The Aphorisms of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: A Look at John 4:35

*Linda McKinnish Bridges**

The literary genre "aphorism" finds full expression in the Gospel of John. Vestiges of the world of orality, aphorisms invite intense reflection and response as they illumine not only the literary landscape of the Gospel but also provide a lens for viewing Jesus tradition in the Gospel of John. This study is indebted to the research of John Dominic Crossan, author of *In Fragments* (1983), who has written the definitive work on the aphorisms of Jesus in the Synoptics. More exploration, however, is needed on the aphorisms of Jesus in John's Gospel. Although the aphorisms of Jesus in John were omitted in the database of authentic sayings of Jesus compiled by the members of Jesus Seminar (see Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993, 10), might these lapidary gems be placed on the table once more for historical consideration? While I am confident that the Johannine aphorisms lead us through the narrative landscape of the Gospel and even reveal distinctive sociological aspects of the Johannine community, is it possible that they might also provide a brief glimpse of Jesus (see also my prior discussions in Bridges 1987a; 1987b; 1993)?

Using the agrarian aphorism of John 4:35 as a showcase illustration, this article proposes to identify the form and function of the Johannine aphorism, to investigate the authenticity of the saying in John 4:35 using established criteria of authenticity, and to suggest the often-overlooked criterion of *orality* as a useful tool for continued exploration.

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The Aphorisms of Jesus in John

Words are powerful. Words aligned with other words with economical intensity and artistic flair have a dramatic effect on the listener. The ancient and contemporary genre of aphorism bears these qualities: brief, pithy, prone to use of metaphor, potent, and memorable. Commonly defined as a "concise statement of a principle; a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment; adage," the aphorism is often referred to as a maxim, apophthegm, sentence, or gnome (Crossan 1983, 94). With this literary expression, little becomes much and the subtle becomes obvious. The aphorism is not for skimming and forgetting but for meditating and remembering. The medical student might recognize this famous aphorism from Hippocrates: "Life is short, science is long; opportunity is elusive, experiment is dangerous, judgment is difficult" (*Aph.* 1.1). The student in humanities may have encountered Francis Bacon's aphorism: "Reading maketh a full man; Conference a ready man; and Writing an exact man" (cited in Stephenson 1980, 3). In the ancient world, the aphorism was a highly polished rhetorical skill and a literary technique developed by good Greek pupils. Quintilian says that

> the term ["aphorism"], however, is of wide application (indeed, such reflexions may be deserving of praise even when they have no reference to any special context), and is used in various ways. Sometimes it refers merely to things, as in the sentence: "There is nothing that wins the affections of the people more than the goodness of heart." Occasionally, again, they may have a personal reference, as in the following utterance of Domitius Afer: "The prince who would know all, must needs ignore much." (*Inst.* 8.5 [Butler, LCL])

The identification and classification of the aphorisms of Jesus in John requires a particular strategy. Building on the work of Franz Mautner (1976), H. U. Asemissen (1976), and other scholars to assist in classifying the attributes of the literary genre of aphorism, combined with a close reading of the Fourth Gospel that looks for sayings that resist fluent reading, that produce surprise and illumination, call attention to themselves, demand pause and reflection, or sound strange but familiar, the following criteria emerge for isolating the aphorisms of Jesus in John. A Johannine aphorism

1. is a concise saying;
2. exhibits autonomy, without premise, conclusion, or commentary;

3. may or may not be independent of the narrative;
4. uses some type of introductory formula;
5. points to a bold, new worldview;
6. is the utterance of an individual voice;
7. seeks a personal response;
8. uses metaphor and imagery;
9. does not demand an immediate rational solution to the metaphor;
10. points to the future rather than the past;
11. uses a variety of rhetorical figures, such as definition, antithesis, chiasmus, and paradox;
12. may function as a response to a question in the narrative.

Using the above criteria, at least twenty-six aphorisms of Jesus can be identified in the Gospel of John: John 1:51; 2:19; 3:3, 5; 4:14, 35, 38; 5:19; 8:12, 34–35; 9:4–5; 11:9–10, 25–26; 12:24–25, 35–36; 13:16, 20; 14:6; 15:13, 16, 20; 16:20, 23; 20:23, 27b, 29. This paper will highlight one of the more obvious examples, John 4:35, as a model for a broader consideration of the place of aphorisms in the Johannine Jesus tradition.

The Illustration of John 4:35

> Do you now say, "There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest"? (John 4:35a)
> I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. (John 4:35b)

This saying, contextualized in the tense encounter between Jesus and his disciples (John 4:27–38) that follows his conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:1–26), is marked by a unique feature: a proverb is used to introduce an aphorism, thereby further highlighting the potency of the genre of aphorism (see also 12:24–25; 13:16; 16:20). Verse 35a is the proverb: "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"; verse 35b is the aphorism: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest." Both genres can thus be reviewed through analysis of John 4:35.

While proverbs and aphorisms are both short forms of communication, they are very different in function.[1] A proverb confirms what one

1. Crossan does not make a clear distinction between proverb and aphorism in

already knows; an aphorism tells what one does not know. A proverb provides a vivid summary of experience; an aphorism does not need to explain or summarize. A proverb points backward; an aphorism moves forward. The proverb attempts to clarify; the aphorism intends to shock. Proverbs are passive, only summarizing recurrent behavior; aphorisms are agonistic, introducing new behavior. Proverbs work to resolve conflict; aphorisms establish conflict. Proverbs are anonymous; aphorisms are personal.[2]

The saying in John 4:35a is clearly a proverb. It points back in time in a summary fashion, revealing a collective experience of recurring value. Common wisdom is not questioned but affirmed: "Wait four months, and then comes the harvest." Any seasoned farmer knows the dependable cycle of planting and harvesting. Agricultural society, even liturgical calendars, mark distinctive chronological periods of time by the cycles of seed, soil, sun, and moon. The spring season is for planting; the harvest will come (barring poor weather conditions) in about four months. This is not new information for the listener, but rather conventional wisdom gleaned by the experience of an agricultural society.

The statement that immediately follows, however, reverses this collective wisdom in the form a personal challenge: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (John 4:35b). This saying fulfills the description of an aphorism outlined above at every point. It is concise and easily remembered. No commentary on the statement is offered in the narrative, and the saying is loosely connected to the narrative through the theme of food in verses 31–34 ("Meanwhile the disciples sought him saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought him food?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.'"). In this case, as noted above, the introductory formula for the aphorism is a proverbial statement, a form not unique in John (see 4:38; 12:24–26; 13:16;

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the Synoptic tradition. For a parallel to the approach taken here, see Williams 1981; Perdue 1986.

2. See the work of R. Westcott 1981, 213–25, who sketches the chronology of written sayings from the Sumerian Instructions of Shuruppak (2600 BCE), Akkadian Counsels of Wisdom (1500 BCE), and other Egyptian, Chinese, and Indian literature to posit that the emphasis on individualism in the Hellenistic literature supported the evolution of a more aphoristic style of speech.

16:20) or the Synoptics (see Luke 4:23; Matt 16:2–3); at the same time, the aphorism clearly introduces something new by being postured as a direct antithesis to popular wisdom ("Do you not say"/"Behold, I say to you"). The saying is spoken in the first person ("I tell you"), and because it conflicts with the perceived order of nature, it captures the attention of the listener and offers a personal challenge ("lift up your eyes"). Like other aphorisms, Jesus's statement relies on metaphor, using the agricultural imagery of white fields and harvest to frame its challenge. The saying does not demand an immediate rational solution to the image or metaphor; rather, it simply invites intense reflection. Clearly, the saying points to the present situation and a possible future rather than referring to the past. Finally, John 4:35b is a response to the question posed by the disciples regarding the physical need for food. The aphorism reveals the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus: the disciples are concerned with the physical needs of hunger at the moment; Jesus, however, has a greater mission to accomplish.

The Transmission of Aphorisms and the Criteria of Authenticity

The question that continues to linger, especially for historical Jesus studies, relates to the ways in which aphorisms of Jesus, such as John 4:35b, entered the Johannine tradition. Is it possible to work through the redactional layers of the Johannine tradition, or any gospel tradition, to uncover a glimpse of Jesus? Source critics have attempted to answer the question by positing complex theories of composition (Kysar 1983, 315). Form criticism explains the origins and development of the gospel tradition in response to the needs of the early church. Werner Kelber praises the achievements of these approaches but also points to the weakness of the traditional methods used to analyze the transmission of gospel tradition:

> Form criticism, for all of its methodological inadequacies, succeeded in alerting us to the significance of the tradition. If nothing else, the discipline sensitized us to the variability and complexity of the pre-gospel history of the tradition. Yet form criticism still operated under the presupposition of relatively uncomplicated gospel beginnings. (1987, 111)

The goal of the Jesus, John, and History project in its third triennium—to seek to ascertain the degree to which historical knowledge of Jesus might

be furthered by considering the passion narrative, the works of Jesus, and the words of Jesus through the Johannine lens—is certainly limited if Tom Thatcher's critique stands:

> All of the major tools that are used today to locate the Jesus tradition in the extant sources and to reconstruct the historical Jesus from that tradition—including form, source, and redaction criticism, and the "criteria of authenticity" born in the logic of these methods—were developed from, and in the service of, the study of the synoptic gospels under the Two and Four Source methods. As a result, the entire historical Jesus enterprise, as it exists today, is inherently set against the Fourth Gospel and every other potential source that does not fit the synoptic model. (2007a, 10)

Working from, and illustrating, the assumptions of source and form criticism, Crossan has closely and creatively scrutinized the transmissional processes of the aphorism and described the potent hermeneutical (transmissional) power of the genre. Crossan's *In Fragments* (1983, 313–27) outlines an elaborate transmission process that shows the tremendous generative power of the aphorism: aphorisms combine with other aphorisms to form clusters, expand into full-blown narratives, and even develop dialogues and discourses. At the same time, however, Crossan's model for the traditioning processes is limited by his focus on the Synoptic tradition. By way of contrast, Kelber (1987, 112) observes that the sayings of Jesus in the Nag Hammadi materials, documents notoriously "ill at ease … with narrative syntax," resist the hermeneutical tendencies that Crossan proposes. In other words, if one uses the Nag Hammadi tradition as a test case for the hermeneutical power of aphorisms, one must ask why these particular texts were able to resist this hermeneutical power. Bernard Brandon Scott also questions Crossan's model by observing that much of his analysis of aphorisms operates at the redactional level only, asking instead, "What can we say about the oral (transmissional) and original stages?" Ostensibly, Crossan's model seeks to encompass orality, but his methodology, employed at the redactional level, is bound to written texts. Thus, Crossan "forsakes *ipssisima verba,* but nevertheless, he most assiduously studies *verba*" (Scott 1985, 17).

Might the aphorisms of Jesus in John have more affinity with the oral tradition behind the sayings of Jesus in the Nag Hammadi literature than the Synoptic tradition? If this question is answered in the affirmative, then, returning to Thatcher's point above, a different set of assumptions about

the transmission processes of the genre, unburdened by Synoptic biases, are needed in order to trace the tradition of the aphorisms of Jesus in John. If the aphorisms represent a literary genre that gnostic texts received and stabilized, comfortably employing these independent literary gems without surrounding them with narrative text of dialogue, discourse, and story, is there another way of considering the transmission of aphorisms that is not fully dependent upon models of source and form criticism that favor Synoptic parallels to the exclusion of John's Gospel (see, e.g., Wansborough 1991; Kelber and Byrskog 2009)? Is there a distinctive way of viewing the Johannine aphorisms and of evaluating their potential contribution to understanding the message of the historical Jesus that cannot be seen by utilizing prior models of analysis?

In a 1985 essay that summarizes some of the guidelines used by the Jesus Seminar to identify "authentic" words of Jesus, Eugene Boring highlights the following criteria of authenticity.

1. Attestation in multiple sources: A saying that is found in more than one strand of the tradition is more likely to be authentic.
2. Attestation in multiple forms: A saying that is found developed in multiple forms, such as parable, miracle story, et cetera, is more likely to be authentic.
3. Linguistic criterion: A saying that is closer to the style and idiom of Aramaic—such as the use of the divine passive (e.g., "They shall be comforted" instead of "God shall comfort"), antithetic parallelism, alliteration, assonance, and paronomasia—is more likely to be authentic.
4. Environmental criterion: Sayings framed by the culture of early first-century Palestine (rather than the creation of the Hellenistic church) are more likely to be authentic.
5. Tendencies of the Developing Tradition: Sayings are *not* likely to be authentic if they are more detailed, longer, involve shifts from indirect to direct discourse, or evidence a reduction of Semitisms or the conflation of variant versions.
6. Dissimilarity: Material that is in contrast to both Judaism and Christianity is likely authentic (or, less likely to be inauthentic).
7. Modification: When the tradition appears to have been modified, the more radical form of a saying is the earliest.
8. Coherence: If elements in the saying fit within the elements of an already established corpus of Jesus sayings and themes of Jesus's

teaching, such as the "Jesus as a teacher of Wisdom" theme, the saying is more likely authentic.

9. Plausible *Traditionsgechichte*: A genealogy of the various forms of the saying must be reconstructed diachronically to determine the earliest form.
10. Hermeneutical potential: If one can establish a catalogue of the variety of forms that have emerged from the original form, the saying is more likely authentic.

Significantly, when the above criteria are applied thoroughly to the aphorism in John 4:35b, a consistent pattern emerges in favor of the authenticity of the saying. The following section briefly assesses whether each of the above criteria strongly or weakly supports the authenticity of John 4:35b or would weigh against its historical value.

Attestation in Multiple Sources

The aphorism in John 4:35 has parallels in Matthew and Luke (Q) and the Gospel of Thomas (see Crossan 1986, 183).

> And Jesus went about in all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" (Matt 9:35–38)

> After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.*" (Luke 10:1–2)

> Then Jesus said, "*The harvest is great but the laborers are few*. Beseech the *Lord*, therefore, *to send out laborers to the harvest.*" (Gos. Thom. 73)

> Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying

> holds true, "one sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor. (John 4:35–38)

This criterion offers strong support for authenticity, as the aphorism in John 4:35 is attested in multiple sources: Q (Matt and Luke) and the Gospel of Thomas.

Attestation in Multiple Forms

Rudolf Bultmann (1971, 194 n. 1) considers the unit John 4:31–35 to be thoroughly Johannine in style and thought, with the exception of verse 35, which he considers to possibly be a proverb. Raymond Brown (1966–1970, 1:182) notes that verse 35 is a proverbial saying and points to Jesus's method of using proverbial imagery in the Synoptic tradition (see Luke 4:23; Matt 16:2–3). Barnabas Lindars (1972, 195) posits that John 4:35 is "an item of genuine tradition taken over by John from his sources." C. H. Dodd (1963, 391–99) suggests that verses 35–38 are the backbone of the entire pericope, which is a group of independent traditional sayings of Jesus that have been sewn together.

That this saying generates a proverbial frame in John's Gospel, an aphoristic story in Q (Matt 9:35–38 and Luke 10:1–2), and a single saying in Q (Gos. Thom. 73) is evidence that generativity has occurred but does not offer strong support for an authentic saying based on the limited variation of forms. Other forms, such as miracle story, parable, and pronouncement story cannot be traced in the tradition.

Linguistic Criterion

The linguistic form of the saying in John 4:35 is not particularly related to Aramaic. No Semitic circumlocution for God's activity is observed. In direct contrast to a passive form of presentation, this is a personal, direct confrontation ("I tell you"). Antithetical parallelism, however, is present in similar form to the antitheses present in Matthew's Gospel (form is not present in Luke or Q): "do you not say … I tell you" (Matt 5:21–42). Other linguistic forms, such as alliteration, assonance, and paronomasia, are not observed in this saying. The linguistic criterion seems to offer little support for the authenticity of the saying in John 4:35.

Environment

Does the aphorism in John 4:35 sound like the social world of Jesus? The agricultural world of first-century Palestine and the peasant social world of Jesus and family resonate with this saying. Although a weak and subjective criterion with many possibilities of cultural attributes, this saying can be seen as belonging to Jesus; at the same time, it could also belong to the disciples or to anyone in the agricultural society of the first-century world, for that matter. Nonetheless, this criterion supports the probable authenticity of this saying.

Developing Tradition

The "laws" of this criterion are not fixed, but the general suggestion here is that the more developed the tradition, the less likely it is to be authentic. Following this logic, sayings that are longer and more detailed, show reduction of Semitisms, indicate movement from indirect to direct discourse, and exhibit conflation are more likely to be inauthentic. Tracing the textual tradition of 4:35, it is clear that the Johannine aphorism and the Gospel of Thomas contain the briefer form; that Matthew and Luke's version are indirect while John's is personal and direct; and that conflation, where the aphorism creates a larger narrative framework, resides within the gospel traditions of Matthew and Luke, rather than Q, John, or Thomas. This seems to indicate minimal support for the authenticity of this saying within the tradition.

The following question must thus be asked: If one were to reformulate traditional source-theory assumptions, allowing for the possibility that a pre-Synoptics sayings tradition actually existed and was used by the Fourth Gospel, could John's version of the saying be the earliest, distinctive in its proverbial/aphoristic frame, followed by Thomas, Q, then the Synoptics? The evidence here is obviously not convincing enough to settle the issue, but it serves to raise even more questions about the tradition history of the aphorism in John.

Dissimilarity

Does John 4:35 stand in contrast to themes found in Judaism and Christianity? The missiological focus of the metaphors of planting and harvesting seems to be related to the work of the early church rather than to Jesus, if

one supposes that these two stages would be in contrast to one another (a definite weakness of this criterion). Yet Dodd observes that "the tradition of the mission of the disciples attracted to itself a number of sayings which the Church recalled and preserved because they were felt to be acutely relevant to its own missionary work in the world." Dodd concludes that these "sayings are drawn from the same reservoir of tradition as the kindred sayings in the Synoptics, though by a different channel" (1963, 404). John's Gospel, however, shows no knowledge of the mission of the disciples as a historical incident. This saying, unlike the Synoptic versions, is not located within a call to discipleship. The themes of planting and harvesting, using this criterion, could have been supported by the early church as they remembered the calling of the disciples into their own ministry of discipleship, but it does not necessarily assume that the saying did not come from an earlier source. This criterion thus offered receives weak support to the authenticity of the saying.

Modification

Does John 4:35 represent the more radical form of the sayings tradition? When compared with the indirect tone of the saying in Matt 9:37, where Jesus simply makes a statement to the disciples rather than entreating them ("The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few"), John 4:35 appears more personal and more radical. Similarly, the saying embedded in Luke 10:1–2 is declarative, not imperative, in its force ("The harvest is plentiful"). In John 4:35, the tone and sentence structure are forceful, personally demanding, imperative: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest." If the force of an imperative is more radical than declarative, demanding a more personal response, then this criterion provides strong support for authenticity.

Coherence

Does the saying in John 4:35 fit within an already established corpus of sayings or themes belonging to the Jesus tradition? One of the early assumptions developed by the Jesus Seminar was that "Jesus's sayings and parables cut against the social and religious grain" and "surprise and shock; they characteristically call for a reversal of roles or frustrate ordinary, everyday expectations" (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993, 31). If this assumption accurately describes the Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels,

then the aphorism of Jesus in John 4:35 also finds coherence with that same voice of Jesus—the voice of the wisdom-imparting sage. This criterion thus provides strong support for authenticity.

Plausible *Traditionsgeschichte*

Is a genealogical history of John 4:35 even discernible? At least three sources will be considered here: Q, Thomas, and John's Gospel. The conclusions of the Jesus Seminar regarding aphorisms are instructive.

> We know that oral memory best retains sayings and anecdotes that are short, provocative, memorable—and oft-repeated … the most frequently recorded words of Jesus in the surviving gospels take the form of aphorisms and parables. It is highly probable that the earliest layer of the gospel tradition was made up almost entirely of single aphorisms and parables that circulated by word of mouth, with narrative context, precisely as that tradition is recorded in Q and Thomas. (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993, 28)

A plausible theory must at least consider this question: Could the brief, personal, imperatival saying of Jesus in John 4:35b, uniquely coupled with a proverb in verse 35a, represent the voice of a wisdom-imparting sage who is standing against cultural convention and speaking to the immediate needs of the Jesus movement? The accompanying question then becomes: Could Q have included this saying, which was then used and adapted by individual settings in narratives by individual evangelists, Matthew and Luke? And yet one more: could Thomas have drawn from the oral repository of this saying as well? A tracing of the tradition is possible; however, more challenging is the chronological outline. Based on the criteria of authenticity (multiple sources, multiple forms, environment, dissimilarity, modification, coherence), the saying of Jesus in John seems to bear the earliest markings of the tradition. This criterion is strongly supports the authenticity of John 4:35.

Hermeneutical Potential

That this saying has hermeneutical power cannot be denied. If the saying in John 4:35 bears marks of an earlier tradition, also known and used by Thomas and Q, then the power of this saying becomes evident in the early church's use of the story of the calling of the disciples as evidenced in the

Synoptic Gospels. The call to plant and sow (metaphors for work and calling within the Jesus tradition) becomes attached to the work of the disciples in Matthew's summary statement in 9:35–38. Likewise, Luke uses this same saying (derived from Q) to establish the formal calling of the seventy disciples in Luke 10:1–2. Jesus's individual saying then becomes a part of the description for the work of the twelve disciples in the Matthean community and belongs to the calling ritual for the seventy additional disciples in Luke. This criterion strongly supports the authenticity of John 4:35.

Summary of Results

In sum, the authenticity of John 4:35 is strongly supported by the following criteria: multiple sources, developing tradition, modification, coherence, plausible tradition history, and hermeneutical potential. It is weakly supported by the following criteria: multiple forms, linguistic, environment, and dissimilarity. A majority thus rules, with six criteria supporting John 4:35 as authentic and four criteria offering weak support.

What does this evidence imply? I am not convinced that even after this tedious process and a majority of support for authenticity from the established criteria that John 4:35 is confirmed as an authentic saying of Jesus. What becomes apparent, however, is this: the saying of Jesus in John, using the same criteria for the sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition, can be seen as probably authentic, if one allows that the Gospel of John may contain early memories recorded as utterances of Jesus that precede the Synoptic accounts. By the historical criteria of developing tradition and others, the saying in John 4:35 could be earlier than Q and certainly earlier than the Synoptic tradition. The sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel need to be reviewed independently of the Synoptic tradition or at least not always guided by the assumption that John's Gospel is late, last, and thus ahistorical in the quest for the historical Jesus.

The Criterion of Orality

The instability of the standard historical methodology for analyzing the Johannine aphorism is clear in the work above. No more firm or uniform ground exists here in historical-critical criteria than in a view of the oral aspects of the saying for a possible "glimpse of the historical Jesus." In an attempt to establish the literary independence of the Gospel of John from the Synoptics, Dodd (1963, 349, 423) discovered that John "is transmit-

ting independently a special form of the oral tradition" and concluded that "behind the Fourth Gospel lies an ancient tradition independent of other gospels, and meriting serious consideration as a contribution to our knowledge of the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ" (see also Dodd 1955–1956). Dodd does not attempt to uncover a basic written document, nor one or more layers of literary strata, behind the Fourth Gospel. Rather, for Dodd the oral tradition is the most significant phase of the Johannine tradition.

What tools do we use? The transmissional theory used to understand Jesus's sayings in the Gospel of John must also include criteria relating to orality—the emerging frontier for biblical studies. What theorems or criteria could be used to identify the vestiges of orality in written texts? The work of Walter Ong (1982, 31–77), as applied to studies of the transmission of aphorisms, becomes highly valuable in this investigation. Ong identifies six characteristics of orality that are particularly useful for the study of aphorisms. According to Ong, oral expression: (1) frequently uses additive (the use of "and"), rather than subordinate, styles of speech; (2) carries a load of clustered words, epithets, formulary language (aggregate rather than analytic), preferring, for example, "the beautiful princess" or the "sturdy oak" to "the princess" or "the oak"; (3) reveals a simple, basic structure that is retained through the transmissional process (conservative or traditionalist); (4) remains close to the human world, using abstract places or names only as they interact with human activity; (5) engages in verbal and intellectual combat (agonistically toned); and (6) retains the voice of the hero (empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced). What happens when Ong's inventory of orality is applied to John 4:35?

No extensive use of the "and" construction is seen in the aphorism of John 4:35 (additive). However, when compared to the other versions of the saying, as found in Q (Matthew and Luke) and Thomas, the saying in John does exhibit an additive tendency.

> John 4:35: "I tell you, lift up your eyes, *and* see how the fields are already white for harvest."
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> Matt 9:37: "The harvest is plentiful, *but* the laborers are few."
>
> Luke 10:1–2: "The harvest is plentiful, *but* the laborers are few.
>
> Gos. Thom. 73: "The harvest is great, *but* the laborers are few.

No sign of clustered words are found in the saying (aggregate). The saying in John does not exhibit a more conservative core. The use of proverb and aphorism is distinctive in performance but enlarges and personalizes the saying as compared with other versions. The saying, however, is close to the human life world. Jesus is describing a radical concept using a metaphor of great agrarian value, planting and harvesting. This metaphor relates directly to the experiences of the listener. The saying also bears the dynamic of orality in the agonistic tone: the antithetical pattern, "you say … but I say," has tones of the agonist. With this aphorism comes a new way of life, very different from the old. The narrator does not interrupt, expand, or constrict the aphorism (empathetic), as in John 2:19 where the narrator must produce an aside to explain the intrusive oral saying of Jesus in verse 21.

Conclusion

Using the standard criteria of authenticity and considering the tendencies of orality, with particular attention to the aphorism of Jesus in John 4:35, we might be able to catch a brief glimpse of Jesus through the Johannine lens. Can we hear his exact utterance? I am not convinced. Can we hear sounds of Jesus in John? Perhaps we can. With David Aune (1991, 241), I conclude that "the sheer number of such aphorisms together with their persistent attribution to Jesus makes it certain that Jesus regarded himself and was regarded by his followers and later Christian generations as a Jewish sage and teacher of wisdom." Is there enough of a sound of the voice of Jesus, although faint and perhaps very garbled, for more exploration to be warranted, and might this lead to a glimpse of Jesus through a Johannine lens? Absolutely, yes.

The sayings of Jesus, which were the top priority, and rightly so, for the deliberations of the Jesus Seminar, do not need to be relegated to the final concerns of the Jesus, John, History Project. I contend that more work needs to be done on the sayings tradition in the Gospel of John and that similar analyses deserve to be performed on other aphorisitic sayings of Jesus in John, such as the dying-and-growing kernel of wheat (John 12:24–25) and the woman's labor in childbirth (16:21–22). Although the words of Johannine Jesus do not have an easy, clear, linear path back to the historical Jesus, they can give us the sounds of that world, and just perhaps we can gather a glimpse of the historical Jesus as well. Although these sounds in John may be very different from the Jesus of the Synoptics, they should not be totally excluded or even ignored.

That this saying in John 4:35 could have possibly come from an oral milieu does not mean that the Johannine community did not have influence on the sayings tradition. The evidence does suggest, however, that the influence was more akin to the sayings in the Nag Hammadi materials than to the Synoptic Gospels. That conclusion does not label the Johannine Jesus as inferior to the Synoptic one; if anything, it suggests that the Jesus in John might bear more resemblance to an earlier discourse that had closer affinity to matters of spiritual import as well as the political realities of the Synoptic profile of Jesus. In other words, the *kingdom* mattered greatly, the one inside (spiritual) and outside (political), to the historical Jesus. I close with the words of D. Moody Smith (2008, 111), "John is an independent Gospel, and its claim to be based on an independent witness is worth taking seriously." I echo his sentiment: the aphorisms of Jesus in John need to be taken seriously—and so does a Johannine Jesus.