1. Introduction

The criteria of authenticity have established themselves within New Testament studies as the most widely used means by which material in the gospels—whether concerning the deeds or words of Jesus—are assessed as authentic. By authentic is meant material that is thought to have originated with Jesus, or come as close as one can legitimately determine using the means at our critical disposal. Despite the criteria having become widely accepted as the methodologically most responsible approach to assessing the authenticity of various episodes and sayings, there are still a number of issues that readily emerge when the criteria are subjected to critical scrutiny. This chapter will summarize some of the issues surrounding the criteria, including their development, their use in other historical disciplines, critical periods in treatment of the criteria, and assessments of the major criteria in use today.

2. Development of the Criteria of Authenticity

Most of the recent treatments of the criteria of authenticity take a synchronic, or even a-historical, view of the criteria, in which they are...
presented in synoptic form in order to be compared and contrasted.\(^3\)

As handy as such treatments may be in providing useful points of comparison among the criteria, such presentations have had the deleterious effect of bestowing on the criteria a universality and timelessness that simply cannot sustain critical analysis. The synchronic and synoptic presentations offer a variety of criteria that have originated in differing historical, literary and linguistic contexts and present them as all providing comparatively equal evaluative tools for assessment of Jesus tradition.\(^4\) The result is that the important historical, cultural, theological,

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