

## WHAT DID JESUS THINK ABOUT HIS APPROACHING DEATH?\*

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### 1. *Introduction*

At first sight, this question looks out of place in a seminar on 'The Historical Jesus in New Research'. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that recent research is reluctant to think that we can know anything reliable concerning what Jesus thought about his possible death. The second reason is that, if we could find reliable evidence about what Jesus thought, this evidence would have a practical effect on Christian belief. If Jesus did not think that his death would have a saving role for his followers, then Christian belief about Jesus' salvific death would not coincide with the beliefs of the historical Jesus. Christians might continue to hold this belief, but they could not claim to do what Jesus expected his followers to do. We do not expect our historical work to have such direct effects on Christian belief. But why not?

As to the second reason, the organizers of this volume do not share this misgiving; they have encouraged the contributors to address the issue of the significance of the historical-Jesus Research for the Christian faith.

As to the first reason, the scholars of the Third Quest are not averse to asking what Jesus thought about his possible violent death. However, as they focus on the humanity of Jesus and try to understand him as a member of his human society, they often deny that Jesus had any particular religious notion of the meaning of his death. By now we are far from, for example, even Albert Schweitzer's view around the turn of the century: he at least saw that Jesus must have intended some

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momentous outcome from his death, an act of God answering to the event.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the present-day writers emphasize the humanity of Jesus to such an extent that they cannot say anything concerning Jesus' claim of a special relation to God as his father, especially in connection with his own death. In this regard, even a silence such as that of John Dominic Crossan's book on the historical Jesus is telling. He does not address our question.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon seems to apply to most of the Third Questers, as represented, for example, by the Jesus Seminar.<sup>3</sup> Where the theme of the death of Jesus emerges in the Third Quest, it is most often discussed from the point of view of two questions: who was responsible for Jesus' execution? And, how did the early Church interpret Jesus' death?<sup>4</sup>

Historical-Jesus Research in recent years is not limited to the circle of the Third Questers. There are many scholars who write about matters related to the historical Jesus and/or exegete relevant passages, without being identified as Third Questers. In this essay, I shall refer to the works of scholars regardless of whether they explicitly say that they view their work as part of the Third Quest.<sup>5</sup> For example, the negative

1. A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (UTB, 1302; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 9th edn, 1984 [1906]), pp. 440-46. It is worth noting that in Schweitzer's view Jesus was prepared to die in order to fulfill the suffering necessary before the Kingdom comes. In Schweitzer's words (pp. 441-42): 'In dem Leidensgeheimnis, das Jesus zu Cäsarea Philippi ausspricht, ist die vormessianische Drangsal für die anderen außer Kraft gesetzt, aufgehoben, auf ihn allein konzentriert, und zwar so, daß sie sich in seinem Leiden und Sterben zu Jerusalem auswirkt. Das ist die neue Erkenntnis, die ihm aufgegangen. Er muß für die anderen leiden ...damit das Reich komme.'

2. J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), see especially chap. 14, entitled 'Death and Burial', where we look in vain for a discussion of passion predictions, expectation of death—or its explanation—on Jesus' side.

3. See, e.g., R.W. Funk, R.W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993).

4. See, e.g., C.A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography* (NTTS, 24; Leiden: E.J. Brill, rev. edn, 1996), esp. pp. 219-34 on the death of Jesus. The section on the self-understanding of Jesus (pp. 195-210) includes mainly works devoted to the Messianic consciousness of Jesus and the problem of his 'titles', and only few of them relate to our present topic.

5. For such a self-reference see, e.g., Evans, *Life of Jesus Research*, p. 3. See

result mentioned above is confirmed by an article in a significant reference work published in 1990. In his *TRE* article on the suffering of Jesus, Wolfgang Schenk can only reaffirm what Conzelmann and Bultmann had said decades earlier concerning the historical 'substratum': 'The core-fact is that Jesus was crucified ... All other aspects related to the events are controversial [*strittig*]' (Conzelmann); 'It is difficult to understand Jesus' execution as the inherently necessary consequence of his activity ...' (Bultmann). Schenk summarizes his own view in this way: 'Jesus was executed on the basis of suspicion, perhaps denunciation, amidst a highly explosive situation of a Jewish pilgrims' feast, the Passover, that commemorated how they were liberated from foreign rule'.<sup>6</sup>

E.P. Sanders emphasizes that 'Jesus was a *charismatic and autonomous prophet*'.<sup>7</sup> Sanders acknowledges that Jesus 'regarded himself as having full authority to speak and act on behalf of God', and that he was 'viceroy: at the head of the judges of Israel, subordinate only to God himself'.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, when addressing the issue of Jesus' approaching death, Sanders sees Jesus of Nazareth as only a more dangerous version of Jesus son of Ananias who was flogged after he uttered words against the Temple at a feast:

If we use this case as a guide, we can understand why Jesus of Nazareth was executed rather than merely flogged. Our Jesus' offence was worse than that of Jesus son of Ananias. Jesus of Nazareth had a following ... He had taught about the Kingdom for some time. He had taken physical action in the Temple. He was not a madman. Thus he was potentially dangerous.<sup>9</sup>

Sanders is reluctant to go any further than to say that Jesus taught about the Kingdom and taught his disciples that he himself would play the principal role in the Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> He holds that his historical analysis

further the following collection of studies by 'Third Questers': B. Chilton and C.A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (NTTS, 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994). One essay in this volume is a good summary of issues related to the social and political context of Jesus' crucifixion: R.A. Horsley, 'The Death of Jesus', pp. 395-422.

6. W. Schenk, 'Leidensgeschichte Jesu', *TRE* 23 (1990), pp. 714-21.

7. E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 238 (emphasis his).

8. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, pp. 238, 239.

9. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 267.

10. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 307-308.

corresponds to what a first-century Jew could have thought about the Messiah. In the following, I shall look afresh at some of the words and deeds of Jesus, which he claimed to carry out with full authority on behalf of God, as Sanders himself has put it. My question is whether we can say something more about this authority, even as historians, when exegeting those biblical passages. I shall not discuss the still unsolved problem of the Messianic consciousness of Jesus; rather, I shall ask the question as a historian: what did Jesus think about his approaching death?

In a short essay like this, I cannot aim to cover all the relevant passages. Even in the case of the chosen passages a full exegesis cannot be achieved. At best some aspects can be highlighted. However, a brief discussion of some of the key passages may serve as a call for the re-opening an issue that has often been regarded as closed. In dealing with the Gospel material, I have decided to focus on the Synoptics, although I hold, together with the authors of some more recent works, that the Fourth Gospel contains many historical insights that are yet to be discovered.<sup>11</sup>

## *2. The Passion Predictions*

From the point of view of methodology, the two-document hypothesis imposes on us a major restriction. In order to satisfy the criterion of multiple attestation, we have only two possibilities: we can only turn to Mark or to the hypothetical Q source. Schenk adds a fresh restriction by his observation that the prediction/fulfilment structure, as well as the condemnation/rehabilitation structure, are already there in Mark's Gospel on the redactional level. Schenk summarizes his view in this way: 'The historical questioning has a narrow boundary because of its being necessarily limited to Mark and because of Mark's schematic character.'<sup>12</sup>

This essay cannot re-open the discussion of the problems of the two-document hypothesis. However, I have to indicate that I hold with an increasing number of scholars that every individual pericope or saying

11. See, e.g., R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.: ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994). With regard to the passion prediction sayings, see especially the relevant section of Appendix 8, II, pp. 1482-89.

12. Schenk, 'Leidensgeschichte', p. 719.

has to be examined afresh as regards the question of authenticity, original wording and possible dependence. On occasion a Matthaean version of a saying in the triple tradition may be older than Mark, or a Lukan version may be independent of both Mark and Matthew.

It is also beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the question of criteria in searching for authentic sayings of Jesus. I confine my discussion here to two questions. (1) Can we find arguments that counter the thesis that the passion predictions are redactional or a post-Easter creation of the early Church? (2) Can we argue that we have multiple attestation for the passion predictions? The thesis will be argued that we can find older traditions in these passages and that we have multiple attestation for them. It is acknowledged that our answers cannot prove that these are sayings of Jesus; it is argued, however, that this possibility can be maintained.

The majority view in recent exegetical works seems to be that the passion predictions cannot be authentic. They are regarded as post-Easter formulations of the early Church. The Jesus Seminar arrived at this conclusion on the basis of their 'rules' or 'axioms' set out in the Introduction of the work that summarizes the result of their votes. One such rule states that: 'Sayings and parables expressed in "Christian" language are the creation of the evangelists or their Christian predecessors.'<sup>13</sup> This axiom is reinforced by the statement in the immediate context: 'The language of Jesus was distinctive, as was his style and perspective...' Since 'Mark betrays his knowledge of the oral gospel' in the passion predictions, from this follows that he attributed his version of that oral gospel to Jesus.<sup>14</sup> It may suffice here to say that in the opinion of some contributors to the Third Quest the axiom underlying this decision needs correction.<sup>15</sup>

However, if the 'similarity' of a saying to early Christian statements in itself does not exclude the possibility that the saying originates with Jesus, another reason may still exist for viewing it as non-authentic. One might find a *Sitz im Leben* in the experience of suffering of the

13. Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, p. 24.

14. Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, p. 25.

15. In this regard, I agree with Theissen and Merz who affirm: 'Das Differenzkriterium ist durch das *historische Plausibilitätskriterium* zu ersetzen, das mit *Wirkungen* Jesu auf das Urchristentum und seiner Einbindung in einen jüdischen Kontext rechnet'. G. Theissen and A. Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd edn, 1997), p. 117 (emphasis theirs).

early Christians. In their suffering they sought and found comfort and strength in the conviction that Jesus also had to suffer. Their interest resulted in the formulation of more and more sayings on suffering and possible martyrdom. These sayings were then attributed to the earthly Jesus. Another possibility is to give a reason why sayings attributed to Jesus should be seen as post-Easter creations.<sup>16</sup> Let us, however, turn to observations that might point in another direction.

My first observation is that those sayings belong to the Son of Man sayings. Ulrich Luz has affirmed concerning the Son of Man sayings in Matthew that they are usually taken from the sources of Matthew, that is, from Mark, Q and the *Sondergut*, or special source of the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> They all appear in the words of Jesus, and in no case do they appear in narrative texts or in confessions (*Bekanntnis*) or even in words of address (*Anrede*). The sayings about the suffering and rising Son of Man are not uttered in the presence of enemies or even before the crowds (*nie in der Öffentlichkeit*)—with the exception of the sign of Jonah (Mt. 12.40). Luz further affirms that the readers of Matthew knew who the Son of Man was from the Christian tradition.<sup>18</sup> This tradition is characterized by a relatively constant word- and motif-field, for example, the term *παράδωμι* occurs five times, *ἐγείρω* three times, and *χείρ* twice in the relevant Matthaean sayings. Thus we may add that there might be an argument for the case that these sayings were not a creation, but they were well remembered by the early guardians of

16. As, for example, represented by Theissen and Merz: 'Das Skandalon seiner entehrenden Hinrichtung provozierte nachösterliche Sinndeutungen (wie Mk 10,45) und Leidensweissagungen (wie Mk 8,31 u.ö.)', *Der historische Jesus*, p. 104. May I note here that Mk 10.45 would also deserve discussion in the context of our present theme. However, within the limits of this essay it is not possible to focus on more than a few passages. The authenticity of Mk 10.45 is doubted by the majority of present-day scholars. For arguments in favour of the view that it originates with Jesus, see P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. I. *Grundlegung: Von Jesus zu Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), pp. 120-22 and 128-30; J.C. O'Neill, 'Did Jesus Teach that his Death would Be Vicarious as well as Typical?', in W. Horbury and B. McNeil (eds.), *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 9-27, esp. pp. 24-26.

17. U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (EKKNT, 1.2; Braunschweig: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), p. 498.

18. Luz, *Matthäus*, p. 499.

the tradition. We can find other arguments that count against the theory that these sayings were created by the evangelists.

My further observations concern the variations among the Synoptic parallels of the passion predictions and the differences among the predictions themselves. I shall present my remarks in the order as found in Mark's Gospel, with the differences in the other two Synoptic Gospels.

Mark 8.31 is the first passion prediction of that Gospel: 'And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again'.<sup>19</sup> Joachim Gnilka affirms that it is easily separable from its present context: it is a self-contained tradition.<sup>20</sup> Whereas Lk. 9.22 is an exact parallel, in Matthew's parallel version (16.21) we find some differences: a direct reference to Jesus is substituted for the expression 'Son of Man'; one of the two main verbs, 'reject', ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι, is replaced by 'going to Jerusalem', εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἀπελθεῖν: 'From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised'. However, Albright and Mann have pointed to a significant agreement among the three versions in, what they call, 'a very odd order' of the expressions: elders, chief priests, and scribes.<sup>21</sup> We may further note the minor agreement of Matthew and Luke, 'on the third day', over against Mark's 'after three days'.<sup>22</sup> Taking all these little remarks together, we may raise the possibility that we have here an early Christian tradition with some variation rather than a saying formed by the evangelists.

19. Throughout this essay I refer to the RSV text when quoting the English Bible.

20. J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (EKKNT, 2.2; Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), p. 10.

21. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB, 26; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), p. 200. In other occurrences of similar lists of participants the 'chief priests' are mentioned first in the Gospels.

22. Georg Strecker observed that perhaps Matthew and Luke adjusted this expression to the passion narrative; or they may even have been influenced by the kerygmatic formula found also in 1 Cor. 15.4 (G. Strecker, 'Die Leidens- und Auferstehungsvoraussagen im Markusevangelium [Mk 8,31; 9,31; 10,32-34]', *ZTK* 64 [1967], pp. 16-39 [24]). At the same place he also noted that the Markan expression, 'after three days', stands in contradiction with Mark's own passion narrative: Mk 14.58; 15.29.

Mark 9.12 (par Mt. 17.12 with some differences; Luke has no parallel) is a saying about the suffering of the Son of Man, but there is no reference to death in this verse. However, before I move on to the second passion prediction in Mark, it may be relevant to note that this saying is applied by Jesus to John the Baptist, with a reference to Elijah: 'And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him"' (Mk 9.12, 13). As Jesus knew the fate of the Baptist, this must have been a sign to him that controversies around Jesus himself might lead to similar results. Schenk rightly affirms that the death of John the Baptist can be seen as a consequence of his activities,<sup>23</sup> and we may add that Jesus might have counted on that possibility for himself as well. This point is acknowledged by many scholars who do not accept the passion predictions as authentic sayings of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

Mark 9.31, the second passion prediction, is seen by some scholars, for example, Strecker, as a Markan redactional work based on 8.31,<sup>25</sup> but Gnilka argues that beside the similarities, 9.31 has significant differences as well: for example, the Son of Man being delivered into the hands of men.<sup>26</sup> 'For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise".' Thus Gnilka thinks that although the context is Markan, the very saying about the Son of Man is not. Luz holds that the Matthaean parallel (Mt. 17.22-23) has Mark as its source, but Luz himself points to some peculiarities

23. Schenk, *Leidensgeschichte*, p. 715.

24. So, e.g., H. Schürmann, *Jesu ureigener Tod: Exegetische Besinnungen und Ausblick* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), pp. 29-30. I note that Lorenz Oberlinner has argued against this view; in his opinion the death of John the Baptist did not necessarily lead Jesus to envisage the same fate for himself. See L. Oberlinner, *Todeserwartung und Todesgewißheit Jesu: Zum Problem einer historischen Begründung* (SBB, 10; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980), pp. 38-58. Oberlinner's thesis is that Jesus did not have a certainty as regards his approaching death, but he has counted on its possibility in the very final days of his life.

25. Strecker, 'Die Leidens- und Auferstehungsvoraussagen', pp. 30-31. I note that Strecker argues that there is pre-Markan material in Mk 8.31 (see pp. 24-30), although he holds that the passion predictions are post-Easter creations (p. 33).

26. Gnilka, *Markus*, p. 53.



as well.<sup>27</sup> Matthew has an introductory expression that is difficult to explain, 'As they were gathering in Galilee'. The disciples are already with Jesus in v. 19, so there is no need for them to gather.<sup>28</sup> As in Matthew the following pericope is a Matthaean *Sondergut* (concerning the Temple tax), the passion prediction is isolated in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>29</sup> Albright and Mann have also observed this, and they went even further by affirming that the second passion prediction is not original to Matthew's version, but a later 'editorial addition to the original text'.<sup>30</sup> Luke's parallel to this pericope (Lk. 9.43b-45) does not have a reference to death, only to the Son of Man being delivered into the hands of men.<sup>31</sup> This verse, then, may reflect a tradition that is not dependent on Mk 8.31. It is also possible to maintain that the 'Synoptic parallels' are not in a literary dependence in this case, but can be seen as multiple witnesses to a tradition.

Mark 10.33-34, the third passion prediction, has considerable differences when compared with the first two. On the one hand, the list of those to whom the Son of Man is delivered is shorter, but on the other the fate of the Son of Man is depicted with more words and in greater detail: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days

27. Luz, *Matthäus*, p. 526.

28. Is it not possible that Matthew knew a tradition that did not restrict the passion prediction to the circle of the disciples? This would fit with Mt. 27.63, a verse that may imply that Jesus openly spoke about his resurrection 'after three days'. I owe this remark to Professor Gerd Theissen.

29. Luz, *Matthäus*, p. 527.

30. Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, p. 210. I note that they hold the same about Mt. 17.12b, see p. 205.

31. There is a difference in the disciples' reaction to Jesus' second prediction in Matthew's and Luke's version: according to Matthew (17.23b), the disciples 'were greatly distressed', while Luke affirms that the disciples 'did not understand this saying' (9.45a). Mark also has this motif of non-understanding, but Luke is more emphatic when he also gives a reason by using a *divinum passivum*: 'it was concealed from them, that they should not perceive it'. It has to be noted that some of the differences among the Synoptics may be accounted for by the evangelists' editorial work. However, the personal involvement of the one who hands on the tradition does not necessarily exclude the possibility that he transmits earlier material.

he will rise.’ Although Gnilka thinks that this third prediction is formulated by Mark,<sup>32</sup> he himself notes that it does not correspond fully with the passion narrative of the same Gospel.<sup>33</sup> Matthew has a shorter parallel (Mt. 20.17-19), but he is even more precise in naming the kind of death that awaits the Son of Man: he will be crucified. As the prediction does not fit its context in Matthew, Albright and Mann think that we have a later ‘editorial insertion’ also in this case.<sup>34</sup> Luke is closer to Mark than to Matthew in the details concerning what will happen to the Son of Man, but there are numerous differences as well: Luke adds a reference to scriptural proof (Lk. 18.31);<sup>35</sup> Luke only speaks of the Son of Man here, whereas in Mark the previous verse (10.32) makes clear that Jesus speaks about his own fate; Luke also differs from Mark in a few words in describing what is done to the Son of Man (ὕβρισθήσεται in Luke; κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτὸν θανάτῳ in Mark); they also differ in grammatical forms, for example, passive forms in Luke, a participle in Luke (μαστιγώσαντες) instead of Mark’s future indicative (μαστιγώσουσιν), and in word order (the reference to ‘mocking’ comes earlier in Luke); Luke omits the reference to the Jewish leaders. Once again we note the minor agreement of Matthew and Luke, ‘on the third day’, over against Mark’s ‘after three days’. The passage can be seen as a tradition not depending on the first two passion predictions.<sup>36</sup> The Synoptics may be regarded as independent witnesses to that tradition.

Without entering the debate on the two-document hypothesis, I do

32. Gnilka, *Markus*, p. 96.

33. Gnilka, *Markus*, p. 95.

34. Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, p. 239.

35. I accept R.E. Brown’s argument that it is a better methodological presupposition to hold that ‘Jesus did use the Scriptures’ (*Death of the Messiah*, II, p. 1479), than to affirm that ‘if a concept or pattern is traceable to ... a scriptural background, it cannot have come from Jesus’ (II, p. 1478).

36. I note that R.E. Brown has argued on the basis of Johannine ‘predictions’, three Son of Man sayings (3.14; 8.28; 12.32-34), that ‘already on a preGospel level there was a collection of three sayings predicting the death and resurrection of the Son of Man, and that the Marcan and Johannine traditions and/or evangelists developed those sayings and used them independently’ (*Death of the Messiah*, II, p. 1485). Brown has also discussed other Synoptic texts which he calls ‘less precise or more allusive predictions’ (II, pp. 1470-73). He argues that because their wording does not reflect exactly what happened in the passion of the respective Gospel, ‘it is not possible to dismiss them simply as retrojections of what happened’ (II, p. 1473).

claim on the basis of these remarks that a simple literary dependence is not the only possible solution to the Synoptic problem in our case. I argue that the passion predictions can be seen as traditions that were not created by the evangelists. Although they may be creations of the early church from a pre-Gospel period, they may also be regarded as—at least in some parts—authentic sayings of Jesus. R.E. Brown has rightly observed that only a ‘small portion’ of the language of the texts speaking of this foresight of Jesus is ‘clearly derivable’ from the Gospels’ passion narratives.<sup>37</sup> I agree with his conclusion that the thesis is very unlikely ‘that none of these sayings anticipating a violent death stems from Jesus’.<sup>38</sup> With E.P. Sanders I hold that in these passages the expression ‘the Son of Man’ is a self-reference; it means ‘I’.<sup>39</sup> If this is true, then they point to the awareness with which Jesus looked at his coming confrontations with the authorities. They would lead to a violent death.

If Jesus did foresee that a violent death awaited him, then it is relevant to ask what significance he attached to that death. The passion predictions are addressed to Jesus’ disciples, in order to prepare them for the future. They are met with disapproval (e.g. Mk 10.32), or with lack of understanding (e.g. Mk 9.32) on the side of the disciples.<sup>40</sup> However, they do show that Jesus thought he had to die in obedience to the will of God, which is expressed in the term *θεῖ* (e.g. in Mk 8.31). As the passion predictions also include a reference to the resurrection, this—if authentic—would imply that Jesus expected that God would vindicate him.<sup>41</sup> In the following sections, I shall inquire concerning the meaning

37. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, II, pp. 1486-87.

38. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, II, p. 1487.

39. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 246.

40. I do not discuss here whether the motif of the disciples’ non-ability to understand is only a literary device or whether it has a historical background. Even in the latter case, I do not think that Jesus’ predictions are to be seen as inauthentic because the disciples understood only after Easter what had happened. I think that the tragic character of the events is enough reason why the disciples were surprised at the death of Jesus even though he had warned them previously.

41. I note that this result of the discussion of the passion predictions does not mean that Jesus approached his death with some kind of suicide thoughts. For a good discussion of the difference between suicide and between someone being prepared to sacrifice oneself in martyrdom, see A.J. Blasi, ‘Marginalization and Martyrdom: Social Context of Ignatius of Antioch’, *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 32 (1997), pp. 68-74. Blasi examines the letters of Ignatius, whose

of Jesus' necessary death (as vindicated by God) in two texts only, one related to a symbolic act, and the other related to the sayings on the occasion of the last supper.

### 3. *The Reported Act of Jesus Entering Jerusalem*

The majority of scholars working in the context of the Third Quest have seen some connection between the violent end of Jesus' life and his attack on the Jerusalem Temple. Before I turn to some observations in this regard, I note an exception: although J.D. Crossan holds that 'an action and equal saying involving the Temple's symbolic destruction goes back to the historical Jesus himself', he says he is nevertheless 'much less secure about whether that action/saying led directly to Jesus' arrest and execution', especially because of the symbolic character of the 'destruction'.<sup>42</sup>

In this essay, I confine my references to some works whose contribution can stand here as an example of many others. I argue that some of the arguments they bring forward have not been given their full strength. My aim is to highlight the significance of the relevant passages for our present subject.

Marcus Borg has summarized the recent majority scholarly opinion when he warned that although many Gospel texts 'are filled with a foreboding' that the likely result of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem would be death, nevertheless 'the *outcome* was not the *purpose* of the journey'.<sup>43</sup> We have already seen E.P. Sanders's view that the main reason for Jesus' execution was his attack on the Temple, combined with the danger implied in the fact that Jesus had a following. Sanders affirms: 'I conclude that Jesus' symbolic action of overthrowing tables in the Temple was understood in connection with a saying about destruction,

'social condition' differed from that of Jesus. However, I think Blasi's thesis is applicable also to Jesus' case: 'a martyrdom complex ... is not so much a psychological condition of an individual as a social condition in which an individual may be found' (p. 68). The 'social condition' for Jesus was also influenced by Jewish martyrdom ideas. For a the discussion of the main sources, see J. Downing, 'Jesus and Martyrdom', *JTS* 14 (1963), pp. 279-23.

42. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 359.

43. M.J. Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 172 (emphasis his).

and that the action and the saying, in the view of the authorities, constituted a prophetic threat'.<sup>44</sup> However, Sanders himself acknowledges that Jesus also carried out a symbolic action that implied high claims on his side: 'he rode into Jerusalem on an ass'.<sup>45</sup> Concerning the significance of the prophecy in Zech. 9.9, Sanders rightly points to the two historical possibilities: 'It is possible to think either that the prophecy created the event or that the prophecy created the story and that the event never occurred'. Sanders inclines 'to the view that it was Jesus himself who read the prophecy and decided to fulfil it: that here he implicitly declared himself to be "king"'. However, at this highly explosive time of the feast of the Passover, such a claim would be so dangerous that it would have led to Jesus' death almost immediately, so Sanders goes on to affirm that 'Jesus' demonstration was quite modest: he performed a symbolic gesture for insiders, for those who had eyes to see'.

Unfortunately, Sanders leaves this point as it stands and does not draw the possible consequences. He does not go on along the line of his own observations in the direction where it leads. Marcus Borg rightly points to the Gospels' presentations which make it clear that Jesus 'deliberately made arrangements to enter the city on a donkey's colt' (Mk 11.2-6; Mt. 21.2-3; Lk. 19.29-32; I note that Jn 12.14 differs from the Synoptics: Jesus 'found a young ass', but it is also worth noting that the very act of the riding on the donkey as well as the Zechariah prophecy is also attested by the Fourth Gospel).<sup>46</sup> Borg even raises the possibility that Jesus and his followers—forming a procession—may have arrived at Jerusalem from the east on the same day the Roman troops arrived from the west 'to cope with the throngs of Jewish pilgrims' at the season of Passover.<sup>47</sup> We remember that Sanders emphasized that the authorities did not think that Jesus was mad; that is why they thought he was dangerous. In my opinion, Theissen and Merz rightly argue that Jesus' criticism of the Temple may have caused worry not only among the Temple aristocracy, but also among the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup>

44. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 260.

45. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 254. The following quotations are all from the same page.

46. Borg, *Jesus*, p. 174.

47. Borg, *Jesus*, pp. 173-74.

48. 'Ihre wirtschaftliche Existenz hing zu eng mit dem Tempel zusammen:

From all these observations it seems to me more likely—what Sanders and Borg do not want to accept—that Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the time of Passover clearly counting on the possibility of his violent death.<sup>49</sup> If this is true, then Jesus must have attached a significance to his approaching death. What significance might it have been? If we think the timing is also significant, then the feast of Passover points to the realm of sacrifice. For example, John O'Neill has answered his own question, 'Why did Jesus go up to Jerusalem?', with the following affirmation.

He [i.e. Jesus] went to Jerusalem not to bring in the Kingdom...not to make a complete abandonment of his will without any specific and understandable purpose. He went to Jerusalem as God's Son, sent by his Father to sacrifice himself for mankind. He went to give men time and opportunity to repent.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Maurice Casey, after a discussion of the predictions of the passion, the cleansing of the Temple, and the words of Jesus at the Last Supper concludes:

We should deduce that Jesus' mind was working on the same basic lines as those who meditated on the deaths of the innocent Maccabean martyrs, and who concluded that their deaths were an expiatory sacrifice which assuaged the wrath of God and enabled him to deliver Israel

Kritik an ihm mußte sie als Kritik an ihrer Lebensgrundlage verstehen'. Theissen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*, p. 170. The argument is based on an earlier detailed study of G. Theissen, 'Die Tempelweissagung Jesu: Prophetie im Spannungsfeld von Stadt und Land', in *idem*, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums* (WUNT, 19; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 3rd edn, 1989), pp. 142-59.

49. Another passage that would deserve attention in connection with our present theme is the passage on Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14.32-42 par.). It might allow an insight into Jesus' understanding of his near future: he is ready to die—if that be the will of the Father for the sake of the Kingdom. Theissen and Merz contend that even if the story is not historical, it can rightly describe the feelings of Jesus in his last days (*Der historische Jesus*, p. 379): 'Er rechnet mit seinem Tod (dem Kelch), hofft aber noch immer auf das wunderbare und rettende Eingreifen Gottes, auf den Beginn der Gottesherrschaft'.

50. J.C. O'Neill, *Messiah: Six Lectures on the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cochrane Press, 1980), p. 58. I note that Jesus' consciousness of being the Son of God is controversial among scholars. Without entering this debate, I call attention to O'Neill's argument for the possibility that Jesus 'knew that he was [the Son of God], but did not know beyond the possibility of error'. See his more recent book: *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (BIS, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 117.

(cf. 2 Macc 7.37-38; 4 Macc 17.20-22). Jesus' death likewise was to be an expiatory sacrifice which assuaged the wrath of God and enabled him to redeem Israel despite her faults.<sup>51</sup>

From the reported sayings of Jesus that are relevant for the search of the meaning of Jesus' death, I have chosen the words uttered at the Last Supper. Before I turn to them, may I close this section by pointing to the fact, acknowledged by Sanders, that Jesus' followers understood Jesus' action of entering Jerusalem on an ass: 'they hailed the coming Kingdom (Mark 11.10) or even Jesus himself as king (Matt. 21.9; Luke 19.38)'.<sup>52</sup> To be sure, Sanders does not think that the followers of Jesus understood Jesus' intention as the sacrifice of God's Son for all humanity. Sanders also doubts the Synoptics' reference to the 'crowds', or at least many people, who witnessed and understood Jesus' symbolic action. However, we may repeat that he does stop short of taking the steps that are a logical consequence of his own observations. One wonders why his discussion of this passage ends so abruptly. In my opinion, here we can see an example of exegeting certain passages in a different way on the basis of assumptions about what one thinks was possible or not possible for a first-century Jew to hold.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. *Jesus' Words at the Last Supper*

In a recent monograph on the table fellowships of Jesus, János Bolyki argues that the story of the 'institution' of the Lord's Supper probably originates very early, because its version in Paul (1 Cor. 11.23b-25) was committed to writing in the 50s CE, and the oral tradition contained in it probably goes back even to the 40s.<sup>54</sup> Bolyki also rightly adds that the

51. P.M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), p. 65. He refers to C.K. Barrett, 'The Background of Mark 10.45', in A.J.B. Higgins (ed.), *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), pp. 1-18.

52. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 254.

53. For a recent argument for the thesis that Jesus was conscious of the likely outcome of the events his last week, see E.J. Schnabel, 'The Silence of Jesus: The Galilean Rabbi Who was More than a Prophet', in B. Chilton and C.A. Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (NTTS, 28.1; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 203-257. Schnabel concludes that: 'Jesus went up to Jerusalem not just to preach, but to die, so that the promised new covenant could become a reality' (p. 256).

54. J. Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften* (WUNT, 2.96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), p. 139.

search for the oldest form of the tradition has to be preceded by the question as regards historicity.

The majority of scholars accept the historicity of an occasion of a 'last supper' in the life of Jesus, yet not everybody is prepared to use it as a source for answering the question in this essay. For example, J.D. Crossan argues that the lack of any reference to the Last Supper in the passages dealing with the Eucharist in the *Didache* must mean that we have at least one group of Christians for whom elements of a Passover meal, the Last Supper, or 'passion symbolism' were not part of the origins of the Eucharist.<sup>55</sup> Crossan therefore concludes that these elements did not originate in the life of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> However, the argument from silence is not convincing. Bolyki has rightly pointed out that although the words of institution of the Lord's Supper are not reported by the Fourth Evangelist, this sacrament serves as a background to John 6.<sup>57</sup> In an analogical way, the lack of a reference to the Last Supper in the *Didache* does not prove that its community was not aware of those elements of the origins of the Eucharist.

Jesus' words at the Last Supper do not only include what the church has later called the 'words of institution', but also a reference to Jesus' drinking anew in the Kingdom to come. In an article entitled 'Bread and Wine', John O'Neill has subjected all the existing texts, including the variants, to an investigation as regards their authenticity, and their likely original form, with the aim of finding what significance Jesus attributed to his approaching death.<sup>58</sup> In the following, I am only interested in those observations which help to find an answer to our original question.

On the basis of the variants, O'Neill argues that the 'shorter text' of Luke in the Codex Bezae, which does not have Lk. 22.19b-20, is not to

55. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 364.

56. It has to be noted that the discussion here does not include an attempt to answer the question whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal. For a good presentation of the arguments pro and contra, see Theissen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*, pp. 373-76. They themselves argue against the thesis of a Passover meal. If the Fourth Gospel is right in its dating of the Last Supper as one day earlier than the day of Passover, then this could be used as an argument for the view that Jesus thought there might not be another occasion for him to have a meal with his disciples.

57. Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, pp. 132-38.

58. O'Neill, *Messiah*, pp. 59-76.



be preferred, because it was due to a scribal error.<sup>59</sup> However, in his opinion in Luke's Gospel 'a scribe added an account of the saying "I will not drink until the Kingdom come" to a version of the saying about the nature of the cup, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you" (Luke 22.19, 20)'.<sup>60</sup> This is the opposite process from the process in Mark, argued by Loisy long ago. O'Neill describes the Markan text history as follows: 'In Mark an editor or scribe added words about the wine to an account of how Jesus said he would drink the cup no longer until he drank it anew in the Kingdom'. However, since Paul also knows the word concerning the cup, it is possible to argue that it is an old tradition, because it is attested independently by Mark and Paul.

O'Neill argues that 'we possess four different versions of a tradition that Jesus declared at the last supper that he would not partake of any other such meal until the Kingdom come'.<sup>61</sup> Two of them may be results of translation differences from a common semitic original: Mt. 26.29 and Mk 14.25. The third version, Lk. 22.17-18, is distinct in as much as it stresses the coming of the Kingdom rather than the drinking anew in the Kingdom. Apart from the term 'coming', it is close to the first two. The fourth version, Lk. 22.15-16, is rather different from the previous ones: 'These verses speak of eating the passover and of the fulfilment in the Kingdom'. Marion Soards has argued that we do not only have to emphasize that this latter passage has no parallel in Mark, but we also have to see that in its present form in Luke—just as v. 18—it is an integral part of a balanced structure, because 'vv. 15-18 are a polished unit'.<sup>62</sup>

And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God'. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he

59. O'Neill, *Messiah*, pp. 61-62. For an argument in favour of the thesis that the longer version is to be preferred, see H.F. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection: The Provenance, Meaning and Correlation of the Synoptic Predictions* (WUNT, 2.20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), pp. 30-34.

60. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 61.

61. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 62.

62. M.L. Soards, *The Passion According to Luke: The Special Material of Luke 22* (JSNTSup, 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), pp. 27-28 (28). This can be seen as a confirmation of the results of an earlier detailed study by H. Schürmann, *Der Paschamahlbericht: Lk 22,(7-14.)15-18, 1* (NTAbh, NS 19.5; Münster: Aschendorff, 1953), p. 52.

said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.'

Because of the Lukan redactional character of the unit, Bayer has formulated his conclusion of the analysis of the parallel passages in this way.<sup>63</sup> 'It is indeed most likely, on the basis of literary and material analyses, that Luke constitutes the original context for the eschatological prospect while Mark transmits the more primitive form'. On the basis of 'the fact that the form of eschatological sayings such as Mk 14:25/Lk 22:(16):18 is found in Q, Mark and Matthew'—as well as on the basis of some earlier arguments of M. Black and J. Jeremias—Bayer also argues that 'the eschatological prospect has its provenance with Jesus himself'.<sup>64</sup>

It is worth noting that some scholars who are not willing to accept that Jesus might have reckoned with the possibility of his violent death earlier during his life, for example, at the time when the first passion predictions are set in the framework of the Gospels, nevertheless hold that he must have reckoned with it at the time of the Last Supper.<sup>65</sup> In my opinion, O'Neill thus rightly argues that the only possible meaning of Jesus' not drinking the wine can be that he 'expected an immediate violent death'.<sup>66</sup>

63. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions*, p. 41.

64. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions*, pp. 41-42. Bayer lists the following passages that have a similar form: Mt. 23.39 par. Lk. 13.35; Mt. 5.26 par. Lk. 12.59; Mk 9.1; 9.41; 10.15; 13.30; Mt. 5.18; 10.23. I note that the wide attestation for the form is a good argument for its provenance with Jesus; however, not all of these examples have an eschatological content.

65. Thus, for example, Lorenz Oberlinner has summarized his exegetical analyses in the thesis that 'Jesus in der Situation des letzten Mahles schon um die Pläne seiner Gegner, ihn zu beseitigen, wußte und dieses sein Wissen im eschatologischen Ausblick, einem "Trostwort" an die Jünger, zugleich als Ausdruck der Bereitschaft, den Tod auf sich zu nehmen, mitteilte.' Oberlinner, *Todeserwartung*, p. 134. So also Schürmann, *Jesu ureigener Tod*, pp. 56-59. For arguments in favour of the thesis that reasons that led to Jesus' death can be found also in his ministry prior to the last week of his life, see C.A. Evans, 'From Public Ministry to the Passion: Can a Link Be Found between the (Galilean) Life and the (Judean) Death of Jesus?', in *idem, Jesus and his Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU, 25; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 301-318.

66. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 63.

The main question in relation to these traditions is, what role did Jesus envisage for himself at the messianic banquet to come? I think that Jesus' reference to the Kingdom as his Father's Kingdom in Mt. 26.29 points to the likelihood that Jesus thought he himself would be the host (together with his father), and not simply one participating member among many. Rather, he would receive his disciples anew. As Bayer has put it: 'the analogy between the fellowship of Jesus and his disciples during the Last Supper and Jesus' hope of a future meal celebration suggests that then again Jesus would perform the function of a "host" as the head of the household (*pater familias*)'.<sup>67</sup>

Bayer has argued for an 'implied *Zwischenzeit*' in some Gospel texts including Mk 14.25.<sup>68</sup> 'Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God'. If he is right, then Mk 14.25 also implies that there will be many occasions of such a meal fellowship until 'that day', but Jesus will not partake of them. Therefore, it may be argued that one message of the traditions I have discussed in this section is that Jesus' followers have to repent and believe that, for the sake of Jesus' sacrifice, they have forgiveness of their sins. As O'Neill affirms: 'The Kingdom's coming is dependent on men's repentance and God's forbearance; Jesus' death is the most powerful call to repentance ever made, and the signal sign of God's forbearance'.<sup>69</sup>

As a final observation, I may add that the reference to 'blood' is regarded by most exegetes as secondary.<sup>70</sup> However, Otto Betz has argued that the significance of the reference to 'blood' can be understood against the Old Testament background. As it was forbidden for Jewish people to drink blood, such a challenging thought is to be attributed to Jesus rather than the early Church.<sup>71</sup> O'Neill holds that the reference to blood is secondary in the sense that it did not occur at the Last Supper, but it may originate in another saying of Jesus that did have a reference

67. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions*, p. 52.

68. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions*, pp. 44-49.

69. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 64.

70. See, e.g., W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor 11,17-14,40)* (EKKNT, 7.3, Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), pp. 11-12.

71. O. Betz, 'Das Mahl des Herrn bei Paulus', in *idem, Jesus, der Herr der Kirche: Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie*, II (WUNT, 52; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), pp. 217-51 (220).

to blood. This saying was added to our text (in Mk 14.24) by a scribe.<sup>72</sup> Even if this saying originated with Jesus on some earlier occasion, 'the words actually said about the cup at the last meal would have been all the more transparent to his disciples'. O'Neill gives an excellent example of how unthinkable it was for Jewish people to drink blood.<sup>73</sup> David poured out even the water that was brought to him from the well of Bethlehem, then occupied by the Philistines, because he saw that his men had brought him water by risking their lives (1 Chron. 11.19): '“Far be it from me before my God that I should do this. Shall I drink the lifeblood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it”.' Therefore he would not drink it.' If the reference to blood in Jesus' words is authentic, then it must refer to the life sacrificed for others. The disciples of Jesus can drink the cup, because he would die for them.

I hope I have been able to show that there is still room for discussion concerning the significance Jesus' attached to his own death. I am aware that many more passages are to be exegeted afresh, and I do expect that the discussion will continue. My aim has been to show that the exegesis of some crucial passages is still not a finally settled issue. We have also seen that one's view of first-century Judaism influences one's exegetical results.

The understanding of the passages discussed in this essay bears a strong influence on our Christian faith today. If Jesus did not think his death was effective for sinners, it would be hard for his followers to continue so to think. The evidence I have brought forward suggests that Christians today can hold that they look upon Jesus' death as Jesus intended his followers to look on it: as bringing forgiveness of sins; in other words, as bringing reconciliation and salvation.

72. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 68.

73. O'Neill, *Messiah*, p. 65.