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August 2004

Storytelling and the Gospels

As I understand the point of this conference, we have a week to be together and discuss issues relating to storytelling and the early (and recent) church, and thus the point of our papers is to facilitate those oral discussions. In line with that understanding of this conference, I will use this paper as an opportunity to introduce my work related to oral composition and performance to participants who may not be familiar with it and to suggest some things related to our topic that I have been thinking about and would like to discuss during our time together.

The thing that interests me most the oral performance of gospel stories is the different way that meaning is created in oral communication events compared to the silent reading or even modern communal reading of texts. The beginning point of my thinking about the meaning of oral communication events was my reading of Werner Kelber's *Oral and Written Gospel*, but as I have worked on these issues, it has developed quite a bit.¹ At this point, the clear distinction which the early Kelber made between oral and written communication in early Christianity has been generally abandoned in favor of a more complex view. Most importantly for my own work is the realization that written texts were generally presented as oral communication events in the ancient Mediterranean world.

My research related to storytelling and orality has been focused on the composition and

¹Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983; reprint, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997). For my understanding of the importance of Kelber's work, listen to my encomium of Kelber presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November, 2003.

performance of extended narratives, especially of the Gospel of Mark. In addition I have consistently tried in my exegetical work to take into account the way that the oral performance of gospel narratives would affect the meaning which they conveyed in a first century setting.

The Gospel of Mark as an Oral Composition

The first question I became interested in was whether or not the Gospel of Mark was an oral composition. As a graduate student I developed an interest in Mark, had analyzed its structure, and decided that it was very clearly but very peculiarly organized.² When I read Werner Kelber's *Oral and Written Gospel*, I was struck by how many of the characteristics of oral composition described in his book could be found in the gospel. I also thought that oral composition helped to explain the peculiar organization of episodes in Mark. I spent quite a bit of time reading Kelber's bibliography and trying unsuccessfully to convince my dissertation committee to let me write a dissertation arguing that Mark was an oral composition. There were a number of features of oral narrative technique which I observed in the Gospel.³ In addition to

²This is the same organization presented in Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 114-117.

³None of this material was ever published. During this time I gave one presentation on the subject: "Were There Connected Gospel Narratives in the Oral Tradition?," paper presented at the Chesapeake Bay Regional Society of Biblical Literature/Catholic Biblical Association Meeting, April, 1987. The features I noted were primarily those that have been noted by Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 32-44, *idem* "Mark As Aural Narrative: Structures As Clues To Understanding," *Sewanee Theological Review* 36 (1992): 45-56; *idem*, "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation," in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (E. S. Malbon and E. V. McKnight, eds.; JSNTSup 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 145-63; and P. J. J.

that, there was the question of the scale of narratives that existed in the oral tradition. The early form critics seemed to have rejected the idea of extended oral gospel narratives simply on the basis of their belief that narratives of that scope were impossible to compose or hand on orally. Obviously, the studies of Parry and Lord of the epic singers of the Baltic states, on which Kelber's account of orality was largely based, showed that very long narratives could be composed and reproduced orally.⁴ I found a number additional examples, including prose storytellers.⁵ I also found folklore studies that discussed extended narrative created by splicing shorter stories into a continuous narrative.⁶ By analyzing a fairly typical American folktale, *A Jack and the Giants = Newground*, as told by Maud Long, I argued that oral prose stories were constructed by adding together separate elements that might have independent or prior existence into a continuous narrative much as was the Gospel of Mark.⁷

To some extent the argument was based on the sharp distinction between oral and written compositions championed by Kelber in his early work on orality. In the light of the complex interactions between orality and literacy in the first century world, it seems to me impossible to make a definitive determination whether the Gospel is an oral composition or not. I still believe

Botha, *A Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature: Rethinking the Transmission of Some Traditions about Jesus*, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 304-31.

⁴Everything written by Milman Parry and Albert Lord..

⁵Most notably the Hungarian storytellers studied by Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 106-09. Also Bennison Gray, *The Phenomenon of Literature* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1975), 413.

⁶Richard Chase, *The Jack Tales* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), xi.

⁷Maud Gentry Long, *A Jack and the Giants = Newground*, in *Jack Tales: Told by Mrs. Maud Gentry Long of Hot Springs, N. C. Edited by Duncan Emrich*, Vol. 2, Library of Congress, Division of Music, Recording Laboratory AAFS L48 (1956).

that the Gospel of Mark is a written version of an oral composition. In large part that is because I have not seen in my research examples of written compositions in the ancient Mediterranean world that exhibit such a complex interweaving of episodes into a self-referential whole. In written compositions of the time, episodic material is either linked into an ongoing narrative, as in the *Life of Aesop* and parts of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, arranged topically, as in much of Iamblichus's *Pythagorean Life*, or allowed to be totally episodic without any connection other than the underlying character of the protagonist, as in much of Lucian's *Demonax* and the collections of chreiae much of the *Life of Diogenes* in Diogenes Laertius.

Performance of Extended Narratives

In my book, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, I attempted to reconstruct the expected first century style of oral performance and made some observations about the Gospel of Mark in terms of that reconstructed performance style. The reconstruction is based on the on the similarities among oral reading, oratory, and acting which are described in several sources. It is developed from descriptions of a variety of different types of oral performance including literary readings, oratory, plays, lectures, and sermons. I will summarize the main points of the reconstruction for those who are not familiar with this part of my work and offer some reflection on the significance of the reconstruction for biblical interpretation. Since the evidence for the reconstruction is available in the book, I will not repeat it here.

Oral presentation

First, a work like the Gospel of Mark would have been presented orally even after it was committed to a written text. In part this is because the vast majority of people in the ancient Mediterranean world were illiterate and could only experience narrative aurally, but a the more important reason is the way that people in that culture understood communication. This understanding of the nature of communication is an important part of what Vernon Robbins has labeled scribal culture.⁸ Apart from bureaucratic uses for writing, the written word was largely understood as a representation of an oral communication event rather than an independent method of communication. Oral communication is not simply a matter of transferring words from the mind of one person to that of another. The written word was understood as dead. It was the aspects of communication that were not represented in writing that made oral communication the living word. There are several factors involved in living communication. The first is the actual people involved and the relationship between them. A person=s words cannot be separated from the person him or herself. I interpret oral communication in terms of everything I know about a person and the entire history of our interaction. Secondly, there is the situation involved. Oral communication responds to the situation as it develops and is tailored to the speaker=s reading of the listener=s response. Oral communication constantly adapts, while the written word cannot. Thirdly, even the most one sided oral communication is a two way process. The listener=s response is always an important part of an oral communication event, and the ability to respond is largely absent in written communication. Finally, meaning in oral communication is largely determined by inflection, gesture, and other aspects of the

⁸Vernon K. Robbins, *Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures: A Response*, = Semeia 65 (1994): 75-91.

accompanying non-verbal communication which cannot be represented in writing. Much of the emotional tone of words is lost in writing, and emotion was understood to be a vital part of communication.

The difference between oral and written communication has important implications for the understanding of scripture. Until recently, most modern biblical interpretation assumed that there was some fixed meaning in scripture and that the fixed meaning of passages could be extracted through careful exegesis. The understanding of communication in rhetorical culture makes it clear that there is no one fixed meaning because meaning is situation specific. The symbolic meanings that were such an important part of scriptural interpretation up to the time of the Reformation. Moral, christological, eschatological meanings could always be found for any passage by addressing the passage in a moral, christological, or eschatological context.

Memorization and Oral Recomposition

Second, it is most likely that the written text of the Gospel would have been presented from memory rather than read aloud. Presentation from memory more closely approximated spontaneous communication, which was highly valued, allowed the performer much greater latitude for gesture and movement, and allowed the performer to respond to the audience and situation of the performance. It is clear from the flexible way that stories are retold even when writers are presumed to be referring to a written text, that the specific wording would not have been considered particularly important. The performer would most likely have memorized the general structure of the gospel and filled in the details of the stories and speeches as the performance progressed. While different performers would have been very free in adapting the narrative, it is also possible that a particular performer could maintain a relatively fixed structure

in different performances. School children were taught a method of memorization involving the association of material with a fixed mental image of a building or landscape that would have made this easily possible. I believe that the Gospel of Mark was composed with the aid of this method and that it is reflected in the structure of the gospel. The relatively fixed structure of the gospel which this method allowed made possible the development of more complex meaning than would be possible in more freely recomposed narratives because the performer could develop meaning through cross reference to past or future episodes. Repeated retellings of the narrative would allow for the gradual accumulation of layers of meaning as the performer noticed connections between episodes and levels of meaning made evident in the particular situations of different performances.

These aspects of performance also have important implications for scriptural interpretation. The flexibility of the A_{text} in oral performance undercuts the importance of the specific wording of the narrative embalmed in any particular written or printed version. The printed version is simply one specific instance of the narrative. One might argue for some process of inspiration that makes the written version of the narrative authoritative, but that is problematic if one assumes the modern understanding of scriptural interpretation. In recognition of the flexible meaning of written words in different situations, scholarly biblical interpretation has tended to identify literal meaning with original meaning. The text means what it meant in its original situation. But if in its original situation the written text was understood as a particular instance of a flexible narrative, one cannot insist on both original meaning and fixed text. What was authoritative in the first century was extremely more complicated than that.

The flexibility of the A_{text} and the impossibility of grasping and remembering all the

detail of the performance suggests that the modern method of exegesis, in which great care is given to the specific meaning of each word and nuance of a passage, misrepresents the meaning of the narrative in oral performance. Much of the detail would change from performance to performance, and the meaning of the narrative would be much more impressionistic. I would not advocate abandoning such detailed exegesis, since I think it is the only way to recover meaning by association and meaning in historical context, but it is a means rather than an end in itself. To the extent that meaning is derived from oral performance, detailed historical or literary exegesis is only a preliminary project which prepares one to experience the narrative as a performer or audience member.

I see no way of judging the relative authority of written scriptural text and oral performance of biblical narrative. Certainly one can say that experiencing scripture as written text (including the typical mode of oral reading found in most churches and bible study groups) divorces one from the original experience of the narrative in the first century. Since the experience of performed narrative is always situation specific, however, it is impossible to argue from the authority of the oral narrative experience that the experience of the written or printed text is inherently inferior since that mode of experiencing the narrative is an important part of our own cultural situation.

Not all ancient authors develop meaning through juxtaposition and cross reference to some extent as does Mark, but to some extent that way of creating meaning is inherent in oral composition. This became particularly evident to me when I composed the oral encomium of Werner Kelber which I delivered at the 2003 Society of Biblical Literature. Parry and Lord showed that the performers of oral epic could recompose the epics for each performance by

making use of existing pieces of narrative such as formulaic epithets, type scenes, and a general narrative outline. While I deliberately made use of ancient narratives and other type scenes for comic effect, that process certainly aided in the composition and performance. One only has to remember an association between a part of the narrative and the model to be able to fill in the details in performance. The narrative association of narrative and model associates the two in the performers mind, and to the extent that the audience recognizes the model, it creates the same association in the mind of the audience. Since neither the audience nor the performer remember all the verbal details of an oral performance, it seems very likely that the associations between the narrative and the narrative that served as a pattern is an extremely important part of the communicated meaning. I think this is another reason that the existence of multiple symbolic meanings of scripture was obvious to most intelligent people through Christian history.

Performance and Emotions

Because the ancients understood and appreciated the emotional aspects of communication, first century performance style focussed on emotional as well as cognitive communication. Those aspects of performance that communicated emotion were an important part of the experience. The emotions are experienced by the body as a whole, and as a result it is impossible to communicate emotion as fully in the written word as in oral performance. Performers made use of a wide range of body gesture, facial expression, and vocal inflection. The emotions of various characters would be indicated would have been dramatically represented. Dialog would have been presented in character as part of that representation. The first century speaking style would be considered rather bombastic by twenty-first century American standards, with more yelling and chest pounding than most of us prefer. In part this is

simply a result of the mechanics of communicating to large groups without the aid microphones and jumbotrons. Certainly modern tastes in performance are affected by electronic technology that allows the audience to focus on facial expression and makes softer speech more audible.

It seems to me that it is the emotional aspects of communication that are most easily lost in textual communication and has been very largely ignored in most scholarly exegesis of scripture. Very little scholarly work has looked at the role of emotion in the rhetoric of scripture.⁹ As Rudolf Otto so compellingly argued in *The Idea of the Holy*, emotion is a very important part of religious experience, and thus the full meaning of any religion is lost when emotional aspects of religious experience is lost. While electronic communication does a poor job of replacing many aspects of oral performance, movie and video technology may actually have an edge in shaping emotions, since they can incorporate other emotion laden media such as music into dramatic performance.

The Performer and the Audience

The interaction between the performer and the audience is an essential part of oral communication. In *Performing the Gospel* I focussed in particular on two aspects of this relationship. The first I called audience inclusive dialog. The second is audience response.

Audience inclusive dialog refers to one aspect of the tendency for dramatically enacted oral narrative to collapse the distance between the world of the story and the world of the audience. The ideal or rhetorical narration in the ancient world was to make the audience feel as if they were present at the actual event. When this is successful there is a partial suspension of

⁹One significant exception is Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney, eds., *Paul and Pathos* (SBLSymS 16; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

disbelief. Jesus, the disciples, Pilate, and the Pharisees all become to some extent present in the performance. One of the results of this is that Jesus (and other characters) address the audience directly from out of the story. I believe that this effect is even more strong in oral storytelling than in drama, since the storyteller is always addressing the audience rather than another actor on the stage, so that dialogue is always experienced by the audience as to some extent addressed to themselves as well as to the characters in the story.

I think this ability of storytelling to directly involve the audience in the world of the story is the thing that most contributes to the power of biblical storytelling. Storytelling makes a connection between scriptural events and our own lives. We can directly interact with the narrative Jesus and connect our own lives with scriptural time. This happens to some extent with the written word but not nearly so deeply as through storytelling.

The final aspect of an oral communication event that is entirely lost in print and most electronic media is the role of the audience in creating meaning. Ancient audiences were highly involved in most performances and reacted frequently with applause or derision.¹⁰ They seem to have participated in ways similar to many African American congregations today except more so. Because this reaction helps to form the meaning of the communication event as a whole, audience reaction should not be thought of as something added to the story but as part of it. Active audience reaction also reinforces the emotional impact of the story since emotion cannot be separated from bodily activity. The active participation of the audience also makes the story more of a community event since we experience not only the story but also the response of

¹⁰In addition to the evidence presented in *Proclaiming the Gospel*, see also my *Applause and Applause Lines in the Gospel of Mark*, in *Rhetorics and Hermeneutics: Wilhelm Wuellner and His Influence* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 9; J. D. Hester and

others to it. We often find ourselves participating in a shared response. We may also find that the story divides the community at times. We may find that the response of others points us to meanings that we did not form on our own. Audience response reinforces the feeling of the story as something which I own as part of a community and reinforces the experience of the story as part of my own story.

Formal and Informal Storytelling

My work has concentrated almost exclusively on extended narrative rather than the short narratives and sayings that form and redaction critics have been so fond of analyzing. It seems to me that Holly Hearon's account of the Mary Magdalene traditions is a superb description of how these shorter narratives might have functioned in actual first century settings.¹¹ Her reconstruction is an excellent synthesis of folklore scholarship, the relatively few sources we have describing storytelling in the ancient Mediterranean world, and early Christian sources. Her work has led me to reflect some more on the variety of performance styles and their functions.

Holly proposes one possible situation for the telling of the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, in which a small group of women are gathered in a courtyard and the story is told as part of a conversation about the participation of women in worship in their local church.¹² In a setting such as this, which seems to be a very reasonable proposal, it is hard for me to imagine that the story would have been presented in the same manner as I have proposed for extended narratives such as the gospel. Here the story is part of a conversation, and the sort of bombastic and emotional performance style I have proposed for the gospel would be out of place.

The sort of performance that I have reconstructed in *Proclaiming the Gospel* was certainly not the only style of performance available for early Christian storytellers. While there is not much evidence for the way that shorter narratives would have been presented, it seems to me very likely when someone told a short story in an informal situation both the performance style and the audience response would be much more subdued. I would propose that

¹¹Holly E. Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

¹²Hearon, *Mary Magdalene*, 91.

performance styles would form a continuum between what might be called informal and formal styles.¹³ The pure form of the informal style would be a short story as part of a conversation between two people in which the purpose of telling the story is to support a point being made in the conversation. Richard Bauman defines performance as:

Ψa mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content.¹⁴

According to this definition the pure informal style would be a nonperformance since the storytelling would not be intended to call attention to itself as storytelling. Much of the evidence for the performance style I reconstructed in *Proclaiming the Gospel* comes from the opposite extreme of self-consciously artistic or rhetorical performance. Children were taught reading as a type of self-conscious performance since they memorized and recited the texts they read and received praise or blame from the teacher and their peers on the basis of their performance.

While I have not gathered evidence in any detail, it seems to follow from the folklore studies with which I am familiar that the nature of any particular performance would result from

¹³I should note that I am using formal and informal here in a different sense than Holly does in *Mary Magdalene*, p. 23, where the distinction is between professional and informal (or unpaid) storytellers.

¹⁴Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

an interaction between the performer, the size and nature of the audience, the situation of the performance, and the nature of the particular narrative. I would expect the same performer to adapt his or her performance style to the situation. When Holly=s storyteller repeats the Mary Magdalene story in a church assembly as part of an argument for not excluding women from participation in such assemblies, I would expect the performance to move closer to the formal performance style. The larger audience would be one factor. The use of the story as part of a rhetorical argument would be another. While the woman that formed the audience for Holly=s storyteller in the courtyard was sympathetic to the idea of women participating actively in church assemblies, the assembly itself contains people with various positions on that point. Thus the emotional impact of the story in the rhetorical situation would be more important. It would be important to tell the story in a way that carried more weight. More detail and dialog would add to its rhetorical weight. It would be important for Jesus= direction to Mary to be presented in direct address in order to deepen the involvement of audience in the story and lend the weight of Jesus= own words to the argument. The audience in the assembly is also likely to be much more vocal in its response than was the individual woman in the courtyard situation.

Augustus is said to have employed storytellers to provide entertainment at his banquets and also to help him to relax and fall asleep at night when he had trouble sleeping.¹⁵ Probably the same storytellers performed both functions, but the different situations would call for different performance styles. One would expect that when the storyteller was called upon to provide an aid to sleep that he or she would avoid emotionalism and loud delivery and that Augustus=s reaction would be subdued as well. When the same storytellers performed at

¹⁵Suetonius, *Augustus* 74, 78.

Augustus=s feasts I would expect a performance more in line with that proposed in *Proclaiming the Gospel*. Certainly Augustus would not be pleased if the audience fell asleep.

Various aspects of the nature of the story itself would also affect the performance style. Longer narratives just by their extent have to be presented in the style of self-conscious performance. The longer narrative exists for itself rather than part of a conversation or an argument. It is obviously a performance and the audience would expect it to be presented as such. The emotional variety and intensity of the full fledged performance style is much more important in longer narrative for maintaining the audience=s interest. The content of the story would also affect the performance style. Even a short story involving conflict would push the performance toward the emotional full performance style. The use of direct discourse in a short story would also push the style toward the formal performance style, since even in very informal situations, direct discourse tends to be presented in character and may be accompanied by emotional inflection, voice impersonation, and gesture.

Storytelling style may also have been gender specific to some extent. Much of the material from which I reconstructed the ancient performance style comes from rhetoric or the stage. Formal rhetorical performance was almost exclusively a male domain. Quintilian mentions only one female rhetorician, and she is mentioned because she is so unusual.¹⁶ Tragic and comic acting was also an exclusively male domain, and male actors played both male and female roles. There were female actors in ancient mime, which was a form of often slapstick comedy rather than and not a silent performance as in modern mime. All actors, however, were considered disreputable. While I know of no direct evidence that this is the case, it seems likely

¹⁶Quintilian, Inst. 1.1.6.

that it was considered unseemly for women to perform in the full performance mode. It may have violated cultural conventions about women=s modesty, and since the full performance mode was associated in rhetoric with the exercise of power over the audience, anyone who understood the exercise of power as an exclusively male domain might have resisted women narrating in that style.

Story and Ritual

Story and ritual are interconnected. Formal storytelling, as I have defined it, is always a form of ritual broadly defined. Story is often an important part of ritual actions. In many cases, story gives meaning to ritual. Clearly, this is so for early Christians in regard to the Lord=s Supper. Paul repeats the story of the last supper as a tradition in a form similar to that found in the synoptic gospels.¹⁷ The meaning of the Lord=s Supper as partaking in the body and blood of Christ is determined by the story. Paul goes on to say that by partaking in the bread and wine of the Lord=s Supper, Christians are proclaiming the death of Jesus until he comes. Thus for Paul the meaning of the Lord=s Supper is also connected with the story of the death of Jesus and with the story of his expected return.

Greater depth of meaning is created through the layering of stories. Although not all scholars agree, the feeding miracles in the synoptic gospels seem to be related to the Lord=s supper in the distribution of the bread. John makes the connection explicit in his gospel as well as the connection between the feeding story and story of the exodus which was already implicit in the synoptic feedings. Since God=s care for God=s people is an important aspect both the Exodus story of the provision of manna and quail and the gospel feeding stories, the meaning of

¹⁷1 Cor 11.23-25; Mark 14.22-25; Mt 26. 26-29; Lk 22.14-20.

the Lord's Supper is expanded to include God's care. The mysterious hidden meaning of the Lord's Supper is made into narrative in different ways by Mark and John.

I believe that the Gospel of Mark was composed as a baptismal narrative. There is no way to prove that conclusively, but many aspects of the Gospel make it well suited for such use. Paul interprets baptism as dying with Christ in a passage that suggests that was the ordinarily accepted meaning. Mark's single-minded concentration on the cross would be very appropriate for such a narrative. Since the rhetoricians taught that the purpose of the opening passage of a speech was to connect with the audience and make clear the importance of one's subject, opening the gospel with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus would be most appropriate for a baptismal situation. The first direct discourse in the gospel concerns baptism and the audience is promised that it will receive from Jesus baptism in the Holy Spirit. Mark's gospel contains very little teaching, but two of the three most prominent teaching sections (the parable discourse, the eschatological discourse, and the discipleship discourse following Peter's confession) seem ideally suited for baptismal instruction. The parable discourse centers around meanings hidden below the surface available only to insiders, while the discipleship discourse is addressed to those deciding to follow Jesus, stresses the cost as well as the reward of discipleship, and casts discipleship in terms of Jesus' own death which is reenacted in baptism. I believe that the gospel is also intended to create in the audience a liminal state in which the psychological effect

of baptism would have the greatest power.¹⁸

Q as Story

¹⁸This last point is argued in *ACreating the Kingdom: The Performance of Mark as Revelatory Event*, in *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God* (Festschrift for Robert C. Tannehill; S. Ringe and H. C. P. Kim, eds.; Harrisburg, Pa.: T & T Clark International, 2004), 194-212.

In New Testament scholarship a sharp distinction is usually drawn between narrative and sayings gospels.¹⁹ In the arena of oral studies, Werner Kelber has consistently championed this distinction, seeing it as reflecting two different modes of relating to Jesus. According to Kelber, sayings gospels are closer to the oral prophetic mode of speaking in the name of a Jesus who was understood as present in the church, while the narrative gospels anchor Jesus in the past and thus undercut the prophetic mode of continuing communication and revelation from the risen Jesus. For Kelber Q is much closer to the oral style of communication while Mark is much closer to the written.²⁰

Both texts would have been presented orally. Until recently I believed, however, that they would have been presented in very different ways. Mark would have been presented as narrative performance as described in my book, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, while Q would have been presented in the manner of a school book, with the teacher reading the text piece by piece and expounding upon each piece before going on to the next.²¹ While I do still think that the

¹⁹This is a commonplace of Q studies. Perhaps the most influential essay stressing the distinction is James M. Robinson, *ALOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q*, in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 71-112.

²⁰Werner H. Kelber, *Oral and Written Gospel*, 184-226; *idem*, *ASayings Collection and Sayings Gospel: A Study in the Clustering Management of Knowledge*, in *Language & Communication* 9 (1989): 213-224, *idem*, *AFrom Aphorism to Sayings Gospel and from Parable to Narrative Gospel*, in *Forum* 1 (1985): 23-30.

²¹The best description of the school style of performance is Loveday Alexander, *APaul and the Hellenistic Schools: The Evidence of Galen*, in *Paul and His Hellenistic Context*. Edited by T. Engberg-Pedersen. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 60-83. I see the four basic ways that books were used in the ancient as (1) performance pieces, (2) school books, (3) material for private study, in which the material was learned for use in one's own oral performances, and (4) models for the construction of one's own oral performances.

Gospel of Thomas would have been treated in that way, since the hidden meanings mentioned in the first saying could only be presented through oral exposition, my recent work with Q makes me believe that Q may well have been a performance piece.

After working with a reconstructed text of Q for a paper on the oral performance of Q to be presented at the upcoming meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, however, I have decided that Q also works very well as an oral performance in the *Proclaiming the Gospel* style. Recent scholarship on Q has demonstrated that it is made up of coherent discourses rather than isolated sayings. The discourses contain a lot of emotional material of various sorts, and the different discourses provide various emotional tones that work well when performing the piece as a whole. The effect of the whole reminds me of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, in which Xenophon provides a character sketch of Socrates through a series of dialogs between Socrates and various others, though Q is obviously done in a much simpler style and uses discourses rather than dialogs to sketch the character and teaching of Jesus. There is even a certain amount of narrative development, starting with the prophetic proclamation of John and the temptation of Jesus, continuing with a summary of Jesus' teaching, directions on discipleship and church conduct, condemnation of Jesus' opponents, and teaching about the future time. The narrative aspect of the story is rather weak, but it certainly works as a continuous oral performance.