

THE PATERNALISM OF MEIER'S CRITERIA:  
THE 'PROPHETIC' CASE AGAINST  
THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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**ABSTRACT**

John Meier has offered a detailed argument for a vision of the historical Jesus that centres on the image of the Elijah-like prophet of the end times. This image, while salutary in many ways, plays a powerful role in Meier's evaluation of individual biblical passages beyond the mere application of historical criteria. This essay, by making use of Meier's treatment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, pleads for recognition of the role played by factors other than the strict application of criteria in Meier's reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

IN THE LATEST INSTALMENT OF HIS MASSIVE WORK ON THE HISTORICAL JESUS, John Meier addresses the historicity of the parables, the one feature of the gospels most commonly utilised by scholars over the last two centuries of *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* as the foundation for any account of Jesus' message and ministry.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of his carefully documented and sober presentation, Meier includes an extended assessment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) in which, through a rigorous application of the criteria of authenticity, he thoroughly dismantles the popular case in favour of the parable's connection to the historical Jesus. The criteria, Meier contends, are like parents who refuse to give their demanding children what they want; instead, the criteria function *sine ira et studio* to determine what material can be attributed to Jesus. The 'children,' in Meier's mind, want a theologically relevant Jesus, while the 'parents' demand historical rigor, thus making Jesus largely irrelevant for contemporary theology. Yet, Meier's application of the criteria, while

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<sup>1</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (5 vols; Anchor Bible Reference Library and Yale Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2009 and 2016), 1. Hereafter, *AMJ* I, II, III, IV and V.

instructive and critical, does not tell the entire story behind his assessment of the passage. In fact, Meier's assessment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is also grounded in his appeal to the image of Jesus as the eschatological Elijah-like prophet, rather than, for example, the image of Jesus as the Jewish sage. This image of the Elijah-like prophet, for which Meier provided the framework in Volume Two, has been the constant touchstone for his work in volumes three, four, and five of *AMJ* and has influenced his treatment of passages, especially through his application the criterion of coherence. This essay contends that Meier's assessment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, while thorough and rigorous, is nevertheless informed by his *vision* of the historical Jesus, his understanding of Jesus' intention and self-perception, and is not merely the result of a mechanical application of criteria. As such, Meier's evaluation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan might have received a more favourable assessment had Meier's overall interpretation of Jesus moved in a direction that privileged the influence of the developing Jewish wisdom tradition in Jesus' self-understanding and ministry.

### MEIER'S PRINCIPLED PROJECT

The first stirrings of Meier's project emerged over thirty years ago in a series of short articles and essays that appeared between 1984 and 1990, in the midst of the emergence of what N. T. Wright would term, the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus.<sup>2</sup> These essays provided the basis for his initial contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus, which took the form of an article on "Jesus" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*.<sup>3</sup> In these early writings Meier situates his project over and against some of the most important theological minds of the period. At a major address to the CTSA, Meier famously attacked Latin American theologians Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo for their lack of consistency and selective use of exegetical literature in their reconstructions of the historical Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Meier offers measured praise for the efforts of Edward Schillebeeckx and E. P. Sanders for their seriousness and modesty in making

<sup>2</sup> John P. Meier, "Who Really Was Jesus of Nazareth?" in the "Outlook" section of *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1984, 1 and 5; *idem*, "Jesus Among the Historians," *New York Times Book Review*, December 21, 1986, 1, 16–19; *idem*, "Scripture as a Source for Theology," *The Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 43 (1988) 1–14; *idem*, "Jesus Among the Historians," "Jesus Among the Theologians I," "Jesus Among the Theologians II," in *The Mission of Christ and His Church* (Good New Studies 30; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazer, 1990); *idem*, "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 3–24.

<sup>3</sup> John P. Meier, "Jesus," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1316–28.

<sup>4</sup> John P. Meier, "The Bible as a Source for Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theology Society of America* 43 (1988) 1–14.

theological claims about the historical Jesus and in their application of commonly accepted criteria for historical research.<sup>5</sup> But Meier saved his most consistent and dismissive attacks for the Jesus Seminar, not only for their methodologically specious approach to historical research but also for their commitment to utilise their reconstruction of the historical Jesus as a replacement for the proclamation of the Christian church. Meier argues that theological considerations ought to be set aside as much as possible in favour of a purely historical reconstruction, one that prescind from any claims to theological relevance. This last point seems to be decisive in Meier's project: the autonomy of the historical discipline as a critical enterprise, whose formal objects are matters of historical fact and not matters of faith.<sup>6</sup> Historical consciousness, as one defining element in the contemporary theological and cultural contexts, requires contemporary theologians to make use of the reconstruction of the historical Jesus as part of their responsibility of mediating Christian faith in the modern world, but this requirement does not allow for theologians to dictate the work of historians, or vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

For Meier, historical inquiry requires a rigorous and commonly accepted methodology, one that will generate results around which historians may find broad consensus. Meier concedes that this methodology (i.e., the use of criteria) yields only a profile of Jesus' ministry, a compilation of various pieces of an inherently incomplete puzzle. This admission causes Meier to compare the results of historical Jesus research to the popular image of Victor Frankenstein's monster—a mass of assembled pieces, hardly identifiable as a “real” historical human being.<sup>8</sup> This monster of assembled pieces exercises a negative

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<sup>5</sup> Although antecedent criteria have been discussed since the Enlightenment, a continuous discussion of the criteria of historicity has been sustained from the very beginning of form criticism until today. In this regard, Meier's criteria of historicity are dependent on the insights and shortcomings of form and redaction criticism. Unlike the rather unwieldy discussions of criteria in historical Jesus research, Meier presents a crisp and focused discussion of five primary criteria and several secondary criteria. E. Schillebeeckx most directly inspires Meier's presentation of the criteria of historicity. For an important overview of the development of the criteria, see, e.g. Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTS 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Van A. Harvey (*The Historian and the Believer* [New York: Crossroad, 1966]) offers an important overview of this issue in terms of an ethics or morality of historical knowledge. For an interesting assessment of Harvey see, e.g., Terrence W. Tilley, “Practicing History, Practicing Theology,” in *Theology and the New Histories* (ed. Gary Macy; CTS Annual Volume 44; New York: Orbis, 1999) 1–20.

<sup>7</sup> On the limitation of historical Jesus research in theology see, e.g., William P. Loewe, “From the Humanity of Christ to the Historical Jesus,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 314–31.

<sup>8</sup> John Meier, *Christ and His Mission: Essays in Christology and Ecclesiology* (Good News Studies 30; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazer, 1990) 34. See also Christopher

function in relationship to theology: the historical Jesus is not the object of Christian faith, but can serve as a restraint against theological musings and preserve the autonomy of the historian (or the historical critical exegete) against the encroachment of theology, ideology or the tyranny of contemporary relevance. Although Meier has remained stridently faithful to his understanding of history and historical methodology, one can identify tensions in his work, in particular, the tension between his formal statements on methodology and his performance of historical Jesus research, a performance that is marked by a distinctly contrarian and even combative tendency.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE IMPACT OF MEIER'S ELIJAH-LIKE PROPHET

Meier's choice to evoke the image of Frankenstein's monster in an effort to communicate the nature of his historical reconstruction deserves comment. The image of the monster dramatically calls to mind the 'piecemeal' character of historical Jesus research, and the image helps to illustrate the limitations inherent in any line of historical inquiry. It also helps to emphasise how unmanageable and freakish the historical Jesus is in relation to contemporary sensibilities. The image of Frankenstein's monster, however, is also somewhat ironic, since in Mary Shelley's novel there is no description of the secret of life that animates the monster. Victor Frankenstein, in fact, refuses to share the secret with Walton since the good doctor believed that this secret would corrupt whoever possessed it, but it is this secret that gives life to Meier's portrait of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Yet Meier insists again in Volume Five, "In reconstructing the his-

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McMahon, "Christology, History, and Frankenstein's Monster: The Evolution of the Historical Jesus in John P. Meier," *New Blackfriars* 83 (November 2002) 504–13.

<sup>9</sup> This point has formed the nucleus of Luke Timothy Johnson's criticisms of Meier's project (see *The Real Jesus* [San Francisco: Harper, 1995]; see also his reviews of *A Marginal Jew* in *Commonweal*, April 24, 1992, 24–26; Nov 18, 1994, 33–35; Nov., 9, 2001, 21–23). Others have offered substantial critiques of Meier's methodology and the philosophical 'baggage' he seems to be unaware he is carrying into his project. Of note, see, Ben Meyer, "The Relevance of Horizon," *Downside Review* 386 (1994) 1–15; Tony Kelly, "The Historical Jesus and Human Subjectivity: A Response to John Meier," *Pacifica* 4 (1991) 202–28; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) Chapter 4; Roch Kereszty, "Historical Research, Theological Inquiry, and the Reality of Jesus: Reflections on the Method of J. P. Meier," *Communio* 19 (1992) 576–600. Kereszty uses Paul Ricoeur's notion of the role of subjectivity in the historian's craft as articulated in "Objectivity and Subjectivity in History," in *History and Truth* (trans. Charles A. Kelbley; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965) 21–40.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term "portrait" deliberately. The word stands in contrast to Meier's characterisation of the historical Jesus as an "abstraction." Additionally, the term, "portrait" also reflects the artistic and imaginative dimensions of Meier's project he seems unwilling to acknowledge.

torical Jesus, the whole *is* the sum of the parts selected for analysis.”<sup>11</sup> But, such protestations notwithstanding, it is clear that throughout *AMJ*, Meier regularly employs historical imagination as he extends himself into the data available in order to create a portrait, an image of Jesus, the boundaries of which extend beyond the pieces he has assembled in order to impart meaning and significance.

Meier’s ability to extend himself into the world of first-century Palestinian Judaism is anchored only by his commitment to the study of ancient texts, since he refuses to make use of allied disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, politics, etc.) as tools for understanding and reconstructing the life of Jesus. Perhaps the most glaring example of this limitation and its consequences can be found in Meier’s discussion of Jesus’ disciples in Volume Three.<sup>12</sup> For example, although Meier asserts that there is abundant textual evidence that Jesus accepted women among his closest followers, Meier nevertheless fails to explain what Jesus’ motivation might have been in this remarkable practice.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Meier affirms the authenticity of Jesus’ practice of table fellowship with disreputable characters but fails to explore the social, economic and political aspects of such actions with the thoroughness he demonstrates in his treatment of Jesus’ sayings on the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup> In his defence Meier contends that “a present-day historian must not ... retroject modern thought about social classes, revolutionary, utopian egalitarianism, and theoretical anarchy *into the mind* of a first-century Palestinian Jew ...”<sup>15</sup> Granted that anachronisms are to be avoided, and cross-temporal/cross-cultural models are rightly viewed with caution, this does not mean that the historian ought, in principle, to refrain from using appropriate theories about social and economic systems in order to gain some clarity about the social world of first-century Palestine and an understanding of what ancient people thought.<sup>16</sup> Just because a theory is modern, it does not necessarily follow that the reality a given theory helps to illuminate is necessarily anachronistic.

<sup>11</sup> *AMJ* V: 27 n. 28, emphasis in original.

<sup>12</sup> On this failure in Meier’s work, see, e.g., Mark Allen Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998) 144, and Larry W. Hurtado, “A Taxonomy of Recent Historical-Jesus Research,” in *Whose Historical Jesus* (eds. William E Arnal and Michael Desjardins; Studies in Christianity and Judaism n. 7; Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1997) 283.

<sup>13</sup> *AMJ* III: 247.

<sup>14</sup> On Jesus’ table fellowship, see, e.g., *AMJ* II: 149–51.

<sup>15</sup> *AMJ* III: 250; emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> In response to Mary Douglas’s evolving views of biblical purity (*AMJ* IV: 426–27 n. 2), Meier quips, “Social science is fine—but whose social science is one using?” Meier apparently does not see the irony of the remark in light of evolving criteria, developing accounts of first-century Judaism or changing views on the development of the synoptic tradition.

In the second volume of his massive project Meier reconstructs the message of Jesus using the criteria, especially the criterion of multiple attestation of forms and sources.<sup>17</sup> In the process of reconstructing the message of Jesus, Meier admits that the “kingdom of God” is a symbol that draws upon a narrative found embedded in various parts of the OT, but he insists that it is a narrative with which Jesus and his contemporaries were intimately familiar.<sup>18</sup> Meier reconstructs this narrative world of Jesus and his contemporaries by sympathetically and imaginatively projecting himself into the minds and the texts of first-century Palestinian Jews in order to better contextualise and therefore understand the words and deeds of Jesus in the canonical gospels.<sup>19</sup> Yet, Meier reconstructs the message of Jesus without looking at the parables of Jesus—even those parables explicitly centred on the in-breaking kingdom. The lone exception is Meier’s treatment of the parable of the children playing in the street found in the second Baptist block from Q (Matt 11:16–19 // Luke 7:31–35). Interestingly, in this context, Meier argues for a global acceptance of parables as part of the earliest traditions about Jesus, even if he remains somewhat sceptical about the authenticity of individual parables. Moreover, he also presents parables within the context of the developing OT wisdom tradition.

The “parable” as a way of teaching reaches back to a flexible, many-faceted form of OT wisdom speech known as a *m š l*, often translated in the LXX as “parable” (*parabol*) and in the English OT as “proverb.” At the heart of a *m š l* lies some sort of comparison, used as a tool for teaching and capable of being dressed in many different literary forms.<sup>20</sup>

Meier includes aphorisms, examples and allegories, among other sub-forms of the genre, *m š l*.<sup>21</sup> Although Meier will maintain, in Volume Five, that Jesus likely used parables in his preaching and teaching, Meier remains sceptical about the authenticity of individual parables, save for a small group of parables Meier calls “the happy few”—a telling reference to Henry V’s combative St. Crispin’s Day speech in Shakespeare’s play.

In utilising the image of the Elijah-like prophet of the last days, Meier is forced beyond his stated goal of determining what material in the sources might come from Jesus; rather, Meier seeks to make sense of the context of Jesus, impart motivation and make tentative connections and correlations in an

<sup>17</sup> *AMJ* II: 241 and 252.

<sup>18</sup> See *AMJ* II: Chapter 14.

<sup>19</sup> In some ways this is similar to N. T. Wright’s reconstruction of the stories that informed the worldview of first-century Judaism where he employs the structuralism of A. J. Greimas; see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992) 215–43.

<sup>20</sup> *AMJ* II: 145.

<sup>21</sup> *AMJ* II: 146.

effort to fill out a picture of the historical Jesus—a Jesus that may have more relevance for Christian faith than Meier would allow. In this context Meier is rightly compelled to ask the basic Christological question of the historical Jesus: “Who does this man think he is?”<sup>22</sup> Meier’s account of Jesus’ self-understanding articulated in Volumes Two through Five seems much less hypothetical than Volume One made the entire project sound: “As I have argued throughout the first four volumes of *A Marginal Jew*, the historical Jesus presented himself to his fellow 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestinian Jews first and foremost as the miracle-working, Elijah-like prophet of the end time.”<sup>23</sup> Although Meier acknowledges that Jesus engaged in halakic debates, proffered teachings centred in the wisdom tradition, and said and did other things that cannot be encompassed by the image of the Elijah-like prophet, that image remains the recurring pattern into which Meier situates the interpretation of the biblical data he continues to examine.<sup>24</sup> And Meier’s image of Jesus as a prophet like Elijah is generally well founded even if Meier’s thesis contains holes.<sup>25</sup>

#### MEIER’S ASSESSMENT OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10:27–36)

Even the casual reader of Volume Five of *AMJ* cannot fail to notice the book’s cover art: Van Gogh’s *The Good Samaritan*. While cover art and jacket designs are fully in the control of editors and publishers, these professionals rightly understand how Meier has singled out this parable as emblematic of *AMJ*’s rigorous pursuit of a thoroughly historical and unsentimental approach to the parables. True to his tendency to embrace the role of historical-critical curmudgeon and contrarian, Meier sets the tone of his presentation in Volume

<sup>22</sup> *AMJ* II: 1046.

<sup>23</sup> *AMJ* V: 40. See, also John P. Meier, “From Elijah-like Prophet to Royal Davidic Messiah,” in *Jesus: A Colloquium in the Holy Land* (ed. Doris Donnelly; New York: 2001) 45–83.

<sup>24</sup> Meier regularly evokes the image of the Elijah-like prophet in conjunction with the criterion of coherence to bolster his more controversial positions. For example, see *AMJ* IV: 527–28, where Meier’s treatment of the love commandments runs in a rather unemotional and restricted direction, he states that the love Jesus commands is “a truly biblical, Jewish love. While not divorced from emotions, it is first of all a matter of willing and doing good, not feeling good.” This account of the love command “fits in more specifically with [Jesus’] self-conception as the eschatological prophet called to begin the regathering of a scattered Israel in the end time.”

<sup>25</sup> See Tobias Hägerland, “A Prophet like Elijah according to Isaiah? Rethinking the Identity of Jesus,” in *The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices* (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2014) 70–86. Hägerland challenges Meier’s characterisation of Jesus as the Elijah-like prophet on several grounds, including Meier’s failure to distinguish the earthly Elijah of the OT and the eschatological expectations around the figure of Elijah circulating in the first century and Meier’s failure to discern the elements of his portrait of Elijah that were not specific to him (e.g., itinerancy and illiteracy).

Five by proffering seven highly “Unfashionable Theses” on parables research.<sup>26</sup> Among these theses, numbers two, three and four are of particular importance.

Thesis 2:

The OT wisdom *m-š-l* is not the prime source or analogue of those “parables” that are most characteristic of and particular to the Synoptic Jesus within the NT corpus.<sup>27</sup>

Thesis 3:

It is in the “writing prophets” (alias the Latter Prophets) that we see both (1) a notable expansion of the genre of comparative short story used in argumentation about key events in Israel's history and (2) the use of *m-š-l* vocabulary to designate this type of speech.<sup>28</sup>

Thesis 4:

The Synoptic Jesus who tells narrative parables stands primarily not in the sapiential but in the prophetic tradition of the Jewish Scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

These theses represent the fruit of years of study and insight into the past two centuries of parables research. Yet, Meier's meticulous study also clearly finds a point of convergence with the emerging gestalt of his research into Jesus as the Elijah-like prophet of the eschaton and not the social-contrarian teacher of wisdom. This vision of Jesus' parables, as Meier admits, stands in contrast to the characterisation of the parables from a wide range of both conservative scholars (e.g., Ben Witherington, III) and liberals (e.g., John Dominic Crossan and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) who view the wisdom tradition as the most appropriate analog for understanding Jesus' use of parables. It seems as though Meier wants to challenge the “unpapal conclave” of his first volume when it comes to the interpretive framework for the parables of Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

As he enters into the discussion of the parables, Meier “doubles down” on his characterisation of Jesus as the Elijah-like prophet.

Our quest concerns what the historical Jesus intended when he decided to use parables in general and to speak this or that parable in particular. *This historical purpose is one reason*

<sup>26</sup> *AMJ* V: 30–81.

<sup>27</sup> *AMJ* V: 36.

<sup>28</sup> *AMJ* V: 38.

<sup>29</sup> *AMJ* V: 40.

<sup>30</sup> *AMJ* I: 1–2.

*why I have kept consideration of the parables until late in my overall project. Without a firm historical framework arising out of the mission of a peculiar 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish prophet, these parables are open to as many different interpretations as there are imaginative critics.* In contrast, once we locate and anchor the parables within the portrait of the historical Jesus that has slowly emerged throughout our first four volumes, the possible ranges of a given parable's meaning is considerably reduced—though a range still exists.<sup>31</sup>

As the above quote indicates, Meier seeks to control the interpretation of the parables in order to define the role parables play in the reconstruction of Jesus' message and given that he has developed an overarching pattern of Jesus message and ministry, he can control the interpretation of the parables within the image of the Elijah-like eschatological prophet he has constructed. This construction helps to reinforce Meier's portrait by allowing material that coheres well with it to be included in the portrait, thus building an increasingly formidable edifice against encroaching contemporary relevance. "[T]he parables cohere with Jesus' symbolic healings and exorcisms as well as with his symbolic 'street theatre,' such as his 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem and his 'cleansing' of the temple."<sup>32</sup>

While Meier has moved beyond the philosophical and ideological prejudices of the early form critics (i.e., latent anti-Semitism, scepticism concerning the miracle tradition, pre-occupation with existentialism, etc.), he nevertheless remains under their influence, and this is reflected in his appreciation for the reconstruction of the sources for the synoptic tradition. One can see how often the appeal to multiple attestation of sources and forms plays a decisive role in the assessment of any passage.

In light of these theses, and in conjunction with the absence of support from other criteria, his analysis centres on the literary and theological predilection of the author of Luke-Acts and sees the parable of the Good Samaritan as "a perfect specimen of an L parable"<sup>33</sup> and therefore not attributable to the historical Jesus. In the space of a few pages, and some lengthy footnotes, Meier reaches the following conclusion:

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<sup>31</sup> *AMJ* V: 33, emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> *AMJ* V: 33.

<sup>33</sup> *AMJ* V: 119. Meier cites numerous exegetes in basic agreement with him on this point, including Gerhard Sellin, "Lukas als Gleichniserzähler: der Erzählung vom barmherzigen Samariter (Lk 10:25–37)," *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 65 (1974) 166–89, and *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 66 (1975) 19–60; Vincent Henry Stanton, *The Gospels, a Historical Document* (3 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909) II: 200; H. F. D. Sparks, "The Semitisms of St. Luke's Gospel," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943) 129–38.

In sum, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, taken together with its introduction, is thoroughly Lucan on every imaginable level: the macro-structure of Luke-Acts, the macro-structure of the Great Journey Narrative, the characteristically Lucan literary structure of introductory anecdote-plus-parable, the exact parallel in the literary structure of first the introduction and then the parable, the Lucan theology suffusing both parts of the bipartite pericope, the typically Lucan vocabulary and grammar, and of course Luke's unique focus on the figure of the Samaritan, fleshed out in midrashic fashion from an OT narrative.

... If we strip away every Lucan theological, structural, literary, and philological trait from 10:25–37, what hypothetical poltergeist are we left with? ... and how would we move from this poltergeist to the historical Jesus and the parable he supposedly composed?<sup>34</sup>

Meier may be correct in his evaluation of the parable, in my opinion, even if his case is perhaps somewhat overstated. But Meier's language strikes a paternalistic note as he admonishes those who would argue on behalf of the parable's authenticity. He sees the criteria of historicity as exercising "the indispensable but annoying role of parent: they say no to what we want."<sup>35</sup> Meier asks those who would suggest that Luke is reworking material that has its origins in the preaching of Jesus, "How would we get back from Luke through a hypothetical source to whatever was the original parable of Jesus?"<sup>36</sup>

Although Meier's affinity for the form critics has invited a consistent appeal to the criterion of multiple attestation of sources and forms in Meier's project, one would do well to note the importance of the criterion of coherence as well. The criterion of coherence assumes its conclusions, to a great extent, insofar as it presupposes a core of material that has been judged authentic by other criteria.<sup>37</sup> So, coherence really amplifies the portrait that has emerged in the

<sup>34</sup> AMJ V: 207–8.

<sup>35</sup> AMJ V: 371. He cites Wesley's experience at the meeting on Aldersgate Street, as having his heart "strangely warmed." Meier repeatedly contrasts such a desire with the cold hard truth of historical-critical methodology.

<sup>36</sup> AMJ V: 226.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (trans. M. E. Boring; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002) 17–19. This is a revised and expanded English translation of the German book, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (Novum testamentum et orbis antiquus 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). The criterion of coherence was championed by Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) 105, and *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols; trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM, 1951, 1955) I: 4–11. On the importance of the criterion, see, e.g., Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: West-

course of an investigation, and Meier's selection of the interpretive matrix of "Elijah-like prophet" has enabled him to give life to his portrait of Jesus, a portrait that is clearly no mere abstraction. For the historical endeavour Meier invites critics to pursue, imagination plays a decisive role alongside the criteria,<sup>38</sup> but re-evaluating the Parable of the Good Samaritan would also require a reassessment of Meier's theses about the parables.

#### WISDOM, COHERENCE, AND THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Clearly, there is a heavily Lucan flavour to the parable as it stands in the journey narrative, and even if there is a core parable that goes back to Jesus, the reconstruction of the *ipsissima verba* remains impossible. But, as Meier himself has demonstrated, the evidence might be interpreted differently, especially if a different hermeneutical portrait were utilised. In other words, Meier's assessments of individual passages, like the Good Samaritan, are occasionally softer than his presentation often suggests.

First, it might be noted that Meier's approach to the passage was not nearly as thoroughly pessimistic when he treated the question obliquely as he addressed Jesus' relationship to the historical Samaritans in Volume Three.<sup>39</sup> Although the redactional interests of Luke are evident, this evidence does not move Meier to dismiss the parable entirely.

I consider it more likely that, while the Parable of the Good Samaritan shows the redactional style and theology of Luke in its final form and placement, it is not simply a creation of Luke but goes back to his special L tradition. [...] Whether the parable goes back to the historical Jesus is more difficult to say, though Christian piety and sentiment, if not hard-nosed critical arguments, certainly favour the idea.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Meier notes that there is multiple attestation of sources and forms that support a picture of Jesus as standing "over and against the typical Jewish views of the day in that he held a benign view of Samaritans, even when that attitude was not reciprocated."<sup>41</sup> Certainly, this attitude should help to contrib-

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minster, 1963); J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963); C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1935).

<sup>38</sup> For an example of Meier's own use of historical imagination run wild, see his characterisation of Luke's agency in the creation of Luke 15:11–32, The Parable of the Lost Son; *AMJ* V: 225, 225 n. 46.

<sup>39</sup> *AMJ* III: 546–47.

<sup>40</sup> *AMJ* III: 546; see also, e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Anchor Bible; 2 vols; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981, 1985) II: 882–90.

<sup>41</sup> *AMJ* III: 549.

ute to a more positive evaluation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, even in light of the image of the Elijah-like prophet (see, 1 Kgs 17:7–16).

Third, L material is not always judged inauthentic in Meier's project. For example, in his foundational work reconstructing the message of Jesus, Meier makes the case for the authenticity of Luke 17:20b and 21b, a unique Lucan logion (L):<sup>42</sup>

The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed;  
For behold, the kingdom of God is among you

All of this is done within the context of delineating the message of Jesus, and in particular, the temporal dimensions of the *basileia*. This logion is judged authentic through an appeal to the criterion of coherence in addition to an appeal to several hapax legomena. Meier treats the passage "after the consideration of a number of other sayings"<sup>43</sup> in an effort to make his argument through an appeal to the criterion of coherence as well as to literary and stylistic similarities with other authentic passages. But at the heart of Meier's argument for the passage rests the conviction that Jesus understood the advent of the kingdom as, in some sense, already present or anticipated in his ministry. Meier sums up his argument:

I think that the convergence of the signs of pre-Lucan tradition, the vocabulary foreign to most NT writers and yet typical of Jesus, and the coherence of the saying with the general style and content of the sayings of Jesus already judged authentic makes the view that Lk 17:20b + 21b is authentic more probable than the opposite opinion.<sup>44</sup>

Admittedly, there are many differences between the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the logion in Luke 17, but Meier's presentation of the passage and his tenacity in arguing for the historical plausibility of this L material reflect the dynamics of his methodology. Although he remains appropriately cautious of grand hypotheses, he must, nevertheless, construct a narrative portrait, a worldview, a self-understanding, a mindset, within which to situate the authentic pieces of Jesus' life he extracts from the sources.

At least one option for the elusive "poltergeist" Meier claims one needs in order to positively assess the authenticity of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is the Jewish wisdom tradition as it had developed within Palestinian Judaism by the first century. Meier begrudgingly acknowledges the influence of the wisdom tradition on Jesus but refuses to afford it any real prominence in his reconstruction of Jesus' ministry. Although many have argued for a wisdom

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<sup>42</sup> *AMJ* II: 423–30.

<sup>43</sup> *AMJ* II: 424.

<sup>44</sup> *AMJ* II: 430.

context for understanding Jesus, noteworthy in this regard are the efforts of Ben Witherington, who in his reconstruction of the historical Jesus blends the categories of eschatological prophet and Jewish sage. It is precisely in this blended category that Witherington situates an authentically and thoroughly Jewish Jesus, but one who is influenced by diverse traditions. Moreover, in this context Witherington is able to locate the parable of the Good Samaritan as a prophetic / wisdom *m ṣ l* and an authentic part of the early Jesus tradition.<sup>45</sup> Witherington's both-and approach to the wisdom tradition and prophetic eschatology averts the temptation to collapse the sapiential aspects of Jesus' teaching into the Cynic-Stoic hypothesis made popular by members of the Jesus Seminar. Witherington instead argues for a portrait of Jesus which includes the

correlation of Wisdom with Torah, but also of a sage who draws on eschatological traditions, Deuteronomistic themes, the story of Israel's salvation history, prophetic assessment of cultic worship, and expresses his wisdom even in hymns and beatitudes.<sup>46</sup>

His argument centres on the developments in the wisdom tradition he maps through Ben Sira, Qoheleth and the Wisdom of Solomon, and concluding in the message and ministry of Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

The eschatological dimensions of the wisdom tradition, as well as the close connection of Torah and Wisdom (characteristic of Ben Sira), are both evident in the preparatory anecdote and the Parable of Good Samaritan itself. Witherington rejects the division of the anecdote from the parable and eschews Gerhard Sellin's scepticism regarding the authenticity of the Good Samaritan, arguing instead that the redactional hand of Luke does not hide the parable's disclosure of the counter-order on offer in the in-breaking of the kingdom of God (even though the phrase is not employed in the context of the parable). Moreover, the parable's explicit concern with the network of issues involving purity, holiness and Torah observance suggests that it coheres well with the understanding of Jesus as Jewish sage.

To this point, the acceptability of Meier's five "primary" criteria has gone unchallenged, but it should be noted that the criteria are not without their is-

<sup>45</sup> See, Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994). It should be noted that Witherington is not the only exegete to employ the wisdom tradition as the interpretive framework for understanding Jesus, but his efforts closely resonate with much of Meier's work. For this reason he provides an interesting counterpoint to Meier's approach to Jesus and to the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

<sup>46</sup> Witherington, *Jesus the Sage* 113.

<sup>47</sup> Although the Wisdom of Solomon is a non-Palestinian text, Witherington seeks to establish a trajectory of development within the wisdom tradition, broadly considered, within which to situate the message and ministry of Jesus.

sues, especially when it comes to working with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>48</sup> John Meier probably represents the epitome of the so-called “criteria approach” to the historical Jesus. But anyone even casually concerned about the contemporary quest for the historical Jesus will have noted the controversies surrounding all of the criteria of authenticity, but especially the so-called criterion of dissimilarity, or double dissimilarity. The history of this criterion’s role in historical Jesus research has led some historians to propose a criterion of “double similarity and dissimilarity” or “plausibility” (*Plausibilitätskriterium*) that echoes and amplifies the thrust of the criterion of coherence.<sup>49</sup> What these scholars have in mind is to reconstruct a Jesus that fits within early Judaism but one that also can be explained as the progenitor of a new movement, features of which are discernible even after his death. So a given passage or episode of the gospel tradition may be judged authentic if it:

- a) credibly coheres with an early first-century Palestinian Jewish context,
- b) reflects some idea or practice that stands over and against what is known about conventional Judaism in the first century, but still
- c) continues to play a role in early Christian thought
- d) without it being a dominant feature

Within a wisdom context, and through a nuanced application of the criterion of coherence and even plausibility, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, while demonstrating Lucan editorial activity, nevertheless might be judged as having its origins within the ministry of Jesus. For example:

- a) Witherington’s image of Jesus as Jewish sage finds amplification in the parable/example story genre, including the opening exchange with the *nomikos* in Luke 10:25–29.
- b) Meier admits that Jesus’ attitude toward the Samaritans stands out against the practice of first-century Palestinian Judaism.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., the collection of essays in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (ed. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne; London: T&T Clark, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996) 131–33; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. J. Bowden; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998) 115–18; Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (trans. J. Bowden; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002) esp. 210–11; and Dagmar Winter, “Saving the Quest for Authenticity from the Criterion of Dissimilarity: History and Plausibility,” in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* 115–31.

- c) Both Luke-Acts and John testify to the importance of a Samaritan connection/mission in the early church.
- d) But Samaritans do not play a significant role as “Samaritans” within the church beyond the first century.

This is not a definitive argument for the authenticity of the parable. Clearly. But perhaps the dismissive tone of Meier’s evaluation might demand a lighter touch and an admission that the evidence is not nearly so unidirectional as Meier’s presentation might make it appear.

## CONCLUSION

Volume Five of *AMJ* includes an endorsement from Harold Bloom, which reads: “Fr. Meier’s amazingly disinterested accounts of the career of Jesus will now include this subtle and astute exegesis of the parables.” But this essay has suggested that Meier’s work, while salutary in so many ways, is not “disinterested.” Rather, Meier’s efforts centre on a repudiation of a certain vision of Jesus, a portrait of Jesus that centres on the wisdom traditions of Israel. Many of Meier’s concerns are well founded, and he provides his interlocutors and critics with clear reasoning, ample footnotes and respectful engagement of a variety of positions, so his take on the parables cannot be characterised as idiosyncratic. Rather, his work provides an insightful, sympathetic and critically informed portrait of Jesus that makes a substantial and even indispensable contribution to the contemporary debates on the historical Jesus. While his work will endure as an essential resource in the on-going conversations about the historical Jesus, his efforts will necessarily require appropriate contextualisation. This is no failure, for it could not have been otherwise. But readers may rightly hope for an epilogue to the final volume in which Meier will revisit his methodological statements in light of his performance and, in the spirit of Augustine, issue a set of *retractationes* that would nuance his earlier methodological statements, defend the overall project, and help readers make good use of *AMJ*’s laudable achievement.

This is when he told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), to explain that people should love everyone, including their enemies. It is easy to love friends and family, but it is much more difficult to love those who you may not get along with, or even those who may harm or hurt you. To show love to your enemies is to truly love as Christ did. Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus uses the example of the Jew and the Samaritan, who would not ordinarily have been friendly towards each other. The parable ends with Jesus giving a commandment to go out and do the same as the Samaritan had done. This teaching of loving one's enemies is also reflected in Matthew's Gospel. 1. 2. Paternalism generally involves competing claims between individual liberty and. The discursive use of the term paternalism is almost exclusively negative, employed to diminish specific policies or practices by presenting them in opposition to individual freedom. History of paternalism. The term paternalism first appeared in the late 19th century as an implied critique predicated on the inherent value of personal liberty and autonomy, positions elegantly outlined by Immanuel Kant in 1785 and John Stuart Mill in 1859. Actually being a Good Samaritan is helping someone that might hate you and praying for someone that dislikes you to the max. The truth is that we can all be good Samaritans or we can be someone that doesn't care for anyone but themselves. Which are you? Who Are the Samaritans? As usually happens in such cases, they adopt the worship of their false, pagan gods, falling into idolatry. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem and tried to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans would pour pigs blood in the temple area which was to make the temple unclean and the building project of the temple had to be stopped so that the temple area could be cleaned up again. In the first place, the name of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is never mentioned by Jesus. Prof J M Darley and Dr C D Batson conduct experiment to determine motivations underlying Good Samaritan principle using Princeton Theological Seminary students and discover that situational factors are more significant than fact that people have become apathetic or soc dehumanized; conclude that failure to intervene in situation can be better understood by knowing relationship among bystanders rather than between bystander and victim; experiment described; illus. Did those who were en route to record a talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan stop? Or did they, like the priest and Levite, pass by on the other side? In Biblical times there were few controlled field studies, but in recent years psychologists have been making up for lost centuries. The parable of the Good Samaritan is told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.[Lk 10:25-37] It is about a traveler who is stripped of clothing, beaten, and left half dead alongside the road. First a Jewish priest and then a Levite comes by, but both avoid the man. Finally, a Samaritan happens upon the traveler. Although Samaritans and Jews despised each other, the Samaritan helps the injured man. Jesus is described as telling the parable in response to the question from a lawyer, "And who is my neighbor