

MARK 7:1-23 AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

William Loader
Murdoch University

William (Bill) Loader is Associate Professor in New Testament at Murdoch University and Lecturer in the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia

οὐδέν ἐστιν ἕξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινούοντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

There is nothing from outside of people which entering them can defile them; but it is the things coming out from within people which defile people.¹

Mark 7:15

The man who denies that impurity from external sources can penetrate into man's essential being is striking at the presuppositions and the plain verbal sense of the Torah and at the authority of Moses himself. Over and above that, he is striking at the presuppositions of the whole classical conception of cultus with its sacrificial and expiatory system.

Ernst Käsemann²

These words from that epoch-making lecture given in 1953 in Jugenheim by the late Professor Dr Ernst Käsemann belong to his tentative reconstruction of what might be said to have been distinctive of the historical Jesus despite the caveats of

¹ In this translation I have deliberately replaced singular by plural in order to avoid both the less inclusive "man" and to retain a close correlation between nouns and pronouns in the text, which with a word like, "person" in the singular would have created an awkward sounding text.

² E. Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" in *Essays on New Testament Themes* SBT 41 (London: SCM, 1964) 15–47, here 39.

vigorous historical research and dialectical theology. In honour of the one who spoke them and who helped inspire me to pursue New Testament research I offer this paper which addresses the question: what does the passage Mark 7:1-23 tell us about the historical Jesus?³ While my conclusions will confirm what Käsemann declared, as true in relation to Mark rather than to Jesus, I stand in great awe of a great scholar who in so many major areas of New Testament research opened new directions and evoked fresh understandings, *ein Bahnbrecher der Wissenschaft*.

The paper begins with a brief consideration of the passage itself in its Markan context and proceeds to discussion of pre-Markan tradition before finally addressing the question of the historical Jesus. The paper assumes that we do not have direct access to Mark's sources (ie. it assumes Mark predates Matthew and Luke). It also proceeds on the dual assumption both that Mark 7:1-23 does tell us something about the historical Jesus and that such historical reconstruction is fraught with difficulties. Since the focus of the paper is the historical Jesus, the section on Mark itself will be brief, the one on pre-Markan tradition less brief, and the one on the historical Jesus more detailed.

I. Mark 7:1-23 in the context of the Gospel of Mark⁴

1. The function of Mark 7:1-23 within its literary context

(a) In 7:1-23 Mark portrays Jesus as rejecting the tradition of the elders and effectively declaring purity distinctions in relation to food invalid (thereby removing a barrier to inclusion of Gentiles).

(b) In 7:24-30 Mark's account of Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman exemplifies the problem and portrays Jesus as prepared to cross the boundary.

(c) In 8:14-21 Mark shows Jesus trying to lead the disciples to understand the meaning of the major events which have occurred over the preceding two chapters, especially the feedings; it is effectively instruction for the hearers. Jesus warns the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees (and of Herod). The leaven of Herod recalls the latter's murder of John the Baptist, recalled as a flashback in 6:17-29 (cf.

³ I remember with great pleasure the visit of Professor Käsemann to Auckland, New Zealand in 1978. I particularly recall one evening when in face of his initial scepticism I persuaded him that it was indeed possible for us to see the southern cross in the night sky as we stood in the car park; we succeeded. It was my pleasure to be with him also in Melbourne and Perth and his lecture tour and my emigration to Perth coincided.

⁴ Much of what follows reflects my discussion in *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law. A Study of the Gospels* WUNT 2 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 65-79.

also the murderous plotting of the Pharisees and Herodians in 3:6). The leaven of the Pharisees is above all their teaching. This recalls 7:1-23, where, according to Mark, Jesus pits his own teaching, which leads to inclusiveness, against that of the Pharisees, which led to exclusiveness. In 7:19-21 Jesus calls attention to the numbers in the feedings of the 5000 and the 4000: 12 and 7; they symbolise the inclusion of Israel and the Gentiles, made possible in part by Jesus' radical approach to the food laws.⁵

(d) In 6:17 - 8:21 food imagery plays a significant role, both literally and symbolically: Herod's "black eucharist" (6:21-29; cf. 8:16); the feeding of the 5000 (6:30-44); the failure of the disciples to understand it (after the miracle of the walking on the water, 6:52); 'the loaves' (7: 2); issues of eating food (7:2,5,15-23); food 'for the dogs' (7:27); the feeding of the 4000 (8:1-9); the disciples have only one loaf in the boat (8:14), prompting Jesus' warnings about the leaven of the Pharisees and that of Herod (8:15) and the challenge to understand the meaning of the numbers of baskets at the feeding (8:16-21).

(e) Within this broader context 7:1-23 helps celebrate the inclusion of Gentiles by showing that Jesus made it possible. It is hardly arguing for such inclusion as though it had not already been achieved. We find a similar concern to affirm such inclusion, also, in part, by use of symbolism, in Mark 5 where Mark juxtaposes the exorcism of the demoniac in Gentile territory (5:1-20) and the healing of two women in Jewish territory (5:21-43), one 12 years old and the other 12 years ill.

2. Mark 7:1-23 in Mark's Theology

(a) 7:19 καθαρίζων⁶ πάντα τὰ βρώματα summarises the point of the context. It is not to be seen as the hinge of the argument or a new insight. Even without it, the context would be clearly implying that eating food cannot make one unclean. Foods are not clean or unclean. Such concerns are not just of lesser significance, as they

⁵ Additional Israel imagery in 5000 includes: "like sheep without a shepherd"; the seating in 50's and 100's; and that it is a feeding in a desert place or wilderness. It also takes place in Jewish territory. The word for basket may reflect Jewish baskets. Except for the location in the wilderness, in the feeding of the 4000 all these elements are absent. It takes place in Gentile territory. The word for baskets may reflect Gentile baskets. In addition, in the feeding of the 5000 the number of loaves (5) may intend a reference to Torah, and the 7 loaves in the feeding of the 4000, a universal reference - may!

⁶ B. J. Malina, "A Conflict Approach to Mark 7" *Forum* 4 (1988) 3-30, esp. 22-25, argues that 7:19 should read καθαρίζον. Jesus is uttering "a truism to the effect that once food is ingested and subsequently defecated, it is no longer unclean" (p. 23). The better attested

might be for some Jews and some Christians of the day; they have no significance, according to Mark. It is not that they once had significance and have now been “abolished”; the argument of the context implies that they never could have validity. Mark’s Jesus is pointing this out. That is the import of the comment in 7:19c. By this comment Mark is not indicating that Jesus suddenly abolished purity laws with regard to food, but that he had effectively demonstrated that all food is clean. The broader context of 7:1-23, like the immediate context of 7:19c, also demands that we understand 7:19c in this way. In that sense 7:19c, while not the key to understanding the passage, is a convenient summary of its point which Mark appends lest the hearer miss it. In addition, however, καθαρίζων, which here must mean, declare to be clean rather than make clean,⁷ functions not so much as part of the argument, but as an indication of Jesus’ authority. It tells us what Jesus was doing by authority, much as 2:17b and 2:28, compared with 2:17a and 2:27 respectively, add the christological element of Jesus’ authority.

(b) Thus foods are not unclean, according to Mark; things from outside (7:15) cannot render a person unclean. He understands 7:15 as an exclusive antithesis.⁸ Therefore from Mark’s perspective traditions based on that like the multiple washings (including handwashing) mentioned in 7:2-4 are nonsensical. Foods never were unclean; for food is just food and passes through us and out into the toilet (7:17-23). Mark’s view is that Jesus showed that such purity laws are and were invalid.

reading, he proposes, was the work of a Gentile scribe trying to harmonise New Testament food laws and Gentile Christian practice. He argues that the rating of excrement was an issue in Jesus’ day, citing Essene strictures (on this see the discussion below). The argument is, however, insufficient to overturn the strong manuscript evidence for καθαρίζων. Cf. also G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973) 29, argues that in 19c Mark has modified part of the original saying of Jesus which had alluded to the function of the latrine “where all food is cleansed away”. He suggests it originally was a pun between אכיל (“the place”) and אכל (“be clean”). Against a reference to ἀφεδρῶνα see R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* SNTSMS 28 (Cambridge: CUP, 1975) 144.

⁷ Cf. J. Marcus, “Scripture and tradition in Mark 7,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels* BBETL CXXXI, edited by C. Tuckett (Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 177-196, who argues that “καθαρίζων does not imply that foods have *always* been clean” (183 n. 25). It never bore that meaning in ritual contexts in the Old Testament. Against this is the plain meaning of the argument of the context: food by its nature cannot make people unclean. Context determines meaning.

⁸ So U. Luz, in: R. Smend and U. Luz, *Gesetz Kohlhammer Taschenbücher - Biblische Konfrontationen* 1015 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981) 58-156, here 118; H. Sariola, *Markus und das Gesetz. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum* 56 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990) 54.

Mark would have been aware that this also set aside OT law; he is very familiar with OT.⁹ Mark does not share OT purity values.¹⁰ Mark defines purity in 7:21-23 (and implicitly in 7:9-13) in ethical terms, coherent with, though not necessarily directly derived from decalogue values (cf. 10:17-21; 12:28-34). For Mark it is not that these matter more, but that the others do not matter at all. Similarly Mark has the temple “made with hands” replaced by a community of prayer, which had been the temple building’s purpose all along.¹¹

(c) Mark also argues that attention to externals goes hand in hand with neglecting the internal, which, in turn, manifests itself in hypocrisy and deceit (7:6-13). Thus in 7:6-7 Mark has Jesus address the Pharisees and scribes as hypocrites and cite Isa 29:13 LXX as evidence: “This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching the commandments of human beings as their teachings.” He uses it to contrast lip and heart, on the one hand, and to attack mere human teachings. 7:8 presses home the point by equating “the commandments of human beings as their teachings” with the scribes’ tradition (“the tradition of human beings” 7:8), which in turn equates to “the tradition of the elders” of 7:5. The implicit contrast between mere externals and the internal in 7:3-4 now becomes in 7:6-8 one of external behaviour of the lips not matching the heart. The “teachings” are portrayed as enabling this to happen.

“And he was saying to them” introduces a new section, 7:9-13, closely related to the previous argument. Thus 7:9-12 goes on to claim that “the tradition of the elders”, which, according to 7:3-4, stipulates external washings, also cements a more serious division between religion of the heart and actual behaviour, between honouring parents and immorally robbing them of support through abuse of the corban system. Jesus tells them; you are thus “setting aside the word of God for your tradition which you have received” (7:13). The focus of the tradition on externals produces

⁹ Cf. Sariola, *Markus*, 56-57, who doubts this.

¹⁰ Malina’s conflict analysis in “A conflict approach”, remains in the arena of dispute about the tradition of the elders and does not appear to recognise that even were 19c to read as he suggests the context addresses something much more than Jewish tradition. For the context attacks fundamental principles underlying Torah itself. It requires a conflict theory that gives weight to such absolutes and changes the nature and type of the conflict from one among differing interpretations to one where unquestioned authority is called into question. This dimension is also missing from J. H. Neyrey, “The Symbolic universe of Luke-Acts: ‘They Turn the World Upside Down’” in: J. H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts. Models for Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 271-304, who otherwise offers a helpful analysis of Markan purity issues from the perspective of cultural anthropology.

¹¹ See Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude to the Law*, 95–117.

this kind of behaviour - so Mark. In 7:13b Mark has Jesus generalise: "You do many such things like this!"

7:6-13 amounts to an attack not only against abuses but against what Mark understands as the tradition of the elders and its concern with externals, which Mark implies leads to such abuses. It is not in itself a setting aside of aspects of Torah, as is 7:15, in the way that Mark understands this saying. But nor should we separate Torah and "the tradition of the elders" too sharply, as written and oral Torah. For the same principle used in argument against concern with externals in 7:6-13 also affects understanding of Torah where it is concerned with purity laws. The transition from 7:6-13 to 7:14-23 is not as great as sometimes supposed. Similarly the mood and tenor of 7:15-23 needs to inform our reading of 7:6-13 and, indeed, 7:1-5.

(d) In summary, in 7:1-23 Mark portrays Jesus as exposing the Pharisees' teaching as leaven which corrupts and at the same time he has Jesus argue and declare that concern with outward purity is both irrelevant and nonsensical. There are three kinds of argument: (i) moral: concern with externals as expressed in the Pharisees' teaching leads to hypocrisy and corruption; (ii) rationalising: externals like food have no purity or impurity values in themselves; and (iii) christological: Jesus was καθαριζων πρηντα τα βρρωματα.

II. PreMarkan Tradition in Mark 7:1-23

1. Mark 7:15-23

Most commentators see καθαριζων πρηντα τα βρρωματα (7:19c) as a Markan addition.¹² If so, then the exposition of 7:15 which we find within 7:17-23 is pre-Markan. Looking more closely at 7:17-23, we may note that the inclusion of the material in a private word to the new insiders (in a house; 7:17) is a typically Markan arrangement and likely to come here from Mark, as is the introduction which affronts the disciples in typically Markan fashion (7:18a). Therefore the pre-Markan tradition is likely to be contained in 7:18b, 19ab; 20 and perhaps 21-23. It looks like coming from a circle which shared Mark's secularising ideology relating to food and had developed in a Gentile context where the community applied the logion, 7:15, to issues of food, clean and unclean, possibly also including food that had been offered to idols.¹³

¹² For instance, R. H. Gundry, *Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 367, who points to the awkward syntax as indicative of an addition.

¹³ So Sariola, *Markus*, 49; J. D. G. Dunn, "Jesus and Ritual Purity: A Study of the Tradition-

This means we may detect at least three levels in the text with regard to 7:15-23.: (i) 7:15; (ii) 7:18b,19ab,20 (and possibly 21-23)¹⁴ and (iii) 7:17-18a and 19c (and possibly 21-23 or just 23).

2. Mark 7:1-5

Turning to 7:1-15, 7:3-4 is clearly a parenthetical comment, inserted as an explanation for a Gentile audience. It may stem directly from Mark, or, as is more likely, Mark added the words, καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι “and all the Jews”, to an existing parenthesis. The author of the parenthesis also added the explanation, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ἀνίπτοις, “that is, with unwashed hands” in 7:2. Mark is probably responsible for 7:1 and for the reference to “the loaves” in 7:2, which recalls the feeding of the 5000 and the left over fragments. If not directly by Mark, the parenthesis would probably have been added at the same stage as the exposition of 7:15 in 7:18b,19ab,20(21-23), in a Gentile setting. Behind 7:2 and 5, now on either side of the parenthesis, 7:3-4, is an earlier objection about Jesus’ disciples eating bread with unclean hands, perhaps represented in the wording of 7:5. The words, κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων,, “the tradition of the elders”, may well have formed part of the original question; but they may be an addition to provide a basis for what immediately follows. Either way, within the present text the initial response of Jesus picks up these words.

3. Mark 7:6-13

There are strong links between the generalisations in 7:6-13 (especially 7:8-9 and 13) and those of 7:3-4. This probably means that much of 7:6-13 stems from Mark or the pre-Markan author of the parenthesis. In its present form 7:6-13 has two parts, 7:6-8 and 7:9-13, each with an introduction (7:6 and 7:9). 7:6-8 is focused on Isa 29:13, which 7:6a introduces as applicable to the Pharisees and scribes and which 7:8 actually applies. Similarly 7:9 and 13a neatly frame 7:10-12. The generalisation, 7:13b (καὶ παρόμοια τοιαῦτα πολλὰ ποιεῖτε., “you do many such things”) probably stems from Mark. The same may apply to the generalising framework, 7:9 and 13a. Alternatively, these verses, together, perhaps, with 7:6-8, are from the same pre-Markan stage to which 7:3-4 and 7:18b,19ab,20 belong; but

History of Mark 7:15,” in: *Jesus, Paul and the Law. Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990) 37-60, here: 47.

¹⁴ On 21-23 see Sariola, *Markus*, 58-60. The list of vices is stylised, the first six in the plural, the second, in the singular, alludes only in part to the decalogue in the LXX, but loosely and is wider in scope.

either way, there is a consistency of emphasis. Mark or Mark's ideological circle may well be turning Isa 29:13 back on their accusers, who would have seen liberalising Christian tradition as substituting human principles for the precepts of Torah, as Marcus has suggested.¹⁵ It therefore makes sense to see 7:6-13 as a secondary addition undertaken in a Gentile context, dealing with conflicts which would concern a Gentile church under fire from Jewish or Christian Jewish criticism about "relaxing" Torah, and belonging therefore in the same realm of thought as the extrapolation of 7:15 in 7:18b,19ab,20(21-23). It is a secondary expansion of the anecdote which has its beginning in 7:2,5.

Is there evidence of tradition in 7:6-13 which goes earlier than Mark and the pre-Markan radicalism? The use of Isa 29:13 LXX need not, in itself rule out the possibility of earlier traditional use, since the difference of the LXX from the MT text may well reflect a variant Hebrew text which read וְהָיָה ("void/in vain") instead of וְהָיָה ("and is") of MT. The same might apply to Mark's additional word: "teaching .. as teaching", though this is less likely. It is difficult to be sure, but I am more inclined to believe that the expansion came at the level of dispute in the Gentile church context than that it formed part of the original anecdote as the response to the question about hand washing.¹⁶ Behind 7:10-12 there may be an older tradition about Jesus attacking abuse of corban laws.¹⁷

4. The anecdote behind Mark 7:1-23

If 7:6-13 makes best sense as an expansion of an earlier anecdote, the anecdote, itself, probably consisted of 7:(2),5 and 7:15 as Jesus' response.¹⁸ In the next section

¹⁵ Marcus, "Scripture and tradition in Mark 7."

¹⁶ Cf. R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 17; C. E. Carlston, "'The Things that defile' (Mark vii. 14) and the Law in Matthew and Mark," *NTS* 15 (1968) 75-96, here: 91; E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968); *The Good News according to Mark* (London: SPCK, 1970) 77-78; J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* II/1.2 (Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978/79) 267-269.

¹⁷ So H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1973; 2nd edn., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986) 142-146, 164-165, who sees the original conflict anecdote as 7:10a,11,12,13a; S. Westerholm, *S. Jesus and Scribal Authority* Coniectanea Biblica NT Ser 10 (Lund: Gleerup, 1978) 80, 82; Luz, *Gesetz*, 118; Sariola, *Markus*, 49, who sees the reference to the decalogue commandment in 11d,12 as stemming from Mark.

¹⁸ So K. Berger, *Die Gesetzesauslegung Jesu. Ihr historischer Hintergrund im Judentum und im Alten Testament. Teil I: Markus und Parallelen* WMANT 40 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1972) 463-464; J. Lambrecht, "Jesus and the Law. An Investigation of Mk

I shall deal with the many questions which this raises, including the ways in which the response connects and does not connect with the question. For now, it is worth noting that the anecdote with its response would reflect a similar pattern to others found in Mark's gospel. They are characterised by a question about Law, usually from what might be deemed an extreme standpoint and a clever aphoristic response in bipartite form.

The pattern is to be traced within the following passages:

2:1-12 (question over declaring sins forgiven) response:

“What is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your pallet and walk’?” (2:9)

2:15-17 (question over eating in bad company) response:

“It is not the well who have need of a doctor, but rather the sick.” (2:17a)

2:18-22 (question over the disciples' not fasting) response:

“The children of the bridal chamber cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them.” (2:19a)

2:23-28 (question over disciples' plucking grain on the sabbath) response:

“The sabbath was made for people; not people for the sabbath.” (2:27)

3:1-6 (question over healing on the sabbath) response:

“Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm?” (3:4)

7:1-23 (question over eating with unclean hands) response:

“There is nothing from outside of people which entering them can defile them; but it is the things coming out from within people which defile people.

10:2-12 (question about divorce) response:

“What God therefore has yoked together let no one separate” (10:9)

12:13-17 (question about tax) response:

“What belongs to Caesar give to Caesar and what belongs to God, to God” (12:17).

7,1-23,” *ETHL* 53 (1977) 24-82, here: 56, 66; R. P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity. Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* JSNTS 13 (Sheffield: JSOTPr, 1986) 62-67, 74; B. L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence. Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 189-192; W. Weiss, “Eine neue Lehre mit Vollmacht” *Die Streit- und Schulgespräche des Markusevangeliums* BZNW 52 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 66-67; F. Vouga, *Jésus et la Loi selon la Tradition synoptique* Le Monde de la Bible (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1988) 70; J. W. Taeger, “Der grundsätzliche oder ungrundsätzliche Unterschied. Anmerkungen zur gegenwärtigen Debatte um das Gesetzesverständnis Jesu” in *Jesus und das jüdische Gesetz* edited by I. Broer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), pp. 13-36, here: 24. G. Salyer, “Rhetoric, Purity, and Play: Aspects of Mark 7:1-23,” *Semeia* 64 (1993) 139-170, discusses the subsequent elaboration of the *chreia* in the light of ancient rhetorical theory (142-146). Sariola, *Markus*, 30, objects to seeing 7:2,5,15 as a unit, because it would imply that Mark had added the less logical material between 7:5

I have argued elsewhere that behind each passage there is an anecdote with a *mashal* like punchline (Mark even calls 7:15 a *parabole* in 7:17). The logion is argumentative and confrontative and normally poses alternatives or contrasts two possibilities or images. The nature of the argumentation is not on the basis of Jesus' authority but on the basis of an appeal to reasonableness. Frequently we find in addition (and, I would argue, as an addition at some stage) an appeal beyond mere argument to Jesus' authority or to his significance.¹⁹ Thus:

2:10 "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"

2:17b "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners"

2:19b-20 "As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day."

2:28 "For the Son of Man is lord also of the sabbath"

3:4 "...to save life or to kill"

7:19c "making all foods clean"?

In addition we frequently find that the anecdotes have been elaborated. In 2:23-28 and 10:2-11 we see the introduction of scriptural argument, as, indeed, also in 7:1-23.

With regard to aphoristic responses, the logia, at least one is inseparable from its context (2:9) and two others are also so closely related that it is doubtful that they ever would have existed separately (2:19a and 3:4).²⁰

7:1-23 appears then to built around a *chreia* which is reflected in 7:(2),5,15, and which has been subsequently elaborated in a Gentile Christian setting by (a) parenthetical remarks in 3-4 and a clause in 2; (b) an attack on the tradition of the elders (7:6-13), which may, in turn draw on earlier material about Jesus and corban; and (c) an elaboration of 7:15 in 7:18b,19ab,20(21-23) applying the logion to food

and 7:15. Instead he posits two sources: 7:3b-4c,5b-6a,9b-11c,11e,13ab, on the one hand, and 15, already expanded before Mark by 18b-19b, 20, on the other (p. 49). I see no reason why his two sources should not be seen as one and that behind them lies the anecdote. Its elaboration in stages both through 6-13 and 17-20 makes good sense if seen in the context of Gentile Christian polemics against Jewish (Christian) attacks.

¹⁹ See also Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 197.

²⁰ So A. Hultgren, *Jesus and his Adversaries. The Form and Function of the Conflict Stories in the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979) 81, 82. On *mashalim* in the synoptic tradition see Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 81-82; also P. Sellew, "Aphorisms in Mark: A Stratigraphic Analysis," *Forum* 8 (1-2, 1992) 141-160 and on controversy anecdotes: Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 172-207.

issues of the day (possibly also by the addition of words to 7:15). Mark has drawn it together (a) by links to his food theme, to the feeding of the 5000, and to the overall composition of 6:14 - 8:21 which celebrates the inclusion of Gentiles, (b) by the generalising statements (probably ‘and all the Jews’ in 7:3; “and you do many such things” 7:13b and possibly 7:9,13a) and (c) by the explanation of what Jesus was doing in 7:19c and the framework of private teaching and manner of Jesus’ address to the disciples (7:18a).

III. Mark 7:1-23 and the Historical Jesus.

Possible Jesus material is to be found in the anecdote 7:2,5,15. Possibly there is Jesus tradition also in 7:11-13.²¹ Elements of 7:6-8 and of 7:20-23 may also reach back to Jesus. The rest of this paper will focus, in particular, on the anecdote and address a number of key questions: Is the Markan anecdote thinkable: What is our evidence for the practice of washing hands for purification before meals? How could failure to wash hands render a person unclean? This is related to the question of how 7:15 connects or does not connect with the question in the anecdote. Why focus on the disciples? Is the anecdotal form of 7:2,5,15 secondary to the logion, 7:15 (which is found in Thomas in a mission context)? What was the original form of the logion? How might Jesus have understood 7:15? How does this tradition cohere with what we otherwise might claim to have been characteristic of the historical Jesus and developments in the early church?

1. Washing²² hands for purification before meals.

There is no indication from the available evidence which would suggest that this element of the anecdote is unthinkable in the time of Jesus. The best case is that hand washing for purity was practised by some, probably some Pharisees, as our

²¹ Westerholm, *Scribal Authority*, 76-78, concludes that earlier Pharisaic teachers did not free people from vows even in such a case of conflict with parents’ interests. We are dealing here with abuse. See also Gundry, *Mark*, 363 and the discussion in E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 51-57, who points also to Philo’s stance in *Hyp* 7:3-5, which is similar to the position being attacked here.

²² Neither washing nor rinsing adequately conveys the action entailed which probably consisted of pouring water over the hands or dipping them up to the wrist. On πσυμῆ see M. Hengel, “Mc 7,3 πσυμῆ: Die Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Lösung,” *ZNW* 60 (1969) 182-198.

text suggests, on the basis of applying higher standards of purity to themselves and expecting it of others of apparently like intent, that is, of people like Jesus who were also serious about being fully obedient to God's will.²³ One might counter that there is no reason to expect that they would want to force their view on others in the manner presupposed, but this depends on the historical reconstruction. I have no difficulty imagining that that there might have been (at least from the perspective of

²³ Relevant texts include: Judith 12:7-9 Judith bathed every night. "After bathing she prayed to the Lord God ... Then she returned purified and stayed in the tent until she ate her food toward evening" (NRSV).

Sib Or 3:591-592 In contrast to people who honour "the works of men": "For on the contrary, at dawn they lift up holy arms toward heaven, from their beds, always sanctifying their flesh* with water, and they honor only the Immortal who always rules, and then their parents." * v.l. "hands"

Sib Or 4:162-166 "Ah, wretched mortals, change these things, ... and wash your whole bodies in perennial rivers. Stretch out your hands to heaven and ask forgiveness.."

Aristeas 305-306 Referring to the practice of the translators: "Following the custom of all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea in the course of their prayers to God, and then proceeded to the reading and explication of each point. I asked this question: 'What is their purpose in washing their hands while saying their prayers?' They explained that it is evidence that they have done no evil, for all activity takes place by means of the hands" (All 3 texts cited from *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* Vols 1&2, edited by J. H. Charlesworth [New York: Doubleday, 1983/1985]).

Of these only Judith appears to make a link with eating in a state of purity after such washing. Note also the symbolic use of the motif of hand washing in Ps 24:3-4; 26:6, which assumes the act of hand washing (probably by priests, Ex 30:17-21 or possibly Deut 21:6-7 as a sign of innocence). Cf. also James 4:8: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you people of double mind" to which Marcus, "Scripture and Tradition," draws attention (p.182 n. 21). Relevant mishnaic tradition includes: mEd 1:3; mMiqw 1:1 - 6:11; mYad 1:1 - 2:4; mEd 5:6; mHag 2:5-6; see also tDemai 2:11-12 (discussed in detail in Booth, *Purity*, 194-199). There is evidence in the New Testament for immersion before meals (Luke 11:38; and in our passage in 7:4, if we read βαπτισονται); this fits well in the landscape of the time where *mikwaoth* were very common.

For discussion of the practice of washing or rinsing hands before eating see Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 30-31, 39-40, 160-163, 228-231, 258-271, esp. 260-263 and Booth, *Purity*, 155-203. Assessing the available evidence for how such hand washing would be understood Booth concludes: "It seems probable that solid *hullin*, if rendered susceptible by water being put on, was capable of suffering first- or second-degree impurity at the time of Jesus, but not third degree" (178). On hands, he writes: "The history also shows that the defiling power of hands actually or presumptively defiled was probably second degree in the time of Jesus" (p. 180). This means they could not then render *hullin*

the questioners) sufficient common ground to justify such a question.²⁴ It does not commit one to the view that Pharisees were forever seeking to missionise the populace with their interpretations.

On the understanding of purity at the time it appears that unclean hands, which would have second degree impurity, could not directly render food unclean, which could carry only first or second degree impurity. The impurity would have to be mediated from hands to a liquid, which would be rendered impure to the first degree and thence to food, which would be affected with second degree impurity. The assumption of the questioners appears, then, to be that washing hands will avoid the possibility of contaminating liquid at a meal which, rendered unclean, would make food unclean if it came into contact with it. Thus we are dealing with a group of Pharisees who are fencing themselves off against a potential danger at meals created by unclean hands. A number of anecdotes, as we have noted in the previous section, are best understood as arising from conflicts with such people (extremists, some would call them).

impure, except by a process of rendering liquid unclean which in turn might render the *hullin* unclean (p. 184). On the other hand, he assembles evidence which he believes supports the conclusion that *haberim* “did handwash before *hullin*, and were urging Jesus and his disciples to adopt the supererogatory handwashing which they themselves practised, ie. to become *haberim*” (p. 202). Both Booth and Sanders agree that there is no evidence that Pharisees in general (let alone “all the Jews or Judeans”) washed their hands before eating ordinary food (the Pharisees did on the sabbath before special meals - so Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 229-230). Sanders argues that handwashing may have developed as an alternative to immersion, as a practice in the diaspora under the influence of the practice in pagan temples of dipping the right hand in water before entering, or as a development of the focus in biblical material on hands as the instrument of evil and defilement (p. 262). Booth, *Purity*, 189-203, argues that we are dealing here with *haberim* supererogation, who were seeking to avoid the danger that unclean hands might render liquid unclean and so render food unclean with which it came into contact. See also R. Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit: eine archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Joh 2,6 und der jüdischen Reinheitshalacha zur Zeit Jesu*, WUNT 2.52, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993) 267-275, who argues that Sanders arrives at his negative conclusion by following Neusner’s methodology of excluding anonymous mishnaic traditions such as mYad 1; 2; mHag 2:5. He argues that the practice was more widespread and explains the presence of the six stone jars in John 2:6.

²⁴ See for instance the discussion of such common ground in R. A. Wild, “The Encounter between Pharisaic and Christian Judaism: Some Early Gospel Evidence,” *NovTest* 27 (1985) 105-124.

2. Making sense of the objection and the response

7:15 addresses the issue of contamination through what enters a person: οὐδέν ἐστιν ἕξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτόν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινῶντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον (“There is nothing from outside of people which entering them can defile them; but it is the things coming out from within people which defile people”). In its present form 7:15 directs attention to food. 7:18-20 expounds it on the basis that it refers to food. Thus as a response to 7:2,5, the logion 7:15 assumes: unclean hands will render food unclean which will in turn render people unclean.²⁵

Booth proposes that, while Mark received the logion intact, an earlier form has existed which was without the words, εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτόν (“entering into him”), and which had ἕξω rather than ἕξωθεν, concluding that the logion was originally addressing outward, external things in general.²⁶ It would be responding to the accusation in 7:2,5 with a more general statement about external purity. Washing hands is dealing with external impurity. Such external impurity, it would claim, cannot make a person unclean. I shall return to a more detailed discussion of the form of the logion below.

Whatever the case, for Mark and Mark’s Gentile community, through whose tradition he has received the anecdote, the focus appears to be primarily on asserting that Jesus removes the basis of discrimination or separation because of food, rather than on other issues of impurity. This might explain the possible modification of the saying in this direction, had it once been without these words. Food issues might also include the matter of food offered to idols, but that is not the primary focus here, where Mark is showing Jesus as removing the basis for excluding Gentiles from fellowship in the community of faith.

3. Why focus on the disciples? An indicator of origin?

It is noteworthy that the accusations are directed against the behaviour of the

²⁵ Gundry, *Mark*, 368-369, notes that 7:5 concerns eating with unwashed hands, while 7:15 concerns food which defiles and is addressed to the crowd (so already Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 17). The broadening of the addressees reflects Markan editing. The transition from unclean hands to unclean food makes sense against the background of Jesus’ dealing with an extreme standpoint.

²⁶ Booth, *Purity*, 68; see also W. Paschen, *Rein und Unrein. Untersuchungen zur biblischen Wortgeschichte*, StANT 24 (Munich: Kösel, 1970) 173-174; Vouga, *Loi*, 72. See below for further discussion of the earlier form of the logion.

disciples. This is also the case in 2:18-20 (why Jesus' disciples do not fast); 2:23-27 (why the disciples pluck grain on the sabbath; cf. also 2:15-17 (they are asked why Jesus eats with toll collectors and sinners). In all these cases we may be dealing with problems in the early church which may have created or developed these anecdotes as a way of dealing with the issues.²⁷ But, in itself, to question Jesus about his disciples' behaviour should not be seen as out of the ordinary, especially since a teacher would be held responsible for behaviour of his followers.²⁸

The coherence among the anecdotes which underlie the Markan controversy stories includes, as noted in the previous section: clever aphoristic responses, some of which are inseparable from their anecdotal setting, as well as, in most cases, an issue with extremists and a reference to the disciples. Their frequency and consistency is argument in favour, at least, of their common origin. The responses exhibit a high level of creativity. Mack argues that this creativity derives from rhetorical convention; he assumes conscious use of such rhetoric in the early decades of Christianity.²⁹ Are we dealing with a particularly creative development within early Christianity or with stories which trace their origin to Jesus' ministry? What criteria are there which can help us go beyond posing the alternatives?

The lack of such stories outside Mark's tradition³⁰ is a weakness for the claim

²⁷ So, for instance, Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 39-54; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 28; see also Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 193-194.

²⁸ So D. Daube, "Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the gospels," *NTS* 19 (1972-73) 1-16.

²⁹ Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 172-207. While he suggests that "many of the pronouncement stories in the Gospel of Mark appear to have been created long after the time of Jesus" (p. 193), he leaves open the possibility that a few of them from what he calls "the synagogue reform movement", especially those containing Cynic like humour (7:15?) "could even be understood as 'authentic' in the sense that they capture Jesus' circumstances and style without an eye to his importance for the movements stemming from him" (p. 194). See also his "Q and a Cynic-like Jesus" in *Whose Historical Jesus? Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7* edited by W. E. Arnal and M. Desjardins (Waterloo, Ca.: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Pr., 1997) 25-36, where he writes: "The Cynic-like data from Q and Mark are as close as we shall ever get to the real Jesus of history" (p. 36). Cf. B. W. Henault's response in the same volume, "Is the 'historical Jesus' a christological concept?" 241-268, who, on the basis of Thom 14, rejects Mack's assumption that Mark 7:15 formed part of a core anecdote in favour of the view that it was first an independent logion (and argues that it could not have emerged before the 40's when controversy with Jews was rife (pp. 256-257). This appears to overlook the possibility that at least some form of conflict existed between Jesus and his contemporaries on matters of interpretation of the Law.

³⁰ Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 41, lists as responses in non-Markan controversy dialogues: Luke 7:41-42 (about the woman who anointed his feet); 13:15; 14:5 (both about sabbath

that they originate with Jesus. On the other hand, logia of this kind are present elsewhere and the method of *mashal* and parable appears to have characterised the historical Jesus and, one could argue, incomparably so among his first century followers as far as we can tell. The balance favours historicity? Perhaps. It seems more credible. It also depends what we mean. The anecdotes were doubtless constructed in the period of the early church. The issue of historicity is the extent to which their logia and their setting depend on memory of actual logia and situations belonging to the life of the historical Jesus.

4. Alternative contexts for the logion.

In Thomas 14 (independently?)³¹ the logion occurs in the context of mission:

“Jesus said to them: If you fast, you will put a sin to your charge; and if you pray, you will be condemned; and if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits. And if you go into any land and walk about in the regions, if they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick among them. For what goes into your mouth will not defile you; but what comes out of your mouth; that is what will defile you.”

This may relate to mission in Gentile lands.³² If so, it is not likely to reflect a setting of the saying in the ministry of Jesus, since evidence for Jesus enjoining or

healing) and Matthew 17:25 (about the temple tax), but none of these exhibits the clever aphorist style of the Markan anecdotes, though some could be said to employ *mashal*.

³¹ The question is still far from settled. See, for instance, M. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium. Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* NTabh NF 22 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991) 73–76, who assumes dependence on Matthew; B. Lindars, “All foods clean: thoughts on Jesus and the law” in *Law and Religion. Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* edited by B. Lindars (Cambridge: Clarke, 1988) 61–71, 167–170, here: 67 n. 12; earlier W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomasevangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelien-übersetzungen*, BZfNW 29 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964) 55. Contrast Dunn, “Jesus and Ritual Purity,” 43–44, who assumes Thomas draws on a common source with Q.

³² The translation is that of B. Blatz, “The Coptic Gospel of Thomas,” in *New Testament Apocrypha. Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, edited by W. Schneemelcher, (Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2nd edn, 1991), pp. 117–133. M. W. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: the Hidden Sayings of Jesus*: (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) at this point translates: “When you go into any region and walk through the countryside...” (p. 29). On its own this statement need not be referring to countries beyond Jewish areas; it may just mean rural areas. The word translated “regions” is a Greek loan word from *χώρα*

assuming a mission to Gentiles is weak. The food in question would be Gentile food. However given the polemic in the earlier part of the verse against Jewish practices,³³ it more likely envisages conflict with Jews and with Jewish purity laws concerning food. The polemical stance is scarcely credible within a Jewish framework, so that, like much of Thomas, it reflects a position outside of Judaism, hardly one from the beginnings of Christianity.³⁴

This is not to say that there may not be earlier tradition behind Thomas 14, which preserved a connection between the logion about food and the mission material. It could preserve the original setting of the logion about unclean food. Jesus would be instructing his disciples to disregard concerns about food purity when on mission, either because mission took a higher priority or because such concerns had no validity. It would be an extrapolation of “eat what is set before you” understood in the context of concern about food purity.

Such an assessment of Thomas 14 is not without its problems. Its version of the saying about unclean food is remarkably similar to Matthew 15:11.

οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

Not what enters the mouth makes a person unclean, but what comes out of the mouth, this makes a person unclean.

Some, like Dunn,³⁵ see the similarity as confirming the existent of a form of the logion independent of Mark 7:15. Others, like Gundry,³⁶ note the typically Matthean formulation, especially the presence of εἰς τὸ στόμα and ἐκ τοῦ στόματος, which may indicate direct or indirect influence from Matthew. This feature also curtails the (more original?) playful effect, present in the Markan logion.

There is also the interesting conjunction between Thomas 14 and what we find in Lk 10:8-9,

8 καὶ εἰς ἣν ἂν πόλιν εἰσερρήσθε καὶ δέχωνται ὑμᾶς, ἐσθίετε τὰ παρατιθέμενα ὑμῖν 9 καὶ θεραπεύετε τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ λέγετε αὐτοῖς· ἤγγικεν ἔφ’ ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

And into whatever town you enter and they receive you, eat what is put before you, 9 and heal the sick in it, and say to them, “The Kingdom of God has drawn near to you.”

³³ On this see Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law*, 493; Fieger, *Thomasevangelium*, 75.

³⁴ On the stance towards Torah attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas see the discussion in my *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law*, 492-502.

³⁵ Dunn, “Jesus and Ritual Purity,” 42.

³⁶ Gundry, *Mark*, 364; Weiss, *Vollmacht*, 68-72; Sariola, *Markus*, 40 n. 117.

The SBL Q reconstruction does not include ἐσθίετε τὰ παρατιθέμενα ὑμῖν, (“eat what is set before you”) but holds open the possibility that in QLuke 10:6-7, concerning entering houses, the words τὰ παρ’ αὐτῶν may occur:

QLk10:6 καὶ ἐὰν ἐκεῖ ᾗ υἱὸς εἰρήνης, [[ἐλθάτω]] ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἡ εἰρήνη ὑμῶν· ε[[ῖ]] δὲ μὴ ὑμᾶς [[ἐπιστραφήτω]] 7 [[... τὰ παρ’ αὐτῶν]], ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ.

And if there is a son of peace there, [[let]] your peace [[come]] upon him; but [[if]] not [[]] ... you [[let it return]]. 7 [[... [[what is from them]], for the worker is deserving of his wages.

[Cf. Luke 10:5 εἰς ἣν δ’ ἂν εἰσέλθητε οἰκίαν, πρῶτον λέγετε· εἰρήνη τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ. 6 καὶ ἐὰν ἐκεῖ ᾗ υἱὸς εἰρήνης, ἐπαναπαύσεται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἡ εἰρήνη ὑμῶν· εἰ δὲ μὴ γε, ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀνακάμψει. 7 ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ τῇ οἰκίᾳ μένετε ἐσθίοντες καὶ πίνοντες τὰ παρ’ αὐτῶν· ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ. μὴ μεταβαίνετε ἐξ οἰκίας εἰς οἰκίαν.

Into whatever house you enter, say first, “Peace be to this house.” 6 And if a son of peace is there, let your peace rest on him; but if not, let it return to you. 7 Stay in the home, eating and drinking what comes from them, for the worker is deserving of his wages. Do not go from house to house.)

In the Lukan context the freedom to eat in 10:7 is related not to the issue of purity but to right as reward. This will also determine the meaning of the injunction in 10:8. The reconstructed Q has only a possible allusion to food and in the context only of QLk 10:7 and in association with the notion of wages. The version in Thomas reflects what we currently find in 10:8, but without the preceding context and therefore more easily allows the application of “eat whatever is set before you” to purity scruples. It is hard to imagine that Matthew or Luke would have omitted the logion about unclean food as part of the Q source and omitted it.³⁷

If as some argue Q and Thomas share the same source, the question is just pushed one step further back: why would Q have omitted the saying? Possibly because it was too radical for Q, which had a Law observant stance.³⁸ But that would assume Q read the antithesis exclusively, not inclusively as did Matthew.³⁹ It looks much more likely that the logion’s presence in Thomas 14 was a secondary development. It is also possible that the striking similarities between Thomas 14, on the one hand, and both Luke 10:8 and Matt 15:11, on the other, are the result of a synthesis drawing

³⁷ Similarly Lindars, “All foods clean,” who argues that the logion has been added secondarily to its present context in Thomas 14 on the basis that it is missing in Q (170 n. 42).

³⁸ On this see Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law*, 390-431.

³⁹ On this see Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law*, 213-216.

together similar material from disparate gospel contexts or of assimilation to these. The case, then, for Thomas preserving the original context of the logion is not strong.

It should be noted that, if such a pre-Thomas tradition existed containing the saying about unclean food independently of both Matthew and Mark, and if we assume Matthew used Mark as his source, then Matthew would have had to have been aware of the logion independently of the Markan context as well as in Mark and so reproduced it in the form also evidenced in Thomas. Alternatively, even if Thomas is drawing on earlier tradition, independent of Matthew and Mark, Thomas may nevertheless have assimilated the saying to its Matthean form. It appears more likely that its presence in Thomas 14 is the result of secondary development, and probably under the influence directly or indirectly of Matthew 15:11.

To argue that the anecdotal setting behind Mark is the original setting of the logion implies that the setting of the Thomas tradition is not. And conversely, to argue that the setting of the Thomas tradition is original implies that the anecdote is a secondary creation. The other question which such possibilities pose is whether the logion originally existed independently.⁴⁰ If, as seems likely, its presence in Thomas 14 is secondary, was the anecdote behind Mark perhaps created on the basis of the logion? The difficulties then would be that the setting (the controversy) is not what one might have expected to have been created. Something more straightforwardly related to food would have been better. On the other hand, we have no way of knowing whether there may have been disputes in some groups of earliest Christianity concerning washing hands, who may have seen fit to apply a known logion in this way, thus developing the anecdote.

5. The original form of the Logion?

Ernst Käsemann once warned scholars not to imagine that they can hear the grass grow under their feet. Embarking on the adventure of trying to reconstruct what Jesus might have originally said warrants such a caution. I am not confident that it is possible. At most we may be able to indicate only the kind of thing which he is liable to have said.

We have the logion in three forms:

⁴⁰ The majority of the Jesus seminar group of scholars favour a pink (second best) rating on authenticity of Mark 7:15 and Thomas 14 and deem it to have existed independently of both contexts. See R. A. Funk, R. W. Hoover *The Five Gospels. The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 69, 481.

Mark 7:15

οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινούντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

("There is nothing from outside of people which entering them can defile them; but it is the things coming out from within people which defile people").

Matthew 15:11

οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

("Not what enters people's mouth makes people unclean but what comes out of the mouth; that makes people unclean").

Thomas 14

"For what goes into your mouth will not defile you; but what comes out of your mouth; that is what will defile you."

Dunn discusses the various options with appropriate caution.⁴¹ They include attempts to identify secondary additions in Mark 7:15:

- (i) εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν and ἔκπορευόμενά⁴²;
- (ii) οὐδέν ... ἀλλὰ and δύναται as Markan style;⁴³
- (iii) εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν;⁴⁴ and
- (iv) ἔξωθεν replacing an original ἔξω.⁴⁵

In the light of its supposed Aramaic origin, Dunn notes that Mark 7:15 reflects the "antithetical parallelism ... characteristic of Hebrew poetry or proverbial speech" and that other features (ἄνθρωπος, κοινῶ) would be consistent with such an origin.⁴⁶ Some have suggested that πᾶν ... οὐ in 7:18b may more closely reflect the Aramaic original than οὐδέν.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Dunn, "Jesus and Ritual Purity," 40-42.

⁴² V. Taylor, *Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 343.

⁴³ Lambrecht, "Jesus and the Law," 59, who also argues that ἔξωθεν reflects Markan concerns, reflected also in ἔσωθεν in 7:21,23.

⁴⁴ Paschen, *Rein und Unrein*, 174; see the critical response by H. Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws: reflections on Mark 7:15," in *Jesus, Paul and Torah* JSNTS 43 (Sheffield: JSOT Pr., 1992) 127-148, here: 129-130; also Lindars, "All foods clean," 63.

⁴⁵ Booth, *Purity, Purity*, 68.

⁴⁶ Dunn, "Jesus and ritual purity," 42.

⁴⁷ Paschen, *Rein und Unrein*, 176; Hübner, *Gesetz*, 165-168; Dunn, "Jesus and Ritual Purity," 42; Lindars, "All foods clean," who suggests that "verse 15 is a slightly polished version

Dunn sees Matt 15:11 and Thomas 14 as providing evidence of the independent existence of the logion and notes that “the Matthean version of the text goes back into semitic form a good deal more easily than the Markan version.”⁴⁸ He puts forward the thesis that in 15:11 Matthew is already using Q material, evident behind 15:12-14 (cf. Luke 6:39), and that this explains the similarity to Thomas 14, which also draws on Q’s sources (perhaps more faithfully reflecting an original Q ‘you’ form). See the discussion in the previous section about the difficulties which stand in the way of this thesis. Dunn also argues that the form in 7:18b and 20 appear also to reflect either knowledge of a variant to 7:15 or some knowledge of its Aramaic original. Identification of precise wording is always difficult in such reconstructions.

Whatever form the original took, there is no obstacle in believing it might derive from an originally Aramaic version. There is insufficient evidence to decide whether the original had words corresponding to those which are variously held to be additions in Mark 7:15. At most this affects Booth’s proposal that the original might have had a broader reference than just food. The Markan form of the antithesis is sharper than that found in Matthew and Thomas, but this does not, in itself determine how the antithesis should be understood on the lips of Jesus (on which see below).

There are, however, two additional features which should be taken into account in weighing whether the Markan or Matthean/Thomas form is more original. The first is the playfulness of the logion as presented in Mark. It plays on levels of meaning in a way that is typical of Jesus, or, at least, of many of the logia embedded in anecdotes. It makes sense at a literal level: what exits stinks, not what enters! This is unlikely to reflect concerns about purity of faeces, but it may allude to such concerns.⁴⁹ It is a riddle or mashal, like a parable, deliberately playful and ambiguous.⁵⁰ Such is not the case with the Matthean and Thomas form of the logion, which has reference to “the mouth”, both removing the possible double meaning

of the saying, which is best preserved in verses 18b and 20b” (p. 63). For critique see Gundry, *Mark*, 364-366.

⁴⁸ Dunn, “Jesus and Ritual Purity,” 42-44, 59.

⁴⁹ It is interesting that Josephus reports concerns about faeces and their impurity among the Essenes. He writes that Essenes washed themselves after defecating *καθάρως μεμιασμενος* (*JW* 2 147). At another level, in Torah bodily emissions are a greater purity issue than eating contaminated food. But Jesus does not appear to imply anything about the impurity of faeces; otherwise we would hear more of Christian toiletry arrangements; nor to be concerned with bodily emissions.⁴⁹ 1QM 7 and 11QT 46 are also concerned with ensuring toilets are at a significant distance from the camps/Jerusalem, but the concern is nakedness not faeces.

⁵⁰ F. G. Downing, *Christ and the Cynics. Jesus and other Radical Preachers in First-Century tradition* JSOTManuals 4(Sheffield: JSOT Pr., 1988) 129-130, draws attention

and narrowing the focus to verbal impurity. The second is that, as Gundry argues, the Matthean/Thomas form “reflects Matthew’s favorite diction,” including the reference to the mouth.⁵¹ These considerations favour an original form of the logion having the broader Markan focus.⁵²

Are there any other traces of the logion? In the context of discussing scruples concerning food Paul writes in Romans 14:14

οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι’ ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself except for the one who reckons it to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

In 14:20 we also find the words, πάντα μὲν καθαρὰ, ἀλλὰ κακὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῷ διὰ προσκόμματος ἐσθίοντι. (similar to Mark 7:19c καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα but hardly under its influence). The issue is doubtless related to food purity laws. The reference to vegetables in 14:2 reflects the strategy among many Jews of avoiding all meat for fear lest it be contaminated (cf. Josephus *Jewish War*, 2.143-144, which mentions Jews in Rome who lived on figs and nuts). The short phrase, ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, in 14:14 appears to imply that Paul draws his conclusion from his sense of oneness with Christ, rather than that he is citing Christ’s words, as might be the case if he were alluding to the logion we are considering. Where he does cite a dominical logion, he says so more directly (cf. 1 Cor 7:10). Had Paul known such a logion directly, one would expect him to have used it.⁵³ It is clear that he would have read the antithesis exclusively, for while he enjoins sensitivity, he assumes that food scruples have no divine sanction.

to the use of scatic imagery among street philosophers of the Cynic mould; similarly Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, p. 189. R. A. Funk, *Honest to Jesus. Jesus for a new Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), considers the Markan form more original and the saying as authentic (204-205).

⁵¹ Gundry, *Mark*, p. 364.

⁵² Interestingly, R. A. Funk, *Honest to Jesus. Jesus for a new Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), considers the Markan form more original and the saying as authentic (pp. 204-205).

⁵³ For the view that the logion may stand behind Rom 14:14,20 see Taeger, “Unterschied,” 28-29; Luz, *Gesetz*, 60; C. Breytenbach, “Vormarkinische Logientradition. Parallelen in der urchristlichen Briefliteratur” in *The Four Gospels 1992*. Festschrift für F. Neirynck, edited by F. van Seybroeck et al., Vol 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 725-750, here: 733-735. Cf. Räisänen, “Jesus and the Food Laws,” 141-142; G. Dautzenberg, G. “Gesetzeskritik und Gesetzesgehorsam in der Jesustradition” in *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament* edited

While it is not possible to reconstruct an original with any degree of certainty, there are two major possibilities: one with playful multidimensionality and one focussed more narrowly on what enters and comes from “the mouth”. The latter is attested in Thomas and Matthew, but seems in its present form to be derived directly or indirectly from Matthew, and by Matthew from Mark. The evidence is in favour of Mark’s version as reflecting more closely the intent of the original logion.

5. The Logion on the lips of Jesus

Is the logion (in either form) making an absolute statement or a statement about priorities? Is it an inclusive or exclusive antithesis? For Mark it is exclusive: food cannot possibly render a person unclean!⁵⁴ Was it always so? If the logion reaches back to Jesus and was originally exclusive, it would indicate a major departure from Torah on the part of Jesus and be a major piece of evidence about his attitude, as it was in Käsemann’s proposal cited at the head of this paper. If inclusive, it would have the sense of: “Not so much... but.”

There are a number of examples of this kind of antithesis, often in relation to cultic and other aspects of Torah. They include: Hosea 6:6 “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”; Ps 51:16-17 “For you have no delight in sacrifice; is I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”; Ps 40:6 “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.”; Aristeeas 234 “..not with gifts and sacrifices, but with purity of heart and of devout disposition”. None of these is anti-sacrifice. Notice also the inclusive meaning of the following constructions in Mark which, like 7:15, use an οὐδέν ... ἀλλά construction: Mark 9:37 “Whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me” (ὃς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίῳ δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται· καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέξηται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.); Mark 13:11 “And when they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry what you are to say, but whatever is given you in that hour, say that; for it is not you who are speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (καὶ ὅταν ἄγωσιν ὑμᾶς παραδιδόντες, μὴ προμεριμνᾶτε τί λαλήσητε, ἀλλ’ ὃ ἐὰν

by K. Kertelge (Freiburg: Herder, 1986) 46-70, here: 48-49. J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* WordBibComm 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988) 819, 830, argues that Paul both Paul and Mark were making use of a less radical form of the saying. Why then, if Paul is interpreting a logion of Jesus so radically, does he not cite it? Because he knew others saw it differently, as Dunn suggests? Is that credible?

⁵⁴ This would also have been Paul’s understanding had he known the saying.

δοθῆ ὑμῖν ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦτο λαλεῖτε· οὐ γάρ ἐστε ὑμεῖς οἱ λαλοῦντες ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον).⁵⁵

If we assume the anecdotal setting behind Mark 7 reflects the original, then the response is either a rejection of extremism by claiming that higher priority should be given to attitudinal/ethical purity, without neglecting the other (at least as required by Torah; explicitly: QLuke 11:42), or, is understood as an exclusive antithesis, a rebuttal of both the extremists and of all concerns with outward purity, including by implication those of Torah. If the setting of the supposed pre-Thomas tradition is original, then the logion is saying either that mission has a higher priority than observance of food laws where such scruples might jeopardise mission (hospitality), though they remain valid in themselves, or, if understood exclusively, that food laws are invalid and should not bother those on mission. On the latter, one would have thought there would be no need to make this point in relation to mission, if it was an absolute.

In determining the meaning which the logion might have had in the context of the historical Jesus we must take into account the matter of coherence both with what we know otherwise of his teaching and behaviour and with what we know were the beliefs of his followers. The oft repeated argument remains valid that the early church's difficulties over matters of purity in relation to food are scarcely credible if Jesus had made such a categorical dismissal of Torah provisions as an absolute reading of the logion demands.⁵⁶ It is incredible to suggest, for instance, that enthusiasm about Jesus' messiahship caused such teaching to be initially

⁵⁵ On the evidence for such inclusive antitheses see Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 28; Booth, *Purity*, 69-71, who argues that even the sharper Markan form should be understood inclusively. See also W. D. Davies, and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, Vol II, VIII-XVIII, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). 527-531, who allude to rabbinic parallels and also make the point that a similar pattern of thought underlies the antithesis in the Sermon on the Mount about adultery. On the inclusive interpretation of Mark 7:15 see also E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium*, HNT 3, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950) 79; Carlston, "Things that defile," 95; Luz, *Gesetz*, 60-61; M. J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984) 96-97.

⁵⁶ So Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 28; Booth, *Purity*, 206, 219; Borg, *Conflict*, 97; U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 8-17)* EKK 1/2(Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1990) 424; M. Bockmühl, "Halakhah and Ethics in the Jesus Tradition," in *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context* edited by J. Barclay and J. Sweet (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 264-278; here 272.

overlooked.⁵⁷ It is equally difficult to believe that only some knew of it or that it was ambiguous from the start.⁵⁸

As far as coherence with the rest of Jesus' teaching and ministry is concerned, should we assume such coherence as likely, there are traditions which portray Jesus as concerned to uphold Torah. While the Matthean Jesus asserts as much directly, "I have not come to abolish the Law and the prophets, but to fulfil them" (5:17), Q traditions also indicate similar concerns. QLk 16:17 (par. Matt 5:18) asserts the abiding validity of every jot and tittle of Torah. QLk 11:42 (ἄλλὰ οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς Φαρισαίοις, ὅτι ἀποδεκατοῦτε τὸ ἡδύοσμον καὶ τὸ πῆγανον καὶ πᾶν λάχανον καὶ παρέρχεσθε τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ· ταῦτα δὲ ἕδει ποιῆσαι κακείνα μὴ παρεῖναι) assumes a commitment even to upholding minutiae. It is possible to conjecture that these are secondary insertions into the tradition which took place once the disputes over Torah arose and do not reflect the stance of the historical Jesus or that the tithing saying should not be taken literally, but the rest of the Q material, beginning with the preaching of John the Baptist, unambiguously affirms God's commandments and nothing suggests abrogation of any of them.⁵⁹

In addition, Jesus' stance toward the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) and to entering the centurion's house (QLk 7:1-9, where I would read ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν; Matt 8:7; as a question) indicate traditional, conservative behaviour (as might the encounters with the leper, Mark 1:40-45, and the woman with the flux, Mark 5:25-34).⁶⁰ All of these stories report a Jesus who crosses boundaries, but from a starting point of reluctance. To these observation we must add that it is scarcely credible that Jesus could have so blatantly spoken against Torah and for this not to have surfaced among the accusations levelled against him. Such a stance would be bound to become known. It would surely have surfaced in the accusations leading to Jesus' execution. It would also be unparalleled within the wide spectrum of Jewish understandings of Torah of which we know.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Against Hübner, *Gesetz*, 170-174.

⁵⁸ Westerholm, *Scribal Authority*, 81-82. Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 370, who cites anecdotes about eating with toll collectors and sinners as having potential to address the question of fellowship with Gentiles. But Gentiles and sinners are not to be equated. Gundry's belief that Peter stands behind Mark makes the ambiguity theory doubly difficult.

⁵⁹ See my more detailed discussion in Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law*, 396-397; 414-419.

⁶⁰ See W. Loader, "Challenged at the Boundaries: A Conservative Jesus in Mark's Tradition," *JSNT* 63 (1996) 45-61.

⁶¹ Probably the only exception is the among the group whom Philo lashes in *De Migr Abr* 89-94 for abandoning the literal observance of Torah in their enthusiasm for symbolic meanings, whereas he insisted both should be held together.

This makes it likely that on the lips of Jesus the logion would have been an inclusive antithesis. Whether in response to a particular confrontation by extremists or in the context of mission instruction (less likely) or as an isolated logion whose context is irrecoverable, the logion reflects the prioritising typical of Jesus' teaching. People should be more concerned with loving attitudes and behaviour than with issues of outward purity. This is an approach deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, from Deuteronomy to the prophets, from the psalms to wisdom literature and Philo, from the Community Rule to the Rabbi. This concern is being applied here to external purity, particularly in relation to food. Get the priorities right: not so much what enters, but what comes out makes a person unclean. This is not an attack on the purity code, but an affirmation of what matters more.⁶²

The argument about coherence with Jesus' teaching and with Judaism of the time is used also by those who read the antithesis as absolute to deny that it could have emanated from Jesus. Instead it must have originated in those settings where Christians were making the decisive break with the dietary code in the diaspora or in the context of the conversion of Gentiles in Palestine.⁶³ The key issue here is whether the saying may be understood as inclusive rather than exclusive. The evidence supports the former.⁶⁴

IV Conclusion

In this paper I began by looking at Mark 7:1-23 in its literary context. There it serves Mark's purpose of celebrating that Jesus made possible the inclusion of

⁶² Similarly Westerholm, *Scribal Authority*, 83-84; Luz, *Gesetz*, 61, 118; Gnilka, *Markus I*, 280; Booth, *Purity*, 69, 104-107; Dunn, "Jesus and Ritual Purity," 58; Weiss, *Vollmacht*, 70; Lindars, "All foods clean," 71. Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 365; Taeger, "Unterschied," 26-28; Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws," 132-133.

⁶³ So Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws," 139-148; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 28; Cf. also Berger, *Gesetzesauslegung*, 507, who argues the logion must have arisen in a Hellenistic Jewish context, because, he argues, it was there that prophetic criticism of the cult in an absolute sense was fostered. On this see the critique in Booth, *Purity*, 72, 84-97; Gundry, *Mark*, 366-367, who emphasises that the so called Jewish parallels offer examples of relative weighting, not absolute antithesis.

⁶⁴ Some find this easier to believe if it had a form which was less sharp than Mark's οὐδέν .. and closer to Matthew's οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον. So Dunn, "Jesus and Ritual Purity," 42-44; cf. Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws", who writes: "In Mk 7.15a the sweeping οὐδὲν and the strengthening διναται surely stand in the way. 'Nothing is able to . . .' is, at any rate, an odd circumlocution for 'it may not so much. . .'" (132 n.4). But see the examples from Mark 9:37 and 13:11 above.

Gentiles. He did this by showing that purity laws in relation to food had no validity, thus removing a major barrier between Jew and Gentile.

Mark's Gentile community had access to early anecdotal forms of the Jesus tradition. It had expanded one about hand washing for purity before meals, in which the logion 7:15 was embedded, by attacking the tradition of the elders in general as merely human and as leading to hypocrisy and deceit. In doing so it turned Isa 29:13 (back?) against the Jewish (Christian?) opposition and extrapolated the logion of Jesus reflected in 7:15, to show that purity laws with regard to food could have no substance. It may also have been drawing on an earlier tradition which reported Jesus' attack on abuse of corban.

The core anecdote behind Mark 7:1-23, now present in 7:2,5,15, was one of a number preserved in Mark and characterised by witty aphorisms. We noted that Matthew 15:11 and Thomas 14 preserve an alternative version of the saying, probably not independently, but with influence from Matthew on Thomas. While not ruling out the possibility that Thomas also know a form of the saying independently, we found the Thomas setting nevertheless less likely to reflect the original setting of the logion. The anecdote doubtless emanates from very early in the life of the Church and preserves a saying of Jesus which may well have been originally formulated in the setting which the anecdote reports. In substance it should be understood inclusively, that is, as a statement about priorities, rather than as an attack on the biblical and related food purity laws about which it speaks.

This paper, therefore, suggests that what began as an inclusive antithesis on the lips of Jesus came to be used as an exclusive antithesis in Mark's Gentile tradition and is also understood in this way by Mark. In that sense it suffers the same fate as similar priority statements in the biblical tradition which are turned into statements of exclusive alternatives in some parts of the Christian movement. The notion of circumcision of the heart is a good example. What was a common biblical metaphor became in Paul an alternative to circumcision of the flesh. Jesus stood in the tradition which emphasised the priority of ethical attitude and behaviour over observance of cultic and ritual law. Parts of the Christian movement found themselves needing to go one step further and discard laws which were effectively excluding or impeding fellowship with Gentiles.

My studies elsewhere have shown that Mark's stance is not shared by the other gospels or not to the same degree.⁶⁵ Matthew, who takes up this section of Mark, rewrites it so that the issue is reduced to a dispute over hand washing. Just in case we miss the point he concludes his version with the statement: "To eat with unclean hands does not make a person unclean." Gone is Mark's generalising καθαρίζω

⁶⁵ I refer to *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law*.

πάντα τὰ βρώματα. The antithesis, now more mildly formulated, reverts to its Jesuanic inclusive sense. Matthew may also have been concerned to sanitise it of its scatic humour. Matthew has also undone Mark's composition celebrating the inclusion of Gentiles. His feeding of the 4000 is no longer of Gentiles, but of Jews. A mission to the nations will come in 28:18-20. His Jesus, like the disciples, was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24; 10:5-6).

Luke, for whom a Gentile mission can come only through a process of divine interventions in the early days of the church, has omitted most of Mark's composition, including Mark 7:1-23. One might be inclined to believe that he has also transferred the nullifying of food laws to Acts, where he uses a story of Peter challenged to eat unclean meat, but this is not the case. Luke uses the story only to justify not calling people unclean. Gentiles are not unclean and may be included with Jews. Divine intervention indicates circumcision may be waived, but that is the exception which proves the rule that the Law remains intact as Jesus had indicated in Luke 16:16-18. Even Gentiles are portrayed as being instructed to do all that the Law requires of them. Paul, their apostle, is law observant to the end.

Both Matthew and Luke have followed Q's stance on Torah, not that of Mark, whom they otherwise follow closely, especially in the portrayal of Jesus' divine authority. John is closer to Mark, but would still be unhappy with the rationalising argument in Mark 7. Like Paul and Hebrews, John is happier to attribute divine purpose in giving all the Law, but to come to terms with its inapplicability by espousing a version of salvation history: the Law was given for a limited period and at a lesser level of reality, even though all three have elements of substantial critique such as that espoused by Mark ("weak and useless" Heb 7:18). Thomas' Jesus does not even need the prophetic tradition and stands in sharp contrast to Judaism and its rites.

The sequence: Jesus - Mark - Matthew/Luke, inclusive - exclusive - inclusive understanding of the logion, invites speculation that perhaps the sequence should be Jesus - Matthew/Luke - Mark. This would however be a gross simplification. Once we put Paul into the picture, we clearly have something closer to the former sequence. In reality, responses within early Christianity were diverse and complex.

With regard to the historical Jesus I believe that Mack is correct when he writes: "The Cynic-like data from Q and Mark are as close as we shall ever get to the real Jesus of history,"⁶⁶ but, to employ a distinction important to this paper, I would not say, exclusively so. We may argue about the suitability of "Cynic-like", which is at least more careful than "Cynic", but the distinctive rhetorical features are not to be denied and they do seem to have their matrix in such movements. In the case of

⁶⁶ Mack, "Q and a Cynic-like Jesus," 36.

Jesus, however, the other streams are equally important. At the rhetorical level that includes the parallelism which points to Jesus' Jewish tradition.

There is little doubt, in my mind, that much of the authentic Jesus material reflects what one might broadly call the wisdom or popular philosophical tradition. The difficulty appears to me to come when this is used too sharply as a criterion of coherence to exclude, for instance, the apocalyptic/eschatological tradition or even a conservative stance on some matters of Law (witness the encounter with the Syrophenician woman). We know both from the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls, including the so called sectarian literature, and from the Enoch and Testament traditions (eg. the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs), on the one hand, and Sirach and, more particularly, the Wisdom of Solomon, on the other, that wisdom and eschatological (including apocalyptic) traditions commonly occur side by side. In Jesus of Nazareth this seems to be the case. His focus is the impending reign of God. His way of expressing God's will has more in common with Sirach than with the Mishnah and its traditions.

Such exposition of God's will was never seen as alternative to the Law; rather it expounded the Law in the broadest sense. Its context is not priestly, in the sense of being concerned to control and define appropriate cultic behaviour and related purity concerns, such as we find in the Scrolls, but more universal in outlook, influenced much more by the experiences of daily life in the world and expressing itself in such imagery. It need not be anti the cult; Sirach was certainly not. It has much in common with the wisdom of other cultures and is doubtless open to their influence especially where nothing particularly Jewish is at stake. It was with this kind of authority that Jesus taught, not with that of the scribes nor, I believe, with the authority which Mark's christology presupposes, as the lord of everything, who therefore has the right to declare law.

In settings of such exposure to wider cultural influence (which for Sirach was in Jerusalem!), it invites people to set priorities, which are usually focussed on universals rather than particulars. Such a setting makes good sense of Jesus' logion in Mark 7:15. It is not calling into question the assumed biblical regulations about foods and purity. It is stating the higher priority of purity of heart and mind. If the context of the anecdote is original, it is doing so in protest against obsession of the questioners with matters of purity to the point of excess.