

Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition*

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The literary mindset ('default setting') of modern Western culture prevents those trained in that culture from recognizing that oral cultures operate differently. The classic solution to the Synoptic problem, and the chief alternatives, have envisaged the relationships between the Gospel traditions in almost exclusively literary terms. But the earliest phase of transmission of the Jesus tradition was without doubt predominantly by word of mouth. And recent studies of oral cultures provide several characteristic features of oral tradition. Much of the Synoptic tradition, even in its present form, reflects in particular the combination of stability and flexibility so characteristic of the performances of oral tradition. Re-envisaging the early transmission of the Jesus tradition therefore requires us to recognize that the literary paradigm (including a clearly delineated Q document) is too restrictive in the range of possible explanations it offers for the diverse/divergent character of Synoptic parallels. Variation in detail may simply attest the character of oral performance rather than constituting evidence of literary redaction.

1. Defining a default setting

For some time now I have been reflecting on the perils of the 'default setting'. For any who may be less than familiar with the pleasures and perils of computers or of word-processing, let me explain. From my *Idiot's Guide to the One-Eyed Monster* I read this definition: 'Default is a pre-set preference that is

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used by a program, the “fallback” position.’ In word-processing, for example, there may be a default setting for the style of type and size of font used – let us say, New York type, 12 point size; also for margins of a certain width – let us say, 2 inches.

The problems come when you want to change your default settings. You may want a broader margin (2.5 inches), to use Palatino type and font of 10 point size. And so you set up all these different options; you format the document you are writing according to your own design, and override the default settings provided for you by your computer or program. All that is fine, and you produce the document according to your preferred format. The trouble is, that when you open a *new* document, and want to start afresh, you find that, whether you wanted it to or not, your format has reverted to the original default settings.

The default setting means that when you want to create something different, you need constantly to resist the default setting, you need consciously to change or alter it. But when you turn your attention elsewhere, the default setting, the pre-set preference, reasserts itself.¹

The default setting is a useful image to remind us of our own pre-set preferences, the mindset by which we unconsciously, instinctively process and format information. The most obvious example today is the difficulty many (most) of my generation in Britain have in dealing with centimetres and litres. *Inches* and *feet* and *pints* are so deeply bred into us, we automatically think in these terms. They are our default settings. I think inches; I do not think centimetres. And when confronted with centimetres I must consciously revise my way of looking at the item in question.

Similarly, perhaps, with languages. Many here are fluent in several languages. But the first language, the language of childhood, is likely to be the default language. In moments of stress or great emotion our involuntary reflex is to speak in our mother tongue.

The more serious examples are the default settings which determine our attitudes and behaviour towards others. Through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, the idea of *progress* was a default setting. It was the way European academics saw history and the historical role of the West. That is, we understood progress as scientific advance, as the spread of European ‘civilization’. The consequences are still a major factor in our relationships with Africa and the Far East.

In Britain the mistakes made in investigating the tragic murder of a black London teenager in 1993 forced us to confront the reality of what the official

1 On a computer, of course, the experienced operator can easily alter the default setting. My point is that it is much more difficult to alter the default setting of the ‘onboard mental computer’. The analogy is not precise!

report, the Macpherson Report, described as ‘institutional racism’.² ‘Institutional racism’ is Macpherson’s term for a prejudicial mindset towards individuals of another race which unconsciously predetermines attitudes and actions in particular instances. ‘Institutional racism’, in other words, is another example of a default setting – an involuntary reflex attitude, a ‘pre-set preference’ in attitudes endemic within, in the case in point, the Metropolitan Police Force. The point was not to deny that such attitudes were being combatted, not to deny that when members of the Metropolitan Police concentrated on the problem they succeeded in avoiding racist sentiments. The point rather was that when people did *not* concentrate on the problem, when they relaxed their vigilance, they fell back to their default setting; their actions expressed their involuntary, pre-set preferences.

So too in Christian circles, and in NT scholarship, it is only relatively recently that we have become aware of the default setting of centuries-old *patriarchalism*. We simply took it for granted, as an unexamined *a priori*, that ‘man’ of course denotes humanity, that ‘brethren/brothers’ of course was an appropriate way to address a Christian congregation. I recall the shock I experienced when working on Rom 16 to find commentators convinced that προστάτις in 16.2 could mean only something like ‘helper’ (RSV), because, of course, a woman (Phoebe) could not have been a ‘patron’, the normal meaning of the word προστάτις. Likewise, the accusative Ἰουνίαν must denote a man, Junias rather than Junia, because, of course, a woman could not have been ‘outstanding among the apostles’ (16.7).³ Was such logic not indicative of a patriarchalist mindset or default setting?

If anything, more serious has been what might be called the ‘institutional anti-semitism’, or more accurately anti-Judaism, which for so long disfigured Christian theology, including NT scholarship. What was it that caused our predecessors to persevere with a description of Second Temple Judaism as ‘late Judaism’, *Spätjudentum*, well into the second half of the twentieth century? They must have been aware that such a description perpetuated Christian supersessionism, the belief that Judaism’s only function was to prepare for Christianity, so that when Christianity came Judaism ceased to have a reason for existence, so that first-century Judaism was *late* Judaism, the *last* Judaism. Such a supersessionist attitude must have become so inbred over centuries, an involuntary reflex, a subconscious default setting, that our predecessors fell back to it without thinking.

A default setting, then, a computer’s pre-set preferences, is a useful image of an established mindset, an unconscious bias or *Tendenz*, an instinctive reflex response. The point is that to alter a default setting, to change a habitual attitude

2 The Macpherson Report on *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (1999) identifies ‘institutional racism’ in ‘processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people’ (28).

3 For details see J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988) 888–9, 894–5.

or instinctive perspective, requires a conscious and sustained or repeated effort, otherwise we revert to the default setting, to our unexamined predispositions, without realizing it.

However, it is another default setting in NT scholarship that I want to speak about in this paper.

2. The literary paradigm

We here are all children of Gutenberg and Caxton. We belong to cultures shaped by the book. Our everyday currency is the learned article and monograph. Libraries are our natural habitat. We trace the beginnings of our modern discipline to the Renaissance's reassertion of the importance of studying classical texts in their original languages, to Erasmus's first Greek NT in 1516. Our discipline developed in the nineteenth century round the distinction between 'lower criticism', the attempt to reconstruct the original text of our NT writings, and 'higher criticism', concerned with questions of sources and genre. The dominant mode of treating the Synoptic Gospels during the last generation has been redaction criticism, the Gospels as the product of literary editing. A major concern for many today is summed up in the word 'intertextuality', where the appropriation of earlier texts, oral as well as written, is conceived in exclusively literary terms.

In a word, we naturally, habitually and instinctively work within a *literary paradigm*. We are, therefore, in no fit state to appreciate how a *non-literary* culture, an *oral* culture, functions. And if we are to enter empathetically into such a culture it is essential that we become conscious of our literary paradigm and make deliberate efforts to step outside it and to free ourselves from its inherited predispositions. It becomes necessary to alter the default settings given by the literary-shaped software of our mental computers.

The prevalence of the literary paradigm in study of the Synoptic tradition can be readily illustrated, as also the fact that it has both shaped and restricted NT scholarship's way of envisaging the Jesus tradition and its early transmission.

I need only remind you of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debate about the origins of the Synoptic tradition.⁴ The early solution of Lessing and

4 Of the various reviews and analyses I found the following most helpful: T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (ET 3 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909) 2.400–27; J. Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911, ³1918) 179–217; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (1973; ET London: SCM, 1975) 44–80; B. Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) ch. 1; E. P. Sanders and M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989) 51–162; U. Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (ET London: SCM, 1998) 162–97; J. S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 271–408.

Eichhorn was of an original gospel composed in Aramaic, written as early as AD 35, and known to the three Synoptic evangelists in different recensions.⁵ Schleiermacher's 'Fragment hypothesis' was conceived in terms of multiple written sources, in which various recollections, notes or reports of Jesus had been written.⁶ It is true that Herder and Gieseler thought more in terms of an orally formulated tradition; though Herder was evidently still thinking of a full gospel, 'a history of Christ';⁷ and Gieseler assumed that frequent repetition produced a fixed form of the narrative and outline of Gospel history from the Baptist onwards in which the most important events and sayings were reproduced with great uniformity, so that this Gospel survived, in spite of modifications, in its original stereotyped form.⁸

Such alternatives, however, were swamped by the dominant impression that 'the Synoptic problem' could be solved only in terms of literary sources, that the intricate variations and coincidences in the Synoptic Gospels could be realistically explained only in terms of literary dependence. As James Moffatt summed up the nineteenth-century debate:

The gospels are books made out of books; none of them is a document which simply transcribes the oral teaching of an apostle or of apostles. Their agreements and differences cannot be explained except on the hypothesis of a more or less close literary relationship, and while oral tradition is a *vera causa*, it is only a subordinate factor in the evolution of our canonical Greek gospels.⁹

It should occasion no surprise, then, that the hypothesis which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the most plausible resolution of the Synoptic problem is still known simply as the two *document* hypothesis.¹⁰ And even when some variations are offered in explanation of some of the complexities

5 For Lessing see his 'Neue Hypothese über die Evangelisten', *Werke 7: Theologiekritische Schriften I und II* (München: Carl Hanser, 1976) 614–36; ET H. Chadwick, *Lessing's Theological Writings* (London: A. & C. Black, 1972). W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* (1970; ET Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) provides extensive excerpts from both Lessing and Eichhorn (76–9). See also Zahn, *Introduction*, 2.403–4; Schnelle, *History*, 162–3.

6 Reicke, *Roots*, 12–13, refers to F. Schleiermacher, *Über die Schriften des Lukas. Ein kritischer Versuch* (Berlin: Reimer, 1817), 15 years before the better known 'Über die Zeugnisse des Papias von unseren beiden ersten Evangelien', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 5 (1832) 738–58.

7 J. G. Herder, 'Vom Erlöser der Menschen', *Herder Werke: Theologische Schriften* 9/1 (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1994) particularly 671–87 (here 679); see also Reicke, *Roots*, 9–12.

8 I echo Zahn's description (*Introduction*, 2.409).

9 Moffatt, *Introduction*, 180.

10 There is no need to rehearse the usual litany of Lachmann, Weisse, etc.; for details see e.g. Kümmel, *New Testament*, 146–51; Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 295–309.

of the data, like *Urmarkus* or Proto-Luke, what is envisaged are still *written* documents.¹¹ The literary paradigm continues to determine the way the problem and its solution are conceptualised. B. H. Streeter certainly recognized the importance of ‘a living oral tradition’ behind the Gospels and cautioned against studying the Synoptic problem ‘merely as a problem of literary criticism’, but, ironically, he went on to develop ‘a *four document* hypothesis’.¹²

The main development from and challenge to *source* criticism was, of course, *form* criticism, which began as a deliberate attempt to break away from the literary paradigm to conceptualise the transmission process in oral terms. The character of the challenge was already signalled by Wellhausen’s observation that ‘Die letzte Quelle der Evangelien ist mündliche Überlieferung, aber diese enthält nur den zerstreuten Stoff’.¹³ In effect Wellhausen was combining the hypotheses of Herder and Schleiermacher – Jesus tradition as oral tradition but in small units. Bultmann took up the challenge when he defined the purpose of form criticism thus: ‘to study the history of the oral tradition behind the gospels’.¹⁴ His analysis of *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, I need hardly remind you, became the single most influential exposition of *Formgeschichte*.¹⁵

Unfortunately, however, Bultmann could not escape from the literary default setting; he could not conceive the process of transmission except in literary terms. This becomes most evident in his conceptualization of the whole tradition about Jesus as ‘composed of a series of layers’.¹⁶ The imagined process is one where each layer is laid or builds upon another. Bultmann made such play with it because, apart from anything else, he was confident that he could strip off later (Hellenistic) layers to expose the earlier (Palestinian) layers.¹⁷ The image itself, however, is drawn from the literary process of editing, where each successive edition (layer) is an edited version (for Bultmann, an elaborated and expanded version) of the previous edition (layer). But is such a conceptualization really appropriate to a process of *oral* retellings of traditional material? Bultmann never really addressed the question, despite its obvious relevance.

Similarly, Kümmel in his classic *Introduction* recognizes the importance of oral tradition, both in ‘fixing’ the gospel material in written form and in the

11 On *Urmarkus* see e.g. Kümmel, *Introduction*, 61–3; and Proto-Luke, particularly V. Taylor, *Behind the Third Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926).

12 B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924) ch. 9 (quotations from 229).

13 J. Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1905) 43.

14 R. Bultmann (with K. Kundsinn), *Form Criticism* (1934; ET New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962) 1.

15 R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921; ET Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

16 R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (1926; ET New York: Scribners, 1935) 12–13.

17 *Ibid.*

reworking of the earliest sources into the canonical Gospels; but his discussion focuses mainly on the two-source hypothesis and his references to form-critical analyses do little to carry the discussion forward or to envisage how a process of oral transmission worked or how it might have influenced the shape of the tradition.¹⁸ It may be true, as E. P. Sanders affirms, that ‘everyone accepts oral transmission at the early stages of the gospel tradition’.¹⁹ But in reality the role of oral tradition is either reduced to characteristically fragmentary forms,²⁰ or when unknown oral sources are postulated, the working assumption, signalled by the word ‘source’ itself, is usually that the source was in effect a fixed version of some Jesus tradition used by the evangelist as one would use a written document.²¹

Even more revealing are the various more recent attempts to contest the dominance of the two-document hypothesis. W. Farmer’s attempt to revive the Griesbach hypothesis (Luke dependent on Matthew, and Mark on both) only begins to make sense if the Synoptic problem is viewed in exclusively literary terms, of one document dependent on and derived from another.²² Sanders’s justified critique of Bultmann’s assumption of a uniform tendency in the development of the original ‘pure forms’ of the Jesus tradition itself suffers from the idea of linear development evoked by the word ‘tendency’.²³ M. E. Boismard in turn assumes that the complexity of the Synoptic problem can be resolved only by a complex literary solution, a multi-stage interaction among earlier and later versions of the three Synoptic Gospels.²⁴ M. D. Goulder demonstrates that once the hypothesis of literary dependence is given exclusive explanatory rights, then, with

18 Kümmel, *Introduction*, particularly 76–9; Schnelle’s acknowledgment of the role of oral tradition is cursory (*History*, 174).

19 Sanders and Davies, *Studying*, 141. Sanders and Davies, and Reicke (*Roots*), are fairly exceptional in the importance they have accorded to oral tradition in the development of the Jesus tradition.

20 ‘... those fragments of tradition that bear the imprint of orality: short, provocative, memorable, oft-repeated phrases, sentences and stories’ (R. W. Funk and R. W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [New York: Macmillan/Polebridge, 1993] 4).

21 ‘Even now, when we have come to affirm that behind some or many of the literary works we deal with there is an oral tradition, we still manipulate such traditions as though they too were “literary” works’ (W. H. Silberman, “‘Habent Sua Fata Libelli’: The Role of Wandering Themes in Some Hellenistic Jewish and Rabbinic Literature”, in W. O. Walker, ed., *The Relationships Among the Gospels* [San Antonio: Trinity University, 1978] 195–218 [here 215]).

22 W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) ch. 6.

23 E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 9; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969).

24 M. E. Boismard, ‘The Two-Source Theory at an Impasse’, *NTS* 26 (1979) 261–73; also ‘Théorie des niveaux multiples’, in D. L. Dungan, ed., *The Interrelations of the Gospels: A Symposium Led by M.-É. Boismard*, W. R. Farmer, F. Neirynck, Jerusalem 1984 (BETL 95; Leuven: Leuven University, 1990) 231–43. See also the discussion in Sanders and Davies, *Studying*, 105–11.

sufficient imagination and ingenuity, Matthew can be derived entirely from Mark, and Luke by a combination of the prior two.²⁵ And Mark Goodacre, despite acknowledging the potential importance of oral tradition, discusses individual cases in terms exclusively of literary dependence.²⁶

At the present time the main focus of interest lies in Q. As the transition from nineteenth to twentieth centuries was dominated by fascination with the Gospel of Mark, so the transition from twentieth to twenty-first centuries has been dominated by fascination with the second of the two sources in the two-document hypothesis – the second source common to Matthew and Luke, the sayings source Q. That Q was a document, written in Greek, is one of the principal points of consensus; although overdependence on the literary paradigm again dictates, as with Mark and *Urmarkus*, that divergences between Matthew and Lukan Q material have to be explained by postulating different versions of Q, a Q^{Mt} and a Q^{Lk}.²⁷ The debate, however, now focuses on the issue whether different compositional layers can be distinguished *within* Q, with Kloppenborg's hypothesis that three layers can be so discerned winning a substantial following.²⁸ What is of interest here is the almost tacit assumption that each layer is to be conceived as a written document, and the process of development conceived in terms of editing and redaction. It should occasion no surprise that Kloppenborg envisages his investigation of Q in terms of an archaeological dig, as *Excavating Q*, where, as with Bultmann, the process is visualized as stripping away successive layers to reach the bottom layer, or as removing the redactional elements of successive editions to recover the original edition.²⁹

Finally, we might simply note that the discussion of possible knowledge of Jesus tradition in Paul's letters has similarly suffered from an assumption that the case depends on a quasi-literary interdependency. Since the case cannot be clearly made that Paul knew the form of tradition as it has been recorded in Mark or Q, the case cannot be made.³⁰ That Paul, as well as James and 1 Peter, not to mention the Apostolic Fathers, bear testimony to *different* versions of the *same* sayings of Jesus has been too little considered. More to the point, that such allu-

25 M. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (2 vols; JSNTS 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989) in his attempt to dispense with Q (particularly vol. 1 ch. 2).

26 M. Goodacre, *The Case Against Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 2002) 56–9, 89–90 (despite 64–6, 188).

27 E.g. Schnelle, *History*, 187.

28 J. S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

29 Kloppenborg does not explicitly address the issue of whether Q¹ was also a document, but he does assume it (*Excavating Q*, 159, 197, 200, 208–9); see also 154–9 on the genre of Q¹.

30 Notably F. Neirynck, 'Paul and the Sayings of Jesus', *BETL* 73 (1986) 265–321, repr. in *Evangelica II* (Leuven: Peeters, 1991) 511–68. Neirynck's many and valuable contributions on the Gospels well illustrate the dominance of the literary paradigm.

sions to what we know from the Synoptics as Jesus tradition attest a much more diverse and fluid transmission process has been allowed too little say in our conceptualization of the character of the Jesus tradition and the way it was initially passed on.³¹

In all this discussion the literary paradigm has dominated. Even when a conscious effort has been made to alter the default setting, to recall that oral tradition would not necessarily move along the grooves of literary composition, of reading and revising, the literary paradigm soon reasserts its influence and closes down the historical possibilities which may be envisaged. As soon as attention shifts from the perspective itself to the data to be discussed, the default setting clicks back into place, and the interrelationships of the data are conceived in literary terms as though no other terms were relevant.

Should this be so? Need this be so?

3. What do we mean by an oral culture?

We should not underestimate the difficulty for a mindset formed within a long established literary culture trying to shift to an oral mindset, the difficulty for someone bred to the literary paradigm trying to enter empathetically into an oral paradigm. Water Ong illustrates the problem effectively by imagining how difficult it would be for those who knew only transport by automobile to visualize a *horse*, a horse conceptualised as an automobile without wheels.

Imagine writing a treatise on horses (for people who have never seen a horse) which starts with the concept not of horse but of 'automobile', built on the readers' direct experience of automobiles. It proceeds to discourse on horses by always referring to them as 'wheelless automobiles', explaining to highly automobilized readers who have never seen a horse all the points of difference in an effort to excise all idea of 'automobile' out of the concept of 'wheelless automobile' so as to invest the term with a purely equine meaning. Instead of wheels, the wheelless automobiles have enlarged toenails called hooves; instead of headlights or perhaps rear-vision mirrors, eyes; instead of a coat of lacquer, something called hair; instead of gasoline for fuel, hay; and so on. . . . No matter how accurate and thorough such apophatic description, automobile-driving readers who have never seen a horse and who hear only of 'wheelless automobiles' would be sure to come away with a strange concept of a horse. . . . You cannot without serious and disabling distortion describe a primary phenomenon by starting with a subsequent secondary phenomenon and paring away the differences.

31 I of course except H. Koester, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957); also *idem*, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM, 1980) 49–75; though Koester has not attempted to develop a model of oral transmission.

Indeed, starting backwards in this way – putting the car before the horse – you can never become aware of the real differences at all.³²

The uncomfortable fact is that if we are to accomplish such a paradigm switch we probably need to be jolted out of the one and make a conscious and sustained effort to train our thinking to the other. If we are to begin to appreciate what it must have been like to live and function in an oral society we must shake ourselves free from the unconscious presuppositions which shape the very way we see the Synoptic problem and envisage the early transmission or retelling of the Jesus tradition.³³

For a start we should recall the estimate of credible authorities that literacy in Palestine at the time of Jesus would probably have been less than 10 per cent.³⁴ Given the importance of Torah learning in Jewish culture, that estimate can be questioned. But given equally that royal officials, priests, scribes and Pharisees would have made up a significant portion of the 10 per cent, the corollaries are probably much the same. These corollaries include the fact that knowledge of Torah for most people would have been by *hearing*, aural, rather than by reading. We have to assume, therefore, that the great majority of Jesus' first disciples would have been functionally illiterate.³⁵ That Jesus himself was literate cannot simply be assumed.³⁶ And even allowing for the possibility that one or two of Jesus' immediate disciples were able to read and write (Matthew) and may even have kept notes of Jesus' teaching,³⁷ it remains *overwhelmingly probable that the*

32 W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982; Routledge, 1988) 12–13. See also M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1962); and E. A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University, 1986), where Havelock sums up a scholarly lifetime of reflection on the transition from orality to literacy.

33 W. H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983; republished Indiana University, 1996), begins with a similar protest (xv–xvi).

34 Recent estimates are of less than 10 per cent literacy in the Roman Empire under the principate, falling to perhaps as low as 3 per cent in Roman Palestine; see particularly W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989); M. Bar-Ilan, 'Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries CE', in S. Fishbane and S. Schoenfeld, *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992) 46–61; C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

35 Kloppenborg Verbin properly reminds us that "literacy" itself admits of various levels: signature-literacy; the ability to read simple contracts, invoices and receipts; full reading literacy; the ability to take dictation; and scribal literacy – the ability to compose' (*Excavating Q*, 167).

36 J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998) has little doubt that Jesus was illiterate (235); similarly B. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 99.

37 See particularly A. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (BS 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 223–9; also E. E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 24, 32, 352.

*earliest transmission of the Jesus tradition was by word of mouth.*³⁸ This also means, as Herder and the early form critics appreciated, that the forms of the tradition were already becoming *established* in *oral* usage and transmission.

Secondly, we need to recall the character of rural Galilee, where, on almost any reckoning, the initial impulse which resulted in the Jesus tradition is to be located. We can be confident that the village and small town culture within which Jesus predominantly operated and where the stories and teachings of Jesus were first retold was a predominantly oral culture. Through recent archaeological work in Galilee we have a much better idea of the physical settings in which that early formulation of the Jesus tradition took place.³⁹ Here a trite but necessary reminder is that there were no newspapers, no television or radio in the first century. But have we done enough to think through what that must have meant for communities? In the villages and small towns of Galilee, when the day's work was over and the sun had set, what else was there to do but to sit round and talk, to share the news of the day, to tell stories, to recall matters of importance for the community? Kenneth Bailey suggests that the traditional evening gathering of Middle Eastern villagers to listen to and recite the tradition of the community, the *haflat samar*, is the continuation of a practice which stretches back to the time of Jesus and beyond.⁴⁰

Can we say more about the character of oral tradition and about oral transmission? The problem is, as Sanders points out, 'that we do not know how to imagine the oral period'.⁴¹ In an overwhelmingly literary culture our experience of orality is usually restricted to casual gossip and the serendipitous reminiscences of college reunions. The burden of my paper, however, is that we *must* endeavour to 'imagine the oral period' for the sake of historical authenticity, to re-envisage how tradition was transmitted in an orally structured society; also that we *can* do so, or at least are more able to do so than has generally been realized. Here we are in the fortunate position of being able to call upon a wide range of research into oral tradition. No longer is it a matter simply of depending on the research into the Homeric and Yugoslavian sagas by Milman Parry and Albert

38 Pace W. Schmithals, 'Vom Ursprung der synoptischen Tradition', *ZTK* 94 (1997) 288–316, who continues to argue that the Synoptic tradition was literary from the first. E. E. Ellis, *Christ and the Future in New Testament History* (SuppNovT 97; Leiden: Brill, 2000) also queries whether there was an initial oral stage of transmission (13–14).

39 See D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough, eds, *Archaeology and the Galilee* (University of South Florida; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997); and particularly J. L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 2000).

40 K. E. Bailey, 'Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991) 34–54; also 'Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *ExpT* 106 (1995) 363–7.

41 Sanders and Davies, *Studying*, 141; ironically in the same volume Sanders has demonstrated that there is an equal problem, too little recognized, of 'imagining the *literary* period'.

Lord.⁴² But I think also, in particular, of research into oral tradition in Africa⁴³ and the 30 years' personal, albeit anecdotal, experience of Bailey in the Middle East.⁴⁴

On the basis of such research it is possible to draw up a list of characteristic features of oral tradition. The point, I will stress at once and will no doubt need to stress repeatedly, is not that an oral tradition once recorded or transcribed will necessarily look any different from a literary tradition. Transcribed oral tradition and literary tradition, not altogether surprisingly, look very much the same. My point is rather to bring home the danger of *envisaging* the process of tradition transmission in too exclusively literary terms and to suggest that it will be necessary for us deliberately to alter our print-determined default setting when we try to envisage the early transmission of the Jesus tradition.

There are five characteristic features of oral transmission of tradition which deserve attention.

First, and most obvious – or it should be most obvious – an *oral performance* is *not* like reading a literary text.⁴⁵ In reading a text it is possible to look back a few pages to check what had been written earlier. Having read the text you can take it with you and read it again later. A written text can be revised, or edited, and so on. But with an oral tradition none of that is possible. An oral performance is evanescent. It is an event. It happens, and then is gone. Oral tradition is not *there* for the auditor to check back a few pages, or to take away, or to edit and revise. It is not a thing, an artefact like a literary text. That fact alone should be sufficient to cause us to question whether models of literary editing, intertextual dependence, of archaeological layers, are appropriate as we attempt to re-envisage the early transmission of the Jesus tradition.

Nor should we forget that even written documents like Paul's letters would not have been *read* by more than a very few. For the great majority of recipients the letter would have been *heard* rather than read. And the public reading of the text

42 The work of A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1978) has been seminal (here esp. ch. 5).

43 I refer particularly to J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), a revision of his earlier *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); and I. Okeke, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992). Annemie Joubert notes that a paradigm shift took place in folklore studies in the late 1970s and early '80s, when a new emphasis on *performance* directed attention away from the study of the formal patterning and symbolic content of the texts to the *emergence* of verbal art in the social interaction between performers and audiences – quoting from R. Bauman and C. L. Briggs, 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990) 59–88 (here 59–60).

44 See above, n. 40.

45 See e.g. Finnegan, *Oral Literature*, 2–7.

would require careful preparation and practice if it was to be heard meaningfully. The public reading of such a letter, in other words, would itself have the character of a performance.⁴⁶ Which also means that general knowledge of and even reference back to such texts would depend much more on recollection of what had been heard when the text was read to the congregation than on an individual perusal of the text itself. In technical terms, oral tradition includes the phenomenon of *second orality*, that is, a written text known only through oral performance of the text.

Second, oral tradition is essentially *communal* in character. On the literary paradigm we envisage an author writing for a reader. We speak of the intended reader, the ideal reader, the implied reader. We envisage the characteristic context of communication as the individual reader poring over the text, as the text there on a shelf to be consulted by readers functioning as individuals in separate one-to-one encounters with the text. But oral tradition continues in existence because there are communities for whom the tradition is important. The tradition is performed with greater or less regularity (depending on its importance) in the gatherings of the community, kept alive for the community by the elders, teachers or those acknowledged as proficient performers of the tradition.⁴⁷

The recognition of this point has enabled J. M. Foley in recent years to merge oral tradition theory fruitfully with receptionalist literary theory. For it is precisely the communal character of oral tradition, the degree to which the elders or teachers retain the tradition on behalf of the community and the performers perform it for the benefit of the community, which reminds us of the community's role in such performances. The performer's awareness that some tradition is already familiar to the community is a factor in the performance. The performance is heard within the community's 'horizons of expectation'. The performance's 'gaps of indeterminacy' can be filled out from the audience's prior knowledge of the tradition or of like traditions. What Foley calls the 'metonymic reference' of a performance enables the performer to use a whole sequence of

46 The point is well made by W. Dabourne, *Purpose and Cause in Pauline Exegesis* (SNTSMS 104; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999) ch. 8. See further P. J. Achtemeier, 'Omne verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity', *JBL* 109 (1990) 3–27.

47 The point was never adequately worked through by the early form critics. The model of 'oral history' drawn into the discussion by S. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (WUNT 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), while valuable in other aspects, also fails at this point. *Oral history* envisages tradition as elicited from eye-witnesses by a historian some years or decades later, tradition which might have been latent or only casually exchanged in the meantime. But the *oral tradition* model put forward here, in contrast, envisages a tradition which sustained a community through its regular performance. Byrskog, in fact, has no real conception of or indeed role for oral transmission as itself a bridging factor between past and present.

allusions to the community's store of tradition and enables the community thus to recognize the consistency of the performance with the whole.⁴⁸

Third, as already implied, in the oral community there would be one or more who were recognized as having *primary responsibility for maintaining and performing the community's tradition* – the singer of tales, the bard, the elders, the teachers, the rabbis. An ancient oral society had no libraries or dictionaries or encyclopedias. It had instead to rely on individuals whose role in their community was to function as, in the words of Jan Vansina, 'a walking reference library'.⁴⁹ In NT terms this certainly accords with the role of the apostle in providing what can properly be called foundation tradition for the churches he founded.⁵⁰ And the prominence of teachers in the earliest communities⁵¹ is best explained by the communities' reliance on them as repositories of community tradition.⁵²

This suggests in turn that the teachers would be responsible for a body of teaching, presumably what Luke refers to as 'the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2.42). There is no reason to conceive of this teaching as entirely fragmentary, a sequence of individual forms preserved randomly. In his paper on 'The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature', Albert Lord observed that 'oral traditional composers think in terms of blocks and series of blocks of tradition'.⁵³ The Synoptic tradition itself attests such groupings of parables (e.g. Mark 4.2–33) and miracle stories (4.35–5.43; 6.32–52), of Jesus' teaching on exorcism (3.23–9) or discipleship (8.34–7), of sequences of events like a day in the life of Jesus (1.21–38), and so

48 J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1991) chs. 1 and 2 (particularly 6–13 and 42–5); he is drawing on the language of H. R. Jauss and W. Iser. The argument is developed in *idem*, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1995) chs. 1–3. Foley's observation is also taken up by R. A. Horsley and J. A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 1999) chs. 7–8. Annekie Joubert notes that 'the use of allusion is normally an appeal to the audience to link the references, and the audience will have to draw on extra-performance/extra-textual information in order to interpret and to understand the web of allusive communication' (private correspondence).

49 Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 37; similarly Havelock speaks of an oral 'encyclopaedia' of social habit and custom-law and convention (*Muse*, 57–8).

50 1 Cor. 11.2, 23; 15.1–3; Phil. 4.9; Col. 2.6–7; 1 Thess. 4.1; 2 Thess. 2.15; 3.6.

51 Acts 13.1; Rom. 12.7; 1 Cor. 12.28–9; Gal. 6.6; Eph. 4.11; Heb. 5.12; Jas 3.1; *Did.* 13.2; 15.1–2.

52 From what we know of more formal teaching in the schools, we can be sure that oral instruction was the predominant means: 'it is the "living voice" of the teacher that has priority' (L. C. A. Alexander, 'The Living Voice: Scepticism Towards the Written Word in Early Christianity and in Graeco-Roman Texts', in D. J. A. Clines *et al.*, eds, *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990] 221–47 [here 244]).

53 In Walker, ed. *Relationships*, 33–91 (here 59).

on.⁵⁴ Our knowledge of how oral tradition ‘works’ elsewhere suggests that this would have been the pattern from earliest days, as soon as the stories and sayings of Jesus began to be valued by the groups of his followers.

Fourth, oral tradition subverts the idea(l) of an ‘*original*’ version. With minds attuned to the literary paradigm, we envisage an original form, a first edition, from which all subsequent editions can at least in principle be traced by form and redaction criticism. We envisage tradition-history as an archaeological tell where we can in principle dig through the layers of literary strata to uncover the original layer, the ‘pure form’ of Bultmann’s conceptualization of *Formgeschichte*. But in oral tradition each performance is not related to its predecessors or successors in that way. In oral tradition, as Lord particularly has observed, *each* performance is, properly speaking, an ‘original’.⁵⁵

The point here can easily be misunderstood or misrepresented, so let me elaborate it a little. The point as it applies to the Jesus tradition is *not* that there was no originating impulse which gave birth to the tradition. In at least many cases we can be wholly confident that there were things which Jesus said and did which made an *impact*, and a *lasting* impact, on his disciples. But properly speaking the *tradition* of the event is not the *event* itself. And the *tradition* of the saying is not the *saying* itself. The tradition is at best the *witness* of the event, and as there were presumably several witnesses, so there may well have been several traditions, or versions of the tradition, *from the first*. Of an originating *event* we can speak; but we should certainly hesitate before speaking of an original *tradition* of the event. The same is true even of a saying of Jesus. The tradition of the saying attests the impact made by the saying on one or more of the original audience. But it may well have been heard slightly differently by others of that audience, and so told and retold in different versions *from the first*. And if, as Kelber points out, Jesus

54 A fuller listing of such groupings of tradition would include the beatitudes (Matt. 5.3, 4, 6, 11, 12/Luke 6.20b, 21b, 21a, 22, 23), the sequence of mini-parables in Mark 2.18–22/Luke 9.57–62), the cost of discipleship and danger of loss (Mark 8.34–8, again followed by Matt. 16.24–7 and Luke 9.23–6), the sayings about light and judgment in Mark 4.21–5 (followed by Luke 8.16–18), the ‘parables of crisis’ (Matt. 24.42–25.13 pars.), Jesus and the Baptist (Matt. 11.2–19 par.), Jesus’ teaching on his exorcisms (Matt. 12.24–45 pars.), and the sending out of the disciples on mission (Mark 6.7–13; Matt. 9.37–10.1, 7–16; Luke 9.1–6 and 10.1–12).

55 ‘In a sense each performance is “an” original, if not “the” original. The truth of the matter is that our concept of “the original”, of “the song”, simply makes no sense in oral tradition’ (Lord, *Singer*, 100–1). R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977) also glosses Lord – ‘There is no correct text, no idea that one version is more “authentic” than another: each performance is a unique and original creation with its own validity’ (65) – and credits Lord with bringing this point home most convincingly (79). Kelber already took up the point: ‘each oral performance is an irreducibly unique creation’; if Jesus said something more than once there is no ‘original’ (*Oral*, 29; also 59, 62).

himself used his most effective parables and aphorisms on more than one occasion, the ideal of a single original, authentic version reduces once again more to the figment of a literary-moulded mindset. Yes, we can and need to envisage teaching that originated with Jesus, actions which characterized his mission. But to treat the history of the Jesus tradition as though it was a matter of recovering some *original version of the tradition* is to conceptualize the transmission of the Jesus tradition at best misleadingly; the Jesus Seminar completely misjudged the character of the Jesus tradition at this point.⁵⁶ In oral tradition performance variation is integral to, even definitive of, the tradition.⁵⁷

Fifth and finally, oral tradition is characteristically (I do not say distinctively) a combination of *fixity* and *flexibility*, of *stability* and *diversity*. The preceding characteristics could easily be taken to encourage the idea of oral tradition as totally flexible and variable. That would be a mistake. In oral tradition there is characteristically a tale to be told, a teaching to be treasured, in and through and precisely by means of the varied performances. Oral tradition is oral memory; its primary function is to preserve and recall what is of importance from the past. Tradition, more or less by definition, embodies the concern for continuity with the past, a past drawn upon but also enlivened that it might illuminate the present and future. In the words of E. A. Havelock, 'Variability and stability, conservatism and creativity, evanescence and unpredictability all mark the pattern of oral transmission' – the 'oral principle of "variation within the same"'.⁵⁸ It is this combination, reverting to our second point, which makes it possible for the community both to acknowledge its tradition and to delight in the freshness of the individual performance.

My basic thesis, then, is that a proper recognition of the characteristics of

56 Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*; also R. W. Funk, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper/Polebridge, 1998). To recognize that variation is integral to orality likewise undercuts much of the critical criteria (particularly 'contradiction with other accounts') used by H. Reimarus, D. F. Strauss and their successors.

57 A. Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) insists 'upon "multiple existence" and "variation" as the two most salient characteristics of folklore' (18–19). The problem of deriving a text from the recollections of a performance is well illustrated by the play 'Pericles' attributed to Shakespeare (S. Wells and G. Taylor, eds, *The Oxford Shakespeare* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1988] 1037); see further J. Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997) 75–87 (I owe the latter reference to H. D. Betz). Nor should it be forgotten that NT textual criticism has to take account of the diverse ways in which the text was performed/used, read/heard in different churches; see particularly B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993); D. C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997); E. J. Epp, 'The Multivalence of the Term "Original Text" in New Testament Textual Criticism', *HTR* 92 (1999) 245–81.

58 Kelber, *Oral*, 33, 54, quoting E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1963) 92, 147, 184, *passim*.

oral tradition, just outlined, requires us to alter the default setting of our typically literary mindset – to recognize that the early transmission of the Jesus tradition took place in an *oral culture* and as *oral tradition* requires us consciously to *resist* the involuntary predisposition to conceive that process in *literary* terms and consciously to *re-envision* that process in *oral* terms.

I have no time here to develop the theoretical model further. Suffice it to say, the model takes up the best of the insights of the early form critics, while avoiding the false paths which the literary paradigm led them down. That is to say, the recognition of the *oral* and *communal* character of the early Jesus tradition should be retrieved from the confusion caused by an unjustifiably schematic conception of the development of the tradition from pure to complex form, from simple to elaborated form.⁵⁹ Likewise the ‘oral principle of “variation within the same”’ tells more heavily than has hitherto been appreciated against the assumption of Bultmann and Käsemann⁶⁰ that there was a steady inflow of fresh material from prophetic utterances into the Jesus tradition in the pre-70 period.⁶¹

The model also recognizes the strengths of Birger Gerhardsson’s response to Bultmann while, hopefully, avoiding its weaknesses.⁶² That is to say, the oral tradition model recognizes that where an influential teacher was in view there was bound to be a concern among his disciples to remember what he had taught them.⁶³ But it sees the more fundamental trait of oral tradition in terms of the combination of flexibility as well as fixity, so that the character of oral transmission is not adequately caught by the single term ‘memorization’.⁶⁴ Bailey’s

59 ‘Das . . . Kriterium der “reinen Gattung” stellt eine Vermischung linguistischer und sprach-historischer Kategorien dar, die einer heute überholten Auffassung der Sprachentwicklung zuzuweisen ist’ – J. Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997) 59; also 141–2. See also G. Strecker, ‘Schriftlichkeit oder Mündlichkeit der synoptischen tradition?’, in F. van Segbroeck *et al.*, eds, *The Four Gospels 1992, Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (Leuven: Leuven University, 1992) 159–72 (here 161–2, with other bibliography in n. 6).

60 Bultmann, *History*, 127–8; ‘In the primitive community at Jerusalem the spirit of Jesus continued to be active, and his ethical teaching was progressively elaborated and expressed in utterances which were then transmitted as the sayings of Jesus himself’ (‘The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem’ [1926], *ET Existence and Faith* [London: Collins Fontana, 1964] 42); E. Käsemann, ‘Is the Gospel Objective?’, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964) 48–62.

61 See further J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) #8.2.

62 B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).

63 Finnegan critiques Lord in pointing out that memorization also plays a part in oral tradition (*Oral Poetry*, 79, 86).

64 E.g., ‘The general attitude was that words and items of knowledge must be memorized: *tantum scimus, quantum memoria tenemus*’ (Gerhardsson, *Memory*, 124); ‘Cicero’s saying was applied to its fullest extent in Rabbinic Judaism: *repetitio est mater studiorum*.

intermediate model of *informal controlled* tradition seems closer to the more broadly recognizable oral tradition model than either Bultmann's informal *uncontrolled* model or Gerhardsson's *formal* controlled model.⁶⁵

So then, in the light of these characteristics of oral tradition, how do we go about re-envisioning the early transmission of the Jesus tradition?

4. Re-envisioning the early transmission

The test of any theoretical model for the transmission of the Jesus tradition, of course, is how well it explains the data which we have, that is, how well it explains the character of the Jesus tradition as we know it. I believe the oral tradition model passes that test with flying colours. But before illustrating the claim I need to make three preliminary points.

First, there is no possibility of producing a knock-down argument. I cannot produce a sample from the Jesus tradition which is demonstrably oral rather than literary in character.⁶⁶ This, of course, is partly because the tradition as we now have it is in literary form. So, naturally it is literary in character. But it is also true anyway, that there are no distinctive characteristics of any particular sample of tradition which enable us to pronounce definitively 'Oral and not literary'.⁶⁷

Knowledge is gained by repetition, passed on by repetition, kept alive by repetition. A Rabbi's life is one continual repetition' (ibid., 168). Sanders and Davies rightly observe that Gerhardsson tries to allow for the flexibility of verbal tradition (citing Gerhardsson's *The Gospel Tradition* [Con BNT 15; Lund: Gleerup, 1986] 39–40), but that even so the Synoptic data do not fit well with the model (*Studying*, 129–32). R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) also emphasizes the role of learning by heart (*Auswendiglernen*) in Jesus' teaching (365–7, 440–53). D. L. Balch, 'The Canon: Adaptable and Stable, Oral and Written. Critical Questions for Kelber and Riesner', *Forum* 7.3/4 (1991) 183–205, criticizes Riesner for assuming 'a print mentality' which was not true of 'passing on tradition of great philosophers' teachings' (196–9).

65 I might simply add that the appeal sometimes made by Horsley in particular (*Whoever Hears You*, 98–103; also *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001] 157–9) to James C. Scott's use of the distinction between the 'great tradition' and the 'little tradition' in a community – the great tradition as expressing the dominant and dominating ruling power, the little tradition as expressing the hidden but continuing values and concerns of the oppressed community – is of little relevance for us. It is used by Scott in reference to a colonialist situation in South-East Asia, which has little bearing on a Jewish Galilee ruled by a client Jewish king. And in the Jesus tradition we have not so much the persistence of old tradition, but the emergence of new tradition (even if much of it can be regarded as a reconfiguration of the older tradition).

66 I recall that my doctor-father, C. F. D. Moule, in the mid-1960s challenged his Cambridge Seminar to produce such a knock-down example in regard to any solution of the Synoptic problem; no example went unquestioned.

67 The conclusion of the Symposium on *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (ed. H. Wansbrough; JSNTS 64; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) can cut both ways: 'We have

On the other hand, the observation cuts both ways. That is to say, we should not assume that simply because the tradition as we now have it is in literary form, therefore its current form is the outcome of a process conceived in purely literary terms. My challenge once again is to shake ourselves out of that literary mindset and to attempt to revisualize that part of the process which must have been largely if not entirely oral in character. What I ask for is that we seriously attempt to reconceptualize the parameters and constraints within which we envisage the transmission of the Jesus tradition taking place. It is not *what* we look at, so much as the *way* we look at it, which we need to reflect on.

Second, as just implied, we simply cannot escape from a *presumption of orality* for the first stage of the transmission of the Jesus tradition. In a society which was so illiterate and where the great bulk of communication must have taken place in oral mode, it would be ludicrous either to assume that the whole history of the Jesus tradition was literary in character from start to finish or to make any thesis regarding the process of its transmission dependent in effect on such an assumption. I say this in response to various recent claims either that the Jesus tradition took literary form from the first,⁶⁸ or that all differences between parallel traditions, no matter how great, can be explained in terms of literary redaction.⁶⁹ As already indicated earlier, I do not for a moment deny that differences within the Synoptic tradition *can* be explained in terms of the literary paradigm. My question is whether they *should* be so explained, and whether in so doing we do not lose sight of important features of the Jesus tradition, the way it was regarded

been unable to deduce or derive any marks which distinguish clearly between an oral and a written transmission process. Each can show a similar degree of fixity and variability' (12). Strecker rightly emphasizes the continuity in transmission of the tradition from oral to written ('Schriftlichkeit', 164–5). Cf. Schröter, *Erinnerung*, 55, 60.

68 See above, n. 38.

69 B. W. Henaut, *Oral Tradition and the Gospels: The Problem of Mark 4* (JSNTS 82; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) is tendentiously concerned to argue the virtual impossibility of recovering any oral tradition behind the Gospels: all differences, no matter how great, can be explained in terms of literary redaction; and oral tradition was wholly fluid and contingent on the particularities of each performance. But his conception of the oral tradition process is questionable – as though it was a matter of recovering a history of tradition through a set of sequential performances (e.g. 118). And he gives too little thought to what the stabilities of oral remembrances of Jesus might be as distinct from those in the epics and sagas studied by Parry and Lord. H. W. Hollander, 'The Words of Jesus: From Oral Tradition to Written Record in Paul and Q', *NovT* 42 (2000) 340–57, follows Henaut uncritically (351–5): he has no conception of tradition as reflecting/embodying the impact of anything Jesus said or did; and he thinks of oral tradition as essentially casual, without any conception that tradition could have a role in forming community identity and thus be important to such communities. Similarly Crossan seems to think of oral tradition principally in terms of individuals' casual recollection (*Birth of Christianity*, 49–93).

and handled, and what that tells us about the earliest communities which preserved it.

Third, despite the cautionary note I am sounding, I remain convinced of the essential correctness of the two-document hypothesis. That is to say, the evidence continues to persuade me that Mark was the earliest of the Synoptic Gospels, and that there was a further document behind Matthew and Luke on which both drew (Q). The primary evidence is as it has always been: the closeness of verbal parallels between two or three of the three documents. When I look at such passages as Mark 8.34–7 pars., on the cost of discipleship, and 13.28–32 pars., the parable of the fig tree,⁷⁰ the evidence forces me to the conclusion that these three versions of particular Jesus traditions are interdependent at the literary level. The evidence almost requires us to speak of sources, of sources already in Greek, of one serving as the source for the other, or of each drawing on a common literary source (the underlining and highlighting indicate the extent of the agreement).

Matt. 16.24–6	Mark 8.34–7	Luke 9.23–5
<p>24 Τότε ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἄράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. 25 ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ εὐρήσει αὐτήν. 26 τί γὰρ ὠφεληθήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐὰν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδῇσιν τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ζημιωθῇ; ἢ τί δώσει ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;</p>	<p>34 Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἄράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. 35 ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν. 36 τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἄνθρωπον κερδῆσαι τὸν κόσμον ὅλον καὶ ζημιωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ; 37 τί γὰρ δοῖ ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;</p>	<p>23 Ἐλεγεν δὲ πρὸς πάντας· εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι, ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἄράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. 24 ὃς γὰρ ἂν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ οὗτος σώσει αὐτήν. 25 τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖται ἄνθρωπος κερδῆσας τὸν κόσμον ὅλον ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἀπολέσας ἢ ζημιωθείς;</p>

Similarly with Q material like the preaching of John the Baptist in Matt. 3.7–10/Luke 3.7–9, and the parable of the returning evil spirits in Matt. 12.43–5/Luke 11.24–6.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Full statistics in R. Morgenthaler, *Statistische Synopse* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Gotthelf, 1971) 239–43.

⁷¹ Full statistics in *ibid.*, 258–61.

Matt. 24.32-6	Mark 13.28-32	Luke 21.29-33
32 Ἀπὸ δε τῆς συκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολήν· ὅταν ἤδη ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς γένηται ἀπαλός καὶ τὰ φύλλα ἐκφύῃ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος· 33 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ἴδητε πάντα ταῦτα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ θύραις. 34 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἂν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται. 35 ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσεται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσιν. 36 Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος.	28 Ἀπὸ δε τῆς συκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολήν· ὅταν ἤδη ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς ἀπαλός γένηται καὶ ἐκφύῃ τὰ φύλλα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν· 29 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ θύραις. 30 Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη μέχρις οὗ ταῦτα πάντα γένηται. 31 ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται. 32 Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἢ τῆς ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ.	29 Καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς· ἴδετε τὴν συκὴν καὶ πάντα τὰ δένδρα· 30 ὅταν προβάλωσιν ἤδη, βλέποντες ἀφ' ἐαυτῶν γινώσκετε ὅτι ἤδη ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν· 31 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. 32 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται. 33 ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται.

Matt. 3.7-10	Luke 3.7-9
7 ἰδὼν δὲ πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; 8 ποιήσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας 9 καὶ μὴ δόξητε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγείραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. 10 ἤδη δὲ ἡ ἀζίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.	7 Ἐλεγεν οὖν τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ· γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; 8 ποιήσατε οὖν καρποὺς ἄξιους τῆς μετανοίας καὶ μὴ ἄρξησθε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγείραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. 9 ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀζίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.

Matt. 12.43-45	Luke 11.24-26
43 Ὅταν δὲ τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διέρχεται δι' ἀνύδρων τόπων ζητοῦν ἀνάπασιν καὶ οὐχ εὐρίσκει. 44 τότε λέγει· εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ἐπιστρέψω ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον· καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐρίσκει σχολάζοντα σεσαρωμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον. 45 τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐπτά ἕτερα πνεύματα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χείρονα τῶν πρώτων. οὕτως ἔσται καὶ τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ πονηρᾷ.	24 Ὅταν τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διέρχεται δι' ἀνύδρων τόπων ζητοῦν ἀνάπασιν καὶ μὴ εὐρίσκει· λέγει· ὑποστρέψω εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον· 25 καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐρίσκει σεσαρωμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον. 26 τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει ἕτερα πνεύματα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ ἐπτά καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ· καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χείρονα τῶν πρώτων.

So, I have no problems in recognizing the probability of literary interdependence between the Synoptic Gospels. My question, once again, is whether the hypothesis of literary interdependence is sufficient to explain *all* the data of correlation between the Gospel traditions. My question is whether we should take such close parallels as the *norm* for explaining *all* parallels, whether we should simply extrapolate from such examples and conclude that all parallels are to be explained in the same way.

Consider the following cases. As you look at these passages I ask you to consider whether literary dependence is the only or most obvious explanation for the degree of similarity between the different versions.

(a) In *the triple tradition* consider first the account of the epileptic boy in Mark 9.14–27 pars. Note the cluster of agreement at vv. 18–19, 25, evidently the core of the story, and the wise variation for the rest (again, the underlining and highlighting indicate the extent of the agreement).

Matt. 17.14–18	Mark 9.14–27	Luke 9.37–42
<p>14 <u>Καὶ ἐλθόντων</u> πρὸς τὸν <u>ὄχλον</u></p> <p>προσῆλθεν αὐτῷ</p> <p>ἄνθρωπος γονυπετῶν αὐτόν 15 καὶ λέγων· κύριε, ἐλέησόν μου τὸν υἱόν.</p> <p>ὅτι σεληνιάζεται καὶ κακῶς πάσχει·</p> <p>πολλάκις γὰρ πίπτει εἰς τὸ πῦρ καὶ πολλάκις εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ. 16 καὶ προσήνεγκα αὐτόν <u>τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου</u>, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν αὐτόν θεραπεύσαι. 17 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος καὶ διεστραμμένη, ἕως πότε μεθ' ὑμῶν ἔσομαι; ἕως πότε ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; φέρετέ μοι αὐτόν ὧδε.</p>	<p>14 <u>Καὶ ἐλθόντες</u> πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς εἶδον <u>ὄχλον</u> πολλὸν περὶ αὐτούς καὶ γραμματεῖς συζητοῦντας πρὸς αὐτούς. 15 καὶ εὐθὺς πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἰδόντες αὐτόν ἐξεθαμβήθησαν καὶ προστρέχοντες ἡσπάζοντο αὐτόν. 16 καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτούς· τί αὐζητεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς; 17 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ ἐκ <u>τοῦ ὄχλου</u>· <u>διδάσκαλε</u>, ἦνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σέ, ἔχοντα <u>πνεῦμα ἄλαλον</u>. 18 καὶ ὅπου ἂν αὐτὸν καταλάβῃ ῥήσσει <u>αὐτόν</u>, καὶ ἀφρίζει καὶ τρίζει τοὺς ὀδόντας καὶ ζηραίνεται·</p> <p>καὶ εἶπα τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου ἵνα αὐτὸ ἐκβάλωσιν, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν. 19 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει· ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι; ἕως πότε ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; φέρετε αὐτόν πρὸς με 20</p>	<p>37 Ἐγένετο δὲ τῇ ἐξῇς ἡμέρᾳ κατελθόντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους συνήνητησεν αὐτῷ <u>ὄχλος</u> πολὺς.</p> <p>38 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ ἀπὸ <u>τοῦ ὄχλου</u> ἐβόησεν λέγων· <u>διδάσκαλε</u>, δέομαί σου ἐπιβλέψαι ἐπὶ τὸν υἱόν μου, ὅτι μονογενὴς μοί ἐστιν, 39 καὶ ἰδοὺ <u>πνεῦμα</u> λαμβάνει αὐτόν καὶ ἐξαίφνης κράζει καὶ σπαράσσει <u>αὐτόν</u> μετὰ ἄφροῦ καὶ μόγις ἀποχωρεῖ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ συντρίβον αὐτόν·</p> <p>40 καὶ ἐδεήθη τῶν μαθητῶν σου ἵνα ἐκβάλωσιν αὐτό, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν. 41 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος καὶ διεστραμμένη, ἕως πότε ἔσομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; προσάγαγε <u>ὧδε</u> τὸν υἱόν</p>

Matt. 17.14–18	Mark 9.14–27	Luke 9.37–42
<p>18 καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς</p> <p>καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ τὸ δαιμόνιον</p> <p>καὶ ἐθεραπεύθη ὁ παῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης.</p>	<p>καὶ ἤνεγκαν αὐτὸν πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν τὸ πνεῦμα εὐθὺς <u>συνεσπάραξεν</u> αὐτόν, καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκυλίετο ἀφρίζων. 21 καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ· πόσος χρόνος ἐστὶν ὥς τοῦτο γέγονεν αὐτῷ; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἐκ παιδιόθεν· 22 καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτὸν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν· ἀλλ’ εἴ τι δύνῃ, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς. 23 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τὸ εἰ δύνῃ, πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι. 24 εὐθὺς κράζας ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παιδίου ἔλεγεν· πιστεύω· βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ. 25 ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐπισυντρέχει ὄχλος, ἐπετίμησεν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ λέγων αὐτῷ· τὸ ἄλλοι καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα, ἐγὼ ἐπιτάσσω σοι, ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ μηκέτι εἰσέλθῃς εἰς αὐτόν. 26 καὶ κράζας καὶ πολλὰ σπαράζας ἐξῆλθεν· καὶ ἐγένετο ὥσει νεκρὸς, ὥστε τοὺς πολλοὺς λέγειν ὅτι ἀπέθανεν. 27 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἤγειρεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέστη.</p>	<p>σου. 42 ἔτι δὲ προσερχομένου αὐτοῦ ἔρρηξεν αὐτόν τὸ δαιμόνιον καὶ <u>συνεσπάραξεν</u></p> <p>ἐπετίμησεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ</p> <p>καὶ ἰάσατο τὸν παῖδα καὶ ἀπέδωκεν αὐτόν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ.</p>

Or again, note the variations in the accounts of finding the empty tomb – Mark 16.1–8 pars.

Matt. 28.1–8	Mark 16.1–8	Luke 24.1–11
<p>1 Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς <u>μίαν σαββάτων</u> ἦλθεν <u>Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία</u> ἡ ἀλλῇ <u>Μαρία</u> θεωρῆσαι τὸν τάφον.</p>	<p>1 Καὶ διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου <u>Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία</u> ἡ [τοῦ] Ἰακώβου καὶ Σαλώμῃ ἡγόρασαν <u>ἀρώματα</u> ἵνα ἐλθοῦσαι ἀλείψωσιν αὐτόν. 2 καὶ λίαν πρωΐ τῇ <u>μῇ τῶν σαββάτων</u> ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου. 3 καὶ ἔλεγον πρὸς</p>	<p>1 Τῇ δὲ <u>μῇ τῶν σαββάτων</u> ὀρθρου βαθέως ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἦλθον φέρουσαι ἅ ἡοίμασαν <u>ἀρώματα</u>.</p>

Matt. 28.1–8	Mark 16.1–8	Lukr 24.1–11
<p>2 καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας· ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου καταβὰ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ. 3 ἦν δὲ ἡ εἰδέα αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀστραπὴ καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιὼν. 4 ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί. 5 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν ταῖς γυναιξίν· μὴ φοβεῖσθε ὑμεῖς, οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον ζητεῖτε· 6 οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἠγέρθη γὰρ καθὼς εἶπεν· δεῦτε ἴδετε τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἔκειτο.</p> <p>7 καὶ ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἰδοὺ προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὤψεσθε· ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν. 8 Καὶ ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου μετὰ φόβου καὶ χαρᾶς μεγάλης ἔδραμον ἀπαγγεῖλαι τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ.</p>	<p>ἐαυτάς· τίς ἀποκυλίσει ἡμῖν τὸν λίθον ἐκ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου; 4 καὶ ἀναβλέψασαι θεωροῦσιν ὅτι ἀποκεκύλισται ὁ λίθος· ἦν γὰρ μέγας σφόδρα.</p> <p>5 Καὶ εἰσελθοῦσαι εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον εἶδον νεανίσκον καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιοῖς περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκὴν, καὶ ἐξεθαμβήθησαν.</p> <p>6 ὁ δὲ λέγει αὐταῖς· μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε· Ἰησοῦν ζητεῖτε τὸν Ναζαρηνὸν ἐσταυρωμένον· ἦέρθη, οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε· ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.</p> <p>7 ἀλλὰ ὑπάγετε εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ ὅτι προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν· ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὤψεσθε, καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν. 8 καὶ ἐξελθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτάς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ.</p>	<p>2 εὗρον δὲ τὸν λίθον ἀποκεκυλισμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, 3 εἰσελθοῦσαι δὲ οὐχ εὗρον τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. 4 καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἀπορεῖσθαι αὐτάς περὶ τούτου καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο ἐπέστησαν αὐταῖς ἐν ἐσθῇτι ἀστραπτούσῃ. 5 ἐμφόβων δὲ γενομένων αὐτῶν καὶ κλινουσῶν τὰ πρόσωπα εἰς τὴν γῆν εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτάς· τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν· 6 οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη, μνήσθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν ἔτι ὢν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ 7 λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι. 8 καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ.</p> <p>9 Καὶ ὑποστρέψασαι ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου ἀπήγγειλαν ταῦτα πάντα τοῖς ἑνδεκα καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς λοιποῖς. 10 ἦσαν δὲ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία καὶ Ἰωάννα καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ σὺν αὐταῖς. ἔλεγον πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ταῦτα, 11 καὶ ἐφάνησαν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὥσει λῆρος τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα, καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς.</p>

My question is whether such evidence is not better explained in terms of *oral* tradition – that is, as *retellings* of a familiar story, with variations dependent on the teller’s foibles and the community’s perceived interests. That may mean that

Matthew or Luke already knew versions of the stories which differed from Mark's, and that they followed these different versions. Or, bearing in mind the characteristics of oral performance, perhaps we should envisage Matthew and Luke *retelling* the story known to them from Mark, that is, retelling it *in oral mode* – that is, as story tellers, rather than editors – Matthew and Luke as evidence not so much of redaction as of second orality.

(b) *Q tradition?* The Q hypothesis, which I accept, is built in the first instance on the closeness of parallel between non-Markan Matthew/Luke pericopes. More than 13 per cent of these common pericopes are more than 80 per cent in verbal agreement. But the fact that the verbal agreement in over a third of the common material is less than 40 per cent⁷² has not been given sufficient weight. Is it to be explained solely in terms of free redaction? Consider the following examples: turning the other cheek, in Matt. 5.39b–42/Luke 6.29–30; dividing families, in Matt. 10.34–8/Luke 12.51–3 and 14.26–7; and forgiving sins seven times, in Matt. 18.15, 21–2/Luke 17.3–4 (the underlining and highlighting once again indicate the extent of the verbal agreement).

Matt. 5.39b–42	Luke 6.29–30
39 ... ἀλλ' ὅστις σε ραπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιάν <u>σιαγόνᾳ</u> [σου], στρέψον αὐτῷ <u>καὶ τὴν ἄλλην</u> . 40 καὶ τῷ θέλοντί σοι κριθῆναι <u>καὶ τὸν χιτῶνά</u> σου λαβεῖν, ἅφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ <u>ἱμάτιον</u> . 41 καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἔν, ὕπαγε μετ' αὐτοῦ δύο. 42 τῷ <u>αἰτοῦντί σε</u> <u>δός</u> , καὶ τὸν θέλοντα ἀπὸ σοῦ δενίσασθαι μὴ ἀποστραφῆς.	29 τῷ τύποντί σε ἐπὶ τὴν <u>σιαγόνᾳ</u> <u>πάρεχε</u> <u>καὶ τὴν ἄλλην</u> , καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντός σου <u>τὸ ἱμάτιον</u> <u>καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα</u> μὴ κωλύσης. 30 παντὶ <u>αἰτοῦντί σε</u> <u>δίδου</u> , καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντος τὰ σὰ μὴ ἀπαίτει.

Matt. 10.34–8	Luke 12.51–3; 14.26–7
34 Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν <u>εἰρήνην</u> ἐπὶ τὴν <u>γῆν</u> ; οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἀλλὰ <u>μάχαιραν</u> . 35 ἦλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τοῦ <u>πατρὸς</u> <u>αυκτοῦ</u> καὶ <u>θυγατέρα</u> κατὰ <u>τῆς μητρὸς</u> αὐτῆς <u>καὶ νύμφην</u> κατὰ <u>τῆς πενθερᾶς</u> αὐτῆς, 36 καὶ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οἱ οἰκιακοὶ αὐτοῦ.	12.51 δοκεῖτε ὅτι <u>εἰρήνην</u> παρεγενόμην δοῦναι ἐν <u>τῇ γῇ</u> ; οὐχί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀλλ' ἡ διαμερισμόν. 52 ἔσονται γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν πέντε ἐν ἐνὶ οἴκῳ διαμεμερισμένοι, τρεῖς ἐπὶ δυσὶν καὶ δύο ἐπὶ τρισίν, 53 διαμερισθήσονται <u>πατὴρ</u> ἐπὶ υἱῷ καὶ υἱὸς ἐπὶ πατρί, μήτηρ ἐπὶ τὴν θυγατέρα καὶ <u>θυγάτηρ</u> ἐπὶ <u>τὴν μητέρα</u> , πενθερὰ ἐπὶ τὴν νύμφην αὐτῆς <u>καὶ νύμφη</u> ἐπὶ <u>τὴν πενθεράν</u> .

72 See Kloppenborg Verbin's summary of Morgenthau's data (*Excavating Q*, 63). Kloppenborg Verbin defends a literary dependence in such cases by pointing out that Matthew and Luke show equal freedom in their use of Mark (64). But he does not consider the obvious alternative noted above, that such divergences of Matthew and Luke from Mark may indicate rather that Matthew and Luke knew and preferred to use other oral versions of the tradition, or to retell Mark's version in oral mode.

Matt. 10.34–8	Luke 12.51–3; 14.26–7
<p>37 Ὁ φιλὼν <u>πατέρα</u> ἢ <u>μητέρα</u> ὑπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος, καὶ ὁ φιλὼν υἱὸν ἢ θυγατέρα ὑπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος·</p> <p>38 καὶ <u>ὃς</u> οὐ λαμβάνει <u>τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ</u> καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ <u>ὀπίσω μου</u>, οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος.</p>	<p>14.26 εἰ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν <u>πατέρα</u> αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν <u>μητέρα</u> καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφάς ἐτι τε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής. 27 <u>ὅστις</u> οὐ βαστάζει <u>τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ</u> καὶ ἔρχεται <u>ὀπίσω μου</u>, οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής.</p>

Matt. 18.15, 21–2	Luke 17.3–4
<p>15 <u>Εἰάν</u> δὲ <u>ἀμαρτήσῃ</u> ὁ <u>ἀδελφός σου</u>, ὕπαγε ἔλεγγξον αὐτὸν μεταξὺ σοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνοι. <u>ἔάν</u> σου ἀκούσῃ, ἐκέρδησας τὸν ἀδελφόν σου·</p> <p>21 Τότε προσελθὼν ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν αὐτῷ· κύριε, ποσάκις ἀμαρτήσῃ εἰς ἐμὲ ὁ ἀδελφός μου καὶ <u>ἀφήσω</u> αὐτῷ; ἕως <u>ἐπτάκις</u>; 22 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐ λέγω σοι ἕως <u>ἐπτάκις</u> ἀλλὰ ἕως ἐβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά.</p>	<p>3 προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς. <u>Ἐάν</u> <u>ἀμάρτη</u> ὁ <u>ἀδελφός σου</u> ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ <u>ἔάν</u> μετανοήσῃ ἄφες αὐτῷ.</p> <p>4 καὶ ἐάν <u>ἐπτάκις</u> τῆς ἡμέρας ἀμαρτήσῃ εἰς σέ καὶ <u>ἐπτάκις</u> ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς σέ λέγων· μετανόη, <u>ἀφήσεις</u> αὐτῷ.</p>

My question is again simple: is there anything in these passages which compels the conclusion that one has drawn the sayings from the other or that both have drawn from a common literary source?⁷³ Is the assumption that only literary dependence need or should be invoked not a consequence of our literary default setting, a consequence of our reading such passages through the spectacles or with the blinkers of a mindset formed by our print-dominated heritage? Ought we not to make the effort to *hear* these traditions as they were shaped and passed down in an oral culture? Ought we not to give more consideration to the likelihood, not to say the probability, that such *variation* in what is obviously the *same* essential tradition is the result of the flexibility of *oral* performance?⁷⁴

(c) *Liturgical tradition.* The two most obvious examples of liturgical tradition are the Lord's prayer and the words of the Last Supper. By liturgical tradition I mean, of course, traditions which were regularly used in worship in the early churches. That these two traditions were so used is not merely a deduction from the Gospel texts but is confirmed by *Did.* 8.2 and 1 Cor. 11.23–6. How then should we explain the variations in the traditions of the Lord's Prayer?

73 My distinguished predecessor C. K. Barrett was asking the same question 60 years ago in his 'Q: A Re-examination', *ExpT* 54 (1942–3) 320–3.

74 As Streeter recognized (*Four Gospels*, 184–6, 229).

Matt. 6.7–15	Luke 11.1–4
<p>7 Προσευχόμενοι δὲ μὴ βατταλογήσητε ὥσπερ οἱ ἐθνικοί, δοκοῦσιν γὰρ ὅτι ἐν τῇ πολυλογίᾳ αὐτῶν εἰσακουσθήσονται. 8 μὴ οὖν ὁμοιωθῆτε αὐτοῖς· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὃν χρεῖαν ἔχετε πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτῆσαι αὐτόν.</p> <p>9 οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς· <u>Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·</u> 10 <u>ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·</u> γεννηθῇ τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς· 11 <u>τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν</u> σήμερον· 12 <u>καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν·</u> 13 <u>καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.</u> 14 Ἐάν γὰρ ἀφήτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, ἀφήσει καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος· 15 ἐάν δὲ μὴ ἀφήτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οὐδὲ ὁ πατὴρ ὁμῶν ἀφήσει τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν.</p>	<p>1 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐν τόπῳ τινὶ προσευχόμενον, ὡς ἐπαύσατο, εἰπέν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν· κύριε, διδάξον ἡμᾶς προσεύχεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ. 2 εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς· ὅταν προσεύχησθε λέγετε· <u>Πάτερ, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου· ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·</u></p> <p>3 <u>τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν</u> τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν· 4 <u>καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν· καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.</u></p>

So too, how should we explain the variations in the traditions of the Last Supper, as between the Matthew/Mark version on the one hand and the Luke/Paul version on the other?

Matt. 26.26–9	Mark 14.22–5
<p>26 Ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἄρτον καὶ εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ δὸς τοῖς μαθηταῖς εἶπεν· <u>λάβετε φάγετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.</u> 27 καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· <u>πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες,</u> 28 <u>τοῦτό γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τῆς πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν.</u> 29 <u>λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ πίω ἀπ' ἄρτι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω μεθ' ὑμῶν καινὸν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου.</u></p>	<p>22 Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν· <u>λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.</u> 23 καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες. 24 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· <u>τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τῆς ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.</u> 25 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ τίω ἐκ τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω <u>καίνον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ.</u></p>

Luke 22.17–20	1 Cor. 11.23–6
<p>17 καὶ δεξάμενος ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας εἶπεν· <u>λάβετε τοῦτο καὶ διαμερίσατε εἰς ἑαυτούς·</u> 18 <u>λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν, [ὅτι] οὐ μὴ πίω ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ γενήματος τῆς</u></p>	<p>23 Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ</p>

Luke 22.17–20	1 Cor. 11.23–6
<p>ἀμπέλου ἕως οὗ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἔλθῃ. 19 καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. 20 καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων· ποῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.</p>	<p>κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον 24 καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. 25 ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. 26 ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ.</p>

What failure in historical imagination is it that could even suggest to us that Matthew, say, only knew the Lord's prayer because he read it in Q?⁷⁵ Or that Luke only knew the words of the Last Supper because he found them in Mark? The alternative explanation positively cries out for consideration: that these were living traditions, living because used in regular church assemblies; that even though liturgical tradition tends to be more stable than other oral tradition, nevertheless, as is common with oral tradition, it adapted in wording to the usage of different churches – as the Lord's Prayer still adapts in different traditions today. Such liturgical traditions are special examples of oral tradition and oral transmission, but they reflect the character of oral communities far more closely than do explanations dependent solely on the literary paradigm.

(d) There are several *stylistic features* characteristic of oral tradition – for

75 Contrast D. E. Oakman, 'The Lord's Prayer in Social Perspective', in B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, eds, *Authenticating of the Words of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 137–86: 'the differences in form are best accounted for by differing scribal traditions and interests' (151–2), with the sounder judgement of H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia: Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 370–1: 'It is characteristic of liturgical material in general that textual fixation occurs at a later stage in the transmission of these texts, while in the oral stage variability within limits is the rule. These characteristics also apply to the Lord's Prayer. The three recensions, therefore, represent variations of the prayer in the oral tradition. . . . (T)here was never only *one original written* Lord's Prayer. . . . (T)he oral tradition continued to exert an influence on the written text of the New Testament well into later times' (370). M. Goulder, 'The Composition of the Lord's Prayer', *JTS* 14 (1963) 32–45, argues that the prayer was written up by Matthew from hints found in Mark, and that Luke was dependent on Matthew's version.

example, parataxis,⁷⁶ rhythmic speech,⁷⁷ repetition,⁷⁸ multiple existence and variation.⁷⁹ This is not to say, I repeat, that such features are *distinctive* of oral tradition: the written document Mark provides one of the best examples of parataxis. However, the question arises once again whether the tradition retold by Mark is retold *in oral mode*, rather than as a distinctively literary exercise⁸⁰ – a question once again of how we envisage the character of the tradition used by Mark, as also how we envisage Mark’s use of it.

One of the best attested characteristics of oral tradition is the *pattern of threes* – stories built on three episodes or illustrations. Such patterning positively invites the oral performer to vary the examples or episodes at his own whim, often quite spontaneously within the performance itself. There are some good examples of this feature within the Jesus tradition. I cite two, focusing only on the section where the pattern of threes is followed. First, Matt. 22.5–6/Luke 14.18–20, the excuses made by those invited to the great supper or royal wedding banquet; note again how little verbal agreement there is between them.⁸¹

Matt. 22.1–10	Luke 14.16–24
<p>1 Καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν εἶπεν ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λέγων· 2 ὁμοιώθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ βασιλεῖ, ὅστις ἐποίησεν γάμους τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ. 3 καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ καλέσαι τοὺς κεκλημένους εἰς τοὺς γάμους, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελον ἐλθεῖν. 4 πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δούλους λέγων· εἰπατε τοῖς κεκλημένοις· ἰδοὺ τὸ ἄριστόν μου ἡτοίμακα, οἱ ταῦροί μου καὶ τὰ σιτιστὰ τεθυμένα καὶ πάντα ἔτοιμα· δεῦτε εἰς τοὺς γάμους. 5 οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες ἀπῆλθον,</p>	<p>16 Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ἄνθρωπος τις ἐποίει δεῖπνον μέγα, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν πολλοὺς 17 καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν δούλον αὐτοῦ τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ δείπνου εἰπεῖν τοῖς κεκλημένοις·</p> <p>ἔρχεσθε, ὅτι ἤδη ἔτοιμά ἐστιν.</p> <p>18 καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀπὸ μιᾶς πάντες παραιτεῖσθαι.</p>

76 ‘One law of narrative in oral poetry, noted by specialists, takes the form of parataxis: the language is additive, as image is connected to image by “and” rather than subordinated in some thoughtful relationship’ (Havelock, *Muse*, 76).

77 Ibid., 70–1. Here the examples from the Jesus tradition produced by J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology. Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971) are very much to the point (20–7).

78 Achtemeier, ‘*Omne verbum sonat*’, 23–4.

79 See above, n. 57.

80 See particularly J. Dewey, ‘Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark’, *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 32–44; also ‘The Gospel of Mark as an Oral–Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation’, in E. S. Malbon and E. V. McKnight, eds, *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (JNSTS 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994) 145–63; Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, ch. 3.

81 Note that in *Gospel of Thomas* 64, the performance variation runs to four different excuses.

Matt. 22.1–10	Luke 14.16–24
<p>ὅς μὲν εἰς τὸν ἴδιον <u>ἄγρὸν</u>,</p> <p>ὅς δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμπορίαν αὐτοῦ·</p> <p>6 οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ κρατήσαντες τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ ὑβρίσαν καὶ ἀπέκτειναν.</p> <p>7 ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ὥργισθη καὶ πέμψας τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτοῦ ἀπώλεσεν τοὺς φονεῖς ἐκείνους καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἐνέπρησεν. 8 τότε λέγει τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ· ὁ μὲν γάμος ἔτοιμός ἐστιν, οἱ δὲ κεκλημένοι οὐκ ἦσαν ἄξιοι· 9 πορεύεσθε οὖν ἐπὶ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν καὶ ὅσους ἐὰν εὕρητε καλέσατε εἰς τοὺς γάμους.</p> <p>10 καὶ ἐξελθόντες οἱ δούλοι ἐκείνοι εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς συνήγαγον πάντας οὓς εὗρον, πονηροὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς· καὶ ἐπλήσθη ὁ γάμος ἀνακειμένων.</p>	<p>ὁ πρῶτος εἶπεν αὐτῷ· <u>ἄγρὸν</u> ἡγόρασα καὶ ἔχω ἀνάγκην ἐξελθῶν ἰδεῖν αὐτόν· ἐρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον.</p> <p>19 καὶ ἕτερος εἶπεν· ζεύγη βοῶν ἡγόρασα πέντε καὶ πορεύομαι δοκιμάσαι αὐτά· ἐρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον.</p> <p>20 καὶ ἕτερος εἶπεν, γυναῖκα ἔγημα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐ δύναμαι ἐλθεῖν.</p> <p>21 καὶ παραγενόμενος ὁ δούλος ἀπήγγειλεν τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτοῦ ταῦτα. τότε ὀργισθεὶς ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης</p> <p>εἶπεν τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ ἐξελθε ταχέως εἰς τὰς πλατείας καὶ ῥύμας τῆς πόλεως καὶ τοὺς πτωχοὺς καὶ ἀναπειρούς καὶ τυφλοὺς καὶ χωλοὺς εἰσάγαγε ὧδε. 22 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ δούλος· κύριε, γέγονεν ὃ ἐπέταξας, καὶ ἔτι τόπος ἐστίν. 23 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος πρὸς τὸν δούλον· ἐξελθε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ φραγμοὺς καὶ ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν, ἵνα γεμισθῇ μου ὁ οἶκος· 24 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων τῶν κεκλημένων γεύσεται μου τοῦ δεῖπνου.</p>

Second, the account of Peter's threefold denial, in Mark 14.66–71 pars.

Matt. 26.69–75	Mark 14.66–72	Luke 22.56–62
<p>69 Ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἐκάθητο ἔξω ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ· καὶ προσῆλθεν αὐτῷ <u>μία παιδίσκη</u></p> <p>λέγουσα· καὶ σὺ ἦσθα <u>μετὰ Ἰησοῦ</u> τοῦ Γαλιλαίου. 70 ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο ἐμπροσθεν πάντων λέγων· οὐκ οἶδα <u>τί λέγεις</u>. 71 ἐξελθόντα δὲ εἰς τὸν πυλῶνα εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἄλλη καὶ λέγει τοῖς ἐκεῖ·</p> <p>οὗτος ἦν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου. 72 καὶ <u>πάλιν</u> ἠρνήσατο μετὰ ὅρκου ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.</p> <p>73 <u>μετὰ μικρὸν</u> δε προσ-</p>	<p>66 Καὶ ὄνους τοῦ Πέτρου κάτω ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἔρχεται <u>μία</u> τῶν <u>παιδισκῶν</u> τοῦ ἀρχιερέως 67 καὶ <u>ἰδοῦσα</u> τὸν Πέτρον θερμαινόμενον ἐμβλέψασα αὐτῷ λέγει· καὶ σὺ μετὰ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ ἦσθα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. 68 ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο λέγων· οὐτε οἶδα οὔτε ἐπίσταμαι σὺ <u>τί λέγεις</u>. καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἔξω εἰς τὸ προαύλιον. 69 καὶ ἡ παιδίσκη ἰδοῦσα αὐτὸν ἤρξατο πάλιν λέγειν τοῖς παρεστώσιν ὅτι <u>οὗτος ἐξ αὐτῶν</u> ἐστίν. 70 ὁ δὲ <u>πάλιν</u> ἠρνεῖτο.</p> <p>καὶ <u>μετὰ μικρὸν</u> πάλιν οἱ</p>	<p>56 <u>ἰδοῦσα</u> δὲ αὐτὸν <u>παιδίσκη</u> τις καθήμενον πρὸς τὸ φῶς καὶ ἀτενίσασα αὐτῷ εἶπεν· καὶ οὗτος σὺν αὐτῷ ἦν. 57 ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο λέγων· οὐκ οἶδα αὐτόν, γύναι.</p> <p>58 καὶ μετὰ βραχὺ ἕτερος ἰδὼν αὐτόν ἔφη· καὶ σὺ <u>ἐξ αὐτῶν</u> εἶ. ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἔφη· ἄνθρωπε, οὐκ εἰμί.</p> <p>59 καὶ διαστάσῃ ὥσει ὥρας μιᾶς ἄλλος τις</p>

Matt. 26.69–75	Mark 14.66–72	Luke 22.56–62
<p>ελθόντες οἱ ἐστῶτες εἶπον τῷ Πέτρῳ· ἀληθῶς καὶ σὺ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, καὶ γὰρ ἡ λαλιά σου δηλόν σε ποιεῖ. 74 τότε ἤρξατο καταθεματίζειν καὶ ὁμνῶναι ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον. καὶ εὐθέως ἀλέκτωρ ἐφώνησεν. .</p> <p>75 καὶ ἐμνήσθη ὁ Πέτρος τοῦ ῥήματος Ἰησοῦ εἰρηκότος ὅτι πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρίς ἀπαρνήσῃ με· καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκκλαυσεν πικρῶς.</p>	<p>παρεστῶτες ἔλεγον τῷ Πέτρῳ· ἀληθῶς ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, καὶ γὰρ Γαλιλαῖός εἶ. 71 ὁ δὲ ἤρξατο ἀναθεματίζειν καὶ ὁμνῶναι ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον ὃν λέγετε. 72 καὶ εὐθύς ἐκ δευτέρου ἀλέκτωρ ἐφώνησεν.</p> <p>καὶ ἀνεμνήσθη ὁ Πέτρος τὸ ῥῆμα ὡς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι δις τρίς με ἀπαρνήσῃ· καὶ ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν.</p>	<p>δι´σχυρίζετο λέγων· ἐπ’ ἀληθείας καὶ οὗτος μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἦν, καὶ γὰρ Γαλιλαῖός ἐστιν. 60 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Πέτρος ἄνθρωπε, οὐκ οἶδα καὶ παραχρήμα ἔτι λαλοῦντος αὐτοῦ ἐφώνησεν ἀλέκτωρ. 61 καὶ στραφεὶς ὁ κύριος ἐνέβλεψεν τῷ Πέτρῳ, καὶ ὑπεμνήσθη ὁ Πέτρος τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ κυρίου ὡς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὅτι πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι σήμερον ἀπαρνήσῃ με τρίς. 62 καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκκλαυσεν πικρῶς.</p>

In all these cases we see what is characteristic of oral tradition’s combination of fixity and flexibility, stability and variation. Of course, I repeat yet again, such characteristics are not exclusive to oral tradition. The difference comes in *the way we envisage the traditioning process*. In oral transmission we do not look for an explanation for the diversity in terms (only) of editorial redaction, but in terms of performance variation. The explanation lies as much or more in the character of the tradition as in the interpretative goals of the performer. And we do not look behind the variations for some original (and therefore more authentic) version or source. Rather, we recognize the character of the Jesus tradition as oral tradition, where appropriateness of performance to context is not a departure from authenticity but integral to the tradition’s living character.

Had I time I would extend the exploration to the knowledge of Jesus tradition outside the Gospels. In my judgement, discussion of possible allusions to and use of the Jesus tradition, both within the NT epistles (Paul, James, 1 Peter), within the Apostolic Fathers, and now also within the Nag Hammadi texts, has been seriously flawed by overdependence on the literary paradigm. For if we are indeed talking about largely illiterate communities, dependent on oral tradition and aural knowledge of written documents, then we have to expect *as the rule* that knowledge of the Jesus tradition will have shared the characteristics of oral tradition. That is to say, the historical imagination, liberated from the *literary* default setting and tutored in regard to *oral* culture, can readily envisage communities familiar with *their* oral tradition, able to recognize allusions to Jesus tradition in

performances of an apostolic letter written to them, and to fill in 'the gaps of indeterminacy' in other performances of that tradition.⁸²

The suggestion of a living oral tradition, still continuing after so much of it was written down in various Gospels, carries with it, of course, the possibility that the tradition was significantly modified in its central thrust – that the flexibility overwhelmed the stability, the diversity the continuity. Here we would have to enter the debate about the 'authenticity' of the Jesus tradition in the forms which it came to take in documents like the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, not to mention the Gospel of John! That is a debate for another day – in particular, on the criteria by which a form of the tradition was recognized as true to its originating impulse, and on the role of the community in checking the performances of that tradition.⁸³ Here it must suffice simply to note again that any attempt to resolve the issue purely in terms of literary dependence, or of the literary concept of the 'original' form of the tradition, is hardly likely to prove satisfactory in the long run. Unless we take seriously the oral character of the early transmission of the Jesus tradition we are always going to be in the position of one who attempts to describe a horse as a wheelless automobile, with the misperception of what we are trying to describe as the unavoidable outcome.

5. Conclusions and corollaries

I believe we are confronted with a stark alternative: either we continue to operate within the literary paradigm and allow it to determine the way we envisage the earliest churches, their knowledge of the Jesus tradition and their use of it; or we deliberately alter that default setting and attempt consciously to envisage a world strange to us, a world of rampant illiteracy, a world where information was communicated orally, a world where knowledge in the vast majority of cases came from hearing rather than from reading. There is room for compromise on this alternative, but not so much as we have simply assumed. For if we allow that the Jesus tradition as it has come down to us consists to any extent of various performances, frozen in writing to be sure, but no less in the first instance *performances*, rather than edited versions of some 'original', then our basic methodologies of source and form and redaction criticism become increasingly speculative in their application and uncertain in their outcome.

Consider what corollaries we are loaded with when we opt for an exclusive or

82 I may refer here simply to my earlier attempts to develop this theme – 'Jesus Tradition in Paul', in B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 155–78 (particularly 176–8); also *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 651–3.

83 At this point I would wish to take issue with a central thrust of Koester's magisterial contribution, *Ancient Christian Gospels*.

overdependency on the literary paradigm. For no hypothesis is more vulnerable to *reductio ad absurdum* than the hypothesis of an exclusively literary explanation for the Synoptic tradition. Was there no Jesus tradition known and used and circulated until Mark gave it life by writing it down? Of course not. Did Mark have to seek out ageing apostles or rummage for scraps in boxes hidden away in various elders' houses in order to gather unknown, unused tradition and set it out in writing? Of course not. Was the tradition gathered by Mark known only to Mark's church or circle of congregations? Surely not. And once Mark had gathered the tradition into his Gospel, did that mean that the tradition ceased to be oral? Of course not. Or again, when Matthew received Mark's Gospel, are we to assume that this was the first time Matthew or his church(es) had come across this tradition? Of course not.

What is the alternative? The alternative is to recognize that in an oral culture, tradition, oral tradition, is *communal memory*. A group's tradition is the means by which the group affirms and celebrates what is important about its origins, and about its past. So the alternative is to envisage little groups of disciples and sympathizers, their identity as a group given by their shared response to Jesus himself or to one of his disciples/apostles – little groups who met regularly to share the memories and the traditions which bound them together, for elders or teachers to tell again stories of Jesus and to expound afresh and elaborate his teachings.

Of course Good Friday and Easter made a difference: they brought illumination to many features of the earlier tradition; they became integral to the tradition and were often more important than the earlier tradition; Easter faith became the context in which the tradition was performed. I do not question that for a moment. But the fact remains that much if not most of the pre-Easter tradition retained its pre-Easter content and perspective, and various clear indications of its Galilean provenance.⁸⁴ The very features which Q specialists read as evidence of a *post*-Easter Galilean community which knew nothing of the passion narrative are much more naturally read as evidence of Jesus' *own pre*-passion *Galilean* mission. That character was already impressed in and on the Jesus tradition as it was orally circulated already during the mission of Jesus.

And of course the transition from village to city, and from Aramaic to Greek, introduced still further factors influencing the preaching, telling and performance of the Jesus tradition. But here again the preservation of that Galilean, pre-passion character of so much of the tradition, now in Greek, and as it was circulated in ever widening circles as new churches were established, indicates that it was the

84 See particularly H. Schürmann, 'Die vorösterlichen Anfänge der Logientradition: Versuch eines formgeschichtlichen Zugangs zum Leben Jesu', in H. Ristow and K. Matthiae, eds, *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus* (Berlin: Evangelische, 1961) 342–70; also *Jesus: Gestalt und Geheimnis* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1994) 85–104, 380–97.

same tradition which was being thus circulated and used. The essential character of that tradition was being maintained in and through the diversity of its performances.

On this model which I ask you to envisage, we need not assume that *Mark* wrote down all the tradition known to him; we can envisage quite readily that the tradition he drew upon continued to circulate in oral communication and was known more widely than the Gospel itself; and we can allow that Mark's Gospel itself functioned for many as itself a kind of oral performance,⁸⁵ known only by hearing, and recalled on the basis of that hearing. We can assume that *Matthew* knew at least many of the traditions written down by Mark, and knew the tradition almost certainly in different versions, in accordance with the nature of oral tradition. Also that in various instances Matthew probably preferred the version of the tradition which he already knew, rather than Mark's. The same with Luke.

The corollaries regarding Q are of greater consequence, particularly in the light of the latest attempt to recover the text of Q.⁸⁶ For if much of the shared Matthew/Luke material attests *oral* dependency rather than *literary* dependency, then *the attempt to define the complete scope and limits of Q is doomed to failure*. It is not simply that by definition of 'Q' (material common to Matthew and Luke) we cannot know its scope and limits, since wherever Matthew or Luke decided not to use 'Q' we do not have 'Q'!⁸⁷ It is rather that the material common to Matthew and Luke itself attests the pervasiveness of *oral* Jesus tradition precisely in its *variability*, as well as whatever of that material had already become more fixed in writing (Q).⁸⁸

I fully appreciate that the consequences of altering the default setting so abruptly are extensive. To abandon the hypothesis of exclusive literary dependence means that *we will simply be unable to trace the tradition-history of various sayings and accounts so confidently*. The unknown factors and variations so characteristic of oral tradition put the tradition-history – or better, performance-history – beyond reach. The model of linear development, layer upon layer, edition following edition, is no longer appropriate.

To press the point more strongly. In recognizing the oral character of the early Jesus tradition we have to give up the idea of a *single original form*, from which all

85 See again n. 80 above.

86 J. M. Robinson *et al.*, eds, *The Critical Edition of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress/Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

87 The spate of recent work on Q has provoked several vigorous responses, particularly C. S. Rodd, 'The End of the Theology of Q?', *ExpT* 113 (2001–2) 5–12, and Goodacre, *Case Against Q*. The case *against* Q is only as strong as it is because the case *for* Q has been overstated.

88 Cf. F. G. Downing, 'Word-Processing in the Ancient World; The Social Production and Performance of Q', *JSNT* 64 (1996) 29–48, reprinted in his *Doing Things with Words in the First Christian Century* (JSNTS 200; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 75–94 (esp. 92–3).

other versions of the tradition are to be derived, as though the ‘authenticity’ of a version depended on our ability to trace it back to that original. In so saying, again, I do *not* mean that it is impossible to envisage or speak of the *originating impact* of Jesus himself. Quite the contrary. What I mean is that the original impact was itself *diverse* in character from the first. What I mean is that the form of the tradition itself was from the first *multiform*. That also means that *variation in tradition does not of itself either indicate contradiction or denote editorial manipulation*. Variation is simply the hallmark of oral tradition, how the Jesus tradition functioned.

In consequence also, the suggestion that we can define the character of a community from the character of the documents they held in their possession is shown to be unrealistic. And the suggestion that the character of a community can be restricted to the character of a single document (for example, the Q community) becomes little short of ludicrous. For if the Jesus tradition was relatively widespread among churches in oral form, if indeed the Jesus tradition formed a kind of network linking the churches, as apostles, prophets and others moved among them, then there is no good reason to limit the Jesus tradition known to individual churches to a certain kind of tradition or a particular written version of some of that tradition.

Confronted by the greater uncertainty thereby implied, some may be tempted to invoke Occam’s razor: why multiply unknown factors when a simple two-document hypothesis with redaction can cover every eventuality?⁸⁹ The answer is that the simplicity envisaged is far from simple, since it has to postulate editorial ingenuity of tremendous complexity and sophistication. Much more simple in fact is the inference that the variations within the Synoptic tradition reflect more closely the kind of variations which were common in the performance traditions of the early churches. Again I stress that it need not be an either–or. I am not arguing for one against the other; I am arguing for both.⁹⁰

There is much more to be said about the way the Jesus tradition was used in performance by apostles and teachers. For example, I have already noted how Lord’s observation that ‘oral traditional composers think in terms of blocks and series of blocks of tradition’ correlates well with the various groupings or clusters of pericopes evident in the Synoptic tradition.⁹¹ We need not assume, as the early form critics did, that in the pre-written-down stage the tradition was used only in

89 But it is a double-edged razor, since both Farmer (*Synoptic Problem*, 203) and Goodacre (*Case Against Q*, 18, 77) can use it to excise one of ‘the two documents’ (Q). It is a fallacy to assume that elegance of solution can be achieved simply by restricting the range of options which the character of the evidence invites.

90 Streeter had already noted the danger of imposing an oversimplified solution on more complex data (*Four Gospels*, 229).

91 Above, nn. 53 and 54.

small, individual units.⁹² And the old suggestion of C. H. Dodd, that already in the pre-written Gospel stage we can detect what we might call a narrative- or kerygma-sequencing of tradition,⁹³ should be re-examined.⁹⁴ For the connectedness of the passion narrative still attests some such concern; as does the fact that Mark and Q both reflect a common intuition (practice?) of beginning their rehearsal of the Jesus tradition with John the Baptist;⁹⁵ just as elsewhere it seems to be 'taken-for-granted familiar' that a period of Jesus' mission in Capernaum preceded his return to Nazareth (Luke 4.23), and that the mission of the twelve was a consequence of time spent with Jesus (made explicit in Mark 3.14), and so on. Thus the sequencing of the centurion's servant after the collection of Jesus' teaching (Sermon on Mount/Plain), which provides a decisive argument for the inclusion of the centurion's servant in Q (Matt. 7.28; 8.5–13/Luke 7.1–10), may after all be better explained as a recurring feature of the various performances of the Jesus tradition in more than one community.⁹⁶

A fuller study of the Jesus tradition as oral tradition would also need to examine more closely what balance between stability and variation, between fixity and flexibility, was actually maintained, what it means to speak of the *same* tradition being maintained through the diversity of oral performance, how Jesus was actually remembered in and by those earliest disciple groups. I have attempted to press further in this direction in my study of *Jesus Remembered*.⁹⁷ In the present paper it has been a sufficient challenge to attempt to persuade you of the need to alter our inherited literary default setting which (in my judgement) has contorted the way we envisage the early transmission of the Jesus tradition.

Perhaps the point most to be emphasized in conclusion is that to recognize the character of the Jesus tradition as oral tradition is to recognize its character also as *living* tradition. The Jesus tradition was not at first a written text, to be read by individuals in the solitude of their studies, capable of fine literary analysis and redaction. It was not carried around like a sacred relic fixed in written form. It was living tradition; that is, lived-in-and-through tradition. It was not so much kept as used, not so much preserved as performed, not so much read as heard. To treat it as a lifeless artefact, suitable for clinical dissection, is to lose it. Its variability, the

92 Pace Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels* (n. 20 above) who would regard their observation as form-critical orthodoxy.

93 C. H. Dodd, 'The Framework of the Gospel Narrative', *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1953) 1–11.

94 See further also Reicke, *Roots*; S. Hultgren, *Narrative Elements in the Double Tradition: A Study of Their Place within the Framework of the Gospel Narrative* (BZNW 113; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).

95 See also N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 442; Schröter, *Erinnerung*, 439–51.

96 This is in response to Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 172 n. 6.

97 See below, n. 61.

oral principle of 'variation within the same', is not a sign of degeneration or corruption. Rather, it puts us directly in touch with the tradition in its living character, as it was heard in the earliest Christian groups and churches, and can still be heard and responded to today.

In short, to alter the default setting is to refuse to treat the Jesus tradition first and only as a written text, and to insist on the importance of *hearing* it, of hearing it as it was heard in the beginning, but of hearing it also as a tradition which still lives and still demands response from its hearers as it did from the beginning.