

## NOTE

### MEMORY AND MANUSCRIPT: THE ORIGINS AND TRANSMISSION OF THE GOSPEL TRADITION

Birger Gerhardsson, a young Swedish *NT* scholar, has recently published a thesis which bids fair to open new avenues of Gospel research. It is entitled *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*.<sup>1</sup> Its aim is to reconsider the *Sitz im Leben* (or "life situation") responsible for the Gospel tradition, and it discovers it in an institution of the early Church which was similar to the transmission of the oral torah in contemporary rabbinical Judaism. The approach to the age-old problem of the formation of the Gospel tradition which is adopted here is characteristic of the so-called Scandinavian "tradition-historical school," which is well known in *OT* circles.<sup>2</sup> This thesis represents an analogous extension of the method of that school into *NT* research. It is a thorough and careful study of the material of the rabbinical and Qumrân literatures which touches on the transmission of the written and oral torah in Palestinian Judaism, in order to derive from it an understanding of the Christian phenomenon responsible for the preservation of the Jesus tradition. The book is not easy to read, because it presupposes some acquaintance with rabbinical literature; but anyone who will stick with it is sure to discover a rich store of valuable observations on many parts of the *NT*. Its chief significance, however, lies in the path which it opens in the post-Bultmann phase of Gospel study. It is the purpose of this note to try to present this significant book in its proper perspective. To do this, we shall briefly recall some of the phases through which research into the Gospels has passed and then summarize the contents of the book.

#### I

Beginning with Tatian, who produced in his *Diatessaron* the first Gospel harmony ca. A.D. 160,<sup>3</sup> commentators on the Gospels were for centuries

<sup>1</sup> Tr. by Eric J. Sharpe. *Acta seminarii neotestamentici Upsaliensis* 22. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup; Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1961. Pp. 379. Sw. Kr. 30.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction* (London and Chicago, 1954), for a brief introduction.

<sup>3</sup> It is not extant in the original language (which is even a matter of dispute); its contents and structure are known mainly from an Armenian version of the Syriac commentary of Ephraem on it: L. Leloir, *Saint Ephrem: Commentaire de l'évangile concordant, version arménienne* (CSCO 137 [text], 1953; 145 [translation], 1954). However, a copy of the original of Ephraem's commentary has recently come to light; see L. Leloir, *Biblica* 40 (1959) 959-70.

content to use such a harmonizing method to explain the Gospels and to resolve the *concordia discors* in matter, order, and individual words or expressions which appears in Mt, Mk, Lk, and Jn. Augustine especially wrestled with the latter problem, writing *ca.* A.D. 400 *De consensu evangelistarum libri quattuor*,<sup>4</sup> an apologetic work intended to reply to the claims of pagans that the Gospels contain contradictions. He stressed the substantial agreement of the Evangelists and only incidentally explained their interdependence. But the making of harmonies of the Gospels, or the resolving of their discrepancies by such a method, continued for centuries, even into the twentieth century, in serene neglect of the developments of modern Gospel study.

The modern literary and critical study of the Gospels may be dated from the end of the eighteenth century, possibly from 1774, when Johann Jacob Griesbach introduced the word *synopsis* (a simultaneous view, *vue d'ensemble*, *Zusammenschau*) into the study of the first three Gospels. From that time on we have been accustomed to speak of the "Synoptic Gospels," and implicitly recognize thereby the fundamental difference between the first three Gospels and that according to John. But it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the problem of the mutual relation of the Gospels was even correctly stated. Then the "Synoptic problem" was isolated and seriously posed for the first time, and since then attempts have been made, with more or less success, to solve it.

The history of the solutions proposed for the Synoptic problem has often been sketched.<sup>5</sup> At the risk of oversimplification, we shall mention here only a few of the main phases through which it has passed. In the early nineteenth century various forms of an *oral-tradition* theory held the field. Proponents of such a theory were right in emphasizing this aspect of the formation of the Gospels, because it had been neglected by the preceding generations of scholars who strove to modify the traditional theory of literary dependence supposedly inherited from Augustine.<sup>6</sup> Even in the twentieth century some Catholic writers like P. Gächter and A. G. da Fonseca have preferred a form of the oral-tradition theory.

However, the fundamental difficulty with it was its neglect of obvious telltale marks of literary dependence (on written sources) which are unmistakably present in the first three Gospels. It is almost universally ad-

<sup>4</sup> CSEL 43 (ed. F. Wehrich, 1904).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., L. Vaganay, *Le problème synoptique: Une hypothèse de travail* (Tournai, 1954) pp. 1-32.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine had proposed that each Evangelist depended on the one who preceded him in the traditional order; e.g., Mt wrote first and Mark later, "tamquam pedisequus et breuiator eius" (*De cons. evang.* 1, 2, 4 [CSEL 43, 4]).

mitted today that some utilization of an earlier *written* text must be acknowledged at least for Mt and Lk. The problem, however, is how much and to what extent.

The achievement of the nineteenth century in Synoptic studies was the proposal of the *Two-Source* theory, which held sway from 1860 to 1900. Its basic tenets were that Mk was the oldest Gospel, was used by Mt and Lk, and thus constituted a written source for the other two Evangelists; in addition, a written source was postulated for the matter common to Mt and Lk alone, which was called Q (= *Quelle*, "source"). The two sources were thus Mk (responsible for some 330 verses of the Triple Tradition) and Q (responsible for some 235 verses of the Double Tradition). But even this theory, for all its attractive features, did not answer all the problems. Short-lived modifications of it were often proposed (*Ur-Marcus*, Proto-Luke, etc.), but none of them won the adherence of scholars as did the basic outline of the Two-Source theory itself. Today, when the Synoptic problem is discussed, a modified form of this theory is still widely used—the modifications differ often enough<sup>7</sup>—and many modern commentaries presuppose it.

But by the beginning of the twentieth century it had become apparent that Synoptic studies had more or less come to an impasse. The complicated situation presented by the first three Gospels yielded no more to the type of investigation which proceeded along the lines of source analysis.<sup>8</sup>

## II

In the early twentieth century, source analysis gave way to Form Criticism. At the end of the first World War a new line of investigation was opened up by the books of Martin Dibelius (*Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* [Tübingen, 1919]; Engl. tr., *From Tradition to Gospel* [London, 1935]),

<sup>7</sup> Though some Catholic scholars did espouse the Two-Source theory in the early period, outright acceptance of it by them in more recent times was impeded by the decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, especially those of June 26, 1912 (which rejected it in its classic form; see *DB* 2164–65, also 2148–52). However, a modified form of the theory has been used by Catholic scholars for a long time; the modification consists mainly in providing for the extrinsic data of the patristic tradition: that an earlier form of Mt existed *hebraidi dialektiō*. This is often related by them to the source of Q. Further modifications consist in the admission of special sources for Mt and Lk, and even at times for Mk. See A. Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction* (New York, 1958) pp. 239–53.—It is noteworthy that Card. E. Tisserant, the President of the Biblical Commission, wrote the preface of a book by B. de Solages, *A Greek Synopsis of the Gospels* (Leiden, 1959), in which, according to two British reviewers, "the two-document hypothesis is systematically established" (*New Testament Studies* 7 [1960–61] 98).

<sup>8</sup> That the situation is no better today can be seen from W. R. Farmer, "A 'Skeleton in the Closet' of Gospel Research," *Biblical Research* 6 (1961) 3–27.

Karl Ludwig Schmidt (*Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* [Berlin, 1919]), and Rudolf Bultmann (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [Göttingen, 1921]). The Form-Critical method has been called by Vincent Taylor "the child of disappointment,"<sup>9</sup> because it was born of the shattered hopes of research into the Synoptic problem.

It may be described as the critical study of the literary forms of the Synoptic Gospels, which attempts to classify them, compare them with analogous extrabiblical forms, explain their genesis (or *Sitz im Leben*), and trace the development (or history) of the individual form in its various manifestations in the Gospels. Whereas source analysis had been interested in discovering the written sources which underlie the existing Gospels, Form Criticism tried to pierce back beyond written sources into the period of oral transmission and account for the rise of the different types of episodes which eventually became part of the Gospels. Schmidt's work called in question the basic framework of the Synoptic Gospel story and regarded it as an artificial construction; links and bonds between episodes were nothing more than stereotyped formulae with no validity whatsoever for the historian. He contended that there was no life of Jesus in the Gospels in the sense of a continuous biography or a chronological sketch, but only single stories which had been collected. Both Dibelius and Bultmann went further and tried to account for the *Sitz im Leben* of the single stories, that vital context of the early Church which would account for the origin and development of these stories. For Dibelius, the *Sitz im Leben* was preaching, in which he summed up various forms of early Christian activity. But Bultmann allowed for a more diverse *Sitz im Leben*, which was responsible for the "creation" of stories about Jesus (such as preaching, teaching, apologetics, Church order, discipline, study of the Scriptures, etc.). Dibelius' method was "constructive," in that he proceeded in his arguments and presentation from an imagined vital context of the Church to the gospel material, whereas Bultmann pursued a more "analytical" method in scrutinizing the forms themselves and trying to discern in each the different situations of the early Church which would explain their genesis and development.<sup>10</sup>

There is no doubt that "a particularly fruitful epoch for gospel research dawned in 1919," and that the work of the Form Critics "represented a bold and decisive step forward into that hitherto little-known region dividing the written Gospels from the Master from Nazareth."<sup>11</sup> There were

<sup>9</sup> *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London, 1949) p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> A certain amount of circular reasoning is involved here, as has been pointed out by Gerhardsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

decisive gains in this sort of study of the Gospels, especially in the fourfold classification of the Gospel episodes as Pronouncement Stories, Miracle Stories, Sayings and Parables, and Stories about Jesus,<sup>12</sup> and in the emphasis put on an orally transmitted tradition which antedated the written Gospels. The pattern observed in the classes often enables one to penetrate better the meaning of the pericopes and to trace their development.

However, Form Criticism was not without its defects. These have often been pointed out and there is no need to repeat them here.<sup>13</sup> One difficulty was the failure to realize that such criticism was a distinctly literary instrument, not a historical one. The mere fact that an episode could be classified in one category or other did not deprive it of all historical foundation. In this respect Bultmann was most radical; for him, the majority of the Gospel pericopes became community creations, etiological legends fabricated by the early Christians, who ascribed to Jesus the origin of certain community tenets or practices. That any of the episodes should have a *Sitz im Leben Jesu* frankly did not interest him. He made use of the famous distinction between *der historische Jesus* (the Jesus who walked the roads of Palestine) and *der geschichtliche Christus* (the Christ who gives meaning to the course of history). Only the latter can be known by Christians, and that through faith. With the advent of the Second World War his basic analytical approach to the Gospels took another step and resulted in the demythologization of them. But it was a step which was aided by extrinsic features: a pastoral concern for modern Hitlerized and dechristianized German youth and a certain influence of Heideggerian existentialist philosophy. That the *NT* might be made palatable for modern German youth, it had to be demythologized. Thus it was that Bultmann ended in a radical skepticism regarding the historical Jesus—and this became an impasse for Form Criticism. Modern German Protestant critics speak today of the stagnation of the Form-Critical method, and among Bultmann's own pupils there is a manifest discontent with the master's conclusions and a realization that the impasse calls for a reassessment of the methods employed.

But if Form Criticism was the "child of disappointment," it too in time gave birth to a similar progeny. One such child is the so-called *Redaktionsgeschichte* ("redactional history"), the attempt to analyze the relationship of the individual gospel-units to the whole, to sketch the history of the

<sup>12</sup> The names for the categories used here are those of V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32. They represent a refinement of those proposed by the original Form Critics. Dibelius would have said for the same classes: *Paradigmen, Novellen, Worte Jesu (Paränese), Legenden*; Bultmann: *Apophthegmata, Wundergeschichten, Herrenworte, Legenden*.

<sup>13</sup> See V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-43. Seven defects have been pointed out in A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (2nd ed. rev. by C. S. C. Williams; Oxford, 1957) pp. 52-58.

redaction of the Gospel, or to explain the theological import of the very framework in which the Synoptic material was arranged. Such work has been done by W. Marxsen (*Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* [Göttingen, 1959]), H. Conzelmann (*Die Mitte der Zeit* [Tübingen, 1954]; Engl. tr., *The Theology of St Luke* [New York, 1961]), G. Bornkamm (*Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium* [Neukirchen, 1960]), et al. The concern is no longer for the *Sitz im Leben der Kirche*, nor even for the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* (both legitimate perspectives in the study of the Gospels), but for the *Sitz im Evangelium*, the gospel-context of the pericopes and of the whole. What relation has the incident to the whole, to the purpose which the Evangelist has set for himself in so ordering and editing the material which he has received from the early Church's tradition? How does it contribute to his portrait of Christ?

Another child of the parentage is—as yet unnamed—the fruit of the investigation of the Scandinavian school of Gospel research. B. Gerhardsson's thesis is representative of it. His work was heralded by a paper read at the Oxford Conference on the Four Gospels (1957) by the veteran *NT* scholar Harald Riesenfeld. It was entitled "The Gospel Tradition and Its Beginnings."<sup>14</sup> When it was published in a brochure in 1957,<sup>15</sup> it bore the subtitle "A Study in the Limits of 'Formgeschichte,'" which reveals its kinship. It was widely acclaimed, being considered a harbinger of future Gospel studies; but R. Bultmann dismissed it with characteristic disdain, "Mir scheint diese Konstruktion nicht haltbar zu sein,"<sup>16</sup> though he never tells us why. Its significance lay precisely in calling in question the *Sitz im Leben* postulated by Bultmann and offering a substitute, which was based on *NT* data and contemporary Jewish methods of teaching and showed that the Gospel stories were much more the result of a preservative process than a creative one.<sup>17</sup>

### III

It is at this point that we return to Gerhardsson's *Memory and Manuscript*. In the course of his Oxford lecture Riesenfeld had noted that his considerations were based on recent studies carried out in Uppsala, which

<sup>14</sup> *Studia evangelica (Texte und Untersuchungen 73; Berlin, 1959)* pp. 43–65; reprinted in *The Gospels Reconsidered* (Oxford, 1960) pp. 131–53.

<sup>15</sup> This edition (London, 1957) contains a few extra paragraphs but omits the bibliographical references.

<sup>16</sup> "To me this construction seems to be untenable" (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition: Ergänzungsheft zur 3. durchgesehenen Auflage* [Göttingen, 1958] p. 5).

<sup>17</sup> A third child of that parentage might be seen in the attempt of a number of Bultmann's pupils to reconsider the problem of *der historische Jesus*; see J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1959).

were to be published in a thesis by Gerhardsson. Now we have the detailed presentation of the position which was so briefly exposed by Riesenfeld on that occasion.

The first part of Gerhardsson's thesis is a thorough investigation of the *process* of transmission of the written and oral torah in late Judaism. As for the written torah, G. analyses the attitude manifested toward the *OT* text among the Jews of the early Christian period. "From the beginning of the Christian era [the text has] been preserved with remarkable precision" (p. 40). "Side by side with a general tendency toward diverse, dynamic adaptation of the context of the text [in the Targumim and Midrashim], there has continually been a tendency to detailed, static reproduction of its wording" (p. 40). This static reproduction of the written torah in its untouched, traditional state was abetted by three different institutions in contemporary Jewish life: (a) The School of Scribes (*sôp̄rîm*, professional copyists), whose responsibility was the deliberate and methodical preservation of the *OT* text. Such a scribal school was connected with the Jerusalem Temple, but the Qumrân scriptorium seems to have been a smaller version of it, undoubtedly for the use of the sect itself. The school included professional *magghê s̄p̄rîm* ("correctors of the books"), whose task it was to insure the normative transmission of the texts. In such a school the preservation of the text was a function per se. (b) The elementary school (*bêt s̄p̄er*), in which the young Jew was taught to read the torah with correct vocalization, accentuation, and fluency (*miqrā'*) and to learn a relatively simple Aramaic translation of it (*targūm*). This elementary schooling concentrated on the written torah and thus functioned indirectly as a preservative control over the *OT* text. (c) The public worship of the synagogue, where the reading (*miqrā'*) of the *OT* was carried out according to a "well-defined holy rite . . . in a cantillated style" (p. 67), destined to insure a proper and traditional recitation of the *OT*. In the synagogue service the *miqrā'* was clearly distinguished from the explanatory translation (*targūm*) and from the expository homily (*midrāš*). These three institutions thus acted as a preservative force which insured the correct transmission of the written torah.

As for the oral torah, it too was a vital part of the Jewish heritage. The "tradition of the Fathers," particularly of the Pharisaic branch, was learned in the Jewish homes, synagogues, and courts, but above all it was handed down by learned specialists in the *bêt hammidrāš* ("house of study," an advanced school). There existed here a methodical, controlled transmission of sayings of the elders, which likewise insured the careful handing on of the oral torah. It consisted mainly of two elements: a chain of short oral passages or focal texts, assembled frequently on the basis of the continuous text of *OT*

passages; and a series of halakic or haggadic sayings, built up on various principles. (In time there grew up an additional, complementary tradition which interpreted even these, a sort of *talmūd*.) The teacher in the *bēt hammidrāš* was supposed to familiarize his pupils with the traditional and complementary material of the oral torah. The midrashic method consisted in learning traditional interpretations based on a consecutive text of Scripture, while the mishnaic method concentrated on traditional halakic (or even haggadic) material grouped in subject-units and independent of the OT text. In such schools there eventually grew up a group of official repeaters (*iannā'tm*, whom G. calls "traditionists"), gifted pupils particularly responsible for the transmission of oral passages. Though they do not appear before the second century A.D., it is likely that in earlier times ordinary teachers and pupils functioned as "traditionists." Thus were handed down the traditions which eventually became the Mishnah, Tosephta, and early Midrashim.

Especially important is G.'s study of the techniques of this process of transmission. He brings out clearly the great stress which was laid on the memorization of the focal texts, section by section, through oral repetition by teacher and pupil (four times over!). Emphasis was put on the mechanical learning of the words of the text, before any study of their meaning was begun. Conservation of the authentic wording of the passage, the *ipsissima verba*, was thus a primary concern of the pupil. Along with it, however, also went the master's concern to express his teaching "in the shortest way" (*derek q'šārāh*), in an epigrammatic fashion or even elliptically. He frequently made use of summary statements (*k'āl*) and of condensed memory texts. In the course of time mnemonic techniques (catchword bonds and association patterns) were developed, and even written notes (*šimāntm* or, in Greek, *hypomnēmata*) were used.

As for the origin of this oral torah, G. discovers it in two sources. First, there was a sayings-tradition (*d'būrīm*, "words") of the great rabbis, which was transmitted for repetition, interpretation, and discussion. It included sayings selected by the teacher himself as significant, sayings regarded as such by the pupils, and finally sayings incorporated only later into the tradition because of a subsequent realization of their importance. Secondly, there was a narrative tradition (*ma'asim*, "deeds"), which originated in the actions of the rabbis and was remembered or recalled by the pupils for imitation ("I saw my teacher do this or that"). The example of the rabbi thus became a model and was often incorporated in a legal halakah; it was a didactic symbolic action for the pupils.

The foregoing summary of Part 1 of this book has been pared down to the



utter minimum; it is impossible to reproduce here the abundant documentation which G. offers in support of his thesis or the controls he provides for his interpretation of the rabbinical material from recognized secondary sources.

In Part 2, G. studies the delivery of the Gospel tradition in early Christianity against the background of the contemporary Jewish institution of controlled transmission. To show that a parallel institution existed in the early Church, he appeals to three sources: certain early patristic writings, Luke, and Paul.

His basic thesis is thus stated: "There existed in the early Church a *traditional* conception of the origin of the Gospels" (p. 194 [italics his]). First of all, the patristic evidence. Expressions in Papias, Irenaeus, and the anti-Marcionite prologues make it clear that a tradition existed in the period prior to the written composition of the Gospels. "There is general agreement that all four Gospels derive from well-known, reliable traditionists who stand at one or two removes from Jesus Christ" (p. 194). These post-Apostolic writers assign to the Gospels the literary form of *hypomnēmata* (or, in Justin, *apomnēmoneumata*), the very expression employed in the Jewish tradition for the "notebooks" used by pupils to aid their memorization of the rabbi's sayings. Though much caution is needed in the use of patristic data about the Gospels, it seems clear at least that "the gospel (*to euaggelion*) was not at this time regarded as being *written* in the same way as the O. T. word of God" (p. 199). This is not due to a belief that Christ's authority was less, nor to a conviction that the gospel as a preached kerygma could not withstand the process of being written down. The OT was *hierai graphai* at least in part because its real or supposed origins were lost in the mists of antiquity, whereas the Gospels were of known origin and were rather a *hieros logos*, an oral (messianic) torah. Moreover, the second century was apparently well advanced before there was a general distribution of all four Gospels; one church was evidently satisfied with one version, though aware that other versions were used in other places. Again, from the early manuscripts it is evident that the NT text was not being copied in the second century with the same care as in later times. Private (not professional) copyists were not loath to introduce assimilations and harmonizations; the written text was not yet fixed in its smallest details, as the manuscript variants suggest. Furthermore, it must be remembered that Jesus' disciples came from Pharisaic Judaism with its high regard for the oral torah, and hence the tradition about Christ was carried on *orally* for the first few decades (with the possible aid of *hypomnēmata*). Thus it can be seen that the Gospels were at that time not yet regarded as being *written* in the

same way as the *OT* word of God. "By the middle of the 2nd century, the four Gospels had reached a position in which it began to be natural to quote them as Holy Scripture: a development which later spread very rapidly and which became accepted in different parts of the Church. But up to this time the Gospels are *holy tradition* rather than Scripture, and function to all appearances mainly orally" (p. 202).

After appealing to data preserved from the post-Apostolic Church about the existence of a tradition antedating the Gospels, G. turns to the *NT* itself for further evidence and finds striking similarities to the contemporary Jewish counterpart. Luke, especially in Acts, becomes his next source of information. Admitting that Luke was a purposeful theologian and writer, he stresses with vigor that such a quality does not prevent him from being "a fairly reliable historian," a writer "faithful to the tradition he has received" (p. 209).<sup>18</sup> Above all, Luke writes as a witness, anxious to tell how the "word of the Lord" (*ho logos tou kyriou*) spread from Jerusalem, the Old Testament center where the torah was codified and copied, and whence it was conveyed to the people of Israel. The apostles, or the Twelve, are presented in Acts as witnesses, carrying forth the "word of the Lord" from Jerusalem and testifying to all that He had said and done. Their apostolic commission is expressed occasionally by the term *euaggelizein*, but the more usual term in Acts is *didaskein* ("teach"), or *phihēgēsithai epi tō onomati tou Iēsou* ("speak in the name of Jesus" [4:18]). Luke's main term for the message which they carried is not *euaggelion*, and even less *kērygma*, but rather *ho logos tou theou* or *ho logos tou kyriou*. This is a significant term when it is realized that it has the connotation of the "transmitted word," with *OT*

<sup>18</sup> The paragraph in full reads: "It seems to be an extremely tenaciously-held misapprehension among exegetes that an early Christian author must *either* be a purposeful theologian and writer *or* a fairly reliable historian. This misapprehension is applied to the author of Acts, to the Evangelists, and to those who preceded the Evangelists in forming the various elements of the gospel tradition. The pioneer form-critics DIBELIUS and BULTMANN have contributed materially to the perpetuation of this error. They work on a basis of an over-simplified alternative, maintaining that the men who shaped the gospel tradition had no wish to preserve memories for posterity, but *instead* wished by their proclamation to arouse faith in Christ. This is a false alternative. To present the problem in this way fails to do justice to the deep rooted respect for divine revelation which was felt in Antiquity (and elsewhere): to that profound reverence associated with the words which were 'heard' and the things which were 'seen', i.e. those events which were understood and interpreted in religious categories. Nor does it do justice even to the reverence commanded by the authoritative teacher or a received authoritative tradition. The fact of the early Christian Apostles, teachers and Evangelists having presented their material with a religious end in view does not necessarily mean *per se* that their memories ceased to function, or that their respect for historical facts vanished" (p. 209 [italics his]).

roots and rabbinical parallels. Though the concept *ho logos* has a number of variations in meaning in Luke's writing, nevertheless "the divine logos appears to the author of Acts to be almost an independent and personified entity, like the Jewish concept of the Torah" (p. 224; cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20).

In contrast to contemporary Judaism, early Christianity was not torah-centric, but Christocentric. This does not mean that there was any opposition between Christ and the torah; indeed, in His ministry Jesus often used the *OT* and gave it a Christological midrashic exegesis. But it is important to realize that the "*sayings of Jesus are repeated and are 'used'*" by the apostolic witnesses in a manner which is similar to the rabbinical use of the *OT*. The apostles "are bearers, not only of the tradition concerning Christ, but also of the correct interpretation of the Scriptures" (p. 230). The early Christian proclamation often proceeded from *OT* texts, using and interpreting them Christologically; but it also proceeded from *the message of Christ* (the tradition concerning Him) and examined the *OT* in order to see whether the new *logos* agreed with the words of Scripture or to prove the validity of what was being taught. To this general work of the study of the *OT* and the sayings of Jesus G. has related the expression of Acts 6:4, "the ministry of the word" (*diakonia tou logou*), a function entrusted primarily to the collegium of the apostles (= the Twelve in Acts, who are the *autoptai* and the *hypēretai tou logou* of Acts 1:1). The apostolic collegium, which is compared by G. with the general session of the Qumrān community (*mōšab hārabbīm*) and the rabbinical academies (*yēšibāh*), is seen in action in Acts 15. Here we see the apostles deciding cases on the basis of the *OT* and issuing judgment in the manner of the rabbis.

Finally, the evidence from the Pauline letters likewise suggests the existence of a tradition in the early Church. G. shows convincingly the dependence of Paul on a controlled transmission of the *logos* from Jerusalem. Despite Paul's conviction that his apostolic commission has been received not from men but from Jesus Christ and God (Gal 1:1), he frequently refers in his letters to his dependence on a tradition. His strict observance as a Jew of the traditions of the fathers (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:5-6) conditioned him for his obligation to pass on what he had heard. He uses the expressions *paradosis* ("tradition"), *paradidonai* ("to pass on"), *paralambanein* ("to receive [a teaching]"), the Greek equivalents for well-known rabbinical terms for the controlled transmission of the oral torah. A number of other equivalent expressions related to the oral traditions of the rabbis likewise turn up in his letters ("stand fast by," "hold fast," "walk according to," etc.). All of these manifest his awareness of being part of a process which was trans-

mitting the Christian "word." He appeals authoritatively to the "word of the Lord," in the sense of the "transmitted word." 1 Cor 15:3 ff. is "unambiguous evidence that Paul had received an authoritative tradition about the death and resurrection of Christ" (p. 300). Still other manifestations of that awareness are found in the way he passes on "decisions" about specific problems which arise (1 Cor 7:1 ff.; 9:1 ff.; 11:2 ff.); the "cases" are decided like their rabbinical counterparts. Paul binds and looses. This sketchy summary of G.'s comprehensive discussion of the Pauline data shows at least that there was an institution in the early Church in which Paul, the former Pharisee, felt perfectly at home.

The final chapter is entitled "The Origin and Transmission of the Gospel Tradition." G. admits that a separate monograph would have to be devoted to the study of the Synoptic material itself for traces of the institution. Here is work for the future. But he emphasizes that "it is not possible historically to understand the origins of early Christian tradition by beginning with the *preaching* of the primitive Church" [as did Dibelius], nor even by beginning "with Jesus," for He "looked back to something which already existed: to the Torah tradition in its written and oral forms" (p. 324). "The synoptic tradition was transmitted and written down in the context of a Church which did not believe Jesus to be a mere earthly teacher; it believed him to be the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Servant of the Lord, the Son of God, the Lord . . ." (p. 325). And yet, it never lost sight of the fact that Jesus *taught*. He fulfilled the torah, by giving His definitive interpretation of it, an interpretation which replaced the oral torah of the rabbis. But He linked His words and actions to the torah; He taught both in word and deed, and some of His deeds became didactic symbolic actions, worthy of imitation. The Synoptics have recorded condensed memory texts, but also interpretative expositions of His sayings (a *talmud* on His parables), which go back in principle to Jesus. The collegium of apostles, which resided in Jerusalem for a considerable time after Christ's departure (during the forties and perhaps even as late as the fifties), had sufficient time to shape the "word of the Lord from Jerusalem." This explains how their crystallized message came to be presented as an eyewitness report, as "that which we have seen and heard." During that time they were not engaged merely in preaching, but in many varied activities (preaching, teaching, prayer, sacred meals, charitable works, exorcism, healing, Church discipline, jurisdiction, etc.). In the course of such activities problems arose and questions were asked; in such circumstances members of the community "remembered" and made use of authoritative sayings, not only passages from the *OT*, but sayings of Jesus and recollections of what He did. But what was the activity

which was responsible for the collection and the fixing of the tradition about Jesus?

In the course of this present investigation we have come to the conclusion that the leading *collegium* in the Jerusalem church carried out a direct work on *ho logos tou kyriou* (i.e. the Holy Scriptures and the tradition from, and about, Christ). From certain points of view this work resembled the labours of Rabbinic Judaism on *dbr yhwk* (the Holy Scriptures and the oral Torah) and the work carried out in the Qumran congregation on *dbr yhwk* (the Holy Scriptures and the sect's own tradition, which was partly oral and partly written). This apostolic work on "the word of God" was thus the most important element in the comprehensive concept *hē didachē tōn apostolōn* (Acts 2.42) and the concept *hē diakonia tou logou* (Acts 6.4). (p. 331)

This work on the "word of the Lord" took the form of "searching the Scriptures," a midrashic exegesis which interpreted the *OT* in the light of the teaching of Jesus and in the light of the Easter event. But it also took the form of discussions of doctrinal questions raised by members of the *collegium* or of current problems, the answers to which were sought either in the *OT* or in the tradition from Jesus. For He was the "only" teacher (Mt 23:10). The work gave rise to the grouping of Jesus-traditions, such as are found in various spots in the Synoptics (instructions of the apostles in Mt 10, the parable tractate in Mk 4, the "bread traditions" in Mk 6:31—8:26). And from the *collegium* in Jerusalem the Jesus-tradition was passed on by word of mouth, by a direct methodical delivery.

But if there was so much methodical delivery and controlled transmission, how can one account for the variations between the different parallel traditions in the Synoptics? First, care must be used to make sure that one is dealing with variations of one and the same basic saying, and not with sayings of Jesus delivered in more than one version. Secondly, most of the gospel material is haggadic, which is often transmitted with a somewhat wider margin of variation in wording than halakic material. Thirdly, certain adaptations arose at an early stage, when the material was being gathered, but others are due to translation—not only on one definite occasion, but in a process which was protracted and complicated. Lastly, the principles of redaction used by the different Evangelist-editors must be reckoned with.

#### IV

At the end of this long summary of Gerhardsson's book a few remarks are in order. There can be no doubt that G. has made a significant contribution to the study of the Gospels. His careful analysis of the process and concept of tradition in contemporary Judaism has certainly shed much light on its

early Christian analogue. It has often been remarked that one of the positive results of Form Criticism was the emphasis that it laid on tradition in the early Church. In its attempt to pierce back into the period of oral tradition which antedated the written composition of the Gospels, it made clear that the *NT* is basically only a privileged form of the Church's tradition, a part of it singled out and endowed with an added charism of the Spirit. The work of G. on the process and form of oral tradition in the early Church now enhances even more the function and role of that institution.

If it is customary to distinguish today three different perspectives which can be adopted when the Gospels are studied, viz., the quest for the *Sitz im Leben der Kirche*, for the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, and finally for the *Sitz im Evangelium*, it is obvious that G.'s thesis directly affects the first of these. He has substituted for the postulated *Sitz im Leben* of Dibelius and Bultmann a well-documented institution of the early Church. Others have recognized before this the existence of a pre-Gospel tradition in the early Church; but the merit of G.'s book lies in the form of the tradition which he has discovered and the details of the process of controlled transmission which he has brought to light.

As a sort of by-product, G.'s investigation also enhances the historical value of the Gospel tradition in its global aspects; for it is likewise pertinent to the perspective of the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*. But here we must be careful. One cannot simply conclude from his thesis: "Therefore, the Gospels do present us with the *ipsissima verba Jesu*." The care of the rabbinical traditionists to transmit accurately the rabbis' words, and the concern of the rabbis themselves to formulate their sayings in epigrammatic, easily repeatable forms, might suggest that there is much more of the *ipsissima verba* element in the corresponding Gospel traditions than the Form Critics, or perhaps even such an indefatigable investigator of the "Sayings of Jesus" as J. Jeremias, might be inclined to admit. There is some truth in this conclusion, but the issue is complicated. On the last page of his book G. finally faces the problem of the Synoptic variations in the sayings of Jesus and in the accounts of His deeds, and makes a few remarks about this problem (see above). But he does not allow sufficiently for the well-known process in oral tradition by which a nucleus-story is eventually embellished and modified. No matter how much one stresses the controlled transmission of oral material, one has to allow for the tendency of what is handed down orally to become modified in the course of time—at least in details. Such strands of tradition are like light which has been refracted in a prism. This accounts almost certainly for such minor variants as those found in Mk 1:7 (and Lk 3:16), contrasted with Mt 3:11. Nor does he reckon sufficiently with

the markedly theological formulation which has been given to many of the sayings of Jesus—a theological formulation which has been shown to be due to the Evangelist-editor or to others from whom he derived his material. Consequently, although *Memory and Manuscript* supports in a new and unexpected way the basic historicity of the Gospel tradition, it does not permit us to conclude to the unadulterated transmission of the *verba et facta Jesu*.<sup>19</sup>

G.'s book builds on the achievements of his predecessors in the study of the Gospels, but it acts as an important corrective to one of the overplayed features of Form Criticism, the Dibelius-Bultmann *Sitz im Leben*. This feature had been negatively criticized often in the past, but it now finds a reasonable substitute. However, it is also significant that it reverts in some respects to certain elements of Gospel study which were once espoused by such Catholic scholars as M. Jousse, S.J., R. Pautrel, S.J., J. Huby, S.J., and even most recently X. Léon-Dufour, S.J. Among others, these students of the Synoptic problem have often accorded more importance to oral transmission than those who adopted a solution along the lines of literary dependence. The lines of convergence here are quite interesting.

When one reflects on the direction which *Memory and Manuscript* is taking and recognizes that it represents a modern tendency in Gospel study—another step away from the radical skepticism of Bultmann—one cannot help but detect in it still another manifestation of that inner dynamism of scholarly research which always copes in time with the frail hy-

<sup>19</sup> A few other minor points of criticism should be added. First of all, G. has presented an impressive array of data from the biblical and extrabiblical sources to support his thesis. Our summary and remarks above will indicate the basic soundness of his approach and results. But one cannot help feeling at times that the institution in the early Church by which the oral tradition was passed down was not quite as crystallized as the picture of its Jewish counterpart which emerges from rabbinical literature. Secondly, it seems that the weight of the general thesis has at times forced G. to read certain vague expressions in the light of it with a little more conviction than can really be supported by the passage itself. For example, Gal 1:18 (*historēsai Kēphan*) is a *crux interpretum* which is too summarily handled (p. 298); Acts 15 is treated as a unit, when it is far more likely that the decision about circumcision was an event quite distinct from the decree sent down to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Thirdly, it should be recalled that the rabbinical process itself, as described by G., may date mainly from a slightly later period, from the time after the destruction of the Temple, and that one may legitimately ask therefore whether it was so thoroughly crystallized before A.D. 70. Here there is room for debate. Fourthly, some of G.'s views on the transmission of the stabilized OT written text are rather questionable. Finally, for the sake of readers who are not initiated into the intricacies of references to the rabbinical literature, it would have been well to list somewhere what p, b, M, T, etc. mean.

potheses of investigators. Certain theories of Synoptic research have over the years proved their usefulness and validity; others have long since been interred. Certain elements of the Form-Critical method will always be part of enlightened *NT* study; others will struggle for survival for a while, until the scholarly *coup de grâce* is finally dealt them. One of the extreme elements of that method should now be laid to rest as a result of Gerhardsson's *Memory and Manuscript*.

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