the pre-eminence of the Jews. Matthew developed his version into a rejection of the Gentile mission. Luke does away with the ambiguity by eliminating the passage altogether.

2. Matthew has conflated his special material with the tradition inherited from Mark.

A possible explanation is that Matthew knew of a different version of the story of the Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician woman, which he has conflated with Mark's account. Alternatively, Matthew may have thoroughly revised Mark in order to adapt Mark's text to suit his theological interests. The question is whether Matthew's expansion of Mark is due to Matthew's access to another source unknown to Mark or whether it is due to Matthew's redactional activity.

3. Matthew has reworked Mark to suit his theological interests and those of the Church.

This theory attributes the differences between Matthew and Mark to Matthew's editorial activity. The differences stem not from an alternative

tradition but from Matthew himself. Supporters of this view cite as evidence the fact that many of the divergent terms in Matthew's version appear in redactional comments elsewhere in the Gospel. The appearance in Matt. 15.21–28 of terms identified as redactional elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew make it likely that they are due to Matthew rather than to his use of an alternative independent source. Since it is Matthew's practice elsewhere in the Gospel to insert logia into Mark's framework, it may be that he has done so in this passage, and has slotted Matt. 15.24 into the material he has inherited from Mark.

Matthew's omission of Mark 7.24b and 7.27 and addition of Matt. 15.24b can be explained on the basis of what we know of Matthew's theology elsewhere in Gospel. In order to highlight Jesus' status, Matthew has a tendency to remove the passages where Mark has Jesus conceal his messiahship. This may account for why Matthew has omitted Mark 7.24b. He may also have been conscious of the impossibility of Jesus concealing himself in the way described by Mark.

Evaluation of source criticism

Is source criticism necessary? Is it important to identify the sources of a biblical writing? Its proponents certainly think so. The sources we identify and the way we arrange them will determine how we see Israelite and Christian history. Thus if we take Matthew rather than Mark as the earliest Gospel, this will affect the way we view the development of early Christian doctrine. If the Gospel of Mark is a development from rather than the basis of Matthew's Gospel, then our understanding of, for example, the development of the Christology of the early Church will be radically different.

In the nineteenth century, source criticism was of immense importance, for by its careful employment it was believed possible to construct an accurate picture of the life of Jesus. If we are to get back to the historical Jesus, then it is important to identify the earliest sources and to detach them from the later theologizing of the Church. This led, at least initially, to Mark becoming regarded as the primary source for knowledge of the life of Jesus. On the basis of Mark's allegedly historical account of Jesus' life, it was believed that an undogmatic Christology could be constructed that avoided what was regarded as the now untenable Christology inherited from the Church tradition. With the publication of Wilhelm Wrede's book *The Messianic Secret* (1901), however, the confidence that Mark could be employed to enable us to get back to the historical Jesus suffered a severe blow. Wrede showed that Mark had not provided a historically reliable account of Jesus' life, but, like the other Evangelists, had written his

Gospel from a distinct theological perspective that guided his portrayal of Jesus.

Modern source critics have consequently become less ambitious in their employment of source criticism. The aim is no longer to get as close as possible to the historical facts that underlie the writings of the New Testament, but rather to understand the formation of the biblical writings. If we can isolate an author's sources, then we can study how that author has modified and adapted his sources to suit his theological needs and those of the community for which he was writing. This can shed light on the theology of the author and on the character of the community of which he was a member.

There are, however, several criticisms that have been levelled against source criticism. Firstly, source criticism is based on the assumption that the inconsistencies and contradictions in a text mean that that text cannot be considered to be a unity. These tensions indicate that the text has been built up from the conflation of earlier, originally independent sources. This approach thus presupposes that authors strive for consistency in their writing. The problem here is: why did the purported editors of the final text not do a better job at unifying their sources? Why did they not eliminate the tensions and contradictions? Of course, if the editors had eliminated all inconsistencies, then we would not be able to identify the tensions that point to the presence of an earlier source embedded in the text. Source criticism needs to explain, however, why the biblical authors were seemingly unable to eliminate inconsistencies when integrating their sources into their writings.

Secondly, source criticism assumes that modern notions of contradiction and inconsistency were also held by ancient writers. The problem here is that we do not know whether ancient writers were as troubled by contradiction as modern human beings. What if their notion of consistency differed from ours or they were simply not as sensitive to contradictions as modern human beings? Perhaps they were more capable of living with contradictions or simply did not recognize what we call contradictions as contradictions. Presumably the author did not see the alleged textual tensions detected by source criticism as contradictions, otherwise it is difficult to see how he would have included them in the text. And if the author was not conscious of inconsistency, then is the source critic justified in using supposed inconsistencies to identify earlier sources the author has supposedly integrated into his writing? Such considerations have led some scholars to argue that the alleged inconsistencies in the text by which source criticism identifies different sources may be due not to the conflation of sources but to oriental modes of thought, which were more tolerant of inconsistency than modern Western thought.⁴⁸ Other scholars provide theological and stylistic explanations for the inconsistencies in what they

take to be a unified text.⁴⁹ The problem here is how to identify *genuine* inconsistencies.

Thirdly, source criticism has been criticized for allegedly ignoring the oral nature of ancient Israelite culture. The view of literary production as the synthesis of earlier *documents* is a modern view, and one which is not appropriate to an oral culture. It has been argued that the variations in style, vocabulary and theology detectable in biblical texts were due not to the conflation of disparate documentary sources, but to the oral transmission of the units that underlie the text. Other critics of source criticism have claimed that source critics presuppose the fragmentary character of the text and read this presupposition into the text. If we worked from the assumption of unity, then the supposedly fragmentary character of the text would not be as apparent as the source critics claim.⁵⁰ These views, however, have found only limited acceptance among scholars of the Pentateuch. The variety of style and theology, as well as breaks and inconsistencies in the text are too great, it is argued, to regard the Pentateuch as a unified whole stemming from the pen of a single author.

Chapter Four

- 1 For summaries of the methods employed by source criticism see Zimmermann, *Neutestamentliche Methodenlehre*, 83–127. Wolfgang Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft: Entwurf einer alttestamentlichen Literaturtheorie und Methodologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 50–72. David Wenham, ‘Source Criticism’, in Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*, 139–52. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 20–9. Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, 78–94. Wilhelm Egger, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament: Einführung in linguistische und historisch-kritische Methoden* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, ³1987), 162–70. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 49–63. Pauline A. Viviano, ‘Source Criticism’, in Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (eds), *To Each Its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, revised and expanded edition (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 35–57. R. N. and R. K. Soulen, ‘Source Criticism’, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001). Suzanne Boorer, ‘Source and Redaction Criticism’, in Thomas B. Dozeman (ed.), *Methods for Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95–130.
- 2 Isa. 1–39 is itself not a unified text, as is evident from such passages as Isa. 11.11–16; 21.1–10.
- 3 See Isa. 45.1 and the references to Cyrus (d. 530 BCE) in Isa. 47; 52.7–12, and elsewhere.
- 4 The term ‘literary criticism’ has sometimes been used in English in the sense of source criticism. See, for example, Norman Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).
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Chapter Five

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