

Response to the Respondents

RICHARD BAUCKHAM

University of St. Andrews

St. Andrews, Scotland

Response to Samuel Byrskog

SAMUEL BYRSKOG makes several important points. I will try to respond to those that seem to me especially to require my comment.

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* I did not provide an adequate discussion of the relationship between ancient historiography and biography or of the implications of that relationship for the Gospels. I hope to remedy that omission in a forthcoming book. Meantime, I have published an essay arguing that the Gospel of John in particular has characteristics readers would have regarded as features of historiography, making this Gospel an example of the kind of *bios* that was quite close to historiography.¹

Unfortunately we still lack an accurate typology of ancient biographies, but one way of classifying them is by *proxima genera*, that is, by their relationship to any other of the literary genres with which the flexible genre of biography overlaps. I would argue that the Gospels are biographies quite close to historiography. One reason for that judgment is Luke's preface. If it is an indication of the genre of Luke, as I think it is, then it must also be an indication of the genre of Matthew and Mark, which can hardly be said to differ generically from Luke.

Another important aspect is that the Gospels are contemporary biography, written (even if only just) within living memory of their subject. There are quite a number of such contemporary biographies, including Lucian's biography of the philosopher Demonax, with whom he had

¹ Richard Bauckham, "Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John," in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); originally published in *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 17–36.

studied; the same writer's biography of the "false prophet" Alexander of Abonoteichus (Lucian had had some personal contact with him, but also knew some of his devotees); Xenophon's *Life of Agesilaus*, the Spartan king and general (Xenophon had served under him); Tacitus's life of Agricola, the Roman politician and general who was Tacitus's father-in-law; the life of Plotinus the Neo-Platonic philosopher by his disciple Porphyry; Cornelius Nepos's life of his friend and patron Atticus (mostly written in Atticus's lifetime); and Josephus's autobiography. The Gospels should primarily be compared with these biographies, rather than with such patently legendary or fictional biographies as those of Homer and Aesop, who were figures of the distant past, or even with Plutarch's quite well researched biographies of people who lived long before his time.

That the Gospels are contemporary lives itself brings them close to historiography, which ancient historians thought could only properly be written within living memory of the events. The reason for this restriction was largely methodological: it made possible firsthand acquaintance with the places and firsthand contact with eyewitness sources. I think that this aspect of historiography (stressed and expounded in Byrskog's own book, *Story as History, History as Story*) means that the Gospels, as contemporary biographies, would have been expected to have eyewitness sources. Pretending to eyewitness testimony they did not really have would, if discovered, have been regarded as a breach of faith with their readers.

This brings me to the issue of truth in ancient historiography. I think we should probably distinguish three aspects of this issue. First, ancient historians were, like most historians before modern times, storytellers who needed to interest and entertain their readers. Licence to tell the story in an effective way—adding vivid detail, simplifying the plot, and so forth—was taken for granted and not generally regarded as untruthful, if the substance was based on good evidence. Because speeches were seen as essential to history and accounts of them often not available, licence to create speeches that were in character and appropriate to the occasion was also widely accepted. It may be these widely accepted historiographical conventions that led Seneca to dismiss all history as lies, but this was not a common attitude.

Secondly, historians and biographers often wrote to persuade their readers, and this is where rhetoric comes in. No doubt, this could open the door to deliberate falsehood, but not necessarily. As Byrskog himself puts it, "persuasion was of course most effective when it could be shown to relate as closely as possible to the factual truth of the past."² He also

² Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History, History as Story* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 210.

comments: "Persuasion and factual credibility were supplementary rhetorical virtues, not contradictory."³ Another important consideration is that, whereas in a court of law persuasion was the entire purpose of a speech, this was not necessarily the case with history and biography. The Greek lives of the poets, for example, were not written to persuade so much as simply to satisfy the curiosity of readers who wanted to know about the lives of famous literary figures. So we should be a little cautious about supposing that, when Quintilian says that "it is sometimes permitted also for a philosopher to tell even a lie" (2.17.27), the concession also applies to historical writing.

Thirdly, some historians made false claims to have visited sites or to have been present at events or to have had access to the testimony of particular eyewitnesses. Lucian severely mocks them. There is no reason to suppose that some people thought such practices by historians justifiable. The claims are simply fraudulent. They actually constitute evidence that historians were expected to have eyewitness sources. So I am not entirely convinced that there were two recognized ways of writing history or biography (accurate or rhetorical) or that we must decide in which category the Gospels belong.

The authors of the Gospels were not trained orators (though they may have been experienced popular storytellers) and their works are, in literary respects, unsophisticated. We have only to study Matthew's and Luke's redactions of Markan material to see that their elaboration of their sources is quite minimal. There seems to me no reason to suppose that the Synoptic evangelists handled any of their sources much differently. This means that, by contrast with the much more sophisticated way in which Polybius and Tacitus absorbed sources into their own literary compositions, in the Gospels the eyewitness sources still show through.

Byrskog's last point is really a theological one. A strong emphasis in my book is on the co-inherence of fact and meaning in the eyewitness testimonies. Even as they experienced the events that they witnessed and even as they first remembered them, the eyewitnesses were interpreting what they saw and heard. There is no way back to uninterpreted occurrences of any real interest. The reports about Jesus came with interpretation from the start. Later reflection by the eyewitnesses themselves, for example in the light of the resurrection, might expand the significance of events, as might the use of the traditions by the writers of the Gospels. But such further interpretation would normally be continuous with the significance the events originally had for those who were involved in them

³ Byrskog, *Story*, 223.

when they occurred. (I would say the same, for example, of Holocaust testimonies.) This gives the testimonies of the eyewitnesses a kind of normative priority for interpretation. Since there is no way back to the uninterpreted event, all further interpretation is dependent on them. This was the significance, in part, of the canonizing process. The apostolic eyewitnesses were understood to be the authoritative sources of normative knowledge of Jesus in his history, able both to report reliably and to interpret faithfully. Such an understanding corresponds to the fact that, for faith in the real incarnation of God in the human historical life of Jesus, the history really mattered, and that it was not readily prised apart from the interpretation that was given it from the beginning. Only if it were possible to reconstruct a purely historical Jesus and set out afresh to interpret him would it be possible to argue, as Byrskog suggests, “that theology should be equally concerned with the *various* testimonies of the same historical event during several centuries of interpretation and so soften the heavy emphasis on the eyewitnesses.” I do think, quite strongly, that Jesus needs to be interpreted contextually in each new context in which the Gospel is preached and lived, but the Church has always understood that such interpretation must be deeply rooted in the Gospels.

Response to Frank Matera

Frank Matera gives a sympathetic and accurate account of the main lines and results of my arguments. I value his positive assessment of my work. I do not need to dispute or correct anything he says! Perhaps I can add something I think is of great importance for the issue of history and interpretation that he covers in his last section. Cognitive psychology shows that as early as when we commit an event or an experience to memory we are already interpreting it. In the case of an event that was of great significance to us, this is especially the case. If it then becomes an event that we frequently recount to others, two things can happen. One is that the way we tell the story quickly acquires a fairly fixed form. We might vary it to an extent for different audiences in different contexts, but substantially we repeat what we have been saying all along. It would be different with an event we hardly ever recalled, even to ourselves. In that case, asked to remember the event long afterwards, our memory would be much less trustworthy. Frequent recall is a key feature of memory that makes for stability. That is true when modern people like ourselves repeat a story in purely informal ways, but it is even more likely to be the case in an oral society when an eyewitness, in a formal setting, is repeating a story highly prized by the community. But the other thing that can happen is what cognitive psychology calls “deferred meaning”:

where the significance of the event dawns on us in retrospect, often in the light of later events or circumstances. The Gospel of John actually describes this process (e.g. 2:22; 12:14–16), showing that early Christians were fully self-conscious about it.

After form criticism, we need to think more about how these two factors—fixed form and deferred meaning—relate. The developing interpretation may affect the way the story is told (or the saying of Jesus recalled), but then again it may not. Repetition can make the repeated form of the story sturdy enough to survive, while the additional interpretation remains external to the story itself. A nice illustration is Mark 7:19b. Probably the saying of Jesus in 7:18–19a would not originally have been understood as revoking the Torah's distinction between clean and unclean foods. Mark's comment ("thus he declared all foods clean") draws a conclusion that would not have been drawn until later. But this further interpretation has not altered the form of the saying. It is conveyed only by Mark's editorial comment, which remains external to the saying. Form criticism has led us to assume too easily that later interpretation shaped the way the traditions were recalled, and redaction criticism has made us attend in a perhaps one-sided way to how the evangelists' own interpretation shaped their material. We need a more careful study of the relationship between stable memory and added interpretation. John's Gospel, because it is by general consensus the Gospel that engages most in reflective interpretation, is a special case, but also needs to be studied with a sensitivity to both sides of this dialectic, especially as there are clear indications that even this evangelist—or, perhaps, especially this evangelist—was well aware of the difference between immediate and deferred meaning.

Response to Rodrigo J. Morales

Rodrigo Morales's response to my book features a number of constructive suggestions and questions that point to the further work that is needed if my arguments are broadly acceptable. I hope that he may be one of those who can carry forward this work of further assessment and consequent issues. About the possibility of re-assessing more of the patristic material about the origins of the Gospels, the need for testing my hypothesis against detailed exegesis of the Gospels, and the need to explore further parallels to the Gospels that might have been composed in a similar way (historical biographies from the Greco-Roman world especially), I can only agree.

Also important are the two questions he raises in the penultimate section of his response. One is about the role of historical Jesus research

if my general thesis about the Gospels is accepted. I would suggest we need far more work that makes use of all that we now know about the world of Jewish Palestine in the early first century in order both to assess the accuracy of the way the Gospels depict that Jewish context of Jesus' life and work (which for the Gospel writers was already a historical context) and also to illuminate the figure of Jesus in the Gospels by filling out the picture of his historical context that the Gospels provide. Some historical Jesus scholars (especially those now often classified as part of the Third Quest) have done important work in this respect, but far too much scholarly energy has been deflected from these tasks by two features of Gospels scholarship. One is the form-critical view that the *Sitz im Leben* of the traditions in the Christian communities must be the prime historical interest and the other is the emphasis laid by redaction criticism and the "Gospel communities" hypothesis (supposing that each Gospel was addressed to a specific Christian community) on the orientation of the Gospels to specific needs of a specific group of readers or hearers who need to be historically reconstructed from the evidence of the Gospels. Some critics of my book have accused me of uncritical acceptance of everything in the Gospels as historical. My response is that, if the sources are as I argue in the book, then certainly we need to assess their reliability, but that the ways this has been done within the form critical tradition—such as by the reconstruction of tradition history and the application of the famous criteria of authenticity applied to individual stories and sayings—are not appropriate ways of assessing such sources. I would lay far more emphasis on the match between the sources (each source as a whole) and the world of first-century Jewish Palestine to which they purport to refer.

The second question Morales asks in his penultimate section is about the relationship between the four witnesses to Jesus that we have in the four Gospels and the one Jesus of Christian faith. I have long thought this is an important question that modern scholarship, even when sceptical of the quest for the historical Jesus, has conspicuously failed to address. We have been urged to appreciate each Gospel's portrayal of Jesus in its own right, and this is an important task, which we should not neglect in favour of going straight to a harmonized or composite portrait. But the role of Jesus in Christian faith does require some kind of unified image of him. How to move from the four Gospels to the one Jesus in a theologically disciplined way I do not know! I do think it is relevant to remember that the existence of our four Gospels suggests the inadequacy both of each of them and of all of them to pin down a definitive single portrait of Jesus that we can grasp and hold. Not that they are misleading, but that the real

Jesus must always be more than any account of him. In practice, the images Christians form of Jesus, often influenced by the cultural context in which they live their faith, are never more than partial. What matters is that they are well rooted in the Gospel testimonies and that they do not replace the Gospel testimonies. Our images of Jesus will always need correction, extension, and deepening from our continued reading of the Gospels.⁴

I will devote the rest of this response to addressing Morales' comments on my treatment of the Gospel of Matthew. He is not the only reader to have found this treatment unsatisfactory. My method in working on the book was to take the arguments as far as they led me, and in Matthew's case they did not seem to lead very far. I do think that the Gospel makes some sort of eyewitness claim. I don't think the lack of an *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony, such as I find in the other Gospels, contradicts that assessment. A biography based on eyewitness testimony did not have to employ such an *inclusio*. If the author of Matthew's Gospel knew Mark, as I think he did, then his reproduction of Mark's list of the Twelve probably indicates that he saw Mark's Gospel as preserving the traditions of the Twelve. (I think the function of the list in Mark and Luke is to indicate that the Twelve were the source of many of the traditions they preserve, and there is no reason to think otherwise in the case of Matthew.) Like Luke, Matthew reproduced much of Mark's material for this reason, although, unlike Luke, he gives no indication that the Markan material was connected specifically with Peter. Furthermore, his addition of "tax collector" to Mark's mention of Matthew and his transference of Mark's story of Jesus' call of a tax collector to Matthew cohere with the attribution of the Gospel to Matthew (which must be very early) to indicate some kind of dependence on the eyewitness testimony of another member of the Twelve, Matthew. In the light of these indications, we could see the list of the Twelve as functioning in Matthew to authenticate not just the Markan material but also whatever material derived specifically from the apostle Matthew.

But there seems to me no more specific indication in the Gospel itself as to what form this dependence on the apostle Matthew took. While we might conjecture that the Q material or some of the special Matthean material came from Matthew, there seem to me to be no textual indications of this. I intentionally restricted my discussion of Gospel sources to the indications the Gospels themselves give as to their eyewitness sources,

⁴ Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus: A Portrait* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), xiii–xv, has some brief but helpful comments on the way that knowing any other person, and especially knowing Jesus, is a matter of "grappling with an elusive mystery."

because I think the first readers/hearers would have expected the Gospels to have eyewitness sources and would be alert to indications of what those sources were. But they would not, for example, have examined the texts of Matthew and Luke and identified the non-Markan material that those two Gospels share. There is nothing wrong with doing that kind of source criticism ourselves, but it is a different exercise from arguments about the way the Gospels themselves indicate their sources. I thought it important not to confuse the two. That is also why I said hardly anything about the Q hypothesis.

I do not think it likely that the attribution to Matthew is pseudepigraphal. I included that possibility on page 302 of my book, because there I was arguing that none of the four Gospels was ever anonymous. My point was that, even if the attribution of Matthew's Gospel to Matthew was fictitious, the Gospel would still not have been anonymous. Morales makes the point that a pseudepigraphal use of the name Matthew is unlikely because "pseudonymous writers were more likely to choose figures with a higher profile in the early Christian movement." This seems to me a broadly plausible, though not conclusive argument. One would have to take account of logion 13 of the Gospel of Thomas, which treats Matthew as a prominent disciple, alongside Peter and Thomas. I think this alludes to our Gospel of Matthew (see pp. 236–37 of my book), but others might treat it as evidence that Matthew was a prominent disciple in extra-canonical traditions. The Gospel of the Ebionites was probably attributed to Matthew, but this was doubtless because it was largely based on our Gospel of Matthew. However, there are several apocryphal texts associated with the apostle Bartholomew, who is otherwise a very obscure member of the Twelve.

Although quite a lot of my readers would have liked me to derive more information about Matthew's Gospel from Papias, I have to say I think I said enough to show that Papias has nothing reliable to tell us about this Gospel, apart from its association with the apostle Matthew. This conclusion follows from my argument about Papias's reasons for saying what he did about Matthew. I argued that Papias's statements about both Mark and Matthew are best understood if we suppose that he was comparing them with John and was therefore dealing with the differences in the chronological order of the events in these Gospels. By comparison with John, he judged both Mark and Matthew to be lacking in order. If they derive, as he supposed, from apostolic testimony, this lack of order needs explaining. (He assumes that an apostolic eyewitness would have known the actual order of events and would have set them down in that order if he wrote a Gospel. This is not an assumption we

need to share, but I think it was Papias's assumption.) In Mark's case, the explanation is that Mark knew Peter's traditions as individual units, and so was not in a position to know in what order they occurred historically. As a non-eyewitness himself, he did his best. Matthew, on the other hand, was an eyewitness, and so Papias offers a different explanation for that Gospel's lack of order. He ascribes it to the translators, who (like many "translators" in the ancient world) adapted the material they translated from Matthew's original Hebrew or Aramaic, creating the non-chronological order of the Greek Gospel Papias knew. This is a clever hypothesis, which Papias thought up to account for a problem he had with Matthew's Gospel (not one that we need have), but it cannot be true. Papias does not say that Matthew wrote one of the sources of Matthew's Gospel; if he knew that, he would have said so. It would have explained what, in Papias's view, was the lack of order in Matthew's Gospel just as well as his actual statement does. Papias must mean that Matthew wrote a Hebrew or Aramaic Gospel that contained, at any rate to a large extent, the substance of the Greek Gospel of Matthew, but in a different order. No one who supposes that our Gospel of Matthew is dependent on the Greek Gospel of Mark, as I do, can agree with Papias about that.

Part of my concern in examining the fragments of Papias in detail was that we must give priority to determining what Papias meant, whether or not it is historically plausible. Too many interpretations of Papias proceed by supposing that Papias must have said what the scholar in question thinks was the historical fact of the matter, and this has been especially true of the statement about Matthew. This practice is just as much to be avoided as the opposite practice of assuming that Papias could only have been freely inventing everything he says on the topic.

So, if my argument, in the book, as to what Papias meant and intended by his statement about Matthew is correct, there is no more to be said on the subject. Sadly, I do not think any of the later patristic testimonies about the origin of Matthew's Gospel can help us either. None of them show evidence of knowing anything they did not learn from Papias. Jerome, it is true, knew a Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic that some people regarded as the original of the Greek Matthew. (He himself seems to have changed his mind and become dubious of this.) To judge from his quotations, it was certainly related to the Greek Gospel of Matthew, but it looks more like a secondary development of our Matthew than a more original form of it. Nevertheless, there may be something to be learned from fresh study of the tantalizingly little evidence we have of the early Jewish Christian Gospels. Whether the Coptic version of Matthew in the

Schøyen collection, recently published by Schenke,⁵ which has many variants from the text of the Greek Matthew, can help us at all in the quest for the origins of Matthew's Gospel, it is too early to say.

I wish we could go further in trying to identify Matthew's contribution to the Gospel that bears his name, but I do not see how it can be done. Until someone can demonstrate otherwise, it seems to me that I took my own methodology as far as it can go in that direction.

Response to Christopher Seitz

Christopher Seitz is quite right to point out that I do not, in this book, address the question of the role of the Old Testament in the formation of the Gospel traditions and of the Gospels. I do just touch on its role when I discuss Mark's story of Jesus stilling the storm (p. 504). There my concern is to show that literary allusion need not compromise the authenticity of an eyewitness account as genuinely recollected. In this respect, I compare it with Elie Wiesel's allusions to Dostoevsky in his account of his experience of Auschwitz. I argue that the Old Testament allusions in Mark's story of the stilling of the storm enhance the significance of the story, placing it in "a wider symbolic field of resonance," but that "the interpretation does not come in between us and the realistic character of the story, as interpretation can." Since the disciples, given their Jewish cultural context, likely would have experienced a dangerous storm at sea as an instance of the always-threatening waters of chaos, the interpretation of the story given by the Old Testament allusions has real continuity with the event as originally experienced.

This may point in the direction that I would take in bringing the Old Testament into my overall thesis about the origins of the Gospels. Seitz, when he depicts me as rather exclusively concerned with historical reliability, has perhaps (like some other readers) missed the extent to which I stress the coinherence of fact and significance in any history that is more than a pointless collection of bare facts. This coinherence was the case, with the Gospel traditions, all the way back to their origins. The events were already significant for the participants when they occurred and would have been already fraught with significance when the participants remembered them. Of course, further interpretation developed later, and this would have included both relating the events to the whole story of Jesus, including his resurrection, but also relating them to the Old Testament, through which the first Christians understood what had happened as the climax of the whole scriptural story of Israel. There is so much

⁵ Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Mattäus-Evangelium im mittellägyptischen Dialekt des Koptischen* (Codex Schøyen) (Oslo: Hermes, 2001).

precise exegesis of Old Testament texts within the New Testament that we have to envisage, I think, a great deal of serious exegetical work taking place within the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem.

Take, for example, the pervasive allusions to the Psalms in the Gospel passion narratives (from Gethsemane onwards). The connexion of these events with the Psalms certainly did not originate with the Gospel writers (though they were aware of it and may sometimes have enhanced it) but must go far back in the traditions. Some scholars conclude that much of the story was simply constructed out of the prophecies of the suffering Messiah that early Christians found in the Psalms, but the way the Gospels actually stress the eyewitness character of their accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus rules that out, in my view. The connexion with the Psalms of lament may go back to Jesus' own use of the words of Psalm 22 in his dying cry, and we can easily imagine the first Christians already following up that scriptural clue in their earliest attempts to understand the cross in the light of the Scriptures. In that case, again, there is continuity between what the events already meant to those who witnessed them and the scriptural interpretation that developed later. Probably the allusions to the Psalms were woven into the earliest Passion narrative forged by the apostles at an early stage of the Jerusalem church's history.

John's Gospel is especially interesting in relation to this topic (see my brief account on pp. 352–53) because it is quite explicit about the differences between pre- and post-resurrection perceptions of pre-resurrection events and about the role of Scripture in this. In the case to which Seitz refers, John 19:32–37, I think the probable meaning is that the witness (the Beloved Disciple) simply observed, at the time, that blood and water flowed from Jesus' side and that his bones were not broken. The Beloved Disciple's scriptural enlightenment as to the meaning of these things came later. But his witness, I think, encompasses both. The empirical facts mean little in themselves, but it is important to the author that he had observed them, and his witness to their meaning would not be witness had he not seen them. Another very interesting, and somewhat different case, is John 12:12–16. John cannot mean that the disciples at the time did not recognize that Jesus, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, was acting out the scriptural role of the Davidic Messiah. After all, the crowds recognized this. What dawned on the disciples only later, when they reflected on the texts and the event, was that he was acting out the unexpected role of a Messiah who comes in humility to suffer death. In this case, therefore, there was a degree of scriptural meaning attached to the event when it happened, which was then available, in the memories of the eyewitnesses, to be developed further after the resurrection.

In some cases, therefore, we can observe the way in which scriptural meaning entered the eyewitnesses' memories of the events at an early stage, even at the very beginning of their memories. But we must also note that a large number of narrative traditions in the Gospels lack scriptural interpretation within themselves (as I point out on p. 323), gaining it only in the larger context of the Gospels. In these cases we may have a rather straightforward recollection of an eyewitness with little, if any, subsequent reflection added. Here we see evidence that, in the process by which the Gospel traditions reached the Gospel writers, eyewitness recollection maintained its own integrity and was not simply overwhelmed by scriptural interpretation.

Response to Gregory Tatum, O.P.

Gregory Tatum seems largely to agree with my model of how the Gospel traditions reached the Gospel writers. I am encouraged by that agreement. But he thinks I have "an awkward emphasis on historical reliability." By contrast, he himself has no problem at all with the difference between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. But it is very clear that this is not because there cannot in principle be such a problem, but because he is confident that the Gospels (even John) do have a large measure of historical reliability: "the general character of the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is certain." What I say in the passage he quotes is that a problem arises "when historians suspect that these texts [the Gospels] may be hiding the real Jesus from us, at best because they give us the historical Jesus filtered through the spectacles of early Christian faith, at worst because much of what they tell us is a Jesus constructed by the needs and interests of various groups in the early church" (p. 2). This kind of thorough-going suspicion of the historical value of the Gospels has undoubtedly fuelled a large part of the quest for the historical Jesus in its various phases. Both the nineteenth-century liberal Protestants and the prominent members of the Jesus Seminar today self-consciously portray the historical Jesus, the Jesus they as historians can reconstruct, as *incompatible* with the Jesus of the Gospels.

I think Tatum would agree with me that *if* such historical conclusions were plausible, *then* there would be a problem. But he brushes this problem aside with a few reasons for believing that "the general character of the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is certain." He seems to think the historical issue is merely a matter of how much of the Gospels can be treated as factually reliable and to what degree. What he entirely misses is the issue of meaning and interpretation in history, with which I am very much concerned, from that initial statement of the problem through

to my final chapter in which I return to the theological issue. The quest for the historical Jesus has not been just a matter of weighing evidence and classifying what we may know about Jesus as certain, highly probable, less probable, and so forth. It has been an attempt to extricate mere history from the highly tendentious interpretations of Jesus that are deeply ingrained in the traditions as a whole. But historical work, if it goes beyond verifying a few bare facts, is always interpretative. What the quest produces is a series of Jesuses that are just as much constructed by the historians as the Jesuses of the Gospels are by the Gospel writers. It is essential to get to grips with the fact that *both* the Gospels *and* modern reconstructions of the historical Jesus are inseparable blends of fact and significance. Tatum seems to be telling me, as though I had missed it, that this is the case in the Gospels, while ignoring the extent to which it is true of historical Jesus research. My book, on the other hand, is pervasively concerned with the coinherence of fact and meaning in history. I am surprised that Tatum seems not to have noticed this.

I cannot but wonder whether Tatum has actually read my last chapter, in which I develop at length the sense in which I see testimony as a category in which history and theology can come together. I cannot understand how anyone who has read that chapter can possibly suppose that I am working with "the notions of historical truth inherited from the French Enlightenment." In the first place, I think the kind of historical reliability that can be expected of the Gospels is that of ancient historiography when it was based on good sources. One has only to read Lucian's *How to Write History* to see that people in the ancient world were not uninterested in historical reliability. But the historical conventions were considerably different from ours, allowing, for example, the historian to vary the details of a story for reasons of literary effect, and to invent whole speeches for characters when there was no evidence to follow, provided the speeches were in character and appropriate to the occasion. But what is especially important (and therefore I stress it already in my first chapter) is that ancient historians valued the insider testimony of people who had been close to the events, not only because they might be more likely to get the facts right but also because they could speak out of a perception of the significance of what had happened. Eyewitness testimony was rooted in the coinherence of fact and meaning, and this was regarded not as a disadvantage, but as an advantage.

Secondly, my notion of testimony in history, as I develop it in the last chapter, is not in the least "inherited from the French Enlightenment," but depends on recent philosophical study of testimony as a legitimate and indispensable feature of knowledge (*against* the individualistic epistemology

of the Enlightenment), and on Paul Ricoeur's study of the nature of historiography, which combines a strong affirmation of the indispensability of testimony in history with recognition that the historian's critical questioning of the sources is also essential. What matters to me about the category of eyewitness testimony is that the Gospels are based on good sources, as ancient historians reckoned good sources, but also that these sources are none the worse for embodying the witness's perception of meaning and significance. I am not trying to establish the factual historicity of every detail in the Gospels (let alone with "certainty"), which no historical method could possibly establish, but to argue for the general credibility of the sources and to legitimate the faith perspective with which the eyewitnesses already told their stories. It is the coinherence of fact and meaning in testimony of this kind, rather than simply a quantitative measure of facticity, that makes testimony an appropriate category from both a historiographical and a theological point of view. *This* is why it takes us beyond the dichotomy of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

It seems to me that Tatum has failed to understand what the "problem" from which the book sets out is, and therefore he has also failed to understand the solution. He seems to be engaged in a different discussion.

Finally, of course I don't think that the point of the Gospels is "simply to provide the reader with historical information about Jesus." It is to enable us to know, to worship, and to follow the Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose from the dead in first century Jewish Palestine and who is our living Lord today. That the Gospels are historical matters because the living Christ retains his historical identity as Jesus of Nazareth. It has always mattered to Christians in a way that has nothing to do with "the notions of historical truth inherited from the French Enlightenment." Of course, the Gospel "comes alive in the Church's prayer, proclamation, praise, growth in virtue, acts of mercy, and holiness." My concern in this book was to show that we do not have to substitute for the Jesus of the Gospels a historically reconstructed Jesus of history who will be at odds with the Jesus of the Gospels and who must therefore undermine the role of the Gospels in the life of the Church. **N V**