

An evangelical and critical approach to the sayings of Jesus

Bruce D Chilton

Dr Chilton, who lectures in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, England, here questions the widespread scepticism as to the historicity of the Gospels' account of Jesus, and goes on to show how the method of redaction criticism (commonly distrusted by evangelical students) can in fact be used to demonstrate the authenticity of a controversial saying. It is essentially an essay in method, and as such will prove of value even to those who may disagree with some of the exegetical conclusions.

1. The approach

At the close of his Manson Memorial Lecture (12 November 1976), Professor Étienne Trocmé referred to New Testament scholars as 'tired sceptics'; his not altogether lighthearted remark is especially pertinent to students of the life of Jesus. The simple fact of that life stands at the heart of our faith, and for that matter at the heart of a sceptic's questioning. For this reason, the more recent phases of the postwar quest for the historical Jesus have been dissatisfying from both points of view. While it is true that faith is more than the assimilation of data, there is a danger that, with our attention riveted too exclusively on what the evangelists thought of Jesus (redaction criticism)¹ and on what we are to make of him (hermeneutics),² we will fail to inquire diligently into the facts about Jesus. An evangelical approach would resist this trend, and I wish to suggest that the critical means are available to reverse it.

¹ See, e.g., N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

² See, e.g., E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1964).

Contrary to a very sloppy brand of popular thinking, there is better attestation for the life of Jesus than could be expected for that of an ancient figure. Besides notices in Jewish and Roman sources, and post-apostolic references to Jesus,³ we have the canonical Gospels. These four documents, unique against the background of contemporary literature and peculiar for the excellence and volume of their manuscript evidence,⁴ record impressions of Jesus in the mind of the first-century church. The author of each Gospel has preserved the memories of those who went before him, framing them into a coherent account.⁵ It is into this wonderfully rich material that the New Testament critic primarily delves in order to collect data about Jesus. When he deals with these documents he is, from the outset, closer to the object of his inquiry than the investigator who looks for Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, for Pericles in the 'Funeral Oration' of Thucydides, or for Caesar in Plutarch's *Lives*: the New Testament is more fully attested textually and is informed by many more witnesses than any of the last mentioned sources.

None of the documents which make up the New Testament, however, would pass as 'history' in the modern sense; Edward Gibbon and Leopold von Ranke were not about at the time to write it. Since the Enlightenment, we have expected historians to write of a complex of events 'as it actually happened' (to use the latter's famous

³ See F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974).

⁴ See B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 1968).

⁵ Luke 1: 1-4 and John 21: 24 constitute evidence for this process.

phrase).⁶ A writer of the stamp of Thucydides, while he felt constrained to preserve the purport of what people said, would admit that he framed his characters' speeches in accordance with what he understood of their circumstances.⁷ We cannot say that the evangelists shared either of these programmes, because the literary peculiarity of the Gospels prevents us from categorizing them within a genre whose historiography can be typed. Before we can assess the historicity of the Gospels, we must confer with the texts in order to determine the purpose for which they were written.

The author of the fourth Gospel is quite explicit about this: 'these are written that you may believe . . .' (Jn. 20: 31). His colleagues would no doubt have agreed. It is not the primary intent of the evangelists to record data in a modern historical sense. They wish to put us in touch with God as he now is. To be sure, this God is revealed in past events whose epicentre is Jesus, but each of our writers orders the recollections of witnesses to bring out their essential (that is to say their divine) meaning. It is reasonable to allow that the witnesses themselves, consciously and unconsciously, would have articulated their testimony in terms of what they believed or came to believe. The Gospels, then, are historically grounded considerations of the significance of Jesus in the mind of faith.

Statements such as the last are sometimes taken to mean (both by radicals and conservatives) that the Gospels are not 'objective', *viz.*, not worthy of critical investigation. On two counts, this evaluation is invalid. First, historical 'objectivity' is, as suggested above, a modern standard which it is anachronistic to apply to ancient documents. Secondly, historians of any period would read very little indeed and would form odd impressions of their subjects if they attended only to what they thought was not tendentious. Human perception and communication take place on the basis of agreed (although not necessarily expressed) premises and standards; in this sense they are subjective. Objectivity in historical thought is achieved, not by searching for the nonexistent impartial observer and settling for nothing less, but by taking a writer's premises and standards into account when reading his work. Put in the abstract, this may appear a daunting task, yet it is not very far from what an intelligent reader does when he reads a newspaper. Every writer has an axe to grind: if one knows what sort of cutting edge he aims to

achieve, one is in a better position to infer how he has milled his material than if he hides behind an assumed 'objectivity'.

It is, then, theoretically possible to construct a critically sound impression of Jesus. How may this be achieved?⁸

As every theological student knows, particular attention has been paid in this century to the sayings of Jesus as distinct from narrative about Jesus. The logia excite such concern because it is held *a priori* that those who contributed to the formation of the New Testament would have taken care to preserve Jesus' diction, while they would have chronicled his actions in their own idioms. This supposition finds support in the rabbinic injunction, repeated in Talmud and Midrash, 'A man must speak in the words of his master'.⁹ It is eminently reasonable to focus on Jesus' words in the quest for the most reliable data about him.

Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God have borne the brunt of logia analysis.¹⁰ This also is in order, because the evangelists themselves present kingdom material to summarize the gist of Jesus' preaching (Mt. 4: 17, 23; 9: 35; Mk. 1: 15; Lk. 4: 43; 8: 1).¹¹ How then should we evaluate dominical kingdom logia?

A form-critical investigator decides what the simplest, oral form of a given saying would have been and eliminates additional material as secondary incursions. The use of this method is problematic. The Gospels are continuous documents in their present shape, so that they can be subdivided into various sorts of units only hypothetically. Moreover, folklore studies generally contradict the view that oral tradition circulates in discrete pericopae, and such an understanding is foundational to the form-critical exercise.¹² When a 'form' is isolated, the critic is then to decide where

⁸ For historical surveys of the attempt to answer this question, see, e.g., A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: A. and C. Black, 1910 and 1963); G. Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963); Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963 and 1966).

⁹ Cited by J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1969) p. 49.

¹⁰ In addition to the books cited in n. 8, see, e.g., R. Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (New York: Herder, 1963); Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (London: SCM, 1976).

¹¹ It is one of the remarkable features of John's Gospel that it does not have a notice of this sort.

¹² See T. Boman, *Die Jesus Überlieferung im Lichte der neueren Volkskunde* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967); cf. M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (Cambridge: Clarke, 1971); R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972).

⁶ In his preface to *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker* (1824).

⁷ *The Peloponnesian War* I. xxii. 1.

it was produced, and the temptation must be great to dismiss uncongenial matter as 'secondary'. In this regard, it should be mentioned that the Bultmann school's insistence that little historical data can be gleaned from the Gospels fits in suspiciously well with its master's theological assertion that faith in Christ should not be grounded in mere history.¹³ In a word, form criticism involves too much unsupported hypothesis to serve as a reliable tool for the student of Jesus' life.

Since the end of the Second World War, redaction criticism has gained a firm hold in biblical criticism generally. In Gospel study, redaction critics have been concerned to delineate the theology of the evangelists.¹⁴ They do so with the understanding that the Gospel writers were less akin to novelists or modern historians, whose every word betrays their intention, than they are to editors (or redactors), whose work is manifest in the way in which they collect material. In order to determine the extent of a given evangelist's work, redaction critics have undertaken to study his vocabulary, syntax and thematic proclivities to distinguish what is characteristic of him (or is redactional) from what must stem from the material available to him (or is traditional).¹⁵ This procedure is rather new as a systematic method, and it will be some time before criteria are fully agreed for judging whether or not a given word, phrase or pattern is characteristic of an editor.

Nonetheless, the method points us in the direction of a most important step forward in logia criticism. Redaction criticism, by showing up the work of the evangelist, permits us to infer what was prior to the evangelist. My own investigation convinces me that traditional dominical kingdom logia contain diction also preserved in the Aramaic Targums.¹⁶ This use of redaction criticism, which

¹³ See H. Anderson, 'The Shift away from the Historical Jesus' in *Jesus and Christian Origins*, pp. 16-55 (New York: OUP, 1964).

¹⁴ The classic works in this field are: G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H.-J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM, 1963); H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke* (London: Faber, 1969); W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (New York: Abingdon, 1969).

¹⁵ This method has been championed by Heinz Schürmann in many books and articles. His work has consistently demonstrated the historical value of the Gospels, and has made it abundantly clear that modern redaction criticism is not a mere extension of form criticism (cf. Perrin in the work cited in n. 1.). It is to be regretted that Professor Schürmann's contributions have not been published in English.

¹⁶ *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (Cambridge PhD thesis, 1976). The following discussion is based on the fifth 'Exegesis' of the thesis. Specialists in the field will find more detail there than I present here,

we may call tradition criticism, is based upon the actual texts of the Gospels, and is therefore less hypothetical than a form-critical approach. Once the method comes to maturity and is applied consistently, it can be expected to yield a critically reliable picture of Jesus.

Such a picture will not be attained easily, as the test case we are about to consider will show. Its achievement requires researchers who are willing to compare the diction, syntax and theme of a given saying with the verbal structures of the Gospel within which it appears. The work is exacting, even tedious, but it is work on the basis of empirical data leading to a functionally objective result. It is not so much a job for tired sceptics as for those who find refreshment in bearing the light burden of critical discipleship.

2. A test case

The above discussion suggests that, given our understanding of how the Gospels have come down to us and of the present capability of New Testament investigation, it is appropriate to analyse dominical kingdom logia using what I have called tradition criticism. Practically speaking, how is this proposal supposed to work?

Mark 9:1 is a suitable candidate for a trial analysis because its authenticity as a Jesus saying has been denied form-critically and its meaning remains problematic.¹⁷ Any approach which claims to be evangelical and critical must be able both to reply to the denial of authenticity and also to illuminate the question of interpretation. The reader of the next few pages will find, I hope, that the proposed method establishes the substantive authenticity and meaning of this dominical saying. (Although I provide translations of the passages which will concern us, you will find the argument easier to follow if you have a synopsis close to hand.)

a. The priority of the Markan version

Since W. R. Farmer's brilliant critique of the intellectual descent of the two source hypothesis,¹⁸ no serious student of the Gospels can merely assume Markan priority to Matthew and Luke. In the present instance, however, it is evident that Mark preserves the most primitive wording of the

since the present effort is designed more to acquaint the student with my method than to run through all of the relevant evidence.

¹⁷ H. Anderson's *Mark* commentary (New Century, 1976), pp. 220-222, provides a good introduction to the discussion of this verse. All commentaries will be cited by Gospel, series (where applicable) and date only.

¹⁸ *The Synoptic Problem* (London: Macmillan, 1964).

logion, which Matthew and Luke interpret so as to bring out its meaning as they understand it, as follows:

'Amen I say to you that there are some of those here standing, some who will not taste death until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom' (Mt. 16: 28).

Matthew has no introduction to his form of the saying corresponding to Mark's 'and he was saying to them'. His version is therefore most closely linked to the Son of man saying which precedes it.¹⁹ This correlates precisely with the fact that Matthew 16: 28 refers to 'the Son of man coming in his kingdom' rather than to the kingdom of God (so Luke and Mark). Following W. C. Allen, most commentators have agreed that Matthew has shaped the logion according to his own conception (developed out of such material as the uniquely Matthean 10: 23).²⁰ A significant voice of dissent was that of Theodore Zahn, who insisted that the Matthew Son of man reference was primitive, and that Mark and Luke expunged it in face of the delay in the parousia.²¹ The construction 'some of those here standing' (*tines tōn hōde hestōtōn*) tells against Zahn's position, since it is far smoother than Mark's 'some here of those standing' (*tines hōde tōn hestēkotōn*) and for that reason should be taken as a secondary improvement.²² We conclude, then, that Matthew has worded 16: 28 to suit his own eschatology.

'But I say to you truly, there are some of those there standing who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God' (Lk. 9: 27).

Luke proceeds analogously at 9: 27. His 'but' or 'and' (*de*) also relates the logion to the preceding Son of man saying, but his use of the phrase 'those there standing' (*autou*, in the less awkward position instead of *hōde*)²³ makes us think of a less imminent

encounter between the Son of man and the 'some' than that predicted in the Matthean parallel. Since Luke saw this saying from an eschatological perspective, he found 'having come in power' (Mk. 9: 1) unsuitable, especially because 'power' for him was a present force for witness given by God or Jesus.²⁴ It was therefore as natural for him to drop this phrase as it was to write 'truly' for 'amen' (cf. 12: 44; 21: 3 and parallels) and the definite article (*hoi*) for 'some who' (*hottines*, which, as Luke felt, is redundant after *tines* in the versions of Matthew and Mark).

We are now left to treat the Markan form of the logion with the assurance that it is the most primitive form extant, the version presupposed by Matthew and Luke. En route, we have discovered the importance of redaction-critical technique for investigating the relationship between the synoptic Gospels. More to the present purpose, we have seen that Matthew and Luke introduced wording into the logion which we recognize as their own because it corresponds to features of their editorial policy manifest elsewhere in their respective works. Neither Gospel writer has fabricated the saying, but each has interpreted it. It is even possible that they knew the logion in its pre-Markan form and have shaped it accordingly, but we can only evaluate this possibility after we have isolated the pre-Markan tradition. To do this, we will continue to search for linguistic traces of redaction, this time in Mark 9: 1.

b. The Markan redaction

'And he was saying to them, Amen I say to you that there are some here of those standing, some who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God having come in power' (Mk. 9: 1).

Many authors have commented on the similarity of Mark 9: 1 to 13: 30.²⁵ They are structurally

¹⁹ Lk. 4: 14; 5: 17; 9: 1; 24: 49; Acts 1: 8; 6: 8; 10: 38; Schürmann, *Lukus* (Herder, 1969), pp. 550-552; cf. E. E. Ellis, *Luke* (New Century, 1974), p. 141. For the eschatological meaning of this verse in Luke's work, see S. Wilson, *The Gentiles and Gentile Missions in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973), pp. 69, 70, 83.

²⁰ A. Cadoux, *The Sources of the Second Gospel* (London: Clarke, n.d.), p. 177; A. Vögtle, 'Exegetische Erwägungen über das Wissen und Selbstbewusstsein Jesu' in J. Metz (ed.), *Gott in Welt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), pp. 642f.; J. Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse* (Rome: Bibelinstitut, 1967), pp. 203f.; Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 199-201; R. Pesch, *Naherwartung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968), pp. 187f.; Perrin, 'The Composition of Mark 9: 1', *Novum Testamentum* 11 (1969), pp. 68f.; V. Hasler, *Amen* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1969), p. 158; A. Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1972), pp. 203f.

¹⁹ W. C. Allen, *Matthew* (ICC, 1912), p. 183.

²⁰ A. H. McNeile, *Matthew* (1915), p. 248; T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: CUP, 1931), pp. 118 n. 1, 213, 220 n. 2; J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (London: SCM, 1957), pp. 53f.; J. Schmid, *Matthäus* (Regensburger Neues Testament, 1959), p. 94; E. Haenchen, 'Die Komposition von Mk. 8: 27—9: 1 und Par.' *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963), p. 103; R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (München: Kaiser, 1966), p. 155; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (Anchor, 1971), p. 201; D. Hill, *Matthew* (New Century, 1972), p. 266; E. Schweizer, *Matthew* (1976), p. 347.

²¹ *Matthew* (1903), p. 552, and *Luke* (1913), p. 382.

²² The oddity of the Markan placement is demonstrated by the fact that it is altered in most manuscripts of Mark. Later scribes found Mark's order unacceptable, and so did Matthew.

²³ For this meaning of *autou*, see Acts 21: 4 and the variant readings at 15: 34; 18: 19; cf. Gn. 22: 5 LXX.

identical, each having the 'amen' locution, a solemn negation (*ou mē*) with the subjunctive, and a word for 'until'. On the basis of their common form, it has been argued that one derives from the other. Jan Lambrecht has held to the priority of 9: 1, and Norman Perrin to that of 13: 30.²⁶ To accept either reconstruction, one would have to be convinced that Mark felt free to hang his own words on dominical syntax. We can only be so convinced if the language of our logion proves on analysis to be redactional; there is no form-critical short-cut around weighing linguistic traits. If the wording of 9: 1 were substantively Markan, we would agree with Perrin (whose conclusion, unlike Lambrecht's, directly impinges on our understanding of this logion) that it is a supplementary development within the Gospel tradition.

In the event, analysis quickly makes it plain that Mark's contribution to 9: 1 is not substantive, but is of the same, interpretative order as that of Matthew and Luke. He introduces 'and he was saying to them', 'that', 'some', 'here' and 'having come'. We will now consider the evidence upon which this deduction is based, and see how these words reveal Mark's understanding of the saying.

Kai elegen autois ('and he was saying to them') is commonly found in the second Gospel as a bridge to connect the saying which follows it to the material which precedes it (*cf.* 2: 27; 4: 2, 11, 21, 24; 6: 4, 10; 7: 9, 14; 8: 21).²⁷ Hence Werner Kelber describes 8: 38 as achieving 'the transition from discipleship to eschatology' and 9: 1 as positing the reward of this eschatologically motivated discipleship.²⁸ Since the Fathers, it has been maintained that 9: 1 points forward to the transfiguration, and F. J. Schierse actually refers to it as 'eine Art Überschrift zu Verklärungsepi- kope'.²⁹ This judgment is confirmed when we see instances of the use of *kai elegen autois* to introduce logia which are followed by narrative sentences (4: 2; 6: 4; 7: 14), and in one case even a full narrative sequence (2: 27), directly pertinent to the sayings in question. The dual connection of 9: 1 in Mark's mind to the Son of man saying which precedes and the transfiguration which follows is therefore established.

²⁶ Lambrecht's argument is more complete than Perrin's, which is refuted by Ambrozic (all three cited in previous note).

²⁷ See, e.g., J. Wellhausen, *Mark* (1903), p. 74; V. Taylor, *Mark* (1966), p. 384; Ambrozic (cited in n. 25), p. 204.

²⁸ *The Kingdom in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), pp. 71, 72.

²⁹ See Taylor (cited in n. 27), p. 385; W. L. Lane, *Mark* (NICNT, 1974), pp. 313, 314; Schierse, 'Historische Kritik und theologische Exegese', *Scholastik* 29 (1954), pp. 528f.

Mark seems to have found it odd to place the solemn negation *ou mē* on the heels of the obviously affirmative 'amen I say to you'. In four of the five occurrences of 'amen' with *ou mē* in his Gospel, 'that' (*hoti*) separates the two (9: 1, 41; 13: 30; 14: 25). *Hoti* does not appear at 10: 15, where a full clause keeps the two expressions at a distance. The practice of Matthew and Luke is not so consistent,³⁰ so it appears that the ambiguity of juxtaposing affirmation and firm negation was felt more keenly by Mark than by his colleagues, and that his use of *hoti* recitative is correspondingly more frequent. It is probable that Mark has inserted the conjunction here. 'Some' (*tines*) is another instance in which the frequency of the usage's appearance in the second Gospel suggests that its pedigree is redactional.³¹ Its presence here handsomely corresponds to Mark's placement of the saying, since it may be construed to refer back to those who will see the parousia,³² and forward to the select three who will see the transfiguration.³³

'Here' (*hōde*) has been placed in such an odd position that not only Matthew (and, using his own term, Luke), but most manuscripts of Mark shift it so as to fall between the participle 'standing' and its definite article.³⁴ Mark 11: 5 (*cf.* also 15: 35) shows that even our redactor would have preferred the normal arrangement. It appears that 'those standing' was a set phrase which Mark felt was not to be broken up; 'here' could only be added in an unusual and awkward manner. For all its oddity, 'here' acquires significance as a Markan connecting link to the transfiguration when it is echoed in Peter's declaration at 9: 5, and Matthew's repetition of *hōde* in 17: 4 shows that he fully appreciated this connection.

'Having come' is Mark's final contribution to the understanding of this logion. To some extent, it may be held to associate itself with the use of the verb 'to come' in the previous verse,³⁵ but due weight should be given to its perfect tense here, which does not correspond to the usage in 8: 38. At 7: 29, 30 the perfect is used twice, once in the

³⁰ While the Matthean parallels to 9: 1 and 13: 30 preserve *hoti*, neither Mt. 10: 42 (= Mk. 9: 41) nor 26: 29 (= Mk. 14: 25) do so. Lk. preserves it in this situation at 21: 32 (= Mk. 13: 30), but not, in most manuscripts, at 9: 27 (and *cf.* 22: 16-18). Neither Mt. 18: 3 nor Lk. 18: 7 have *hoti* (so Mk. 10: 15).

³¹ So Ambrozic, pp. 33, 34, 207.

³² G. Bornkamm, 'Die Verzögerung der Parusie' in W. Schmauck (ed.), *In Memoriam Ernst Lohmeyer* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches, 1951), pp. 117, 118.

³³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Mark* (Cambridge Greek, 1966), pp. 287f.

³⁴ As the more difficult reading, the clumsy order is to be preferred. It is supported by B and perhaps D*.

³⁵ See F. Neiryneck, *Duality in Mark* (Louvain: Leuven University, 1972), p. 79.

indicative and once as a participle, to emphasize that what Jesus says in fact occurs. The Matthean parallel does not use this device, so that we may proceed on the hypothesis that this is a Markan locution, and look for a partner for the participle (*elēluthuian*) in 9: 1. We in fact find the indicative (*elēluthen*) used in Mark 9: 13, where Jesus insists that Elijah *has* come. Again, Matthew did not use the locution (Luke has an equivalent neither to Mk. 7: 29, 30 nor to Mk. 9: 13); 'having come' seems to be a product of Markan style whose correlate is 'has come' in 9: 13 more than 'should come' in 8: 38. Mark has so interpreted 9: 1 that it can be considered fulfilled by the Jesus saying after the transfiguration: Elijah having come is the seal of the kingdom having come. This is why Mark gives priority to Elijah in 9: 4 (*cf.* the more straightforward order of the parallels and Mk. 9: 5). For him, our saying is confirmed by what happened on the mount to Peter, James and John.

c. *The origin and meaning of the saying*

When we remove the Markan redactional elements from our saying, we are left with the following logion:

'Amen I say to you, there are those standing,
some who will not taste death
until they see the kingdom of God in power.

It is now our task to show that these words are traditional (*i.e.*, non-Markan), and to determine the origin of this tradition. In the following paragraphs, we will see that Mark treats this wording in a way which suggests that he knew it from a prior source, and that its complexion is Semitic, sometimes specifically Aramaic. Finally, it will emerge that, once the saying is seen in this context, the vexed question of what Jesus meant when he said it is answered.

The studies of Victor Hasler and Klaus Berger have brought the brief epoch to an end during which it was possible to seize on 'amen' as a hallmark of *ipsissima vox Jesu*. Joachim Jeremias had argued that it was such an indicator, although it should not be ignored that he listed it as one among several.³⁶ But, in a book published in 1969, Hasler showed that the synoptic evangelists exercised discretion in placing the 'amen' phrase, and Berger followed this by suggesting that the term itself has a prehistory in Greek-speaking Jewish Christianity (see the expression *ē mēn* in the

Septuagint).³⁷ Of course this does not mean that Jesus never used this or an equivalent phrase, but it does mean that the presence of 'amen' can no longer be considered a sufficient indication that the saying which follows it is dominical.

In the present instance, the fact that Mark placed *hoi* between the introductory formula and *ou mē* suggests that it did not suit his taste to have the two elements in proximity, and therefore that he inserted neither of them. *Ou mē* itself always occurs in logia in the second Gospel (9: 1, 41; 10: 15; 13: 2, 19, 30, (31); 14: 25, 31),³⁸ and represents the Semitic emphatic negation (*l'* instead of 'l').

Similarly, the awkward Markan addition of *hōde* suggests that 'those standing' is an independent, traditional idiom which Mark thought it better not to interrupt. This suggestion gains force when we see the phrase surfacing in other books of the New Testament (Mt. 26: 73; Jn. 3: 29; Acts 22: 25).³⁹ F. C. Burkitt explained its presence in our literature by pointing out that it is known in Syriac and Aramaic (*hlym dqymyn*) in the sense of 'the bystanders'.⁴⁰ The fact that the phrase was current in Aramaic reinforces an observation which John A. T. Robinson made without reference to this philological detail: the saying envisages a group referred to in the third person (with the participle) which is distinct from those who are addressed in the second person.⁴¹ Who is in this group? We have already seen that Mark identifies them (using *tines* and *hōde*) with the few who are present at the transfiguration, but this is a redactional identification. Without the Markan vocabulary, the question remains open, especially because we know that 'those standing' is not an empty description, but a fairly fixed expression. Is there a traditional identification for this group?

When it is said that 'those standing' are 'some who will not taste death', such a traditional identification does emerge. The fact that Markan 'some' (*tines*) is redundant when placed in proximity to 'some who' (*hoitines*) indicates that the latter is pre-Markan. The construction 'not taste death' is a *hapax legomenon* in the synoptics, but it is known from other sources of dominical logia and from rabbinic literature.⁴² To apply this Semitic

³⁷ Hasler (cited in n. 25); Berger, *Die Amen-Worte Jesu* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), and 'Zur Geschichte der Einleitungsformel "Amen, ich sage euch"' ZNW 63 (1972), pp. 45-75.

³⁸ Neiryneck (cited in n. 35), p. 88.

³⁹ As H. B. Swete, *Mark* (1908), p. 186, saw.

⁴⁰ *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe* II (Cambridge: CUP, 1904), p. 283.

⁴¹ (Cited in n. 20), pp. 90, 91.

⁴² See John 8: 52 and the Gospel of Thomas logia 1, 18, 19, 85 (111); K. Beyer, *Semitische Syntax im Neuen*

³⁶ 'Kennzeichen der ipsissima vox Jesu' in J. Schmid (ed.), *Synoptische Studien* (München: Zink, 1953), pp. 86-93.

idiom (in which taste is used to mean 'experience') to someone is the equivalent of calling him immortal. It is not said of men generally, indeed Adam was understood to have been 'preordained to taste the taste of death'.⁴³ The rabbis thought that immortality belongs, as readers of the Old Testament might guess, to such as the angels, Enoch and Elijah, and in addition to such as Moses, Jeremiah and Ezra.⁴⁴ The likes of these figures, who had been 'taken up', were expected to return with the Messiah (4 Ezra 6: 26) and are known as 'those who have not tasted death'.⁴⁵

Could Jesus have had such figures in mind? Mark's understanding that a subset of the disciples is in view may owe something to John 8: 51, 52, where it is explicitly promised, 'If anyone keep my word, he will not taste death'.⁴⁶ But our logion does not in fact promise immortality in this way; rather it refers to ones, distinct from those addressed, who will not taste death. There is a world of difference between promising immortality and referring to an immortal group, and our logion does the latter. As it happens, we find in the transfiguration two figures (Moses and Elijah) of whom Jewish tradition could say that they did not taste death. That is: Mark placed this saying before the transfiguration precisely because Jesus is speaking of figures similar to those which appear in that pericope. Matthew and Luke also understood this, which is why the former repeats 'here' in 17: 4 and the latter adds the detail that Moses and Elijah were *standing* in 9: 32. The evangelists were not arbitrary redactors; we can see that their interpretations are grounded in the traditional meaning of this logion in which Jesus referred to deathless figures.

Before we move on to the last words of our saying, we must ask: why did Jesus refer to an immortal group? We find an answer in the so-called pseudo-Jonathan Targum to Deuteronomy 32: 1. There, Moses swears 'by witnesses which do not taste death'. Using a similar Aramaic idiom, in tandem with a construction (*ou mē* with

'until') which can carry asseverative force,⁴⁷ Jesus calls the deathless figures to witness that what he says is true, just as he assures us elsewhere (Mt. 8: 11, 12; Mk. 12: 27 and parallels) that God's concern for us is as sure as his continuing relationship with the patriarchs. Jesus can call those like Moses and Elijah as witnesses because his God is the God of the living.

The use of 'until' (*heōs an*) does not mean that 'the ones standing' are expected to die after they see the kingdom; this is part of a Semitic construction (*l'* with *d*) which serves as an emphatic negation whose temporal aspect is not to be pressed.⁴⁸ At Genesis 28: 15, for example, God says to Jacob, 'I will not (Hebrew *l'*; Greek *ou mē*) leave you until (Hebrew *d*; Greek *heōs*) I have done that of which I have spoken to you'. The point is obviously not that God will desert Jacob after he performs his promise, but that he will really do what he says. By analogy, Mark 9: 1 does not predict the death of those to whom reference is made, but affirms that they will definitely see the kingdom. In this it is similar to John 8: 51, 52 and unlike Luke 2: 26 (which has 'before' instead of 'until'). Mark only uses *heōs an* in logia (6: 10; 9: 1) and in an Old Testament citation (12: 36), so that it should not be considered a redactional turn of phrase.⁴⁹

The crux of the logion is what those who will not taste death experience (*i.e.* 'see', as at Jn. 3: 3, a Semitic construction used by Jesus in reference to the kingdom): they will participate in 'the kingdom of God in power'. The prepositional phrase *en dynamei* is unusual in the second Gospel.⁵⁰ At 14: 62, 'power' is a periphrasis for God, and the 'with much power' of 13: 26 suggests the accompanying spectacle of the Son of man's coming, not the actual means of the kingdom's manifestation. Since Bernhard Weiss, scholars have associated Mark's diction here with Paul's *en dynamei* usage,⁵¹ and 1 Corinthians 4: 20 is especially striking in the present connection: 'not in word is the kingdom of God but in power'. Paul apparently knew something of the saying which Mark reproduces more fully, so it would be perverse not to assign it to a primitive stock of dominical logia.

⁴⁷ Such force can be seen in Mt. 5: 18, 26; 10: 23; 23: 39; 24: 21, 34; 26: 29; Mk. 13: 19; 14: 25; Lk. 12: 59; 13: 35; 21: 32; 22: 16, 18; Jn. 13: 38. See also Jn. 4: 14; 8: 51, 52; 10: 28; 11: 26; 13: 8; 1 Cor. 8: 13.

⁴⁸ Beyer (cited in n. 42), p. 132f. n. 1.

⁴⁹ Perrin, 'Composition' (cited in n. 25), p. 69, attempted to draw a conclusion on the basis of the mere frequency of *heōs* without considering the sort of material in which it is used.

⁵⁰ Cf. Perrin, *Rediscovering* (cited in n. 25), p. 19 n. 4.

⁵¹ See E. Klostermann, *Mark* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 1936), p. 85.

Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Rupprecht, 1968), pp. 132f.

⁴³ Genesis Rabbah 9.6.

⁴⁴ See the helpful note in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), pp. 576f. Josephus (*Ant.* IV.326) thought that Moses enjoyed a status similar to that of Elijah and Enoch (*cf.* IX.28b).

⁴⁵ The Syriac reads 'ylyn dnmwt' *l' temw*, the Latin *qui mortem non gustaverunt*.

⁴⁶ See Berger, *Die Amen-Wörter* (cited in n. 37), pp. 64f. As Barnabas Lindars points out in his commentary on *John* (New Century, 1972) pp. 332, 333, the Markan passage is probably a source of the Johannine passage.

Finally, we have at our disposal an Aramaic source which similarly associates the kingdom with the phrase 'in power'. In the Targum to Isaiah (40: 9) we find the injunction, 'say to the cities of the house of Judah, the kingdom of your God is revealed'. The following clause reads, 'Behold the Lord God in power (*btqwv*) is revealed'. Now extant Targums generally date from a late stage in rabbinic development, but they contain elements from much earlier periods.⁵³ The coherence of the Targum to Isaiah 40: 9, 10 with Mark 9: 1 may be taken to date the former in the first century and to imply that it provides an example of the sort of language Jesus used. It is also significant that the 'kingdom' in the Targum is not an elaborately conceived regime, but a rendering of the Hebrew 'your God'. Jesus here assures us in an idiom known to us from the Targum that the kingdom, understood as God's revelation on behalf of his people, is a reality. He was as certain of this as he was that the patriarchs, Moses and Elijah, live in the sight of God.

d. Conclusions

Having worked through the wording of Mark, a few general comments from me are in order. First, I am well aware that it is not a common practice to subject a verse to such a 'microscope' (as Professor C. F. D. Moule has dubbed my method), but neither is it a common result of twentieth-century criticism to show that the evangelists substantively transmit a dominical saying. To be sure, we have seen that they do so in a way which accords with their respective redactional habits, but our conclusion has been emphatic: this saying of Jesus was indeed interpreted, but none but he invented it.

Now a word about my exegesis of what Jesus meant by this logion. It is common practice to take 'those standing' to refer to the disciples, or to a group of disciples. Taking the saying in this way ignores the fact that those addressed are syntactically distinguished from those to whom reference is made, and it rides roughshod over the Semitic constructions ('not taste death', *l'—'d*) which may indicate that immortal witnesses are in view (as in

the targum cited to Deuteronomy 32: 1). The most unsatisfactory feature of the usual exegesis is that it turns the kingdom of God into a cipher, something it never is in the teaching of Jesus;⁵³ if you refer this saying to the disciples, you must look for some esoteric indication of what they are to 'see' in their lifetimes, and you have only the kingdom phrase to find it in. This situation has occasioned the identification of the kingdom with, e.g., the transfiguration, the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, the spread of the gospel, the parousia.⁵⁴ My interpretation begins by taking details of syntax and grammatical form seriously, and ends by asserting that the 'kingdom in power' is no apocalyptic crossword puzzle, but, as Paul knew very well (1 Cor. 4: 20), a forthright reference to God's strength, whose efficacy Jesus avers to his followers by immortal witnesses.

Last but far from least: our microscope has shown what amazing documents the synoptic Gospels are. They actually preserve traces of Aramaic kingdom locutions best ascribed to Jesus himself. They do not preserve as a museum preserves, with each specimen in its proper bottle; they weave dominical traditions together with their own language, their own experience, and the result is a durable tapestry, historical patterns highlighted with theological coloration. They stand as a challenge to us to weave the Jesus pattern, the kingdom in power which he proclaimed, into our own experience. Notice too how vital these documents are. We approached them asking empirical questions about their language; they answered these questions, and in the process revealed the authenticity and meaning of a central Jesus saying. It was not necessary to *assume* that they are the word of God, they prove themselves as such under open inquiry. This is as it should be: the authority of the Bible is not merely a human assumption; if it were it would be useless. No—biblical authority is inherent in the canonical documents' attempt to transmit a divine *datum*. A primary evangelical and critical task is, not to peddle our assumptions, but to encourage the sort of open, detailed inquiry which will vindicate them.

⁵³ Bowker (cited in n. 9) provides a good introduction to this material. In particular, P. Churgin, *Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (New Haven: Yale University, 1927), has seen in the Isaiah Targum exegetical elements stemming from the period from before the destruction of the Temple (p. 23) to the Sassanid persecution (p. 28).

⁵³ A point made recently by Perrin in *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (cited in n. 10), p. 196.

⁵⁴ For competent catalogues of such interpretations, see Cranfield (cited in n. 33), pp. 286-288 and A. Plummer, *Luke* (ICC, 1922), p. 249.