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Orality as the Key to Understanding Apostolic Proclamation in the Epistles

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ORALITY AS THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION IN THE EPISTLES

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A dissertation presented to the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of Exegetical Theology, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology.

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by

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To Sara, Anne, and Benjamin

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<div align="center">* * *</div>

Readers from the modern academy may be surprised that the present author has abided by traditional conventions of language usage, retaining masculine pronouns for non-specific, impersonal references. There is meaning in this too—but the meaning must be made explicit lest it be misunderstood. Chapter one argues that all language is shorthand. The "inclusive language" movement fails to grasp this fundamental linguistic truth. Her ladyship Margaret Thatcher once referred to the rule in which one is schooled, that "'He' embraces 'she.'" It is with this understanding that this study proceeds, that linguistic shorthand is by nature already "inclusive."

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PREFACE

How then shall they call upon the One in whom they have not believed?
And how shall they believe in the One whom they have not heard?
And how shall they hear apart from a preacher?
And how shall they preach if they are not sent?
Just as it stands written: "How beautiful are the feet of those preaching a Gospel of good things."
However, not all heeded the Gospel.
For Isaiah says: "Lord, who believed what we put forth to be heard?"
For faith is from hearing, and hearing through the message of Christ.

(Rom. 10:14-17)

St. Paul, it is generally acknowledged, was schooled in the finest rhetorical tradition of the Graeco-Roman world. As a student of Gamaliel, he also inherited a rich rabbinic legacy of immersion in the Word of God. His writing unfolds according to the ways which were put into him. In the same way, the modern reader escapes his own schooling only with great difficulty. St. Paul's manner is utterly foreign to us. How often is this grand sequence from Romans chapter ten scanned silently in the privy confines of the parlor or study, the eye alone with the ink, the rustle of onionskin the only whisper to intrude upon the moment?

Yet how gracefully St. Paul mates sound with script. What Isaiah writes [γέγραπται] is also what he says [λέγει]. What Isaiah writes of is preaching [κηρύσσω], a proclamation of Gospel [εὐαγγελίζομαι], a message of good things meant to be heard [ἀκοή]. The Gospel which Isaiah proclaimed is put forth and received in the same way as the message [ῥῆμα] of Christ: through ears, from hearing [ἐξ ἀκοῆς], which hearing may only occur where there is speaking. The ear is the organ of the faith of which he speaks. His vocabulary carries his message: ἐπικαλέω, ἀκούω, κηρύσσω, εὐαγγελίζομαι, ὑπακούω, ἀκοή, ῥῆμα. It is all too easy to remove the ear and the mouth from these verbs: ἀκοή becomes "report"; ἐπικαλέω is interiorized as "pray" or "believe"; εὐαγγελίζομαι simply "brings good tidings" or "evangelizes"; ὑπακούω becomes an activity of the will, "obey"; and ῥῆμα takes on the ambiguity of "word."

And so the word has fallen silent. Is it not ironic that in the church of the Reformation—that moment when the Word proclaimed renewal, that church devoted to clear

preaching and vernacular proclamation—the Word could seem confined to pulp and paper? In a valuable comparative study of "sacred writ" in world religions, William Graham notes this as a peculiar emphasis of the modern Christian, especially the Protestant:

> "the word of God" no longer reflects so much an aural sense of hearing God speak as it does a fixing or reification of "word" into a synonym for "Bible" in the sense of holy writ. ... Such reification masks in many instances the degree to which for Christians the "word" is theologically and functionally not a written text, but the living, spoken message of the Gospel. The identity of this vocal message of the Gospel preaching with the vocal word of God that spoke from the pages of scripture was still vivid for Christians of earlier, more aurally oriented ages.[1]

Graham's **functional** definition of "word of God" exposes a distinct shift in meaning. Although one would hesitate to assert that the Word is "not a written text," Graham's investigation highlights how it is **more than** written. The contrast is not between Word as Bible and Word as not-Bible, but rather between a silent, textbook Word, and a written Word which has a living voice; it is between a Word received primarily by the eye with all its modern training, and the Word received through the ear, from preacher to hearer, in the way of Romans ten.

If what is said in introductory hermeneutics is true—that the first cross-cultural move is the move from our world into the world of the text[2]—then this cultural chasm must be bridged. Father Walter Ong, a key figure in bringing orality research to illumine biblical studies, pictures precisely the dilemma facing modern, Western man:

> Although its founding fathers were steeped in a still strong oral and oratorical tradition, the United States was founded in literacy .... Most Americans, even those who write miserably, are so stubbornly literate in principle as to believe that what makes a word a real word is not its meaningful use in vocal exchange but rather its presence on the pages of a dictionary. We are so literate in ideology that we think writing comes naturally. We have to remind ourselves from time to time that writing is completely and irremediably

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[1]William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 63.

[2]See Dean O. Wenthe, "Entrance into the Biblical World: The First and Crucial Cross-Cultural Move," *Logia* 4.2 (Easter/April 1995): 19-24. Both traditional and modern hermeneutics texts deal with this problem. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, repr. 1974), 232: "It is not an easy task for one to disengage himself from the living present, and thus transport himself into a past age." The same task today is spoken of as fusing "two horizons." See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

artificial and that what you find in a dictionary are not real words but coded marks for voicing real words, exteriorly or in imagination.[3]

Ong certainly presents a strong bias against writing which remains to be proved. But it prompts the questions of the day: Can we cross this chasm and learn to hear the Scriptures as God's living message? Does the modern image of the critical scholar laboring at his desk in the privacy of a study carrel, scrutinizing each vocable, fanning pages forwards and backwards, dissecting the text with Gospel synopsis and concordance—does this image in any way correspond to what the scriptural writers expected of their "readers"? Or, on a more popular level, is placing Bibles into hotel rooms τὸν λόγον κηρύσσειν as the scriptural world understood it?

To focus upon the academic context, does not the modern historical-critical (or even the traditional historical-grammatical) method render the text silent, dulling its character as **proclaimed** Word of God, with Christ the λόγος at its heart? Ong challenges this academic establishment by asking: "If the ecclesial dialogue through the living Word of God in Jesus Christ is the essential element in Christian hermeneutic, how is the exegesis furnished out of biblical scholarship to be appropriated into this hermeneutic?"[4] That is, has the silence of academia rendered it irrelevant to the church?

Though today the Word may have fallen silent, at the beginning it was not so. What is the oral milieu from which the Scriptures arose? For this is also a question of scriptural origins, as Ong phrases it: "How far is the Bible to be regarded as actually composed in writing and how far as a record of speech insofar as it is considered God's revelation to mankind?"[5] Within this basic question, however, lurk hidden dangers. Can one accent the lively, vocal character of Scripture, as proclamation recorded that it might continue to proclaim, without reducing

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[3]Walter J. Ong, "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," in Winfred Bryan, ed., *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 129.

[4]Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 445.

[5]Ibid., 444.

Scripture to a simple record of proclamation—a typically Barthian perspective on Scripture and revelation? Ong often missteps in this direction.

There is another danger, albeit less serious, of romanticizing the past. Thus warns Werner Kelber:

> ... insofar as interest in speech and discourse gives the appearance of being inspired by a longing for former times, orality-literacy studies could likewise arouse the suspicion of reinventing a romanticized past. Is not the urge to recover the spoken word but one more example in the unending history of human cravings for original simplicity and pristine originality?[6]

We are not practicing reverse ethnocentrism, substituting an ancient culture for our own, as if orality were superior to textuality.[7] One strives to honor and recognize the culture in which the text arose in order to understand it better. But the Gospel is also at stake. For if "faith is from hearing" as St. Paul says, then we dare not silence the Word.

There is, of course, a certain irony in addressing the lively, oral character of Scripture in the antiseptic environment of the academic dissertation. The paradoxical inadequacy of this pursuit, however, is paralleled by our inability to study the original oral production of a Scripture which necessarily survives only in written form. Eric Havelock, a pioneer in the field, recognizes this dilemma:

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[6]Werner Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words: The Apotheosis and Narrative Displacement of the Logos," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58.1 (Spring 1990): 70. It is Jacques Derrida who criticizes "logocentrism"—the privileging of voice over writing, the philosophy of "presence." Of course, in "deconstructing" this position, he simply elevates text in place of *logos*.

[7]A feature of post-modern deconstructionism is the assertion that it is all about power. Joanna Dewey, "Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions," *Semeia* 65 (1994): 37-65, argues that the earliest age of the church was egalitarian and oral. Textuality was thus imposed by the literate male segment of the church in order to subjugate the largely illiterate female component. Vernon K. Robbins, "Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures." *Semeia* 65 (1994): 75-91, correctly counters that, "This is a form of romanticism that inverts the common tradition that nonliterate people are unintelligent" (77). That is, she glorifies the oral age as superior to the literate. "Dewey's statement presupposes that oral leaders are kinder and better people than literate people. In actual practics, 'oral leaders' can be exceptionally hierarchical and some 'literate' leaders are exceptionally egalitarian" (77).

There is also the awkward fact—awkward for oralists—that a thesis covering Greek orality and the intimate partnership in which it became involved with literacy can be tested for the most part (though not exclusively) only by a scrutiny of written texts.[8]

Yet the very nature of Scripture is that it is written. We are not dealing with a word which was only spoken once, which by nature quickly fades from existence. Rather, the Scriptures live at the intersection of oral and written, and it is this very interaction of speech and text which we are concerned to address. Father Ong speaks of this moment as an "interface": "The place where independent systems meet and act on one another or communicate with one another is called an interface."[9]

Oddly enough, the interface has been studied, even by biblical scholars, for more than a century. Perhaps it was a response to the supreme bookishness of the Victorian era; in biblical studies it was certainly a response to the anachronistic approach of Synoptic source criticism, dependent as it was on documentary theories. Form criticism owes a great deal to the early work of folklore traditionalists, postulating as it did an oral layer behind the written sources. Yet biblical interpretation in general has taken little notice of how the oral discipline has developed. Ong comments:

> Everyone in or near scriptural studies today is in some way aware that the Bible in great part comes out of an oral tradition, and in various ways, although scriptural scholarship as a whole, so far as I can see, still shows little awareness in depth of the psychodynamics of an oral culture as these psychodynamics have been worked out by Albert B. Lord and Eric A. Havelock and some others, so that the definitive breakthrough in scriptural studies, I believe, is yet to come.[10]

Certainly form criticism did little to address the oral character of the text itself as it now stands, being content to theorize concerning oral origins.

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[8]Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 123.

[9]Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 334.

[10]Ibid., 231.

For a long time matters simply got worse. Redaction criticism and its modern successors in the literary field, while they give more credit to the text and the author, have at the same time mired the academy again into a modern mud of sources and manipulation. There is promise in certain new paths—rhetoric, reader-response, speech-act theory, methods which we will note briefly in the first chapter. But finally we must move out of the "academy" and into the church. For the orality of Scripture is not just about its origin but also about its use and purpose. The Scriptures are a liturgical piece. They belong not on the desk but in the lectern. They were written to be proclaimed. Thus, in a sense, this is a "canonical" study—yet undertaken with more ecclesiastical seriousness than that fledgling field commonly musters.

The Bible is a church book. St. Paul proclaims that it is "useful" for many pastoral ends, all of which are taken up by "the man of God" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Such considerations raise many questions. How were the Scriptures produced, published, disseminated, used? If they were spoken into script in order that the voice might again speak them into the ear, how might this recognition affect our method of interpretation? Do they indeed mean or function differently when they are heard? Might there soon be a method known as "oral criticism"? Or would it be preposterously self-contradictory to turn the results of oral research into another method to be wielded in the scholar's silent study? What impact will these results have on the valuation of the Scriptures and their reading in the liturgy? What is the purpose of this reading in an age when everyone can read the Scriptures at home? How does the living voice of the Scriptures relate to the institution and mandate of the Office of the Holy Ministry? These persistent questions, we believe, give urgency to the present study.

CHAPTER 1

BEYOND THE SEMANTICS OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

*For the Word of God is **living** and **powerful** and sharper than any two-edged sword,*
and piercing through as far as the separation of soul and spirit,
both joint and marrow,
and able to judge the thoughts and reflections of the heart.   *(Heb. 4:12)*

Introduction: Pragmatics

Orality research promises to produce more than just another tool, more than just another lexicon or grammar. Such volumes present themselves as concrete shorthand for two aspects of conventional semantics, the science of discovering the meaning of a text. What, on the one hand, is often itself called "semantics," could more precisely be called "lexical semantics": the way in which each **vocable** brings semantic baggage to the text. For a word carries a definite range of possible meanings from its history and environment (diachronic and synchronic considerations), which are narrowed in the context of the text to convey meaning. "Syntax," on the other hand, is the way in which the **relationship** of the meanings of the vocables one to another in the text conveys meaning, as such relationships are expressed by word order, morphology (conjugation and inflection), and so forth. That is, the way meaningful vocables are put together (συντάσσω) itself conveys meaning.

But there is more to a text than just lexical and syntactical semantics. The meaning or significance of the text is also caught up in what the text **does**, in its **pragmatics**. In a sense pragmatics is still a part of semantics, since we are still concerned with **meaning** as it arises from words. We might try to clarify by restricting semantics to the study of the "bare information" conveyed by the text, and defining pragmatics as "the issue of the **function** of a discourse as a

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whole—that finally **a speaker/writer wants actually to accomplish things with words.**"[1] Yet

even this aspect of pragmatics is dealing with the conveyance of information—the information is

simply given by non-linguistic, or at least non-lexical signifiers.[2] Pragmatics thus encompasses

more than just what is known as "speech-act theory" (see below, p. 20). One might include under

pragmatics, broadly speaking, also the creation, delivery, reception, audience, use, connotation,

implication, and interpretation of a text, and so on, many of which include an oral factor. In each

pragmatic aspect, meaning is conveyed (or misconstrued). It is precisely the point that this

"makes everything semantics/semiotics, in the end!"[3] In other words, pragmatics is concerned

with the meaning of texts, and thus is a legitimate and necessary part of exegesis.

Perhaps it will be more helpful to define these terms according to the usage of modern

linguists. Robert Fowler draws on the Saussurian terminology of linguistic "signs":

> Invoking the common linguistic terminology of *syntactics* ("The relations holding among signs"), *semantics* ("the relations between signs and their referents"), and *pragmatics* ("the relations between signs and their human users"), we would have to say that modern scholarship has approached the Bible with semantic concerns foremost.[4]

Nevertheless, this too falls short. He fails, for one thing, to distinguish between the "concept

signified" by a sign (traditionally called "meaning"), and the "referent" (which may or may not

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[1] James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 277-78. Emphasis original. (Bold-face type is a print-based society's attempt to recover the immediacy of oral communication.)

[2] At this point the term "semiotics" could be introduced, which refers to non-linguistic signifiers of meaning, such as gestures, clothing, environment, etc., all of which contribute to the understanding of spoken language. Yet, pragmatics overlaps even semantics in the narrow sense, for in the absence of an authoritative performance of the text, the pragmatic force must be deduced from the words in context.

[3] Voelz, 280. See also Voelz, 319: "The actual reading experience is itself meaningful, i.e., a conveyor of meaning. More accurately put, **the very experience one has while reading**—which is itself a reaction to the meaning one perceives—**can itself be read as a signifier and interpreted for its meaning.**" Emphasis original. Thus, reader-response criticism (see below) is also concerned with meaning.

[4] Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 52-53. Emphasis original. Fowler traces these definitions to Charles Morris and Charles Peirce.

be in the real world).[5] Furthermore, these definitions lack the crucial element of **meaning**. **Syntax** is the way in which the grammatical relationship between signs or concepts signified conveys meaning. **Semantics** is the way in which signs point to concepts signified and thus give meaning. And **pragmatics** is the way meaning is conveyed by the relationship of signs and concepts signified to their speaker/author and hearer/reader. Hence, meaning is conveyed by all elements of communication.[6]

Post-Modern interpretation recognizes pragmatic issues at many points. Within these, orality is not really another theory but an oft little acknowledged component of all the others. What pragmatic theories hold in common is a broader understanding of the act of interpretation itself, the recognition that **meaning is conveyed by more than just the text itself**. Interpretation occurs at every point of contact between the text and people: in production, distribution, proclaiming, and receiving.

Put another way, a text is not simply an entity in and of itself, an object for examination, or a neat package in which **meaning** is **contained**. For one thing, as Werner Kelber

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[5]Consider the standard semiotic triangle:
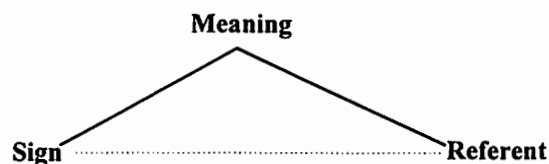
See Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster, *Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 83-84, where they refer back to Umberto Eco (1977). The line between sign and referent is dotted to indicate that one must move indirectly from sign to meaning before finding the referent. Voelz, 96, uses the more precise terminology of "Signifier" and "Conceptual Signified" in place of "sign" and "meaning." Voelz notes that Ogden and Richards (1945) spoke of "symbol" and "sense."

[6]Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49.3 (1987): 448, suggests that his field takes exegesis "beyond" semantics: "Rhetorical criticism of literature takes the exegetes of biblical literature beyond the study of the theological or ethical meanings of the text to something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics."

reminds us, the text itself is already an **interpretation** of something else. Working from the two-source hypothesis, he writes:

> Here we can see how a narrative [Mark] that had already come into existence by virtue of reinterpretation was itself destined to engender more interpretation. When viewed from the perspective of tradition history, therefore, Matthew and Luke are interpretations of the interpretation (=Mark) of an interpretation (=sayings gospel).[7]

One could add also that the "sayings" gospels—whatever they may have been—were themselves interpretations of the words and life of Jesus. Thus, the reader, hearer, or exegete who approaches the Gospel text adds his interpretation to a long line of predecessors.

In a significant study on the connection between media and hermeneutics, Thomas Boomershine notes in his own words the shift "beyond the semantics of the written word" in modern criticism:

> The collapse of Biblical theology as a strong and viable hermeneutic, the emergence of narrative theology and literary critical methods of exegesis, the impact of semiotics and deconstruction, the development of social science methods of analysis—all are connected by a common epistemological thread which moves away from the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal to the phenomena of sense experience itself. In electronic media and its cultures, what is known is what is seen and heard.[8]

Extremely text-oriented methodologies of the past often used the text as pre-text, something which had to be reformulated into propositional language, or, as in the case of historical criticism, as something which must be overcome to reach the level of truth behind the text.[9] The medium shift beyond print has drawn attention to the phenomena of the biblical narrative, to the involvement of all the senses in its proclamation, and to the meaning which is conveyed by the **entire** experience of its reception.

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[7]Kelber, 119.

[8]Thomas E. Boomershine, "Biblical Megatrends: Towards a Paradigm for the Interpretation of the Bible in Electronic Media," in Kent Harold Richards, ed., *Society for Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 150. The last phrase, "what is known is what is seen and heard," is reminiscent of 1 John 1, whose epistemology is founded upon μαρτυρία "witness," by ear, eye, and hand.

[9]In chapter two we will demonstrate how such perspectives arose with the advent of literacy and more particularly print, and perhaps as a consequence of both.

This first chapter is not at all intended to be a comprehensive treatment of the methods under consideration. Rather, we wish in what follows to expose the explicit or unstated oral presuppositions of these fields in order to demonstrate how orality research can impact upon their work, and can also learn from them.

Receptor-Oriented Communication Theory

The autonomy and objectivity of the text has been one of the casualties of the post-modern era.[10] While the author and his world was the concern of classic higher criticism and redaction criticism, and the text the focus of literary criticism and structuralism under the influence of New Criticism, recent times have shifted the focus onto the reader. A healthy concern for all three is reflected in Bernard Lategan's "triptych":[11]
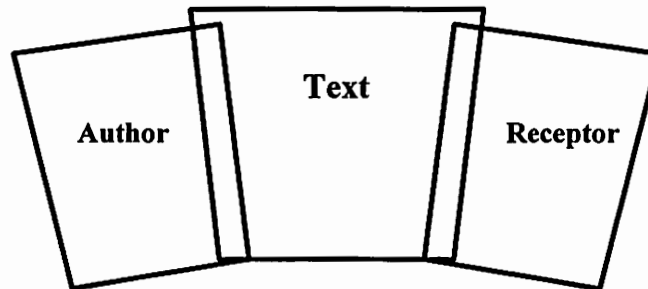
The text is the doorway into the process of communication between the author and the receiver. How this communication occurs is a question complicated by the oral problem. What sort of

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[10]Voelz, 15 n. 7: "Post-modernism is characterized by increasing **distrust of reason** and its ability to achieve understanding; **lack of belief in objectivity** as a possible stance with which to achieve understanding, so that all attempts at understanding are perspectival; **disbelief in the possibility of comprehensive explanation** of anything and everything in life, so that all explanation is partial; and **loss of faith in the notion of 'progress,'** including the loss of belief in the inevitability of progress."

[11]Adapted by Voelz, 19, from Bernard C. Lategan, "Current Issues in the Hermeneutical Debate," *Neotestamentica* 18 (1984): 3. Not surprisingly, ancient Greek rhetoric spoke of the same three factors in the communication equation (which emphasizes the oral nature of the triptych): *ethos*, the character of the speaker; *logos*, the persuasive force of the speech as such; and *pathos*, the effect on the audience. See Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 36, among others.

author is this? What sort of receptor is this? A reader? A hearer? What impact do the answers to these questions have on the "text"?

"New Criticism," which arose in the 1940s, perceived that the historical preoccupation of traditional literary criticism had silenced the text, bypassed it, manipulated it as a mere stepping stone to the greater treasure behind. New Critics labeled this preoccupation with the left panel of the triptych the "Intentional Fallacy." Yet silencing the author—and with it, history—is as grave an offense as silencing the text. Victor Paul Furnish laments this loss:

> What Isaac Stern once said about playing a Bach violin concerto also applies to understanding Paul and his letters. Various interpretations, he said, can be called "right"; but equally, many interpretations have to be called "wrong." No reading of a text, whether from Bach or from Paul, that neglects its historicality—that is heedless of its origins, genre, form, structure, intentions, however imperfectly these may be discerned—can be credibly called an *interpretation* of that text.[12]

At the same time, he levels the equal and opposite criticism at the merely historical reading:

> Of course, it is no less a confiscation of the Pauline texts when they are approached only as artifacts to be catalogued, described, explained, and then put in their place on the shelf. No reading of Paul's letter is genuinely historical unless the interpreter is in dialogue with the texts, attentive to their claims on their terms, whether or not those are judged to be acceptable. This is especially clear in the case of Paul, who through his letters sought to command the hearing that he hoped he would have if present in person ... . Perhaps the musical analogy can be pushed a bit farther. A musicologist can describe and explain a Bach concerto, and catalog it, and might be able to help a violinist understand some of the interpretive options. But until that concerto is actually performed, the score and its composer remain uninterpreted and unheard.[13]

Furnish thus claims that historical criticism, in silencing the text, has been false to history. The text in historical reality is to be performed, and any legitimate interpretation must be a performance.

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[12]Victor Paul Furnish, "On Putting Paul in His Place," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113.1 (Spring 1994): 13.

[13]Ibid., 13.

But New Criticism also closed the right panel in which this performance resides. The dawn of the era of New Criticism is marked by the classic essay of Beardsley and Wimsatt on the "Affective Fallacy":

> We believe ourselves to be exploring two roads [i.e., the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy] which have seemed to offer convenient detours around the acknowledged and usually feared obstacles to objective criticism. ... The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*), a special case of epistemological skepticism, ... It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome ... is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.[14]

It is precisely this arrogant claim by New Criticism to scientific rigor in such a field as poetry which encouraged the revival of pragmatic interests such as reader-response criticism. For such objectivism is not only fictional (since no objective interpretations can be made); it is also inappropriate to the subject matter. The effect of the poem on the reader is precisely the point!

In other terms, there has been a steady narrowing of linguistic **reference**.[15] In the strongly literate age of the Reformation era, the text was simply thought to correspond directly to reality. Historical criticism, by contrast, looked for the reality hidden **behind** the text. In reaction to this devaluation of the text, moderns have declined altogether the historical question. Werner Kelber identifies in this a steady trajectory driven by a print-oriented world:

> Centuries of interiorization of typographical consciousness gave birth to the Saussurian principle of integrity of language whereby meaning is figured as relations within language and not as reference to something outside of it. Both the Russian formalism and the so-called New Criticism, while originating independently, epitomized typography in advocating the transauthorial autonomy of texts.[16]

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[14]Quoted by Michael Vander Weele, "Reader-Response Theories," in *Contemporary Literary Theory: A Christian Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 132. Emphasis is Vander Weele's.

[15]Despite popular misconception, reader-response theory is fundamentally concerned with the relationship of text to reality. This problem is the subject of the four essays by Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster, *op. cit.*

[16]Kelber, 123.

The text has become most objectified when all reference resides only within the object itself.

When reader-response criticism rejects such reification of texts, it is from one point of view simply returning to a pre-modern, pre-typographic understanding of linguistic communication, one which always includes its effects on hearers. Werner Kelber's comments give a foretaste of the oral response: "To regard spoken words as knowable in terms strictly of themselves and as operable apart from historical contextuality is a notion that has no conceivable reality in oral culture. Oral utterance cannot exist in transauthorial objectivity."[17] While written text may exist outside of the context of actual communication, even where the author is dead and the manuscript unread, an oral production can have no such existence. It must be proclaimed and received to have life. Renewed stress in post-modern times on the reader—or rather the hearer— thus coincides with the results of orality research.

When one concentrates on the receiving end of things, one is forced to consider the mode of discourse. The reader and the hearer constitute quite different audiences. Walter Ong once titled a chapter: "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction."[18] What does this mean?

> First, that the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role—entertainment seekers, reflective sharers of experience (as those who listen to Conrad's Marlow), inhabitants of a lost and remembered world of prepubertal latency (readers of Tolkien's hobbit stories), and so on. Second, we mean that the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. A reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom coincides with his role in the rest of actual life.[19]

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[17]Ibid., 122. Herbert Schneidau, "Let the Reader Understand." *Semeia* 39 (1987): 144, illustrates the results of New Criticism: "the greatest danger of the New Critical heritage, as I see it, is not formalist hermeticism, but a deadly moralism that almost always crept into its readings. Marvin Mudrick wonderfully parodies this: '*Macbeth* teaches the important lesson that it's a mistake to be wrong.'" In effect, this is the same critique: that formalism has removed the text from the context of life.

[18]Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 53.

[19]Ong, *Interfaces*, 60-61. Elsewhere, Ong phrases this fiction with a little sarcastic bite: "I want to write a book that will be read by hundreds of thousands of people. So, please, everyone leave the room. I have to be alone to communicate. Let us face the utter factitiousness and fictitiousness of such a situation, which can in no way be considered natural or even

The farther a text is removed from the real audience of the spoken word, the more distance there will be between "implied reader" and "actual reader" (to use Wolfgang Iser's language), and the more chance there is of the author's intentions going amiss.[20] In a world where script is still a newcomer, however, "the fictionalizing of readers was relatively simple. Written narrative at first was merely a transcription of oral narrative, or what was imagined as oral narrative, and it assumed some kind of oral singer's audience, even when being read."[21] That is, the author may have imagined his implied reader to be an audience.

As receptor-oriented theorists unravel such relationships between implied and actual readers, they must address the issues raised by oral researchers which impact upon their definition of such readers. Father Ong argues that the vital differences between oral speech and writing in this regard cannot be ignored:

> First, as we have seen, composition in writing, or even setting down in writing something actually said orally, is not the same as oral speech, nor is it simply a parallel operation, for it involves utterance in a different way with time, with past, present, and future, and relates writer and reader differently from the way oral speech relates speaker and listener. Secondly, a reader is not the same as a listener, nor a writer the same as a speaker. The reader is absent from the writing of a text, and may be anyone from anywhere, the writer

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normal." - "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," in Winfred Bryan, ed., *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 130.

[20]Ong, "Text as Interpretation: Mark and After," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 9: "A distinctive feature of the textual utterance as against oral utterance is that its author cannot absolutely predict or often even discover who will continue the discourse he or she has started. Anyone might pick up and read a text once it has been set down."

Let us explain this another way. All language is shorthand. The author must presume certain knowledge and abilities in his reader. Knowledge of the language itself is fundamental, but common cultural and relational experience also come into play. The less the author knows about his reader, the less shorthand he can use, or the more his shorthand is misunderstood. The speaker knows precisely to whom he is speaking, and in the process of speaking he can gauge where his shorthand needs to be filled out. The temporal and cultural gap between the modern world and the biblical world distances the exegete from the implied or ideal reader of the text, a problem further complicated if the text was indeed prepared for an oral context in which shorthand is a greater factor.

[21]Ong, *Interfaces*, 61.

absent from the reading of a text, whereas speaker and hearer are fully determined persons normally present to one another quite consciously in vocal exchange.[22]

All of these issues complicate greatly the interpretation of Scriptural writings. For whom are they produced? There are many answers to that question, all of which are bound up with the question of how they are to be "performed" to the "reader."[23]

Father Ong's argument blurs the distinction between receptor-oriented and orality research. For in **spoken** discourse the role of the receiver in "creating meaning"[24] is even greater than in written. As we will observe in chapter two, heavily literate style is specifically designed to minimize the ambiguities resulting from the absence of live exchange. In orally-biased communication, however, the listener plays a greater role in bringing the word to life:

> When is a text an utterance? When does an inscribed work "say" something? In so far as a text is fixed, "out there," it is not utterance but a visual design. It can be made into an utterance only by a code that is existing and functioning in a living person's mind. When a person knowing the appropriate code moves through the visual structure and converts it into a temporal sequence of sound, aloud or in the imagination, directly or indirectly—that is, when someone reads the text—only then does the text become an utterance and only then does the suspended discourse continue, and with it, verbalized meaning. Texts have meaning only in so far as they emerge from and are converted into the extratextual. All text is pretext.[25]

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[22]Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 443-44.

[23]Ong, "*Maranatha,*" 444: "The Bible has regularly seemed to the Christian to be much simpler than all we have said here: it is God speaking to man, here and now. And so it is, of course. However, to say this is not to do away with questions, but to create them. Secondly, the biblical text is understood somehow by the Church as being addressed to all ages."

[24]That the receiver "creates meaning" is easily misunderstood or exaggerated. Voelz, 213, specifically rejects the tendency of reader-response critics to remove the author's intentionality from the triptych:
> Texts are not arbitrary collocations of signifiers, with no preconceived intentionality (such as a pattern made by ink dripping from an uncapped pen), ... **We know this from being producers of various kinds of texts. Text production**—our text production—**is not aimless.** Intended meaning is a goal. Which means that the radical subjectivity of many who embrace post-modernism ... —specifically, the radically perspectival understanding of all interpretation which they embrace—is an inadequate approach. [Emphasis original]

[25]Ong, "Text as Interpretation," 9.

As a metaphysics, these comments are perhaps wanting. Who is to say whether a text "has meaning" apart from its being read? But what Ong highlights is that which the receiver brings to the text in deriving meaning from it—whether that meaning is what the author intended or not.[26]

One cannot consider the receiver of communication without addressing the author/"performer." Ruth Finnegan's study of the "performance" of texts in oral cultures illuminates in another way the intersection of orality research with receptor-oriented theory. The primitive poets she has investigated count on the performance as a part of their technique in conveying meaning:

> One crucial difference as [*sic*] between oral and written literature is the important factor of its dissemination. In literate communities this is primarily through the written word, whereas in non-literate or semi-literate groups it must be orally delivered for its communication as literature. In the oral context, that means, the literature comes across as *performance* as well as a sequence of words. The actual *enactment* of the literary piece is necessarily a vital part of its impact and this fact can be exploited in many ways by the oral poet. His audience, furthermore, sees as well as hears him and the skilful composer/performer takes advantage of this fact. Characterization, for instance, need not be expressed directly in *words* when it can be as clearly and as subtly portrayed through the performer's face and gestures; conversations too can be lavishly introduced, a sure technique for the performer to convey personification and drama—points that have been made for recited literature as different otherwise as medieval narratives or contemporary African tales ... . Similarly, the styles of these pieces may be related to their form of delivery. Repetition may be particularly marked and also the use of various well-known formulaic phrases and runs, or the highlighting of particular dramatic episodes or detailed descriptions in a way not altogether in keeping with the unity of the whole when *read*.[27]

There is, of course, a difference between this absolutely oral situation, and the Scriptural context of the oral/literate interface. In the case of the oral proclamation of Scripture the **composer** of the text is not present. Thus the influence of the audience on the process of composition could only occur through the author's **fictionalization** of the audience.[28] Yet the

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[26]See also the discussion below of the phenomenon of misunderstanding. Here the hearer definitely "creates meaning"—albeit the wrong meaning!

[27]Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 78.

[28]See Ong, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," as discussed above.

author does rely on the lector's ability to "perform" the writing, and upon the presumed reactions of the audience. There remains also the possibility of the lector failing in his task, or misrepresenting the author, as also the possiblity that the audience will not react as anticipated. All three—author, lector, and audience—are involved in the creation of "meaning," even if the result is "misunderstanding," that is, the creation of a meaning which does not correspond to what the author intended. Thus, the apprehension of meaning by an **aural** audience is conditioned by far more than just the written text.

Actually, the phenomenon of misunderstanding is a prime piece of data for what we have been discussing. In a volume of essays related to the field of generative grammar, Clair Humphrey-Jones[29] complains that language study in the past has concentrated only on the speaker:

> grammars, be they transformational-generative, systemic or case, are based on the production of sentences and ignore the understanding of them. This approach gives rise to the assumption that the competence of the ideal hearer is simply the converse of the competence of the ideal speaker; no evidence has yet been advanced to support this assumption.[30]

It is a "misleading fallacy" that the hearer simply decodes the message precisely in reverse to the speaker's process of encoding, that the hearer corresponds completely to the speaker's imagining. "The speaker produces an utterance and *assumes* that his hearers will adopt particular roles but he cannot control whether or not they do so in accordance with his assumptions."[31] That is, the "real reader" may (and usually does) differ from the "implied/ideal reader" (see below, p. 17). The greater the difference, the more likely is misunderstanding.

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[29]Clair Humphrey-Jones, "The Role of the Hearer in Misunderstanding," in Graham McGregor, ed., *Language for Hearers* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1986), 105-26. Her conclusions are based on examination of data which was gathered from "actual conversations in unmarked settings" (108).

[30]Ibid., 106.

[31]Ibid., 107. Emphasis added.

Far from being a pure receptacle, the hearer takes a role in the communication and attempts to understand the message from this perspective. From the message the hearer constructs a meaning—what he believes the speaker was trying to convey. If this meaning fails to correspond to the speaker's intended meaning,[32] a "misunderstanding" has occurred:

> A misunderstanding is "made" by a hearer; subsequent utterances reveal the ways in which speakers and hearers "make do" with that misunderstanding, that is, conceal it, tailor the conversation to accommodate it or fail to be aware of its occurrence, or "mend" it, that is, resolve it so that the hearer ultimately understands the misunderstood utterance correctly.[33]

What is unique to live, spoken communication is that the speaker has the opportunity to perceive that a misunderstanding has occurred and to attempt to correct it.[34] The attempt to correct demonstrates that it is important to speakers that they be understood correctly.[35] Thus it is true

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[32]The correspondence which occurs in "understanding" is always approximate. Ibid., 109: "Exact replication between x [speaker's utterance] and x^r [utterance as received] and between p [speaker's proposition] and p^r [proposition as received] is probably impossible, given that S [speaker] and H [hearer] are distinct individuals who have seemingly unique cognitive systems and separate auditory and vocal mechanisms, and who communicate through a medium beset by interferences. x^r is therefore an approximation of x, and p^r an approximation of p." Humphrey-Jones's data gives evidence that the cause of misunderstanding is not necessarily to be found in the speaker, for in hearing the very same utterance one hearer often understands while another misunderstands. She suggests that the uniqueness of each hearer is the cause: "each participant's perspective or 'line of thought' predisposes him to understand an utterance in a particular way" (114). An individual may therefore misunderstand even when the language does not appear to be problematical (115).

[33]Ibid., 108.

[34]Written communication, on the other hand, does not have this luxury. Thus, as we shall see, one of the characteristics of written language is that it strives for absolute clarity of expression, supplying all the background knowledge and context necessary for the reader to derive the intended meaning with as little misunderstanding as possible. The writer must so narrowly define his ideal reader that no one comes close to fitting. The techniques of the autonomous text culminate in the British essayists, who provide the "rules" for formal writing even today. See David R. Olson, "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing," *Harvard Educational Review* 47.3 (August 1977): 257-81.

[35]Humphrey-Jones, 124. This seemingly banal point is important to stress, for it sometimes appears in receptor-oriented studies that the author's intention is completely irrelevant or non-existent.

that the hearer "creates meaning": not necessarily "**the** meaning," but at least "a meaning."[36] The

uniqueness of oral discourse is thus apparent in the process by which meaning arises.

The interplay of speaker and hearer in oral communication, staving off

misunderstanding and building a "synthesis," is its great strength. In neglecting the oral

synthesis, reader-response criticism does indeed run the danger of plunging into pure

subjectivism. Granted, a written text is an object which can be manipulated only so far. In this

sense, Bernard Lategan applauds writing as a means to liberate a text from the constrictions of

oral communication:

> [I]nscripturation also has some important positive aspects which in fact make
> communication possible despite distance in time and space. The detachment from the
> original speaker-hearer situation by means of inscripturation need not imply a loss. It
> should rather be understood as a liberating move, which preserves the meaning of the
> event in a network of linguistic symbols and sets it free to reach a much wider audience.
> Because of the text, understanding is no longer a private affair restricted to certain
> individuals, but is brought into the open.[37]

Yet this very liberation subjects the text to the whim of an uncontrolled readership. Following

Ricoeur, Lategan exults in this freedom:

> In its published form, the text begins a life of its own which the original author no longer
> controls—he can in fact become … his own reader. The relative semantic autonomy of the
> text … is important for the preservation of its message … . At the same time, temporal and
> cultural distance from the original author opens the way to a multiplicity of readings of the
> same text and calls attention to the role of the reader in establishing the meaning of the
> text.[38]

This unhinging of the triptych is precisely the danger which an oral approach to "reader"-

response would mitigate. The text which is detached from its author/speaker lacks an important

control.[39]

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[36]A distinction which is made by Humphrey-Jones, 124.

[37]Lategan and Vorster, 6-7.

[38]Ibid., 7.

[39]Vander Weele, 145: "The question that reader-response theorists face today is whether they adequately consider the act of enunciation."

Lategan himself voices this concern on many occasions. Heavily text-oriented reader-response theory has tended to bracket the author out of the equation. This imbalance needs to be redressed:

> What is needed, therefore, is the broadening of the theoretical base to accommodate the aspects of reception in such a way that its inter-relatedness with text-production and text-mediation becomes clear. To concentrate all attention on the act of reception, thereby making the reader the almost exclusive arbiter over, or creator of, the meaning of the text, not only overextends the contribution reception has to make but also foreshortens the process of understanding in a dangerous way. All the problems associated with the concept of "intentional fallacy" could thus be repeated in the form of a "receptor's fallacy."[40]

The synthesis of speaker and hearer through the mediation of **oral** communication promises to avoid the dangers.

One scholar who claims to have taken up the challenge is Robert Fowler. In his *Let the Reader Understand*, he attempts to learn from all these related disciplines: "I have forged a critical amalgam of reader-response criticism, narratology, rhetorical criticism, and insights from orality and textuality studies."[41] The interface of orality research with reader-response theory manifests itself in Fowler's working definition of his discipline:

> Most varieties of reader-response criticism share:
> (1) a preeminent concern for the reader and the reading experience and
> (2) a critical model of the reading experience, which itself has two major aspects:
>   (a) an understanding of reading as a dynamic, concrete, **temporal experience**, instead of the abstract perception of a spatial form; and
>   (b) an emphasis on meaning as **event** instead of meaning as content.[42]

What Fowler seems to have gleaned from oral studies is the definition of reading as **temporal**.[43] Reader-response criticism deals with the text linearly, as an experience unfolding from beginning

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[40]Lategan and Vorster, 15. Fowler, 26, evidences such sober thinking: "Although perhaps indeed 'readers make meaning,' such slogans over-simplify. Saying that the reader is everything, the way some reader-response critics do, is misleading. Practically speaking, the text is important, the reader is important, and the interpretive community that provides the context in which text and reader interact is important. Nonetheless, readers and reading have been slighted, and the balance must be redressed."

[41]Fowler, 3.

[42]Ibid., 25. Emphasis and layout added.

to end. In a print-oriented world, one sees in this an artificial imposition. People do what they want with texts. But by imposing this constraint upon the reading process, the reader-response critic is actually making the experience conform to oral norms. Oral communication is always linear, temporal. Oral communication is an event passing through time.[44] Fowler himself recognizes this connection: "In arguing for a temporal model of reading rather than a spatial one, we are adopting an understanding of language that has significant affinities with the language of oral culture."[45]

The reader is then no longer a "parasitic critic" who acts upon the text as an object, but is at the receiving end of an act of communication.[46] Even the standard diagram of the reading experience evidences the linearity of oral discourse:[47]

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[43]Martin Scharlemann's dictum that "the 'real' context of a passage is the preceding context" (Voelz, 317 n. 1) is completely true only of oral discourse, and perhaps arose from that scholar's own well-developed historical consciousness.

[44]Fowler, 42: "The physicality of writing tricks us into thinking of texts as objects existing in space rather than as experiences existing in time."

[45]Ibid., 45. Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), presses the same point in his criticism of reader-response:

> The left-to-right reception of the verbal string, which figures so prominently in Iser's phenomenology of reading, however, has clear affinities with the syllable-by-syllable experience of hearing a text read, an experience that makes all the difference for one's conceptualization of the text. (87-88)

Yet, Moore later acknowledges that no reader or hearer comes to a text completely uninformed:

> Another aspect of this reception would have entailed a competence brought to the hearing (a knowledge of eucharistic traditions and much more), and a preacquaintance with the broad lines of the story and its ending. This aspect is no doubt better accounted for by traditional exegetical methods, in which strict sequentiality plays little part. (93)

Biblical criticism must be eclectic and cumulative in its appropriation of methodology.

[46]Fowler, 27-28: "The reader, by contrast [to the critic], does not reify the text as an object but finds in it a 'real presence' and often a locus of 'inspiration' or 'revelation.' In 'dynamic passivity,' a reader is read *by* the text." Fowler is referring to George Steiner's distinction between critic and reader.

[47]Borrowed by Fowler, 31, from Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*.

Narrative Text

| Real Author | → | Implied Author | → | (Narrator) | → | (Narratee) | → | Implied Reader | → | Real Reader |
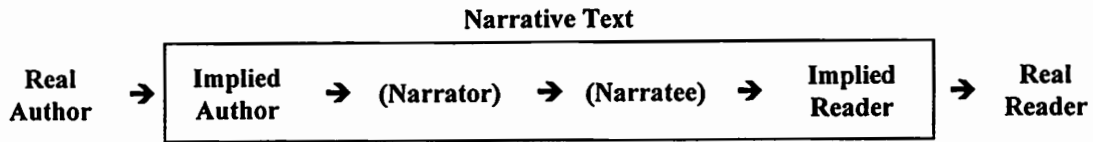
For all the complications of the reader-response analysis, in the end a real reader is **receiving** communication from a real author, rather than performing an exercise of interpretation upon an objectified text. In this sense, this model approximates oral discourse far more than the usual appropriation of written text in our modern world. Although in oral discourse the arrows may be reversed as the hearer feeds back to the speaker, in written communication the arrows are more likely to disappear completely as linearity disintegrates.[48]

Understanding the above model **orally** suggests furthermore that the "reader" is never alone. The hearer is always part of an audience—what reader-response critics would phrase as "the reader in his interpretive community." But the latter community is rather ethereal. An audience is real. And the audience as interpretive community provides a very real "control" on the role of the reader in the exegetical process.[49] When confronted with the problem of the "valid interpreter," Voelz turns to this communal model. The "implied reader" is a valid interpreter if he conforms to the author's expectations, that is, if he belongs to the same community:

> Where does one find the implied reader of the Bible or any other text? The answer of post-modern criticism is and of the church traditionally has been: One does not find her by looking for an individual, for a reader is not alone. A reader is taught to read. ... That is to

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[48]It is reassuring that Fowler chooses to leave the arrows intact. Terence Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 94, turns the last arrow around to show the reader working to produce meaning. Nevertheless, the reader/hearer must first **receive** communication before there is anything for him to act upon. Stanley Fish's personal pilgrimage is instructive. His early position was similar to Fowler's, that the text manipulates the reader. Later he despairs of the text's having any such power, arguing that the reader **creates** the text in the reading process (*Is There a Text in This Class?*). See Fowler, 35, as well as Moore, 113-17.

[49]Stanley Fish, in reducing everything to the reader can find, no control other than this community. See note 48.

say, **a reader interprets in a community**, with other readers, with other receptors, with those who are her contemporaries, and with those who have gone before.[50]

One can see that this paragraph coheres better when the reader is a hearer, for while a reader may indeed be alone, a hearer never is.[51]

Stephen Moore approaches this solution in his own way when he criticizes the notion of a virginal reading or hearing, what Staley called the "first kiss":

> From a historian's standpoint, the temporalized model characteristic of reader-exegesis must be regarded as an insufficient and distorting one. The tradition-attuned hearers/readers that the gospel texts presuppose surely know more than the reader-oriented exegetes (Culpepper and Staley being the main exceptions) give them credit for. If so, then the virgin reader is an anachronistic construct for gospel research.[52]

This is simply another application of the oral principle that hearers are always grouped in audiences, that the Scriptures belong in the Christian community, that no one comes to them cold, but that the Gospel account was given to bring certainty concerning the things already received through **kerygma** and **catechesis** (see Lk. 1:4).

Moore's rollicking joy-ride through literary criticism of the Gospels throws down the oral gauntlet before the biblical critic who speaks of a "reader":

> But is the person posited [as receiver] by a gospel text really a reader? In speaking thus do we not transfer the psychocultural assumptions of a typographic (i.e., print-centered) culture back into the ancient oral and scribal context?[53]

By lifting reader-response criticism *in toto* from modern literary critics, biblical critics have failed to notice that the modern reader is a different animal from the ancient hearer. Reader

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[50]Voelz, 219-20. Emphasis original.

[51]Mack, 101, sees rhetorical criticism as producing a social, communal model of receiving the New Testament: "Traditionally, a hermeneutic has always been imagined on the model of a message that runs from the New Testament as speaker to the Christian as private listener. ... The hermeneutical enterprise has been grounded in a romantic and individualistic anthropology in quest of a communication from God. Rhetorical criticism, on the other hand, prefers a social anthropology in order to desribe adequately what we have been calling a discourse." The oral model suggested by rhetoric places the interpreter into an audience.

[52]Moore, 95.

[53]Ibid., 84.

critics rightly challenge redaction criticism for its "reification" of the text, its comparison of minute details from disparate parts of the text, a technique which requires "that the words of the text be present all at once."[54] But then they fall into the same trap:

> At first blush, reader-response critics of the Gospels would seem to emerge with more egg on their faces than anyone else. After all, to call the evangelist's intended listening audience "the reader" and then produce minute analyses of a reading that in all probability never occurred (at least not in the modern sense) would seem the ultimate waste of time.[55]

The saving grace, in Moore's mind, is that reader-response critics have inadvertently taken up the oral-aural factor.[56] And only insofar as they do, will their work be appropriate to the material.

Robert Fowler is one reader-response proponent who shows a keen—and rare—grasp of orality research,[57] and he acknowledges it overtly in his introductory chapters. He recognizes it simply as a return to the way things were:

> [R]omanticism's quest to understand the mind of the author, historicism's inquiries into the world reflected in the text, and formalism's analysis of the text apart from its author or reflected world are all relatively recent departures from the norm that has dominated the history of literature and criticism in Western culture.[58]

Ancient critics were far more concerned with what today is called "pragmatics" than with referential "meaning."[59] One studied texts to learn how to wield their power,[60] to grasp and use

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[54]Ibid., 86.

[55]Ibid., 86.

[56]Ibid., 86: "It may well be that the reader-response exegetes inadvertently do justice to the oral-aural factor in a way that redaction critics and narrative critics do not." He proceeds to give examples.

[57]Ibid., 88: "Reader-oriented critics of the Gospels, by and large, have yet to connect explicitly with orality-literacy concerns. Robert Fowler has been virtually unique in this regard."

[58]Fowler, 49.

[59]Most helpful in this regard is the communications model of Roman Jakobson as modified by Paul Hernadi (see Fowler, 52-58). Hernadi identifies two axes: "the rhetorical axis of communication" and "the mimetic axis of representation." Fowler suggests that modern scholars have been preoccupied with the latter, the informational axis concerned with history and theology, whereas ancients were more concerned with the former axis, the rhetorical impact of the speaker on the hearer through the communication. One must be careful not to separate the axes of the diagram, however, as if there could be rhetorical power apart from representational

their rhetoric (see below). The ancient world believed that "language had to do primarily with action, not signification."[61] They moved "beyond the semantics of written communication." When reader-response criticism recognizes its debt to orality research in this way, it is simply evidencing an historical consciousness, and giving due weight to each panel of the triptych.[62]

Speech-Act Theory

That "speech"-act theory relates to orality research is perhaps self-evident. Yet the alacrity with which biblical critics have blithely transferred it to the silent text is alarming. Speech-act theory was borne from the labor of Oxford linguistic philosopher John Langshaw Austin,[63] and nourished and raised by his student, Berkeley philosopher John R. Searle.[64]

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meaning. In fact, the strength of allegorizing, supported by (Neo-)Platonic philosophy, could be seen as an overemphasis on the mimetic axis even then.

[60]When St. Paul refers to the **meaning** of language, he calls it τὴν δύναμιν τῆς φωνῆς "the power of the sound" (1 Cor. 14:11). Speaking in other languages apart from an interpreter lacked this crucial element. The image of the sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 1:16; 19:15; cf. Is. 11:4) is in accord with the power which ancient cultures ascribed to the spoken word. Compare this to the dictum of a literate age: the **pen** is mightier than the sword. (The sword is said to have a "mouth," although this would refer to its ability to "consume" victims, not to any analogy of speech; see Lk. 21:24; Heb. 11:34). See also Heb. 1:3 "upholding all things by the Word of His power [τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως]," which might be understood Semitically as "His powerful Word."

[61]Fowler, 50, citing Jane P. Tomkins, "The Reader in History."

[62]Fowler, 52, concludes: "Therefore, whereas most reader-response critics are consciously trying to correct the neglect of the reader in modern criticism, from an even broader historical perspective I see this as a sign of a reemergence of the pragmatic theories of language that have dominated most of Western literary history but have been eclipsed in the last two centuries."

Moore, 95, concludes: "Gospel historians risk worse anachronisms if they fail to assimilate the lessons of orality-literacy research ... . Typographic exegetical models seem to sabotage historical exegesis. That we occupy a different world from that of first-century Christianity is a truism. But the orality-literacy factor persuades us that this is not the whole truth: we occupy not just a different world, but a different galaxy as well—'the Gutenberg galaxy' ... ."

[63]J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, [1st ed., Oxford: 1962] 2nd ed., ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

Austin's investigation was spurred by the phenomenon of performative language—a statement which does not describe, but "is, or is part of, the doing of an action."[65] Austin argued that a promise is "performed" in the act of saying it; it is not as if the promise simply verbalized, or gave information about, an internal act of will. He went on to raise numerous similar performative speech acts, among which the "I do" and the "I declare you man and wife" of the marriage rite are archetypical.

From this beginning, Austin went on to dissolve the special status of "performative" speech, for he noted that all language is an action, an attempt to **do** something. He expressed the relationship of word to deed with three classic terms: the **locution** is the speech itself; the **illocution** is the force of the locution, the action which takes place **in** the speaking (promising, commanding, warning, etc.); the **perlocution** is the act which happens or is desired to happen **through** or by means of the speech. The latter two acts are often confused—even in Austin's own thought.[66] Hugh White attempts clarity:

> The fundamental feature of the perlocutionary act is that it refers to an effect upon the receiver (e.g. persuading) achieved *by* an illocutionary act (e.g. arguing), and not to the

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[64]John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). A comprehensive bibliography is available in *Semeia* 41 (1988): 163-78.

[65]Austin, 5.

[66]Voelz, 276 n. 1, questions whether Austin distinguished clearly "between the perlocutionary act as intended result and its actual result." Martin J. Buss, "Potential and Actual Interactions Between Speech Act Theory and Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 130, raises the same concern: "Admittedly, the distinction between illocution and perlocution is not altogether precise and is denied by some language theorists (e.g., Ballmer and Brennenstuhl: 46) as an appropriate one.

Sometimes the issue is theological, not linguistic. Voelz, 291, addresses Holy Absolution. He analyzes the act of an apostolic minister pronouncing absolution as **perlocutionary**, in that the sins are "**actually** connected to forgiveness" by this speech act. Others with a less concrete understanding of this Means of Grace have analyzed it as **illocutionary**, presumably because they cannot be certain of the result. This example suggests that the distinction between illocution and perlocution is, indeed, helpful.

effect achieved *in* the illocutionary act (e.g. as promising, under the proper conditions, has the effect *in* its performance, of creating a promissory relation between two parties).[67]

What White uncovers is that some speech acts have both an illocution and a perlocution, some have only one. Nevertheless, the distinction can be helpful.

Written language lacks the indicators of illocutionary and perlocutionary force. Thus Daniel Patte complains:

> The intentionality (illocutionary force) which is part of the meaning of the utterance is not marked in the text (propositional content) itself. It takes the form of an "absence," or, in Iser's terminology, we could say that it is a "gap," indeed a gap that the reader has to fill in so as to make sense of the text.[68]

Iser's "gaps of indeterminacy," however, are specifically attuned to silent texts. The problem facing the receiver of ancient texts is **reconstructing the illocutionary aspect which was executed by the author, lector, or speaker.** Voelz recognizes this gap in his discussion of the illocutionary force of Acts 1: "This example from Acts indicates that paralingual features such as look, tone of voice, gesture, etc., are key to determining the illocutionary aspect of an act, and when these features are absent, interpretation becomes very difficult indeed."[69] These features are characteristics of oral discourse, where the illocutionary force, though not unfailing, is much clearer than in bare text.

In fact, speech-act theory fails entirely when confronted with silent texts. All the examples of performative language which could be raised—promises, bets, creating, marrying, absolving, etc.—are by nature spoken. In written form they are simply the **record** or at most the concomitant of the oral performance. In legal history, deeds, titles, contracts, wills, and so on, are

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[67]Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism." *Semeia* 41 (1988): 3. Emphasis original.

[68]Daniel Patte, "Speech Act Theory and Biblical Exegesis," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 91.

[69]Voelz, 282. The example Voelz raises as a speech-act problem is similar to what Gilbert Bartholomew addresses with "oral" exegesis. See p. 191, below.

always considered to be a witness to an action performed orally and live,[70] even if the words of

the contract are never actually spoken (and so a "legal fiction" ensues). The text cannot by itself

perform because it is static. Action only occurs when the text is actualized in oral **performance**.

When reading Ruth Finnegan's description of language's oral function in a tribe in

Sierra Leone, one senses that, perhaps, language has always functioned this way:

> A further point arises from the Limba lack of association between language and writing. They do not think of words as primarily fixed in written form but are free to concentrate on their significance in social contexts. As we have seen, they are intensely aware of the relevance of speaking for social relationships and social action. They particularly stress what has been called the "performative" function of speaking—the way in which speech is used to actually perform an action. This comes out in the way in which "speaking" for the Limba actually *is* the making of a contract. It is the "speaking" which ultimately makes valid such transactions as marriage, divorce, transfer of rights over land, appointment of a headman, etc. The functions of written documents in literate cultures are performed among the Limba by the very act of speaking—and of this function of speech the Limba are explicitly aware.[71]

The recognition that language is performative, that words **do** something, should be

nothing new to a Christian theologian, either. Michael Hancher raises two classic examples. First

is Genesis, to which Austin himself had pointed:

> "*Fiat lux.*" "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." No performative could be purer. Saying makes it so.[72]

Secondly, and related, is the Sacrament of the Altar. Hancher recalls St. Ambrose's analysis of

the Words of Institution as they are used in the liturgy:

> Before the consecration the words are those of the priest. He offers praise to God, he prays for the congregation, for the rulers and for all other people. But when he is about to

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[70]See, for instance, Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[71]Finnegan, 57. Emphasis original. Her last remark concerning written documents ignores the oral performance associated with written texts. Perhaps she means to say that such cultures can perform the same legal actions "even without written documents."

[72]Michael Hancher, "Performative Utterance, the Word of God, and the Death of the Author," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 27.

produce the venerable sacrament the priest stops using his own words and starts using the words of Christ. It is therefore the words of Christ which produce this sacrament, *words such as those thorough which he created all things*. So if the words of the Lord Jesus are powerful enough to make nonexistent things come into being, how much more effective must they be in changing what already exists into something else![73]

Ambrose speaks of the priest "using" Christ's words (*"utitur sermonibus Christi"*). Hancher comments: "In quoting Christ's words the celebrant does cite or *mention* them; but in reciting them to consecrate the bread and wine he also *uses* them in performative utterance."[74] The *verba* are not cited simply informationally, as if to remind God or the congregation what happened in the past. They are effective words through whose speaking God creates the Real Presence. Lutherans should recognize a clear affinity between the doctrine of the Word as Means of Grace and speech-act theory.

Rhetorical Criticism

Like speech-act theory, rhetoric was a purely oral art, historically speaking—although in this case it is less self-evident. Certainly the etymology of the term indicates this, as it is related to ῥῆμα "that which is spoken" and ῥήτωρ "public speaker, orator, legal advocate." Walter Ong, whose background before concentrating on orality was in rhetoric, notes: "At root, rhetoric means not writing but speaking."[75] Yet it is in the historical demonstration that the proof resides, that at the time of the New Testament rhetoric was so understood and practiced.

Only recently has rhetoric fallen from the curricula of universities and thus faded from memory.[76] In western history rhetoric was a standard element in the liberal arts training, even

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[73]Quoted in Hancher, 30. Emphasis added by Hancher. This is a "free paraphrase" from St. Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 4:4.13-15; from *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 73:51-52.

[74]Hancher, 30.

[75]Ong, *Interfaces*, 216.

[76]George Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 240-41, traces its decline in 19th-century Britain and America.

through the Middle Ages forming one part of the *trivium*: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. In biblical studies right up to modern times it was simply natural to apply one's rhetorical training to one's task. Burton Mack cites a remarkable list of studies through the 18th- and 19th-centuries, including even a commentary on 2 Corinthians by Hans Wendland in 1924, which concentrate on the rhetorical aspects of Paul's argumentation. Mack comments:

> We know that interest in rhetoric waned around the turn of the century, ushering in approximately four generations of scholarship without formal training in rhetoric and with very little knowledge of the tradition of rhetorical criticism.[77]

Two factors might be adduced to explain this loss of interest. First, the media shift from orality to textuality, brought to an extreme by the ubiquity of print, lessened the need for an art of public speaking.[78] The second factor is intertwined with the first: the historical fact that rhetoric had shifted from its primary character as the art of persuasion to become an ornamental art, concerned with style not substance.[79] As baroque excess fell in favor of an objective simplicity, so did rhetoric fall victim to so-called scientific rigor.

The modern resurrection of interest in rhetoric coincides with the recognition of the oral environment in which the New Testament was formed. Pivotal moments in this revival are: Amos Wilder's *Early Christian Rhetoric* (1964);[80] James Muilenburg's presidential address to

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[77]Mack, 11.

[78]The decline seems to have been a two-way street: the teaching of rhetoric had served to keep the oral residue alive in western culture. Ong, *Interfaces*, 296: "So long as rhetoric remained dominant in the teaching of the use of language, the oral residue in writing and print cultures remained massive, and the assumption prevailed, implicit and vague but forceful, that the paradigm for all expression was in some way the classical oration."

[79]Kennedy, 5, uses an Italian term for this secondary form of rhetoric: "*Letteraturizzazione* is the tendency of rhetoric to shift its focus from persuasion to narration, from civic to personal contexts, and from discourse to literature, including poetry." Wuellner, 451, laments the continuation of this trend in modern criticism: "Reduced to concerns of style, with the artistry of textual disposition and textual structure, rhetorical criticism has become indistinguishable from literary criticism … ."

[80]Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968, "After Form Criticism What?";[81] the monumental

works of George Kennedy;[82] the new rhetoric of Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca;[83] and

various New Testament applications of the discipline in the 1970s and after.[84] The key discovery

of this revival is that rhetoric is about **argumentation**:[85]

> Defining rhetoric as argumentation countered a cultural sensibility ... that regarded
> rhetoric mainly as a matter of stylistic ornamentation. ... By emphasizing argumentation,

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[81]Published in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

[82]*The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World 300 B.C.-A.D. 300* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

[83]Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

[84]For example: Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Hans-Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); idem, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); F. W. Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); William Lane, *Hebrews*, Word Biblical Commentary, 2 vols. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991); see also Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49.3 (1987): 448-63.

[85]Not, of course, argumentation according to modern norms, but according to the pragmatic goals of ancient rhetoric. As Aristotle would distinguish in his *Ars Rhetorica*, philosophical **dialectic** was about proof in the area of natural and rational order (φύσις); **rhetoric** was about persuading with respect to issues of social moment (νόμος). See Mack, 36.
Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 27, puts this into modern terms: "There are no true rational arguments in the Bible, not even in the New Testament, which despite its late date keeps very close to the Old Testament in its attitude toward language. What may look like rational argument, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews, turns out on closer analysis to be a disguised form of exhortation. Nor is there much functional use of abstraction." - Quoted in Thomas J. Farrell, "Kelber's Breakthrough," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 31. That is, New Testament argumentation is not philosophical speculation, but aims to persuade in the faith. The New Testament stays closer to the Old Testament than to Greek metaphysical systems. Even in Athens rhetoric and philosophy were antithetical systems.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca revived the ancient classical definition of rhetoric as "the art of persuasion," ... .[86]

The second discovery concerning rhetoric was the proper valuation of its social setting, that it concerned "the speaker-audience relationship."[87] Rhetoric arose in the Greek city-state of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., and was a key component of their democracy. Each of the three classic "species" of rhetorical speech was suited to a particular live setting: **juridical** applied to the speeches in the law courts which argued for accusation or defense; **deliberative** suited the public forum, where the speaker tried to persuade or dissuade the body politic, with reference to a future course of action; and **epideictic** found its place in public ritual and ceremony, giving praise or blame to a person.[88] In later contexts, when the Greek democratic process was impinged upon by the prince, and when the Romans brought a new regime, the original social contexts no longer applied directly. In a new environment, rhetoric underwent a number of shifts leading into the first century:

> One such shift was an increased interest in style and oratorical finesse. A second was the domestication of deliberative rhetoric for use in the classroom where all manner of subjects could be debated theoretically. A third was the development of a speech form called the declamation, used in lectures for instruction and in public for display. ... Eventually, rhetoric was shorn of the critical thrust and political nuance characteristic of its origins. Rhetoric was now in the service of culture. It could be used to defend, manifest, and inculcate virtues and values held to be noble, an ethos that celebrated its derivation by idealizing the classical period and imitating its style. Scholars call this development the "second sophistic."[89]

What changed was the societal function of public speaking. The three species were then mixed, especially in Christian argumentation whose social situation was radically different from early Greek democracy.[90] Nevertheless rhetoric remained an oral endeavor.

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[86]Mack, 14-15.

[87]Ibid., 15.

[88]See ibid., 25-28 & 34.

[89]Ibid., 28-29.

[90]Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 6, argues that there is "a distinctive rhetoric of religion," at the heart of which lies "authoritative proclamation, not rational persuasion," what

The eastern Mediterranean was deeply Hellenized by Jesus' day. In fact, a famous center of rhetoric was in Gadara, a city of the Decapolis east of Galilee. The shift in focus of classical rhetoric, together with this spread, suggests that the impact on the New Testament would be enormous. Mack analyzes the impact of rhetoric on **all** literary work:

> One of the results of the merger of rhetoric and literature was that the classics (Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, the poets, historians, and tragedians) were studied for their use of rhetorical techniques. Another result was that the composition of literature other than speeches began to reflect studied attention to rhetorical principles. ... Rhetoric defined the technology of discourse customary for all who participated in the culture of the Greco-Roman age.[91]

Perhaps Mack's analysis could be made more precise by blurring his distinction between speeches and other "literature." For the character of the age meant that all literature was promulgated orally (see chapters two and three), and therefore oral rhetoric was completely appropriate to it. "Speeches" are not a unique genre because they are oral, but because of their occasional nature.[92]

Loveday Alexander evidences some of the same confusion (although she highlights beautifully the oral character of rhetoric):

> Ancient rhetoric was first and foremost the art of *speaking* effectively in public: it was a "performance art", and as such fought long and hard to maintain the superiority of the

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he labels with the New Testament term κήρυγμα. Although one can turn to the literature for manifold examples of New Testament rhetoric, 1 Corinthians provides the most explicit examples. On the one hand, Paul distances himself from certain brands of sophistic rhetoric, concerned only with selling a product to the customer (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5; cf. 2 Cor. 10:1-11:15). On the other, he uses technical vocabulary which signals that he is taking up specific rhetorical species: ἀπολογία (9:3) introducing judicial rhetoric, and δείκνυμι (12:31b) introducing epideictic rhetoric. The language of praise [ἐπαινέω] and blame [ἐντροπή] occurs throughout this epistle.

David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 203, warns against the error of labeling an entire epistle with one species: "Attempts to classify one or another of Paul's letters as *either* judicial *or* deliberative *or* epideictic (or one of their subtypes) run the risk of imposing external categories on Paul and thereby obscuring the real purpose and structure of his letters." Emphasis original.

[91]Mack, 30.

[92]Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 110: "A speech was delivered on a particular occasion; it was heavily influenced by that occasion, and lacked a preexisting text."

truly "live" performance over the exercise of verbal skill in writing. Isocrates is credited with being the first to compose "written speeches", and sending (rather than reciting) them to his chosen target: cf. *Ad Philippum* 25-27.[93]

Isocrates began a school of rhetoric in the 390s B.C.[94] The fact that he could so readily combine rhetoric with literature indicates not a decline in orality but rather an **oral** approach to writing. He could send a speech to his audience because he knew that at the other end it would be performed live by a lector (see chapter three).[95]

Whenever the radically oral character of all ancient literature is ignored, the same mistake is repeated—the varying perspectives of each scholar simply lead to emphasis on different historical periods at which the "turning point" from orality to literacy occurred. Rosalind Thomas speaks of the relationship between text and speech:

> Rhetorical speeches, which certainly got written down and published from the late fifth century, were meant to be learnt by heart: orators and litigants wished to give the appearance of speaking extempore, and the written text was therefore only an aid to recollection and memorization. It is in Aristotle first that one finds extensive discussion of literary and philosophical works in terms of the written text.[96]

The data would indicate a slightly different picture. Centuries later than Aristotle, Cicero would still follow the practice of writing down a speech only after it had been performed.[97] Writing was subservient to the primacy of the oral event.

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[93]Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. David Clines, Stephen Fowl, and Stanley Porter, *JSOT Supplement Series no. 87* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 226.

[94]See Mack, 26.

[95]Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 86, describes this practice as a peculiar exception: "The Greek 'orator' Isocrates was too nervous to speak in public and wrote out his speeches for publication or to send to an addressee as an open letter." Nevertheless, Kennedy notes in *Classical Rhetoric*, 111: "His speeches show great amplification and a lack of concern for immediate effect on an audience. They were intended as texts to be read and studied with care, not to be heard only once in linear progression."

[96]Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 92.

More than others, George Kennedy has seen the rhetorical relationship between biblical text and oral production:

> Rhetoric originates in speech and its primary product is a speech act, not a text, but the rhetoric of historical periods can only be studied through texts. ... We need to keep in mind that the Bible in early Christian times was more often heard when read aloud to a group than read privately; very few early Christians owned copies of the Bible, and some did not know how to read. To a greater extent than any modern text, the Bible retained an oral and linear quality for its audience. ... In practicing rhetorical criticism we need to keep in mind that intent and that original impact, and thus to read the Bible as speech.[98]

In this way Kennedy presses the same point as the reader-response critics did in describing the reading experience temporally and linearly. But most of all, he shows the essential oral component of rhetorical criticism. Once again, this is an historical enterprise, concerning the cross-cultural move into the Scriptures—which means mastering rhetoric, what C. S. Lewis called "the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors," which is "the categorical barrier between oral and literary structures."[99]

Narrative Criticism

What the previous disciplines have in common is that they all began in the field of secular literary criticism. Biblical scholars have always borrowed techniques from their profane brethren who are employed in studying texts. When biblical scholars in the seventies began to speak of "literary criticism," they were simply referring to the latest fad to be borrowed: narrative and reader-response analyses.[100] A century and a half ago, critics spoke of their source investigations of the Pentateuch and Synoptics as "literary criticism" because it was first practiced in that other field. In this last section, we will address miscellaneous aspects of the

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[98]Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 5-6. For proof of these assertions, see chapter three below. Reference to the oral character of the Bible itself is somewhat premature at this point.

[99]Quoted in Wuellner, 457.

[100]Keegan, 73-75, has a helpful discussion of the range of use and ambiguity in the label "literary criticism."

literary endeavor, in order to demonstrate the oral component, and to see how literary criticism can benefit from oral studies.

Once one recognizes the significant oral residue of the age in which the Scriptures were produced, one finds the need to re-evaluate all forms of modern literary criticism. Not only does 19th-century higher criticism, with its concentration on **written** sources become suspect, but the evaluation of biblical literature according to **modern literary** norms and techniques becomes questionable.[101] Walter Ong has pointed specifically to **plot** as a specifically literate phenomenon. The classic "Freytag's Pyramid," whereby the plot builds to a climax, and then descends gradually in *dénoument*, appears to be unknown to the primary oral poet. Already Horace noticed this when he wrote in his *Ars Poetica* that the epic poet "hastens into the action and precipitates the hearer into the middle of things."[102] By *in media res* Horace seems to refer to an episodic structure which has little regard for the type of plot development to which we are accustomed, or for strict temporal sequence.[103]

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[101]This framework may be a form of "evolutionary ethnocentrism," whereby the literature of Western civilization, and that a **literate** art, is presumed to be the highest point in a long history of development, and therefore the norm against which all other literature is measured. Cf. Ruth Finnegan, 84: "There is no reason to suppose that our peculiar circumstances are the 'natural' ones towards which all literature is somehow striving to develop or by which it must everywhere be measured. In particular there is no reason to hold that it is only through the written—far less printed—page that man achieves literary and artistic expression of thought and artistry in other forms."

[102]Lines 148-49, quoted in Ong, "Oral Remembering and Narrative Structures," in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1981* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1982), 14.

[103]This, of course, is to evaluate the poet unfairly according to standards of a later time. This is the mindset of literate man. John Milton refers to the *in media res* technique in the preface to his *Paradise Lost*. Ong, "Oral Remembering," 14, explains: "Milton's words here show that he had from the start a control of his subject and of the causes powering its action that no oral poet could command. Milton had in mind a plot, with a beginning, middle, and end (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b) in a sequence corresponding temporally to that of the events he was reporting. This plot he deliberately dismembered in order to reassemble its parts in a consciously contrived anachronistic patterns." Milton, constrained by his own literacy, believed this was the technique of the epic oral poet, that the plot was **deliberately** thrown into anarchy as a literary technique.

Oral culture envisions narrative episodically, for this is the way **memory** functions. For narrative in such cultures is essentially a function of memory, not creativity. The strict organization of material in a plot is made possible only with writing:

> In fact, an oral culture has no experience of a lengthy, epic-size, or novel-size climactic linear plot, nor can it imagine such organization of lengthy material. ... The "things" that the action is supposed to start in the middle of have never, except for brief passages, in anyone's experience been arranged in a chronological order to establish a "plot". There is no *res*, in the sense of linear plot to start in the middle of. The *res* is a construct of literacy. It has to be made, fictionalized, and it cannot be made before writing. ... Oral poets commonly plunged the reader *in media res* not because of any grand design, but perforce. They had no choice, no alternative.[104]

The oral poet, rather than conforming to modern notions of plot, arranged his material episodically: "What made a good epic poet was—among other things, of course—tacit acceptance of the fact that episodic structure was the only way and the totally natural way of handling lengthy narrative, and possession of supreme skill in managing flashbacks and other episodic techniques."[105]

Literary criticism of the Gospels must take this into account. One cannot expect the Evangelists to observe the modern "Freytag's pyramid." Episodic structure is evident in the pericopal style, the use of flashbacks, and the manipulation of "oral traditional units," as is recognized today. At the same time, the Gospels are not **purely** oral creations—they display their

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The lack of "plot" in ancient art can be traced also to the method of "publication" or dissemination—the thesis of this study. As William Nelson notes, "From 'Listen, Lording' to 'Dear Reader,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 46.2 (Winter 1976-77): 120: "For works designed to be read aloud certain kinds of critical approach are therefore inappropriate. The attempt to discover unity and cohesion of plot in such compositions may lead only to the imposition of irrelevant structures and to distorted interpretation. A close reader with the book before him can find or imagine meaningful connections between a metaphor in canto ii and a simile in canto xi, but, unless the passages are especially memorable or the author explicitly connects them, a listening audience cannot."

[104]Ong, "Oral Remembering," 15.

[105]Ibid., 16.

own type of literary flair and method. The challenge is for literary critics to incorporate oral research into their techniques and to avoid anachronistic measuring sticks.[106]

This chapter has been a foretaste of what is to come. By highlighting the oral component of so many recent directions in biblical criticism, we hope to demonstrate the relevance and impact of this study. The impact of orality research on biblical studies is nothing new. On the contrary, it is what is old, what has been muted by generations of critics raised in the academy of silent texts. When we return to biblical criticism in chapter three, the reader must be conscious that all aspects of exegesis are impacted by this research.

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[106]Werner Kelber, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Ancient Art of Communication: A Response," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 101, claims the middle ground: "The 19th century novel in particular has internalized in most of us narrative expectations that are quite alien to writers and hearers of the first century gospel. I take, therefore, a position midway between those who view the gospel as a fully plotted, deeply psychological narrative, and others who hear it as a virtually unedited rendition of oral composition."

In a companion article, "Narrative as Interpretation," Kelber asks: "might we not grow more tolerant methodologically, acknowledging the gospels both as integral narratives and as narrative participants in tradition, as documents both of synchronic integrity and diachronic depth?" (124). The field of orality research thus promises to be eclectic rather than exclusive.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF ORALITY AND LITERACY

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like a painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing.

(Plato, Phaedrus, *275D-E)*

Introduction

The plural word "theories" in the chapter title is worthy of note. Although one may speak in general of "oral theory," there is very little which is universally accepted. Eric Havelock speaks of "the general theory of primary orality," and "the special theory of Greek orality."[1] One might suppose that the former category would contain the suppositions upon which most scholars agree, while the latter "special theory" would express each scholar's particular viewpoint on the precise nature and moment of the transition from orality to literacy. On the contrary, as in Havelock's case, the "general theory" is often simply abstracted from the special theory. Furthermore, while some scholars argue over which "special theory" best explains the data, others reject in principle any attempt to pin down precisely the transition from orality to literacy and its effects.

This fundamental debate impacts greatly upon this study. While earlier studies tended to emphasize a decisive change in mentality or culture when the transition to literacy occurred (however much they disagreed on when that was), recent scholars often view such "binary oppositions" as over-simplistic at the least, and even totally misleading. Today the trend is to

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[1]Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), chapters 8-11.

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emphasize the **many** factors in a changing society, and the continuous tension between oral and literate culture.

Havelock's most recent work offers an exciting survey of the history of the "orality problem," a discussion which verges on the nostalgic. His perspective on this history is, of course, connected to the Homeric question which will be taken up below (his special theory). Yet his survey of the field's history is helpful to introduce broadly the time frame into which the major scholars fit. That is to say, history of the study of orality is for the most part the story of how to understand Homer. While the suggestion that Homer was an oral poet was already posed by Rousseau,[2] it was not taken up until the present century with the work of Milman Parry. Why? Havelock suggests that our own experience of media transformation (cf. McLuhan below), especially radio, brought the significance of literacy to the fore.[3] But even this took time to germinate.

> ... I think a nerve had been touched common to all of us, an acoustic and so an oral nerve, something that had been going on for over forty years since the end of World War I, to the point where it demanded response. McLuhan's book came closest to realizing what this experience was, one shared by the writer and the thinker and the scholar and the common man alike. We had all been listening to the radio, a voice of incessant utterance, orally communicating fact and intention and persuasion, borne on the airwaves to our ears.[4]

The trickle of studies which began to flow after World War I became a torrent around 1963—a watershed year in the discipline. "The list of authors and works cited can be conveniently divided chronologically, between those who have written later than 1963 and those who wrote before that date: the later group (excluding those with only peripheral connection to the problem) number 136; the earlier one, 25."[5]

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[2]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues: ou il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale* (Paris, 1762).

[3]Havelock, 30-33.

[4]Ibid., 30.

[5]Ibid., 25.

While this is only one man's interpretation of the course of history, it is instructive to examine his reasons for choosing 1963:

> Within the span of twelve months or less, from some time in 1962 to the spring of 1963, in three different countries—France, Britain, and the United States—there issued from the printing presses five publications by five authors who at the time when they wrote could not have been aware of any mutual relationship. The works in question were *La Pensée Sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss), "The Consequences of Literacy" (Goody and Watt, an extended article), *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan), *Animal Species and Evolution* (Mayr), and *Preface to Plato* (Havelock).[6]

The diversity of fields covered by this list is astonishing: structuralism and social anthropology, the sociologist's media studies, evolution, and the classics. This illustrates both the complexity of the problem and its immense significance. Recent times will add to this list the field of linguistics, psychology, medieval studies, and, of course, biblical exegesis. In this chapter we can only hope to touch on the contributions made by such diverse fields, beginning with the "grandfather" issue in the classics discipline: the Homeric question. It will soon become apparent that one might speak more accurately of the "orality **problem**" than the "orality theory."

The Special Theory of Greek Orality: The Homeric Question

As we noted above, the problem of Homer has been at the heart of modern studies of orality and literacy from the start. "The 'orality question,' then, from its inception in modern times, has been entangled with the 'Greek question,'"[7] Havelock insists. When, in the 18th century, cross-cultural encounters with non-literate tribes of the New World first presented "modern man" with an example of oral culture, the implications for his own classical history were quickly drawn.[8] Rousseau, for instance, writing between 1754 and 1762, focused his

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[6]Ibid., 25.

[7]Ibid., 34.

[8]As we shall see, Goody and Watt had similar cross-cultural experiences in Asia and Africa which determined their work.

discussion on the "savage mind" and its implications for the origin of language.[9] He placed a high value on "natural," that is, "savage" language (which categories were taken up by Lévi-Strauss and Derrida).[10] This investigation then led him to ask "Whether it is likely that Homer knew how to write," posing for the first time the Homeric Question. His only conclusion was that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* could not have been products of writing.

The Homeric Question was taken up by the German philologist F. A. Wolf.[11] However, among Wolf and the "Analysts" who followed him, the composition of Homer remained a **textual** problem, searching for the scraps of poems which were redacted into the grand epics we have today. Walter Ong comments:

> Inevitably, the Analysts were succeeded in the early twentieth century by the Unitarians, often literary pietists, insecure cultists grasping at straws, who maintained that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were so well structured, so consistent in characterization, and in general such high art that they could not be the work of an unorganized succession of redactors but must be the creation of one man.[12]

Both schools were oppressed by the supreme bookishness of the nineteenth century so that they could not see beyond textual fragments and literate authors.

Rousseau's oral instincts finally came to fruition in the work of Milman Parry. Previous scholars had, of course, recognized that unlettered composition preceded the literate; but Parry was the first of the modern era to ask seriously whether the former might not be an art

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[9]Rousseau, *op. cit.*

[10]It is Jack Goody who overcame the prejudicial nature of this language and suggested that the "savage mind" is really an "oral mind," and that the "illiterate savage" be better described as non-literate or simply oral (see below).

[11]Friedrich August Wolf, *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, 3d ed. (Halle, 1884). It is difficult to ignore the similarity of this title to Havelock's own *Preface to Plato*.

[12]Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 19. See both Havelock and Ong for a lengthier discussion of the early criticism of Homer.

in its own right, rather than merely a pale reflection, a primitive precursor, of the latter.[13]

"Parry's discovery might be put this way: virtually every distinctive feature of Homeric poetry is

due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition."[14] His insight began with the

recognition of "recurring formulaic epithets" attached to proper names. Presented in his M.A.

thesis at Berkeley, these novel ideas were not well received by those classicists who insisted on

viewing Homer as a text. However, in Paris he reworked the thesis into his doctoral dissertation,

appearing in its classic form as *L'Epithéte Traditionelle dans Homère* (1928).[15] Parry continued

work in this field during his time as a professor at Harvard, which gave him leave to go to

Yugoslavia to visit and record surviving oral poetry among rural poets. After his untimely death,

this work was continued and brought into print by Albert Lord and G. S. Kirk.[16]

What was Parry's real insight? Previous scholars had certainly noticed the expressions

carefully chosen to fit the meter of a given situation. "But the general presumption had been that

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[13]Cf. J. B. Hainsworth, "The Criticism of an Oral Homer," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 90 (1970): 94: "So in saying that Homer was traditional we really pass no judgment at all. We simply say that his genius was expressed through one set of conventions, the inherited sagas, rather than another." Cf. Havelock, *Muse*, 119: "This social condition of illiteracy is confused with the condition of primary orality, which by analogy is also 'put down' in estimation. Greek oral culture before 650 or 700 B.C. is relegated to the status of a Dark Age, or else unhistorically upgraded to meet the literate standard. The prejudice at work here rests on a failure to distinguish between nonliteracy and illiteracy. The former, though negative, describes a positive social condition, in which communication is managed acoustically but successfully. The latter refers to a failure to communicate under altered circumstances. Yet to judge one by the light of the other is commonplace." William Bright discusses today's continuing prejudice which often refuses the honorable title "literature" to oral compositions because they do not fit Western standards of art; see "Literature: Written and Oral," in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1981* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1982), 271-83.

[14]Ong, *Orality*, 21.

[15]Published by Société Éditrice Les Belles Lettres; an English translation is available in Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1-190.

[16]Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962). Milman Parry's own essays are collected in the volume edited by his son Adam, cited above.

proper metrical terms somehow suggested themselves to the poetic imagination in a fluid and

largely unpredictable way, correlated only with 'genius' ... ."[17] The essence of poetic genius was

thought to be the ability to produce metrical expressions spontaneously. It was well-known that

later Latin poets had available to them volumes containing epithets and phrases organized by

meter so that the poet might assemble a poem from these "building blocks." But the Romantic

Age demanded originality:

> For the extreme Romantic, the perfect poet should ideally be like God Himself, creating *ex nihilo*: the better he or she was, the less predictable was anything and everything in the poem. Only beginners or permanently poor poets used prefabricated stuff.[18]

Parry suggested, on the contrary, that they did just this: that the poet had a virtual "phrase book"

in his head from which he "stitched together" an epic.[19]

Milman Parry's thesis led by analogy to the investigation of Homeric formulas. Ong

explains:

> By and large, as Parry's work had proceeded and was carried forward by later scholars, it became evident that only a tiny fraction of the words in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not parts of formulas, and to a degree devastatingly predictable formulas.[20]

Not only were standard descriptions used of key characters, but "standardized formulas" were

grouped into "standardized themes," a repository upon which the oral poet could draw.[21] Rather

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[17]Ong, *Orality*, 21.

[18]Ibid., 22.

[19]Etymologically, it has been noted, ῥαψῳδέω meant "to stitch together," for which reason the reciter of poetry was called a ῥαψῳδός. Even if the etymology is correct, one must question whether we may presume to know just what they were supposedly "stitching together." Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 35, suggests: "Formula and theme are the stuff which the epic singer rhapsodizes or 'stitches' into his oral epic fabric, never worded exactly the same on any two occasions."

[20]Ong, *Orality*, 23.

[21]Ibid., 23. Compare this to the medieval concept of *loci communes* to which Ong draws attention, standardized groupings of formulas and topics for rhetorical use. See below.

than a mosaic of textual sources, "Homer" came to be seen as the cumulative work of generations

of epic poets working with old set expressions.

The central idea of formulas has led the "Homeric Question" today to grow into the

"oral traditional question."[22] The formula itself has been the subject of continuing research (and

debate), not least among devout students of Parry and Lord.[23] Chief among these is John Foley,

who shows his interest in both formula and "theme":

> In *TE* [Parry] first defined the "formula" as "an expression regularly used, under the same
> metrical conditions, to express an essential idea." ... The "theme" is "a recurrent element
> of narration or description in traditional oral poetry. It is not restricted, as is the formula,
> by metrical considerations."[24]

Add to these two the idea of "story pattern" and you have the heart of the field of "traditional

literature."[25] These three elements provide the oral poet with the means to compose his epic, and

at the same time serve as the level of continuity in transmission: "Even from the same singer,

stability from one performance to the next is likely to lie not at the word-for-word level of the

text, but at the level of theme and story pattern."[26]

As is apparent in this description of the poet's technique, oral traditionalism

investigations inevitably lead to a discussion of the **performance** itself—for "poet" and "singer"

are practically interchangeable terms. Hainsworth notes:

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[22]John Miles Foley, "Introduction: The Oral Theory in Context," in John Miles Foley,
ed., *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord* (Columbus, OH: Slavica
Publishers, Inc., 1981), 32-33.

[23]See, for example, Jack Goody's criticisms, discussed on p. 101 below. There is a
great dispute as to whether the formula is really unique to oral literature. Ong, *Rhetoric*, 289,
suggests an answer: "In the last analysis the reason for the difficulty may well be that, since
language is grounded in repetition, there is a residue of formula in all expression, so that we
should not take as our basic question, Is this formulary or not? but rather, How formulary is this
expression as compared to other expressions?"

[24]Foley, 30 & 34.

[25]Foley, 42, prefers "traditional" to "oral."

[26]Ibid., 40.

Both modern observation and inference from old poems indicates that the plain recitation of epic poetry is unusual. The verses are at least intoned and usually sung. Instrumental accompaniment by the singer or by an assistant is regular. A second singer may repeat each verse after the first. There is consequently wide scope for histrionics on the part of the performer.[27]

When discussing oral "texts," the "performance" is as much the subject of investigation as the bare words.

The oral traditional aspect of the field has had great impact on biblical exegesis, yet has usually led to investigating the transmission of sources **behind** the Scriptures, rather than the oral character and performance of the final text. Thus, we must pass quickly by this large body of literature.[28]

The fullest investigation and application of the Homeric research has been done by Eric Havelock in his classic *Preface to Plato*.[29] The contradiction apparent in the previous sentence indicates that Havelock's interest in Homer is for the sake of understanding Plato. In contrasting

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[27]Hainsworth, 91-92. See also our discussion of performance theory in chapter one.

[28]See, for example: Ernest L. Abel, "The Psychology of Memory and Rumor Transmission and Their Bearing on Theories of Oral Transmission in Early Christianity," *The Journal of Religion* 51.4 (October 1971): 270-81; Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Asia Journal of Theology* 5.1 (1991): 34-54; Robert B. Coote, "The Application of the Oral Theory to Biblical Hebrew Literature," *Semeia* 5 (1976): 51-64; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Memory and Manuscript: The Origins and Transmission of the Gospel Tradition," *Theological Studies* 23 (1962): 442-57; Birger Gerhardsson, *Die Anfänge der Evangelientraditionen* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977); idem, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Uppsala: Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1961); idem, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); idem, *Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1964); Burke O. Long, "Recent Field Studies in Oral Literature and their Bearing on OT Criticism," *Vetus Testamentum* 26.2 (1976): 187-98; Jacob Neusner, *Oral Tradition in Judaism: The Case of the Mishnah* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987); Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1954); Daniel Jeremy Silver, *The Story of Scripture: From Oral Tradition to the Written Word* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990); William O. Walker, ed., *The Relationship Among the Gospels* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1978); Geo. Widengren, "Tradition and Literature in Early Judaism and in the Early Church," *Numen* 10 (1963): 42-83.

[29]Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

Homer with Plato, Havelock has developed the most complete theory of the cultural significance of the oral epic poet.

Havelock sees Homer as the archetypical remainder of a totally oral period of Greek history: "Homer roughly represents the terminus of a long period of non-literacy in which Greek oral poetry was nursed to maturity and in which only oral methods were available to educate the young and to transmit the group mores."[30] There is already an allusion here to his thesis that epic poetry served a primarily **pragmatic, didactic** function, rather than aesthetic.[31] With reference to this function, he speaks of "the Homeric Encyclopedia." Support for this notion comes not only from Plato (see below), but from Hesiod's preface to *Theogony*, a hymn to the muses. The muses, he says, sing of "the custom-laws [νόμοι] of all and folk-ways [ἐθέα] of the immortals."[32] In this pre-literate period, νόμος and ἔθος do not mean (written) statute and (philosophical) ethics, as they will by the time of Aristotle, but rather "the social and moral behaviour pattern which is approved and therefore proper and 'goodly.'"[33]

The "encyclopedic" function of the epic was to preserve, transmit, and teach this societal and personal material across generations. The narrative becomes a vehicle of preservation.[34] The actions of the men of power in the tale provide a model for how society

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[30]Ibid., 46.

[31]Havelock, *Preface*, 156, believes it is the fifth-century philosophers who first considered poetry art, and thus subject to aesthetic criteria. However, Hainsworth, 93, cautions one against viewing Homer as a sort of technician: "it is not easy to see in Homer any prominence at all given to these non-artistic aspects. His social duties Homer discharges obliquely, without any conflict between them and his artistic purpose. Nor has Homer any great argument to advance ... ."

[32]Line 53; quoted by Havelock, *Preface*, 62. It is important to note that in the early period of Greek poetry the muses were believed to convey the **contents** of the poem, rather than just the "inspiration."

[33]Ibid., 63.

[34]Havelock, *Muse*, 11: "*Preface to Plato* sought to shift attention, so far as the original Greek epics were concerned, away from improvisation toward recollection and remembrance ... ." These he calls "the key to our civilized existence" (70).

should deal with similar situations, thus illustrating "public law"; similarly, their personal dealings became a model of how to conduct one's personal affairs.[35] Even ritual and technical material was preserved there:

> Procedures have to be observed, and are recorded as operations made up of distinct acts precisely defined, which must follow each other in a certain order. Thus, when Achilles digresses in order to describe the staff of authority which he dashes on the ground, the digression furnishes a piece of tribal law but it also illustrates an item of tribal technique, simple to be sure, but precise for all that. The staff must be properly prepared and ceremoniously handled. ... [T]he series conveys the effect of a procedure carefully generalised so as to be easily imitable. It is a bit of preserved know-how. An oral culture felt the need of a ritual conservation of such procedures.[36]

Thus, epic poetry preserves also the τέχνη of society, both for the ritual of religion and for craft.[37] The "encyclopedic function" of poetry succeeds in explaining huge sections which otherwise appear as inexplicable digressions.

The preceding theory is confirmed by Plato's allusion to the function of the poets when he declines to allow them into his utopian Republic:

> If a man, then, it seems, who was capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating [μιμεῖσθαι] all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool, but we ourselves, for our souls' good, should continue to employ the more austere and less delightful poet and tale-teller, who would imitate the diction of the good man and would tell his tale in the patterns which we prescribed in the beginning, when we set out to educate our soldiers.[38]

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[35]Profuse examples are given by Havelock, *Preface*, 64-74.

[36]Ibid., 80.

[37]Plato, *Republic*, 598E, complained that the poets claimed to "possess the know-how of all techniques." His comment confirms Havelock's analysis. Havelock himself adds (*Preface*, 82-83), however, that when it came to mechanical procedures, the epic recorded only generalities—it was not a "how-to" manual in the modern sense. The precise details were communicated by word and example in the apprenticeship.

[38]Plato, *Republic*, book III, 398A-B.

Let us, then, return to the topic of poetry and our apology, and affirm that we really had good grounds then for dismissing her [poetry] from our city, since such was her character. For reason constrained us. And let us further say to her, lest she condemn us for harshness and rusticity, that there is from of old a quarrel between philosophy and poetry.[39]

To this quarrel we now turn.

Havelock contends that the real subject of the *Republic* is poetry, not politics.

Placing the poet in the same company with the painter, it argues that the artist produces his version of experience which is twice removed from reality; his work is at best frivolous and at worst dangerous both to science and morality; the major poets from Homer to Euripides must be excluded from the educational system of Greece.[40]

Plato claims that poetry cripples the mind, that it is a kind of disease, whose antidote is the knowledge "of what things really are." **The *Republic* is a challenge to the traditional educational system revolving around the poets,** with Homer and Hesiod specifically cited.

Plato writes as though he had never heard of aesthetics, or even of art. Instead he insists on discussing the poets as though their job was to supply metrical encyclopedias. The poet is a source on the one hand of essential information and on the other of essential moral training. ... It is as though Plato expected poetry to perform all those functions which we relegate on the one hand to religious instruction or moral training and on the other to classroom texts, to histories and handbooks, to encyclopedias and reference manuals.[41]

If this is the purpose of poetry, Plato claims, then it is doing a poor job. It does not produce the knowledge of things in themselves which he tries to instill in his academy. Instead it attempts μίμησις "imitation." This complex concept was at the heart of Plato's objections to the poets, describing how they danced around a subject, placing it into a thousand narrative situations instead of getting at its essence.[42] What does Plato's rejection of the poetic educational system

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[39]Plato, *Republic*, book X, 607B. These are only two examples of Plato's rejection of the poets.

[40]Havelock, *Preface*, 4.

[41]Ibid., 29.

[42]See the extensive discussion of μίμησις in Havelock, *Preface*, 20-35, as well as relevant sections of W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vols. 4 & 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-8). As the first quotation above from the *Republic* illustrates, Plato was also concerned with the moral implications of poetic μίμησις, which seemed to him tantamount to deception: the poets in their narratives successively pretended to be various characters in the story.

have to do with the orality question? Havelock's fundamental contention is that Plato is rejecting

oral culture in favor of a **literate** one.

Bound up with this contention is the question of the dating and significance of the

introduction of the alphabet to Greece. The beginning of Greece's "Dark Age" is generally dated

to about 1175 B.C., following upon the fall of Mycenae. With this came the loss of literacy,

which the Mycenaeans possessed in the "Linear B" script. Of this, Havelock notes:

> It is of vital importance to recognise that the Near Eastern scripts of all shapes and sizes
> shared two common limitations: (a) they employed a large number of signs and (b) the
> signs used left a wide range of ambiguity in interpretation. These two factors combined to
> make them elaborate but also very clumsy weapons of communication, as is amply
> testified in the records of the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Hittite empires. Only scribes
> specially trained could handle the script. The governor or executive dictated: the scribe
> translated his word into script; another scribe on receipt of the script retranslated it back
> into acceptable speech and read it out to the recipient.[43]

Havelock's general theory contends that non-alphabetic writing systems such as Linear B, with

their complicated and clumsy system of pictographs, were not able to represent fully the sounds

of speech, nor were they simple enough to make literacy widely available. Thus, the culture of

the Mycenaean period remained essentially oral. The loss of writing in the Dark Age, therefore,

caused no great rift between Homer and the preceding era. For, as Havelock describes the

subservient role which writing had played: "All preserved communication in this culture was

orally shaped; if it happened to get written down, the device of script was simply placed at the

service of preserving visually what had already been shaped for preservation orally."[44]

This totally oral period, the "Dark Age," ended with the writing down of Homer and

Hesiod, a process which took place between 700 and 650 B.C.[45] Homer's tales preserve

memories of the ancient Mycenaean period, memories which were transmitted through this Dark

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[43]Havelock, *Preface*, 117.

[44]Ibid., 136-37. Anticipating future discussions, we must note that this phenomenon is
not immediately destroyed by the coming of the alphabet; in fact, this is the very idea we will
postulate about the NT epistles.

[45]Ibid., 115.

Age by oral means. Crucial to the argument that Homer (or the Homeric poets) composed his epics orally is the date when the Phoenician system was adapted into the Greek alphabet. Earlier scholarship strove to date this as early as possible, based on the pre-conception that Homer must be literate—the 10th-9th centuries were the favored dates. Then in 1933 Rhys Carpenter argued for a date around 720-700 B.C., shocking the traditionalists.[46] This produced a long and drawn out controversy, which we cannot resolve here. Havelock himself admits to being unable to judge the debate, but wishes to point out "how controversial datings are still in part controlled by extrinsic motives which spring from preconceptions about the character of early Greek culture."[47] Lacking **incontrovertible** evidence of literacy before the eighth century, only prejudice stands against the connection of Homer with orality.

In Havelock's theory, the coming of the alphabet did more than provide a simplified writing technology. Rather, the writing system influenced thought and communication. Of the pre-Homeric Near-Eastern writing systems he argues:

> These syllabaries were too clumsy and ambiguous to allow fluency or encourage general literacy. Hence their idiom had no power to change the general idiom of oral communication, but on the contrary was forced to reproduce it ... .[48]

Such writing was produced by the laws of acoustics, and remained bound to the poetic medium.

The invention of the alphabet was revolutionary:

> It is easy to see why pre-Greek systems never got further than the syllable. This 'piece' of linguistic sound is actually pronounceable and so empirically perceptible. ... The Greek system got beyond empiricism, by abstracting the nonpronounceable, nonperceptible elements contained in the syllables. ... The Greeks did not 'add vowels' (a common misconception: vowel signs had already shown up in Mesopotamian Cuneiform and Linear

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[46]Rhys Carpenter, "The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet," *American Journal of Archaeology* 37 (1933): 8-29. Cited in Havelock, *Preface*, 49 n. 4. Havelock offers an **extensive** discussion of the dating of the introduction of the alphabet in this note. See below for Goody's treatment of the question.

[47]Havelock, *Preface*, 51. For the prejudice which equates orality with illiteracy see p. 38 n. 13, above.

[48]Ibid., 135-6. See also Havelock, *Muse*, 60: "Drastic economy ... was purchased at the price of drastic ambiguity."

B) but invented the (pure) consonant. ... The invention also supplied the first and last instrument perfectly constructed to reproduce the range of previous orality.[49]

The new alphabet was able to change communication:

> The alphabet proved so much more effective and powerful an instrument for the preservation of fluent communication than any syllabary had been. And by the fourth century its victory was nearly complete, meaning that the original functional purpose of the poetic style was becoming obsolete. You no longer needed to use it [poetic style] to guarantee a life for what was said.[50]

In the thought of Plato we see this change taking effect. Plato objects to the poets because, first of all, their techniques are no longer necessary.

Yet Plato also objected to the poet's method of teaching, which prompts Havelock's theories concerning the change in thought patterns which literacy produced.

> The formulaic style characteristic of oral composition represented not merely certain verbal and metrical habits but also a cast of thought, or a mental condition. The Presocratics themselves were essentially oral thinkers, prophets of the concrete linked by long habit to the past, and to forms of expression which were also forms of experience, but they were trying to devise a vocabulary and syntax for a new future, when thought should be expressed in categories organized in a syntax suitable to abstract statement.[51]

The struggle towards the abstract is apparent in Plato's *Republic*, where Socrates is challenged to isolate the principle of morality in the **abstract**, apart from the μίμησις of the narrative.[52] Three centuries of literacy had begun to affect thought. By the time of the fifth-century philosophers,

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[49]Ibid., 60.

[50]Ibid., 137. See also Havelock, *Muse*, 9: "It occurred to me that the true orality of these non-Greek peoples was not getting through to us—had in fact been irretrievably lost, because the writing systems employed were too imperfect to record it adequately. ... [T]he Greek symbols had succeeded in isolating with economy and precision the elements of linguistic sound and had arranged them in a short atomic table learnable in childhood. The invention for the first time made possible a visual recognition of linguistic phonemes that was both automatic and accurate."

[51]Havelock, *Preface*, viii.

[52]The difference is illustrated by Havelock, *Muse*, 76: "The formula 'Honesty is the best policy' is a creature of literate speech, of documented speech. In orally preserved speech, this becomes 'An honest man always prospers.' More likely still, instead of being isolated in a maxim, the man's performance is incorporated in a story where he performs honestly (or fails to perform honestly)."

those who thought in prose and preferred prose—that is the philosophers, who were intent upon constructing a new type of discourse which we can roughly characterise as conceptual rather than poetic—were driven to relegate the poetic experience to a category which was non-conceptual and therefore non-rational and non-reflective.[53]

The very shift in style from oral poetry to literate prose indicates the change in thought. The basic principle of poetry is "variation within the same," using "repeated words with repeated meanings," or even repeated sounds.[54] The general Greek rhythmic genius was the center also of their poetic acoustic technique[55] This technique served to make the words more memorable, but also constrained the means of expression, in which Havelock sees three characteristics:

> First of all, the data or the items without exception have to be stated as events in time. They are all time conditioned. None of them can be cast into a syntax which shall be simply true for all situations and so timeless; … . Secondly they are remembered and frozen into the record as separate disjunct episodes each complete and satisfying in itself, in a series which is joined together paratactically. Action succeeds action in a kind of endless chain. The basic grammatical expression which would symbolise the link of event to event would be simply the phrase "and next … ". Thirdly, these independent items are so worded as to retain a high content of visual suggestion; they are brought alive as persons or as personified things acting out vividly before the mind's eye.[56]

Thus, philosophical speculation is not carried out in terms of definition, with the "timeless copula."[57] Plato's epistemology reacts to all of these points, in order to discuss what is "eternally true."

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[53]Havelock, *Preface*, 156.

[54]Ibid., 147-48. Hainsworth, 96-97, offers a more detailed, threefold analysis of the oral poet's style: first, it has **clarity**, deriving from "the poet's firmness of grasp on his story-line"; secondly, it has **balance**, meaning "that in good parataxis episodes are arranged in mirrored fashion around a central scene"; thirdly, there is a certain *horror vacui*—rather than to economy, the oral poet "is inclined to elaboration and duplication."

[55]Havelock, *Preface*, 128. Havelock, *Muse*, calls poetry "rhythmic talk" (71), and rhythm "the foundation of all biological pleasures" (72).

[56]Havelock, *Preface*, 180.

[57]We could at this point become entangled in Plato's demand that a philosophy of "becoming" be replaced by one of "being," which corresponds to the dichotomy Havelock observes.

In this analysis, Havelock has constructed a view of Greek history which aligns concrete, narrative, poetic thought with Homeric orality, and abstract, rational, prosaic thought—Platonic philosophy—with alphabetic literacy. This dichotomy is clearly summarized in his own words:

> Control over the style of a people's speech, however indirect, means control also over their thought. The two technologies of preserved communication known to man, namely the poetised style with its acoustic apparatus and the visual prosaic style with its visual and material apparatus, each within their respective domains control also the content of what is communicable. Under one set of conditions man arranges his experience differently in different words and with different syntax and perhaps as he does so the experience itself changes. This amounts to saying that the patterns of his thought have historically run in two distinct grooves, the oral and the written. The case for this assumption has not yet been clarified. But at least Plato, if we may now return to him, seems to have been convinced that poetry and the poet had exercised a control not merely over Greek verbal idiom but over the Greek state of mind and consciousness.[58]

The oral state of mind, against which Plato railed so vehemently, was persistent, indeed.

Mention must be made here also of the influential article on orality and literacy by Jack Goody and Ian Watt entitled, "The Consequences of Literacy."[59] The title itself betrays his thesis that literacy itself **causes** change in a culture. Prompted by the work of Havelock, Goody and Watt used their experiences in Africa and Asia with newly literate tribes to support the Greek thesis. Like Havelock, they stress the superiority of phonetic/alphabetic writing systems over earlier logograms.[60] Alphabetic writing, they believe, enables the development of a fuller range of thought:

> ... phonetic writing, by imitating human discourse, is in fact symbolizing, not the objects of the social and natural order, but the very process of human interaction in speech: the verb is as easy to express as the noun; and the written vocabulary can be easily and unambiguously expanded. Phonetic systems are therefore adapted to expressing every nuance of individual thought, to recording personal reactions as well as items of major social importance. Non-phonetic writing, on the other hand, tends rather to record and

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[58]Havelock, *Preface*, 142.

[59]In Jack Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1968), 27-68.

[60]Goody and Watt, 35, 40-42

reify only those items in the cultural repertoire which the literate specialists have selected for written expression; and it tends to express the collective attitude towards them.[61]

They, too, suggest that the advent of alphabetic writing enables abstract thinking,[62] private thought,[63] definable, autonomous and permanent truths,[64] in fact, that all of Western civilization and democracy is due to the invention of the alphabet.[65]

Despite his criticisms of the oral/poetic tradition, Plato himself had some harsh words to say of the "new" invention of writing. These need close consideration. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates refers to the legend of the Egyptian god Theuth giving writing to Thamus, claiming it would improve man's memory. Thamus disputes this claim, arguing that writing, first of all, dulls memory.[66] Secondly, Socrates argues, writing cannot teach, but is valuable only as an *aide-mémoire*.[67] Thirdly, writing is mute, silent, undefended.[68] The written word is only the image of

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[61]Ibid., 38. The Linear B script involved some 87 syllabic signs combined with a number of pictorial "ideograms." Thus, their comments on "non-phonetic" writing would apply somewhat to this predecessor of the Greek phonetic alphabet.

There appears to be a referential fallacy in Goody and Watt's analysis, by which they contend that phonetic writing corresponds directly to **thought** (or speech), whereas non-phonetic writing represents **things**. This unfair treatment of non-phonetic systems will be dealt with below.

[62]Ibid., 44.

[63]Ibid., 62.

[64]Ibid., 53.

[65]Ibid., 55. Havelock, *Muse*, 39, queries with similar exaggeration: "A more radical question would be to ask: May not all logical thinking as commonly understood be a product of Greek alphabetic literacy?" This strong emphasis on the invention of writing came to be re-evaluated by Goody in later years, as we shall presently observe.

[66]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275B: "you, who are father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practise their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise."

[67]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275D: "He who thinks, then, that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain,

the spoken word, which is "living and breathing." Thus, the man who has true knowledge will not commit it to writing seriously, but only for amusement.[69] Discourse is a far nobler use to which to put knowledge.[70] Ironically, Plato (through Socrates) finally compares writing to the silliness of the poets, neither of which must be taken seriously.[71] Plato's dialectic stands somewhere between the oral poets and total literacy. Writing is only of value when the author is present to teach and defend it.[72]

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would be an utterly simple person, and in truth ignorant of the prophecy of Ammon, if he thinks written words are of any use except to remind him who knows the matter about which they are written."

[68]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275D-E: "Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like a painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. ... [W]hen ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself." Post-modernists might see this malleability of written language as a plus.

[69]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276D: "The garden of letters he will, it seems, plant for amusement, and will write, when he writes, to treasure up reminders for himself, when he comes to the forgetfulness of old age, and for others who follow the same path, and he will be pleased when he sees them putting forth tender leaves."

[70]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276E: "in my opinion, serious discourse about them is far nobler, when one employs the dialectic method [διαλεκτικῇ τέχνῃ] and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them ... ."

[71]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 277E-278B: "But the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and that no written discourse, whether in metre or in prose, deserves to be treated very seriously (and this applies also to the recitations of the rhapsodes, delivered to sway people's minds, without opportunity for questioning and teaching), but that the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know; ... that man, Phaedrus, is likely to be such as you and I might pray that we ourselves may become."

[72]Plato, *Phaedrus*, 277C: "If he has composed his writings with knowledge of the truth, and is able to support them by discussion of that which he has written, and has the power to show by his own speech that the written words are of little worth, such a man ought not to derive his title from such writings, but from the serious pursuit which underlies them."

In his *Seventh Letter*[73] Plato applies the same ideas to his theory about how philosophy must be taught. It cannot be learned from books, and one who believes it can does not see how much labor is involved in acquiring true knowledge.[74] In fact, he refuses to write a treatise of his own philosophy for fear that readers of it would believe they have learned his teaching.[75] When one attempts to define something, it is bad enough that this must be done in language, for in its ambiguity language cannot approach closely to the "thing in itself"—it is far worse to attempt this in written language which is unchangeable and ambiguous.[76] Instead one must move back and forth among the "name," "definition," "image" and "knowledge," in order to get at the thing itself.[77] True learning comes only from a process of dialogue—question and answer—whereas writing, as a monologue, is always ambiguous and dangerous.[78] Plato's various dialogues, though written, are meant to reflect the oral word, as Guthrie notes:

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[73]Though the authenticity of many of Plato's letters is disputed, the *Seventh Letter* is accepted by the majority of scholars. See Guthrie, 5:399-417.

[74]Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 340D.

[75]Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 341C: "Thus much, at least, I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching of me or of others, or by their own discoveries—that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real skill in the matter. There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself. Yet this much I know—that if the things were written or put into words, it would be done best by me, and that, if they were written badly, I should be the person most pained."

[76]Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 342A-343C. Guthrie, 4:408, comments: "There is nothing stable or lasting (βέβαιον) about words. They can shift their meanings as we have seen, and different people give different names to the same things. Definitions are composed of words, and can be no more permanent than their constituents, and the same is true of the ordering and universalizing of experience into scientific theses."

[77]Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 343E.

[78]Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 344B-D: "After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are brought into contact and friction one with another, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the limits of human powers. Therefore every man of worth, when dealing with

The *Republic* is no ordinary written work (σύγγραμμα, *Ep.* 7, 341c5), purporting to summarize his final conclusions about life and reality, but as I have called it, a *mimesis* of the living, spoken word as it passes to and fro between friends questioning and answering one another not in a competitive spirit, but with one common aim, the discovery of truth.[79]

Once again we have seen that Plato's concerns about the educational system, in speaking in favor of dialectic, are as much opposed to the poets as they are to reading and writing.[80]

Thus, despite the strong impact which literacy had on Greece, one may not assume that it became a completely literate society. Objections such as Plato's ensured that it remained a highly oral society long after the introduction of the alphabet. Even the fact that the culture of the poets survived so long after the introduction of the alphabet (long enough to be attacked by Plato) testifies to the tenacious character of orality. One may assume no sudden and utter shift to

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matters of worth, will be far from exposing them to ill feeling and misunderstanding among men by committing them to writing. In one word, then, it may be known from this that, if one sees written treatises composed by anyone, either the laws of a lawgiver, or in any form whatever, these are not for that man the things of most worth, if he is a man of worth, but that his treasures are laid up in the fairest spot that he possesses. But if these things were worked at by him as things of real worth, and committed to writing, then surely, not gods, but men 'have themselves bereft him of his wits.'" Guthrie, 4:410: "The goal is reached, if at all, through conversation (the basic and still operative meaning of 'dialectic'), in which ideas are put forward and tested by a group of like-minded people."

[79]Guthrie, 4:410-11. Thus, Plato's strictures against writing do not apply to his own works.

[80]This qualification of Plato's comments—that his objections are mostly pedagogical— is supported strongly by William Chase Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 60 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 23-59. This essay gives perhaps the broadest and most balanced presentation of the role of literacy in the Greek classical period, especially centering around the Academy. However, Greene does evidence a traditional bias which cannot accept that Homer and other epic poets could have composed entirely without writing.

The best discussion of these Plato texts is found in Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. David Clines, Stephen Fowl, and Stanley Porter, *JSOT Supplement Series no. 87* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 237-42. Alexander argues "that Plato's real concern is with the difference between oral and written *teaching* rather than with rhetoric or with books in general" (238). Again: "The fixed nature of a written text makes it unsuitable for expressing the deepest perceptions of reality" (239). More precisely, Plato objects to writing most strongly because it is incapable of true dialectical teaching. Oral language is more suited to his pedagogical preferences, although it, too, can become one-sided, as it does in poetic technique. Of course, even with the poets there was an element of dialectic, as the speaker interacted with the audience. But it was not what Plato considered useful teaching.

literacy. Havelock himself notes how oral the culture remained in many ways. Though the alphabet had been in use for over three centuries by Plato's day, "Up to this point its introduction had made little practical difference to the educational system or to the intellectual life of adults."[81] There is little evidence of general public literacy; rather, the situation may be described as "craft literacy," meaning first that public inscriptions were used as a reference for officials, not so much for public consumption. Secondly, "As for the poet, he can write for his own benefit and thereby can acquire an increase in compositional skill, but he composes for a public who he knows will not read what he is composing but will listen to it."[82] Reading was a skill learned in adolescence, if at all, and thus was imposed on top of a previous oral schooling.[83] It would have remained an uncomfortable, foreign skill. The lack of an adequate **reading** audience is what keeps a culture oral. Plato himself, when distinguishing painting from poetry, opposes ὄψις "seeing" to ἀκόη "hearing."[84] The first prose writers appear to have adopted the poet's oral style, first writing down the lecture, and then learning it by heart for oral presentation.[85] "Oral publication" remained the norm.[86] This was true for many years:

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[81]Havelock, *Preface*, 38. Havelock, *Muse*, 86-87, notes that oral Greece lacked the social pressures to become literate which weigh upon colonized peoples of modern times. "The alphabet was an interloper, lacking social standing and achieved use. The elite of society were all reciters and performers" (87). "The flow of texts—at least those we either now have or can know something about—remained meager until the fifth century" (89).

[82]Havelock, *Preface*, 39.

[83]Ibid., 40. In Attic schools the introduction of letters at a primary level does not seem to have occurred until the end of the fifth century B.C. Thus, Plato stood on the brink of an educational revolution, which was slow in coming. Ibid., 41: "The testimony of the orators could probably be used to show that by the middle of the fourth century the silent revolution had been accomplished, and that the cultivated Greek public [note the modifier!] had become a community of readers."

[84]Ibid., 53 n. 8, referring to Plato, *Republic*, 603B.

[85]E. G. Turner, cited by Havelock, *Preface*, 53 n. 8. There seems to have been a controversy raging in Plato's day between Isocrates, who turned oratory into a written medium, and Alcidamas, who maintained that speeches should not be written down at all, but improvised at the moment. The latter's treatise, *On those who compose written speeches*, has survived, and it

But as effective as the alphabet was to prove, its functional victory was slow. Down to Euripides ... it was still very largely used (aside of course from inscriptions) for the transcription of communication that had in the first place been composed not by the eye but by the ear and composed for recital rather than for reading. The writers of Greece, to repeat, remained under audience control.[87]

The "oral residue" in Platonic Greece was certainly thick.[88]

"Oral Mentality"

We have already observed in Eric Havelock's work the thesis that the medium of communication affects the way one thinks. Havelock observes an irreversible change wrought by the advent of literacy in Greece:

A special theory of Greek literacy involves the proposition that the way we use our senses and the way we think are connected, and that in the transition from Greek orality to Greek literacy the terms of this connection were altered, with the result that thought patterns were altered also, and have remained altered, as compared with the mentality of oralism, ever since.[89]

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may be that Plato's comments in *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter* reflect his involvement in the debate. See Guthrie, 5:58.

[86]Havelock, *Preface*, 127: "You cannot flourish a document to command a crowd: it is symptomatic that as late as Aristophanes the use of the document for this purpose is regarded as funny and inept."

[87]Ibid., 137; cf. Ong, *Rhetoric*, 3: "Early written prose is more or less like a transcribed oration ... ." This method must be kept in mind when we examine the New Testament.

[88]"Oral residue" is an expression borrowed from Walter Ong. See Ong, *Rhetoric*, 25: "By oral residue I mean habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice, or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture, or indicating a reluctance or inability to dissociate the written medium from the spoken."

[89]Havelock, *Muse*, 98. What was this change? As noted above, the enduring emphasis lies on the purported shift to abstract thought: "The removal of pressure to memorize, registering slightly at first and very gradually increasing its force, had as its first effect some removal of the corresponding pressure to narrativize all preservable statement. This had freed the composer to choose subjects for a discourse which were not necessarily agents, that is, persons. They could in time turn themselves into names of impersonals, of ideas or abstractions or 'entities' (as we sometimes call them). Their prototypes had occurred in oralism, but only incidentally, never as the subject of the kind of extended language allotted to persons" (101). This could be more carefully phrased. Discourse continued to be memorized, as we have seen. Nevertheless, it was composed in **written** form, which ensured its preservation. "Memorizability" was no longer crucial to its survival.

One is tempted to ask whether "proposition" is not interchangeable with "presupposition" in this statement. Has this connection been proved? That question is best put off until after we have examined the writings of Walter Ong, the greatest proponent of this idea.

Father Ong, professor of humanities and psychiatry at St. Louis University, brings a wide range of knowledge and experience to the problem. The starting point, rarely investigated, lies buried in his published doctoral dissertation, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*.[90] Peter Ramus (1515-1572), by no means famous as a theologian, specialized in Latin and rhetoric, though it is his reforms of the educational system which make him significant. Ramus began his career with a savage attack on Aristotelianism in 1543, which resulted in his books being banned. With the ban lifted in 1547 he was appointed regius professor of "Eloquence and Philosophy" at the Collège de France. This title illustrates his resolve to combine humanism with scholasticism.[91]

Ramus was a product of humanism's renewed stress on rhetoric, standing in the line of Rudolph Agricola (1444-1485).[92] Agricola, in turn, was a student of the rhetoric of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Thomistius, and Boethius.[93] Ramus, famous in his day as "by far the leader of his whole age" in speaking and writing Latin, was naturally interested in the humanist campaign, since "[t]he humanists were replacing the practical medieval rhetoric with a more elaborate art

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[90]Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[91]See Ong, *Ramus*, 23-27.

[92]Philip Melanchthon may also be numbered among the intellectual children of Agricola. Ramus had studied Melanchthon's *Elementa Rhetorica*, and there actually arose a school of thought in Germany known as the "Mixts," or "Philippo-Ramists." See Ong, *Ramus*, 158-60, 299, *et passim*.

[93]Ibid., 98. The relationship of rhetoric to orality will prove to be of immense importance.

designed to teach perfect Latin expression as a literary and stylistic instrument."[94] While

attacking the Aristotle of categories, Agricola (and Ramus) exploits the Aristotle of the *topoi.*

> The nature of the *topoi*—or loci or places or commonplaces—is well-known. They are the headings or key notions to which one turns to find out what is available in one's store of knowledge for discourse on any given subject. Lists of the topics or places commonly include such things as definition, genus, species, wholes, parts, adjacents ... , relatives, comparisons, opposites, and (what Agricola's own list omits) witnesses. These are the headings one is to run through when one has to say something on any subject, to pronounce a eulogy or to plead a cause or simply to give a lecture on a question of the day.[95]

The shift from **categories** to **topoi** is often claimed to evidence a shift from the auditory to the

visual,[96] for with its emphasis on predication and attribution, "categorizing" had meant **saying**

something about a subject.[97]

Ong thus argues that Ramus exploited this early shift to the **visual.** "Places" and

"commonplaces" are visual images, at least as this ancient method was taken up by Ramism; one

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[94]Ibid., 21.

[95]Ibid., 104. The traditional stress on Aristotle's **categories** may be due to the standard textbook written by Porphyry around A.D. 280, *Introduction to the Categories of Aristotle.* See George Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 84.

[96]See footnote 132, below.

[97]Ong, *Ramus,* 107: "Yet there remains in the notion of categories a certain residue which ... derives not from visual-type but from aural-type analogies." He argues this from the family of Greek words revolving around the verb κατηγορεῖν, which means "to accuse"— referring to the linguistic theory that the predicate "accuses" the subject in a propositional statement. "Human knowledge for Aristotle exists in the full sense only in the enunciation, either interior or exteriorized in language; the *saying* of something about something, the *uttering* of a statement, the expression of a *judgment* (ultimately declaring a 'yes' or a 'no'), or, in what from the point of view of grammar is a sentence, a union of subject and predicate (*praedicatum*=the thing *said*)" (108); emphases original. While this explanation of "category" smacks of faulty etymologizing (κατηγορία might better be defined as a simple "verdict" concerning a topic, the result of one's investigation), Ong's oral analysis of *praedicatum* appears historically sound.

Ramus focused on and pushed those elements of classical rhetoric which leaned towards the visual. In this he was not altogether faithful to his sources. As Kennedy, 212, comments: "Perceptive critics of Ramus and his followers, however, have noted several features of Ramism which negate or even vitiate the principles on which classical rhetoric is based. Classical rhetoric is essentially civic and essentially oral; Ramism is neither."

looks into a *locus* to find information.[98] Ramus fathered the modern compulsion to diagram all knowledge, to produce flowcharts and tables illustrating the perceived systematic logic of a subject. "Ramism ... is at root a cluster of mental habits evolving within a centuries-old educational tradition and specializing in certain kinds of concepts, based in simple spatial models, for conceiving of the mental and communicational processes and, by implication, of the extramental world."[99] The "dialogue" begins to drop out of "dialectic," as it turns to "spatial models apprehended by sight."[100] Ramism stands at a crucial point in the oral-literate matrix, for he "furthered the elimination of sound and voice from man's understanding of the intellectual world and helped create within the human spirit itself the silences of a spatialized universe."[101] Thus, in his doctoral research Ong already focused on dialectic, rhetoric, and their transformation under humanism as key elements in the transition from orality to literacy.

Though not published in 1963, Walter Ong's *The Presence of the Word*[102] surely deserves to be considered on par with Havelock's "group of five" (see p. 36 above) as a pioneer study in orality. Showing the greatest evidence of his interest in psychology, it includes some of the strongest statements on the relationship of orality to thought. Ong begins with consideration

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[98]The *loci* in the ancient world were, apparently, visualized "pigeonholes." Kennedy, 82-83, and Ong, *Rhetoric*, 108, consider this to be related to the ancient art of memory, which literally taught one to visualize places into which information to be recalled was placed. On memory see Francis A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[99]Ong, *Ramus*, 8.

[100]Ibid., 9. Cf. the title of Ong's concluding section, "The Spatial Model as Key to the Mental World." Both dialectic and logic undergo a shift in meaning towards private **thinking** with the coming of print; Ong, *Rhetoric*, 5: "It [dialectic] was typically defined the way Cicero defines it, as *ars disserendi* or the 'art of discourse,' an art of communication, not of solipsistic (and by implication wordless) thought such as is implied by 'the art of thinking'—a favorite definition after the invention of print."

[101]Ong, *Ramus*, 318.

[102]Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1967). This volume is an expansion of the "Terry Lectures" which Ong gave at Yale University on 27-29 April 1964.

of the "sensorium," the place of each sense in man's thought and communication processes. Various cultures stress and relate the senses differently, possessing more taste or smell analogies than our own. Yet "Freudians have long pointed out that for abstract thinking the proximity senses—smell, taste, and in a special way touch (although touch concerns space as well as contact and is thus simultaneously concrete and abstract)—must be minimized in favor of the more abstract hearing and sight."[103] Of course, he will propose that from hearing to sight there is a further move to the abstract. In the shift from orality to writing Ong sees a shift in the sensorium from hearing to seeing.[104] The modern electronic media are effecting a shift back towards the auditory, but only in a **secondary** way: "this is not to say that we are returning to an earlier oral-aural world. There is no return to the past. The successive verbal media do not abolish one another but overlie one another."[105] This significant observation helps to explain how long the "oral residue" lingers in Western culture after the invention of writing.

Speaking in language reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan (see p. 73 below), Ong divides the history of cultures in terms of communications media into three successive stages: "(1) oral or oral-aural, (2) script, which reaches critical breakthroughs with the invention of the alphabet and then later of alphabetic moveable type, and (3) electronic."[106] Entrance into the third stage

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[103]Ibid., 6.

[104]Ibid., 8: "Writing, and most particularly the alphabet, shifts the balance of the senses away from the aural to the visual, favoring a new kind of personality structure, and alphabetic typography strengthens this shift … ."

[105]Ibid., 9. See also ibid., 88-89; and idem, *Rhetoric*, 24-25. Ong has a full discussion of modern society's secondary orality in "The Literate Orality of Popular Culture Today," in *Rhetoric*, 284-303.

[106]Ong, *Presence*, 17. Vernon K. Robbins, "Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures, *Semeia* 65 (1994), lays out a more elaborate "taxonomy":
(1) oral culture
(2) scribal culture
(3) rhetorical culture
(4) reading culture
(5) literary culture
(6) print culture

has made us aware of the previous two, yet it is impossible to go back: "Even with the greatest effort, contemporary man finds it exceedingly difficult, in most cases quite impossible, to sense what the spoken word actually is. He feels it as a modification of something which normally is or ought to be written."[107] One must constantly recall that writing is derivative from speech, not vice versa.[108]

The first stage, of which Ong uses the appellation "primary orality," is the culture with neither use nor knowledge of any kind of writing, akin to the Homeric era as discussed. What characterizes such a culture? Primarily, its characteristics revolve around the role of **memory**. The need to remember determines both style and structure. Information is repeated thematically rather than verbatim, as writing enables.[109] Mnemonic devices lie at the heart of education. The type of binary parallelism so common in Hebrew poetry is a mnemonic technique which has been

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(7) hypertext culture. (p. 77)
There is a certain amount of overlap in levels 2-4, and Robbins argues that both Jesus and Paul participated to a degree in these three "cultures."

[107]Ibid., 19. This highlights the difficulties of this present study, attempting to elucidate in **writing** the significance of **oral** culture.

[108]Cf. ibid., 21. We have spoken before of the fallacy of equating orality with illiteracy (see p. 38 above). Ong compares this to describing a horse as "a four-legged automobile without wheels." Nevertheless, because of the overlapping of media, there is a certain cross-fertilization. After literacy oral language is never the same again. See Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 87: "Moreover, you now were obliged to sound a little bit like writing quite regularly or perhaps even always, or you would not sound educated. You were expected—as we expect today—to let your speech be colored by the way writing was or could be done. Talk, after writing, had to sound literate—and 'literate,' we must remind ourselves, means 'lettered,' or post-oral."

[109]The culmination of the memory systems developed in the ancient world are explained in Yates, *op. cit.* Ong considers the verbatim recall these systems enabled to be an intermediate step between orality and literacy, for primary oral cultures did not stress the verbatim recall which systematized knowledge demands. Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 180 & 294, likewise points out how dependent these memory methods were on **writing**, both as motivation and as means. D. H. Green, "Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65.2 (April 1990): 278, argues that the system of memory had reached its limits: "If printing provided a release from the near exhaustion of scribal capacities available in a manuscript culture, we are reminded that the introduction of writing had for its part meant a liberation from the overloading of memory in oral culture."

related to the physical action of rocking back and forth typical of oral recitation techniques.[110]

Secondly, in primary oral cultures both learning and language are **communal** matters:

> In an oral culture, verbalized learning takes place quite normally in an atmosphere of celebration or play. As events, words are more celebrations and less tools than in literate cultures. Only with the invention of writing and the isolation of the individual from the tribe will verbal learning and understanding itself become "work" as distinct from play, and the pleasure principle be downgraded as a principle of verbalized cultural continuity.[111]

In such a context the word is understood more as an "event," rather than an object,[112] an event which always involves speaker and hearer.

Ong makes no attempt to hide his distaste for the second stage, which he titles "The Denatured Word." Like Havelock, he places the greatest importance on the development of **alphabetic** writing, arguing that this for the first time recorded the **sound** of speech, thus competing with oral culture. Here he speaks of the psychological:

> Speech itself as sound is irrevocably committed to time. It leaves no discernible direct effect in space, where the letters of the alphabet have their existence. Words come into being through time and exist only so long as they are going out of existence. ... A moving object in a visual field can be arrested. It is, however, impossible to arrest sound and have it still present. If I halt a sound it no longer makes any noise. I am left only with its opposite, silence.[113]

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[110]Marcel Jousse, therefore, names such cultures "verbomotor cultures"; see his *Le style oral rhythmique et mnémotechnique chez les Verbo-moteurs* (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1925). Today this technique is particularly evident in Muslim Koran recitation (see the work of William Graham discussed in chapter 3).

[111]Ong, *Presence*, 30.

[112]Dependent upon Havelock, Ong sees Plato's philosophy as a crucial dividing line in this respect, as Plato concerns himself with "ideas, the 'really real,' ... not events at all, but motionless 'objective' existence, impersonal, and out of time" (34). Ong, *Rhetoric*, 162, attributes the same reification of the word to Ramism: "The tendency of a Ramist not to exploit utterances unless he has first analyzed them ... fixes attention on the written word rather than the spoken word, for analysis is primarily an exercise conducted upon a written text. ... This special fixation upon what is inscribed rather than upon what is spoken makes human expression less a conveyance of truth or of wisdom and more an object upon which one performs an operation. Ramist analysis strengthens the tendency to regard the word as a thing."

[113]Ong, *Presence*, 40-41.

In this way he believes writing "de-natures" sound.[114] Through writing, words can be stopped and analyzed as never before:

> Operations with the alphabet imply that words—not the things which words refer to, but words themselves as sounds—can somehow be present all at once, that they can be somehow dissected into little parts called letters of the alphabet which are independent of the one-directional flow of time and which can be handled and reassembled independently of this flow.[115]

Thus, writing changes the way one derives meaning from words, because one no longer receives them in a strictly linear fashion through time, but is able to dissect, move back and forth, rearrange and compare. In fact, time itself comes to be viewed spatially when it can be set down in calendars and charts, examined rather than experienced as it passes. Communication and verbalization are no longer linked to the ears but to the eyes.[116]

Of particular interest to us is Ong's discussion of "Complications and Overlappings," which includes his theory of "residual orality." In "scribal or manuscript culture" (Ong's

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[114]Ibid., 41: "The necessary progression of sound through time appears to be one of its central properties, differentiating it from the objects of the other senses."

[115]Ibid., 42. This "psychological" analysis of the word as sound pervades *The Presence of the Word*, and explains the title: "since sound is indicative of here-and-now activity, the word as sound establishes here-and-now personal presence. Abraham knew God's presence when he heard his 'voice'" (113).

Ong stresses the experience of hearing the word as an event in and through time, so that the Hebrew use of דָּבָר as both "word" and "event" is not unique, but characteristic of oral culture. The rejection of the Word as Means of Grace, so common today, may therefore be linked to the loss of orality. The study of orality, on the other hand, may more clearly explain the nature of God's Word as a Means, accomplishing what it says, so central to Lutheran theology. Cf. Luther's emphasis on the preached Word, discussed in chapter three below.

[116]Ibid., 50, notes how printing exacerbates this: "What happened with the emergence of alphabetic typography was not that man discovered the use of his eyes but that he began to link visual perception to verbalization to a degree previously unknown." Print will be addressed in connection with McLuhan and Eisenstein, beginning on p. 73 below.

An analysis of modern vocabulary for cognition and the intellect illustrates how pervasive **visual** imagery is, compared to the other senses. Ong, *Interfaces*, 133-34, lists forty-five English expressions in the visual field, such as insight, idea, observe, discern, explain, etc. Thirty expressions from the tactile realm are listed, such as follow, decide, apprehend, infer, confute, etc. Yet in the aural sphere he can find only seven: category, predicate, judgment, logic, dialectic, response, and question. While his reasoning may not always be clear, in general his point is well taken.

excellent label for the literate age before print) orality remains strong. "Living more than a millennium after the invention of the alphabet and in a culture which had used the alphabet for some three hundred years, the philosopher Socrates left none of his philosophy in writing."[117] When Cicero wanted to learn Greek philosophy he went to Greece to **hear** the philosophers; he did not than just read their books. It is known also that Cicero wrote down his orations only **after** delivering them orally.[118] Thus, the oral residue was strong also in Rome. Even in the Middle Ages through to the Renaissance, education followed an oral bent, with no written exams or papers, only oral testing and disputations.[119] What we today might call "the art of structuring thought" continued in the Middle Ages to be taught as **dialectic**. The situation was not to change until Descartes:

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[117]Ong, *Presence*, 55. He notes also Plato's concerns about writing, which we have quoted above, pp. 50ff. As we have seen, orality is terribly persistent.

[118]Ibid., 56, citing Torsten Petersson, *Cicero: A Biography* (New York: Bilbo and Tannen, 1963). Ong considers the oration to stand alongside the epic as "the two great verbal art forms of oral and residually oral society" (57). This points to the need to examine the relationship of rhetoric (the art of oratory) to orality.

[119]Nevertheless, as Ong repeatedly emphasizes, the orality of the Middle Ages was strongly secondary. While Latin continued to be spoken and used in such oral disputations, it was at heart a **chirographically** controlled language. No longer did anyone speak it as a mother language. It was learned from books as a second tongue. In fact, recognizing this problem, medieval Latin scholars produced handbooks of "conversational Latin," phrase-books giving examples of what to say in trivial circumstances. Much of Erasmus' collections were not proverbial, but merely "ways of saying things"—Ong, *Rhetoric*, 30. Schoolboys were expected to make use of these books to carry on everyday conversations. Latin had no baby-talk or slang, so it had to be invented. This problem Ong terms a "sound-sight split," characteristic of learned languages. See Ong, *Presence*, 76-79, *et passim*.

An interesting illustration of this situation is the new dictionary published by the Vatican foundation called Latinatis. The two-volume work, *Lexicon Recentis Latinitatis*, attempts to bring Latin into the twentieth century with some 18,000 new entries, including: *cursus pedester* "jogging," *pharus adversus nebulam* "fog lights," *bracae linteae caeruleae* "blue jeans," *aeronavis celerrima* "jet," *voluntarius sui interemptor* "kamikaze," and *oppugnatio inermis Iaponica* "karate." This is Latin on life support—lacking the common, everyday use which makes a language self-sustaining, the language must look to artificial, "made by committee" vocabulary and expressions to handle situations in the modern world. See William D. Montalbano, "Lingua Est Longa, Vita Brevis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Sunday, February 21, 1993), reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times*.

By the eighteenth century Descartes' logic of personal inquiry, silent cerebration, had ousted dialectic, an art involving vocal exchange, as the acknowledged sovereign over human intellectual activity. The new logic was not the art of discourse (*ars disserendi*) as earlier ages, following Cicero, had commonly taken dialectic and/or logic to be. Rather, it was the art of thinking—that is, of individualized, isolated intellectual activity, presumably uninvolved with communication ... .[120]

When writing finally triumphed, it institutionalized individualism and isolation. "Writing and print created the isolated thinker, the man with the book ... ."[121]

Another item which Ong considers to be a major piece of oral residue in literate culture is the use of commonplaces. The recurrence of this ancient technique in a discussion of the Middle Ages illustrates the complication of this period of overlap. Although in ancient Greece the *topoi* evidenced a certain shift to the visual, it was a technique necessitated by the "limitations" of oral culture. The survival of commonplaces into the (literate) Middle Ages is thus a residue from a more oral age.[122] Ong explains:

The formulary character of oral performance is responsible for the development of the doctrine of the commonplaces or *loci communes* which dominated skilled verbal

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[120]Ong, *Presence*, 64. The eighteenth century also saw the standardization of language through the dictionary movement, which increased the tendency to hold **written** language as the norm, and to move language into the visual sphere. Philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke made popular the theory of knowledge as light and the conscience as a *camera obscura*, whereby understanding comes through **sight** and the projection of images onto the soul. This analogy feeds the misconception of communication as the perfect and direct transmission of knowledge from transmitter to receiver, a theory especially conducive to sight analogies. The conception of God changed similarly. Rather than a God who **speaks** and creates (as Genesis teaches), the Deists of the eighteenth century envisioned God as the "Great Architect," "a manipulator of objects in visual-tactile space, or possibly as a 'force,' a kinesthetically based concept, also spatial in its implications" (73).

[121]Ibid., 54.

[122]Werner Kelber, "Modalities of Communication, Cognition, and Physiology of Perception: Orality, Rhetoric, Scribality." *Semeia* 65 (1994), defends the association of commonplaces with oral culture: "This interior visualization, the forming of images from what is heard, is deeply rooted in orality and conceptualized by rhetoric. For Cicero (*De Oratore* II, ixxxvi 351-60), for the anonymous author *ad Herennium* (III, xvi 28-xxiv 40), for Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* XI ii 1-51) and many others, memory is the treasure-house of rhetoric, which is filled with the furniture of *imagines* and *loci*. Hence, neither Philo nor Augustine are fully comprehensible as converts to the new medium of scribality, for Philo's seeing of the voice and Augustine's concept of thought as a visual re-collection are concepts still rooted in the old world of rhetoric" (204-5).

performance from oral-aural times until the maturing of the romantic age. The *loci communes* were essentially formulaic modes of expression derivative from oral practice and perpetuating oral psychological structures. They were codified by the alphabetic but still highly oral-aural ancient Greeks (Aristotle's *Rhetoric* indicates that the Sophists made systematic use of them) and thereafter became a central part of Western culture. One could even argue that they were in many ways *the* center of the culture.[123]

At their most oral, the commonplaces tend to group knowledge around facets of human behavior, particularly virtue and vice. The *locus* or τόπος was the "place" (what we might call a "heading") in which arguments were stored to prove a certain point. There were two broad kinds. When orating on the virtues or vices of a person or other subject, "one could betake oneself to headings such as causes, effects, contraries, comparable things, related things, and so on through the various lists of 'common' places."[124] These "analytic commonplaces" dissected a subject via the various *loci*. Thus the commonplaces served the art of dialectic, or logic.

Even more widespread and enduring was a second kind of commonplace:

> In this second sense a commonplace was a prefabricated passage for an oration or other composition (the oration was regularly taken as the prototype of any and all literary forms, including poetry). Such passages were got up in advance on a multitude of more or less standard subjects, and, since they were stored in the mind or in writing, we might style them cumulative commonplaces.[125]

Working in a similar fashion to the oral poet's **rhapsodizing** ("stitching together"), the orator or author could fashion his work out of the building blocks which these commonplaces provided.[126] Ong has traced this technique through the Tudor authors, Montaigne, Bacon, Shakespeare, and

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[123]Ibid., 31. Ong discusses *loci* technique frequently; see also his *Rhetoric*, 36-38, 47, 61.

[124]Ong, *Presence*, 80-81.

[125]Ibid., 81.

[126]Kennedy, 28-29, notes how these sorts of commonplaces were characteristic of sophistic rhetoric: "Just as the composition of oral poetry and the oratory in it was built up with blocks of memorized material adapted to a variety of situations, so sophistic oratory was to a considerable extent a pastiche, or piecing together of commonplaces, long or short. ... In the fragmentary speech *Against the Sophists* (12-13) Isocrates compares the teaching of rhetoric by some sophists to teaching the alphabet. The student memorized passages as he would letters and made up a speech out of these elements as he would out of letters."

other authors up to the Romantic Age.[127] In this way the "commonplace books" served also the

art of rhetoric.[128] The age of print for a time simply multiplied such collections and simplified

their use.[129]

In this way, the "doctrine" of commonplaces can be considered a strong example of

residual orality in the Middle Ages, as Ong concludes:

> The connection of the doctrine of the places with oral modes of expression has been
> explicated and should be evident: the oral performer, poet or orator, needed a stock of
> material to keep him going. The doctrine of the commonplaces is, from one point of view,
> the codification of ways of assuring and managing this stock, a codification devised with
> the aid of writing in cultures which, despite writing, remained largely oral in outlook and
> performance patterns.[130]

The oral residue extends even to the slant of the commonplace material: "the overwhelming

impression one gets in working through masses of it is that it tends to cast up issues in terms of

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[127]See "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style" and "Tudor Writings on Rhetoric, Poetic, and Literary Theory," in Ong, *Rhetoric*, 23-47, 48-103, as well as the other studies in that volume; also Kennedy, 213 & 215-19.

[128]Ong, *Presence*, 81-82: "Commonplace books, such as that of John Milton, are essentially such collections of passages which might prove useful later. Since such books helped assure *copia*, the fluency or free flow of speech so touted by humanists, they were also called *copia* books or copiebooks." On *copia* see also Ong, *Rhetoric*, 29.

[129]Ong, *Presence*, 85: "Print gave the drive to collect and classify such excerpts a potential previously undreamed of. Getting together an assemblage of snippets on classified subjects culled from any and every writer now paid a thousandfold and more, for the results, the ranging of items side by side on a page, once achieved, could be multiplied as never before. Moreover, printed collections of such commonplace excerpts could be handily indexed: it was worthwhile spending days or months working up an index because the results of one's labors showed fully in thousands of copies." Some of Erasmus' most enduring work were his collections of commonplaces: his *Adages*, his *Apothegms*, and his *Colloquies*, which together ran some 6,000 editions.

It is not hard to imagine, however, how print destroyed the benefits of commonplaces and changed entirely their character. They could not serve "fluency" when they were no longer in the head, and the author had to pore over thousands of pages to find a "quotation." Moreover, the romantic notion of creativity ultimately ruled out the old oral style of patchwork composition. "They are the flotsam and jetsam of the old oral culture to which the Western world bid adieu in the age of romanticism ..." - Ong, *Presence*, 87.

[130]Ibid., 82-83.

virtues and vice."[131] This applies especially to the cumulative places, the "stock quotations."

This point coincides with oral culture's tendency to group knowledge around persons, archetypes

of virtue or vice. Together with the tendency to formulaic expression, this constitutes the

intimate connection of *loci communes* with orality.[132]

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[131]Ibid., 83. This should be noted well, for here lies the clearest intersection of orality research with the New Testament, which is replete with "catalogues of virtues/vices." This will be taken up in the next chapter.

[132]Ibid., 84-85: "What one finds in the doctrine and use of the commonplaces are thus the essential tendencies which an oral culture, as described by Lord and Havelock, develops because of its information storage problem: a tendency to operate verbally in formulas and formulaic modes of expression combined with a tendency to group material for memory and recall around action in the human life-world, thus around interactions between persons and around questions of virtue and vice, plus a tendency, which combines the two foregoing tendencies, to make individuals themselves into types, thereby shaping them to formulaic treatment."

The role of commonplaces in orality argumentation is another example of "sliding perspectives" on precisely when the shift from oral to literate occurred in a particular society. In fact, it is usually unwise to make too precise of a determination. From one perspective Ong treated the *loci* as a visual phenomenon in his *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, discussed on p. 57 above. Ramus certainly exploited the visual aspects of the *loci* in his pedagogical method, aspects which print unnaturally exaggerated. Havelock, *Muse*, 103, similarly perceives that the idea of a τόπος includes a visual metaphor, linked to literacy: "The first beginnings of the alphabetic revolution have occurred, in the creation of a *topic* as a subject of a 'discourse' made possible by the conversion of acoustically preserved memorized speech into materially preserved visible artifacts that are capable of rearrangement. ... As the partnership develops and the ratio of control slowly alters, topicalization slowly increases its presence in classic Greek." Within the broader context of the Middle Ages, however, the commonplaces can be seen as a strong legacy of oral culture. They are a case study in the overlap between orality and literacy. Furthermore, there is tremendous variety in the use of the *loci* throughout rhetorical history itself, which perhaps reflects the inconsistency and confusion in Aristotle's own discussion of the same; see Kennedy, 64.

Philip Melanchthon was the first to apply the classic system of *loci* to theology, following upon the humanistic revival in other disciplines. In his *Loci communes* (first edition 1521) he drew from his study of Romans a list of twenty-three *loci* which he believed Paul had treated, producing what would become the first Lutheran "dogmatics." Nevertheless, the various Lutheran *loci* of the 16th century were more commentaries on the Biblical text using the *loci* method than systematic works. This is confirmed by the fact that there was no set list of *loci* in that century—the *loci* were given by the Scriptural text at hand. See Robert Kolb, "Teaching the Text: The Commonplace Method in Sixteenth Century Lutheran Biblical Commentary," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 49.3 (1987): 571-85. Strictly speaking, these were not *loci communes* but *loci theologici*, for the *loci* were restricted to one field of knowledge. This method of producing theological works derives from the **dialectic** of Aristotle and Cicero,

Ong's third stage of media is the electronic age, which progresses in the sequence:

... telegraph (electronic processing of the alphabetized word), telephone (electronic processing of the oral word), radio (first for telegraphy, then for voice; an extension first of telegraph and then of telephone), sound pictures (electronic sound added to electrically projected vision), television (electronic vision added to electronic sound), and computers (word silenced once more, and thought processes completely reorganized by extreme quantification).[133]

As Havelock also noted, the renewed emphasis on sound in the electronic era has brought on a sort of secondary orality. It is secondary because the media are always **cumulative** (see p. 59 above)—the electronic media do not supplant the written word. Despite the fact that the present revival of orality has awakened our awareness of ancient orality, the layers of successive media which stand between our ages hinder our ability truly to relive the orality of the ancient world. At the present stage of the electronic world's rapid development, the medium offers two roads. On the one hand, the ever-increasing multimedia capabilities of computers and video technology are reducing modern man's dependence on and addiction to the written word. On the other hand, with its even greater ability to objectify, dissect, and analyze the written word, computers may lead us to look at ancient texts in a way even more removed from their origin. Furthermore, as a "hypertext" approach becomes more prevalent, the linear experience of language, which linked text to speech, recedes.

Thus, at the heart of Ong's work is the contention that as the word undergoes changes in medium, the human psyche and its thought structures are reoriented. Such restructuring involves the turn from community to individuality, exterior to interior, preservation to creativity, subjective to objective, personal to impersonal.[134] In concluding this section, perhaps the best

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whereby one analyzes one's opponent's argument by discerning the *loci* behind it. Nevertheless, it is a development beyond anything which had gone before.

[133]Ong, *Presence*, 87-88. This "silent word" view of the computer shows how quickly media studies become outdated.

[134]Similar ideas are expressed by M. M. Slaughter, "Literacy and Society," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 56 (1985): 123-24, that the transition to literacy involves:

summary of Ong's theory is found in the nine characteristics or "psychodynamics" of oral

mentality which he lists in his latest writing, *Orality and Literacy* (1982). It is:

(1) "Additive rather than subordinative": What is often considered "Hebraistic," Ong considers

oral, that is, the introductory "and." While modern versions attempt to reduce these to

subordinate conjunctions, older translations produced in a more residually oral culture retained

the parataxis.[135]

(2) "Aggregative rather than analytic": Traditional expressions such as "the brave soldier" or

"the sturdy oak" are perpetuated, carrying the accumulated wisdom of their culture. "Oral

expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects

as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight."[136]

(3) "Redundant or 'copious'": As we have seen in the rhetorician's love of *copia*, redundancy

aided the ear in following the course of the spoken word, keeping the listener on track.[137]

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1. a movement from endogomous relations to exogamous, from private to public domains;
2. a movement from group identity to individual consciousness and isolated activity;
3. a movement from tradition to new ideas and awareness;
4. a movement from homogeneous information and knowledge with similar people to heterogeneous knowledge with strangers and others;
5. a movement from interpersonal to impersonal decontextualized functions in all kinds of discourse;
6. a movement from known to unknown audience requiring explicitness and explanation (autonomy) in discourse;
7. a movement from "home" to new locales, workplaces, markets, etc.

[135]Ong, *Orality*, 37-38. Ong compares the translation of Gen. 1:1-5 in the Douay (1610) and New American Bible (1970) versions. He suggests that older translations were not naive or simplistic in their understanding of conjunctions and semantic fields, but rather that the simple translation "and" was still completely natural to them.

[136]Ibid., 38.

[137]Ibid., 39-41. "Sparsely linear or analytic thought and speech is an artificial creation, structured by the technology of writing. Eliminating redundancy on a significant scale demands a time-obviating technology, writing, which imposes some kind of strain on the psyche in preventing expression from falling into its more natural patterns" (40). Ong's observations help to explain the many "doublets" in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. The "redundancy" of Genesis 1 and 2, for example, is only a problem to the literate mind, which requires

(4) "Conservative or traditionalist": While literate society values the young, creative mind, encouraging it to discover something new, oral culture values the wise old people who can preserve the accumulated knowledge of the past.[138]

(5) "Close to the human lifeworld": Knowledge is not stored in the abstract, but rather in terms of human activity, in narrative and archetypical characters. "Oral cultures know few statistics or facts divorced from human or quasi-human activity."[139]

(6) "Agonistically toned": As knowledge remains "embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle."[140] This is another aspect of the **communal** nature of knowledge, over against the individualism which print enables. One can hardly debate with oneself.

(7) "Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced": "For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the

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redundancy to be eliminated, or searches for multiple written sources which have been incompetently stitched together.

[138]Ibid., 41-42.

[139]Ibid., 43.

[140]Ibid., 44. Ong goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the medieval academic world was a polemical, adversarial one, which became "civilized" and silenced finally in the Romantic age. "Fliting," the exchange of personal, verbal abuse, is a characteristic of oral culture as far back as Homer. Ong believes that the closed system of Latin education, restricted to males, perpetuated—even fostered—this into the Middle Ages. This observation is based on studies of dialectic and rhetoric, which are at heart polemical, reflecting an educational system centering on the disputation. The entrance of women into formal education by the nineteenth century, made possible by books printed in the vernacular (for the restriction of Latin education to males had effectively kept women out of academics), served in part to suppress the polemical bent. See Ong, *Presence*, 192-286; idem, "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite," in *Rhetoric*, 113-41; idem, *Orality*, 43-45; and idem, *Ramus*, 32-34, 197.

Ong, *Interfaces*, 215, summarizes in three points the major oral features of the academic world which persist up until the age of print: "the organization and exploitation of knowledge through *loci communes* or commonplaces, the use of academic procedures centered upon oral reaction and upon the agonistic intellectuality which preliterate orality fosters, and an overall attitude toward expression which, at first overtly and later less openly but still actually, regarded oratory as the paradigm of all verbalization."

known," whereas writing "separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity', in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing."[141]

(8) "Homeostatic": The oral society attempts to maintain equilibrium "by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance." It has no academic interest in etymologies or dictionaries,[142] but only present needs. Traditions are thought to represent **present** values more than past ones.[143]

(9) "Situational rather than abstract": Extensive field work among non-literate tribes has demonstrated how firmly connected Western logic is to Western literacy. This is not to imply that non-literates cannot consider universal truths, but they conduct such investigations situationally. Category, logic, definition, and syllogism, taken for granted by literates as marks of intelligent thought, are in reality **culturally** determined and related to the acquisition of literacy.[144]

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[141]Ibid., 45-46.

[142]The Old Testament's interest in the etymologies of proper names is always for the sake of the narrative, and is related to the connection which was believed to exist between name and reality. One is what one is called. Etymologizing in traditional linguistics comes from a more academic, historic interest.

[143]Ibid., 47-49. Ong's thought here seems dependent on the work of Goody and others among African tribes. While oral culture is oriented to preservation, such scholars suggest that the tradition is manipulated unconsciously to deal with present needs.

[144]Ibid., 49-57. Categorization questions, so familiar to Western children, draw unexpected answers from oral tribes-people. In one study conducted in Uzbekistan, the subjects were asked which of the following did not belong: hammer, saw, log, hatchet. The response was: "They're all alike. The saw will saw the log and the hatchet will chop it into small pieces. If one of these has to go I'd throw out the hatchet. It doesn't do as good a job as a saw"; Ong, *Orality*, 51, quoting Aleksander Romanovich Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, ed. Michael Cole, trans. Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 56. The subject envisioned the **situation** of cutting wood, not the logical category of "tool."

Similarly, the syllogism is not understood apart from the situational context. Ong, *Orality*, 53, notes: "James Fernandez (1980) has pointed out that a syllogism is self-contained: its conclusions are derived from its premises only. He notes that persons not academically educated are not acquainted with this special ground rule but tend rather in their interpretation of the given statements, in a syllogism as elsewhere, to go beyond the statements, as one does normally in

Recent attempts by social-anthropologists to **demonstrate** the change of mentality brought on by literacy among peasants in Russia and developing tribes in Africa have produced mixed results. On the one hand:

> The line of theory developed by Vygotsky (see Luria 1976) maintains that when an individual comes to master writing, the basic system underlying the nature of his mental processes is changed fundamentally as the external symbol system comes to mediate the organization of all his basic intellectual operations. Thus, for example, knowledge of a writing system would alter the very structure of memory, classification and problem-solving by altering the way in which these elementary processes are organized to include an external (written) symbol system.[145]

On the other hand, the most recent and exhaustive investigation of the Vai literacy project (Africa) appears in many ways to reject this general hypothesis.[146] The work of Scribner and Cole modifies the view that the cognitive implications of literacy should be immediately and everywhere evident. In fact, they claim to find "no general cognitive effects," that is, effects which appear like the results of a chemical reaction. Jack Goody's own work stresses that writing is only one "ingredient" in the formula.[147] These issues will be explored further after the next section.

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real-life situations or riddles (common in oral cultures). I would add the observation that the syllogism is thus like a text, fixed, boxed-off, isolated."

With literacy, therefore, comes the baggage of Western (Greek) philosophy, at least in those places where literacy is brought by Western cultures. In the next section we will meet authors who stress even more strongly that the transition from orality to literacy cannot be considered apart from the particular cultural context where it occurs.

[145]Goody, *Interface*, 205.

[146]Sylvia Scribner, and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Goody, *Interface*, 214, notes that the authors deny this interpretation of their work, but admit that at first they were disillusioned by what they found.

[147]Goody, *Interface*, 221: "That is to say, we did not expect the 'mastery of writing' (of whatever form) to produce **in itself an immediate change** in the intellectual operations of individuals." Emphasis added.

"Media Criticism"

One cannot ignore the notoriety brought to orality by the so-called "Toronto school,"[148] the well-spring of "media criticism." Most famous, of course, is Marshall McLuhan's oft-quoted dictum: "the medium is the message." This brought many people to consider for the first time the significance of the communications medium for the meaning of what is communicated. The importance of the University of Toronto to media criticism is hard to over-emphasize. Eric Havelock, himself a one-time professor at Toronto, offers his interpretation of the origins of the "Toronto school":

> I have even been referred to as a member of a "Toronto school." The reverse is more likely to be the case. After encountering the work of Milman Parry, guided also by a reading of Martin Nilsson's *Homer and Mycenae* (1933; for me still the classic work on the subject), and following those intuitions born of pre-Socratic studies I have previously referred to, I recall giving two or three public lectures at the University of Toronto on the topic of oral composition, and I suspect Innis was one of those who heard them, at a time when he was thinking along similar lines in his own field (Havelock 1982b). Communication that passed between us later, after I had left Toronto for Harvard, leads me to infer this.[149]

Thus Havelock includes himself at the source of the movement with Harold Innis,[150] traditionally recognized as the founder of the school.

Innis, by calling an economist, argued that the "bias of communication" must be recognized as playing a role at least equal to economic factors in the formation and direction of human society. From the study of small-town Canada, he saw the significance of folk ways and personal identity, characteristics which, he believed, were being eroded by the mass media— particularly popular press, instant news and shallow thinking. In support of this thesis he turned to examine the orality of the ancient world. His conclusions were tied to his previous study of the

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[148]Ibid., 261-62, includes in the "Toronto school": Innis (1950, 1951), Ong (1958, 1982), Havelock (1963, 1973, 1976), Carpenter (1973), McLuhan (1962), Goody and Watt (1963, 1968), and Olson (1976).

[149]Havelock, *Muse*, 17.

[150]See his major work: Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

Canadian pulp and paper industry. Havelock believes: "As a patriot he thought he saw his native country's forests being destroyed to make a moment's shallow reading on a New York subway."[151] Thus he set up the printing press as an enemy, a corrupting influence, a technology which changes culture.[152]

From Innis, the mantle passed to Marshall McLuhan, whose *The Gutenberg Galaxy* appeared contemporaneously with Havelock's *Preface to Plato*.[153] According to Havelock, "McLuhan saw at once that there was an unstated partnership between these two works, and later continued to acknowledge it with a generosity for which I shall always be grateful."[154] From Havelock's perspective McLuhan's book performed two great services:

> It asserted, and largely demonstrated from examples, the fact that technologies of communication as they vary exercise a large measure of control over the content of what is communicated ("The medium is the message"). It also posed, even if indirectly, the

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[151]Havelock, *Muse*, 43.

[152]It is tempting to say that McLuhan continued Innis' work, expanding on his thesis. Havelock, *Muse*, 43, however, suggests that McLuhan "was standing Innis on his head." While Innis attacked the modern, high-speed roller press, McLuhan attacked the Gutenberg, moveable type press. Modern technologies, he believed, liberated man from the book, from the results of older printing methods. Nevertheless, they agreed insofar as they recognized the technology of print as an agent of social change.

[153]Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). Wise as he is to the impact of form on substance, McLuhan lays out his book to reflect his topic. Writing in a style which is at once reminiscent of *Future Shock* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, McLuhan "orders" his thoughts into brief two-page "chapters," each elaborating upon a one- or two-sentence "gloss." McLuhan, 314, calls it "a mosaic pattern of perception and observation." The effect is to disarm the reader, challenging his assumptions of what a book should be from the constrictive tenets of an age of print. Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:16-17 & 40-41, pays great attention to this style and finds it wanting. She deals a scathing blow: "The chaotic format of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* probably owes less to the impact of new media than to the old-fashioned difficulty of trying to organize material gleaned from wide-ranging reading—evaded in this instance by an old-fashioned tactic, by resorting to scissors and paste" (1:17).

[154]Havelock, *Muse*, 17. McLuhan, 9, however, explicitly allies his work with Lord's *The Singer of Tales*.

question: Does the human mind, or consciousness, or however we may choose to describe it, represent a constant in human history, or has it been subject to historical change?[155]

These two points prepared for the proposal that oral "literature" might in fact be qualitatively different from written literature; that is, that its content will be affected by its medium. Secondly, they suggest that the human mind might vary with the change in communications technology.

McLuhan, as his title implies, is concerned with the grand sweep of things, so grand as to see the spawning of a new galaxy with Gutenberg. As Havelock recognized, the fundamental theme is the connection of technology to the social environment. "Technological environments are not merely passive containers of people but are active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike."[156] The ability to see the effects of print on society has only been possible because of the new age which the electronic media have brought.[157] He believes that "the job could only be done when the two conflicting forms of written and oral experience were once again coexistent as they are today."[158] Thus the "strong secondary orality" (Ong) of the contemporary world enables us to recognize the stranglehold which print held on a bygone age.

One of the first creations of print is the **public** itself. Manuscript technology did not have the "power of extension" necessary to produce a national "public," or readership. In fact, McLuhan repeatedly suggests that nationalism itself is a product of the printing press. For instance:

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[155]Havelock, *Muse*, 27.

[156]McLuhan, 7.

[157]Ibid., 70, suggests that it is the extreme suddenness with which new communications technologies have now appeared, and the new ability to observe other cultures, which has allowed us to recognize the effects of "external technologies" today. See also p. 326.

[158]Ibid., 10. See also ibid., 11: "In the electronic age which succeeds the typographic and mechanical era of the past five hundred years, we encounter new shapes and structures of human interdependence and of expression which are 'oral' in form even when the components of the situation may be non-verbal."

For the hot medium of print enabled men to *see* their vernaculars for the first time, and to visualize national unity and power in terms of the vernacular bounds: "We must be free or die who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake."[159]

The electronic media threaten to disrupt—or surpass—this accomplishment by producing the "global village."[160] That is, electronic communications both return us to a form of orality, which creates the village, and then extend the village across the world by their mass capabilities. For "today, as electricity creates conditions of extreme interdependence on a global scale, we move swiftly again into an auditory world of simultaneous events and over-all awareness."[161]

The detribalizing of man is by the same token a drive towards individualism.[162] In Shakespeare's England the poetic wit expresses disappointment that "[c]ompetitive

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[159]Ibid., 169. Print was to spell the end of Latin, for it depended economically on the mass market of the vernacular (249). Furthermore, "Nationalism depends upon or derives from the 'fixed point of view' that arrives with print, perspective, and visual quantification" (264). This is epitomized by national constitutions. He notes also that print enabled the creation of national market economies and national armies. Furthermore, by accelerating the rate of mass literacy, print helps to strike down class barriers, thus producing a more homogeneous nation (180). See also pp. 239-40, 282-85. See also Slaughter, 130: "One of the things that accompanied print (and preceded mass literacy) was the standardization of a national language, to the diminishment of local dialects."

[160]See McLuhan, 43, where the chapter gloss reads: "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village." See also p. 262. However, Ong, *Presence*, 88-89, warns that there is a difference between the global village and the tribal village: "for tribal man either did not yet know or at least had not yet fully assimilated writing and print. Present electronic culture, even with its new activation of sound, relies necessarily on both. For the media in their succession do not cancel out one another but build on one another." For further discussion of the overlap of media see p. 59, above.

[161]McLuhan, 40. The tribe, for McLuhan is by definition oral: "For until men have up-graded the visual component communities know only a tribal structure. The detribalizing of the individual has, in the past at least, depended on an intense visual life fostered by literacy, and by literacy of the alphabetic kind alone" (57). McLuhan thus holds to the extreme stress on the Greek alphabet which we found in Havelock and Goody/Watt. He expresses this even more clearly: "it is by alphabet alone that men have detribalized or individualized themselves into 'civilization.' Cultures can rise far above civilization artistically but without the phonetic alphabet they remain tribal, as do the Chinese and the Japanese" (63). This "detribalizing" was at the same time a "desacralizing" of the world—springboarding off of Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), McLuhan claims to demonstrate the historical processes by which this occurred.

[162]This conclusion results from a complicated—and tenuous—argumentation. McLuhan, 192, argues that print is merely pushing to its extreme the "individuating power of the

individualism had become the scandal of a society long invested with corporate and collective values."[163] The latent ability of writing to create individualism at both poles of author and reader is realized with print:

> It is not entirely self-evident today that typography should have been the means and occasion of individualism and self-expression in society. That it should have been the means of fostering habits of private property, privacy, and many forms of "enclosure" is, perhaps, more evident. But most obvious is the fact of printed publication as the direct means of fame and perpetual memory. For, until the modern movie, there had been in the world no means of broadcasting a private image to equal the printed book.[164]

At the reader pole, the economic advantages of print, together with the ease of reading it brought, encouraged the private acquisition of knowledge through print apart from the historic method of communal, oral publication.[165]

As literacy brought changes to oral expression, so print has a great impact upon writing style, McLuhan believes. The residue of orality in Shakespeare is obvious,[166] and equally so is Dr. Johnson's disdain for the former. When Johnson attacks Shakespeare's puns, he does so from

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phonetic alphabet." By this he means not so much the ability to read alone, but the isolation of the senses, the externalizing of sight which breaks down both internal and external community, the "segmentation" of man. He would have done better simply to contrast the communal nature of oral production with the literate man's ability to read on his own.

[163]Ibid., 20.

[164]Ibid., 161. At the author pole, McLuhan, 230-36, suggests that print became a substitute for auricular confession! The age of print could even be said to have borne the author anew, after the medieval age which gave little real concern to questions of authorship. Many factors produced this condition: most books were produced through classroom dictation, which handed down "knowledge" with little attribution of origin; many books were often bound together, and referred to by the author of the first work in the volume (e.g., "Augustine, p. 308"), causing much confusion through imprecise quotation. With time print overcame these problems.

[165]See the detailed discussion of oral publication in chapter three. McLuhan, 174, speaks of printed matter becoming "privately portable and quick to read." Citing Febvre and Martin, McLuhan points out that in the first century of print pocket books of devotion were by far the most numerous: "This very natural inclination towards accessibility and portability went hand in hand with greatly increased reading speeds which were possible with uniform and repeatable type, but not at all with manuscripts" (248).

[166]See also Walter Ong's studies: "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style" and "Tudor Writings on Rhetoric, Poetic, and Literary Theory," in Ong, Rhetoric, 23-47, 48-103.

the reductionist perspective of print's hyper-literacy. McLuhan argues: "It is easy to gauge the degree of acceptance of print culture in any time or country by its effects in eliminating pun, point, alliteration, and aphorism from literature."[167] With print comes a shift from concern with the words themselves to visual aspects:

> Paradoxically, a close attention to precise nuance of word use is an oral and not a written trait. For large, general visual contexts always accompany the printed word. But if print discourages minute verbal play, it strongly works for uniformity of spelling and uniformity of meaning, since both of these are immediate practical concerns of the printer and his public.[168]

Likewise, the popularity of Senecan style in scholastic times and its demise in Elizabethan is readily explainable by the effects of print.

In Ong's study of Peter Ramus we observed the shift from ear to eye which comes with literacy.[169] McLuhan demonstrates how print pressed the ear/eye split to its utmost.[170] Shakespeare recognized it:

> The allusion to "the most precious square of sense" shows Shakespeare doing an almost scholastic demonstration of the need for a ratio and interplay among the senses as the very

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[167]McLuhan, 128. See also pp. 279-81. Alexander Pope had criticized print for anesthetizing wit and leading to unconsciousness—ibid., 308-10.

[168]Ibid., 190. This first assertion is not quite correct. Literate, and especially print-oriented style takes great care in precise word use, but primarily in the direction of **uniformity** of meaning. As noted before, this is because of the literate reader's ability to look back and forth, seeking consistency in the larger context, which is impossible in oral production. On the other hand, oral usage plays with words in the heat of the moment, with less regard for the larger context. The dictionary movement is the pinnacle of print culture's obsession with consistency. McLuhan, 277 & 285-86, suggests that print "made bad grammar possible"—perhaps an exaggeration.

[169]McLuhan repeatedly notes his indebtedness to this work (e.g., pp. 176-78, 193-95).

[170]Ibid., 72: "The dynamics of individualism and nationalism were merely latent in the scribal mode. For in the highly tactile product of the scribe the reader found no means for splitting off the visual from the audile-tactile complex, such as the sixteenth and seventeenth century reader did." See also pp. 138-39. Ong, *Rhetoric*, 182 & 184, reiterates his thesis that the mass production of books reifies the word, which, together with Ramism, leads to a stress on **visual** layout rather than auditory effect. The attribution of this shift to print as much as to literacy itself is affirmed by Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 29.

constitution of rationality. ... The breaking of "the most precious square of sense" means the isolation of one sense from another by separate intensities with the ensuing irrationality and clash among wits and persons and functions.[171]

This "ratio between the senses" is disturbed by the overwhelming visual orientation of print. Normally the senses enjoy a free "interplay," but "any sense when stepped up to high intensity can act as an anesthetic for other senses."[172] The importance of this shift is illuminated by J. C. Carothers, who notes that among the people with whom he worked in Africa, reality lies more in what is heard than in what is seen. "Indeed, one is constrained to believe that the eye is regarded by many Africans less as a receiving organ than as an instrument of the will, the ear being the main receiving organ."[173]

When technology "exteriorizes" one of the senses, the result is both a change in the internal balance of the senses and a disruption of the culture into which the new sense is thrust.[174] He uses an intriguing (visual!) analogy:

> It would seem that the extension of one or another of our senses by mechanical means, such as the phonetic script, can act as a sort of twist for the kaleidoscope of the entire sensorium. A new combination or ratio of the existing components occurs, and a new mosaic of possible forms presents itself. That such switch of sense ratios should occur with every instance of external technology is easy to see today.[175]

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[171]McLuhan, 21-22. The quotation is drawn from *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.

[172]Ibid., 35. He later remarks that "the dominance of one sense is the formula for hypnosis" (93).

[173]Cited in ibid., 29. Such a perspective arises from an understanding of vision like that prominent in Western thinking until the modern age: that the **eye** actively emitted a substance which created vision, rather than **receiving** light. The eye was also an instrument of the will in that it could choose to look or not, what to see and when to look, thus controlling what was seen. The ear simply receives. This must be remembered in later matters. The Scriptures present the ear rather than the eye as the organ of faith. One might say also that in its "only receiving" character, the ear is the organ of the **Gospel.**

[174]Ibid., 54: "[chapter gloss:] *When technology extends one of our senses, a new translation of culture occurs as swiftly as the new technology is interiorized.* [end gloss] ... It is simpler to say that if a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture."

[175]Ibid., 70.

This process serves also to separate the senses and segment man's consciousness, one of McLuhan's major themes. This "fragmentation" is not only a separation of the senses, but "of functions, of operations, of states emotional and political, as well as of tasks."[176] It is not hard to see why McLuhan embraces the electronic age with its promise to make man whole again.[177]

Visualism, McLuhan argues, leads also to an obsession with precision: "During the hundred years that followed Rabelais' death in 1553, there are many indications that exact time, exact quantities, exact distances were coming to have a greatly increased interest for men and women in connexion with private and public life."[178] This was the time when the Roman Church abandoned the Julian calendar (in use since A.D. 325) in favor of a more exact method. In this environment, modern mathematics also thrived. McLuhan believes it is wrong to suppose that "Euclidean space, linear, flat, straight, uniform, is rooted in our minds at all. Such space is a product of literacy and is unknown to pre-literate or archaic man."[179] A great step was taken in moving from the Greek and Roman alphabetic representation of numbers to the Arabic system. "That is, until number was given a visual, spatial character and abstracted from its audile-tactile matrix it could not be separated from the magical domain."[180] In fact, science itself was dependent on this separation of the visual from the other senses.[181]

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[176]Ibid., 56.

[177]Ibid., 319. See also p. 59: "The phonetic alphabet reduced the use of all the senses at once, which is oral speech, to a merely visual code. Today, such translation [of spaces] can be effected back and forth through the variety of spatial forms which we call the 'media of communication.' But each of these spaces has unique properties and impinges upon our other senses or spaces in unique ways."

[178]Ibid., 202, quoting John Nef.

[179]Ibid., 214. Citing many authorities in the field, he argues that the ancient Greeks lacked just one last piece in putting together the geometric puzzle.

[180]Ibid., 217. He cites calculus as the ultimate expression or result of this move, for it begins the form of mathematics which is a pure manipulation of numbers apart from direct analogy to the world around (as in geometry).

[181]Ibid., 221.

McLuhan's work may be summarized in the words of his mentor, Harold Innis, upon

which statement McLuhan considers his entire work to be merely a gloss:

> The effect of the discovery of printing was evident in the savage religious wars of the
> sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Application of power to communication industries
> hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution, and new
> outbreaks of savagery in the twentieth century.[182]

His entire effort has been to make man aware of the effects of print by looking at the great

changes in society which accompanied it.[183]

In the shadow of McLuhan's popular work, Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press*

as an Agent of Change grew up.[184] Sober, and deliberate, this exhaustive study focuses on social

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[182]Ibid., 258-59, citing Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 29. The relationship of print
to the Reformation will be taken up with Eisenstein below.

[183]McLuhan, 296: "The theme of this book is not that there is anything good or bad
about print but that unconsciousness of *any* force is disaster, especially a force that we have
made ourselves. And it is quite easy to test the universal effects of print on Western thought after
the sixteenth century, simply by examining the most extraordinary developments in any art or
science whatever." That McLuhan can attribute **any** and **all** developments of this period to the
effects of print opens him up to the criticisms which will be reviewed in the next section.

[184]Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication
and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe,* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1979). She agrees with McLuhan's basic thesis that the modern scholar is blind
to the effects of the medium with which he works, that "subliminal effects are engendered by
repeatedly scanning lines of print presented in a standardized format" (1:16).

However, Eisenstein is repeatedly critical of McLuhan for his shallow work. E.g.: "By
making us more aware that both mind and society were affected by printing, McLuhan has
performed, in my view at least, a most valuable service. But he has also glossed over multiple
interactions that occurred under widely varying circumstances in a way that may discourage
rather than encourage further study" (1:129). This criticism—that McLuhan makes print into a
single cause with homogenized results—will be seen again in the next section. She is disturbed
that McLuhan brushes aside as "obsolete" historical perspective, chronological sequence and
context. "Developments that have been unfolding over the course of five hundred years, affecting
different regions and penetrating to different social strata at different intervals, are randomly
intermingled and treated as a single event" (1:40). This culminates in a devastating blast: "It is
not really accurate to say that McLuhan has taken data out of context, for an adequate context
has not yet been supplied. As noted earlier, I think the author has shirked the difficult task of
organizing his material coherently. His insistence that coherence is itself outdated strikes me as
unconvincing" (1:41). Walter Ong is found to be more historically reliable (1:41 n. 97). She
notes also the ever-present paradox that these investigations are carried out in **print**: "When its
author argues that typography has become obsolescent and that an 'electronic age' has outmoded

change in which the printing press was one factor.[185] Nevertheless, she is not afraid to call the printing press a "revolution."[186] Critical of oral scholars who treat the impact of literacy but not of print, she states the problem:

> The gulf that separates our experience from that of literate élites who relied exclusively on hand-copied texts is much more difficult to fathom [than the oral-literate gulf]. There is nothing analogous in our experience or in that of any living creature within the Western world at present.[187]

Thus she reminds us that the differences between "chirographic," or scribal culture, and "typographic" culture may be just as significant as between oral and literate.

While a certain "bookishness" flourished in some areas of the scribal world, library collections remained rare, relatively small, and subject to the continual dangers of copying errors and physical damage. Aside from Rome and Alexandria in the ancient world, or monastic and university centers in medieval times, scribal culture remained heavily oral:

> Outside certain transitory special centers, moreover, the texture of scribal culture was so thin that heavy reliance was placed on oral transmission even by literate élites. Insofar as dictation governed copying in scriptoria and literary compositions were "published" by being read aloud, even "book" learning was governed by reliance on the spoken word— producing a hybrid half-oral, half-literate culture that has no precise counterpart today.[188]

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the 'technology of literacy' he is himself (in my view, at least) failing to take full note of what is under his own eyes and that of the reader he addresses" (1:17).

[185]Eisenstein is critical of single-cause arguments, such as those asserting that "literacy is the basic personal skill that underlies the whole modernizing sequence" (1:414).

[186]Some scholars have tried to lessen the significance of printing by pointing to the "*pecia*" method (piece-work) of book production, introduced in the twelfth century. At this point book production, in university towns, at least, moved out of the monastic *scriptoria* into the workshop of the lay stationer. Eisenstein objects: "It is a mistake to imply that the 'pecia' once introduced, continued down to the advent of printing. Available evidence suggests that it declined a full century before the first presses appeared. During the interval between 1350 and 1450—the crucial century when setting our stage—conditions were unusually anarchic and some presumably obsolete habits were revived. Monastic scriptoria, for example, were beginning to experience their 'last golden age'" (14). The invention of print did indeed bring a dramatic shift from *scriptorium* to print-shop.

[187]Eisenstein, 1:9.

[188]Ibid., 1:10-11.

She therefore agrees in principle with McLuhan and Ong's assessment of the importance of print, and further exposes the chasm which separates the modern reader from the ancient text. Having discussed the merits of a "gradualist, evolutionary approach," she shows her preference instead for the revolution: "A persuasive case, then, can also be made out for regarding the age of incunabula as a major historical great divide and for viewing the advent of printing as inaugurating a new cultural era in the history of Western man."[189] The traditional approach, which stresses both discontinuity and continuity, she rejects as disappointing and unhelpful.

Among the mass of data which Eisenstein rallies to her cause, one area might serve as a relevant and interesting example: the Reformation.[190] That the Reformers were the first to exploit fully print's capability to spread their message to the masses is commonly recognized— the one field where this is true.[191] Yet print was not only a servant of change:

> The invention of the printing press made it possible, for the first time in Christian history, to insist upon uniformity in worship. Hitherto the liturgical texts could be produced only in manuscript, and local variations were inevitably admitted and indeed tolerated. But now printed editions were produced with uniform texts and rubrics.[192]

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[189]Ibid., 1:33. As she herself notes on occasion, and as Clanchy points out (see below), the incunabula themselves seem to stand closer to the scribal side of the divide, for "at least fifty years after the shift there is no striking evidence of cultural change; one must wait until a full century after Gutenberg before the outlines of new world pictures begin to emerge into view" (1:33).

[190]Ibid., 1:303-450. This chapter is summarized in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "The Advent of Printing and the Protestant Revolt: A New Approach to the Disruption of Western Christendom," in Robert M. Kingdom, ed., *Transition and Revolution: Problems and Issues of European Renaissance and Reformation History* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1974), 235-70. Our citations will be drawn from the former, more complete work.

[191]Eisenstein, 1:314: "It is almost always when discussing the dissemination of Protestant tracts that historians pause over printing at all." She expresses clearly her intent to go beyond "broadsides and tracts" (1:367).

[192]Daniélou, Conratin, and Kent, *Historical Theology*, 233, quoted in Eisenstein, 1:313. While Protestants are generally accused of using print to enforce **doctrine**, it is actually the Roman Catholics who enforced uniformity of **liturgy** through print. Because of the use of Latin, the Roman church could promulgate the same rite for the entire Catholic world; the Lutherans made use of print to bring uniformity of practice only on the smaller scale of *Land* or city.

Both Romanist and Reformer made use of the medium for their cause. As each side wielded the weapon, according to Eisenstein, Christian concord was the first victim.[193] While Eisenstein evidences her own disdain for confessionalism, she does bring to light the significance of print to doctrinal debate. Not only did print allow the dissemination of new ideas, but it gave new life to old ones: there was a revival not only of the ancient fathers among the Reformers, but also of Aquinas and the scholastics in the Roman camp.[194] The maturation of the lay "scholar-printer" brought a third party to the fray.[195] Print tended to ossify positions, and perhaps hindered reconciliation.[196]

Certainly there is some correlation, as Eisenstein suggests, between the advent of print and the Reformers' insistence on the authority of Scripture. That is to say, once the Scriptures were more available through cheap editions it was easier to appeal to them and to study them.[197] For the laity this led in two directions: among Protestants the stress on vernacular Bible reading

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Through print the Roman church itself would finally implement long-overdue reforms, especially concerning the education of clergy.

[193]Eisenstein, 1:319: "Heralded on all sides as a 'peaceful art,' Gutenberg's invention probably contributed more to destroying Christian concord and inflaming religious warfare than any of the so-called arts of war ever did."

[194]Ibid., 1:314.

[195]The lay printer was influenced in what he printed more by market than theological influences. This served to reduce ecclesiastical influence and the dominance of scholarship by the clergy. See ibid., 1:320 & 378-403 (esp. 391, 398).

[196]Ibid., 1:326: "Doctrines that could co-exist more or less peacefully because full implementation was lacking, thus came into sharp conflict after printers had set to work. With typographical fixity, moreover, positions once taken were more difficult to reverse." Finnegan, 82, agrees that the text becomes fixed with print more than writing alone: "But, like the other differences discussed, it [the degree of verbal fixity] does not produce a clear-cut and fundamental division between them [oral and literate cultures], and, if there is a divide, perhaps it is between societies with and without printing rather than with and without writing."

[197]In fact, as Eisenstein, 1:329-30, demonstrates, the printed, vernacular Bible preceded the Reformation by many generations and was an important antecedent. The Reformation did not lift the Bible out of the dust, but rather the reverse.

led to increased literacy; among Roman Catholics adherence to the Vulgate hindered it.[198] For

scholars the wide availability of the printed text brought new problems to light, especially with

the publication of critical editions. Greek and Hebrew studies produced at the same time

agreement and confusion.[199] To print can be attributed the movement of the Bible out of the

liturgy and into the study.[200] Thus it extended greatly the impetus which writing gives to the

dissection of texts, the search for contradiction, and the misuse of a work intended for

proclamation.[201]

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[198]Ibid., 1:333. It is not print itself which affects literacy, but the availability and desirability of its use. Ruth Finnegan, of whom we will hear more below, stresses this strongly: "The use of print meant that access to writing could be extended much more widely. Not that the existence of print in *itself* guarantees widespread literacy in the absence of a far-reaching educational system (witness the high illiteracy rates in many developing countries even today). Even large absolute numbers of printed books can still go along with the limitation of control over writing to a small minority, particularly when the script is an ideographic one, as in China. But it does at least provide the *opportunity*, hard to envisage without printing, for the widespread and rapid distribution of the information, attitudes and economic benefits already mentioned as the likely consequences of writing" (28-29).

[199]Eisenstein, 1:338: "The more Greek and Hebrew studies progressed, however, the more wrangling there was over the meaning of words and phrases." Text critical questions merely raised more problems. Strangely enough, for the scholars who were at home in Latin the move from the Vulgate to the original texts was a move **away** from the vernacular. The Vulgate had its home in the liturgy, and was thus evaluated in the oral mode. Eisenstein, 1:353, notes: "It was printing, not Protestantism, which outmoded the medieval Vulgate and introduced a new drive to tap mass markets." See also 1:355.

[200]Ibid., 1:339, cites Alan Richardson: "The Bible came to be regarded as a book for experts requiring an elaborate training in linguistic and historic disciplines before it could be properly understood ... ." There is at the same time the beginning of the **lay** Bible scholar, whereby theology became a discipline also outside of the church. Calvin is a prime example of the "new kind of theologian, one who had taken no degree in theology and had never been ordained priest" (1:402). In fact, marketing considerations favored the production of books on the Index of forbidden books (1:417), and in general what was libertarian or heterodox (1:419).

[201]Eisenstein thus gives support to our contention that higher criticism is a child of hyper-literacy, that it treats the Scriptures in a way which is inconsistent with their origins and intended use. The specific advantages of **print** were that it allowed a pool of scholars to enhance each other's work: they could now cite chapter and verse, or even page numbers, for they were working with standard editions. With print comes also the workable concordance, essential to the critical endeavor. This will be taken up again below.

Eisenstein's work is important to our study for two reasons. First, she carefully addresses the social and intellectual impact which a change in media can have—in this case, print. Secondly, she highlights many of the factors related to the coming of print which have created the modern hermeneutical approach to the biblical text. The transition from manuscript to printing press may have been just as significant in creating today's approach to the text as the victory of the literate mindset over residual orality.

But Michael Clanchy disagrees with the force of Eisenstein's argument. He worries that in the fixation on the importance of the printing press scholars may overlook the fact that the book had already been maturing for some one thousand years.[202] Noting two studies which imply that the book was invented together with print,[203] he argues on the contrary: "the book made its appearance in the fourth century, not in the fifteenth, and beginning a world of books was the work of medieval monks and not of printers."[204] The book could thus be seen as an invention of Christianity, which favored the codex over the scroll, and parchment over papyrus, perhaps to distinguish themselves from false religions. The "official baptism" of the book "is marked in 332 A.D. by the Emperor Constantine's order for vellum Bibles in the principal churches."[205] Ruth Finnegan points also to the importance of **paper** in this development: "Some would even go so far as to say that it was the adoption of paper in Europe rather than the invention of printing that

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[202]Michael T. Clanchy, "Looking Back from the Invention of Printing," in Daniel P. Resnick, ed., *Literacy in Historical Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983), 7-22.

[203]Clanchy, 7, refers to these two studies of the effects of printing: Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre,* and Margaret B. Stilwell, *The Beginning of the World of Books, 1450 to 1470.*

[204]Clanchy, 8. Eisenstein, 1:35, does note this, suggesting that the real subject of her work is **print**.

[205]Clanchy, 13. See also McLuhan, 93, who points out that only one-third of the history of the book has been typographic.

was the really crucial factor, for once the material was available, the means to exploit it were

bound to be developed."[206]

Clanchy's reaction to Eisenstein therefore highlights the typical tendency of scholars to

"over-dramatize" the era which they are studying as "the starting point of a new age." He

suggests the opposite evaluation of print:

> Instead of viewing printing as the starting point of a new age, I want to look at it as the
> endpoint or culmination of a millennium. Writing was of extraordinary importance in
> medieval culture; otherwise printing would not have been invented.[207]

Citing McLuhan himself,[208] Clanchy argues that the immediate consequence of printing was to

make **medieval** books more available! "While in some areas of experience printing marked a

new start, in others it reinforced medieval ways of thinking because it caused them to be more

uniformly diffused."[209]

This interpretation is confirmed by examining Gutenberg's work and intentions. Early

printers had quite a model to which to aspire:

> Gutenberg could not hope to surpass the best medieval books, for no books have ever
> surpassed in quality of production such works as the Book of Kells, the Winchester Bible,
> and the Très Riches Herures du Duc de Berry. ... The manuscript books of Gutenberg's
> time were not therefore primitive precursors of printed books. On the contrary, they
> presented an image of perfection, encapsulating a thousand years of experience.[210]

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[206]Finnegan, 28.

[207]Clanchy, 8.

[208]McLuhan, 142: "the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw more of the Middle Ages than had ever been available to anybody in the Middle Ages." N.B. In our copy of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* this quotation is found on p. 174. See also McLuhan, 146: "until printing, very few books ancient or medieval were available at all."

[209]Clanchy, 8. While, as Eisenstein and others have stressed, the printing press was essential to the Reformation as a means for disseminating new ideas, there is another side to the coin. The printing press also made more accessible the ancient and medieval fathers, from whom Luther could draw the theology of the church catholic in order to compare it to the distortions of more recent times in the Roman Catholic church. Printing thus provided Luther with the opportunity to be the quintessential **medieval** man, not renaissance man.

[210]Ibid., 9.

The competition was fierce, for at first printing was measured by the standard of the scribe, not by its own unique strengths. The press was criticized because it could not reproduce the multicolored illumination of the manuscript, and even because ink on paper was considered less permanent than words "incised" by quill into parchment.[211] The art of manuscript production was a highly developed discipline which was hardly a "primitive precursor" to print. In fact, the illuminated manuscript in its own way made literacy popular by making writing inviting. The possession of a book thereby became highly desirable.[212] The medieval era of the monastic scribe must not be overlooked in viewing the impact of communications media.

Clanchy thus argues that it is not the technology itself which brings social change, but rather the use to which it is put. As long as the printing press was expected to reproduce the look of the manuscript (in fact, many of the incunabula had illumination added by scribal hands), print was seen as an "automated scribe." Clanchy notes: "Gutenberg and his associates, out of commercial necessity, identified the chief features of medieval literate culture and aimed to reproduce them as exactly as possible."[213] This is the period of media overlap, as in the case of writing, which at first is used simply to record oral language without venturing forth on its own. The printing press became "an agent of change" only when it was turned to the mass production of tracts and other literature. The artistic quality of the manuscript had to be given up before this could happen.

A hint of this interpretation can be discovered in McLuhan's writing (quoting William Ivins):

> ... it can be argued that the printing of books was no more than a way of making very old and familiar things more cheaply. It may even be said that for a while type printing was

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[211]Ibid., 10, referring to the criticisms of Trithemius.

[212]Clanchy, 14, argues that manuscript illumination, a monastic invention of the seventh century, "gave to writings a force and prestige which was unprecedented." It helped to bridge the literacy gap between monk and laity, even if only **wealthy** laity benefited.

[213]Ibid., 20.

little more than a way to do with a much smaller number of proof readings. Prior to 1501 few books were printed in editions larger than that handwritten one of a thousand copies to which Pliny the Younger referred in the second century of our era.[214]

Thus the first impact of the press was **economic**: it did the scribe's work cheaper.[215] In fact, print was at first referred to as "*ars artificialiter scribendi*,"[216] akin to the term "horse-less carriage." Only later did it become an instrument of **mass production**. One could even argue that print's first great contribution was the exactly repeatable **pictorial statement**, which was of incalculable importance to the progress of scientific research.

We have touched upon the significance of the modern electronic media, especially in the work of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan. Though it anticipates the application of oral theory to exegesis, Thomas Boomershine's study of "Media Interpretation" provides a fitting summary to this section.[217] As the title might indicate, his thesis is "that the major movements or paradigm shifts in the history of Biblical interpretation are related to changes in the dominant medium of communication."[218] That is, when the medium changes, one should expect to find a major change in the biblical hermeneutic. Dividing time into five major periods, he then attempts to find the "paradigm" associated with each medium.

The first period is "The Bible in Oral Culture," when "the medium was exclusively sound and the sounds were transmitted by memory."[219] The message was presented through

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[214]McLuhan, 98.

[215]Eisenstein, 1:11, however, while agreeing that the "average" **early** edition consisted of from 200 to 1,000 copies, notes that we have no data whatsoever for the size of "editions" the fifty years of scribal output preceding the age of print. In fact, she believes it is nonsense to speak of an "edition" of a manuscript.

[216]McLuhan, 165 & 187.

[217]Thomas E. Boomershine, "Biblical Megatrends: Towards a Paradigm for the Interpretation of the Bible in Electronic Media," in Kent Harold Richards, ed., *Society for Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 144-57.

[218]Ibid., 145.

[219]Ibid., 145.

improvised chant, and the hermeneutic was that of the authorized story-teller, re-presenting the narrative in light of present experience.

The second stage is "Manuscript Culture": at this point—in the late first century—print ceases to be a **servant** to oral hermeneutics, and becomes its master.[220] At this time "the primary traditions of Israel" were accommodated to Hellenistic culture.

> Symptoms of this paradigm were: the collection and organization of oral traditions in manuscripts, the production of multiple Biblical manuscripts, the formation of a canon, the cantillation of manuscripts in public worship, the formation of the synagogue/congregation as a place for public readings, and the development of oral forms of commentary on the written manuscripts.[221]

The hyper-textual Massoretic techniques, he argues, with their concern for the precise preservation of the text with its pronunciation and cantillation, are a product of this shift.[222] Christianity, he believes, embraced textuality and adopted the Hellenistic hermeneutic of allegory.[223] Pharisaic Judaism, on the other hand, subordinated writing to oral tradition. "Thus, the paradigm shift associated with writing is evident in the divergent hermeneutics of

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[220]Ibid., 145. Boomershine does not footnote his study, intending it only to provoke discussion. However, his sources are often clear. This idea comes apparently from the oral theory of Werner Kelber, which proposes a massive "paradigm shift" when the oral tradition becomes fixed in print. See chapter three.

[221]Ibid., 145. How can he ascribe all of these things to the "growing dominance of Hellenistic culture," as effects of the dominance of writing in the late first century? By this time all of these elements had been firmly in place for three hundred years from the most skeptical critical perspective, and most elements since the time of the Exile. It is difficult to maintain that until this time the tradition was entirely fluid. Perhaps this point of view is another example of ethnocentrism, discussed in the next section, which ignores the fact that the Semitic peoples gave writing to the Greeks, not vice versa.

[222]This evaluation of the scribal age supports Clanchy's criticisms of Eisenstein and throws some of McLuhan's observations into doubt. For they had argued that it is **print** which brought on an obsession with precision. See p. 80, above.

[223]Ibid., 146. Relying on Havelock, he argues that with literacy comes philosophical abstraction, and that the allegorical method was the attempt to accommodate the Scriptures to Neo-Platonism. One assumes that Boomershine would also attribute Philo's use of allegory to Hellenistic influence.

Christianity and Judaism as each community sought to respond to Hellenistic culture in which writing was the most powerful medium of communication."[224]

Step three comes with the advent of print. The accompanying hermeneutical shift he perceives is from allegory to the literal and figurative—as epitomized in the Reformation. Although the Scriptures continued to be read aloud, intonation was on the decline, and private reading grew.[225]

The fourth step Boomershine names "The Bible in the Culture of Silent Print/Documents."[226] With this coincides the rise of historical criticism. As the text is silenced, so, too, is its narrative character, which had been so alive in the oral world.[227] It is at this point that the present paradigm shift comes to light. Recent trends react against higher criticism:

> The promise of the historical critical paradigm was that it would render the past alive and would result in illumination and vitality for the religious community. The religious communities that have accepted historical criticism since the 19th century are in decline and the educational enterprise of critical study of the Bible has been massively reduced in theological curriculums since the '30's because it did not produce spiritual vitality and life.[228]

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[224]Ibid., 146.

[225]Ibid., 146. Typically, Boomershine does not distinguish Lutheran from Reformed, for in Lutheranism the lessons continued to be chanted publicly many centuries past the invention of print. This coheres with the strong "oral residue" in Lutheran theology, to be discussed in chapter three.

[226]Ibid., 146.

[227]This process is traced most thoroughly by Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). In a quasi-"testimony," Boomershine, 155, confesses that it was the feeling that historical criticism had silenced the narrative which led him to consider the impact of media. By strumming his guitar and chanting the Greek text he rediscovered the sound of the story.

[228]Boomershine, 144. Boomershine offers strong support to our contention that the historical critical approach is a corollary of the hyper-literate age of print, a method whose time has passed. He notes particularly the anachronism of source criticism: "The entire paradigm on which the study of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic problem has been based is fundamentally flawed because of an anachronistic reading back of our media world of silent documents into the ancient world" (151). Modern man's picture of the ancient redactor sitting at his desk with J, E,

Thus we arrive at Boomershine's fifth stage: "The Bible in Electronic Media." He

suggests that there is a great need for this new medium to be embraced rather than resisted, for an

electronic "translation" to serve as the Vulgate, vernacular, Gutenberg, or Westcott and Hort of

today. This involves a twofold revival of sight and sound. First:

> A foundational step will be to reconceive the Bible as sounds rather than as documents.
> This in turn raises a new set of questions for historical research: how did the Bible sound
> in its original form? ... Thus, a major element in the paradigm shift is the recognition that
> the Bible is sounds that were recorded in manuscripts so that they could again be
> resounded rather than texts to be studied in silence.[229]

This means at minimum creating a printed translation designed for public recital rather than

private study. Beyond this it means the addition of music and melody.

Secondly, the video age raises the need to examine "the appropriate visual components

of the Biblical texts." Such could include "[s]ymbols, art both [sic] icons and paintings,

photographs and video montage, the sights of liturgy and worship, the faces of living persons,

historical documentary footage, and dramatizations."[230] Boomershine himself has been involved

in the American Bible Society's video translation experiments.[231]

D, and P before him (or Mark and Q), cutting and pasting from one text into another, is wholly
out of character for the oral world.

[229]Ibid., 151.

[230]Ibid., 151-52. Strangely enough, on p. 151 Boomershine objects to "dramatizing" the
Scriptures, because drama is not the same as narrative, which is the essence of Scriptures.

[231]This now-defunct project produced several videos, most prominent among them a
version of Mk 5:1-20 entitled, "Out of the Tombs." These are available from the American Bible
Society.

The connections which Boomershine draws between media and hermeneutics, while
arguable in details, are basically helpful. However, one must question his working definition of
"Bible." Just what is the "Bible" before it is written down? (While one might theologically
accept the oral and written word as equally "Word of God," it is problematic to speak of the oral
tradition already as the "Bible.") If the Scriptures can be defined apart from writing then there
is the danger of losing the essentials in the electronic age. Boomershine himself objects that the
biblical narrative has been pushed aside while we "do theology":
> But theology is not the Bible nor is it the primary language of the Biblical tradition. It is a
> hermeneutical language, a secondary, reflective language. If we use the language and
> literature of theology as our norm for what is authentically Biblical, our approach to

Boomershine argues that with every change in media and its corresponding "paradigm shift," there are three possible reactions: resistance, appropriation, or capitulation.[232] The broad significance which he ascribes to his theory can be seen from the following chart:[233]

Patterns of Response to Biblical Paradigm Shifts

Resistance against the new medium in the old culture	*Appropriation* of the new media in the new culture in continuity with the tradition	*Capitulation* in the new medium and its culture
Writing Rabbinic Judaism	Christianity	Gnosticism
Print Roman Catholicism	Protestantism	Scholastics
Silent Print Fundamentalism	Historical criticism- Mediating Liberalism	Deists/Radical Liberalism
Electronic/Television Orthodox Christianity		Electronic Church

The gap in the bottom middle clearly indicates Boomershine's proposal: that the electronic media have yet to be appropriated without the capitulation of the tele-evangelists. Our interest in his work, however, lies primarily in what we have learned of the relationship of media to hermeneutics.

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electronic media will be as if we would put literary, music, and film critics on TV and never have storytellers, musicians or athletes (154). This seems precisely to be the danger of capitulating to the electronic media. While all translation is to some extent interpretation, the addition of sound and sight images in the "electronic translation" makes the result more a commentary than a version. It is difficult to compare the New Media Bible to the Vulgate. Can one say of such a highly allegorical performance as "Out of the Tombs," "this is the Bible"?

[232]Ibid., 147.

[233]Ibid., 156. Note the split he suggests between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism over the appropriation of print. Boomershine makes observations similar to Eisenstein's, discussed above: "There is a close correlation between the ecclesiastical divisions in the history of Christianity, paradigm shifts in Biblical interpretation, and changes in the systems of communications" (149).

Critics of the Oral Theory

We have withheld the criticisms which have been raised against the preceding

theories—primarily the Greek Theory—until now, because it seemed worthwhile to listen first to

how the Greek theory spread into other fields. The reader must judge to what degree the

criticisms we shall review apply both to the Greek theory and to its children, for Ong's

generation is heavily dependent on the work of Parry, Lord, and Havelock. The fundamental

criticism to which these theories are vulnerable is the tendency to set up a strict dichotomy, a

binary opposition, between oral and literate societies and thought.[234] This includes what many

consider an undue emphasis on the significance of the Greek alphabet, elevated above other

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[234]Consider these strong statements which Havelock makes in *The Muse Learns to Write*: "Orality, by definition, deals with societies which do not use any form of phonetic writing. ... One way of realizing the difference is to recognize that in primary orality, relationships between human beings are governed exclusively by acoustics (supplemented by visual perception of bodily behavior)" (65). "Orality, as a functioning condition of society, does not fossilize until it is written down, when it ceases to be what it originally was" (66). "By definition, it [orality in a literate society] is no longer 'primary.' This must be as true of Homer as it is of the scraps of early poetry in the Old Testament. As for the later verse—that of the Psalms, for example—this is all heavily compromised by conditions of composition which employed writing, despite the lingering influence of oral rules and oral intention" (67).

Nevertheless, Havelock at times recognizes the problem, but only in order to extend the effects of orality for a few centuries: "But even this analysis [of Parry and Kirk] has suffered from an inhibition which prevents its extension beyond Homer: its reliance on the premise that orality and literacy, the oral word and the written, constitute categories mutually exclusive of each other prevents the formation of any conception of a creative partnership between the two which might have lasted at least to the death of Euripides" (124).

systems of writing.[235] It, furthermore, involves the charge of "reductionism," of making literacy the single cause of a huge range of social and historical phenomena.[236]

One of the most vocal critics, surprisingly, is a social anthropologist and one of the early **proponents** of the Greek theory: Jack Goody.[237] In his *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*[238] Goody rejects the mainstream conclusions of his earlier work as he writes a critique of Lévi-Strauss' *La Pensée Sauvage*.[239] Goody was disturbed that Lévi-Strauss set up two alternative categories of "wild/savage" and "domesticated," primitive and advanced, viewing the latter as superior in all ways. Thought processes and world views of these two classes of mankind are made into a rigid dichotomy. Lévi-Strauss, Goody believes,

> ... is a victim of the ethnocentric binarism enshrined in our own categories, of the crude division of world societies into primitive and advanced, European and non-European, simple and complex. As general signposts these terms may be permissible. But to build on so slender a base the idea of two distinct approaches to the physical universe seems scarcely justified.[240]

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[235]E.g., ibid., 91: "That is why Greek orality requires its own special theory. Its transcription into the alphabet was historically a unique event. The Hebrew example furnished in the Old Testament is not a parallel case. The instrument of inscription was imperfect. It could not 'hear' the full richness of the original oral tradition. The vocabulary as it is written shows a steady tendency to economize and simplify thought and action." One wonders whether Havelock has given due consideration to the possibility of **variety** between oral cultures—is he looking for Homer in the OT and disappointed not to find him? What he sees might not be the insufficiency of the Semitic script, but simply Semitic poetic style (although it is no doubt modified somewhat in the writing process).

[236]Ong, *Interfaces*, objects that he does not intend his theory to be "reductionist," intending to explain all social changes. "Rather, the thesis is relationist [*sic*]: major developments, and very likely even all major developments, in culture and consciousness are related, often in unexpected intimacy, to the evolution of the word from primary orality to its present state" (9-10). Yet, even this sounds reductionistic.

[237]See his article, in collaboration with Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," discussed on p. 49 above.

[238]Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

[239]Paris: Plon, 1962.

[240]Goody, *Domestication*, 8.

Goody proposes to abandon crude, "ethnocentric" dichotomies, and to look for an explanation of cultural differences in the communications media: "our starting point must be that the acquisition of language, which is an attribute of mankind alone, is basic to all social institutions, to all normative behavior."[241] Thus, Goody has proposed that the communications media are significant to the development of **all** cultures, not just Greece.

Much of Goody's new insight grew out of his return visit in 1970 to the LoDagaa tribe of Northern Ghana, whose contact with literacy began with the opening of a school in 1949.[242] Here he observed a growth of abstraction with the onset of literacy which was similar to that postulated for Greece. Yet the particular effect of literate schooling on this tribe was unique:

> When I first asked someone to count for me, the answer was "count what?". For different procedures are used for counting different objects. Counting cows is different from counting cowries. We have here an instance of the greater concreteness of procedures in non-literate societies. It is not the absence of abstract thought, as Lévi-Bruhl believed; nor is it yet the opposition between the "science of the concrete" and the "science of the abstract", of which Lévi-Strauss speaks. The LoDagaa have an "abstract" numerical system that applies as well to cowries as to cows. But the ways in which they use these concepts are embedded in daily living. Literacy and the accompanying process of classroom education brings a shift towards greater "abstractedness", through the decontextualisation of knowledge ... , but to crystallise such a developmental process into an absolute dichotomy does not do justice to the facts either of "traditional" society, or of the changing world in which the LoDagaa now find themselves.[243]

Literacy was able to "decontextualize" knowledge, to remove it from the sphere of daily life, but it did not **introduce** abstract thought.

Rather than dichotomizing, Goody suggests a careful evaluation of communication as a mechanism of change in each culture:

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[241]Ibid., 9.

[242]As Goody will remind us to consider writing **together with** many other social factors, we must ask whether it is possible to distinguish in this African example the influence of literacy from the influence of **formal schooling**. Which is responsible for the cognitive changes observed? Goody himself recognizes this problem in *Interface*, 235.

[243]Goody, *Domestication*, 13

I have tried to take certain of the characteristics that Lévi-Strauss and others have regarded as marking the distinction between primitive and advanced, between wild and domesticated thinking, and to suggest that many of the valid aspects of these somewhat vague dichotomies can be related to changes in the mode of communication, especially the introduction of various forms of writing. The advantage of this approach lies in the fact that it does not simply describe the differences but relates them to a third set of facts, and thus provides some kind of explanation, some kind of mechanism, for the changes that are assumed to occur.[244]

Attention is being drawn away from the Greek alphabet, with its role in **Western European** civilization, to the significance of literacy itself in **any** culture. Goody's interest is rather "to disentangle the particular features or 'modes of thought' that appear to be affected by changes in the means of communication."[245]

Rather than looking for "residual orality," as Ong did, Goody was searching for evidence of how writing changes culture with its use and with the acquisition of knowledge. With writing, man's relationship to knowledge changed:

Culture, after all, is a series of communicative acts, and differences in the mode of communication are often as important as differences in the mode of production, for they involve developments in the storing, analysis, and creation of human knowledge, as well as the relationships between the individuals involved. The specific proposition is that writing, and more especially alphabetic literacy, made it possible to scrutinise discourse in a different kind of way by giving oral communication a semi-permanent form; this scrutiny favoured the increase in scope of critical activity, and hence of rationality, scepticism, and logic to resurrect memories of those questionable dichotomies. It increased the potentialities of criticism because writing laid out discourse before one's eyes in a different kind of way; at the same time it increased the potentiality for cumulative knowledge, especially knowledge of an abstract kind, because it changed the nature of communication beyond that of face-to-face contact as well as the system for the storage of information; in this way a wider range of "thought" was made available to the reading public. No longer did the problem of memory storage dominate man's intellectual life; the human mind was freed to study static "text" (rather than be limited by participation in the dynamic "utterance"), a process that enabled man to stand back from his creation and examine it in a more abstract, generalised, and "rational" way.[246]

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[244]Ibid., 16.

[245]Ibid., 19. Thus, while we could consider his work together with Ong's, it has been separated because of his expressed opposition to the narrowness of the Greek theory.

[246]Ibid., 37. While much of this seems to follow and agree with Havelock's generation, notice the words "to resurrect memories of those questionable dichotomies." Goody is uncomfortable with the stark categories of earlier work. Following this Goody notes: "In giving

Through writing, communicative acts become "objectified," able to be taken apart, run backwards and forwards, in a manner foreign to normal speech.[247] It should not be surprising, then, to find that "major steps in the development of what we now call 'science' followed the introduction of major changes in the channels of communication in Babylonia (writing), in Ancient Greece (the alphabet), and in Western Europe (printing)."[248]

Finally, Goody comes to his direct criticism of his own previous work, and that of Havelock:

> One of the problems in the earlier discussion was that, like Havelock (1963; 1973), we attached particular importance to the introduction of the alphabet because of its role in Greece. In doing so, we tended to underemphasise the achievements of societies that employed earlier forms of writing and the part these played in social life and in cognitive processes. While these systems did not equal the alphabet in its ease of operation, they could nevertheless be used to achieve some of the same ends. The lack of fluency mattered much less when they were mainly used for transcribing words rather than speech; indeed it was perhaps an advantage in providing a very definite spatial framework for verbal concepts and thus enabling them to be subjected to the kind of formal manipulation

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this summary account of some of the implications of writing ... I have deliberately used words with which others have spelled out the traditional-modern dichotomy" (38). While not denying these conclusions entirely, he is setting up the reader for the criticisms to follow.

[247]Ibid., 44: "... when an utterance is put into writing it can be inspected in much greater detail, in its parts as well as in its whole, backwards as well as forwards, out of context as well as in its setting; in other words, it can be subjected to a quite different type of scrutiny and critique than is possible with purely verbal communication. Speech is no longer tied to an 'occasion'; it becomes timeless. Nor is it attached to a person; on paper, it becomes more abstract, more depersonalised. ... Writing makes speech 'objective' by turning it into an object of visual as well as aural inspection; it is the shift of the receptor from ear to eye, of the producer from voice to hand."

Goody applies this insight to the traditional method of concordanced "word study," especially the kind which attempts to find discrepancies in an author's use of a vocable. Referring to a critique of a book on scientific thought, he comments: "No listener, I suggest. could ever spot the twenty-one different usages of the word 'paradigm'. The argument would flow from one usage to another without anyone being able to perceive any discrepancy. Inconsistency, even contradiction, tends to get swallowed up in the flow of speech (*parole*), the spate of words, the flood of argument, from which it is virtually impossible for even the most acute mind to make his mental card-index of different usages and then compare them one with another" (49-50; emphasis added). The modern word study is a literate technique which must be used with great caution on oral creations.

[248]Ibid., 51; cf. idem, *Interface*, 76-77. Notice how he has extended his argument **beyond** the Greek alphabet.

available even to those graphic systems that symbolise objects (i.e. pictograms) rather than words (i.e. logograms). Let us treat this argument in two parts. Firstly, there is no need to abandon the claim that the alphabet made reading and writing much easier, and made it available for more people and more purposes (including writing down one's "thoughts"). But, in their turn, earlier syllabic and "consonantal alphabets" were simplifications of Sumerian logograms, and had similar, though not so far-reaching effects. It is clear that the greater abstraction and simplification of progressive changes in the writing system increased the number of literates, potentially and sometimes in practice.[249]

Goody is keen to emphasize that every step in the progression of writing systems brought changes in cognitive processes, furthered scientific work, and had a backlash effect on the spoken language which spawned it. Furthermore, culture as a whole changes, as every simplification in the technology of writing brought literacy to a larger segment of society.

In his *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, Goody systematizes his ideas on the progressive effects of writing systems, discussing in turn five general categories:

(1) "Picture Writing" - the referent of the symbol is thought to be the real world object, independent of the language employed;
(2) "Early Writing Systems" - a combination of pictorial, logographic and phonetic signs;
(3) "Logographic Writing Systems" - the immediate referent of the symbol is a word in the linguistic world, rather than an object (Chinese writing is the classic example);
(4) "Phonetic Transcription" - "syllabaries," the first attempts to record sounds, independent of their combination into words (Semitic systems come to mind);
(5) "The Alphabet" - sound is further subdivided into vowel and consonant, allowing a more accurate transcription of sound.[250]

While there is obviously some overlap in these categories,[251] the intended progression is from an objective to a linguistic referent: "The main development lies in the degree to which the graphic

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[249]Goody, *Domestication*, 75-76. See also Goody, *Interface*, xvii: "The 'alphabetic' writing of the Greeks is no longer seen as so unique an achievement, while its dates seem to require revising in an earlier direction. ... [I]t was clear that certain features attributed to alphabetic writing were to be found in other systems."

[250]Goody, *Interface*, respectively: pp. 8-18, 18-27, 27-38, 38-40, 40-51. As we have indicated before, there is a problem of referent either in Goody's thought or in the system of "picture writing" itself. For a symbol in picture writing may be thought to refer directly to a real world item. But it may also refer to a "class" which exists only in the thought world (as when the writer refers to "horse" or "pharaoh" in general, and not to one specific example). If symbols can refer to general classes in the thought world, then they can be used for abstractions as well—a conclusion which further weakens the special theory of Greek orality. Perhaps the difference between picture writing and logographic systems is simply the proportion of symbols capable of expressing abstractions.

system succeeds in duplicating the linguistic one, that is, in the extent, first, of word-to-sign (semantic) correspondence and, secondly, of phonetic correspondence."[252]

As we have seen from Goody's reaction to Lévi-Strauss, he believes that the Greek theory is colored by racial bias: "It is a gross ethnocentric error of Europe to attribute too much to the alphabet and too much to the West."[253] The classic evidence to the contrary are the accomplishments of Chinese civilization via their logographic system of writing, which enables communication between peoples speaking different dialects or even languages. Nevertheless, Chinese, like all non-alphabetic scripts, restricted total literacy to an elite class of intellectuals or technicians. "The invention of the alphabet," on the contrary, "and to some extent the syllabary, led to a considerable reduction in the number of signs, and to a writing system which was potentially unrestricted both in its capacity to transcribe speech and in its availability to the general population."[254] One must constantly emphasize the modifier "potentially," for the **actual**

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[251]Ibid., 62: "Current opinion would certainly modify the radical distinction in modes of writing, suggesting that the breaks between logographic, syllabic, and alphabetic systems are less clear cut than the terminology implies." The phonetic principle appears very early, and over time the non-phonetic falls away.

[252]Ibid., 18. The **implications** of technological development in the transcription of language are threefold (p. 54):
   (1) *inter*generational communication (storage);
   (2) *intra*generational communication;
   (3) internal cognitive development.
Intergenerational preservation of knowledge allows for the development of science; **intra**generational communication leads to commerce and the rise of cities; cognitive development influences all forms of philosophy, as we have seen.
   Further technological developments, such as print and computers, serve to enhance and spread the use of the existing phonetic alphabet. **Electronic** media, on the other hand, introduce a whole new method of transcription and communication. See the discussion of media criticism below.

[253]Ibid., 56. Many of the effects once attributed to the Greek alphabet are now being pushed back to the earlier Semitic syllabaries. See pp. 63-64.

[254]Ibid., 55.

significance of writing depends as much on education and the cost and availability of manuscripts as on the facility of the writing system.[255]

Goody's most controversial criticisms are of the seminal work on orality, that of Milman Parry's "formula." Arguing against the foundational principle that formulas are the mark of the oral poet, he instead contends that "formalized language" is more characteristic of literate productions![256] He believes recent evidence is demonstrating that Homer's time can hardly be considered "archetypically oral."[257] The investigation needs to be broadened:

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[255]Ibid., 56: "Nevertheless, a potentially democratic form of writing, one that could, if allowed, make the easy transcription of language and direct access to learning a possibility for the vast majority of the community, followed the development of the alphabet and syllabary, though it was not until the emergence of mechanical means of reproducing these texts by movable type that the alphabet came fully into its own. Equally, it was the limited number of alphabetic signs that enabled Europe to exploit the benefits of movable type, first used in the East."

[256]Goody argues that the essential characteristic of oral poetry is not formulaic repetition but variety. Oral poetry is marked by flexibility. Both Parry's work in Yugoslavia and Goody's work in Africa have demonstrated that oral poets know of no "authoritative" version of an epic. In order to explain how the poet could recreate "off the cuff" such monumental tales, Parry investigated the role of the formula as the building block which the poet "stitched" into an epic. Goody suggests that this misses what is unique about oral poetry. Goody, Domestication, 118:

> ... exact repetition, as both Parry and Lord were well aware, seems to be more characteristic of the written transmission of written literature than the reproduction of oral verse. Of course, metrical arrangements impose their own restrictions upon what can be said and how words can be used; its sentence structure is not that of ordinary speech and its "memorableness" makes it liable to repetition. Equally the very speed of the performance makes for a reliance on certain set combinations ... . We know too that whole chunks of descriptive verse may be transferred from one story to the next ... . But even the most standardised segments of oral sequences never become so standardised, so formulaic, as the products of written man. Repetition is rarely if ever verbatim.

See also Goody, Interface, 85-89. Perhaps Goody is concentrating overmuch on the problem of repetition from one performance to the next. Oral theorists like Parry are more interested in repetition within an epic, and to a lesser degree in the elements which carry between performances. One must admit that good writing style abhors repetition within one text, even while writing assures the transmission of the text verbatim from "performance" to "performance."

[257]Goody, Interface, 107.

Discussion of the oral character of the Homeric poems has concentrated upon the analysis of the formulas, but we need to look also at other features, at lists, at metrical forms, at narrative structure, that seem to have more in common with the literate culture that was coming into being than with purely oral forms of communication.[258]

Thus, he believes the Homeric epics to be not a product of purely oral culture, but of that culture which is experiencing the "interface"[259] of oral and written.[260]

Furthermore, over against Ong's view of the art of rhetoric as a preservation of oral techniques, Goody believes that the formal art of rhetoric is a product of literacy:

The rhetoric of the Greeks, Romans and the late medieval educators can hardly be taken to represent the customs, conventions or consensus of pre-literate speech, even formal speech, though it may share certain features in common. While rhetoric has to do with the organisation of oral forms, it displays a consciousness of those forms that seems to depend upon the deliberate analysis (*analytika* was Aristotle's term for logic) that writing makes possible, or at least does a great deal to promote.[261]

He is not suggesting that formulas are **absent** from oral literature, but simply that the structured formulaic method of classical rhetoric is different from the oral method. "The process is not simply one of 'writing down', of codifying what is already there. It is a question of formalising

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[258]Ibid., 98. While Parry's students would hardly accept this strong a statement, they do admit that the formula is not the exclusive property of oral poetry. Foley, 61, cautions: "Claes Schaar pointed out in 1956 that 'the proposition "all formulaic poetry is oral" does not follow, either logically or psychologically, from the proposition "all oral poetry is formulaic".'" The reference, according to Green, 270, is to Claes Schaar, "On a New Theory of Old English Poetic Diction," *Neophilologus* 40 (1956): 301-5.

[259]The term "interface," popular in oral theory, is colorfully illustrated by McLuhan, 182: "Two cultures or technologies can, like astronomical galaxies, pass through one another without collision; but not without change of configuration. In modern physics there is, similarly, the concept of 'interface' or the meeting and metamorphosis of two structures."

[260]Unfortunately, Goody's argument borders on being a truism. Of course, the epics as we have them in written form will show evidence of literate culture. Apart from the influence of literacy they could not have been written down. There may be some "talking past one another" here, for while Goody is looking at the written text, Parry and Havelock were looking through the written text to the era which produced the presumed oral prototype.

[261]Goody, *Domestication*, 114-15.

the oral forms and in so doing, changing them into something that is not simply an 'oral residue' but a literary (or proto-literary) creation."[262]

The reference to Walter Ong is obvious. Nevertheless, it is possible that Ong and Goody are not so far apart. Each views the evidence from his own perspective. While Goody, from his experience in Africa, is interested in how literacy changes the oral world, Ong is interested in how ancient oral culture lingers on into the literate world. Ong stresses what has survived, Goody what has changed.[263] Thus, while we have made and will make much use of formal rhetoric in discerning the characteristics of oral culture, we must heed Goody's warning that the formal rhetorical treatises of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian, and others, have changed the nature of orality by committing it to writing. Just as all techniques of observing the inner workings of the atom by their very intrusive nature change what is observed, so, too, when orality is examined in writing it ceases to a degree to be oral.

Goody's ultimate contribution is to challenge the "Grand Dichotomy" of domestic versus savage, alphabetic literacy versus primitive oral precursors, Greek civilization versus the world.[264] Instead he suggests the analysis of various technologies of writing as "mechanisms for

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[262]Ibid., 116.

[263]This problem of perspective plagued our discussion earlier of the *loci* method. From one point of view it illustrated the incursion of the visual analogy; from another it evidenced residual orality. See pp. 57 and 64 above. Goody, *Interface*, 82, elaborates on his concern: "The problem raised here is the degree of influence that the presence of another register, another channel of communication, has on any specific 'oral' composition, genre, or author, when both exist within the same, or possibly neighbouring societies. I would argue that almost no 'oral' form can be unaffected by the presence of written communication."

[264]In Goody, *Interface*, 105-6, Goody offers four arguments against the "Great Divide." First, one cannot simply distinguish oral and literate, but one must consider each successive method of writing individually. Secondly, writing technology does not by itself affect communication, but its impact is modified by religious, political, economic, and other forces. Thirdly, writing inevitably modifies culture by accumulating and preserving that culture's past. Fourthly, the move from orality to literacy is never a simple binary shift, crossing a line, but there is continual cross-fertilization at the interface.

change," from pictograms to syllabaries to alphabets to print and beyond.[265] Each makes its own

contribution. Goody also focuses our attention clearly on the period when orality and literacy

overlap. He proposes three major types of linguistic situations:[266]

(1) where language takes a purely oral form	≅ local languages
(2) where language takes both written and oral forms (for all or for a proportion of people)	≅ world languages
(3) where language takes a written form only, either because the oral one has died out or because it never existed	≅ classical languages

Whereas pure orality applies only to Homeric theories and work among isolated primitive tribes

today, and whereas the third category reminds one most readily of medieval Latin (as Ong has

pointed out), our concern is really with the second category. Here we find biblical culture as well

as our own. The problem is to determine how much of category one carries over into category

two in a given era and culture, for the second category is far from homogeneous. It is "the

situation of the interface," that is, the "co-existence of an 'oral' and 'literate' tradition."[267]

Goody concentrates our attention on the period of **interface**. He relieves one of the

frustrations often felt reading Ong and Havelock, namely, that their descriptions of orality only

apply to those rare situations of **primary** orality. Goody sharpens the tools necessary for

examining biblical literature and culture, produced at the interface of oral and written. He also

reminds us that the function of literacy is unique in each particular culture, and that other societal

forces work with or against it.[268]

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[265]This observation is similar to Walter Ong's and Marshall McLuhan's dictum of "cumulative media." Goody himself writes in *Interface*, xii: "Strictly speaking, therefore, it is a mistake to divide 'cultures' into the oral and the written: it is rather the oral and the oral plus the written, printed, etc." Once again, however, whereas Ong is concerned with the levels of media which persist, Goody looks to the levels which are added.

[266]The following table is adapted from Goody, *Domestication*, 152.

[267]Goody, *Interface*, 78; hence the title of his book, as well as Ong's *Interfaces*.

[268]Though he meant something slightly different, Havelock did recognize this to a degree, as he writes in *Muse*, 68: "A general theory of orality must build upon a general theory of

To give proper credit, we must note that the term "Great Divide" originates with Ruth Finnegan, the strongest critic of the traditional oral/literate theory. She complains:

> ... how useful is this binary typology when it turns out that most known cultures don't fit? In practice a *mixture* of media (oral and written) is far more typical than a reliance on just one, with writing being used for some purposes, oral forms for others (and in recent cases electronic media playing a part too). This kind of mixture is and has been a common and ordinary feature of cultures through the centuries rather than the "abnormal" case implied by the ideal types model.[269]

Thus she reminds us that the vast majority of cultures exist at the **interface** of written and oral.

Finnegan notes that past scholars have searched for "*general*—or at least widely applicable—patterns in the results of literacy for society and for human development."[270] Recently, however, scholars have become suspicious of generalized conclusions, and have restricted themselves to in-depth studies of specific, limited implications of writing or print. Her concern is that the Greek theories which we have discussed, as well as the media theories to follow, are **deterministic**, tying change directly to technology:

> Many of the generalized accounts of the "impact" of literacy rest on the implicit assumption that once literacy—or indeed modern IT [Information Technology]—is acquired, certain results follow. The implicit or explicit technological determinism that underlies such approaches makes the consequent generalizations seem plausible. For if the *technology* is the same (whether writing, print or networked computers) then the social and cultural results will be the same too.[271]

"Technological determinism" is her way of describing theories by which certain results **necessarily follow** from a change in communications media.[272]

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society. It requires communication to be understood as a social phenomenon, not a private transaction between individuals."

[269]Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 141.

[270]Ibid., 6.

[271]Ibid., 8.

[272]Ibid., 10: "In this model, then, what is seen as coming first is the technology, and social conditions follow. Similarly 'human factors', if they enter in at all, are thought of as secondary and arising from the technology. The view is: get the technology right and then think of any subsequent human problems." Under the umbrella of "technological determinism"

A deterministic view, at a minimum, fails to take into account the complexity of human development. Many scholars now argue that communication—let alone technology itself—cannot be taken as a single cause for change.[273]

> Much of the plausibility of the "Great Divide" theories has rested on the often unconscious assumption that what the essential shaping of society comes from is its communications technology. But once technological determinism is rejected or queried, then questions immediately arise about the validity of these influential classifications of human development into two major types: the oral/primitive as against the literate/civilized.[274]

Finnegan's own anthropological field work gives evidence which shakes the theory. For example, the Limba peoples of Sierra Leone defy the theory that abstract thought is necessarily tied to literacy. They are aware that their language is just one among many, and that there are various dialects within their own and within other languages. They are able to discuss language in a highly complex, abstract manner. In fact, language and abstraction are closely connected for them: "The prefix *hu-* is commonly used not only for most terms referring to speech, words or language but as the normal prefix used to transform a root word into a noun."[275] Surrounded as they are by other linguistic groups, language is a favorite topic of study:

> The Limba take a certain amount of reflective interest in the analysis of their own speech. Discussion of separate elements and words is made easier by the common Limba word *na*

Finnegan would place both Ong and McLuhan (145). McLuhan should have observed more closely his own chapter gloss, which stated: "The method of the twentieth century is to use not single but multiple models for experimental exploration—the technique of the suspended judgment" (90).

[273]Ibid., 12, quotes J. D. Slack: "Technologies are not autonomous ... [so] one cannot properly speak of technologies as having impacts."

[274]Ibid., 13. The latter word pairings illustrate the evolutionary model at work. Most scholars in the past have viewed oral cultures as deficient in the development of language skills. Literate cultures by corollary are "more advanced." Finnegan notes, however, that "it is now fully accepted that every known human culture possesses language in the fullest sense" (16). To be fair, Ong certainly objected to this contrast, arguing that purely oral language stands on its own merits.

[275]Ibid., 47. Finnegan gives a spate of examples of how abstract terms can be made in such a system. See also ibid., 58. This argument on the basis of common morphology is perhaps specious. It would be very difficult to prove that the Limba actually made such a connection in practice.

which is used both to introduce reported speech and to put a word or phrase in, as it were, quotation marks. Thus one term, phrase or sentence can be singled out for discussion or elucidation in its own right by prefixing it with *na*. People sometimes came to me spontaneously with the intention of explaining some word or phrase in this way, quoting it for the sole purpose of comment and explication. ... The Limba are well aware of the possibility of considering a linguistic formulation in itself detached from its direct social or personal context.[276]

The same ability to stand back and analyze is found in Limba poetry, through which the poet comments on his world. Thus, the Limba people put to lie many common assumptions about the lack of abstract thought in oral cultures.[277]

A second example comes from investigation of oral composition and "literature" among traditional cultures of the South Pacific. Here the stereotype of the oral poet composing his epic spontaneously upon the base of a traditional tale is contradicted.[278] While the "composition-in-performance" is common,[279] another type of composition exists:

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[276]Ibid., 50.

[277]Finnegan, 57, points out that, whereas the literate Greeks are famous for speculative, abstract thought, the equally literate Romans have never developed such a reputation. Yet this fact has been conveniently overlooked. See also Finnegan's discussion of abstract thought on pp. 149-54.

[278]Finnegan, 88-89, summarizes the relevant aspects of the Parry-Lord theory as follows:
1. The text of oral literature is variable and dependent on the occasion of performance, unlike the fixed text of a written book.
2. The form of composition characteristic of oral literature is composition-in-performance, i.e. not prior composition divorced from the act of performance.
3. Composition and transmission of oral literature is through the process mentioned above and not (as we once thought) through word for word memorization.
4. In oral literature, there is no concept of a "correct" or "authentic" version.
These points demonstrate how rigidly oral literature was defined in the past. If oral productions were discovered which did not fit this mould, they were dismissed as "corrupted" by literacy, or given the bizarre kind of explanation which Lord offers: "I think there is a possibility that the kind of composition in which the singer makes up the song orally, and doesn't commit it to writing, but commits it to memory, may not be oral composition, but rather **written composition without writing**" (quoted in Finnegan, 105; emphasis added)! Green, 271, criticizes Lord for a metaphorical "empire building," in that Lord refuses "to admit that there might be forms of oral practice other than those catered for by the oral-formulaic theory." The phenomenon of "oral-formulaic poetry" does not exhaust the category of "oral poetry." Finnegan also argues on p. 144 that there is no evidence that the coming of literacy **destroys** the power of true oral composition.

[279]Finnegan, 91-95.

This second form of composition in the Pacific applies mainly to composition of poetry associated with the dance. In this the poet works out his composition some time before the planned time of performance (often several months or more). He or she then teaches it to the future performers, and a series of concerted rehearsals takes place before the final public performance.[280]

The performers, or sometimes the apprentice poets, listen to the composition and offer its author suggestions and critiques. The author incorporates these changes and produces a final product which is then memorized by the performers. Yet despite the "communal" input, the tribe recognizes the result as the property or creation of the one author.[281] Thus the association of the "**fixed** text composed ahead of time" with literate culture, while it may be a **usual** phenomenon, is not a **necessary** association.[282]

Finnegan suggests four general ways in which the connection between communications technology and social development has been formulated:

1. The technology of communication is the single cause of social development and determines the nature of society in its various phases.
2. It is an important causal factor, but only one among several.
3. It is an *enabling* factor: i.e. it leads to the opening up of various *opportunities* which may or may not be taken up in particular societies or periods.
4. It causes (or influences) some things in society, but not everything.[283]

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[280]Ibid., 95.

[281]Ibid., 95-101.

[282]Finnegan, 108, thus argues that oral communication can have the same variety as writing: "There is perhaps no one abiding set of characteristics that *always* appears in 'oral culture' (any more than in 'literate culture'), but there are instead a number of different options and differing possibilities, as exemplified by the varying arrangements that have proved possible for the composition and performance of oral literature. Once the question has been opened up it can be seen that, though there are a number of differences between oral and written communication, these differences are not necessarily absolute and universal ones: in many cases they are found, in some they are not, in others they are a matter of degree rather than kind."

Many other examples which contradict the standard theory of the media could be cited. On the one hand, oral peoples such as the Kapauku Papuans of New Guinea and the Ibo of West Africa evidence a "stress on achievement, individualism and secularization"; the Yoruba of Nigeria possess "large-scale urbanism"; and the Somali emphasize "precise memorization"— characteristics normally tied to literacy. See Finnegan, 142 & 167.

[283]Ibid., 38. Emphasis original.

There is much evidence to contradict the strongest view, number one. For instance, while China

and Japan have a long tradition of literacy, neither culture had an established scientific method in

the Western sense. Such rationality has often been labeled as a necessary consequence of

literacy. Likewise, systematic historical research does not appear in India. "Again, it is true that

in western Europe print can be seen as connected with industrialization, mass communications

and religious revolution; but that these are not an invariable result of print is shown by India and

Japan."[284] Many of the same arguments hold against the "causal" theories which modify this

"strong view" at one or the other pole: numbers two and four.

The third, "weak view," is much easier to fit into the mounds of apparently

irreconcilable data which anthropologists have produced. It allows for the recognition of multiple

causality, including political and social factors:

> Certainly the picture of *opportunities* being provided (rather than consequences
> determined) through various communication technologies seems to fit well with the
> detailed evidence on social and economic development. The medium in itself cannot give
> rise to social consequences—it must be used by people and developed through social
> institutions. The mere technical existence of writing cannot effect social change. What
> counts is its *use*, who uses it, who controls it, what it is used for, how it fits into the power
> structure, how widely it is distributed—it is these social and political factors that shape the
> consequences. Thus the implications of writing are very different when strictly confined to
> priests and rulers and largely concerned with religion (as in early Egypt) from a society
> where there is widespread literacy. ... Again, it is a social not a technological matter what
> kind of information is expressed in which medium.[285]

Thus the **cause** of change is more social than technological—the technology provides the

instrument which may be used in various ways. A technology may be available but not put to

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[284]Ibid., 40. One **positive** aspect of the strong view, Finnegan admits, is that it "jolts us out of our complacency," offering a model of causality which has been overlooked in the past. She calls it "a *suggestive* but not yet solidly based theory" (39).

[285]Ibid., 41-42. Emphasis original. Print can "encourage conformism, unthinking regurgitation and copying" (156), rather than individualism. Certainly the Communist ideal would be impossible in a world without print—another example of how the impact of a medium is dictated somewhat by who has power to control it (cf. p. 176).

use,[286] or it may be restricted in its availability. While Finnegan admits to the appeal of the stronger causal explanations, she finds the weaker theory more in accord with the evidence.[287]

Thus, Finnegan emphasizes not the medium itself but the **use** to which the medium is put. This is evident today with the supposed "mass" (electronic) media:

> They [dissenting scholars] raise the question of how far it is the *means* of modern communication in themselves—their technologies—that bring about mass use and the consequent results, or whether it is only certain media that are of this nature, or certain *uses* of the media. It used to be widely assumed that television, radio, computers, telephones, tapes, and records necessarily depended on public (or mass) circulation. But in fact this is not inevitably so of any of them. It is a fallacy to assume that, e.g. television is most naturally suited to public broadcasts (even though this has been a common use in the U.K.). Even by the 1970s it was also widely used for teaching (via closed circuit television) in medical schools, etc., and could also be transmitted by cable television, not to speak of the many more personalized uses developing in the late 1980s. The point is that we *use* media for certain purposes, but these purposes are not necessarily inherent in their nature.[288]

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[286]Finnegan, 43, notes how groups with a vested interest in the old technology of communication will resist the adoption of the new. Such change renders their laboriously acquired skills less valuable, and deprives them of power and control. It is also true that new technologies do not make the old completely obsolete—writing does not **replace** spoken communication, nor does printing replace all handwriting or television replace radio. As long as the older technologies remain in use the impact of the new is mitigated.

Slaughter, 134, also emphasizes that a new technology will not affect a society until the society is ready for it: "Unless the 'need' is there, the new communicative medium (e.g. writing) will not stick. This suggests that new conditions and ideas and outlooks come first, the technology of literacy second. It suggests further that it only makes sense to introduce the technology if you introduce at the same time the new world views, the new outlooks, and new contexts."

[287]Finnegan, 159 & 179-80, appears to commit herself to the latter view as the most fruitful. Of the "stronger view" she says that it "often implies a focus on the *technology* of communication as itself being the motive force rather than on the *uses* to which that technology is or can be put" (160).

[288]Ibid., 36. In other words, while Ong and McLuhan might argue that television by its very nature is a mass communication device, many recent uses of the television would contradict this assumption. Rather than producing a "global village," uses of the television for Nintendo games, movie rentals, or home videos, tend to produce a "cocoon" syndrome. Not everyone watches BBC, CBC, PBS or CNN!

The impact of media lies in opportunities and constraints: "The various technologies of communication *do* provide opportunities, and, conversely, their absence provides constraints."[289] Which path is taken with each opportunity is influenced by political, social, psychological, and innumerable other factors. She suggests that the most fruitful line of investigation is to ask why a particular medium was used in a particular way in a given situation or culture.[290] Finnegan's strong final words are a caution to be well heeded: "What I hope I have established is that it *is* a huge and complicated subject—far too complex to be reduced to trite classifications or the categorization implied when we facilely define certain groups as 'non-literate' and unthinkingly go on to assume consequences from this for the nature of their thought."[291]

While Finnegan's critique applies to the Greek hypothesis in principle (and occasionally by direct reference), a recent study by Rosalind Thomas[292] directly addresses—and challenges—the Parry-Lord-Havelock school. Though she recognizes the fundamental oral characteristics of ancient Greece,[293] her criticisms are more useful to us. She begins with a general challenge to the oral-literate dichotomy:

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[289]Ibid., 44.

[290]Ibid., 161. This requires the Biblical scholar to ask why the apostles and prophets chose to commit their message to writing, and why they nevertheless continued to proclaim it, and to have their writings proclaimed. This will be our task in succeeding chapters.

[291]Ibid., 85.

[292]Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[293]Note, for instance, this excellent summary, ibid., 3-4: "Yet most Greek literature was meant to be heard or even sung—thus transmitted orally—and there was a strong current of distaste for the written word even among the highly literate: written documents were not considered adequate proof by themselves in legal contexts till the second half of the fourth century BC. Politics was conducted orally. The citizens of democratic Athens listened in person to the debates in the Assembly and voted on them there and then. Very little was written down and the nearest Greek word for 'politician' was 'orator' (*rhetor*). Tragedy was watched in the theatre, and rhetoric or the art of speaking was a major part of Greek education. A civilized man in Greece (and indeed Rome) had to be able, above all, to speak well in public. Socrates pursued his philosophical enquiries in conversation and debate and wrote nothing down. His pupil Plato attacked the written word as an inadequate means of true education and philosophy: he may have

The tendency to see a society (or individual) as either literate or oral is over-simple and misleading. The habits of relying on oral communication (or orality) and literacy are not mutually exclusive (even though literacy and illiteracy are). As we have seen, the evidence for Greece shows *both* a sophisticated and extensive use of writing in some spheres *and* what is to us an amazing dominance of the spoken word. Fifth century Athens was not a "literate society", but nor was it quite an "oral society" either. ... We can see that the presence of writing does not necessarily destroy all oral elements of a society, and orality does not preclude complex intellectual activity. ... The written word was more often used in service of the spoken.[294]

We are again brought to the point of **interface**: "Rather than separating the literate areas in one period from the oral, or still worse, the earlier centuries, supposedly oral, from the later, supposedly 'literate' ones, we should examine the interaction of oral and written communication techniques."[295] Thomas stands clearly in the intellectual tradition of Goody and Finnegan, rejecting the bald classification of a society as "oral" or "literate," and instead concentrating on the way orality and literacy function and interact in a given society.

Both orality and literacy, according to Thomas, should be viewed as fluid. Literacy does not have the same impact in all societies, and is introduced very slowly. Likewise, there are "degrees of orality," for its impact must be evaluated in at least the three areas of communication, composition, and transmission.[296] By contrast, past studies have tended to see "oral culture" as monolithic. For instance, Walter Ong emphasized that oral societies are warm and personal, since all communication is done face-to-face, rather than through the impersonal and individualizing text. Yet, Thomas notes, the remote, old-fashioned village communities in modern Greece hardly conform to this ideal, with every family pitted against the rest.[297] "Studies which stress the general characteristics of orality, and which believe that the method of

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published his own work in dialogue form in order to recreate the atmosphere of oral discourse and debate, and towards the end of his life he may have decided against committing any of his most important views to written form at all (*Seventh Letter*, attributed to Plato)."

[294]Ibid., 4.

[295]Ibid., 5.

[296]Ibid., 6, quoting Finnegan.

[297]Ibid., 7.

communication is decisive in determining a society's character, inevitably tend to see oral culture as homogeneous rather than varied."[298]

Likewise, the significance of literacy depends on **what** texts are being read, for literacy can (as today) inundate the reader with **new** texts, or (as in the Middle Ages) serve mostly as an *aide-mémoire* to the texts he already knows (mostly the Bible). Thomas also suggests we should distinguish "comprehension literacy," the ability to decode a text silently and understand it, from "phonetic literacy," whereby the reader must vocalize the text, perhaps even memorize it, before he understands it.[299] Furthermore, "reading and writing are quite distinct processes which are not necessarily mastered by the same individual."[300] Likewise, the **uses** to which writing was put varied from its restriction to private inscriptions, laws, and certain religious purposes in the "archaic period" (*c*. 700-500 B.C.), to the widespread bookishness of the fourth century B.C. "The Athenian general and politician Pericles was said to be the first man to have a written text with him when he spoke (440s-430s)."[301] "Literacy," then, is no homogeneous phenomenon, either.

Thomas, like Finnegan, believes that much orality-literacy research is ethnocentric.

At some time or other almost every feature of the modern Western world has been linked closely to literacy. ... One begins to wonder how often these effects can occur, and to what

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[298]Ibid., 8.

[299]It has been suggested that much ancient "literacy" fits into the latter category, especially in view of the space saving writing techniques which required decoding. The marks on the page had to be, as it were, "translated" into oral speech before meaning was obtained.

[300]Ibid., 10. See also Green, 275, who notes "that writing was considered a special skill in the Middle Ages, which was not necessarily coupled, as it is today, with the ability to read; and we know, for example, that Charles the Great could read but that his attempts to learn to write were laborious and futile." Modern definitions of literacy may not necessarily be applied to earlier times.

[301]Thomas, 13; see also Greene, 40-41. The very length of time required for literacy to take hold in Greece is seen by Thomas as evidence against "technological determinism," for, she asks, "why had it taken four centuries to work?" (17).

extent these analyses are based on an easy—but incorrect—correlation between Western values, modernity, economic development, and literacy.[302]

"Are we confusing 'literacy' with Western literacy?" she asks.[303] The intellectual revolution attributed to literacy in Athens and Ionia did not occur in Rome or Sparta, who had a similar level of literacy. In fact, despite widespread literacy across the world, vast cultural and intellectual gaps still separate earth's peoples. The Japanese, for instance, believe that knowledge resides **in** and **only in** writing, rather than that writing is the record of the spoken word.

Thus, she concludes, "A forceful case is being built up for regarding the effects or implications of literacy as heavily dependent on whatever society is using it."[304] This is spoken in contradiction to McLuhan's "technological determinism," which flattens societies and expects literacy to produce the same result everywhere. In sum:

> They [recent analyses] suggest that we should abandon the idea that literacy is a single, definable skill with definite uses and predictable effects. Its manifestations seem, rather, to depend on the society and customs already there. Perhaps writing can exaggerate or strengthen tendencies already present, rather than transform them, but what is fundamental are the pre-existing features. Writing does not descend onto a blank slate.[305]

Finnegan's "strong" and "weak" theories coincide mostly with what Thomas labels "the 'autonomous' model of literacy" and "the 'ideological' model." The former refers to "technological determinism," as we have discussed. The latter model, to which she subscribes,

> ... sees literacy as much more fluid: its uses, implications and effects are largely determined by the habits and beliefs (i.e. "ideology" or mentality) of the society already there. Literacy does not itself change society, but is, as it were, changed by it.[306]

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[302]Thomas, 19.

[303]Ibid., 20.

[304]Ibid., 22. Thus, she subscribes to Finnegan's dictum that the **use** to which writing is put determines its impact. Ibid., 27: "The mere presence of writing in the ancient world tells us comparatively little: what is most interesting is how it comes to function, and what particular use is made of its potentials." Ibid., 28: "In a sense, there has been a shift of attention from literacy to the use of writing."

[305]Ibid., 24.

[306]Ibid., 24.

While earlier hypotheses had attributed the different uses of literacy in, say, classical Greece and medieval England to an evolutionary development, Thomas suggests the differences are simply a manifestation of the fundamental distinctions between the societies. This has the added advantage of obviating the need to fit Japan into a developmental line between Greece and England, for instance!

Thomas specifically challenges the caricature of the oral poet given by Parry and Lord. While they had emphasized the role of each poet in the line of tradition making his contribution to the construction of the epic, so that every performance is unique (whereby our written text of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* is only **one** possible version), Thomas with many others believes one can see the unmistakable mark of the master or "monumental" poet who crafted the work.[307] She finds evidence of two levels of composition, including a richer and "highly wrought" style, found particularly in the speeches, which does not fit the oral-traditional theory.[308] This suggests that at least parts of the epic were pre-conceived, **composed**, and not entirely "improvised."

> If we accept that oral poets are capable of premeditation and reflection, of developing an idea without the aid of writing, then I see no reason to doubt that the final Homeric poet of the *Iliad* could have worked on the grand structure over a period of many years. ... So a large-scale poem like the *Iliad* could have been developed very gradually—and not necessarily with writing. The greatest scenes might have been carefully crafted in private and refined continually, reproduced in at least roughly the same form in successive performances.[309]

This theory contradicts the strict dichotomy of the Parry-Lord thesis between "oral" and "literate" compositional techniques. It suggests that memorization **complemented** improvisation and creativity, even in an oral world.

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[307]Ibid., 35. See also the extensive discussion of Homer's style and creative originality in Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word." He agrees (29) that a final single master is demanded.

[308]Thomas, 37.

[309]Ibid., 39.

Thomas goes into great detail concerning the relationship of the formula to oral composition.[310] She believes that the centrality of the formula has been greatly exaggerated. For example, she notes, roughly 35% of the vocabulary in the *Iliad* occurs only once, compared to 45% in Shakespeare—famous for his richness in vocabulary. The Greek epic poems do not appear to be so much more formulaic than much "literate" poetry. In fact, within Homer there are many levels of formulaic style. Furthermore, not all formulaic poetry is oral, for much medieval European poetry appears just as formulaic; nor is all oral poetry formulaic. She concludes:

> Surely the formula and formulaic style cannot be so clear and absolute a sign of oral poetry. The choice of clear dividing lines for formulaic content on either side of which poetry must be either oral or literate begins to appear arbitrary, and the search for oral formulaic proportions seems ultimately to rely on faith rather than statistics.[311]

Continuing her critique, she notes that the Greek theory traditionally teaches that Homer could not himself have written down his epics, because once he became literate he would have ceased to be an oral poet. He must have dictated it to someone who could write.[312] However, this judgment is based on observations in Yugoslavia and Africa, where literacy was acquired together with Western European schooling, and even with the advent of a new religion. How much of the new respect for the authority of the written text which followed can be attributed to the accompanying influences, rather than to literacy itself—influences which did **not** accompany literacy in Greece? Perhaps the experience of Yugoslavia and some parts of Africa does not apply to ancient Greece:

> In short the severe division so often drawn between the oral poet and the literate one does not hold universally, even if it holds true in some areas. The use of writing in early Greece,

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[310]Ibid., 40-44.

[311]Ibid., 43. On the other hand, one might object with Ong that formulaic style in later, supposedly "literate," poetry (even Shakespeare!) is a sign of "residual orality." Perspective is a huge factor.

[312]Of course, even if Homer **could** write, he probably would have still used a scribe. The intended contrast is between an illiterate and literate Homer *in se*.

when seen in the wider context, more probably duplicated the activity of the oral bards rather than suppressing it.[313]

Again, the use to which writing is put, and its effects, are dependent upon the society into which literacy comes.

Further "cultural chauvinism" appears, according to Thomas, in the undue stress placed on the invention of the Greek alphabet. "Elevation of the Greek 'invention' of the alphabet obscures the Phoenician contribution and possible Phoenician influence on the Greeks' use of the medium."[314] The Greek alphabet cannot be considered apart from its origins. Furthermore, the alphabet is not so revolutionary as it is claimed. Near-Eastern and Oriental societies had considerable intellectual development despite admittedly more difficult scripts. Nor is the alphabet so clearly "phonetic" over against other scripts. Spelling in alphabetic language is often purely conventional, and generally only approximates sounds. Furthermore,

> ... the conceptual significance of the addition of vowels has probably been exaggerated. The Phoenician alphabet also has letters corresponding to sounds (so do syllabic systems, including the Cypriot Greek syllabary). The phonetic principle is hardly a Greek discovery. So why are Phoenicians never credited with a revolution in abstract thought?[315]

Western man may be tempted to over-exaggerate the importance of Greek developments simply because Greece stands at the heart of his own intellectual tradition.

What was the use of writing in early Greece? The answer is partly an outcome of destroying the rigid dichotomy between oral and literate. Thomas argues that "early writing in Greece was primarily used in the service of the spoken word," and thus she stresses "the extent to which the new writing drew its meaning from earlier oral habits, rather than undermining

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[313]Thomas, 49-50.

[314]Ibid., 54. Jack Goody was one of the first to redress this earlier "chauvinism" by pointing to the significance of all writing systems in their own way.

[315]Ibid., 56. The significance of the vowel sign in Greek may be connected to the nature of the language's grammar, which needed precise recording of the vowel for comprehension, over against Semitic languages which did not.

them."[316] Speech was written down to ensure its permanence, without necessarily changing it into something other. "Much if not all of the early writing put on stone was meant to represent statements which were to be uttered aloud, usually in verse: so here writing is the servant of the spoken word, a means of communicating what would usually be sung or said."[317] Nevertheless, even what was written was expected to be communicated orally, with writing serving as an a mnemonic aid. The poetic form which had served to preserve past wisdom was appropriately the first thing to be recorded in writing.

At first, inscriptions were written in the first person, as if to give a "voice" to the impersonal object. The passer-by brought the inscription to life by reading it aloud. By the mid-sixth century this changes to the third person. What does this mean?

> What this may suggest is that writing was at first used as a straightforward counterpart to speaking—writing gave statues the oral communication that human beings took for granted—as well as to allow them to explain what would otherwise be forgotten, but by the late sixth century writing could be used in a more impersonal manner, as a third-person notice of information.[318]

Writing also provides the facility to record "ungrammatical," non-oral language, such as labels and lists. On the other hand, public inscriptions in Athens usually recorded speeches verbatim, preserving the decrees of the Assembly.[319] Thus writing begins to develop some autonomy, although for the most part it remains a "servant of speech." Rather than finding "the discovery of self or development of rationality" in the graffiti and inscriptions she has studied, Thomas finds

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[316]Ibid., 61.

[317]Ibid., 62.

[318]Ibid., 64.

[319]A vast part of Thomas' book deals with the tension between writing and the office of "remembrancer" in the preservation and recollection of Greek laws. Much of this lacks application to our topic.

"an enthusiasm for writing as a means of memorial, preservation or self-advertisement," as well as "a way of magnifying or dignifying an action, whether a curse or a law."[320]

Tied as they are to oral practice, written documents were not seen in the ancient world as possessing the kind of autonomy which is believed today. Their meaning can be understood only when one goes beyond their content to their use in context.[321]

> This is most readily seen in what they leave out. Some documents (e.g. written contracts) presuppose knowledge which is simply remembered and not written down. So far from being autonomous, they cannot perform their task without backing from non-written communication. It becomes difficult to separate oral and written modes in any meaningful sense except in the most basic one (i.e. what was written down and what was not). It is surely only our modern confidence in and obsession with the written text which see documents as entirely self-sufficient.[322]

Surely this is only a logical extension of the presupposition which leads one to consider isagogics. Thomas reminds us that the text in the ancient (Greek) world may be even more dependent upon context than we have heretofore believed. This is especially true of monuments:

> Archaic inscriptions are particularly compressed and enigmatic: they presumed that everyone knew—and would continue to know—what they were talking about. Whether memorial, mnemonic aid, or record of a law, the written text was not thought of as the sole and complete record of its subject matter. ... What we have to envisage is a world in which most activities were carried out without writing—from the dirges at funerals to the conduct of everyday business; when writing was added to these it was usually in a subordinate and supplementary tradition. ... In one sense the written word was subordinate

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[320]Ibid., 72.

[321]We have already noted Ong's suggestion that the word became "reified" around the time of Ramus. David Olson puts this another way, that from the invention of alphabetic writing to the printing press there is a progressive drive towards seeing meaning as being **in the text**: "My argument will be that there is a transition from utterance to text both culturally and developmentally and that this transition can be described as one of increasing explicitness, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning." See David R. Olson, "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing," *Harvard Educational Review* 47.3 (August 1977): 258. The autonomous text reaches its zenith with the British essayists. In oral language, on the other hand, the utterance "specifies only part of the meaning, the remainder being specified by the perceived context, accompanying gestures, and the like" (261).

[322]Thomas, 76.

to the spoken, thus perhaps rather a mnemonic aid for the recollection of what was to be communicated orally than a text to be read in its own right.[323]

The implications of this are vast.[324] Most of all, however, it reminds us that the written was inseparable from and subordinate to the non-written, and that the use of the written was an extension of earlier non-written custom.

Because of the importance of the non-written concomitants, Thomas draws our attention to the **performance**. Past research has concentrated on the impact of orality on the **style** of a creation, thus deflecting attention from "the nature of the performance itself … ; the character and role of the audience; the relation of the written text to the performed version; the social and political context."[325] Yet the composition of the words was only one part of the poet's task, for the performance was certainly chanted, with the accompaniment of the lyre. Thomas returns to a familiar theme:

> This must mean that the written texts of the poetry, certainly made in the archaic period, recorded only an element of the total performance. They were mainly an *aide-mémoire*, a silent record of a much richer experience, hardly something to be relished and read on their own.[326]

While the text is passed on through writing, one assumes that the dance and musical accompaniment was transmitted solely through the performance, through "oral tradition." By the fourth century the performance of poetry became less important to Greek society, but the prose

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[323]Ibid., 90-91.

[324]Anticipating our application to biblical studies, and the epistles especially, this places much greater weight on the role of the messenger to whom the epistle was entrusted. How much of the message was delivered apart from the text? We can only guess. Many things were certainly clearer to the original audience than they are to us. One could also include here the significance of the *regula fidei*, or simply the apostolic teaching, which lived alongside the written word in the early church. Thomas' insights help to explain the early Fathers' stress on these.

[325]Ibid., 102.

[326]Ibid., 119. One cannot help but think of the recent habit in Christian churches of **reading** the Psalms, instead of singing them. That the recording of the Psalms, too, preserves only part of the performance is clear from the innumerable, probably musical, directions such as *"selah."*

rhetoric which followed was delivered just as much through oral performance. The Greek orator strove to make his speech sound spontaneous. "There was considerable prejudice against written speeches in the fifth and fourth century, fuelled by a suspicion that someone who had written out his speech carefully might neglect the truth in favour of artifice."[327] Nevertheless, the orator did prepare his text, perhaps in writing, then he memorized it, and performed it a number of times, improvising upon it to suit his audience—all this before finally recording it for posterity.[328] Even for prose, the oral and written interacted fluidly. For each type of literature, therefore, one must search for the proper mode of performance into which context the text was placed.

As we have noted, there is a discernible change of attitude towards texts which begins around the time of Plato—to his great chagrin.[329] Yet the text does not seem to come into its own until the Hellenistic age. "If certain kinds of written texts really were thought of primarily as mnemonic aids for what the people concerned knew already or were going to learn by heart, that might explain why written literary texts were so unhelpful to the reader right down to the Hellenistic period (they were not, in fact, dissimilar from inscriptions)."[330] That is, the difficulties in reading a text without word division, accents, or punctuation suggests that the reader usually knew something already of what was in the text—it served primarily as an *aide-mémoire*. In the third century B.C. Alexandrian scholars invented accentuation and better

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[327]Ibid., 124. See the "prejudice against the written word" discussed in chapter three for evidence of this.

[328]Greene, 41, notes that in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. statesmen published their more important speeches **after** presenting them. There were also paid, professional speech-writers [λογογράφοι] who prepared speeches which their clients would subsequently memorize and perform. Thus the relationship between oral production and writing was somewhat varied.

[329]Thomas has demonstrated "that there is a quite definite increase in the production of written documents (not merely inscriptions) in the first half of the fourth century as Athens became more 'document-minded'" (96). This is related both to philosophical developments and to the fact that "Athens was developing an ever more complex administration to run her empire" (148).

[330]Ibid., 92.

punctuation, even visual poetic page layout. Although such practices never became common in ancient times, they do evidence the need to make a text readily understandable to the "virgin" reader, a desire appropriate to the Alexandrian scholarly milieu. The text was taking on some autonomy.[331]

With Thomas' work we come closer to placing the New Testament onto the oral-literate spectrum, within the bounds of the interface. She destroys the simplistic notions of oral versus literate societies, a dichotomy which actually hinders the crusade of the oral scholars who propound it, for there are very few cultures to which pure, primary orality applies. Instead she concentrates on the growing relationship between oral and literate customs in ancient Greece and Rome, leading us past Plato towards the Hellenistic and Roman ages. The position of the New Testament should be found to have a logical place within the practice of its Greek, Roman, and Semitic cultures.

One further writer is worth listening to in this context: Brian Stock, with his investigation of the coming of literacy to medieval Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[332] To someone locked into a "technological determinism" model, Stock would appear to be throwing just another date into the ring, vying for truth in a quest to pinpoint the moment when mankind became literate. However, Stock is more sophisticated, agreeing with Finnegan that orality and literacy must be considered within the context of a particular culture. He notes that the way in which literacy affects thought processes is not yet fully understood, so that one must confine himself to the case study:

> The first [perspective] is the replacement of much linear, evolutionary thinking with a contextualist approach, which describes phases of an integrated cultural transformation happening at the same time. For "humanity," C. S. Lewis observed, "does not pass through

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[331]Ibid., 93: "respect for the authority of the written text grew with the Alexandrian scholars and the Roman period."

[332]Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind."[333]

Thus Stock proposes to investigate medieval Europe not as a stage in man's evolution, but as a point of "interface" which may illuminate our understanding of the implications of literacy—to the degree that the culture under consideration is similar to the one Stock investigates.

The concept of "interface" is very much at home in Stock's thought. His interest lies in the Middle Ages precisely because there is so much interaction of orality and literacy there. "The type of orality for which the Middle Ages furnishes the most abundant evidence is verbal discourse which exists in interdependence with texts."[334] This situation is, in fact, the only one where literacy exists:

> There is in fact no clear point of transition from a nonliterate to a literate society. ... The change, as suggested, was not so much from oral *to* written as from an earlier state, predominantly oral, to various combinations of oral *and* written.[335]

It is the relative importance which texts hold in a society which distinguishes it from others, past or contemporaneous.

Stock believes that there is a certain mentality associated with orality and literacy, **but,** avoiding determinism, he argues that oral ways may persist into the literate world.[336] Just as spoken language may conform to the structure and grammar of the text, so also in the recording of oral exchange its original features may survive. This is particularly true before the age of print, when literacy remained exceptional.[337] In the Middle Ages the tendency to separate oral

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[333]Ibid., 5.

[334]Ibid., 8. Is this not very near to the situation of the Greco-Roman world in which the New Testament arose?

[335]Ibid., 9.

[336]Ibid., 12: "As noted, ways of thinking associated with orality often survived in a textual environment; writing them down did not always eliminate their links with oral exchange."

[337]Ibid., 13. This accords with Ong's idea of residual orality, which explains such features as formulas and repetition, when they appear in literature, as remainders from an oral past.

and written language progressed with the development of Latin as a learned language. "Wherever Latin improved, the spoken and grammatically written languages grew farther apart."[338] Once literacy became associated with learned Latin, so, too, did the modes of thought which went along with Latin education: "perhaps the most injurious consequence of medieval literacy … was the notion that literacy is identical with rationality"[339]—a legacy which plagues most early orality studies. And, as we have seen, many still maintain that the Greek form of rationality is inseparably linked to the acquisition of literacy. Stock's investigation of the impact of Latin textuality in the Middle Ages provides a theoretical source for this error.

Stock's work deflects attention away from the simple **technology** of communication to the use and importance accorded to texts in a given society. He reminds us that even before print, learned Latin may have tricked Western man into believing that rational thought must be literate thought. On the contrary, "[i]n the ancient world the literary language suitable for superior

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[338]Ibid., 25. Stock, 20, argues that "learned Latin" developed from the imposition of an alien (Greek) grammar, syntax, and rhetoric, upon the "paratactic, verbally unsophisticated structure of early Latin." This began to occur already in the second to third centuries A.D. "As Horace wryly noted, the conquest of Greece had backfired … ." By the Middle Ages *litteratus*, normally referring only to the ability to read and write, meant literacy in **Latin** (26-27). Clanchy, 16-17, notes further that, since Latin was the church's language, *clericus* became synonymous with *litteratus* by the twelfth century. By corollary, a person could claim the legal benefits of clergy status by demonstrating Latin ability (reading a portion of the Psalms). Thus, since clergy status meant exemption from capital punishment, literacy was a matter of life and death, and thereby clergy status promoted the growth of literacy among the laity! Green, 274, complains, however, that this definition of literacy, though used in the Middle Ages, should not dictate how literacy in the Middle Ages is defined by modern scholars. For, "in that it takes into account only Latin literacy this definition excludes consideration of the position in the vernacular by denying, in its very terms, that there was any such phenomenon in the Middle Ages as a layman able to read a vernacular text."
   The situation of "extreme diglossia" is not at all uncommon, and illustrates the wedge between written and spoken language driven to its limits. Goody, *Interface*, 281, notes these examples: medieval Europe, when Latin was used in writing regardless of the vernacular; ancient Mesopotamia, in which writing continued in Sumerian in order to maintain access to past documents; and Africa, even today, where writing takes place in the language of the colonizer. One could add the situations of modern, multi-lingual countries such as Canada, where all official texts must be written in both French and English, regardless of the spoken language in a particular area.

[339]Stock, 31.

discourse remained in touch with orality, even when it was written down."[340] The precise data of Stock's research—the relationship of oral to written in medieval law—must be passed over as not directly relevant to our study.[341] Nevertheless, his results indicate something of the kinship, and distancing, of the medieval and ancient worlds:

> ... the typical medieval and early modern state of affairs, as noted, is for orality to retain its functions within a system of graphic representation for language, as for instance it does in the notarial tribunal, which, in superseding oral record, nonetheless demands personal attendance and verbal testimony. What distinguished medieval from ancient literacy, it is arguable, was not the presence of such roles, but their variety and abundance.[342]

It is not the presence or absence of writing *per se* which is of significance; rather it is the relative role of the text.

Linguistic Investigations

We have often noted the paradox of studying orality by means of modern literate scholarship. The simple dilemma of this field is that by definition ancient orality cannot be studied directly. In what ways did ancient literary Greek differ from spoken Greek? We can only guess from **written** sources. However, it is possible to investigate the differences between written and oral language in today's world. The problem, of course, is to decide to what degree these findings will be applicable to another language in another time—given the importance which scholars now attribute to the total societal context of media change. Nevertheless, the

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[340]Ibid., 31.

[341]The scope of his study was dictated by the fact that in the twelfth century written documents began to replace oral testimony in medieval civic and canon law (ibid., 58).

[342]Ibid., 42. He notes furthermore a change in attitude towards writing: "Man began to think of facts not as recorded by texts but as embodied in texts, a transition of major importance in the rise of information retrieval and classification" (62). Though this is a highly subjective judgment, it does reflect a change in understanding of where the primary reality lies: what is "real" shifts from what is spoken to what is written. The text comes to be seen as an objective, impartial witness: "Literacy, like the market, insured that an entity external to the parties in a given interchange—the text—would ultimately provide the criteria for an agreed meaning. Just as the market created a level of 'abstract entities' and 'model relations' between producer and consumer, literacy created a set of lexical and syntactical structures which made the persona of the speaker largely irrelevant" (86).

work of modern linguists and psychologists brings hard data in support of the principle that oral and written registers vary greatly.

"Register" is a term which denotes the various levels of language which exist in any living tongue. Pedagogues are finally recognizing the need to teach the language **as it is actually being spoken,** as well as "according to the grammars." How often are Canadians frustrated that their textbook Parisian French leaves them unprepared to speak to the man on the street in Quebec! Similarly, a recent volume on spoken German is careful to address **all** registers of German in common use, for "everyday and conversational German is often quite different from written German and from what he or she has been taught."[343]

Durrell defines register as: "A language variety determined by use and influenced by such factors as medium (ie speech or writing), subject matter and situation."[344] For example:

> The spoken register ... , although subject to considerable variation according to situation, is characterized in general by grammatical carelessness, with incomplete sentences, broken or elliptical constructions, repetitions, and phrases added or inserted as afterthoughts without proper syntactic links. There are fewer subordinate clauses; main-clause constructions are the rule. Filler words, such as the modal particles (*aber, doch, denn,* etc, see **2.6**), hesitation markers (*öh, mhm,* etc), interjections, and comment clauses (*sehen Sie, weißt du,* etc) are prevalent. Regionalisms are almost inevitably present to some extent and they become more noticeable the further South one goes ... .[345]

Register may be broken down far beyond the basic media distinction of written and oral. In fact, some situations may call for the use of the written register in a spoken situation: sermons, public lectures, parliamentary speeches, or news broadcasts.[346] Durrell finally adopts the following

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[343]Martin Durrell, *Using German: A Guide to Contemporary Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), vii.

[344]Ibid., xvi-xvii.

[345]Ibid., 4.

[346]Such situations **usually** involve the use of a written manuscript. However, modern awareness of media differences is leading away from the use of written register in public speaking to a more informal, oral mode.

register definitions, based around the three primary categories of "informal colloquial," "neutral," and "formal," with sub-categories for precision:[347]

R1* = vulgar
R1 = informal colloquial
R2 = neutral
R3 = formal
R3a = literary
R3b = non-literary

Using these labels, Durrell is able to discuss appropriate use of vocabulary and expressions according to the medium, audience, or situation at hand.

These three elements of register remain in constant tension. As we consider the following studies it will become apparent that it is not always clear **which** element produced a given result. If audience and situation are standardized, while medium is allowed to vary, the unique characteristics of oral and written language should appear. On the other hand, what if differences in audiences and situation are actually necessary or even usual concomitants of oral or written language? Does one not choose a particular medium to suit an audience or situation? These questions must be used to evaluate the results of such studies.

A significant early study was conducted by G. H. J. Drieman at the University of Amsterdam.[348] The first half of his study is "quantitative," that is, "descriptive word-statistics"

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[347]The registers are described in detail by Durrell, 6-8. The chart appears every few pages throughout the book. Note that both oral and written language may take place on R1, R2, or R3. However, the **usual** register for oral language is R1, and for written, R3. R2 (textbook German) avoids obvious characteristics of either. Situation or audience may overrule medium in determining register.

[348]G. H. J. Drieman, "Differences Between Written and Spoken Language: An Exploratory Study," *Acta Psychologica* 20 (1962): 36-57, 78-100. It is important that this study was conducted in Dutch, for its results coincide greatly with many English studies. On pp. 51-54 Drieman compares the figures with French, American, and Dutch studies, and finds remarkably similar results. This suggests that the differences between oral and written language discovered are not unique to English. Nevertheless, Dutch, French and English are much more closely related to each other than to Greek. The applicability of these studies to New Testament Greek remains a problem.

obtained from counting words and syllables. The subjects of the study were eight graduate students of psychology.[349] The subjects were shown two paintings and asked to give their impressions. Four responded first orally and then in writing, and four the reverse.[350] They were not made aware of what was being tested.

The quantitative results are summarized in the following chart:[351]

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[349]Ibid., 39. The testing methodology in each study surely colors its results. Is it wise to restrict oneself to **graduate** students in such a test? Certainly such highly educated people would display oral skills strongly influenced by their literacy. Goody, *Interface*, 265, notes that the influence of the "prescriptive grammarian" is greater in written than in spoken language. Such rules (e.g., avoidance of split infinitives or dangling prepositions), he believes, feed back into the speech of "the learned or the pedantic, those who spend much of their time with the written word and with worrying about its formalities." A more varied sample of subjects would seem more appropriate.

[350]This is meant to cancel out any effects produced by order of composition. Other studies have shown that order makes little difference.

Drieman, 40, expresses the difficulty experienced in making the students speak a **monologue**—this was felt necessary to make the product directly comparable to the written "monologue." Unfortunately, this also obscures one of the primary features of orality—the presence of the audience. The students always attempted to bring the interviewer into the conversation, to produce a dialogue. In this study, however, Drieman was attempting to isolate strictly grammatical differences.

[351]Because of the length of these studies, and the enormous wealth of data, we will attempt to draw the final results into a summary chart. The details may be found by consulting the appropriate article. Our comments reflect the original authors' consideration of **all** the statistical data.

| Factor	Written	Oral	Analysis
Total number of words	922	1733	Oral is 1.88x longer
Average number of words	115	216	Oral is 1.88x longer
Average syllables per word	1.626	1.335	Written averages 1.21x the syllables
1 syllable words	62.5%	74.6%	Written/Oral ratio: 0.84
2 syllable words	20.3%	15.1%	1.34
3 syllable words	10.7%	7.2%	1.49
4 or more syllable words	6.2%	3.0%	2.07
Use of adjectives[352]	4.6%	2.6%	Written uses 1.77x more
Use of verbal forms	16%	14.5%	No significant difference

Thus, it appears from this study that spoken language tends to use more total words than written to convey "the same amount of information,"[353] and does so with more one-syllable words; whereas written language uses more multi-syllable words and more adjectives (it is more "ornamented").

One quantitative analysis cannot be reduced so simply to averages, as we have done above: the type-token-ratio (TTR). The TTR indicates the variety of vocabulary used in a text. It is calculated by dividing the number of different words (types) by the total number of words (tokens). Because the weight of repeated words will gain as the length of the text increases, no

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[352]Drieman does not actually calculate this figure, but notes the absolute totals: 43 adjectives in the written texts and 45 in the spoken. We have provided the percentage of total words which are adjectives for comparison's sake. Likewise, for occurrences of verbal forms Drieman gives only the absolute figures: 148 for written and 251 for spoken. Why these were not related to the total number of words is unclear.

[353]Drieman, 53. Clearly, Drieman is concerned only with the "transferal" of semantic content, for written and spoken "speech-acts" certainly differ in pragmatics (see chapter one). The view of language as a process of "telementation," the transfer of thoughts from speaker to hearer, has been terribly influential since John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (III, 1, 2) - cited by Talbot J. Taylor, "Do You Understand? Criteria of Understanding in Verbal Interaction," in Graham McGregor, ed., *Language for Hearers* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1986), 91. This theory simply cannot account for major phenomena such as misunderstanding and ambiguity. Yet its prevalence accounts for the neglect of attention to medium and pragmatics in earlier times. Goody, *Interface*, 270, suggests that the differences between written and spoken language "are matters of variations on an identical deep structure." He notes, though, that "such a view seems to lead to a static conception of the role of language, written and oral, in social interaction." In many ways, the level of variation is just as important to the communication as the level of the deep structure. The latter must not be stressed to the detriment of the former.

absolute relationship can be expressed—the TTR will depend on the length of the text. However, plotting the TTR of each of the eight students shows a fairly clear trend:[354]

total numbers of types:2
total numbers of tokens:2

K (types)

written   spoken

N (tokens)
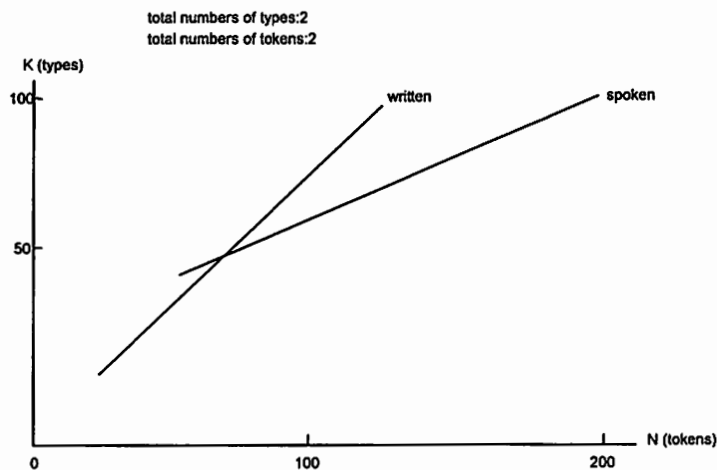
The graph shows that as the total number of words in a text increases, the difference between spoken and written language becomes apparent. Written language will show a more varied vocabulary, while spoken language tends more to repeat words.

In a follow-up article, Drieman discusses with the subjects of the study their "qualitative" impressions of the differences between spoken and written language. The front-runner was the recognition of "extra-lingual forms of utterance":

All subjects thought it a great advantage of speech over writing that in oral contact the partner's reaction can be immediately observed. Certain expressive possibilities of the speech situation, such as inflection, intonation, pauses, laughing, mimics, which cannot be

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[354]The graph is taken from Drieman, 47. The actual TTR figures are as follows (adapted from p. 46):

Subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Written	57/71	98/135	72/102	85/133	134/203	94/129	39/47	75/102
Written %	80.28	72.59	70.58	63.90	66.00	72.86	82.96	76.47
Spoken	80/176	86/107	141/302	107/191	182/413	103/165	100/166	130/209
Spoken %	54.45	80.37	46.68	56.02	44.06	62.42	60.24	62.20

From this it is all the more clear that the TTR declines as the text grows in length, and that spoken language generally shows a lower TTR.

brought to bear in writing, are considered to be a great advantage of the speech situation.[355]

This explains the reticence the subjects showed to producing an oral monologue: by removing the audience the discourse is shifted into another medium. They also noted frequently that written language is more planned, given greater care, and is subject in greater measure to societal conventions. Because the audience is lacking and the written text is irrevocable, the writer strives to make his text as concise and correct as possible; everything liable to misunderstanding is crossed out in the process of re-writing. Thus, the observed conciseness of written language can be attributed to the writer's conscious effort.

A similar "quantitative" study by Joseph DeVito examines "psychogrammatical factors."[356] The subjects were ten male members of the speech and theater department at the University of Illinois. They were asked to provide examples of their best writing style from published articles. The spoken samples came from discussions over the content of these articles. The total sample consisted of 9,000 written and 9,000 spoken words.[357] The results were as follows:[358]

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[355]Ibid., 80.

[356]Joseph A. DeVito, "Psychogrammatical Factors in Oral and Written Discourse by Skilled Communicators," *Speech Monographs* 33.1 (1966): 73-76.

[357]The dangers of this study are readily apparent. The subjects are highly educated, and their spoken language is very likely to be under literate influence. Furthermore, by choosing equal sample lengths of written and oral language, the author is not able to determine whether length is a significant difference between the media. In an earlier article, DeVito explained his choice of subjects: "The assumption was that persons skilled in both speaking and writing would be more likely to demonstrate measurable stylistic differences than would relatively unskilled subjects, such as college undergraduates"; DeVito, "Comprehension Factors in Oral and Written Discourse of Skilled Communicators," *Speech Monographs* 32 (1965): 124. The presupposition appears to be that written and oral discourse are both learned **formally**, so that a highly educated person will best evidence the differences. This is questionable, for in today's society "rhetoric" is no longer taught, and oral style is learned outside of school. The results of this experiment bear out these objections. DeVito found **no difference** in "readability" based on the "cloze test" (whereby the reader was asked to fill in deleted words from context); likewise, sentence length did not differ significantly, indicating a cross-fertilization of styles. On the other hand, there was

	Oral Discourse	Written Discourse
Self-reference terms (*I, we, the writer,* etc.)	26.4	15.4
Quantifying terms (precise numerical words)	4.6	8.1
Pseudo-quantifying terms (*much, many, a lot, very,* etc.)	10.4	6.1
Allness terms (*none, all, every, always,* etc.)	6.5	3.4
Qualification terms (*if, however, but, except,* etc.)	7.8	5.6
Consciousness of projection terms (involving the observer in the observed: *apparently, to me, seems, appears,* etc.)	8.5	1.5

In each of these factors a significant difference was found. The speaker uses more self-reference, more vague terms, more qualification and far more subjective tentativeness; the writer, on the other hand, uses more precision and objective language.[359]

Another "quantitative" study worked with a far better test group: forty-five beginning speech students at two universities.[360] The students chose a topic on which, after one week's preparation, they were to write 750-1,000 words, and give a five minute extemporaneous speech. The results were examined on the following factors:[361]

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evidence in the written texts of more difficult words, greater idea density, and a more diverse vocabulary.

[358]The chart is summarized from DeVito, 75. The figures are mean calculations reflecting a sample of 900 words.

[359]These results are, however, are directly related to the nature of academic writing. Subjectivity, vagueness, and reticence are not generally desirable in scholarship. The extent to which these results apply to other "registers" of speaking and writing has not been established.

[360]James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, Robert J. Kibler, and Francis J. Kelly, "A Quantitative Examination of Differences and Similarities in Written and Spoken Messages," *Speech Monographs* 33.4 (November 1966): 444-51.

[361]This chart offers in summary only the mean figures from Gibson et al., 449. The calculations were performed on the first 500 words of each subject's essay or speech. Average sentence length and number of syllables is calculated per 100 words. Recalculating, the written samples averages 1.63 syllables per word, and the spoken samples 1.53. The Flesch Reading-Ease score is based on these two figures: average sentence length and number of syllables. A higher score indicates an easier text. The results fall into these categories, according to Flesch: 60-70 is "standard" (8th and 9th grade levels); 50-60 is "fairly difficulty" (10th to 12th grade levels). The Human-Interest Score is based on the number of "personalized words" used.

Variable	Written	Spoken
1. Flesch Reading-Ease Score	50.20	60.90
a. Average Sentence Length	18.18	16.28
b. Average Number of Syllables	163.89	153.03
2. Flesch Human-Interest Score	14.49	25.97
3. Type-Token Ratio (TTR)	.7135	.6908

The Flesch Reading-Ease Score indicates that spoken language is considerably more "readable" (comprehensible) than written language, and this primarily because it uses shorter words. The average sentence length did not differ in a statistically significant way. The Human Interest score reflects the more personal style of speech, though it is highly influenced by the setting. The TTR shows a slightly more varied vocabulary in written language, though it is not as great a difference as Drieman found (cf. above).

Joseph DeVito, continuing to work on data we discussed above, proposes that spoken and written language differ also in "abstraction."[362] The norm for abstract language was taken to be the philosophical essay, while the "adventure narrative" served to norm the concrete. While there are no precise and objective ways to measure abstraction, DeVito chose to use a formula which has been tested with great success.[363] The results were as follows:[364]

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[362]Joseph A. DeVito, "Levels of Abstraction in Spoken and Written Language," *Journal of Communication* 17 (1967): 354-61.

[363]DeVito cites Paul J. Gillie, "A Simplified Formula for Measuring Abstraction in Writing," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 68 (1964): 640-47. The formula is: (a) the number of finite verbs per 200 words **plus** (b) the number of definite articles and their nouns per 200 words *plus* (c) the constant 36 **minus** (d) the number of nouns of abstraction (words ending in the suffixes *-ness, -ment, -ship, -dom, -nce, -ion,* and *-y*) times 2. The scores are to be interpreted by the following scale: 0-18=very abstract; 19-30=abstract; 31-42=fairly abstract; 43-54=standard; 55-66=fairly concrete; 67-78=concrete; 79-90=very concrete.

[364]The chart summarizes the mean figures from DeVito, 357. Note that the absolute figures are per 200 words.

	Spoken	Written
1. Abstraction Score	50.78	39.98
a. Finite Verbs	17.08	13.63
b. Definite Articles + Nouns	8.55	6.85
c. Nouns of Abstraction	5.38	8.25

DeVito believes that his study demonstrates written language is considerably more abstract than spoken language. While "abstraction" is a debatable category, what the study does demonstrate is this: the written samples were grammatically more like the philosophical essay, while the spoken were more like a narrative. Even more "concretely," oral language appears to use more finite verbs and fewer nouns of abstraction.[365] The difference in use of definite articles with nouns was not statistically significant.

An assertion often made is that written language is "more complex" than spoken, that is, that the sentences are more involved, longer, and use more subordination. Roy O'Donnell[366] proposes to investigate this thesis using the "T-unit" ("Terminable syntactic unit") rather than the sentence, for the sentence, clear in writing, is not clear in speaking. The T-unit is defined as "one independent clause and the dependent clauses (if any) syntactically related to it."[367] Using

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[365]As DeVito, 358, notes, because these abstract nouns are by definition multi-syllabic, this figure is directly related to the higher average number of syllables we have previously observed in written language. Furthermore, word length is **inversely** related to frequency of usage, thus connecting these figures to the TTR. That is, longer words are used less frequently, thus leading to greater variety in vocabulary.

[366]Roy C. O'Donnell, "Syntactic Differences Between Speech and Writing," *American Speech* 49 (1974): 102-10. The study is intended more to illustrate the methodology than to produce defensible conclusions, for the sample data is far too small.

[367]Ibid., 103. The T-unit, according to O'Donnell, was defined by Kellogg W. Hunt, *Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels*, Research Report No. 3 (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1965). The advantage of T-unit analysis is that it allows the researcher to observe differences in total number of words between samples, which the "500 word" selection technique does not. On the other hand, the total number of words counted in this study is derived grammatically, not semantically. That is, O'Donnell does not suggest that the same amount of information was conveyed by both samples, as Drieman did. In O'Donnell's study the written text contains more words than the oral.

various samples of written and spoken language from a prominent personality, 100 T-units were examined from each medium:

Factor	Spoken	Written
Total words	1792	2497
Number of words per T-unit (mean)	17.92	24.97
Short T-units (18 words or fewer)	62	38
Long T-units (19 words or longer)	38	62
Total clauses	215	237
Dependent clauses (=total clauses - 100)	115	137
Total nonfinite verbals	80	97
Total passive constructions	14	29
Total auxiliary verbs	40	53
Total attributive adjectives	74	101

O'Donnell notes that the spoken units have only 72% as many words and 87% as many dependent clauses as their written counterparts. The last four rows indicate another reason for the greater complexity of written language and also illustrate how the greater number of dependent clauses are constructed. O'Donnell thus demonstrates that in his samples written language uses longer T-units with more dependent clauses per unit, as well as more gerunds, participles, adjectives, passives, and modal and perfective auxiliaries. This accounts for its greater apparent complexity.

Barbara Kroll presses further the investigation of coordination and subordination.[368] She argues that past research has concentrated strictly on the syntactic function of clauses, without noting their **semantic** import. That is, a clause may be **syntactically** subordinate, and yet carry "the ideational weight of the sentence."[369] A semantic subordinate clause "does not make a

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[368]Barbara Kroll, "Combining Ideas in Written and Spoken English: A Look at Subordination and Coordination," in Elinor Ochs Keenan and Tina L. Bennett, eds., *Discourse Across Time and Space* (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, 1977), 69-109.

[369]Ibid., 75. In much of this discussion she is indebted to transformational grammar, particularly to Chomsky.

statement, ask a question, or give command," whereas a semantic main clause does.[370] Two clauses may be syntactically coordinate and yet one is subordinated to the other semantically. In fact, the binary distinction itself of coordinate versus subordinate may be over simplistic.

The data for her study comes from seven freshman composition students who were asked to relate an experience when they came close to death. After speaking in class, they were to write up the story at home. With a complex list of rules, the results were broken up into "idea units," intended to match the thought process of the speaker rather than simple syntax. They have the added advantage of applying equally to written and spoken language. For the written texts the results were as follows:[371]

Written Narratives

Of the Idea Units:	Average
% Phrases (no finite verb)	16.7%
% Subordination (marked by a subordinator)	18.7%
% Coordination (syndetic or asyndetic)	25.4%
% Unmarked (not linked by any lexical marker)	40.0%

The spoken narratives evidenced different methods of combining idea units:[372]

Spoken Narratives

Of the Idea Units:	Average
"And" initiated I.U.'s	36%
% Phrases (no finite verb)	7%
% Subordination (marked by a subordinator)	7%
% Coordination (syndetic or asyndetic)	4%
% Unmarked (not linked by any lexical marker)	38%
Speech Production Initiators (*you know, so, um,* etc.)	9%

Kroll comments on the significance of these findings:

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[370]Ibid., 76.

[371]Summarized from a chart in ibid., 93. In a traditional "syntactical" analysis, Kroll found these samples to contain 57% coordination and 43% subordination.

[372]Summarized from a chart in ibid., 97. In a traditional "syntactical" analysis, Kroll found these samples to contain 74% coordination and 26% subordination.

> What does surface as being a major feature of the spoken syntax is the use of the word "and" ... as the major cohesive strategy for linking ideas in these casual spoken narratives. The pragmatic function of "and" is multi-faceted: it serves as a filler word, it holds the floor for the speaker, and it indicates the psychological reality of some connection between ideas in the speaker's mind. In our writing sample, the amount of time available for planning allowed the writer to structure more explicit relationships between ideas; in speaking it is not the small percentage of explicit subordination that should surprise us but rather the fact that any explicit subordination occurred under the pressure to continue talking.[373]

Thus, "and" phrases are removed entirely from the coordination-subordination opposition. By collapsing the "phrase" and "subordination" categories into one, Kroll summarizes the amount of "dependent structures" as: 35% in written and 14% in spoken. Her new methodology finally supports the contention that spoken language uses less subordination.

Unfortunately, it is apparent that Kroll has not heeded completely her own warnings about the semantic functions of clauses. The "and" clauses remain an undifferentiated mass, able to upset completely her conclusions should they be broken down functionally. Recognizing this, Karen Beaman returns to the problem.[374] She proposes to address more clearly the semantic function of clauses rather than just counting "tag words." She argues further that previous studies are faulty because they have drawn the oral and written examples from different registers: that is, the written texts have invariably been from a more formal setting. To combat this, she turns to the narrative mode, in which formality varies little between the media. Her data are drawn from a study at Berkeley in 1975, in which twenty subjects gave oral and written summaries of the "pear film," produced specifically for the occasion.

One result is surprising: the written texts contain 13% **more** coordinate complex sentences than the spoken, while the number of subordinate complex sentences is roughly

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[373]Ibid., 95-96. Emphasis original.

[374]Karen Beaman, "Coordination and Subordination Revisited: Syntactic Complexity in Spoken and Written Narrative Discourse," in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984), 45-80.

equal.[375] Furthermore, when the speaker coordinates, he tends to string together far more clauses (one example reaches thirteen) than the writer. Contrary to O'Donnell's findings, Beaman also finds that spoken language presses more subordinate clauses into one sentence, on average. Again, when the many functions of "and" are accounted for, much of spoken language's coordination disappears. By these criteria, spoken language appears **more** complex. Better said, each medium has its own kind of complexity: "The increased lexical density of writing is balanced by a relatively greater number of dependent clauses in speech."[376] That is, while written language exhibits higher TTRs, more abstract nouns, and greater syllable length, spoken language can spin off quite long and complicated sentence structures. Beaman issues a strong challenge to previous quantitative studies.[377]

Wallace Chafe of Berkeley has produced a much admired study which combines elements of the quantitative and qualitative approaches.[378] He attempts to assess the psychological effects of the grammatical features. The major features which concern him are:

1. that speaking is faster than writing (and slower than reading),
2. that speakers interact with their audiences directly, whereas writers do not.[379]

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[375]Ibid., 57. Beaman has used a system of organizing sentences into simple and complex, with complex further subdivided into coordinate, subordinate, and mixed. It is important to note that these figures represent whole sentences, not phrases.

[376]Ibid., 78. Each medium's subordination is complex in its own way: "Whereas nonfinite nominals and adverbial subordinate clauses are more frequent in written narrative, finite nominals and adjectival subordinate clauses are more common in spoken" (78).

[377]Why do Beaman's results differ so greatly from others? First of all, as she recognizes, the narrative genre is unique. She chose narrative in order to remove all differences in register besides medium, hoping to isolate what is unique to the medium. Unfortunately, it may well be that other elements of register are necessary or usual concomitants of each particular medium. The informality of many studies' spoken samples might be quite appropriate. Secondly, the continual problem is that every experiment uses different criteria, different methods of counting, different units. Their results are often not directly comparable. The "quantitative" studies have yet to amass enough data and to agree on a system of measurement.

[378]Wallace L. Chafe, "Integration and Involvement in Speaking, Writing, and Oral Literature," in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1982), 35-53.

Chafe chose to analyze the "idea unit," consisting of about six words, lasting about two seconds, and thus reflecting the normal "thinking rate." In writing, the thoughts get ahead of their expression: "The result is that we have time to integrate a succession of ideas into a single linguistic whole in a way that is not available in speaking."[380] By contrast, spoken language is characterized by "fragmentation." Fragmentation shows up partly in asyndeton, but also in the excessive use of coordinating conjunctions, particularly "and." The spoken data contained four times as many coordinating conjunctions at the beginning of idea units.[381]

The "integration" of written language, on the other hand, "refers to the packing of more information into an idea unit than the rapid pace of spoken language would normally allow."[382] Integrated language makes greater use of the following devices:[383]

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[379]Ibid., 36.

[380]Ibid., 37. Robin Lakoff refers to this distinction as "spontaneity vs. forethought," noting that in some circles of modern writing there has been a desire to carry the spontaneity of speech into print; "Some of my Favorite Writers are Literate: The Mingling of Oral and Literate Strategies in Written Communication," in Tannen, 239-60.

[381]Chafe, 39.

[382]Ibid., 39. These observations are significant because of how naturally they might apply to the situation of scribal dictation, prevalent in the ancient world. The pressures of dictation must have pressed the style in the direction of fragmentation.

[383]Table drawn from ibid., 39-45. The data comes from fourteen subjects, out of the two most radically differentiated styles: 9,911 informal spoken words (from dinner table conversation), and 12,368 formal written words (from academic papers). The figures are occurrences per 1,000 words.

Feature	Spoken	Written
Nominalization of verbs with their associated prepositional phrases (e.g., *treatment of children*)	4.8	55.5
Participles (both past and present)	8.3	35.6
Attributive adjectives	33.5	134.9
Conjoined phrases with the use of ellipsis (e.g., *the tendency to learn and to use*)	5.8	23.8
Series (lists)	0.9	7.2
Sequences of prepositional phrases (e.g., *the question of the nature of forms ...*)	1.8	16.2
Complement clauses (introduced by *to* or *that*)	8.9	19.2
Relative clauses	9.7	15.8

These observations illustrate the effects of the first thesis: that writing is slower than speaking.

To illustrate the second thesis, concerning the involvement of the speaker with his audience, Chafe examines the qualities of "detachment" and "involvement." The chief mark of detachment in written language is that the passive voice is used more often, five times more in this study.[384] Spoken language, on the other hand, evidences the following techniques of involvement:[385]

Feature	Spoken	Written
First person references (*I, we, me, us*)	61.5	4.6
References to the speaker's mental processes (e.g., *I had no idea, I recall, I thought*)	7.5	0.0
Monitoring of information flow: (*well, I mean, you know*)	23.1	0.0
Emphatic particles (*just, really*)	12.6	0.4
Fuzziness and hedging (e.g., *and so on, something like, sort of*)	18.1	5.5
Direct Quotes	12.1	4.2

Thus, in examining examples of spoken and written language which are maximally differentiated, Chafe demonstrates how the two media stand at opposite poles on the axes of fragmentation ⟺ integration, and involvement ⟺ detachment. This study could be most helpful in analyzing the language of the New Testament.

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[384]Ibid., 46. The figures are 5.0 occurrences per 1,000 words in spoken language, and 25.4 in written.

[385]Summarized from ibid., 46-48.

Chafe's comments on the "involvement" factor in spoken language is echoed by Walter Ong. Citing an article by Thomas Farrell, a former student of his, Ong notes how students experience the "transition to literacy" in their schooling:

> Everyone who teaches writing knows the common symptoms: students make assertions that are totally unsupported by reasons, or they make a series of statements that lack connections. Farrell notes that such performance is not necessarily an intellectual deficiency. It is quite consistent with oral conversational situations. In conversation, if you omit reasons backing a statement and your hearer wants them, the normal response is to ask you for them, to challenge you. ... Generally speaking, in live oral communication the hearer will not need many "logical" connections, again because the concrete situation supplies a full context that makes articulation, and thus abstraction, at many points superfluous. Oral communication is interactive, and the audience is known. In written communication the audience is a fiction, absent from the author, who cannot make too many assumptions about their knowledge of the subject or ability to follow his argument.[386]

These kinds of differences are subtle and are not quantifiable—but they are very real. The context of the communication determines to a great degree how it is to be produced and interpreted.

In another article, Farrell responds to an activist students group which objects to the "normalized" English taught in schools. While recognizing the legitimacy of each student's "dialect" in oral communication, Farrell argues that writing by nature must level dialects. For, "the 'uniformity' of the written conventions contributes to the readability of the text."[387] Now, we have seen that written language is, in fact, usually **less** readable than spoken. However, Farrell's point perhaps pertains to the author's need to avoid regionalisms—for his text must reach a wider audience—as well as the need for the text to be independent of the context, which aids comprehension in oral conversation. Because writing is broadly conventionalized, its use must be taught in school. "Writers learn the conventions of writing because these practices will help them communicate better *in writing*, not because these conventions will help them

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[386]Ong, "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," 131. The article to which he alludes is Thomas Farrell, "Literacy, Basics, and All That Jazz," *College English* 38 (1977): 443-59.

[387]Farrell, "Differentiating Writing from Talking." *College Composition and Communication* 29 (1978): 346.

communicate better in talking."[388] Regularization of style is a logical progression from the regularization of typeface and orthography which came with print.

Spoken language, nevertheless, lives by its own conventions. These conventions are simply culture-dependent on a smaller scale. John Gumperz[389] speaks of these cultural norms as providing "cohesion," providing the missing link which makes sense of discourse. For example:

$$\diagup \qquad \diagdown \qquad \diagup \qquad \diagdown$$
Bill   Mary   Mary   Bill

In the context of the introduction, the conventionalized use of intonation enables one to fill in the elided information: "Bill, this is Mary; Mary, this is Bill." Writing substitutes other conventions—syntax, punctuation, lexical complexity, among others—to achieve similar effects. Gumperz suggests: "The syntactic constructions associated with written language are those that supply information usually available from context in speaking."[390] Many of the difficulties in understanding ancient texts arise from the missing link of cultural norms. When the language is heavily oral, the norms are not necessarily to be found **in the text,** just as a bare sound recording of the above introduction might confound scholars from another culture.

These quantitative and qualitative studies round out orality theory by providing an empirical base. Further research in tangential fields could be adduced. Structuralism and generative grammar seek to determine how the oral poet, or speaker of any kind, puts together his

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[388]Ibid., 347. Emphasis original. See also Olson, 272: "Written language can have no recourse to shared context, prosodic features, or paralinguistic conventions since the preserved sentences have to be understood in contexts other than those in which they were written. The comprehension of such texts requires agreed-upon linguistic conventions, a shared knowledge of the world, and a preferred way of interpreting events."

[389]John J. Gumperz, Hannah Kaltman, and Mary Catherine O'Connor, "Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourse: Ethnic Style and Transition to Literacy" in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984), 3-19.

[390]Ibid., 8.

tale.[391] However, to pursue these would lead us too far astray, especially since even the proponents of generative grammar admit on occasion to the "remarkable irrelevance" of its pseudo-mathematical approach.[392] There is enough difficulty in determining to what extent research on modern languages applies to ancient ones. Nevertheless, these studies point out avenues of investigation which promise to be rewarding.

Conclusions

As did oral theory, so, too, have we begun with the Greek problem: the question of the oral Homer. The proposition that Homer (or the Homeric poets) composed and performed his epics orally forever altered our understanding of the role of writing. Lord and Parry began the process of bringing recognition to the craftsmen who formed elegant works of art without recourse to writing. This was their prime contribution: to shake up the prejudice which equates written with civilized and oral with savage. They also began to dig up the methods which were used to create and preserve such masterworks in the preliterate age. Yet they and their students— particularly Eric Havelock—suggested also that the Greek alphabet was more than just another writing technology. With its supposed ability to reproduce the entire range of sound it enabled man for the first time to record all of his words and thoughts. From the age of the epic poet, preserving history and culture in verse, the alphabet moved man into the age of prose.

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[391]The application of generative grammar to orality has been pursued in Graham McGregor, ed., *Language for Hearers* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1986). The roots of structuralism in oral literature studies can be seen from Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal, eds., *Patterns in Oral Literature* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1977). The latter's introduction provides a helpful historical survey.

[392]Charles F. Hockett notes this in reviewing his own twenty-five year old article for a new collection, even calling it "pompous trivia." He "became convinced that the then current mathematical model-building in grammar was at best futile, at worst dangerous, diverting our attention away from substantive problems to a preoccupation with trivial mathematics and bad linguistics." See the author's introduction to Charles F. Hockett, "Grammar for the Hearer," in McGregor, 49. The editor of the volume, however, does not agree with his judgment. There is a certain value to Hockett's article in that it is a rare attempt to view the construction of sentences from the hearer's perspective, one who does not know what is coming next, receiving language in a completely linear fashion. It is a field deserving further work.

The changes this wrought are thought to be legion: the rise of abstract thought and philosophy, large-scale trade and commerce, government and laws, even democracy itself. In short, all the foundations of Western civilization have been attributed at one time or another to the development of the Greek alphabet. Others scholars, Walter Ong being the prime example, soon extrapolated from the Greek theory to the rest of Western history. Many features of medieval society and scholarship, humanism and enlightenment, the Reformation and Shakespeare, are thought to relate to the interplay of the older oral culture with the newer technology of writing. "Residual orality" continued to leave its mark. In the writings of Marshall McLuhan and the "Toronto school," "technological determinism" reaches its pinnacle. McLuhan claims that a communications technology in and of itself has the power to transform individual and societal thought and consciousness. Writing, the printing press, radio and television, all such media must be examined for their effect. As Tom Boomershine argues, even the interpretation of the Scriptures has gone through stages which reflect the change in communications technology.

Such radical claims did not go unchallenged. Jack Goody was the first strong voice objecting to the "ethnocentrism" of the traditional line. Western European man was bent on finding the source of all civilization in Greece, and ignored all evidence to the contrary, Goody argued. In opposition Goody raised up the accomplishments of Semitic, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and oriental cultures, where non-alphabetic writing techniques enabled vast progress in philosophy and science. Goody's investigation of modern literacy campaigns demonstrates that the effect of literacy is culturally determined, that each society will be affected in a unique way. Ruth Finnegan, among others, pursued this line, arguing that no technology can be said to have an "impact" in and of itself. Rather, it is the use to which a particular society puts the communications technology which determines its effects. The cautions raised by such scholars compel us to limit blanket conclusions, and to investigate the role of writing and speaking **within** the particular culture which concerns us.

The importance of the linguistic investigations we have surveyed lies primarily in the fact that they offer substantial proof to the contention that written language does indeed differ

from spoken. Despite some variation in results—often because of differing methodology—the data from the various studies are remarkably consistent. Jack Goody, who has read extensively in the field, offers the following summary of his findings concerning the unique features of written language (in this case, English) over against spoken:[393]

Lexical features

1. the tendency to use longer words
2. increased nominalization as against a preference for verbalization in speech, a process that is connected with a certain type of abstraction
3. greater variety of vocabulary e.g. in the selection of adjectives
4. more attributive adjectives
5. fewer personal pronouns
6. greater use of words derived from Latin as distinct from Anglo-Saxon

Syntactic [& pragmatic & stylistic] differences

1. preferential usage of elaborate syntactic and semantic structures, especially nominal constructions (noun groups, noun phrases, nominalizations, relative clauses, etc.) and complex verb structures
2. preference for subordinate rather than coordinate constructions
3. preferential usage of subject-predicate constructions instead of reference-proposition
4. preferential usage of declaratives and subjunctives rather than imperatives, interrogatives, and exclamations
5. preferential usage of passive rather than active verb voice
6. preferential usage of definite articles rather than demonstrative modifiers and deictic terms
7. higher frequency of certain grammatical features, e.g. gerunds, participles, attributive adjectives, modal and perfective auxiliaries, etc.
8. the need to produce complete information or idea units and make all assumptions explicit
9. reliance on a more deliberate method of organizing ideas, using such expository concepts as "thesis", "topic sentence", and "supporting evidence"
10. preferential elimination of false starts, repetitions, digressions, and other redundancies which characterize informal spontaneous speech.

This list complements our own findings, offering some additional observations, while missing others. Of course, many of these points are under dispute, especially concerning verbalization and subordination. The data, being drawn from English and other modern European

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[393]Goody, *Interface*, 263-64. For our purposes we have removed the extensive references which Goody includes in the list. Those interested in this field will find a rich resource in his bibliography.

languages, are also of debatable application to ancient languages. Since there obviously are no recordings of oral language from the ancient world to compare with what is written, the researcher must decide to what extent these findings apply. The next step must be the analysis of ancient language in similar categories to see whether any patterns appear. We must be content with being aware of these features as we look to the New Testament later in this work.

CHAPTER 3

ORALITY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF WRITTEN DOCUMENTS:

THE CASE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

*Blessed is the one who **reads** and those who **hear** the words of the prophecy
and hold fast the things written in it, for the time is at hand. (Rev. 1:3)*

Reading in the Ancient World and Orality

In the preceding chapter, oral aspects of the production, performance, and transmission

of written texts were often mentioned as the oral theorists guided us through Western history. For

modern man, quite accustomed to silent reading, the practice of earlier times is rather

astonishing. Before the oral interpretation of written documents (such as the Scriptures) can be

pursued, it will be helpful to review the evidence. In this first section we shall uncover data

which demonstrate that in the ancient world reading was almost always done aloud, often by

professional "lectors," and that the written word was accorded a great deal of distrust.

The foundational study, one which has never been superseded, is by Josef Balogh.[1]

This monumental work contains far more examples than we dare cite; nevertheless, we shall try

to touch on the most interesting ones. Balogh begins with Lucian's complaint in a pamphlet

about the book collectors who buy huge lots of books without regard for their content. On

occasion, he says, they do "skim" through them, "aber so schnell, daß **die Augen den Lippen**

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[1]Balogh, Josef. "'Voces Paginarum'. Beiträge zur Geschichte des lauten Lesens und Schreibens." *Philologus* 82 (1927): 84-109, 202-40. Some of the same and much fresh material is presented in a near contemporary: H. L. Hendrickson, "Ancient Reading," *The Classical Journal* 25 (1929): 182-96. Balogh may be credited with establishing the modern "standard doctrine," although not without some dispute.

immer zuvorlaufen [φθάνοντος τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ τὸ στόμα]."² Already from this it is apparent that some sort of "silent" reading was not unheard of, but it was considered undesirable, abnormal.³ In normal reading the eye and mouth are coordinated.

The *locus classicus*, however, is surely the following passage from Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine had just come to Milan, and he was anxious to meet the famous bishop, Ambrose. He speaks of Ambrose's busy schedule:

> I was excluded from his ear and from his mouth by crowds of men with arbitrations to submit to him, to whose frailties he ministered. When he was not with them, which was a very brief period of time, he restored either his body with necessary food or his mind by reading. When he was reading, his eyes ran over the page and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent [*Sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant*]. He did not restrict access to anyone coming in, nor was it customary even for a visitor to be announced. Very often when we were there we saw him silently reading and never otherwise [*sic eum legentum vidimus tacite et aliter nunquam*]. After sitting for a long time in silence (for who would dare to burden him in such intent concentration?) we used to go away. We supposed that in the brief time he could find for his mind's refreshment, free from the hubbub of other people's troubles, he would not want to be invited to consider another problem. We wondered if he read silently perhaps to protect himself in case he had a hearer interested and intent on the matter, to whom he might have to expound the text being read if it contained difficulties, or who might wish to debate some difficult questions. If his time were used up in that way, he would get through fewer books than he wished. Besides, the need to preserve his voice, which used easily to become hoarse, could

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²Lucian, *Adv. ind.* 2, in ibid., 84. Note: In our quotations from Balogh's German, we indicate with boldface type what he has emphasized through the German method of "g e s p e r r t e S c h r i f t"—spaced out letters. When Balogh offers his own German translation of the patristic citations, we simply present his words; for how he translates the Fathers is an important aspect of his interpretive work.

³Balogh, his theory, and his disciples, have been attacked for stating this thesis too categorically, as if he claimed that **no one ever** read silently until Ambrose. See especially B. M. W. Knox, "Silent Reading in Antiquity," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 421-35, and also Frank D. Gilliard, "More Silent Reading in Antiquity: *Non Omne Verbum Sonabat*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112.4 (1993): 689-94. Gilliard writes of Knox "that the evidence demonstrates clearly 'for fifth and fourth century Athens that silent reading of letters and oracles (and consequently of any short document) was taken completely for granted.'" (691). On the contrary, Balogh deals explicitly with the many early examples of silent reading, in order to indicate how they were related to extraordinary circumstances—most often due to dramatic effect on stage. Gilliard runs too quickly to the other extreme. One must, however, heed his warning, that there was perhaps never a time when silent reading was **completely** unheard of.

have been a very fair reason for silent reading. Whatever motive he had for his habit, this man had a good reason for what he did.[4]

Ambrose's habit was sufficiently unusual for Augustine to comment upon it at length.[5] In fact, his followers would sit around watching him, trying to come up with reasons why he read silently! This passage indicates by inference that reading was normally aloud and socially interactive, for if Ambrose read aloud he would have to expound on the text to his hearers.

Augustine reports on his own silent reading experience later in the *Confessions*. At the point of his conversion, in response to the divine oracle "*tolle, lege*," he writes: "*arripui (codicem), aperui et legi in silentio, quo primum coniecti sunt oculi mei* [I seized (the Bible), opened it and read in silence the first (passage) upon which my eyes lit]."[6] The grandeur of the sublime moment left him speechless and he read **in silence**. Gregory of Nazianzus reports a

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[4]Augustine, *Confessions* VI.iii (3). We offer this important passage from the English translation by Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Balogh takes up Ambrose again on pp. 219-20. Here he notes Ambrose's own words from *Ep.* 47:1, that he often wrote silently, especially at night, in order not to disturb those trying to sleep [*non enim dictamus omnia, et maxime noctibus, quibus nolumus aliis graves esse ac molesti*]. Ambrose then claims to derive some added benefit from this kind of writing, that not only the ears, but also the eyes were able to ponder deeply what he was writing [*non solum auribus, sed etiam oculis ea ponderemus, quae scribimus*]. The "linearity" of the dictation process was not amiable to these thought processes. Ambrose, thus, often thought and worked like a modern scholar. Balogh concludes: "**Ambrosius ist die erste, uns 'lesetechnisch' verwandte lesende und schreibende Gestalt des Altertums**" (220); emphasis original.

[5]Balogh, 87, notes that until 1898 this was the only passage known to make reference to reading silently. What is a universal custom need not be mentioned. That is, the scarcity of references to reading habits indicates how uniform the practice was. Ambrose's silent reading was sufficiently rare to confirm the rule.

[6]Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 29; cited in Balogh, 88. Where Balogh cites only the original language we will offer an English translation. Gilliard, 694, understands this passage quite oppositely, believing from it that Augustine was quite accustomed to reading silently. This, of course, makes one wonder why he was so surprised at Ambrose's reading habit. Gilliard suggests that the surprise "was due simply to the bishop's unusual habit of *always* reading silently" (694). Perhaps a better interpretation is that Augustine was surprised that Ambrose read silently without any extraordinary provocation. One must recall also that it is Augustine himself who wrote: "*omne verbum sonat*" (see below).

similar experience: "So oft ich auch die Klagegesänge des Jeremias lese, stockt meine Stimme [ἐγκόπτομαι τὴν φωνήν]."[7]

In Horace a number of references occur. He notes in one passage that he finds joy in silent reading [*ego lecto aut scripto, quod me tacitum iuvet*].[8] In another place he writes of how a fortune hunter could sneak a look at a rich man's will: he is "to pass over it swiftly with the eye" [*veloci percurre oculo*], rather, presumably, than with the eye **and mouth**.[9] When the incident occurs later, Horace reports more clearly that "he reads silently" [*tacitus leget*].[10] The unique situation called for the reader to keep silent in his deceit.

Plutarch relates a fascinating anecdote about Caesar. In the presence of Brutus' uncle Cato and the entire Senate, Caesar is handed a small note. This he reads **in silence**. Cato then accuses Caesar of receiving secret messages from state enemies—so strange is it that Caesar should read in silence. Caesar responds by turning over the note to Cato, who then—to his embarrassment—reads it aloud: a love-note from his own sister, Brutus' mother, to the emperor![11] The story indicates that even personal letters would normally be read aloud, and that to do the opposite would raise quite a sensation.

Other passages from antiquity testify more positively to the practice of reading aloud. Augustine describes the activity of reading the Psalms with the words "call out, cry out." He expresses the wish that his old Manichaean cronies were somehow present (without his

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[7]Gregory of Naz., *Or.* 6, c. 18; J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina* [=*MPL*] and *Series graeca* [=*MPG*], (Paris: Montrouge 1844-64), *MPG*, 1:191; Balogh, 89.

[8]Horace, *Satire* I,6.122; Balogh, 90. Many examples in which *legere* and *tacitus* are assumed to be antithetical are cited by Balogh, 98-99.

[9]Horace, *Satire* II.5.55; Balogh, 90.

[10]Horace, *Satire* II.5.68; Balogh, 91.

[11]Plutarch, *Life of Brutus*, 5; Balogh, 92.

knowledge) to "hear his voice" when he reads the fourth Psalm. Augustine is alone in his room,

but he still reads the Psalms **aloud**, even expressing his own thoughts aloud between the verses.[12]

Gregory of Nazianzus brings some insight into the significance of reading aloud for the

ancient man. He notes that in reading Basil's *Hexaemeron* the creation came alive in a way that it

never had before, **when he used only his eyes:**

> Ὅταν τὴν Ἑξαήμερον αὐτοῦ μεταχειρίζομαι καὶ διὰ γλώσσης φέρω, μετὰ τοῦ κτίστου γίνομαι, καὶ γινώσκω κτίσεως λόγους, καὶ θαυμάζω τὸν κτίστην πλέον ἢ πρότερον, ὄψει μόνῃ διδασκάλῳ χρώμενος. [Whenever I take in hand his Hexaemeron and **utter [it] through the tongue,** I am with the Creation, and I know the matters of Creation, and I marvel at the Creation more than formerly, when I used to make use of **the eye alone** as teacher.][13]

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[12]Balogh, 93, describes this incident as occurring after Augustine's conversion, when he returned with his mother and friend Alypius to Cassiciacum. Unfortunately, he does not give the precise reference from the *Confessions*. Relevant passages cited by Balogh include: "*quas tibi voces dabam in psalmis illis*"; "*et audirent voces meas, quando legi psalmum*"; "*et exclamabam legens haec foris et agnoscens intus*"; "*et clamabam in consequenti versu clamore alto cordis mei*"; "*quae inter haec verba dixerim*"; "*et haec omnia exibant per oculos et vocem meam*"; "*et insonui multa graviter et fortiter, quae utinam audissent, qui ... .*" Note the coordination of *lego* with *clamo, exclamo, dico,* and *insono,* involving the use of the *vox,* to which the response is *audio.*

The phenomenon of overhearing one who is reading in private is a repeated theme in ancient literature. For example, Balogh, 100, cites a fifth-century love story, in which Akontios tricks Kydippe into swearing to marry him, by writing the following note on an apple, which she picks up and reads (aloud): "Ich schwöre bei der Artemis, daß ich des Akontios—Gattin werde [μὰ τὴν Ἄρτεμιν Ἀκοντίῳ γαμοῦμαι]." As another author continues the story, she later receives a letter from Akontios, which, it is noted specifically, she reads "*sine murmere*" in order that she might not again be tricked into an unintentional oath (Ovid, *Heroid.* XXI,1-2; Balogh, 101). There are many further examples in which it is clear that the servants who are present have overheard what their master or mistress has read. A remarkably late example demonstrates how long reading remained voiced. McLuhan, 116, cites a letter of St. Thomas More to a Martin Dorp, reproving Dorp for his letters: "However I am certainly surprised if any person should take it into his head to be so flattering as to extol such matters even in your presence; and, as I began to say, I wish you could watch through a window and see the facial expression, the tone of voice, the emotion with which those matters are read."

[13]Gregory of Naz., *Basil. Epitaph.,* LVII, 1; Balogh, 95 n. 15. Emphasis added by Balogh. Does γίνομαι mean "I am," "I become," or "I prove to be" in this context? It seems that Gregory believes the oral production of the *Hexaemeron* makes the Creation account so real to him that he becomes part of it.

The vocal reading involved the ancient reader in the text in a way which is unknown to the modern, distanced, silent reader.

In the act of reading, Balogh notes, three elements were involved: "Für den antiken Menschen waren daher Lesen, d. i. Sehen und Hören einerseits und Verstehen andrerseits, eine **dreifaltige Einheit**."[14] Augustine labels the seeing and hearing as external [*foris*] and the understanding internal [*intus*].[15] This distinction is only understandable in light of the practice of reading aloud. In another place Augustine refers to these three as a process. He teaches "daß das **geschriebene** Wort noch eigentlich kein Wort ist; es muß erst **ausgesprochen** werden. Wenn es aber ertönt, wirkt es vorerst nur aufs Gehör, sodann gelangt es zum Verstand."[16] In Augustine's words: "*Ita fit, ut cum scribitur verbum, signum fiat oculis, quo illud, quod ad aures pertinet, veniat in mentem* [Thus it happens, that when a word is **written**, a sign is made for the **eyes**, by which the former, which pertains to the **ears**, comes into the mind]."[17]

Out of John Cassian's monastic instructions comes evidence that also **writing** was a vocal process. Cassian writes that when the bell tolls for prayer the monks are to leave whatever they are doing—"*non solum operi manuum seu lectioni vel silentio et quieti cellae* [not only the work of the hand or reading, but also the silence and quiet of the cell]"—in order to go.[18] Balogh believes that the contrast being made is between two **vocal, loud** activities, and quiet rest. The "work of the hand" is the activity of copying and writing manuscripts. Thus, Balogh concludes, we have evidence that in the process of writing the words were also spoken aloud.[19]

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[14]Ibid., 95. He gives no reference for this.

[15]Ibid., 95. Again no reference.

[16]Ibid., 96.

[17]Augustine, *De magistro*, IV, 8; Balogh, 96.

[18]John Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum*, IV, 12; Balogh, 98.

[19]This is the consensus conclusion of modern classical scholars. Composition via dictation to a scribe was so common that the verb *dictare* came to mean "to compose" as well as

The monk, too, originally did his reading aloud, as many anecdotes report. Athanasius tells a story of the ascetic St. Antony of Egypt, who was constantly plagued by an echo as he read. In a speech to his company of monks he attributed it to demons: "ἔστι δὲ ὅτε καὶ ἀναγινωσκόντων ἡμῶν εὐθὺς ὥσπερ ἠχὼ λέγουσιν αὐτοὶ τὰ αὐτὰ πολλάκις ἅπερ ἀνέγνωσται [When we are reading, like an echo they (the demons) immediately say the same things which have just been read over and over]."[20] This account only makes sense if they read aloud. Investigations of the monastery's eastern cousins—the Torah schools—have demonstrated that the Torah was chanted not only in the synagogue but also at study. Filled with scholars and scribes, such schools were noisy places.[21] In later Christian monasteries this came to be quite a problem, solved partially by the monk's carrel.[22] Another solution was a change in reading habits. The monastery was the seedbed for the eventual silencing of reading.[23] In fact, already in *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, the monks are admonished to silent reading: "*Post sextam autem surgentes a mensa, pausent in lectis suis cum omni silentio, aut forte qui voluerit legere, sibi sic*

"to dictate." See Raymond J. Starr, "Reading Aloud: *Lectores* and Roman Reading," *The Classical Journal* 86.4 (April-May 1991): 337, citing the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *dicto* 2b.

[20]Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, *MPG* XXVI, 881; Balogh, 102-3.

[21]Balogh, 104.

[22]Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 115, refers to the difficulties which past historians have had understanding the purpose of the monk's reading carrel:

> Chaytor, in his *From Script to Print* (p. 19), was the first to tackle the problem of the medieval monk's carrel or reading-singing booth: "Why this attempt to secure privacy in establishments where the inmates as a rule spent most of their time among their fellows? For the same reason that the reading-room of the British Museum is not divided into sound-proof compartments. The habit of silent reading has made such an arrangement unnecessary; but fill the reading-room with medieval readers and the buzz of whispering and muttering would be intolerable."

See also Balogh, 105-7.

[23]Balogh, 107, cites two reasons for this: one practical, one ideological. The former we have noted. The latter related to the monkish ideal of **silence**: "denn das mönchlische Ideal war nicht nur der antiken Rhetorik, der Freude am gesprochenen Wort abhold, es stand sogar dem **Wort** und dem **Sprechen** überhaupt feindlich gegenüber, eines seiner höchsten Ziele erblickte das Mönchtum im *silentium*, diesem stärksten Mittel der frommen Einkehr und der andächtigen Meditation." This ideal is illustrated with examples in ibid., 215 and 233-34.

legat, ut alium non inquietet [After the sixth hour, having left the table let them rest on their beds in perfect silence; or if anyone wishes to read by himself, let him read so as not to disturb the others]."[24]

Rosalind Thomas argued that ancient inscriptions were thought to give a **voice** to the monument (see chapter two). Balogh supports this with numerous examples. On Augustine's grave, the epigram included this: "*Quod legis ecce loquor, vox tua nempe mea est* [What you read, behold I speak; your voice, in truth, is mine]."[25] More importantly, the pages of Scripture had a voice. Augustine records that the heretic Tychonius was converted by "*omnibus sanctarum paginarum vocibus circumtunsus evigilavit* [all the thundering voices of the sacred pages]."[26] In Balogh's words:

Für den antiken Menschen hat eben das Blatt eines Buches, ja sogar der tote, isolierte Buchstabe, in erster Reihe eine **Stimme**: das Buch oder der Buchstabe "sprechen" oder "schweigen", "ertönen" oder "verstummen",—*pagina loquitur aut silet, littera sonat*.[27]

In a passage from Jerome, *legere, cantare,* and *tenere* are coordinated.[28] For the ancient writer, thought of the text conjured up acoustical images. To read is to hear, as Balogh concludes:

Im allgemeinen können wir sagen: ἀκούειν und *audire, aures adferre, aures exponere* und die meisten rhetorischen Umschreibungen dieser Art sind schlechthin gleichbedeutend mit *legere*. „*Legere et audire*" ist zum stehenden Ausdruck geworden ... .[29]

Balogh's extensive documentation gives irrefutable proof.

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[24]*Rule of Saint Benedict*, 48:12; Balogh, 107. The English translation is from McLuhan, 116.

[25]Balogh, 202.

[26]Augustine, *Co. Epist. Parmen.*, I, 1; Balogh, 203.

[27]Balogh, 203. Among his numerous examples are the folowing: *sonus litterarum; vox antiqua chartarum; de his sacrorum voluminum linguae sonent; pagina garrula; verbositas paginae; loquax pagina;* and *pagina canit*.

[28]Jerome, *Ep.* XXI, 13, 8; Balogh, 205.

[29]Balogh, 206-7.

On the basis of such evidence, H. L. Hendrickson postulates that οἱ ἀκούοντες "those

who hear" may have been the most common and idiomatic expression for "readers" to the person

of antiquity.[30] He adduces frequent references from Plato, for example:

> ... in *Phaedrus* 268C Plato speaks of one who fancies that he is a physician because he has
> *read* something in a book, as Jowett correctly translates ἐκ βιβλίου ποθὲν ἀκούσας. But
> the same translator renders 112A of the *First Alcibiades*: "Of quarrels about justice and
> injustice you have certainly heard from many people, including Homer, for you have *heard
> of* the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*?"—καὶ Ὀδυσσείας γὰρ καὶ Ἰλιάδος ἀκήκοας; But obviously
> the words should be rendered "for you certainly have *read* the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*."[31]

Hendrickson argues that it is incredulous to suggest that in all these instances the author

envisions a public oration.

In providing a summary investigation of vocalized writing, Balogh gives an insightful

description of the use and production of texts in the ancient world. Beyond the Cassian citation

above, there is manifold proof. Theodoret, for example, reports of Socrates that he stuttered

laughably like a child when reading or writing [ὁπότε δὲ δέοι ἢ γράψαι ἢ ἀναγνῶναι,

βατταρίζοντα ὥσπερ τὰ παιδία].[32] The common Latin term for this vocal activity was

"*murmur*." Of this there were many degrees:

> Diese *murmur* ist vieldeutig (auch in der Gebetsterminologie spielt es eine wichtige Rolle)
> und hat manche Abstufungen. Es kann schreiend, laut, halblaut, ja sogar "stumm" sein,
> wie wir oben sahen, aber selbst so bleibt es stets artikuliert. Das laute Schreiben ist für den
> antiken Menschen ein "Gespräch mit sich selber" oder eine "Konversation der Hand mit
> dem Papier" (eine "*paginis locutio*", wie Gregor der Gr. einmal ausdrückt).[33]

As in the process of reading the mouth was connected to the eye, so in writing the mouth is

connected to the hand.

Of particular interest to our study are the epistolary references. St. Paulinus of Nola

wrote a letter which "swelled up" into a book. At the end he left a blank page, and encouraged

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[30]Hendrickson, 188-91.

[31]Ibid., 189.

[32]Theodoret, *Graecar. affect. curatio*, I, 29; Balogh, 213.

[33]Balogh, 214. The Gregory reference is from *Registr. Epist.*, IV, 11, 6.

"the tongue and the hand [*linguam et manum*]" to write something there.[34] The same writes that a friend's letter has come from his **mouth** [*tuo mihi littera venit ab ore*].[35] Similarly, Gregory the Great praises a letter which came not just from the physical tongue [*per linguam carnis*] but from the soul.[36] As late as the fifteenth century Thomas à Kempis would close a letter with reference to the tongue and hand:

> *Et quia excessum loquendi feci ad portum silentii iam remeo: lingua ergo manusque scribentis simul hoc iam fine silescant* [And since I made a digression of speaking I now return to the haven of silence: therefore the tongue and the hand writing together fall silent now at the end].[37]

For Thomas à Kempis writing is still **speaking**, the common (*simul*) work of hand and mouth. The two are so tied together that he can actually speak of the **hand** falling silent!

One final citation demonstrates at length how both writing and reading took place **orally**. St. Isaac of Antioch, the supreme poet of Syrian Christianity, admonishes the reader of his highly parabolic "Concerning Monastic Perfection":

> ... **höre** auf meine Worte, wie sie **geschrieben** sind, **vernimm** sie nach dem Sinn, der unter dem Gleichnis verborgen ist! Unterrichte dich über ihren Inhalt, denn sie haben viele Gesichter. **Dein Mund möge lesen**, was offen da liegt, dein Herz möge erforschen, was unter den Worten verborgen ist. Prüfe sie wie im Glutofen und durchsuche sie wie mit einer Lampe! Denn auch ich habe sie beim Lampenscheine **geschrieben und in stiller Zelle vor mich hingeflüstert**. Bei Nacht hat die **Zither getönt**, was du bei Tag liesest. — Dein Geist möge meine Worte nicht so eng auffassen, **wie sie von den Lippen gelesen werden**, sondern gib dir vielmehr die Mühe, ihren zweifachen Sinn zu verstehen, damit du ihren wahren Inhalt durchschaust![38]

This description harks back to Parry's epic poets, who spun their tales to the sound of the lute. The poet sings as he writes, and he expects the reader to voice the poem at the other end.

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[34]Paulinus of Nola, *Letter 32*; Balogh, 214.

[35]Paulinus of Nola, *Carm.* X, 3-4; Balogh, 215.

[36]Gregory the Great, *Ep.* I, 7; Balogh, 215.

[37]Balogh, 215. No precise reference is given.

[38]Ibid., 218. The reference given is a collection entitled: *Ausgewählte Schriften der syrischen Dichter*, trans. P. S. Landersdorfer, *Bibl. d. Kirchenvät.* [*sic*] (Kösel: Kempten, 1912), 201.

Balogh pauses at this point to draw a conclusion from this evidence about oral writing and reading. He suggests that ancient reading and writing in the oral mode are simply variations on the practice of **dictation**. One who is in the habit of dictating to others will also do so when he himself puts quill to parchment.

> Das laute Schreiben der Antike ist aber nur eine **Abart** der gewohnheitsmäßigen Form schriftstellerischer Tätigkeit: des **Diktierens**: derjenige, der stets (oder zumeist) laut liest und seine Arbeiten in die Feder sagt [an idiom for dictation], wird schließlich **auch sich selber diktieren**, wenn er einmal notgedrungen oder der Sorgfalt halber selbst zur Feder greift.[39]

Of course, the practice of dictation itself is a remnant of oral society in which "documents" were "published" (disseminated) only orally. If reading, therefore, was to receive all that the author put into the text, it must involve and touch **all** the senses which were used when it was written. Reading just with the eyes gives "only the sense."[40] The ancient practice of oral reading thus had a twofold foundation. First, just as today the novice reader sounds out the letters, so also the difficulties of ancient reading demanded that the reader decipher the text aloud. But beyond this technical reason was the aesthetic. Only in the oral production could the reader hope to uncover all of the beauty the author had placed into the text. For these two reasons the full realization of the text demanded skill and preparation.[41]

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[39]Balogh, 218-19. We will take up at greater length the ancient vocation of *lector* and the practice of dictation. This will be of immense importance to our epistolary theory.

[40]This comment, quoted by Balogh, 222 n. 69, was made concerning the writing style of Sainte-Beuve. He would often make his secretary read back his articles to him aloud. The secretary recalled: "On est frappé des repetitions et des mauvaises consonnances. À la simple lecture par les yeux on n'entend rien, on ne suit que le sens." Troubat, *Souvenirs du Dernier Sécret de S. B.*, p. 277. "Only the sense" would seem to refer to more than just aesthetics, perhaps referring to the distinction between the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the text. Silent reading ignores the pragmatic aspects.

[41]Quintilian warned of the dangers of reading over the text too quickly. First the reader must read very slowly for the basic meaning; only later will fluency come. See Balogh, 228.

Augustine had theorized about the nature of writing in a manner characteristic of his times, though perhaps influenced by neo-Platonism.[42] In writing the living language is petrified. In reading it is brought back to life. For Augustine this meant that the letters on the page were merely "signs" which pointed to the words which exist in the world of sound. In Balogh's words:

> Jedes Wort ist—behauptet er—**Laut**. Denn solange es in Schrift ist, ist es kein Wort, sondern bloß ein Zeichen des Wortes ("Note"). Erblickt der Leser plötzlich den **Buchstaben**, so erinnert er ihn sogleich an den entsprechenden **Laut**. Der geschriebene Buchstabe hat nämlich zweierlei Wirkung: erstlich zeigt er sich selbst dem Auge des Lesers, **sodann zeigt er aber auch überdies noch der Vernunft des Lesers—den Laut.**[43]

The sign is on the level of the eyes; the meaning—the sound—is realized at the level of reason.

In Augustine's own, famous words:

> *Omne verbum sonat. Cum enim est in scripto, non verbum, sed verbi signum est; quippe inspectis a legente litteris occurrit animo, quid voce prorumpat. Quid enim aliud litterae scriptae quam se ipsos oculis et praeter se voces animo ostendunt?* [Every word sounds forth. For when it is in writing, it is not the word, but the sign of the word; but when the letters have been looked at by the reader, it [the word] reaches the mind, it sounds forth something with the voice. For what else do the written letters present but themselves to the eye, and beyond themselves sounds to the mind?].[44]

Oral reading thus speaks to the level of the mind's understanding.

"Publication," to the ancient Roman world, meant public recitation. While this was, of course, the usual practice in all the ancient world—as we have seen in classical Greece—in Rome the public recital became quite a phenomenon. It was "the absorbing occupation and perpetual distraction of cultivated Romans."[45] Two factors pressed the formal development of

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[42]Balogh, 225, notes that scholars have perceived Stoic philosophy behind this theory. Our suggestion is more to the point.

[43]Ibid., 225. Balogh's parenthetical remark ("*Note*") refers to the ancient writers' musical analogy, by which they compare words on a page to notes, which must be performed to create music.

[44]Augustine, *De dialext.* V, 11; Balogh, 225.

[45]Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome,* ed. Henry T. Rowell, trans. E. O. Lorimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 193. Carcopino's caustic comments about the recitation perhaps betray his modern bookishness, though there is much truth in his assertion

the public *recitatio*: the multiplication of public libraries, and the growth of "publishers" who provided copies of books for the former. Book merchants and their teams of copyists often gained no permission to publish from the author. Even when they procured the same, they paid only one fee, which under Roman law gave the right to unlimited copies. The author received no royalties from the empire-wide distribution of his work.

Thus, starved of income and recognition, authors turned increasingly to the formal recital hall, or *auditorium*. Hadrian, Carcopino notes, "set his seal on public readings by consecrating a building for this exclusive purpose: the Athenaeum, a sort of miniature theatre which he had built with his own money on a site which is unknown to us."[46] Beyond this, readings would take place in the home of any well-educated man, who perhaps had a room set aside for readings as an *auditorium*. As Carcopino describes:

> The plan of these *auditoria* varied little from house to house: a dais on which the author-reader [*lector*] would take his seat ... . Behind him hung the curtains which hid those of his guests who wished to hear him without being seen, his wife for example. In front of the reader the public who had been summoned by notes delivered at their homes (*codicilli*) were accommodated, in armchairs (*cathedrae*) for people of the higher ranks and benches for the others. Attendants told off [*sic*] for the purpose distributed the programs of the séance (*libelli*).[47]

A third level of recitation occurred wherever and whenever a crowd of people might be found, into which an author might slink and unfurl his manuscript—at the forum, under a portico, at the baths, or any crossroads. As Starr's exposition of the institution of *lector* concludes, "Roman

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that public reading reached an absurd condition in first-century Rome: "Instead of promoting a love of literature, these public readings produced mental indigestion and must more often have deadened than stimulated the love of letters... . Men of the world who had never written in their lives, save in the course of their professional duties or to keep up family and social relations, did not hesitate to reproduce the eulogy they had pronounced at the funeral of a relative" (199). And again: "the disease devoured like a cancer hordes of people who had developed through it a false belief in their literary vocation... . [L]iterature lost all dignity and all serious purpose" (201).

[46]Ibid., 195.

[47]Ibid., 196.

literature, then, might more accurately be described as 'aural' than as 'oral.' Literature was

appreciated primarily through the ears rather than the eyes."[48]

Because of the orality of reading in the ancient world, the *lector* held a vital place in

Roman society. A normal, wealthy Roman household could be expected to have had one *lector* or

several *lectores*, so necessary and basic was their function. Starr explains who they were:

> *Lectores* were slaves or freed slaves, as was the rest of the support staff for literary activity
> and research (note-takers, clerks, copyists). Most *lectores* were probably male, although
> inscriptions reveal some female readers... . Certain periods, e.g., wartime, might yield
> slaves who were freeborn and had been educated before being enslaved, but it was also
> possible to buy slaves who had been trained for particular duties specifically for sale. It
> seems clear that clerically trained slaves coud be purchased and reasonable to imagine a
> small but steady market for *lectores*, who would have been comparatively expensive.[49]

The Roman *lector*'s responsibilities were primarily literary,[50] while more mundane reading

would be handled by a secretary or clerk. The *lector* was so specialized that he would not be

expected to take notes, or do any form of writing, for which purpose there was a *notarius*.

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[48]Starr, 338.

[49]Ibid., 339.

[50]The *lector*'s duties lay in four areas. **First**, because he was expected to put a great
deal of preparation into his performances, his specialized ability could improve the quality of the
composition. Thus, it was common for a *lector* to read even his master's own compositions at
private recitations (Starr, 340). Pliny reports that he read his own poetry badly, and so employed
a *lector*, while he always gave his speeches himself. The *lector* spoke with all the authority of the
author himself, who, in fact, was usually present. **Secondly**, some authors report that their *lector*
assisted in the work of composition by reading the text aloud and suggesting improvements.
Thirdly, and most commonly, they served as entertainment. They read for their master's private
enjoyment, as well as for guests'. They formed the most popular and simplest entertainment at
dinner parties, evidencing their master's social class. **Finally**, "*lectores* read to their masters in
many of the miscellaneous situations where we today might pick up a book and read to
ourselves" (ibid., 342)—to combat insomnia, during meals, while sun-bathing or being rubbed
down, to name but a few. The *lector* accompanied his master constantly, leading often to a close,
warm relationship. (Cicero, in a famous letter to Atticus, laments greatly the death of his *lector*.
Att. I.12.4. See also his *Friends*, V.9.) The *lector* thus enabled the master to "read" at times when
it would be difficult to handle a scroll, and even served as "eyeglasses" for aged and deteriorated
eyes. He was "more than a luxury," relieving the master of the laborious task of deciphering the
difficult texts of the day, thus allowing the auditor to "focus on the literary work and not on the
work of reading" (Starr, 343).

The universal practice of vocalized reading persisted in the West through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. Oral theory has proved to be fruitful for medievalists. William Nelson, in an entertaining survey, notes how "Medieval compositions of whatever kind, whatever length, are typically addressed to a listening audience or, in that common, awkward formula, to 'readers and hearers.'"[51] Public recitation served as entertainment, especially during northern winters, when lighting was poor, eyes were worse, and a young reader could entertain quite a large group. Through at least to the seventeenth century, there were still professional lectors:

> Just such reading had in fact been a regular practice at the court of François I. The task of selecting what was to be read as well as reading and commenting on it was assigned to a formally designated officer with the title *lecteur ordinaire du roi....* . From 1527 to 1537 the post was held by Jacques Colin who accompanied the king wherever he went, read to him regularly during his meals, and participated in the discussions that followed.[52]

There is evidence that a similar post was in place in Elizabethan England. Even "ladies of lesser rank" had servants for this task. Walter Ong's contention that oral reading did not die out until the Romantic Age is thus supported by medievalists.[53]

In Judaism the place of the *lector* was secured by the rule that "the sacred books must be read, not recited after being learnt by heart (as was the case with the uncanonised oral Law) ..."[54] Thus, texts being scarce, the disciple of Scripture centered his devotion on the lector-proclaimed Word, rather than the memorized recitation, as in Islam (see Graham, below). In fact,

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[51]William Nelson, "From 'Listen, Lording' to 'Dear Reader,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 46.2 (Winter 1976-77): 112.

[52]Ibid., 113-14.

[53]Aside from Nelson's article, see Franz H. Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55.2 (1980): 237-65; Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 11.1 (January 1936): 88-110; D. H. Green, "Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65.2 (April 1990): 267-80; Roger Walker, "Oral Delivery or Private Reading? A Contribution to the Debate on the Dissemination of Medieval Literature," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 7 (1971): 36-42.

[54]C. H. Roberts, "Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible,* vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome,* ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970), 50.

in Rabbinic circles the written word was, to a degree, the object of distrust; it was considered quite inferior to the spoken. In the thought of Judah Ha-Levi, reported by Raphael Jospe, this superiority was attached directly to the superiority of the Hebrew language: "Hebrew qualifies as the 'natural language' par excellence, in terms of conforming to the thoughts of the speaker without prior agreement, because it is the language of God and the angels, the original human language, the language of creation."[55] Because it is the "natural language," Hebrew is also the only language whereby thoughts can be directly "transmitted" to the receiver.[56]

To Judah Ha-Levi, Hebrew is by nature an oral language. The superiority of oral language is thus also the superiority of Hebrew:

> For oral [communication] is superior to written [communication], as they said: "From the mouth of the authors, and not from books" (*mi-pi soferim ve-lo mi-pi sefarim*). For in oral [communication] one is assisted by pauses, when a person stops speaking, or by continuing, in accordance with the subject; or by raising or lowering one's voice; or by various gestures to express amazement, a question, a narrative, desire, fear, or submission, without which simple speech will be inadequate. Sometimes the speaker may be assisted by motions of his eyes, eyebrows, or his whole head and his hands, to express anger, pleasure, requests or pride in the appropriate measure. (*Kuzari* 2:72)[57]

What Ha-Levi has noticed is that semantic import is carried by more than just the words. The "performance" also brings meaning. Hebrew, he believes, is ideally suited to bear this extra weight by the system of Massoretic cantillation notes, which are able to transmit something more of the original oral flavor. In his opinion, it is not that the ear is a superior organ to the eye as such, but rather that oral communication as a whole has distinct advantages: it "is immediate,

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[55]Raphael Jospe, "The Superiority of Oral over Written Communication: Judah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari* and Modern Jewish Thought," in Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Nahum M. Sarna, eds., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding. Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 3:129.

[56]Jospe, 129, cites Ha-Levi: "The purpose of language is that what is in the soul of the speaker be attained by the soul of the listener. This purpose can only be completely fulfilled orally [Arabic: *mushafahatan*; Hebrew: *panim el panim*] (*Kuzari* 2:72)." On the linguistic theory of "telementation" see chapter two.

[57]Quoted in Jospe, 130.

alive, and facilitated by aids (gestures, tone of voice, etc.) which by their very nature are present in a face to face encounter, but not in a written text."[58]

In one of the most important studies on the subject Loveday Alexander has assembled a host of references which illustrate the prejudice against—or at least **skepticism** towards—the written word in Roman times.[59] Clement of Alexandria begins his *Stromateis* with "an elaborate justification for the use of writing":

> Now this treatise is not a carefully-wrought piece of writing for display, but just my notes stored up for old age [μοι ὑπομνήματα εἰς γῆρας θησαυρίζεται], a "remedy for forgetfulness" [λήθης φάρμακον], nothing but a rough image [εἴδωλον ἀτεχνῶς], a

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[58]Ibid., 136. Jospe, 142, notes later Jewish scholars under the influence of Ha-Levi who argue for the superiority of the Jewish religion as such: "because it conveys its adherents to the highest truth, with the least interference with or dilution of that truth by plastic symbols ['idolatrous corruption' (147)] and the fixed, immutable and inflexible word." Just as Hebrew is the "natural language," so also Judaism is the natural religion, because it is **oral**. For this reason the Rabbis forbade their instruction to be written down. In later periods when they reluctantly gave such permission, they called it "a destruction of the law" (144), for it was no longer living and adaptable.

Some scholars, however, suggest a rather different reason for the oral priority. The Rabbinic prohibition against the oral Law being written down may not only have come from a distrust of writing's ability to convey accurately the teaching, but also out of "jealousy for the priority of the written Law." The Rabbinic writings could not be placed on the same level as the Torah, which was "book" in a unique way. See Roberts, 49. Roberts continues to describe the uniquely bookish character of Judaism: "What we know as the Old Testament ... occupied a place in Jewish national life, worship and sentiment to which classical antiquity offers no parallel. Greeks and Romans were acquainted with sacred books, ... but the physical object was not treated with the same veneration nor the text itself so scrupulously protected as was the case with the Jewish Law" (49). **Nevertheless, the *use* of this book was still profoundly *oral*, rather than silent and textual in the modern sense,** as other authors shall demonstrate below.

To pursue further the reluctance of the Rabbinic academies to commit the Oral Law to writing, see Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Uppsala: Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1961), as well as his later works and the debate which followed them.

[59]Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. David Clines, Stephen Fowl, and Stanley Porter, *JSOT Supplement Series no. 87* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 221-47. Even within this context, of course, the church fathers did not hold rhetoric above criticism. They often expressed a certain distaste for rhetorical excess, "the sinful lust of the ears," according to Balogh, 233.

shadow [σκιαγρα'α (? *sic*)] of those clear [ἐναργῶν]and living [ἐμψύχων] words which I was thought worthy to hear [ἐπακοῦσαι], and of those blessed and truly worthy men.[60]

This encapsulates most of the opinions we have already seen in ancient Greece, showing also the influence, no doubt, of neo-Platonism. Writing is but a shadow, a *signum*, of the reality which exists in the world of sound.

A similar thought appears in the famous words of Papias, though they lack the *res-signum* split:

> For I did not imagine that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice [τὰ παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης].[61]

From this quotation Alexander draws her title and theme: "the living voice." This phrase appears to have been a well-known proverb, as Galen asserts: "There may well be truth in the saying current among most craftsmen, that reading out of a book [ἐκ συγγράμματος ἀναλέξασθαι] is not the same thing as, or even comparable to, learning from the living voice [παρὰ φωνῆς]."[62] The origin seems to be Greek, as the earliest known quotation nestles Greek words into Latin: "Where are those who talk about the 'living voice' [*Ubi sunt qui aiunt* ζώσης φωνῆς]?"[63]

Alexander's analysis suggests that the proverb was current in three fields. First was rhetoric, for which Quintilian serves:

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[60]Alexander, 221. The English translations are her own. Alexander, 242, attributes these attitudes directly to Clement's links to Platonic philosophy.

[61]From Papias' preface to his *Collection of Dominical* Sayings, recorded by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III 39.1; quoted in Alexander, 222. Alexander argues that the "strange" word order is explained by supposing that παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς was a "proverb" or stock phrase, onto which Papias tacked καὶ μενούσης. Yet "adjective-noun-καὶ-adjective" is simply good Greek word order. Alexander, 243, agrees that there is no Platonism apparent in Papias.

Roberts, 61, refers us to a similar sentiment of Irenaeus, "who memorised what Polycarp told him of his direct knowledge of John, recorded 'not on papyrus but in my heart,'" thus giving further evidence that writing was not thought to do justice to Christian teaching.

[62]Opening words from Galen, *De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos* VI; quoted in Alexander, 224-25.

[63]Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* II 12.2; quoted in Alexander, 225. However, it has not been found in any Greek literature earlier than Cicero, suggesting its origin in the first century B.C.

... that "living voice", as the saying goes, provides more nourishment [*viva illa, ut dicitur, vox alit plenius*].[64]

Secondly, as the Galen quotation above indicates, it was common among the crafts, as these words also testify:

> I blame the earliest writers on the forms of plants, holding it better to be an eyewitness (αὐτόπτης) by the side of the master himself and not to be like those who navigate out of books.[65]

Thirdly, the proverb expressed also an opinion current in the schools. For Galen the fear was that a textbook might be used on its own:

> I ordered that these notes should be shared only with those who would read the book with a teacher.[66]

Galen's writings were essentially transcripts of his lectures. Like Plato, he expected that writing would be merely a supplement to the primary source of oral teaching. The dissemination of writing, therefore, while not entirely forbidden, was hedged with caution.

Alexander's study is of utmost importance in demonstrating that the priority of oral over written was not confined to the Rabbinic academies. She concludes: "Indeed it may well be

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[64]Quintilian, *Inst.* II 2.8; quoted in Alexander, 227. Here we see the famous Latin version of ζώσης φωνῆς: *viva vox.*

[65]Galen, *Temp. med.* VI preface; quoted in Alexander, 228. Walter Ong often pointed out that the problems in producing adequate textbooks for the crafts and sciences was not solved until the advent of **print**, for only then could **drawings** be accurately reproduced. Galen, paradoxically, quotes this proverb at the beginning of a **large** book. Immediately afterwards he qualifies the statement by noting that "those who are diligent and naturally intelligent often gain no common advantage from reading books which are clearly written," especially since it is simply an unabridged record of his oral teaching. See Alexander, 230.

[66]Galen, *De libr. propr.* 11; quoted in Alexander, 230. As a prolific author, Galen was not entirely opposed to writing, but demanded that it be kept in its rightful place. The proverb itself appears in this pedagogical opinion of Seneca's: "However, you will gain more from the living voice [*viva vox*] and from sharing someone's daily life than from any treatise" (*Epist.* VI, 5; in Alexander, 232). The "living voice" valued in the schools was not just the voice of the teacher, but also the voice of his students who have accurately memorized and transmitted his teachings. The latter was always preferred to the written record. In Galen's words: "I would rather trust what his disciples say about their teacher" (*De venae sect.* 5; in Alexander, 233). This attitude is directly parallel to the significance of the apostle in the early church, for one of the apostolic criteria was knowledge of the incarnate Lord in his earthly life (Acts 1:21-22).

felt that *prima facie* the hellenistic schools could provide a more direct cultural link with the churches of the second century than the rabbinic academies, of which Gentile Christians can have had little direct experience."[67] This, of course, speaks primarily to the situation of the early Fathers, not the actual production of the New Testament. However, it is clear that as the Scriptures passed from the Hebraic to the Hellenistic worlds, the attitudes towards word and text underwent a change in detail but not in kind.

The text was never viewed apart from the teacher, never in a vacuum, never apart from interpretation. Alexander's summary is immensely important:

> It is the "living voice" of the teacher that has priority: the text both follows that voice (as a record of teaching already given) and stands in a subordinate position to it (in that it may only be studied with the aid of a teacher and stands ready at any time to be corrected, updated or revised). This would mean that, in this context at least, few ancient readers would have picked up a text to read *de novo* as we would a new novel; writers, conversely, could rely on the nurturing matrix of the teaching situation to expand and explain what was gnomic or technical in the text.[68]

Text and teacher were inseparably linked by orality.

Rosalind Thomas adds to this testimony a number of classical Greek examples of the distrust accorded to the written word. It is poetry which guaranteed undying fame, for it was memorized and spread through space and time.[69] Of course, writing certainly was used to preserve poetry, but the poet could not count on it to achieve his **fame**, for this came only

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[67]Alexander, 243. Alexander thus provides a welcome balance to the work of Birger Gerhardsson.

[68]Ibid., 244. The implications of this ancient attitude will be developed according to the title of chapter four of our study: "Epistles, Apostles, and Orality." Scripture and teaching office are linked not only theologically but also in Hebraic and Hellenistic thought. There are further implications for the so-called "virgin" reading favored by Reader-response critics. We noted in chapter one Stephen Moore's claim that a virginal reading of the Gospels was highly unlikely in the early Christian era.

[69]The poet Pindar contrasts his poetry with immobile statues: "I am no maker of statues / Who fashions figures to stand unmoved / On the self-same pedestal. / On every merchantman, in every skiff / Go, sweet song, from Aigina / And spread the news that Lampon's son, / ... has won the wreath" (*Nemean* 5.1-5). Quoted in Thomas, 114-15.

through the performance.[70] A poem by Simonides even mocks the notion that the inscription

brings immortality, for "even a human hand could so easily destroy it."[71] Poetry, on the other

hand, can be counted upon to preserve the truth.[72] There is an element of this in Havelock's

"encyclopedic" theory concerning the function of the Homeric epics.[73]

Even the medieval world had its reservations about the value of writing. As Michael

Clanchy notes:

> Documents were distrusted for the good reason that many of them (particularly monastic charters) were forgeries and they did not at first contain information to verify them, such as the date and place of issue or the writer's name. It was a legal commonplace that oral witness deserved more credence than written evidence: "Witnesses were alive and credible because they could defend their statements; writing was dead marks on a dead surface, unable to clarify itself if it proved unclear or to defend itself against objections."[74]

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[70]Thomas, 126, points to the vagaries of life in the ancient world: "it would be unnecessary, in fact positively unwise, in the classical period, to rely entirely on the final published text for the propagation of your life's work—when the perilously few copies that were made could, unsupported by any public libraries after all, be lost at sea, copied out badly, eaten by worms, or otherwise become totally illegible." The enormous breadth of propagation of the New Testament, and the vast number of MSS which survived, was extraordinary for the ancient world—testifying to the rapid growth of Christianity and the high position her writings held.

[71]Ibid., 115.

[72]As Havelock pointed out, the Muses were called upon not for "creative inspiration" but to recall to mind the **facts**—for the sake of memory. Truth and memory are inseparable to the Greeks, as even the etymology of ἀληθεία—"not to be forgotten"—suggests.

[73]Thomas, 116, however, warns that one must not read back into Homer the function his work certainly did take on with time. That is to say, Homer did not write his epics **primarily** to serve as such cultural encyclopedias.

[74]Michael T. Clanchy, "Looking Back from the Invention of Printing," in Daniel P. Resnick, ed., *Literacy in Historical Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983): 19. The quotation is taken from Walter Ong's review of Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), in *Manuscripta* 23 (1979): 179. Detailed discussion of the transition in medieval law from oral to written testimony around the twelfth century can be found in the latter work by Clanchy, as well as in Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
    The legal principle valuing oral witnesses over written documents has ancient roots. In the play *Hippolytus* by Euripides (written 428 B.C.), a written message left by a murdered woman incriminates her step-son Hippolytus. Dismayed that his father would believe the accusation, Hippolytus challenges the credibility of written evidence which, unlike a live

That this attitude persisted at least to the high Middle Ages demonstrates how strong the bias towards oral language was in the ancient world.

The technological and economic conditions of the ancient world were not the only reasons why texts continued to be promulgated aloud, even after the invention of writing.[75] That this is true is supported by the evidence of today's world, in which public reading continues. Consider the poetry reading, the academic paper read in conferences and classrooms, political speeches, and, of course, the Scripture reading. Why are these read when they can be easily made available in print? Jack Goody suggests two reasons beyond the ancient technological problems:

> ... the process of reading aloud means that the pupil can ask questions and hence improve his opportunities for learning. ... [A]nd most importantly, by retaining control over the process of transmission, we render our jobs more secure.[76]

Aside from the cynicism of the final point, these arguments together are similar to Plato's own concerns expressed the *Seventh Letter*. They are pedagogical. The presence of the teacher enhances the learning process beyond what can be derived from a textbook. Oral communication is interactive—even in the case of a lecture, for the professor can still gauge the response of his students. There is a consciousness that the words and the author go together; in the process of

witness, cannot be subjected to cross-examination. See Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 21-22. Likewise, William Chase Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 60 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 24-25: "Indeed even in the classical period written laws were regarded as inferior to 'unwritten laws,' not merely by the *Antigone* of Sophocles and by Thucydides in the Funeral Oration of Pericles but by ordinary men." In the accompanying endnote Greene adds: "Roman law also recognized the spoken agreement as the real contract, and the written record as less valuable than the word of witnesses" (53 n. 4).

[75]McLuhan, 105, believes that it was the printing press which was instrumental in silencing the reader. It did not occur simply with writing itself. With print the reader becomes autonomous, whereas in the scribal age the author and reader remained connected by the oral word. "Manuscript culture is conversational if only because the writer and his audience are physically related by the form of publication as performance" (105). When the conversation is ended by removing the writer's presence, silence soon ensues.

[76]Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 119.

oral production the text receives an "author"-itative interpretation. What is received first-hand always retains a certain priority in the hearer's life, moulding him in a way that the written text rarely does.

Thomas Aquinas echoes these ideas. Question 42 of the third part of his *Summa* asks why Christ did not leave his teachings in writing. Aquinas responds:

> I answer by saying that it is fitting that Christ did not commit his teaching to writing. First on account of his own dignity; for the more excellent the teacher, the more excellent his manner of teaching ought to be. And therefore it was fitting that Christ, as the most excellent of teachers, should adopt that manner of teaching whereby his doctrine would be imprinted on the hearts of his hearers. For which reason it is said in Matthew vii, 29, that "he was teaching them as one having power". For which reason even among the pagans Pythagoras and Socrates, who were most excellent teachers, did not want to write anything.[77]

Thus, echoing Plato, Aquinas does not believe that any great teaching could be properly conveyed by writing. The one who "teaches with authority" will proceed purely orally.

The attitudes towards reading are entirely different in the ancient and modern worlds. The difference hinges upon speed and silence. Walter Ong, explains:

> Technologized print cultures foster rapid reading, in which words are formed chiefly in the imagination and often sketchily. They regard movement of the lips in reading as retrograde or childish. The case was different in the highly oral cultures in which the biblical texts came into being, where reading was less deeply interiorized, that is to say, where reading called for a more conscious effort, was considered a greater achievement, and was less a determinant of psychic structures and personality, still basically oral in organization. In such highly oral cultures, it was not sufficient for the reader simply to imagine the sounds of the words being read. Books in such a culture do not "contain" something called "material." They speak or say words (Ong, 1958:307-318; 1977:147-188, esp. 163-166). The written words had to be mouthed aloud, in their full being, restored to and made to live in the oral cavities in which they came into existence.[78]

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[77]Quoted by McLuhan, 122.

[78]Walter Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 437. An excellent way for the modern reader to experience the process of ancient reading is to read any of the many humorous attempts to put dialects into print. In these works it is often nigh impossible to understand what is written until the letters on the page are voiced aloud. Note the following examples (with "translations") from a "dictionary of Canadian English": "bling yule" (bilingual); "Briddi Shyles" (British Isles); "fuchsiad seer asterta phone me" (if you should see her ask her to phone me); "harya" (how are you); "Hugh Ess" (the Mare Can nation, Knighted States); "quorpus" (fifteen minutes past the

The sheer effort involved in moving from written text to spoken word distinguished ancient reading. The process of reading led the reader to experience all the words, rather than passing over them in silence. The reader was thereby receiving more than just informational "content."

What, then, are the effects of the eventual move from oral reading to silent reading? In a fascinating excursus in her discussion of the effects of print, Elizabeth Eisenstein focuses attention on the shift to individualism. "To hear an address delivered, people have to come together; to read a printed report encourages individuals to draw apart."[79] Her comments are directed towards participation by citizens in public affairs, but they are easily applicable to the reading of the Scriptures. Consider the following:

> By its very nature, a reading public was not only more dispersed; it was also more atomistic and individualistic than a hearing one. Insofar as a traditional sense of community entailed frequent gathering together to receive a given message, this sense was probably weakened by the duplication of identical messages which brought the solitary reader to the fore.[80]

Although new social functions arose with print—book-shops, coffee houses, reading rooms—the very nature of silent reading demanded isolation for the task itself. A new conception of society arises: "The notion that society may be regarded as a bundle of discrete units or that the

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hour). See Mark M. Orkin, *Canajan, Eh?* (Don Mills, Ont.: General Publishing Company, Ltd., 1973).

[79]Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe,* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:132.

[80]Ibid., 1:132. On the other hand, print brought a new ability to unite widely scattered people who could not physically come together. "But even while communal solidarity was diminished, vicarious participation in more distant events was also enhanced; and even while local ties were loosened, links to larger collective units were being forged" (1:132). Thus, while the local congregation can be weakened by print, the geographically scattered denomination is impossible without it. Luther's influence was certainly spread as much through his printed works as through his parishioners, co-workers, and students. Witness also the significance of *Der Lutheraner* in creating a network of confessional Lutherans in the early history of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Other examples could include distance learning centers and correspondence systems which today are uniting geographically scattered people by print. Yet the push towards video-conferencing via satellite illustrates the dissatisfaction with the capabilities of text alone.

individual is prior to the social group seems to be more compatible with a [silently] reading public than with a hearing one."[81]

Modern Exegetical Recognition of the Oral Character of the Written Word

Despite continued neglect of the field, Werner Kelber[82] has almost single-handedly brought oral theory to the attention of mainstream exegesis. Nevertheless, his particular approach remains controversial—and somewhat at variance with the thesis of the present study. Accepting and building upon the mass of oral research which has preceded him,[83] Kelber proposes that the "written gospel" stands in fundamental contradiction to the "oral gospel" which has gone before. Thus, he proposes not only to rectify the textual bias of "Gutenberg galaxy" hermeneutics, but also to overturn the oral traditionalist approach, which views the Scriptures as the natural result of an evolution from oral to written.

Kelber begins by considering and rejecting previous models of the relationship between pre-canonical oral tradition and the written text. First there is Rudolf Bultmann's *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*.[84] The title already betrays the thesis, that from the text of the Gospels the history can be traced back logically to the oral sources. Kelber labels Bultmann's theory "evolutionary," since it asserts that there is an implicit tendency in the earliest levels of

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[81]Eisenstein, 1:132. One could easily compare this to the ecclesiology of Reformed Protestantism, devoid of Means of Grace. For it is the Reformed who were more clearly affected by the individualizing power of print, to whom the description "people of the book" applies in a radically different way.

[82]Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

[83]Kelber, xv, presupposes the general theory of orality: "Human consciousness is structured into thought by available forms of communication. Thinking is indebted to the medium through which knowledge is acquired. The oral medium, in which words are managed from mouth to ear, handles information differently from the written medium, which links the eye to visible but silent letters on the page. This axiom forms the premise of my work."

[84]Kelber provides his own translation of the 8th edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

tradition towards growth and expansion, that the oral grew naturally into the written. This leaves

Bultmann open to the oral critique:

> What strengthened Bultmann's model of an effortlessly evolutionary transition from the pre-gospel stream of tradition to the written gospel was his insistence on the irrelevance of a distinction between orality and literacy. In most cases it was considered "immaterial (*nebensächlich*) whether the oral or the written tradition has been responsible; there exists no difference in principle."[85]

Mark's accomplishment in preparing the first Gospel—according to Bultmann—was the merging

of Palestinian tradition with the Hellenistic kerygma of the risen Christ, to produce the first

continuous narrative. Writing down the tradition added nothing new, but "merely brought to

fruition what had already been on the way toward gospel formation."[86]

Birger Gerhardsson[87]—according to Kelber—presents by contrast a "model of passive

transmission," based on research into Rabbinic techniques. That is, he stressed the **verbatim**

transmission, the "mechanical learning" of written text and oral tradition, which was fostered in

professional, educational, and liturgical settings. This was then applied by analogy to the

Christian tradition. A fundamental presupposition was that faithful oral transmission was tied to

written preservation. The oral did not exist in its own right. Here, of course, lies Kelber's

critique:

> When one remembers that Gerhardsson had initially derived the norms of transmission from textuality, one is inclined to read his subordination of the oral to the written Torah as a consequence of his methodological and linguistic priorities.[88]

Gerhardsson envisioned the disciples as faithful students of the tradition, taking down notes

which would later be sources for the written Gospels.[89] While appreciating Gerhardsson's

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[85]Kelber, 6; quoting Bultmann, 91.

[86]Kelber, 5.

[87]*Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Uppsala: Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1961).

[88]Kelber, 10.

awareness of language as sound and his acknowledgment of oral techniques of composition, Kelber compiles six fundamental objections to "a passive and authoritative transmission"—though they are hardly persuasive.[90] It is perhaps the greatest downfall of Kelber's work that he fails to take Gerhardsson seriously enough.[91]

What we must address is Kelber's contention for the difference between oral and written hermeneutics. If there is such a difference—and for that we have argued—then there

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[89]It is precisely at this point that Kelber breaks company with mainstream oral theory, for the use of writing in service to orality has long been recognized as a feature of "secondarily oral" societies (Ong). Perhaps Kelber misrepresents Gerhardsson when he asserts that the latter subordinates oral transmission to writing. Kelber, 21, rejects the picture of the disciples as note takers, based on Acts 4:13, which refers to Peter and John as ἀγράμματοι. However, it is more likely that "literacy" was simply used as synecdoche for schooling. That is, the description of them as ἀγράμματοι does not assert "literally" that they could not read or write, but rather that they were "unschooled"! Again, Kelber, 22 and 212, tries in vain to refute George Kennedy's evidence of note taking.

[90]Kelber, 13-14. He argues, for instance, that the Gospels "fail to attest to Jesus' teaching according to the rules of mechanical memorization," that Luke's treatment of early Christian hermeneutics "cannot be considered normative," that the Jerusalem authorities did not likely legitimize the bulk of the tradition, and that Jesus as expounder of Scripture "reflects the evangelist's literary, visualistic proclivities more than the linguistic realities of the life of Jesus." One can see easily that Kelber's critique rests on the **rejection** of data, rather than upon the data themselves.

[91]Gerhardsson later responded to Kelber in "The Gospel Tradition," in *The Interrelationships of the Gospels*, ed. David L. Dungan (Leuven: University Press, 1990): 519-27. He complains first that Kelber's interpretation of his work is one-sided: "he fails to see the role of the flexible part of tradition and of the interplay between firmness and flexibility in my approach" (523). He also objects that Kelber creates too strong a dichotomy between oral and written:
> It is very misleading if, in our discussions about conditions in antiquity, we put oral and written delivery side by side on the same level as two entirely comparable entities and proclaim that one is made for the eye, the other for the ear, the one is visual, the other auditive, and so on. In antiquity, words were written down in order to be read out. Even the written word was formulated for the ear (519).

Again Gerhardsson comments: "The society where Jesus appeared—even the small towns in the Galilean countryside—was no pre-literary society" (521).

cannot have been a completely smooth transition from oral to written.[92] For oral language is more than a record; it is an event. It is always personalized. This leads to a basic definition:

> Spoken words, therefore, can produce the actuality of what they refer to in the midst of people. Language and being, speaker, message, and words are joined together into a kind of unity. This powerful and binding quality of oral speech we shall henceforth refer to as *oral synthesis*.[93]

The authentic transmission of Jesus' teaching was thus to be found not in writing, but in the authoritative agent (Lk. 10:16),[94] who maintained the message because it was socially relevant and because he lived it. Preservation, of course, was also fostered by "mnemonic formalities," the heavily patterned speech forms first exposed by Lord and Parry. But oral theory leads Kelber to reject the form critical search for "the original," for "in orality, *tradition is almost always composition in transmission*."[95] That is, "each moment of speech is wondrously fresh and new"; in the oral mode, words were spoken over and over. "The paradigm of linearity"—that oral led invariably into written—is "fictitious."[96]

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[92]What becomes apparent, however, is that Kelber rejects Walter Ong's model of "secondary orality"—that is, a society which is **literate**, and yet uses writing only in service to a predominantly oral culture. Kelber, 14, admits that oral scholars disagree on whether or not the media are contradictory and mutually exclusive. On pp. 217-18 he claims to find the distinction between primary and secondary orality helpful, although only to discount the significance of reading a text aloud (it is not **really** oral).

[93]Kelber, 19. Emphasis original.

[94]Ibid., 71: "Stories and sayings are authenticated not by virtue of their historical reliability, but on the authority of the speaker and by the reception of hearers." Perhaps this is the wrong opposition. The contrast should be between, on the one hand, written text carrying authority simply by virtue of its supposed fixity or permanence and, on the other hand, an oral message authenticated by the agent and his reception. The issue is not "historical reliability."

[95]Ibid., 30. Emphasis original. The context of Kelber's work must be kept in mind. He is not simply an iconoclastic "skeptic," looking for proof that the Gospels are untrustworthy, contrasting the "Jesus of faith" with the "Jesus of history." In fact, as we have shown, this is the classic Bultmannian approach which he rejects. Rather, he argues perhaps more radically, that the Gospel writers fundamentally changed the message, that the oral Gospel is incompatible with text.

[96]Ibid., 34. Later he deals extensively with Johann Gottfried Herder's theory of the "oral Gospel" (pp. 77-80). Herder argued that a class of "evangelists" stayed close to the

Where Kelber is most useful is in his inchoate attempts at "oral exegesis"—his search for remnants of the oral Gospel behind the written text. "Storytelling" is chosen as the chief example,[97] in which he finds "a *plurality* of brief tales that are impressive by their *uniformity* of composition and *variability* of narrative exposition."[98] Such characteristics demonstrate the authenticity of the miracle stories—to cite just one example—demonstrating that they are legitimate products of an oral culture rather than Hellenistic intrusions (*contra* Bultmann). The intensely dualistic structure of the "polarization stories"[99] promotes oral remembering. "Didactic stories" (akin to Bultmann's apophthegmatic) place information into a memorable context— again a traditional technique of the oral teacher. The parable invites the listener into the story,

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apostles, being instructed by them, and cultivated an "oral Gospel" by continual delivery. When the Gospels were finally written down it was simply a matter of recording what these evangelists had maintained. This compelling theory suffers in light of Synoptic comparison (which indicates some form of textual dependency among the Gospels), and redaction and literary criticisms (which demonstrate that the differences between the Gospels are deliberate, rather than evidence of oral traditional fluctuation). Kelber will attempt to prove that the "oral imperative" cannot account for the compositional structure of the written Gospel, though "it is not intrinsically implausible that Mark imposed his writing authority upon an unorganized oral lore" (79). In this writer's mind, Herder's theory of the office of "evangelist" is persuasive, although oral theory would indicate that no complete Gospel would be produced orally. Rather, the addition of orality research to isagogics might suggest a combination of oral retelling with note-taking (Kelber's objections notwithstanding), both of which served as material for the author's redaction.

[97]One is reminded that oral theory began by comparing the Greek epics with the songs and folktales of Russia and eastern Europe. The story is the quintessential oral form.

[98]Kelber, 46. Emphasis original. We have already seen that the tension between uniformity and variability is characteristic of oral technique. On p. 50 he cites the classic work of Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1958), 70: the "two-fold quality of a folktale: it is amazingly multiform, picturesque and colorful, and, to no less a degree, remarkably uniform and recurrent."

As to the first point, "plurality"—or repetition—must be understood in the light of oral hermeneutics as a positive quality. What Vincent Taylor called a "sign of the limitations of Mark's art as a writer" is actually a dire necessity. Plurality gives the **audience** time for reflection by keeping the word alive before them. "In those circumstances, repetition is the oral substitute for the eye's privilege to revisit words" (Kelber, 67). However, whereas it is a feature of texts to repeat verbatim, orality modulates repetition by variability.

[99]Jesus and antagonist (often demonic), good and evil, praise and blame, etc.

engaging him "metaphorically." In fact, the parable becomes the model for Kelber's entire analysis of the Gospels:

> To sum up, the parables as metaphors invite polyvalent hearings that are negotiated in oral, social contexts. Metaphoricity, orality, and polyvalency militate against the original form and uniform meanings.[100]

The parable bears repeating because it is open-ended and never "fully narrated." It resists the fixedness of writing, which demands that the parable submit to a once-and-for-all explication. And so at this point Kelber's thesis again arises: what happens to oral speech when it is fixed in print?

One must return to the "oral synthesis." Even in an oral context, the parable risks disrupting the synthesis as it "gestures towards meaning instead of delivering it."[101] But as the parable is embedded in text the disruption becomes complete:

> It is in this context of physical interaction and social commonality that oral speech is embedded and from which it receives powerful ideological and situational support. Without this context, words have no existence and understanding is impossible. It may be said, therefore, that in oral speech, both with regard to the effects it achieves and the meaning it creates, nonlinguistic features have priority over linguistic ones. The *reader* of parabolic *texts* lacks this very physical, social contextuality without which hearers are not inclined to find meaning.[102]

Thus Kelber prepares the reader for "Mark as Textuality."

Kelber suggests that as Mark worked the oral tradition into text, he disrupted and disoriented the old oral world. First he **silenced** the tradition:

> For the moment, language has fallen silent; the ground of Jesus' speech and that of his earliest followers is abandoned ... . The text, while asserting itself out of dominant oral traditions and activities, has brought about a freezing of oral life into textual still life. In

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[100]Kelber, 62.

[101]Ibid., 74.

[102]Ibid., 75. This is open to misunderstanding. It is not that language is incidental or even meaningless, but rather that it receives its meaning **in context,** as we have argued in chapter one.

short, the oral legacy has been deracinated and transplanted into a linguistic construct that has lost touch with the living, oral matrix.[103]

Language is removed from the context of the oral synthesis; speaker and hearer are gone; the balance is destroyed; disorientation results.[104] Meaning becomes the creation of the reader apart from the controlling influence of the authoritative speaker.[105] Now Kelber's radical thesis comes to the fore. This process was not accidental; rather, **Mark produced his Gospel intentionally to critique and subvert the oral synthesis.**

A major, unifying theme of the Gospel is Mark's portrayal of the relationship of Jesus and his disciples as *imitatio magistri.* He is the oral teacher, who—in the tradition of Socrates/Plato—will not entrust his teaching to writing; it can only be given through dialogue. Yet Mark portrays the continual failure of this process, the blindness of the disciples and Jesus' frustration therewith.

> *Both the model of a mimetic relationship and the drama of failing discipleship are drawn with equal care by Mark.* This leads us to suggest that the dysfunctional role of the disciples narrates the breakdown of the mimetic process and casts a vote of censure against the guarantors of tradition.[106]

Mark argues that the mimetic system malfunctioned at the critical moment. As he proposes his own alternative—the written Gospel—he gives an apology for the "new technology" by dramatizing the breakdown of the old. The major frontal attack allegedly occurs in chapter thirteen, where Mark warns of prophets claiming to speak for Christ (:5-6, 21), performing signs and wonders (:22).[107] In effect, Mark is to Jesus as Plato was to Socrates; and just as Plato

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[103]Ibid., 91.

[104]Ibid., 95: "Strictly speaking, therefore, the gospel arises not from orality *per se*, but out of the debris of deconstructed orality."

[105]At this point Kelber notes the anxiety which the Fathers expressed concerning the written word—which we, too, have investigated. Primarily, such distrust of writing relates to this concern that the author cannot control the uptake of his message.

[106]Kelber, 97. Emphasis original.

[107]Ibid., 98. The weakness of his argument appears here, where Jesus' warning about **false** prophets is taken to be Mark's critique of prophetic activity in general. Can one honestly

banished the poets, rejecting the oral world of his teacher, so too Mark "banishes" the prophets and the tradition they represent.

Finally, Mark completes the disruption by declining to present the risen Lord. For if the Gospel rejects the "plenipotentiary of Christ," the claim that Christ lives on in his representatives, then it must also concentrate on the death of Christ to the exclusion of his resurrection and post-resurrectional words. Christ is "not only absent, he is silent."[108] In fact, "the written gospel concludes with the narration of the abortive mission of the oral message (16:8). Mary, the mother, ... has thus become instrumental in the final and decisive breakdown of oral transmission."[109] Disciples, prophets, family, all are rejected as guarantors of the tradition, together with the risen Lord for whom they spoke.

Kelber considers this thesis so important that he takes it up again exclusively in his final chapter. Here he argues that textuality equals death[110]—a proposition towards which he has been moving. In the passion narrative he finds no trace of the oral forms which were prevalent in Mark 1-13.[111] Mark has refashioned his material into a text which records a threefold death: of

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say that Mark 13 is a carefully constructed repudiation of the prophetic/apostolic claim that Jesus is present in their words?

[108]Ibid., 100, quoting M. Eugene Boring. The contention is supported by noting that in Mark as a whole, sayings material accounts for only 27.5%, while in Matthew and Luke it is nearly double that. Of course, Kelber fails to note that in place of **words**, Mark concentrates on the **actions** of Jesus. It was also a prophetic claim to be **acting** in Jesus' stead. Why does Mark not refute that?

[109]Ibid., 104. This identification of "Mary [mother] of James" with Jesus' own mother, completes Kelber's claim that the family of Jesus likewise fall under condemnation as bearers of the oral tradition. Mark alone emphasizes the alienation of Jesus from his relatives (3:20-35; 6:1-6).

[110]The chapter title, "Death and Life in the Word of God," is consciously stolen from Walter Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 419-49.

[111]Kelber, 186. Specifically, he finds the passion to be a tightly constructed narrative, lacking "orally identifiable stories and redundancy of typical stories," as well as a diminution of the "sayings tradition."

Jesus, of the Temple, and of the disciples.[112] All of these are naturally tied to the passion story, which, Kelber concludes, must have been Mark's creation.[113] The impetus? Typically, Kelber appeals to the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 70, as the "major social upheaval" which brought about "the need to disestablish the self-regulating oral process and to implement a new state of consciousness through the vehicle of the written medium."[114] The death of Jerusalem called into question the living reality of Jesus, destroyed the center of authority, and thereby called into question the traditional Christology and hermeneutic. The written Gospel by contrast provides a guarantee of continuity.

Kelber's radical thesis is open to manifold objections. Can one read from such subtle clues an all-encompassing agenda in the creation of a new genre? It seems that Kelber **assumes** Mark's criticism of orality, rather than proving it.[115] Furthermore, in light of the unimpeachable evidence that the written word was held under great suspicion, how could Mark hope to unseat the eyewitnesses and bearers of the oral tradition from their seat of authority via an alternative tradition presented only in writing? For, the thesis of complete disruption between oral and written must certainly be wrong. The text could only have gained the acceptance that it did if it

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[112]Ibid., 185-86. The "death" of the disciples is, of course, figurative for their demise.

[113]Ibid., 196.

[114]Ibid., 210.

[115]Thomas Boomershine—himself at the forefront of media studies and the Bible—raises a more incriminating charge: in effect, that Kelber derives his exegesis from historical criticism, produces the same conclusions as historical criticism, yet claims to be rejecting this method as inimical to the oral medium in which the New Testament was composed:

> Kelber's analysis constitutes a hermeneutical circle. His picture of Mark as operating on the other side of the chasm between the oral and the written gospel is based on the exegesis of Mark's characterization of Peter and the disciples. This exegesis is in turn generated by a redaction critical methodology in which the tradition is analyzed from a highly distanced perspective. This picture is thoroughly congruent with the primary orientation of contemporary biblical criticism and the media world within which it has operated. However, the very basis of Kelber's analysis, the impact of media change, raises questions about the methodological paradigm of contemporary historical criticism. ("Peter's Denial as Polemic or Confession: The Implications of Media Criticism for Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 49.

emerged in harmony with oral tradition. This must have been the intention. Rather than in opposition to, the text must be used in conjunction with the authoritative office. It gained authority only because it dovetailed into the ongoing prophetic office, and because it was maintained in a canonical and ecclesiastical context.[116]

Thus, we are again faced with the problem of defining precisely the relationship between written text and oral Gospel in apostolic times. To what has already been considered— and in contrast to Kelber's picture—we add a recent sketch by Helmut Koester, who proposes that literature served the oral tradition in diverse ways. On the mission field,

> [t]here was no need for the production of authoritative written documents. Founding apostles used personal visits in order to nurture the newly created communities. Written communications (letters), as is evident in the Pauline mission, were needed only when their personal presence was made impossible by external circumstances.[117]

Nevertheless, as Christianity was an historical religion, there was a need to provide new and remote communities with an authoritative record of Jesus' words.[118] Distance from the apostles (in time and space) gave impetus to the production of sayings collections.

The other circumstances which Koester suggests might be categorized as liturgical or sacramental:

> (1) The Christian cult story, the passion narrative, which accompanied the ritual celebration of the memorial meal, could be written down in order to be read rather than

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[116]Evidence from the Fathers makes it clear that the written texts of the New Testament functioned alongside the living oral tradition, not in opposition to it—although it is true, as we have noted with Loveday Alexander, that the written was not above suspicion. Roberts, 54, comments: "Eusebius following Clement and Papias compares Mark's Gospel with 'the unwritten teaching of the kerygma of God', reflecting a time when for some churches there was a choice between the two. No doubt the oral tradition was reinforced, as it was in Judaism, with notes; the contrast here is with a genuine book." There was something new in whatever was the first complete Gospel narrative; but was it the bombshell that Kelber suggests?

[117]Helmut Koester, "Written Gospels or Oral Tradition?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 294.

[118]Ibid., 295: "Wherever the life-giving words of Jesus functioned soteriologically, the medium of writing must have offered itself as a convenient vehicle for the transmission of sayings of Jesus."

simply told during the celebration of the ritual. This resulted in the composition of written passion narratives ....

(2) Catechisms were written down early in order to standardize the instruction for newly converted members who were to be baptized.[119]

Koester suggests that the Gospel of Mark, which appears as "a passion narrative with an extended introduction,"[120] developed out of the former, while the more catechetical Gospel of Matthew arose from the latter. Rather than attributing the written Gospel to an evangelist "with an ax to grind," Koester draws on the realities of early church life to offer a convincing plurality of causes.[121]

In a pioneering example of "oral exegesis," Thomas Boomershine challenges the picture of the disciples which undergirds Kelber's whole thesis.[122] He investigates Jesus' confrontation with Peter (Jn. 21:15-23) to determine whether it should be read as a "polemic"— an attempt to discredit Peter and his cohorts—, or as a "confession," that is, a sympathetic portrayal of Peter as he is drawn to confess his sin and be reconciled to the Lord. He argues that throughout the Gospel Mark shows the disciples, even with their failures, in a sympathetic light.[123] He thus disputes Kelber's reading:

> ... the impact of the story is not polemical. It is a historical fact that people have not been alienated from Peter when they have heard the story of his denial over the centuries. The

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[119]Ibid., 294.

[120]Ibid., 294.

[121]The idea that the liturgical needs of Baptism and Eucharist were behind the production of the written Gospels is argued in detail by Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986). Likewise, the need for epistles as arising from **geographical** rather than **temporal** distance (i.e., their death), is at the heart of John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

[122]Boomershine, *op. cit.*, 55-60. As noted above, Boomershine argues that Kelber's idea that Mark portrays the disciples in a negative light is simply borrowed from redaction criticism—in fact, from Kelber's very own previous work!

[123]The implications of this conclusion should be obvious. Ibid., 61: "If a Markan polemic against Peter and the disciples is historically improbable, so also is a polemic against the oral gospel."

story has not had that effect. If anything, people have loved and revered Peter, particularly in relation to this story.[124]

Furthermore, he contends, when one attempts to put Kelber's interpretation into a real oral reading, one fails. The "anti-Petrine" reading does not work. The view that Mark wrote his Gospel as a polemic against the disciples and the oral tradition they represent functions only hypothetically in the silent world of the historical critic at his desk.[125]

In other words, Kelber fails to take sufficient account of how Mark's **written** Gospel continued to function **orally**, since it was always "published" aloud.[126] Gilbert Bartholomew,

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[124]Ibid., 56. He concludes his investigation: "Mark was not a Plato who developed philosophical and conceptual thought and who wrote dialogues and allegories. Mark continued like the poets to tell the stories. And the Church did not disassociate itself from the storytellers and poets of the traditions of Israel in the way that Plato disassociated the Academy from the rhapsodes and the Homeric traditions. Indeed, the Church canonized their writings and revered Peter as the first Pope" (62).

[125]Boomershine, 59-60, argues persuasively that the psychologically-distanced method of the modern, silent exegete produces innumerable interpretations which are "plausible," but which do not stand up to the "sympathetic" method of oral reading. Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 42, presents another point of view, based on Ong's doctrine that oral literature is characteristically antagonistic and polemical: "Accustomed to an adversarial atmosphere, a first-century audience hearing the Gospel would probably take the negative portrayal of the disciples much less seriously than contemporary Marcan scholars do." Such polarized characters were intended to teach "virtue" and warn against "vice." The audience would not see the portrayal as *ad hominem*.

[126]Boomershine, 51, puts it succinctly: "Kelber assumes a more or less immediate transition from the medium of orality to the modern world of textual experience as silent reading." Such an assumption runs contrary to the consensus of the field that media change is additive and gradual. New media do not replace, but supplement their forerunners. Again, "My evaluation is that Kelber has collapsed 1900 years of media development into a forty year period in the first century" (60). J. Navone argues similarly in his book review: "The author's assumption that the oral metaphysics of presence—the reality of Jesus' presence—is objectionable to Mark is at odds with the liturgical life of the Christian community, which is served by and reflected in Mark's production of his text," *Gregorianum* 65 (1984): 211. See also Arthur Dewey's strong challenge, "A Re-Hearing of Romans 10:1-15," *Semeia* 65 (1994): "… he [Kelber] failed, in my opinion, to bring in the fundamental issue of the power conveyed through this written tradition. … The written text in the ancient world was not silent; rather, it was read aloud, indeed performed, and in so doing actually increased the potential of conveying a tradition through the audience's participation" (112).

Kelber, 90, simply dismisses the issue: "… although profoundly nourished by spoken words and probably meant to be spoken itself, the gospel nevertheless exists in written words." But if the act of writing can so fundamentally change the narrative, what does orality theory have

especially, raises this criticism. He notes that while written texts **can** survive independently of a

social setting (as scrolls in a clay jar, for instance), they actually do arise and function in

particular social settings.[127] And though writing cannot record **all** aspects of oral production, it

need not be totally divorced from the same. He comments:

> Written texts, then, silenced the language of the gospel only insofar as they are made up of
> visible marks on a writing surface which in and of themselves have no sound whatsoever.
> When they were taken up and read aloud, the language they conveyed was not devoid of
> sound. In contrast to the configuration of elements constituting what we term the "oral
> tradition," written texts stood in opposition *only* to *memory* as a means of transmission,
> *not* to *sound*.[128]

This refreshing breeze of common sense brings a welcome course correction to Kelber—

especially as it comes from within the same field.[129]

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to add to historical criticism? Birger Gerhardsson concurs with our criticism: "Kelber's book
contains numerous untenable generalizations of the differences between the oral and the written
word" (522 n. 42).

[127] Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "Feed My Lambs: John 21:15-19 as Oral Gospel," *Semeia*
39 (1987): 72.

[128]Bartholomew, 74. Emphasis original. Walter Ong, "Text as Interpretation: Mark and
After," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 9, suggests another analysis:

> But removing an utterance from its author is not removing it from discourse. No utterance
> can exist outside discourse, outside a transactional setting. Putting an utterance into script
> can only interrupt discourse, string it out indefinitely in time and space. But not "fix" it
> [*sic*]. ... [W]hen someone reads the text—only then does the text become an utterance and
> only then does the suspended discourse continue, and with it verbalized meaning. Texts
> have meaning only insofar as they emerge from and are converted into the extratextual. All
> text is pretext.

Ong agrees that texts are silent in and of themselves. But they return to the world of sound
through the oral production, and in the reading thereof the modern hearer enters into discourse
with the ancient author.

[129]Kelber, in fact, repeatedly argues in a circle: e.g., Mark shows an absence of Q-
material; therefore, Mark is opposed to oral tradition. "In chapter 3 we attributed the paucity of
sayings in Mark to deliberate authorial reservation toward the genre. Undoubtedly the
phenomenon is directly related to the virtual absence of Q material in the gospel" (207). But Q is
by **definition** material which is **not** in Mark! The absolute identification of Q with the oral
tradition, as if Mark omitted the entire oral tradition when writing his Gospel, is a patently false
assumption. Likewise, his argument for the absence of "death" in the oral tradition is ludicrous.
Kelber believes on principle that the theme of death is antithetical to the preoccupation of orality
with "living presence." "Yet," Dewey argues, "the *Iliad* shows that a central concern with death

Once one realizes, however, the fallacy of postulating a complete schism, an irreconcilability between the oral and the written Gospels, Kelber's keen insight into the function of oral proclamation becomes profoundly useful. When the text in a secondarily oral world remains tied to oral proclamation, the prophetic function is **not** lost. What Kelber ascribes to Q can legitimately be applied to the Scriptures in canonical context:

> The hermeneutical principle of prophetic speech is unequivocally stated in Matt. 10:40//Luke 10:16: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." ... Endowed with prophetic authority, they speak the sayings not as mere human words, but as words of Jesus, and not the Jesus of the past, but in his present authority.[130]

The supposed oral hermeneutic of Q is, in fact, simply the Scriptural concept of **office**, of authoritative, apostolic proclamation—whether by mouth alone or by spoken text.[131]

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is quite possible in an oral media world" (34 n. 9). One does the ancient world no justice by eliminating *a priori* certain mental capabilities.

Kelber notes that Q-type sayings material is absent from the passion narrative; therefore, he concludes, the passion is not oral but a written invention (192-93, 201-3). But Christ's death, "what put an end to his speaking" (201), would only be "an embarrassment" to orality if there were no resurrection—which he himself argues is an essential part of the oral Gospel. "Death" is an absent theme in the "oral material" (=Q) because, once again, the passion narrative is by definition not Q—for it is common to all the Gospels. Raymond Brown, in reviewing Kelber's book, notes: "Assumptions about negative Q theology are often dubious because we do not know whether Q represented a complete theology or was meant only as a supplement to an existing tradition," *Commonweal* (21 October 1983): 569. One might even exclaim how precarious **any** assumptions about the theology of a hypothetical document are. And what of the *kerygma*? Does not the content of the preached Gospel as recorded in Acts always necessarily include the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection? Kelber makes no attempt to refute the picture of early Christianity presented in Acts.

[130]Kelber, 202. He cites this as an example of Q's oral/prophetic hermeneutic, yet without dealing with the saying's **present** context in Matthew and Luke. How can the allegedly first Gospel, Mark, reject a hermeneutic so strongly, which the later, more developed Gospels accept? If Matthew and Luke "deprived Q of the very trait constitutive of its oral hermeneutic: the prophetically living voice of Jesus" (203), how could they leave this pivotal statement intact? His only feeble response comes later: "Once the written form of gospel existed, Matthew and Luke, as well as John, could revive the voice of the living Lord" (209). Does this not contradict his entire study? How do orality and textuality suddenly become compatible?

[131]Cf. 2 Thess. 2:15, "whether by word or by letter." Kelber himself explains the theology of office without realizing it: "The speakers of Q sayings, for example, were not bound to a historical figure of the past, but authorized by a Jesus who continued to speak through their words. A separation between the words of the historical Jesus and those of his followers was thus

This comes most clear as Kelber discusses Paul. Whereas most exegetes find the Gospels more oral than the epistles, Kelber proposes the reverse:

> As far as his authorial identity is concerned, Mark has retreated behind his text. Paul, by contrast, plays up his first person singular authority in the manner of oral speech ... . The apostle's preference for writing letters, therefore, may point to a fundamentally oral disposition toward language.[132]

Though Paul wrote reluctantly, preferring to be present in person, he nonetheless believed that the epistle could convey something of his presence.[133]

Kelber cites profuse examples to defend the oral mode which reigns in the epistles. Paul uses auditory images for his deepest thoughts and experiences.[134] The Gospel is always discussed with verbs of speaking,[135] and is synonymous with ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.[136] The Word is the power of God (Rom. 1:16), which is profoundly effective (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:18) and life-giving (Phil. 2:16).[137] "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom. 10:17), and it is the spoken Word which cuts to the heart (Rom. 10:8-10).[138] Even words in the "obedience/disobedience" field are

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not only blurred, but often nonexistent. Their words were the words of the Son of man, and his words were their words" (203).

[132]Kelber, 140.

[133]See chapter four for a discussion of the "apostolic parousia."

[134]Paul was "called" to "proclaim," and God reveals himself primarily through "calling." Christ will return with "the voice of an archangel" and "the trumpet of God" (1 Thess. 4:15-17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:52). Life is called into being by the voice of God (Rom. 4:17).

[135]εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, λαλεῖν, καταγγέλλειν, κηρύσσειν.

[136]Citing Kittel, Kelber stresses correctly that λόγος is not an abstraction, but rather activistic, "the living, preached word of the gospel" (144).

[137]For it is the Spirit who is active in the proclaimed Word (1 Cor. 2:4, 13; 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; Gal. 3:2, 5, 14).

[138]Kelber, 146: "While there is no such thing as a face-to-face encounter with a text, the mouth-to-heart engagement in oral communication fosters personal and intimate relations. The spoken word, emanating from interiority and entering another interiority, creates a deep-set bonding of speaker with auditor." This is the oral synthesis.

at root auditory.[139] There is also much pre-Pauline oral material—all from the context of worship—such as "confessions, formulae, hymns, catechesis, prayer, acclamation, and prophetic words."[140] The oral world of thought is certainly ubiquitous in Paul.

As in Mark, so also in Paul does Kelber discover the oral/written conflict. Whereas in Mark, however, Kelber suggested that the author used writing as a challenge to the old oral tradition, in Paul he discovers a champion of the oral over against what is written. Insofar as Paul speaks with apostolic authority as a representative of Christ—what we noted above—this is an admirable observation. What Kelber proposes, however, is more radical: the identification in Paul of Law/Gospel with written/oral. Paul's "aversion" to the Law is actually hostility to writing.

In Galatians three Paul certainly equates the Gospel way of faith with hearing.[141] Faith, coming through the Word into the heart, internalizes salvation. The works of the Law deal with externals, marks on the flesh, thus failing to achieve the purpose of the Word.[142] Paul consistently refers to this Law as "written."[143] Kelber:

> This written complexification of the Word appears to be contrary to the personalized communication fostered by the oral gospel and faith that comes from hearing. There is, therefore, a linguistic dimension to the Pauline polemic against the Law, which connects the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13: *tès kataras tou nomou*), its tragic inability to give life (3:21), with its objectification into a written record.[144]

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[139]ἀκοή, ὑπακοή.

[140]Kelber, 148. See also our discussion below.

[141]ἀκοῆς πίστεως (Gal. 3:2, 5).

[142]Kelber, 152.

[143]See especially Gal. 3:10 - γέγραπται ... τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ... ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ. Kelber, 153, explains: "Insofar as it is recorded by the written medium, the Law renders the obligation to live up to '*all* that is written down in the book' ever more difficult."

[144]Kelber, 153. He adds also the "mediated" character of the Law (Gal. 3:19-20) versus the immediacy of the oral Word.

The Law enslaves, constricts, closes in upon those whom it can get in its grasp. This, Kelber argues, is in accord with the tendency of writing to produce "closure."[145]

One should not be surprised that Kelber buttresses his new matrix of Paul with an appeal to 2 Cor. 3:1-6, as Ong before him.[146] In this passage Paul apparently deals with "Divine Man" apostles, who presented written letters of commendation to the Corinthian Christians. Paul not only challenges their letters, but presses his attack to the Law as it is written. Paul's statement, "the letter kills; the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6), is, according to Kelber, "a full-blown discussion on hermeneutics":

> *To gramma* constitutes what is manifestly *gegrammenon*, and what is written lacks the quality of the Spirit due to its "grammatological" nature. The ideal letter, on the other hand, which is internalized and personalized, has overcome the externalization of the *gramma*.[147]

Again Kelber asserts that the Law is unable to save because it is **written**, and thus lacks the Spirit.[148]

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[145]Does this logic hold? Does the final, unalterable, fixed character of writing make it somehow more appropriate to the Law? Kelber, 155, argues: "For Paul the Law as written authority locks Abraham's heirs behind its verbal walls, and, instead of opening up to God, alienates and creates a sphere of sin." But such conclusions are specious at best; at worst they turn Paul's argument on its head. The Law is not unable to save **because** it is in writing. Rather, Paul argues that the condemnation of the Law, which in itself is unable to save, cannot be escaped due to its **written**, fixed quality. We will pursue this critique below.

[146]For a further discussion of the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3 see the addendum on p. 241, below.

[147]Kelber, 157. The danger of this interpretation is clear from Kelber's analysis of the polemical context: "The latter [the Divine Man hermeneutic] put a high premium on the written word because they will have been convinced of the intrinsic affinity of *pneuma* with *gramma*. Hermeneutically, their inclination to attribute commanding authority to both personal and heavenly letters rested on the conviction that the written word served as carrier of the Spirit" (157). Does Paul disconnect the Spirit from the written Word? Is that the point of his polemic?

[148]If this is really the source of Paul's aversion to the Law, it is rather hard to explain, historically speaking. For Mark certainly **could** have used the new technology of writing against the old-style oral prophets. But how could Paul as an "oralist" object to the written character of a Law which had been in writing already for some 1,500 years! Its written-ness was no *novum*. It was **produced** in a decidedly oral world—far more oral than Paul's own. Kelber does not address this paradox. In fact, he presents his own paradox: that Paul objected to the Law as any

Kelber's interpretation of Paul must finally fall victim to his own words. For Kelber

detects in Paul a hint of the criticism of the oral prophets and tradition, which will blossom in

Mark.[149] "It is precisely in those chapters [1 Cor. 7 & 9] that urge a break with the oral, life-

giving powers of wisdom," Kelber argues, "that Paul strengthens his case by frequent appeal to

written authority."[150] In 1 Corinthians Kelber cites ten instances where Paul appeals, "for it is

written,"[151] culminating in the charge: "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). Kelber

must finally conclude:

> When faced with the extreme consequences of oral wisdom [the assumed problem in 1
> Corinthians], Paul, preacher of the oral gospel, is here compelled to reconsider his
> hermeneutical priorities and to invoke the norm of Scripture. "Do not go beyond what is
> written" is a wholly exceptional statement in Pauline theology, and in making it the apostle
> has at this point sanctioned the written medium as a basis of the new wisdom.[152]

One fails to see how this admission does not destroy Kelber's entire thesis concerning Paul!

Certainly the material cited from 1 Corinthians demonstrates that Paul was not adverse to the

Law simply because it was written.

To Kelber is certainly due the credit for bringing "oral exegesis" to the mainstream. His

work is fundamentally important. Nevertheless, despite the accolades it has received,[153] it

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Jew would object to the iconic representation of God. The Law is simply a **written** icon, an
external objectification of God (168). Thus, according to Kelber, Paul objects to the written Law
on the basis of the written Law itself!

[149]Kelber, 175-77. He cites especially Paul's use of sayings of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:10-
11; 9:14). He includes also a list of possible allusions in 1 Corinthians to the Gospel of Thomas.
In each case he argues that Paul disassociates himself from the saying.

[150]Ibid., 176.

[151]1 Cor. 1:19, 31; 2:9; 3:19, 20; 9:9; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45, 54.

[152]Kelber, 177.

[153]See especially the examinations of his *opus magnum* in *Semeia* 39 (1987): Ong,
"Text as Interpretation: Mark and After," 7-26; and Thomas J. Farrell, "Kelber's Breakthrough,"
27-45. Farrell hails Kelber as the author to answer Ong's cry for a "definitive breakthrough" of
orality into biblical studies. In the same issue Kelber, 97-106, responds to the critiques which
Boomershine and Bartholomew have raised. Thomas Brodie's review concludes: "If at times his
descriptions of NT orality turn out to be as misplaced as Columbus's descriptions of Asia, they

remains deeply flawed, as we have demonstrated. Thomas Boomershine is one who continues to challenge Kelber's radical approach to media shifts, arguing against a "great divide" between Jesus and the early church (including Paul). On this point, he finds Kelber actually falling into the same trap as Bultmann himself, whose simplistic views of orality and literacy led him in his *Theology of the New Testament* to identify Jesus with oral Jewish sources and Paul with literate Greek culture.[154] Kelber applies the same criteria to the "literate" work of the evangelists. Boomershine argues that such a divide is illogical:

> From a communications perspective, our present picture paints Jesus as the oral precursor for the more literary movement that rapidly developed around his memory. ... Thus, the watershed between oral and written communications systems is presently located between Jesus and the traditions of the church.
>
> Yet this conclusion is itself a puzzle. Is it probable that there would be such a radical discontinuity between the founder of a movement and the movement itself?[155]

Boomershine argues that the relationship of the media was much more complex. On the one hand, Jesus was certainly literate to a degree; on the other, the ancient world was far less "literate" than modern definitions of the term imply. The gulf between Jewish teacher and Hellenistic philosophers is not so great as once presumed. Boomershine's study concludes:

> When the interaction of oral and written communications in antiquity is seen as the interaction of communications systems instead of simply as a neutral stage in the formation, transmission, and meaning of individual literary works, the outline of a different picture of Jesus of Nazareth emerges. The image is somewhat more literate and is set against a more thoroughly Greek background. The picture also reveals more lines of connection with Paul and the early church than have appeared in the past. These lines appear because the basic transition from orality to literacy in the culture of antiquity happened *before* rather than *between* them.[156]

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are nevertheless the mistakes of a courageous pioneer," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984): 575.

[154]Thomas Boomershine, "Jesus of Nazareth and the Watershed of Ancient Orality and Literacy," *Semeia* 65 (1994): 10.

[155]Ibid., 10-11.

[156]Ibid., 29-30. Emphasis original.

Kelber himself now acknowledges that his seminal work over-stated the case. But he claims that it was necessary in order to gain a hearing for this new methodology.

> The concept of tradition as biosphere suggests that the great divide thesis, which pits oral tradition vis-à-vis gospel text, can in the end not supply the answer to questions concerning tradition and gospel. If the emphasis in *OWG* [*The Oral and the Written Gospel*] fell on that division, it was because a novel approach requires a strong thesis. It does not, however, discredit orality studies any more than it outdates examination of the role of scribality in the life of tradition. In fact, we need just such strong theses for revision and reorientation. To grasp the overlaps and interfaces, we have to understand the hermeneutics of speech and writing, even if they rarely, if ever, existed in a pure state.[157]

He thus admits that his earlier analysis was a caricature, designed to play up the differences between the media stages of the tradition. He would ultimately agree with Boomershine, however, that things are just not that simple.

> Given our growing awareness of the media complexity of presynoptic realities, we cannot assent to models that recreate tradition as exclusively textual processes of production, transmission, and transformation, depersonalized and diagrammatically traceable through space, any more than we can accept a reduction of tradition to discourse and the aesthetics of reception, untouched by literacy and transacted in primal oral purity.[158]

Thus, he continues to reject both the Bultmann and the Gerhardsson models, as he did in *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, but he rejects also his own simplistic description of the tradition passing (disrupted) through the oral to the written medium.[159]

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[157]Werner Kelber, "Jesus and Tradition: Words in Time, Words in Space," *Semeia* 65 (1994): 159-60. With his conception of tradition as "biosphere," Kelber departs from the notion that tradition is bound up with orality in opposition to textuality, with one medium rather than another. Rather, tradition is "a more inclusive and less tangible reality than our literate senses let us know" (159). Receptor-oriented communications theories revived interest in tradition because it pointed to the importance of the receptor's cultural context, the world in which the receptor lives. "Tradition in this broadest sense is largely an invisible nexus of references and identities from which people draw sustenance, in which they live, and in relation to which they make sense of their lives. This invisible biosphere is at once the most elusive and the foundational feature of tradition" (159).

[158]Ibid., 158.

[159]Later, Kelber himself argues against a "Great Divide" theory of media relationships; "Modalities of Communication, Cognition, and Physiology of Perception: Orality, Rhetoric, Scribality," *Semeia* 65 (1994):
Separating one modality of communication as a distinct entity from every other is likely to distort linguistic realities. It is more advisable to attend to phenomena such as residual oral

Monumental though it is, Kelber's *magnum opus* remains heavily theoretical, rarely dealing with the nuts and bolts of the oral hermeneutic as a new method of criticism. One promising effort which avoids Kelber's errors is the previously-cited study of John 21:15-19 by Gilbert Bartholomew.[160] The traditional reaction to the threefold, repetitive structure of Jesus' encounter with Peter was to seek a fine difference in meaning between the "synonyms" ἀγαπάω and φιλέω—suggesting that Jesus was questioning the kind of love Peter felt. Bartholomew argues that instead of such textual concordance studies, one should seek the probable oral interpretation. What emotions do Jesus and Peter express? Can this be determined from their actions and relationship up to this point? Is Peter "matter-of-fact," "warmly assured," or "puzzled"? The tone chosen reflects a decision made about the **plot**. Is Peter aware or unaware of his betrayal? Is he "grieved" out of repentance, or annoyance at the impertinent question?

Likewise, what is Jesus' attitude towards Peter? Accusation? Grief? Disappointment? A loving desire to lead him to repentance? Cold detachment? Bartholomew surveys the emotions which John shows Jesus displaying towards his disciples throughout the Gospel, and concludes that a very wide range of possibilities exists.[161] There are deep theological consequences to one's decision. First is the question of how the Law is preached. He notes:

> Contemporary listeners are usually repelled by a rendering of this story in which Jesus is made to sound distressed and biting in his attitude towards Peter instead of understanding and warm. Such an oral presentation conflicts with their theology of Judgment.[162]

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traces or orality filtered through textuality, transformation of voice and the rhetorical outreach of texts, cooperation and tension between oral and textual drives, the engagement of oral and visual, or audio-visual aids in the work of perception, the tangled interfaces of speech with writing, the gradual dominance of one medium over other media, and the reabsorption of a prior heritage into a culture shaped by new media technologies. (194)
The stark contrast between this statement and the thesis of *The Oral and the Written Gospel* is quite remarkable!

[160]See especially pp. 75-92.

[161]Bartholomew, 86, includes: "exasperation," "deep distress," "a biting or ridiculing tone of voice," "distress and impatience."

[162]Ibid., 89.

Secondly, it affects one's Christology:

> When, in line with a prevalent current tradition for reading the scriptures, readers consistently endow Jesus' words with an attitude of objective detachment regardless of clues to the contrary, they *impose* a docetic christology which flies in the face of the clues.[163]

Bartholomew attributes a very wide range of emotions to Jesus—including many which are considered "negative." The oral question challenges one's understanding of Jesus' humanity.

Bartholomew concludes, finally, that Peter was, indeed, aware and ashamed of his sin. Jesus confronts Peter with his failure to live up to his name (calling him Simon, not Peter, for he has not been a "rock"). While differences in **wording** are negligible,[164] Bartholomew argues that there is a growth in intensity through the three questions; as Jesus' questions increase in urgency, Peter moves from shame to grief. Thus, Bartholomew shows how the oral factor addresses interpretive questions of plot, characterization, even deep theological issues—all of which lie undisturbed as long as the text is silent.

Another significant work of oral exegesis was actually composed as a challenge to Kelber's reading of Mark. Joanna Dewey argues "that the Gospel of Mark *as a whole*—not just in its individual episodes—shows the legacy of orality, indeed, that its methods of composition are primarily oral ones."[165] While orality is not untouched by its interface with the technology of writing, the written Gospel shows more than occasional oral flavor. Dewey proposes that the very characteristics of orality ("mimesis") which Plato condemns in the poets are present in Mark. First is the concern with *gignomena* "happenings" instead of abstract thought. This is evident in the episodic structure of the Gospel. Sayings do not float independently of the

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[163]Ibid., 90. Emphasis original.

[164]First Jesus asks, "Do you love me **more than these?**"—calling Peter to recall his earlier boast (John 13:37). Then he asks, in effect, "Do you love me **at all?**" The third question— by Bartholomew's argument—must have expressed another level of intensity by a change only in **elocution**. The change in verb from ἀγαπάω to φιλέω may simply mark the end of the sequence (see below on "Lists").

[165]Dewey, 33. Emphasis original.

concrete situations in which they arose.[166] Secondly, Plato dislikes the *horata* "visually concrete." In Mark, one often finds such colorful details and panoramic descriptions which enable the audience to picture the narrative.[167] Thirdly, Plato objects to the *polla* "many" instead of the "one"—that is, to the additive, aggregate character of oral narrative. An abstract, textual thinker develops his creation linearly. The oral story teller "makes no attempt at climactic linear development."[168] Mark's lack of order, or disregard for modern ideas of plot, are thus easily explained.

Two more points are of interest. Dewey discerns in Mark what Havelock has called "the acoustic principle of the echo."[169] Not only are individual episodes narrated in patterns of *inclusio*, parallelism, and chiasm, but even the complete narrative shows such formulation:

> ... the basic method for assisting the memory to retain a series of distinct meanings is to frame the first of them in a way which will suggest or forecast a later meaning which will recall the first without being identical with it. What is to be said and remembered later is cast in the form of an echo of something said already; the future is encoded in the present.[170]

Rather than a linear sequence, the Marcan narrative evidences such overlapping, repetitive sequences. One healing is patterned like the next, while the next echoes the previous and foretells another.[171]

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[166]Ibid., 35. So also is memory facilitated with "chiasm, ring composition, and verbal echoing."

[167]Ibid., 36. Note that this is different from the preference of written media for visual analogies, with the charts and systematics characteristic of Ramism.

[168]Ibid., 37. Dewey cites extensive examples of pericopes in Mark introduced and connected simply by καί. Do modern Bible versions do a disservice when they translate this additive style into a modern analytical system of "when," "while," "thus," and "then"?

[169]Ibid., 38, quoting Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 147.

[170]Dewey, 39.

[171]Ibid., 39-42, elaborates this point by comparing the miracles in Mk. 8:22-26 with 10:46-52 and 7:31-37. She notes how Albert Lord took such "doublets" not as evidence of multiple traditions or free composition (as Bultmann), but as a mark of true oral composition.

Secondly, Dewey considers the ending of Mark in terms of the theory that Mark is a "parable-writ-large." As Kelber correctly asserted, the parable is a completely oral device, depending on the interaction between speaker and audience. Dewey contends:

> As long as the Gospel was performed orally, the open ending might function very well before a live audience. Yet when the Gospel became treated as a writing and its parabolic function no longer understood, its open ending would be ambiguous and intolerable and the longer endings bringing resolution would be needed.[172]

One can easily imagine the audience asking in suspense, "Is that all? What does it mean? Now what?" and so on, opening the door for further teaching by the speaker. Thus, Dewey concludes that Mark shows ample evidence of being the culmination of a long-standing oral tradition, rather than a radical break with the past.

A much earlier study by Charles Lohr applied the insights of oral folk-lore research to the Gospel of Matthew. While it might today be considered rather mechanical, it clearly and exhaustively unearths Matthew's oral methods. Lohr's choice of Matthew is more than fortuitous; a preliminary comment foreshadows the results of his study:

> I have omitted from this paper any consideration of the Third Gospel, because Lk's combination of the materials, destined for a different audience, seems to be of a more deliberately literary (as distinguished from oral) character. Its antecedents are perhaps to be sought in the Greek tradition of historical writing.[173]

One clue leading to this conclusion is Matthew's "repetition of formulae": "In contradistinction to the practice of Lk, who strives as far as possible to vary his expressions, Mt holds on to an apt expression once he has found it, and uses it repeatedly."[174] But bare repetition is itself only a feature of the deeper patter of oral structuring. Lohr organizes Matthew's repetitive devices into

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[172]Ibid., 43.

[173]Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 404.

[174]Ibid., 407. Lohr cites such examples as: "the Prophets and the Law," "heirs to the kingdom," "the lost sheep of Israel's house," "blind guides," and "brood of snakes"; lengthier formulae such as "Let him who has ears to hear listen," "At that same time," and "When Jesus had finished this discourse."

categories, techniques by which he indicates the various divisions of his Gospel, and by which he focuses the tradition thematically.

(1) *Inclusio* - Known also as ring composition, this is the technique by which a poem is begun and ended with the same word or phrase. In oral recitation it serves to mark that a poem had ended. But within a longer composition it is used repeatedly to frame off and link "episodes, similes, descriptions and digressions"[175] within the web of narrative. One fascinating *inclusio* Lohr suggests frames the entire Gospel:

> His characteristic title for Jesus is Immanuel—a name foretold by Isaiah (Is 7,14) and explained by Mt at the outset of his Gospel as meaning "God with us" (Mt 1,23). At the very close of his book, the Evangelist records the promise of the glorified Christ upon his departure from this world: "I will be with you always, to the very close of the age" (28,20). Thus we have an *inclusio* which gives the spirit of the whole work.[176]

(2) **Refrain** - By the repetition of a common refrain the speaker is able to group verses and to mark the close of an oral unit. But on a larger scale, the device serves to organize vast amounts of material. Lohr notes: "The most obvious example of this is Matthew's use of the phrase, 'When Jesus had finished this discourse' (7,28; 11,1; 13,53; 19,1; 26,1) to group his sayings material in five sermons."[177] When one sees this refrain as a traditional oral **device**, one example among many refrains, one is rescued from the need to discover one **single**, necessary outline to the Gospel.

(3) **Foreshadowing** - In oral "literature" there is a prominent tendency to prepare the reader for upcoming incidents in the story. Again, this serves to interconnect the narrative. Foreshadowing is pervasive in Matthew, right from the opening words: "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Matthew expresses in the genealogy many of the themes he will subsequently explain and explore. His frequent use of dreams to foreshadow events further

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[175]Ibid., 409.

[176]Ibid., 410.

[177]Ibid., 411.

establishes that supernatural forces are behind the scenes of the narrative. The author thereby predisposes his audience to react in a certain way to each new story or saying.

(4) **Retrospection** - The counterpart of foreshadowing, retrospection is a method of relating events to what has gone before by means of summaries and repeated words and phrases. Like the previous devices, this is common in Homer and other Greek literature, for which Lohr provides copious reference. The strongest example in Matthew is the repeated summary statement concerning Jesus' miraculous deeds: "Then great crowds came to him bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, or dumb, and many others. And they laid them down at his feet, and he cured them, so that the people were astonished to see the dumb speak, the lame walk and the blind see" (Mt. 15:30-31). Lohr argues that these summaries (see also 4:23-24; 8:16; 9:35; 11:5; 12:15; 14:35-36; 21:14) connect episodes which otherwise tend to fragmentation. But more importantly, Matthew thereby presses the reader to make the same identification which Jesus urges upon John the Baptizer (11:2-6)—that he is the promised Messiah of Isaiah 35 and 61.

Lohr traces out further examples of oral technique on a small scale, including the "grouping of like materials" and "repetition of key words."[178] But perhaps his most fascinating contribution is the application of *inclusio* to the larger structure of the Gospel. On this scale, Lohr calls this technique "concentric symmetry, that is, according to the pattern a b c x c b a."[179] In this careful balancing act, large chunks of similar material are mirrored around a prominent central pivot. Discover the symmetry and one can find the pivot which to the author is of central importance.

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[178]Ibid., 420-24.

[179]Ibid., 424. At this point one must object to Lohr's evaluation of the Gospel of Luke as less oral, for perhaps the most intensive work on concentric symmetry has been done on this Gospel: see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

In an elaborate demonstration, Lohr gives detailed proof for the structure which he has

uncovered, which can be briefly schematized:

1-4	Narrative: Birth and beginnings
5-7	SERMON: BLESSINGS, ENTERING KINGDOM
8-9	Narrative: Authority and invitation
10	SERMON: MISSION DISCOURSE
11-12	Narrative: Rejection by this generation
13	SERMON: PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM
14-17	Narrative: Acknowledgment by disciples
18	SERMON: COMMUNITY DISCOURSE
19-22	Narrative: Authority and invitation
23-25	SERMON: WOES, COMING OF KINGDOM
26-28	Narrative: Death and rebirth[180]

The pivot suggested by this scheme is a natural one: the great central discourse on the nature of

the kingdom. Such symmetry overcomes the problems raised by the traditional sermons-narration

scheme: "The Gospel cannot be divided into five books each of which is made up of sermon plus

narrative, or vice versa, because whichever way it is taken, there is one narrative section left

over."[181] Whatever one may think of this structure, it is dramatic evidence that orality research is

promising.

Lohr's investigation illustrates to what extent an oral poet would go to arrange

traditional material which he held in great respect. In fact, he considers Papias' words concerning

Matthew and Mark to be clarified by oral research:

Papias tells us that, whereas Mt "arranged the sayings," Mk did not make "any special
arrangements of the Lord's sayings," but nevertheless "he did not go wrong," because he
wrote down a saying as he remembered it and tried not to omit anything.[182]

Thus, Lohr suggests, Papias' comment that Mark wrote things down accurately, οὐ μέντοι τάξει

"though not in order," is not a comment about Mark's disregard for chronology, but rather a

judgment that Mark forsook the usual technique of "ordering" the material in order to reproduce

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[180]Lohr, 427.

[181]Ibid., 428.

[182]Ibid., 434. The reference is to Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.*, III:39,14.

Peter's preaching intact. Papias' words perhaps betray a controversy within the church concerning Mark's work, that it was less valuable because of this lack of order. Papias defends Mark's work, yet, as history shows, the church was so steeped in orality that Matthew quickly became the preferred volume. A fascinating theory!

There have been many exhaustive investigations of such techniques as chiasm, *inclusio,* and alternation—what are now recognized as oral methods. One of the best is by H. Van Dyke Parunak.[183] He suggests that oralists use such devices the way moderns use fonts, paragraphs, footnotes, tables, and so on—benefits of typesetting—to group segments of like material, mark secondary material, to unify and to emphasize. Among his valuable contributions are the following:

(1) Chiastic structures of the "internal" kind (that is, all elements of the chiasm are within the unit) mark off units like modern paragraph indentations or chapter headings. The completion of the chiasm marks the completion of the unit.[184]

(2) The "external *inclusio,*" by contrast, sets off secondary material from the main course of the argument. Formally, it is defined as a unit to which the *inclusio* is external—that is, it precedes and follows, but is not a part of the unit. "After speakers interrupt their train of thought, whether to answer a query or to extemporize, they frequently resume their argument by repeating, often unconsciously, a phrase from just before the interruption."[185] Eph. 3:1, 14 is a good example.[186]

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[183]H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Biblica* 62 (1981): 153-68.

[184]Ibid., 156-60.

[185]Ibid., 162.

[186]This explanation is clearly superior to various critical theories that a source has been interpolated at such a place. Distantly separated verses can be shown to flow into each other not because they once did before something was added, but because the author is consciously marking off his own digression.

(3) Where the two panels of a chiasm are of unequal length, the shorter may often be compared to a modern table of contents or outline. This serves to unify text. Genesis 10 is his major example.[187]

(4) The chiasm may also be used to analyze material into categories—thus serving the function of a table, grouping similar information. He raises Gen. 3:9-19 as an example, in which the sin of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent are detailed, followed by their punishments in reverse order—as if laying out a grid with "person" down the rows, "sin" and "punishment" as the columns.[188]

(5) Finally, when a chiasm consists of an odd number of elements, the one at the center, dividing the two panels of the chiasm, is highlighted. This corresponds to modern-day bold-face, italics, or other font changes. The same effect may be produced by breaking a pattern of alternation or chiasm to catch the listener's attention.[189]

Parunak's work is inspiring, and indeed, much work has been done recently on the chiasm. There is a danger, of course, in drawing such a close analogy to typesetting techniques, **visual** as they are. Chiasms, while they look pretty on paper, are techniques for the **ear**. The necessary lesson is that oral "publication" can be quite as sophisticated as written in ordering a complex creation—if one has ears to hear.

Biblical Evidence for Orality

The previous discussion has demonstrated that exegetes are beginning to incorporate orality research into their work. Nevertheless, the investigation of the oral character of Scripture is in its infancy. In this section we intend to examine the Scriptures more broadly with two purposes in mind: first, to garner evidence demonstrating clearly that the Bible does, indeed, fit

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[187]Parunak, 163.

[188]Ibid., 164.

[189]Ibid., 165-68.

into an oral milieu and itself supports the picture of the ancient reading experience which we have described; secondly, to uncover oral themes, techniques, and characteristics evident in the writings themselves. The following material should in no way be considered a comprehensive collection of data. Nevertheless, it is an attempt to right a grave wrong in most appropriations of oral theory. For, there has been no extensive work done on the Scriptures themselves in order to draw upon their self-witness.

Biblical depictions of the reading experience

The prelude to concordance study is the establishment of a semantic domain.[190] Conversely, the semantic domain is developed through concordance study. Hence, we will first propose a domain in both Hebrew and Greek which corresponds to the English vocable "read," and then proceed to prove the hypothesis by scriptural example. From this exercise, the reading experience presupposed by biblical culture will come clear.

There is no distinct vocabulary in Old Testament Hebrew for the activity of reading. This is in itself significant. In both Hebrew and Aramaic the most common verb used is קָרָא "to proclaim." From this a noun is derived for the act of reading, or for the pericope read: מִקְרָא (Neh. 8:8; LXX ἀναγνώστης). There is no avoiding the oral character of these terms. Reading is aloud and interpersonal. There is no way of naming private, silent reading in Hebrew. In one account, קָרָא is apparently interchangeable with אָמַר. The king of Aram writes a letter for Naaman to take to Israel, asking that he be healed of leprosy (2 Kg. 5:5). When Naaman appears in Israel's royal court, he immediately speaks (לֵאמֹר) the contents of the letter (:6), after which King Ahab reads it aloud (כִּקְרֹא) for himself (:7).[191] The expression for "literacy" is also instructive: יָדַע סֵפֶר "to know (a) writing." In Is. 29:11-12 it is the competence required to

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[190]For an explanation of semantic fields, see Eugene A. Nida and Johannes P. Louw, *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

[191]A similar account is found in 2 Kg. 19:9-14 = Is. 37:9-14. Letter writing will be dealt with in more detail in chapter four.

answer the command קְרָא "read!" One wonders whether the illiterate's reply to the demand, usually translated "I do not know how to read," should rather be translated "I do not/cannot know a book in such a way"—for in the oral synthesis, to read aloud is to meet the text and become intimately involved with it.[192] Thus, the semantic domain for "reading" in Hebrew is primarily קְרָא, but with יָדַע and אָמַר contributing on occasion.

Louw-Nida's Greek lexicon based on semantic range offers a helpful beginning for the New Testament investigation. Into precisely **which** domain they place the cognates for reading is instructive in itself with respect to their philosophy of language. The verb ἀναγινώσκω is found under the domain "Communication" in the subdomain "Written Language." The definition given is orally sensitive; yet, the place into which it is slotted contradicts this.

> **33.68** ἀναγινώσκω; ἀνάγνωσις, εως f: to read something written, normally done aloud and thus involving verbalization - 'to read, reading.'[15] [footnote 15 reads: ἀναγινώσκω and ἀνάγνωσις are placed here as a type of semantic converse of γράφω (33.61) and related terms meaning 'to write.'][193]

Perhaps it is a felicitous coincidence that the sub-domain following immediately upon "Written Language" is "Speak, Talk," with the result that ἀναγινώσκω forms a bridge from one into the next. Nevertheless, to define reading simply in relationship to writing is misleading. The oral definition given would suggest including it also as a converse for ἀκούω (what Louw-Nida places simply into the sensory domain, neglecting its social function in an audience[194]), and as a

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[192]See also "Addendum 2: Hearing and Understanding in the Parable of the Sower," pp. 245ff., below.

[193]Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2d ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:397.

[194]Ibid., 1:282. Indeed, Louw-Nida also include ἀκούω under the domain "Communication," sub-domain "Inform, Announce," as a semantic converse.

part of the sub-domain "Speak, Talk." Furthermore, Louw-Nida is admittedly weakened by its restriction to New Testament Greek.[195]

We can therefore immediately widen the Greek semantic field by consideration of LXX examples (of course, secular Greek could also be considered). The compound παραναγινώσκω, a variation on the standard term, evidences no variation in meaning. When Ptolemy IV is impressed by the Temple and desires to enter into its inner sanctuary, the Jews forbid him. Nevertheless, he presses on, τοῦ τε νόμου παραναγνωσθέντος "even after the Torah had been read" (3 Mac. 1:12). The natural understanding is not that he would read the Torah himself, being a pagan, but that the Jewish authorities "proclaimed" it aloud to him. The uncommon use of ἐντυγχάνω is more complicated. The author of 2 Maccabees refers frequently to his "readers" with this verb, and in each case the distinction between the private reader and the public lector is either unclear or irrelevant (2 Mac. 2:25; 6:12; 15:39). The closing words of the book are most interesting, in which the author claims for his creation: τὸ τῆς κατασκευῆς τοῦ λόγου τέρπει τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων τῇ συντάξει "the matter of the construction of the message with respect to arrangement pleases the ears of those who read" (2 Mac. 15:39).[196] He describes the rhetorical goal towards which he has striven: to order his work aurally. Thus the semantic domain for reading in Greek emphasizes the reader's involvement in the text, for [παρ-]ἀναγινώσκω surely is related to the Hebraic use of ידע "to know intimately";[197] and

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[195]In this respect, Bauer's lexicon in all its incarnations is actually a superior resource in establishing semantic domains in that it includes a wider field of literature!

[196]The Revised English Bible displays a literate bias which contradicts the ear-ness of the message: "variety of style in a literary work charms the ear of the reader." The rather more individualistic view of the reading experience which is evident in 2 Maccabees appears also in the prologue to Sirach, which also directly engages the reader. These books from the inter-testamental period seem to reflect a Judaism which has become scholastic, and expects religious writings to be studied by a scribe at a desk.

[197]Rudolph Bultmann, "ἀναγινώσκω, ἀνάγνωσις," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [*TDNT*], trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:343, begins by stating that ἀναγινώσκω means "to know exactly" or "to recognise." In the story of the writing on the wall in Daniel 5 (see verses 7-8, 15-17), a

ἐντυγχάνω, recalling an "approach" or "meeting," highlights what Ong calls the "oral synthesis" of speaker and hearer through the text.

As the semantic domain for "reading" has indicated, the Old Testament Hebrews were a deeply oral people. At the heart of the faith, as given by divine mandate, was the repeated public proclamation of the Torah, as it was written down in the books of Moses. In observing the course of this mandate we see numerous depictions of the reading experience. It begins at Sinai:

> Then [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read [וַיִּקְרָא] in the hearing [בְּאָזְנֵי "in the ears"] of the people; and they said, "All that Yahweh has spoken [דִּבֶּר] we will do, and we will heed [וְנִשְׁמָע 'give an appropriate hearing']." (Ex. 24:7)

The public reading of the covenant not only connects Moses with his hearers, but because Moses is the authorized representative of Yahweh, it can be said that Moses' speaking is Yahweh's speaking. In the voicing of the text the covenant comes into force. The reading of "this Torah" was to be repeated every seven years at the Feast of Booths "in the ears" of all Israel (Deut. 31:11).[198] When Israel finally took possession of Canaan, Joshua saw to it that this liturgical reading was carried out (Josh. 8:34-35). With all the children of Israel assembled together, this reading of the Torah was certainly קָרָא "calling out, proclamation" of God's Word.[199]

It is this background which explains the Josianic reform. Neglect of such liturgical rubrics was both symptom and exacerbation of the general apostasy of Israel. The simple fact that the Torah could go lost for so long is also an indication of the rather different place of books in ancient Israel over against the modern world. There was no scroll on every mantel. The Torah was kept in the Temple and was made known to the people only through oral means: public

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comparison of the LXX with Theodoret brings the same conclusions. What in the MT is לִמְקְרֵא כְתָבָא "to read aloud the writing," is rendered in the normal way by Theodoret, τὴν γραφὴν ἀναγνῶναι, but the LXX chooses to translate: τὸ σύγκριμα τῆς γραφῆς ἀπαγγεῖλαι "to proclaim the interpretation of the writing" (Dan. 5:8). Reading meant understanding.

[198]Josephus, *Antiquities*, IV:209, refers to this mandate.

[199]Amos 4:5 [LXX] includes as an example of Israel's apostasy and false worship: reading from the Torah in the wrong place.

recitation, worship, and Levitical teaching. Hilkiah the high priest finds the Torah during repair work on the Temple, and delivers it to Shaphan the scribe (who seems to be in dedicated service to King Josiah). Shaphan then reads the book to the king (2 Kg. 22:8-10). Shaphan appears to hold the role of lector in the royal court.[200] That he would read this ancient book to the king is completely natural: Josiah himself would probably find such a task quite daunting. Shaphan is a professional. In the progression of the story, it is said first that "the king heard [כִּשְׁמֹעַ] the words of the book of the Torah" (:11). Then Yahweh says that King Josiah has "read" [קָרָא] it (:16). These are not separate events but one and the same. When the scribe has read the book in Josiah's hearing, Josiah himself has read it. Josiah then decrees that the public recitation of the Torah in the hearing of all the people should be restored according to Yahweh's own mandate, and this reading initiates his reform (2 Kg. 23:1-3).[201]

On another occasion the faith of the people Israel is again renewed through the public proclamation of the Torah. After the return of exiles to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the walls and the Temple, Ezra led the people to a restoration of public worship. The celebration of the Feast of Booths at the proper time was, therefore, accompanied by the reading of the Torah, as specified. Ezra the scribe,[202] being a professional scholar of the ancient texts and a qualified **lector** both by skill and office, commences to read the holy words to all the people (Neh. 8:1-3). It is a lengthy reading, proceeding from morning to midday. For the first time, the reading is not only archaic but in a language no longer vernacular to the people (:3), for Aramaic is now their

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[200]In Est. 6:1 we see another king making use of his lector. It is a rather comical description: the king cannot sleep, so he has the kingdom's record books read to him. The use of lectored reading for entertainment (or medicinal purposes, what we might call the Brandenburg factor) was quite common.

[201]In Baruch 1:3, 14, the author uses his own book read publicly [ἀναγινώσκω] to bring about repentance.

[202]Jeremiah is another figure who makes regular use of a scribe, his companion Baruch (Jer. 36:4 *et al.*). The discussion of Jeremiah 36 will be delayed until chapter four. The use of a scribe must be presumed also in 2 Kg. 10:6, where it is recorded: "Then he [Jehu] wrote a letter to them a second time **saying** [לֵאמֹר] ... ."

native tongue. And so we have the first biblical evidence of a Targum (:8). The role of the priests

and Levites who accompanied Ezra on the podium was to translate and explain what was read so

that there might be understanding among the people (:7, 12, 13). For the eight days of the festival

Ezra read from the Torah (8:18; 9:3). This account is a dramatic portrayal of the oral and public

character of "reading" in the Old Testament, indicating how reading is to be understood as קרא

"proclamation." Furthermore, the LXX use of ἀναγινώσκω throughout these accounts suggests

the same components of meaning for the Greek vocable.

Certainly there are examples of private reading in the Old Testament. Moses foresees

prophetically that the Israelites will demand a king. When he sits upon the throne, the king must

"write for himself a copy of this Torah on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it

shall be with him, and he shall read [קרא] it all the days of his life" (Deut. 17:18-19). But this

private reading must have been aloud, as קרא implies, and as other examples testify. A

messenger brings a letter to the king, reads it aloud to the whole court, after which the king reads

it for himself—aloud, but private (2 Kg. 5:7; 19:14). When Hilkiah the high priest discovers the

long lost Torah and gives it to the scribe Shaphan, the latter reads [קרא] it for himself before

taking it to King Josiah (2 Kg. 22:8). This would likely refer to the scribe's need to practice his

performance of such a difficult text before giving it publicly. And then there is the divine

prophecy, recorded by Habakkuk on a tablet for public display, that whoever comes up and reads

it [קרא], bringing voice to the stone, may flee (Hab. 2:2).[203]

It is this universal practice of reading aloud, whether publicly or privately, which

explains the eating of the scroll in Ezek. 2:8-3:3 and Rev. 10:9-10. Walter Ong elucidates this

enlightening exegesis:

> In such highly oral cultures, it was not sufficient for the reader simply to imagine the
> sounds of the words being read. Books in such a culture do not "contain" something called
> "material." They speak or say words ... . The written words had to be mouthed aloud, in
> their full being, restored to and made to live in the oral cavities in which they came into

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[203]Jn. 19:20, the sign over Jesus' head on the cross, is similar.

existence. In *La Manducation de la parole*, ... Père Marcel Jousse, S. J., treats beautifully what he calls the "eating of the word in oral cultures, its being passed from mouth to mouth" (45-54). This "eating of the word" gives a new dimension and force to imaginary incidents such as the eating of the little scroll in Revelation 10:9-10, which otherwise may appear merely quaint or bizarre to technological man.[204]

In both cases, Ezekiel and John were prophets who had to "eat the scroll," that is, internalize the prophecy which they were receiving before they could pass it on to God's people. Eating the scroll graphically illustrated that what came forth from their mouths was the proclamation God willed them to give. And eating the scroll serves as a general metaphor for the synthesis of author, text, and reader which is achieved when the text is received orally.[205]

But it is one final example together with its history of interpretation which confirms the ancient practice of keeping thought and tongue in unison. Hannah is at the sanctuary at Shiloh, praying that Yahweh would open her womb and give her a son. Eli the priest was watching her pray, and he was distressed at what he saw:

> Now it came about, as she continued praying before Yahweh, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard; so Eli thought she was drunk. (1 Sam. 1:12-13)

What would not raise an eyebrow today, was extraordinary then: that one would pray silently.[206]

In the early church this story appears to have been a model for the behavior of women in church, especially when matrixed with 1 Cor. 14:34. In addressing his catechumens, Cyril of

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[204]Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 437.

[205]This practice explains also the ancient words of the Collect for the Word: "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them ... ." *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 14.

[206]One could argue that St. Paul makes the same extraordinary claim for the prayers of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's prayers are not like ours, in spoken words, but in στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις "wordless groanings" (Rom. 8:26). The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector praying in the Temple must be understood in this light (Lk. 18:9-14). The contrast is not between one who outrageously chooses to pray aloud and one who humbly keeps his words to himself. Both prayed aloud, as was the custom. The Pharisee is censured for taking advantage of the fact that others could overhear him in order to brag. The tax-collector moves to a position where no one but God would hear his humble prayer.

Jerusalem gives instructions as to how they are to act while waiting for the pre-baptismal exorcisms to be completed. The men are instructed to sit together praying, or reading aloud if they have a book: ὁ μέν τις ἀναγινωσκέτω, ὁ δέ τις ἀκουέτω. One reads; the others listen. However, the women are to act differently:

> ... let the young women's group gather in such a way that, whether it is praying [singing] psalms or reading in silence, their lips move but the ears of others do not hear [ἢ ψάλλων ἢ ἀναγινώσκων ἡσυχῇ· ὥστε λαλεῖν μὲν τὰ χείλη, μὴ ἀκούειν δὲ τὰ ἀλλότρια ὦτα]. "For I do not permit a woman to speak in the church." And let the married woman do likewise, and let her pray, and move her lips, but let no sound be heard [καὶ τὰ χείλη κινείσθω, φωνὴ δὲ μὴ ἀκουέσθω], so that Samuel may come, so that your barren soul may give birth to the salvation of God who hears you. For this is what Samuel means.[207]

The requirement that women read in silence is intended to avoid the possibility that a woman should teach in church, for others would listen to what she read. Here again is evidence that reading silently was unusual enough to deserve comment.

This provides a bridge into the New Testament. Josef Balogh points to the struck-dumb Zechariah, who recovers his voice in the very moment of writing down the name for his new son: ἔγραψεν λέγων "he wrote, saying" (Lk. 1:63). Since the text reports the recovery of his voice in the following verse, it has been assumed that this λέγων is just a figure of speech. But Balogh argues, rather, that it was in the act of writing that his voice returned: "Zu **sprechen** beginnt er aber im **Augenblick, da sein Griffel die Wachstafel berührt.**"[208] Whether or not λέγων reflects the Hebrew idiom לֵאמֹר, it gives evidence of oral writing:

> Dies ἔγραψεν λέγων verstand man bisher allgemein, wie das hebr. לֵאמֹר, vgl. II. Kön. 10,6... . Ich sehe nur zwei mögliche Lösungen dieser Schwierigkeit. Entweder ist das λέγων tatsächlich = לֵאמֹר, dann könnte man aber annehmen, daß auch dies nach dem Zeitwort "schreiben" auf das **laute** Schreiben hinweist. Oder λέγων hat nichts mit dem alttestamentlichen Wort zu tun; dann ist meine Hypothese die richtige.[209]

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[207]Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, 14. Reference and translation are from Michael Slusser, "Reading Silently in Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 499.

[208]Balogh, 217. Emphasis original.

[209]Ibid., 217. Emphasis original. Balogh cites evidence from a fourth-century commentator in support of his own interpretation.

By either interpretation of the participle, this datum confirms that hand and mouth were joined in the activity of writing.

Balogh adduces also the clearest example of oral reading in the New Testament. The Ethiopian eunuch was upon his chariot, returning from Temple worship. While he journeyed, he "was immersed in reading [ἀνεγίνωσκεν] the prophet Isaiah" (Acts 8:28). The Spirit told Philip to go meet his chariot, and as he was approaching, "he heard [ἤκουσεν] him reading [ἀναγινώσκοντος] Isaiah the prophet" (:30). Even though alone, the eunuch was reading aloud, with the result that he could be overheard. Then Philip asks him: "Do you **know** [γινώσκεις] what you are **reading** [ἀναγινώσκεις]?" (:30). The pun reflects the Hebrew connection between יָדַע and קָרָא as well as the Greek building of the verb for reading on the verb for knowing.[210] The act of reading was meant to create an intimate relationship of knowledge between reader and text (and through the text also with the author). In the case of the eunuch, this understanding was not happening.[211]

The cry in Mark 13:14 ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω "Let the reader understand" calls out for the same oral synthesis—albeit without the wordplay. This interjection in the midst of Jesus' apocalyptic warning about the coming tribulation has been interpreted with three different referents for the term ὁ ἀναγινώσκων:

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[210]This meaningful wordplay is repeated by St. Paul when he speaks of the Corinthians as his "letter of commendation": "You yourselves are our letter, written in our hearts, being known and read [γινωσκομένη καὶ ἀναγινωσκομένη] by all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). Of this connection he has already spoken: "For we, however, write nothing to you but what you read [ἀναγινώσκετε] and understand [ἐπιγνώσεσθε]. And I hope that you understand until the end" (2 Cor. 1:13). And in 1 Cor. 14:2, ἀκούει is used by itself for understanding: "No one hears" = "No one understands."

[211]See also "Addendum 2: Hearing and Understanding in the Parable of the Sower," pp. 245ff., below.

1. **the reader (=receiver, hearer) of the Gospel of Mark:** the one who hears this warning must take it to heart;[212]
2. **the reader (=lector, public proclaimer) of the Gospel of Mark:** the lector must pay special attention to how he enunciates this difficult passage;[213]
3. **the reader (=receiver, interpreter) of Daniel's prophecy:** this reader must understand what Daniel was referring to.[214]

The resolution of the problem is elusive. New Testament usage would favor the second option, for the liturgical situation of the reading of these books involves a lector and an audience (Rev. 1:3, see below). Fowler's reader-response solution individualizes the reader.[215] Although it is not unheard of for the author to address his reader individually (see the prologue to Sirach, discussed above), nevertheless, canonical writings almost by very definition[216] address their audience in the plural.[217] Yet Fowler's worthy intention is to show how the narrator of the Gospel directs

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[212]The modern received tradition, but also taken up for different purposes by reader-response critics such as Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 82-87.

[213]See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [*BAGD*], trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. ἀναγινώσκω; and *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), s.v. *anagnostes* and *recitatio*. Herbert N. Schneidau, "Let the Reader Understand," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 143, disagrees: "he appeals not to the one who reads the story out loud to others: what would be the point of his understanding if the others didn't?" Yet the lector must first understand so that his hearers may also. One might also postulate that a marginal note to the lector has crept into the text—although there is no such manuscript evidence.

[214]Bultmann, "ἀναγινώσκω, ἀνάγνωσις," *TDNT* 1:343, wonders: "whosoever reads the apocalypse in question—Daniel?" Dewey, 35, posits: "I suggest that 'reader' refers not to the reader of Mark but to the reader of Daniel." This option could be further subdivided. Which reader is supposed to understand Daniel? The lector? The individual reader? The audience?

[215]Fowler, 83, even highlights the fact that "reader" is singular, as opposed to Jesus' audience in the story which is plural. Later he admits: "Someone who is probably not in the mind of the author here is the modern image of a solitary, individual reader of the Gospel, reading silently in private" (83-84).

[216]One criteria for canonicity was a long history of public reading in the liturgy of orthodox Christianity. See note 289, below.

[217]Jesus, in the course of the narrative, will refer to his hearers individually (Mk 4:3, 9) as well as in the plural (7:14), but the narrator, or canonical author confines himself to the latter.

Jesus' words beyond their original audience to the receivers of the complete Gospel narrative. Matthew's "little apocalypse" is for more ears than just those that first heard it.[218]

In New Testament times the public reading of the Torah, which by covenant stipulation must happen every seven years, and which was to be part of the regular ministration of the priests and Levites, took place on a regular basis in the liturgical cycle of the synagogue. Paul refers to this practice: "But their minds[219] were hardened. For up to this very day the same veil remains at the public reading [τῇ ἀναγνώσει] of the Old Testament, not having been removed because it is abolished by Christ. But until this day whenever Moses is read [ἀναγινώσκηται], a veil lies over their heart" (2 Cor. 3:14-15). In Luke 4:16-20 the whole process is described when Jesus reads in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Various indications show that the Christian community continued the practice.[220] This public reading must be seen as the New Testament counterpart to the reading of the Torah on

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[218]Other apocalyptic and eschatological sections also emphasize the understanding of the hearer: Mt. [11:15]; 13:43; 25:29 (critical apparatus); Lk. 12:21 (app.); see also 2 Cor. 1:13; Rev. 1:3; 2:7. There is an urgency to such ultimate issues.

[219]Writing to the Corinthians, Paul substitutes the Greek seat of understanding: not "heart" but "mind."

[220]St. Paul includes the reading of Scripture in his apostolic exhortation to Pastor Timothy concerning his Ministry of the Word: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading [τῇ ἀναγνώσει], to the exhortation [τῇ παρακλήσει], to the teaching [τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ]" (1 Tim. 4:13). In this way Paul outlines the contours of the proclamation of the Word: Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching. Just as in the synagogue, preaching and teaching were based on the reading. (In Lk. 4:20-21 Jesus sits down to teach on the basis of the lection. In Acts 13:15 Paul is invited to give a word of παρακλήσεως "exhortation" following the reading from the Torah and from the prophets.) The popular opinion that ἀνάγνωσις here refers to Timothy's private study of the Word is completely contrary to the scriptural and cultural evidence we have been discussing. These three things are to occupy Timothy's time (in contrast to the "myths and endless genealogies" which the people have been heeding, προσέχω, 1 Tim. 1:4). This Word function of the pastoral office is behind the laurels which Paul heaps upon the Scriptures in commending them to the use of Timothy in his office as a "man of God": "Every passage of Scripture is divinely inspired and is useful for teaching [διδασκαλίαν], for convicting [of sin] [ἐλεγμόν], for restoration, for the discipline which is in righteousness, in order that the man of God might be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16). That "man of God" refers to Timothy as pastor and not to his Christian hearers is clear from Paul's earlier words: Σὺ δέ, ὦ ἄνθρωπε θεοῦ "But you, O man of God" (1 Tim. 6:11).

festivals as mandated by the Old Testament itself (see above). Yet, very soon the writings of the apostles themselves take on the scriptural characteristic of being read in public worship (which leads to canonicity). Peter refers to certain difficulties which the reading of Paul's letters has caused (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul himself enjoined the reading of his letters in worship, both in the church to which they were specifically directed and in others: "I adjure you in the Lord that the letter be read [ἀναγνωσθῆναι] to all the saints" (1 Thess. 5:27); "And when the letter has been read [ἀναγνωσθῇ] among you (pl.), see that it is also read [ἀναγνωσθῇ] in the Laodicean church, and that also you read [ἀναγνῶτε] the [letter] from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16).[221] In Revelation the oral "performance" of the writing is explicitly described: "Blessed is the one who reads [ὁ ἀναγινώσκων] and those who hear [οἱ ἀκούοντες] the words of the prophecy and keep the things written in it, for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). One reader; many hearers; the context is liturgical.[222]

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[221]Other references to the reading of the epistles occur in 2 Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 3:4. C. H. Roberts cites a good example of how such letters were circulated for liturgical use in the Christian community. "Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament." *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 64:

> The clearest reference to the "publication" of Christian texts is to be found in the *Shepherd of Hermas*: "You shall write then", says the Lady to Hermas in his vision, "two little books and you shall send one to Clement and one to Grapte. Clement shall then send them to the cities overseas, for that is his duty; Grapte shall admonish the widows and the orphans; but in this city [Rome] you shall read them yourself together with the priests that have the charge of the Church."

The writing is to be read in the church by the presbyters, and sent abroad to the other Christian churches by the bishop, Clement, in which places it will again be read aloud to the congregations. This was the universal practice. Here we also have remarkable evidence that the task of reading sacred writings (in this case apocryphal) in church was the responsibility of the pastors [πρεσβύτεροι]! The significance of this will be taken up in the discussion of epistles and apostles in chapter 4 and in the Conclusion.

[222]Further references to the reading and hearing process occur in Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9; 22:18.

In the early Fathers there are frequent references to the function of the liturgical reading of the apostolic writings. The earliest extra-biblical accounts of the liturgy include such readings. Justin Martyr reports of the service of the Word:

> And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles [τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων] or the writings of the prophets are read [ἀναγίνεται] as long as time permits. When the reader [ὁ ἀναγνώστης] has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. (*1 Apology* 67)[223]

Thus, from the New Testament itself to the early Fathers, there is abundant evidence that the New Testament writings were produced for the purpose of public, liturgical reading, mouth to ear, lector to audience.[224]

Oral performance: Liturgical pieces and references

The "performance" has been seen to be a key aspect of the oral world. In order to understand the oral component of the Scriptures, one looks for evidence of their performance setting. Eric Havelock reminds us of the great involvement the audience took in an oral performance:

> The oral audience participated not merely by listening passively and memorizing but by active participation in the language used. They clapped and danced and sang collectively, in response to the chanting of the singer.[225]

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[223]Translation from Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 287.

[224]See also St. Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage* 24-26; and Paul Glaue, *Die Vorlesung heiliger Schriften im Gottesdienste* (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1907). The rise of the office of lector in the early church can be traced through Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 42 (in which lectoring is described as a function of the priesthood); Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 12; Council of Laodicea, Canons 17, 23, & 23; Council of Sardica, Canon 10; Council of Chalcedon, Canon 14; 2nd Council at Nicea, Canon 14; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2:57.7; 6:17.2; 8:5.11; 8:22.1-4.

[225]Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 78.

Although one would not expect to find direct evidence of such response in a written document, one might view certain elements of a text differently if one could reconstruct the social setting in which the author expected his writing to be "performed." The public reading of the Scriptures in the liturgy provides just such an established setting.

Examples of liturgical, creedal, and hymnic quotation have been dug out of the New Testament by innumerable exegetes.[226] But is there evidence of the actual public reading of the documents and even of the participation of the audience? The abundance of doxologies in the epistles presents such an occasion.[227] Might the audience have joined in with the lector at this point? Or would the "Amen" at least be their response?[228] That the "Amen" is the congregation's response explains well the divided textual evidence so often for the inclusion of the term, for if the congregation was accustomed to voicing it—whether in the text or not—it would eventually migrate into the manuscripts.

There are many other liturgical formulas and responses evident in the epistles especially which might have involved congregational participation. J. A. T. Robinson has pointed to the close of 1 Corinthians as the most elaborate example. The distinctly un-Pauline vocabulary in 1 Cor. 16:20-24, the stilted style, and the similarity to a section of the *Didache* encourages Robinson in his thesis:

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[226]An excellent, though dated, study is: G. W. H. Lampe, "The Evidence in the New Testament for Early Creeds, Catechisms and Liturgy," *The Expository Times* 71 (1960): 359-63.

[227]Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:25-27; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:5; Phil. 4:20; Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:18; Rev. 7:12 (and elsewhere in Revelation). M. Eugene Boring, "The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 34 (1992): 348-49, notes recent liturgical theories concerning Revelation: "Vanni and Pierre Prigent have argued that some of the tensions in the text resulting from the alternation of voices are to be resolved by considering Revelation as written in the style of a worship dialogue, with the lector playing the part of John and the congregation having responsorial parts. The shifting from John's voice to the congregational doxology and responsorial 'amen' in 1:4-7, and the concluding 'amen' of 22:21 are supposed to be so explained, and in Vanni's view perhaps the alternations in the voices of the dirge in chapter 18 as well."

[228]1 Cor. 14:16 indicates that "Amen" was a congregational response.

Now the succession of clauses in the *Didache*, which I set out in what appears to be their dialogue shape, bears a striking resemblance to 1 Cor. 16[22].

℣ Let grace come and let this world pass away.

℟ Hosanna to the God of David.

Deacon (?) If any man is holy, let him come;

if any be not, let him repent.

℣ Maranatha.

℟ Amen

This exchange of versicle and response comes at the end of the prayer "after you are satisfied". The probability is that the reference is to the Agape and that the dialogue forms the introduction to the Eucharist proper, which presupposes (*Did.* 14.1) prior confession of sin and mutual reconciliation. *Maranatha* ... is then a prayer to Christ to stand among his own in his *parousia* (anticipated in the real presence of the Eucharist). I suggest that in 1 Cor. 16[22] Paul is quoting a similar liturgical sequence already current in the Corinthian Church. He is visualizing the context in which his closing words will reach his listeners. His letter has been read out in the *ecclesia* ..., the Christian assembly gathered for worship. As the *synaxis* comes to an end, dispositions for the Eucharist begin. Mutual greetings and the kiss of peace are exchanged—to which, in autograph, Paul adds his own ... .[229]

The greetings at the end of the epistles are, certainly, too often overlooked. Even before Robinson noticed them, the historically-sensitive Hermann Sasse connected what he read there with what he knew of the earliest Communion liturgies. The greetings were not merely personal, human decencies. Rather:

They are solemn expressions of the existing unity, declarations or reaffirmations of the *communicatio in sacris*, as the admonition to greet one another with the "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20), the "kiss of charity" (1 Peter 5:14), the *Pax*, as it was later called. This kiss, expressing the full peace and unity of the Church, had its place at the beginning of "Holy Communion" already in the apostolic age, as the fact shows that the formula "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (1 Cor. 16; Rev. 22:21) or its trinitarian form (2 Cor. 13:13) has remained in the Eastern Church the beginning of the dialogue leading to the Preface and Sanctus. The "Pax" is already in the New Testament connected with the "Anathema" of those who do not love the Lord (schismatics), 1 Cor. 16:22; or who "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine" of the apostles (heretics), and therefore must be avoided, Rom. 16:17f. comp. the corresponding warnings Gal. 1:8; 1 Tim. 6:3-6,20; Titus 3:10; 1 John 4:1ff; 2 John 10f.[230]

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[229]John A. T. Robinson, "Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in 1 Cor. 16[20-24]," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 4.1 (April 1953): 39.

[230]Sasse, "Selective Fellowship," *The Australian Theological Review* 28.3 (September 1957): 53-54.

The peace, the *maranatha*, the anathema, the greetings, all are elements of the early church's practice of closed communion.[231]

What neither Robinson nor Sasse has suggested, however, is that the apostolic writer may be doing more than just quoting, or alluding to the liturgy. Perhaps there is an actual **overlap** of liturgy and reading at this point. Perhaps the activities described **actually happened** at that point! Might the reading have paused while the greetings and the passing of peace together with the kiss took place (1 Cor. 16:20-21), or while the non-communicants were dismissed (:22)? Might Paul have expected his words, "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (:23), to have spurred a response from the congregation, "And with your spirit," as the early records of the liturgical preface record? Might not the congregation have received his blessing, "my love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (:24), with a unison "Amen"—which is absent from some texts, but included by others?[232] These are possibilities which are suggested by a clear historical understanding of oral text production before a live audience.

The epistles brim over with quotations and allusions to what the Fathers indicate to have happened at celebrations of the Lord's Supper, what followed immediately upon the Scripture readings and homily.[233]

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[231]See also Günther Bornkamm, "Das Anathema in der urchristlichen Abendmahls-liturgie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 4/5 (1950): 227-28; and C. F. D. Moule, "A Reconsideration of the Context of *Maranatha*," in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 222-26.

[232]We might suggest furthermore, that certain epistles which end abruptly—without the usual blessings and greetings—simply assume that the lector and congregation will do these things on their own, according to the liturgical custom of that place. James and 1 John are easier to understand this way. Likewise, the lack of a traditional epistolary opening in Hebrews and 1 John might have been due to the expectation that the lector would fill it in according to custom.

[233]That the epistle might have supplanted the homily will be suggested in chapter 4. For the liturgical order: Word, Sacrament, prayers, see Acts 2:42, properly translated: "And they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communion in the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." There are three elements, not four. The oral structuring around the two καί's must be taken seriously.

1. φιλήματι ἁγίῳ "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14)
2. ἀσπάσασθε "greet" one another (Rom. 16:3-16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 4:21-22; Col. 4:15, 17; 1 Thess. 5:26; 2 Thess. 3:17; 2 Tim. 4:21; Tit. 3:15; Phlmn. 23; Heb. 13:24; 1 Pet. 5:14; 2 Jn. 13; 3 Jn. 15)
3. φιλέω/ἀγαπάω τὸν κύριον "to love the Lord"[234] (Jn. 21:15-17;[235] 1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 6:24; Tit. 3:15; 3 Jn. 15)
4. ἤτω ἀνάθεμα "let him be accursed" (1 Cor. 16:22; cf. Gal. 1:8-9)
5. μαράνα θά (1 Cor. 16:22); ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ "come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17-21)
6. ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν "Grace be with you" (Rom. 16:20, 24 [app.]; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Phlmn. 25; Heb. 13:24; Rev. 22:21)
7. εἰρήνη/κύριος μεθ' ὑμῶν "Peace/the Lord be with you" (Eph. 6:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; 1 Pet. 5:14; 3 Jn. 15)
8. ... μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου "with your [sg.] Spirit" (2 Tim. 4:22)[236]
9. ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης [μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν] "the God of peace [be with you all]" (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20)

The depth of these parallels is hardly coincidental. These data cannot be dismissed as customary epistolary conventions. They place the epistles firmly into the position in the liturgy where public reading and exposition of sacred Scripture occurred, and the gaps in the dialogue leave room for congregational participation.

Evidence of oral traditionalism

Where the New Testament can be found making use of standard techniques of oral transmission, there is further evidence of how the Bible fits into its oral milieu. Whether or not one accepts all the details of Birger Gerhardsson's Rabbinic traditionalist theory, he has firmly

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[234]A description of those who are allowed to commune.

[235]The early church would certainly have seen Jesus' dialogue with Peter, with the question "Do you love me?", as an attempt to restore him into the communion of the church. It is significant, therefore, that also a Gospel closes with a reference to the ensuing Eucharist.

[236]The Fathers understood the liturgical response in the preface, "And with your Spirit," to be a reference to the Holy Spirit who was placed upon the pastor in ordination. This explains the alternation between singular and plural at the close of 2 Timothy. "The Lord be with your [σου] Spirit" is spoken to Pastor Timothy—a blessing upon him that the Spirit within him would continue to be the Lord's Spirit. To all the saints in the congregation Paul says, "Grace be with you [ὑμῶν]." Because of the dual character of the Pastorals—directed both to pastor and congregation, both private and public correspondence—Paul quotes both halves of the liturgical dialogue.

established the existence in New Testament times of a rigorous method of preserving and passing on authoritative teaching apart from writing. Gerhardsson tracks down for us the tell-tale signs of "programmatic tradition" at work, giving evidence of a conscious effort to propagate the tradition:

> ... one is occupied with this, one speaks about this. This fact is especially evident when the traditionalists expressly indicate that this shall be observed and maintained as tradition: φυλάσσειν, τηρεῖν, ἱστάναι, κατέχειν, κρατεῖν, etc. Even summons to take heed, listen, "see and hear," and the like, are telling, as are exhortations to receive and accept.[237]

Where these terms and activities pop up in the New Testament, there is evidence that the Gospel data existed in oral form, faithfully passed on until it was set down in writing as an accompaniment to the continuing oral proclamation.

The oft-mistranslated concluding words of Christ in Matthew 28 are best understood in this light: διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην. Gerhardsson leads us to understand τηρεῖν not in the sense of "obedience" to law. It is traditionalist vocabulary.[238] What Jesus has taught is to be passed on faithfully. He teaches the disciples; they hold fast what was taught; they teach it to others, and teach them to hold fast what was taught. Such an understanding requires also a reevaluation of the final verb in the phrase: ἐντέλλω means more than "to command." It refers to the action of "entrusting" instruction to those under one's authority—such as in the relationship between Rabbi and disciples. Thus, in some ways it is

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[237]Birger Gerhardsson, "The Gospel Tradition," in *The Interrelationships of the Gospels*, ed. David L. Dungan (Leuven: University Press, 1990): 505. Gerhardsson notes that Jesus himself "institutionalizes" the process of transmitting his tradition. "He gathers around himself a number of persons who become his 'primary group': they 'are with' him (εἶναι μετά), they 'follow' him (ἀκολουθεῖν), they are his 'disciples' (μαθηταί), they are his 'brother and sister and mother'" (512). His followers are not just temporarily attached to him (like the crowds), but he has true disciples like a Rabbi. The New Testament evidence suggests—contrary to various legends and "traditions"—that most of the twelve spent the greater part of their lives in Jerusalem. Gerhardsson asks: "What did this highly reputed collegium actually do during its many years in Jerusalem?" (514 n. 24). The implied answer is: they preserved and handed on the tradition. This picture certainly receives some support from Acts 15.

[238]Gerhardsson, 542, specifically refers to Mt. 28.

synonymous with μαθητεύω (Mt. 28:19), although it is heightened in urgency by the component of authority. Christ's instructions may not be ignored.

But there is more to Matthew 28 than Rabbinic traditionalism. The letter to the Hebrews provides an important bridge via this verb back to Mt Sinai: "This is the blood of the covenant which God has given [ἐνετείλατο] to you" (Heb. 9:20). The NASB offers "commanded you." But it is difficult to think of the covenant as something God **commanded** to them. To do so is to think of the covenant only as Law, apart from grace. The Hebrews quotation is from the LXX of Exodus 24:8. The LXX means to do no more than translate faithfully the standard Hebrew vocabulary for making a covenant: הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת יהוה עִמָּכֶם "the covenant which Yahweh **cut** with you".

The use of Mt Sinai vocabulary reminds us that a new covenant is being made on this second mountain. And perhaps we should return to the other vocabulary of this phrase through Exodus.[239] The English versions have similar trouble in translating the giving of the first covenant in Exodus: "Now then, if you will indeed **obey** My voice and **keep** [=obey] My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine" (19:6). A glance at the Hebrew, however, shows that this obedience talk is unwarranted. What they are to give God's voice is hearing: שָׁמַע "to hear." If God's voice has only one word to speak, the word of Law, then obedience is certainly what it demands. But this is reading into the text what it does not say. God calls for His people to "hear" His voice. In His speaking and their hearing He will bless them with a gift. This gift comes through the covenant which He makes with them as a free act of His gracious will. Although all the earth is His, God has graciously chosen this one people for Himself, to be His סְגֻלָּה "special possession" (used of the treasury of a king). His words are to encourage the proper appreciation of this great gift. The covenant is

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[239]On the following exegesis of Ex. 19 see my unpublished S.T.M. thesis: "The Priesthood of All the Baptized: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation" (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1992), 1-21.

more than just the Ten Commandments and the other laws. It includes the sacrificial system

through which they would receive the forgiveness of sins on account of the Christ to which they

looked forward. The covenant involved the promise of a new and rich land, together with

protection from their enemies, a land which typified the eternal kingdom of God, to which as a

holy priesthood they were heirs. What they are to do with the covenant is given with the verb

שׁמר "to exercise great care over, to treasure, to hold fast, never to give up, to keep." It is this

שׁמר which comes into Greek as τηρέω, which appears as an infinitive in Matthew 28:19. The

disciples are to hold onto the New Testament which God was entrusting to them in the same way

that Israel was to hold on to the Old: as something eternally dear, as a great treasure, as

something through which the promises of God were given. Nothing of this new covenant is to be

relinquished. The apostolic mandate therefore includes "teaching them to treasure [or 'hold fast']

all the things which I have entrusted [or 'instructed'] to you."[240] This is oral traditionalism at

work.

More rather explicit traditionalist vocabulary is found in the prologue to St. Luke's

Gospel (1:1-4), to which Gerhardsson also refers:

> Luke classifies his material as tradition and indicates that it is insider-tradition, which is
> there intra muros ecclesiae. It is all about "events that have come to fulfilment among us";
> the information has "been passed on to us" (παρέδωσαν ἡμῖν). This means that the
> material has been preserved in and exists within the Church.[241]

Aside from the key technical term for transmitting tradition, παραδίδωμι, there are other red-flag

words. The originators of this tradition material are called αὐτόπται "eyewitnesses" and

ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου "ministers of the Word"—that is, they received the Word first-hand, and

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[240]τηρέω and ἐντολή are a matched set in the New Testament: Mt. 19:17; Jn. 14:15,
21; 15:10; 1 Cor. 7:19; 1 Tim. 6:14; 1 Jn. 2:3-4; 3:22-24; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12. Cf. Mt. 5:19,
where the semantic converse of τηρέω occurs: λύω—it is forbidden to "loose" what should be
"kept." Christ has instructed his disciples to hold fast (τηρέω) everything which He has spoken:
Jn. 8:51-55; 14:23-24; 15:20; 17:6. The same pairing occurs with the verb φυλάσσω: Lk. 11:28;
Jn. 12:47. Also with κατέχω: Lk. 8:15.

[241]Gerhardsson, 517-18.

then passed it on authoritatively. Luke has tracked down (παρακολουθέω) these men and this tradition. He writes as an "insider," Gerhardsson argues: "he has a general respect for reliable tradition and faithful traditionalists."[242] To him, the tradition is "our own," and he shows a preference for "those in the know." At the other end of the transmitter's work is the disciple, the receiver of the tradition, one who has been "catechized," which technical term also occurs here: κατηχήθης.

The same process is evident in St. Paul's claim to authority for what he has taught concerning the Lord's Supper:

Ἐγὼ γὰρ *παρέλαβον* ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ *παρέδωκα* ὑμῖν, ὅτι ...
"For I **received** from the Lord what I also have **handed down** to you, that ..." (1 Cor. 11:23)

The key verbs παραλαμβάνω and παραδίδωμι firmly connect the New Testament "tradition" to Rabbinic methods. The same oral techniques were used to one degree or another[243] to assure the faithfulness of what the church was receiving from the witnesses. In the case of the Lord's Supper, Paul does not praise them (epideictic rhetoric!), because they have been unfaithful at the receiving end of the tradition (11:17). Concerning other matters this has not been true: "Now I praise you that you remember me in all things, and just as I handed down [παρέδωκα] to you, you keep on holding fast [κατέχετε] the traditions [τὰς παραδόσεις]" (11:2). And Paul uses the same oral traditionalist language concerning the teaching of the resurrection of the dead:

Now I make known to you, brothers, the Gospel which I preached to you, which you also received [παρέλαβετε], in which also you stand, through which you also are saved, if you continue holding fast [κατέχετε] in the Word I preached to you, unless you have believed in vain. For I handed down [παρέδωκα] to you in the first place, what I also received [παρέλαβον], that Christ died for us sinners according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1-3)

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[242]Ibid., 519.

[243]The necessary caveat is the disclaimer Paul makes in Galatians. The Gospel is something bigger than the traditions of men which the Rabbis were concerned with (see Mt. 15:3; Mk. 7:4, 9, 13; Acts 6:14). Lest it be reduced to such an equivocal level, Paul asserts: "The Gospel which was proclaimed by me is not according to man. For neither from a man did I myself receive [παρέλαβον] it nor was I taught it [ἐδιδάχθην], but [it came] through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12).

Other examples of such oral traditionalist language could be cited almost *ad nauseum*.[244] Even Christ speaks of His relationship to the Father in this way (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22)!

An oral theme: Christ the λόγος

"In the beginning was the Utterance" (Jn. 1:1). This is no place for a full-blown investigation of the theological and philosophical baggage hanging from the arms of this λόγος. The λόγος orally conceived,[245] however, impacts greatly upon this study. Modern man, when reading "In the beginning was the Word," conceives a concept, perceives a vocable on a page, for his imposing literacy permits him to do nothing other. But remarkably, there is no place in the New Testament, and perhaps anywhere in Greek literature, where λόγος evidences such usage. Christ is not a "word" in this sense. A λόγος is what results from the action of λέγω-ing, or it can even name the activity itself. It is not what results from γράφω-ing. What John writes of Christ is that He is the utterance of the Father, what the Father has spoken and goes on speaking, the message, the speech, the oral/verbal communication—His address to His people. Such is the way John's Gospel itself unpacks this prological proposition.[246]

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[244]Acts 16:4; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:9; (Col. 2:6?); 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2; 3:14; 4:7; Heb. 2:1-4; 3:14; 4:14; 10:23; 2 Pet. 2:21; 2 Jn. 4; Jude 3; Rev. 1:3; 2:25; 3:11; 22:7, 9. See also the apostolic Fathers: "Do not forsake the Lord's instructions [ἐντολὰς κυρίου], but keep [φυλάξεις] what you received [παρέλαβες], neither adding nor taking away" (*Didache* 4:13; ≅ *Barnabas* 19:11); "Therefore, leaving the foolishness of the many, and their false teaching, let us return to the teaching [λόγον] which was handed down [παραδοθέντα] to us from the beginning" (*Polycarp* 7:2); "Therefore let us set aside empty and vain cares, and let us come to the glorious and venerable rule of our tradition [τῆς παραδόσεως ἡμῶν κανόνα]" (*1 Clement* 7:2); also *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 1, 3:4.

[245]Pun not intended. However, one might argue that the Son of God was **spoken** into His mother through the words of the angel (Lk. 1:28), for the Holy Spirit chooses to work through the Word. Christ, who is the Word, was thus begotten through the speaking of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35), and conceived by the hearing of Mary, who thus conceived Him "by faith" (Lk. 1:38).

[246]Jn. 1:18; 8:38; 10:18 (an ἐντολή is message of instruction from above which is to be passed on); 12:49-50; 14:24; 15:15. Cf. also Mt. 17:5, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am pleased: hear Him."

Christ as the Father's λόγος from the beginning is, of course, a reference to Genesis 1, in which the Father speaks the world into existence. Christ is this speaking activity of the Father, and, in a way, also the message itself. In speaking of Himself He reveals the Father's will towards the world, and in speaking of and from the Father He is the Father's voice. Walter Ong rightly points to John 1 as the Scriptures' oral backbone.[247] He argues:

> Now, the entry of the Word into history did in fact take place in a largely oral setting. Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, left no writing of his own, despite his evident literacy (Luke 4:16-25). To have left his proclamation of the Kingdom in writing would, it appears, at least have somewhat obscured the fact that he is the Word of his Father in a sense that refers to our spoken words, not to written words.[248]

Only when we are sensitive to the cultural milieu of the first-century can we properly appreciate what John is saying. In the past Christians have understood this, although in the technological world it has been eclipsed:

> When the Christian thinks of the Word made flesh, in accordance with the indications in the Bible, he or she thinks of the Word of God by analogy with our own human spoken word, not our own written word. The Father utters the Word, the Son. Nowhere do we find that he writes him.[249]

As William Graham notes so frequently,[250] Christians in the past who have been more orally sensitive have been less likely to think of the "Word of God" exclusively or even primarily as a book. The Word is first and foremost Christ.[251] The Scriptures are "Word of God" because in every stroke they speak of or from Him.

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[247]See especially Ong's foundational work, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1967), 13-14, 180-87, 316ff.

[248]Ong, "*Maranatha*," 442.

[249]Ibid., 441.

[250]See p. 229, below.

[251]Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words," 91, writes of the way in which John presents Jesus as the superlative word, the speaking in a world full of babbling: "A movement from the plural to the singular is an intrinsic feature of the Johannine narrative. On this showing it is tempting to assume a similar motivation for the metaphysical elevation of the singular *Logos*." This much of Kelber's argument we grant. That John, however, has deconstructed and

John's restatement of the thesis in his first epistle combines eyes and ears, though

giving a certain priority to the latter:

> What was from the beginning, what we have **heard** [ἀκηκόαμεν], what we have **seen** [ἑωράκαμεν] with our eyes, what we have observed and our hands have touched concerning the Word [τοῦ λόγου] of life, ... what we have **seen** [ἑωράκαμεν] and we have **heard** [ἀκηκόαμεν], we announce [ἀπαγγέλομεν] also to you, in order that you might have fellowship [κοινωνίαν] with us. (1 Jn. 1:1, 3a)

The priority is given to hearing by the oral technique of *inclusio*: ἀκηκόαμεν holds the places of

honor, framing the period at the beginning and end. The excursus into the other senses—sight

and touch, especially the emphasis on witnesses and manifestation in v. 2—is readily understood

with reference to the postulated Docetic heresy which John is combating.[252]

This mini prologue continues:

> And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write [γράφομεν], in order that our joy might be fulfilled. (1 Jn. 1:3b-4)

John describes a chain of revelation which can be understood in matrix with his Gospel as

follows:

Father ⇨ Son ⇨ apostles ⇨ Christian readers

In this process, the verbs suggest that John's act of writing is simply a continuation of the process

of spoken revelation from the Father:

speaking [λόγος] ⇨ hearing [ἀκούω] ⇨ announcing [ἀπαγγέλω] ⇨ writing [γράφω]

In this activity, κοινωνία is created among all parties. As they hear the message proclaimed by

the apostles, they are united with John, Christ, and the Father. Here is an express biblical

description of what Ong calls the "oral synthesis."

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restructured the discourse genre, and then introduced a "fantasized orality," a "textually reinvented, monumentalized authority" through "the classical metaphysics of presence epitomized by the *Logos*" (91) is a fantasy of Kelber's own making. The absurdity of Kelber's deconstruction is apparent as he argues that John is actually **anti**-logocentric, in that John narrates the displacement of the *logos* from the *arche*!

[252]St. John's words are a warning not to overstate the oral/aural epistemology of the ancient world, for he can also pair **seeing** with **knowing** (1 Jn. 3:6).

Auditory Analogies

Walter Ong has argued that the shift from orality to writing and print in western society has produced a commensurate shift in the sensorium, the relationship and hierarchy of the five senses.[253] Hearing is supplanted by sight. In a further study, Ong examines the "sensory analogies" which are prevalent in a language as an indicator of the sensory hierarchies.[254] In a sample list derived from English, he lists 45 "visually based terms used in thinking of intellect and its work,"[255] such as insight, speculation, elucidate, demonstrate, discern, etc. He lists 31 tactile or kinetic analogies, such as deduce, follow, comprehend, establish, hesitate, etc. But the few aurally-based analogies for thinking he can produce are aural only in their remote etymology, such as "category" (an accusation), or "predicate" (something cried out). This example, and others raised in that essay, suggest a search for sensory analogies in the Scriptures as a further indicator of their oral flavor. In anticipation of studying the epistles as a case study in chapter four, we will restrict this search to these letters alone.[256]

First, however, one must admit that there are many **visual** analogies.[257] The New Testament world was literate. With the Galatians, Paul compares Christ on the cross to a poster:

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[253]See p. 59, above.

[254]Ong, "'I See What You Say': Sense Analogues for Intellect," in *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 121-44.

[255]Ong, *Interfaces*, 133.

[256]With such a small pool of data, we define "sensory analogy" rather loosely. Very often, English translations will modify or remove auditory analogies in the original Greek (and far more could be found in the Hebrew Old Testament), demonstrating how the modern sensorium has shifted.

[257]Kelber, "Modalities of Communication, Cognition, and Physiology of Perception: Orality, Rhetoric, Scribality." *Semeia* 65 (1994), argues that visualization was "a fundamental strategy of the ancient art of persuasion: to bring auditors to see what was being said, so that the images they visualized were vivid to the point of being indistinguishable from actuality. ... We should therefore be on our guard against the assumption that rhetorically informed and oral-derived texts were in all instances following the call of verbal, acoustic principles" (205).

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ crucified was portrayed-as-on-a-placard [προεγράφη]? (Gal. 3:1)[258]

Paul uses a similar visual analogy to the Colossians, in which he compares the forgiveness of sins to the stroking out of a certificate of debt:

> Having wiped out the certificate [χειρόγραφον] with its decrees [τοῖς δόγμασιν] against us, which was opposed to us, even this He took from our midst when He nailed it to the cross. (Col. 3:14)

Although we have learned that such writing would have been read aloud, nevertheless these two examples are primarily visual and written. One might cite many other visual analogies in New Testament Greek,[259] for this was a secondarily oral world, not primarily.

Yet, there is certainly a preponderance of **oral/aural** sense analogies. Teaching, learning, understanding, and obedience are presented primarily in oral/aural terms. For instance:

> Concerning Him [or "this"] there is much for us to say and it is difficult to explain [πολὺς ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος καὶ δυσερμήνευτος λέγειν], since you have become dull in the ears [νωθροὶ ... ταῖς ἀκοαῖς]. (Heb. 5:11)

Not only is faith from hearing (Gal. 3:2,5; Romans 10, see above, p. 247), but the whole relationship of man to God is related in oral/aural terms. Those with the mind of Christ glorify God "with one mouth [ἐν ἑνὶ στόματι]" (Rom. 15:6). On the other hand, sins such as "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, obscene speech" proceed "from your mouth [ἐκ στόματος ὑμῶν]" (Col. 3:8; just as Christ speaks of the wickedness which comes out of the heart through the mouth, Mt. 15:17-20). Even stronger is the analogy Paul uses for his "attitude" or "tone" towards the Galatians: "I wish to be present with you now and to change my voice [τὴν φωνήν μου]"

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[258]Nevertheless, the visual impact of the analogy is tempered a moment later by an auditory reference: "From the works of the Law did you receive the Spirit, or from the **hearing** of faith [ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως]?" (Gal. 3:2; cf. v. 5).

[259]We could pursue the analogies of thought and knowledge which Ong did with English: There are, for instance, common figures of speech like the interjections ἰδού and βλέπετε, both from verbs meaning "to see." Also the common verb for "to know," οἶδα, is really a perfect form borrowed from the disused present stem εἰδ- of the verb "to see." In this case, seeing is knowing.

(Gal. 4:20). And then, to describe his frankness and honesty with the Corinthians, Paul writes: "Our mouth opened to you, O Corinthians, our heart stands wide open" (2 Cor. 6:11).

The epistolary authors use language which suggests a conversation is going on between them and the receivers of the letter. Rather than a prosaic, philosophical "What shall we think/reason/suggest/propose about this?" Paul poses the dialectical question: "What then shall we say?"[260] Such oral engagement continues as the "writers" use verbs of speaking rather than verbs of writing.[261] Rather than γράφω, the apostle describes what he is doing in the epistle with λέγω (Rom. 9:1; 11:1, 11; Gal. 4:1), λαλῶ (Rom. 7:1), φημί (1 Cor. 10:19), and ἐρῶ (Phil. 4:4).[262] His rhetorical expectation is that the audience respond in kind: "You will say [ἐρεῖς] to me" (Rom. 9:19; cf. 11:19; Gal. 4:21); "someone will say [ἐρεῖ]" (1 Cor. 15:35; Jam. 2:18). What he has learned of his audience's situation is described as hearing (1 Cor. 11:18, ἀκούω), and he expects his audience to hear what he has to say: "I hear [ἀκούω] ... you hear [ἀκούετε]" (Phil. 1:27, 30); "listen ['Ακούσατε], my beloved brothers" (Heb. 2:5). Though in writing, the meeting of apostle with congregation through the epistle is conceived in oral/aural terms.

Likewise, Paul "hears" what the Old Testament "says" to him and to the church: "Do you not hear the Torah [τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε]? For it is written that Abraham ..." (Gal.

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[260]Rom. 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14; 9:30; cf. Heb. 11:32. Such language is characteristic of the diatribe, discussed above.

[261]Ian H. Henderson, "Didache and Orality in Synoptic Comparison," Journal of Biblical Literature 111.2 (1992): 295, suggests the comparison between "orality and literacy 'events' in the text." "Orality events" are counted by the frequency and distribution in this work of "speech words": λέγω, λαλέω, διδάσκω, κελεύω, ἐλέγχω, εὐχαριστέω, etc. Henderson concludes that the Didache is by comparison even with the New Testament overwhelmingly oral:

In this, Didache differs decisively from NT texts, which abound in literacy events (γέγραπται). This singular absence from Didache of "literacy events" and its contrasting emphasis on "orality events"—even in the face of its own and its sources' textuality—indicate not only a strongly oral sensibility: so consistent an avoidance of literary symbols must be taken as evidence for a conscious, programmatic option for oral categories. (295)

[262]Ignatius writes to the Ephesians, 9:2, "I was considered worthy through what things I write to speak to you [ἠξιώθην δι' ὧν γράφω προσομιλῆσθαι ὑμῖν]," and to the Magnesians, 1:1, "to address you [προσλαλῆσαι ὑμῖν]."

4:21). In Paul's fight with his sinful flesh, the Law is personified, and stands up to accuse Paul verbally: "... if the Law had not **said** [ἔλεγεν]" (Rom. 7:7). Again, "the Scripture **says** [λέγει ἡ γραφή]" (Rom. 9:17; 10:11; 11:2);[263] "Isaiah cries out [κράζει, present tense]" (Rom. 9:27). And, in fact, the Old Testament is spoken of as preaching: "through the exhortation of the Scriptures [διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως τῶν γραφῶν]" (Rom. 15:4). The oral attitude the apostles have towards their own writings is thus in line with how they first approached the Old Testament Scriptures. It was simply natural for them to "speak" of them in this way.

The Oral Function of the Prophetic and Apostolic Writings as Holy Scripture

The orality of the Scriptures is really a two-faceted question, concerning both origins and usage. Ruth Finnegan, for instance, urges us to distinguish orality and literacy in three main aspects: "composition, performance and transmission over time."[264] Thus far the investigation has been limited to origins, "etymology," if you will—and the analogy is apt. For, just as modern linguistics has learned the limitations of using root meanings for the contemporary meaning of words, so also the oral character of Scripture must be assessed on more than just an historical study of how it came to be. That is, we must also consider how the Bible has been **used** or how it has **functioned**. We can see from the work of William Graham in his *religionsgeschichtliches* study, *Beyond the Written Word*,[265] that the books of the Bible have behaved orally as sacred Scripture, a behavior we must consider reintroducing into the contemporary scene.

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[263]Other uses of λέγει are simply too numerous to cite (see especially the quotations of the Old Testament in Romans 10).

[264]Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 171.

[265]William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) A summary of this work is available in "Scripture as Spoken Word," in *Rethinking Scripture*, ed. Miriam Levering (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 129-69.

Graham treats not only the Christian Scriptures (Judeo-Christian, in his parlance), but also the Vedic texts of the Hindus, and the Qur'an of the Muslims. His goal is to formulate a new definition of "scripture" in the history of religions.

> The term "scripture" is usually reserved for religious texts that have been committed to the written or printed page, as the word itself and its common equivalents, such as "holy writ", suggest (see Chapter 4). Yet in most major religious traditions, sacred texts were transmitted orally in the first place and written down only relatively recently.[266]

This is true to a varying degree in each religion, with Hinduism even today having an almost exclusive preference for oral transmission. Thus, the traditional definition does not cut to the heart of what makes a sacred "text." Graham continues:

> ... from the historian's perspective, the sacrality or holiness of a book is not an a priori attribute of a text but one that is realized historically in the life of communities who respond to it as something sacred or holy. A text becomes "scripture" in active, subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a cumulative communal tradition.[267]

"Scripture" is therefore not a literary genre as such, but rather a characteristic which a written or oral text obtains as it is used in the religious community. If it can be demonstrated—as Graham will—that scriptural use is always oral in that community, then orality can be seen to be an essential characteristic of that scripture.

It is, therefore, primary in Graham's argument that written and oral culture do not embody completely incompatible modes of thinking. Only with print does the silent text win the field[268]—and this is especially evident in scholarship and intellectual culture.[269] Rhetoric then disappeared from the Western curriculum, and knowledge came to reside in encyclopedias,

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[266]Graham, *Beyond*, 4.

[267]Ibid., 5.

[268]Ibid., 17-18, identifies more with Marshall McLuhan's assessment of the impact of Gutenberg than with Havelock and his stress on writing itself: "the great chasm in forms of communication turns out to be not that between literate societies and nonliterate societies, but ... the gulf between our own modern Western, post-Enlightenment world of printed page and *all* past cultures (including our own predecessors in the West), as well as most contemporary ones" (29).

[269]Ibid., 21.

visually organized and static. "Rhetoric" was even taken hostage and made into an art of **written** composition. Thus, the technology of print joined with a host of Enlightenment forces to cut off the modern Western reader from the traditional oral use of texts. We need not linger on his careful rehearsal of oral history. One must note, however, just how late he places the final silencing of text: "Silent, private reading appears to have become dominant only with the advent of widespread literacy in much of Western Europe, which was largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon."[270] This judgment is a part of his resolve that texts are not inherently silent, but that silence is a violence done to words only very recently.

Graham's thesis, therefore, is that the modern Christian's experience of the Scriptures as a "holy book," a bound volume, is out of sync with Jewish and Christian history, as well as historic and contemporary Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu practice. One who approaches the Scriptures only according to their written aspect misses out on their fullness. Today, especially among Protestants, "'the word of God' no longer reflects so much an aural sense of hearing God speak as it does a fixing or reification of 'word' into a synonym for 'Bible' in the sense of holy writ."[271] Previous generations from an aural age more easily identified the "word of God" as it was preached "with the vocal word of God that spoke from the pages of scripture."[272] Even more, they understood the spoken word to have a certain priority—not necessarily **over against** what is written, but as the means by which the written acted and held authority in the community.[273]

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[270]Ibid., 41. The lack of widespread literacy even in Western Europe meant that the majority of people still knew books and other writings only through public recitation. See his statistics on p. 43.

[271]Ibid., 63.

[272]Ibid., 63.

[273]Graham, 66, notes how liturgical or devotional recitation in virtually every scriptural tradition establishes a lectionary sub-canon: "Such recitative texts often become the functionally primary scriptures of entire communities, since these are the texts that are known best by heart and used in daily life and ritual practice." Such is the power of the spoken word.

The Hindu tradition provides the extreme example, in which the written is actually disdained. The Vedas "have been orally transmitted for three millennia or more—for the majority of that time not because writing was unknown, but rather by choice, in explicit preference to writing them down."[274] Oral transmission is thought to be the only appropriate vehicle for holy utterance. Scripture comes alive only when it is spoken by teacher to student. The Hindi term indicating that a text has been memorized is *kaṇṭhastha*, meaning literally "situated in the throat."[275] All Vedic texts (*veda* means "what is known") are characterized as *śruti* "what is heard." Only by **listening** to the Brahman, the inspired Vedic seer, is knowledge received:

> Here, ... the written or printed text, however graphically accurate, is, by itself, only an empty cipher, never a valid proof text. Knowledge or truth, especially salvific knowledge or truth, is tied to the living words of authentic persons, not authentic documents. Further, these living words can be valid only on the lips of one who has been given the authority from a valid teacher to use them.[276]

Thus, in the extreme case of Hinduism, "scripture is, if not exclusively, then overwhelmingly, spoken word *rather than* holy writ."[277]

For this reason, the Muslim Qur'an provides more parallels to the Christian Scriptures. In fact, Graham notes, Islam is "the most radical of the three [book religions] in the exalted place

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[274]Ibid., 4. Only recently have the Vedic texts actually been put into print—and this only for the sake of dilettantes and scholars.

[275]Ibid., 69. Techniques of memorizations used accent, melody, and "alterations": manipulation of the word order until the text is literally mastered backwards and forwards, simply by sound.

[276]Ibid., 75. The authority of the word is tied to the authority of the office which serves it.

[277]Ibid., 77. Emphasis original.

that it assigns to its book, both ritually and theologically."[278] Nevertheless, the book is ultimately

not writ but "recitation," for that is what *qur'ān* means.[279]

> Fundamentally, the Qur'an was what its name proclaimed it to be: the Recitation given by
> God for Muhammad, and after him, all of His worshipers, to recite (as S.96.1ff. suggests),
> above all in worship of Him. Such chanting or reciting served as a "reminder" (*dhikr*) and
> a "criterion" (*furqān*) for human beings who are by nature "forgetful"; it proclaimed God's
> word and kept this word constantly before its intended hearers.[280]

The text of the Qur'an itself mandates this practice, and the practice of recitation has continued

unabated. Already when 'Uthman promulgated the first authoritative written text, he sent along

knowledgeable reciters to teach the proper recitation of the consonantal text.[281] To this day

various traditions of recitation and cantillation are preserved, and it is the sacrality of the

particular authoritative modes of recitation which stands behind the preservation of the Qur'an in

the Arabic language alone.

Today the Qur'an is "the one absolute essential of Muslim ritual and devotional life," it

is "prayerbook, lectionary, and hymnal rolled into one."[282] Fundamental to Muslim education is

the need to recite from the Qur'an in its original form with some ease. Learning the Qur'an by

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[278]Ibid., 79. "The Qur'an stands more clearly alone as the transcendent focus of Muslim faith than does the Christian Bible or even the Jewish Tanakh in its tradition of faith" (87).

[279]See ibid., 88. The Arabic root *QR'* means "to recite, read aloud," as does its Hebrew cognate קרא, which then becomes ἀναγι[γ]νώσκω in Greek. Graham notes later: "Before and after Muhammad's time, the Syriac cognate term *qeryānā*, 'lection', 'reading', was used by Syriac-speaking Christians (and presumably as a borrowing from Arabic-speaking Christians) both for the oral, liturgical reading from holy writ (=*lectio, anagnōsis*) and for the passage of scripture that is read aloud (=*lectio, periochē, anagnōsma*, etc.)" (90). The Jewish use of *Miqrā'* for the whole Bible, stressing its liturgical function, is analogous. **Could it be that the term "Qur'ān" was actually borrowed by the first Muslims from contemporary Jewish and Christian usage?** Graham believes so, and this connection makes his exploration of Islam all the more relevant to the Christian Bible.

[280]Ibid., 89-90.

[281]Ibid., 98.

[282]Ibid., 102.

heart gives a Muslim one of the highest honorific titles. Travelers to Muslim parts always remark on the omnipresence of qur'anic cantillation—today even intensified by radio and other electronic media! It permeates ritual, devotional, and public life, being especially prominent in the month of Ramadan (for which purpose the Qur'an is divided into thirty lections).

The Muslim case raises a fundamental hermeneutical issue: the Qur'an holds meaning for its faithful adherents, even when they do not understand its contents! The non-Arab Muslim who recites the Arabic texts, or the common Arab who understands little of its classical dialect, nevertheless makes use of the Qur'an in a meaningful way for his religious life. Graham thus argues that "meaning is not tied exclusively to the literal and intellectual **content** of the sacred texts."[283] Even where the language of the text is understood—as in the Christian preference for vernacular translation—the use of the text itself adds or changes meaning. Graham probes at the intangible side:

> It is not at all incomprehensible even to us typographic folk that a scriptural truth that is read, recited, chanted, or sung aloud strikes the hearer with an immediacy and emotional potential that the silently read word on the page is much less likely to effect in and of itself—however important that written word may be to the person of faith.[284]

But the sociological approach of *Religionsgeschichte* takes one only so far. It is the Christian Scriptures which push Graham beyond emotion.

It is simply a fact of history that in the Christian church the oral word holds a certain primacy. For, from the beginning the "Word of God" was the *kerygma*.[285] Naturally, then, as the church became "a religion of the book," that book was oral:

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[283]Ibid., 111. Emphasis added.

[284]Ibid., 113-14.

[285]Graham, *Beyond*, 119, heads the chapter with a quotation of Rom. 10:17: "Faith comes from hearing." This is not a denial of the role of the written Old Testament in the church. One simply notes that the apostles' calling was to preach—their writings being historically subsequent, and, as we are arguing, supplemental.

Graham, *Beyond*, 121, connects the establishment of a "fixed canon" with the late conception of "Word of God" as "book." The Roman church fixed their canon at Trent (1546), Protestant England at Westminster (1647). Significantly, Lutherans never "fixed" the canon;

The scriptures, however, were not merely written documents pored over only by the literate in the quiet of their own houses. The actual contents of the scriptural book (or, more correctly for the early Christian centuries, of the scriptural *books*) were transmitted largely through liturgical reading, catechetical instruction, and quotation and exegesis in sermons. This was especially true through the entire early medieval period, from the sixth to the tenth or eleventh century, when, if anything, literacy rates fell rather than rose from the levels that probably obtained in the Hellenistic-Roman culture of late antiquity. Nor did these oral modes of transmission of scripture ever die out.[286]

What we have seen to be the norm for the use of books in ancient culture, was therefore **ritually ingrained** into the life of the Christian church. The public recitation by which a book would be published was not just an event of entertainment and enrichment in the church, but a weekly (or daily) activity which God's people attended according to God's command. The ordinary layman certainly knew the Scriptures **only** through their proclamation in catechesis and liturgy.[287]

The complexity of "Word of God" in Christian tradition—the hesitation to identify it **exhaustively** with a book—is derivative from the identification of the divine Word with Christ himself.[288] Christ himself is active in the Word as it is quickened from the page of Scripture in the act of proclamation—thus, functionally, "God's Word" in Christian theology is defined around three poles (Christ, page, proclamation). God's people were gathered around God's Word in the *lectio*/ἀνάγνωσις. This fact is confirmed by New Testament witness itself (as we have cited above), as well as by the earliest Fathers such as Justin Martyr's *1 Apology* 67:3 (ca. 150)

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rather, they continued to work with the traditional distinction between homologoumena and antilegomena. Is this perhaps evidence of a **less** bookish approach to the Bible in Lutheranism?

[286]Ibid., 120.

[287]This was so true that Clement could write to the congregation: "You know the Holy Scriptures well" (*1 Clement* 53:1). Augustine, letter 71 (*MPL*, 33:242-43) criticizes Jerome's new translation of Jonah because it differs from the text "rooted in the affection and memories of all the people."

Nevertheless, the Christian church from the start was "addicted to literacy" - Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1967), 14. Even in the face of heretics, who cited the Scriptures to their own advantage, the early church did not limit their circulation, comments Graham, *Beyond*, 123. Written and oral worked in harmony.

[288]Graham, *Beyond*, 121. In Muslim theology, **the book itself** holds a salvific and mediatorial role analogous to that of Christ!

and *2 Clement* 2:4. Graham notes that the Muratorian Canon (ca. 200) sees the accepted use of a book in the public *lectio* as the "acid test" of scripturality.[289] The later predominance of lectionaries and breviaries demonstrates that the central significance of Scripture lay in its liturgical—thus oral—use.

Yet even outside of the *lectio*, the Scriptures permeated worship. The Psalms were preeminent, in hymn and chant as well as at the heart of preaching.[290] The sermon itself was usually a cento of Scriptural quotations, or exegesis of a particular passage. Augustine once asserted that, rather than preach a sermon, it would be better if he simply read directly from Scripture:

> *Et ego legere volo. Plus enim me delectat hujus verbi esse lectorem, quam verbi mei disputatorem* ["And I prefer to read. For it delights me more to be a lector/reader of this Word, than a disputant/debater of my word."][291]

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[289]Ibid., 123. The reverse also pertains: what is "canonical" may be read publicly, as the writer of the Muratorian Canon pronounces of the *Shepherd of Hermas*: "Therefore it must indeed be read, but cannot be publicly recited to the people in church." Marcion also, in reducing the canon, had public worship in mind. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) goes further by warning Christians not to read privately what is not read in worship (*Catecheses* 4:33,36). See Graham, 220 n. 17. Louis-Marie Chauvet, "What Makes the Liturgy Biblical?—Texts," *Studia Liturgica* 22.2 (1992): 128, cites the authorities:

> ... the canon of scripture has been constituted by a process of selection, in which the liturgical use has been the determining element. ... Thus P. Beauchamp can write: "What is canonical is what receives the authority from the public reading." This principle is equally true for the New Testament: "The essential criterion (for establishing the canon) was always the ancient use of the communities," a use which was largely determined in the liturgy: "the assembly as Church remains the place where the books were preserved, read, and explained, as they were the place where they were worked out and shaped."

[290]Graham, *Beyond*, 222 n. 22, quotes Emmanuel von Severus: "Kein Buch der Heiligen Schriften wurde in der Liturgie der Kirche häufiger verwandt, von den Kirchenvätern eifriger und eingehender erklärt, als das Buch der Psalmen. Noch für Gregor d. Gr. galt die Kenntnis der Psalmen als Maßstab des theologischen Wissens."

[291]Sermon 355:1 (*MPL*, 39:1574), quoted by Graham, *Beyond*, 223 n. 27. Behind this "preference" lies the conviction that the hearer of Scripture is in direct contact with God. For the proclamation of the Word in all its forms was the activity of the person who is the Word. This sentiment is echoed by his teacher Ambrose:

> Why do you not use the time you have free from church affairs for reading? Why not visit Christ, speak with Christ, listen to Christ? We speak with him when we pray, we listen to him when we read the divine words [*ilum audimus, cum divina legimus oracula*]

Such high value placed on the oral "performance" of the Bible thus explains why the historic liturgy of both East and West is mostly just quoted or paraphrased Scripture.

Graham's lengthy foray into the place of the oral word in the monastery repeats and strengthens what we have already heard from Balogh. He concentrates on the founder of communal monachism, St. Pachomius (d. ca. 347), and his prescriptions for the role of the *lectio divina*. At the heart of his rule was memorization, meditation and recitation. Whereas the modern mind would understand these as three steps, in which the first two are deeply internal and silent, Pachomius saw them as one indivisible act—or perhaps a circle. Graham thus pursues a complete re-orientation of how we understand *meditatio* in the monastic movement. Meditation focused not on a theme or idea, but on a text. It was first an oral activity, "to murmur, recite or repeat aloud (from memory)."[292] Jean Leclercq explains in his classic study:

> For the ancients, to meditate is to read a text and to learn it "by heart" in the fullest sense of this expression, that is to say, with one's whole being: with the body, since the mouth pronounces it, with the memory which fixes it, with the intelligence which understands its meaning, and with the will which longs to put it into practice.[293]

The monastic exercise was thus in the living, spoken Word of God.

It is gratifying to a Lutheran to find Graham concluding his lengthy study with Martin Luther—for in this man's rhetoric Graham sees the faithful continuation of the church's

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- *De Officiis ministrorum* 1:20.88 (*MPL*, 16:50), cited by Graham, *Beyond*, 125, and 223 n. 28. "*Audimus*" presupposes the oral habit of reading even in private—despite Ambrose's own famous peculiarity.

[292]Graham, *Beyond*, 134.

[293]Jean Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de dieu. Inititation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1957), 23; quoted and translated by Graham, *Beyond*, 134. See also Jean Leclercq, "Meditation as Biblical Reading," *Worship* 33.9 (October 1959): 562, where he quotes the Benedictine rule that in meditation "our mind be in accord with our voice [*mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*]."

According to this definition one must understand Luther's famous *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*: "you should meditate. That is, always repeat the oral speech [*die mündliche Rede*] and the literal word in the Book and compare them with each other, not only in your heart, but also outwardly [*eusserlich*], read them and reread them with diligent attentiveness and reflection, [to see] what the Holy Spirit means by them." *WA* 50:659.22-25; translation by Graham, *Beyond*, 149.

commitment to the oral Word.[294] Graham astutely perceives that for Luther the Old Testament was the Scriptures *par excellence*, "whereas the New was first and foremost the spoken Christian gospel, the proclamation, or *kerygma*, of the Christ."[295] Thus it was a book to be **heard**. The Gospel was a *lebendige Stimme* "living voice" speaking from a *Hörebuch* "listening book." And so:

> [I]f you ask a Christian what work renders him worthy of the name Christian, he will not be able to give any answer at all except the hearing of the word of God [*nisi auditum verbi dei*], that is, faith. Therefore the ears alone are the organs of the Christian person, who is justified and judged a Christian not by the works of any member but through faith [*ideo solae aures sunt organa Christiani hominis, quia non ex ullius membri operibus sed de fide iustificatur et Christianus iudicatur*].[296]

For Luther, "[the] Gospel is not really that which is in books and composed in letters, but rather an oral preaching and living word [*mundliche predig und lebendig wortt*], and a voice which resounds through the whole world and is shouted forth abroad."[297]

The extent to which the "living word" permeates Luther's writings makes further examples unnecessary. But it also demonstrates how deeply immersed he was in the historic tradition of the Scriptures as oral production. Luther's mature reflection on Scripture in the church provides the capstone in building Graham's case—and mitigates fears that Graham has

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[294]Graham rightly avoids labeling the Middle Ages as a sepulcher from which Luther resurrected the proclaimed Word. The uneducated peasant was not abandoned to the stained-glass window:

> [W]e should not forget that without the oral reading, reciting, chanting, and singing of the biblical word in liturgical and devotional life, not to mention the biblically tinged popular lore of story and song, the images on the walls and windows of churches and in the pages of books would not have been intelligible—or at least only imperfectly so. "Sermons in stone" could only be "preached" on a cathedral façade or an altarpiece after they had been preached in catechism and worship, in public or private reading, and in homiletic recapitulation and elaboration. (*Beyond*, 142)

[295]Ibid., 145. As a generalization this must be taken for what it's worth.

[296]*WA* 37:512.16-13.9. Graham, *Beyond*, 141, cites this classic passage at the head of the chapter.

[297]*WA* 12:259.10; translated by Graham, *Beyond*, 149.

placed too much importance on non-Christian evidence. Graham's concluding words concerning

the oft-perceived dichotomy between spoken and written Word are most wise:

> In this study, I have sought to move beyond this kind of dichotomization in order to highlight the *interpenetration* of the written and the spoken word. Rather than argue for the importance of oral texts over written texts, I have sought to emphasize the oral aspects of written texts themselves and the relative neglect of these aspects in both modern scholarship and popular usage.[298]

This perception of the oral use of written texts is precisely the vision needed for the interpretation of Scripture.

What are the implications of this vision? Graham asks and answers four questions concerning oral versus silent reading, religious revitalization, the liturgy, and scriptural authority. In doing so he asserts that oral reading and memorization "internalize" a text and increase scriptural piety. He suggests that "a shared text—one that can be chanted in unison and constantly referred to as a proof text common to an entire community—is a powerful binding factor in any group." He observes that liturgical reading of a text "is the surest index of its scriptural status." And finally he concludes: "Regardless of the supposed 'inexactness' of oral transmission, emphasis upon the oral text of a scriptural book does not appear to have worked against scriptural literalism [by which he means: authority]."[299]

One respondent suggests that Graham may have missed the essential eastern conception of God's Word by retaining western "attitudes and vocabulary." Or, put another way: the question Graham asks concerns a western problem (the textual approach to Scripture), which consequently produces the wrong answer, especially since Graham seems to judge modern Christianity only by the witness of American Protestantism. George Bebawi's review neatly summarizes the contrast of the present-day eastern approach:

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[298]Graham, *Beyond*, 157. Emphasis original.

[299]Ibid., 160-62. With the last point he attempts to de-emphasize the tradition versus writ argument.

The East took its starting point from God Incarnate. The divine revelation is in Jesus Christ rather than the Bible. The Word of God bears witness to Christ, and there is no dichotomy between the written and the oral word. ... What we have inherited is the incarnation-printed text dichotomy rather than the written-oral dichotomy (see pp. 156ff.). The Bible in the Eastern Christian tradition is a liturgical book. It cannot be understood correctly outside the broad context of Eastern worship, which includes a very wide vision of God, creation, history, salvation, and the eternal destiny of humanity. It is within this wide vision of worship that we can understand the background of memorization, meditation and the application of the Word of God. We must remember that our modern critical approach was unknown to the Fathers. Nor is it appreciated by contemporary Eastern Christians. This is due to the fact that the Bible is not only the heart of worship, but also its source.[300]

While not all his words bear up to intense scrutiny, Bebawi has made a crucial connection

between what westerners call "textuality" and the decontextualizing of the Bible. The silent

Word has become a scholar's book. Modern criticism remains misdirected as long as it removes

the Scriptures from their oral proclamation in worship. Thus, the orality problem concerns more

than just sociology, more than a McLuhan-esque media shift.[301]

When the place of the Scriptures in the oral proclamation of the liturgy is recognized,

we are on the threshold of a new hermeneutic. This is a move beyond viewing the Bible as a

source-book for propositional truths, or a puzzle to be sorted through by critical tools. Bebawi is

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[300]Bebawi, George, "Bible East and West," *The Expository Times* 100 (1989): 107.

[301]Recognizing that orality is really a question of Biblical **context** helps one to evaluate the popular work of Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1982). In this major work, based on his doctoral dissertation, Klem describes an experiment in west Africa, concerning how best to inculcate Bible knowledge among new Christians. A traditional text-based approach to teaching Hebrews 1-6 was compared with other patterns utilizing recordings of the words set to native music. The latter methods worked far better—according to debriefing exams used to determine knowledge acquired. Yet, despite Klem's call to abandon "western" patterns of text-based education, it seems that he has missed another bias. For, while he challenges the connection of Christian training to mass literacy campaigns, he fails to question the "Bible study" approach to Christianity. More than the medium is at stake. The goal of the teaching campaign was that the students would understand the content, themes, structure, etc., of the letter to the Hebrews—an educational, academic, even "critical" model. An oral approach to the Scriptures which is truly faithful to their origin must emphasis their liturgical context and use, and their divine function (in Lutheran terms, as "Means of Grace"). See also Klem, "The Bible as Oral Literature in Oral Societies," *International Review of Mission* 67 (1978): 479-85.

wrong in claiming the liturgical Word only for eastern Christianity. Westerners such as the

Lutheran theologian, Hermann Sasse, have made the same analysis:

> For the Scriptures are not primarily books meant to impart theoretical knowledge, but liturgical books meant to be read or chanted "en ekklesia" to make men wise unto salvation. Even the Law was read in the solemn assembly of God's people (2 Kings 23; Nehem. 8f.) and the liturgical formulas in the conclusions of the Pauline epistles (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:19ff.) show that even this kind of literature was read in the solemn assembly of Christ's Church... . Freed from the fetters of a mere school-book, the Bible has become again the book of the Church.[302]

Thus, orality studies simply ask for a recognition of the role the Scriptures have always held in

the church, that they become again *viva vox*.

To emphasize the oral aspect of Scripture is not to deny the place of private reading, as

the Roman church maintained for so long.[303] The ancient church taught a twofold use of the

Scriptures which would be expected at the interface of the oral and the literate, a fact which

Rome is now recognizing:

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[302]Sasse, "Rome and the Inspiration of Scripture," *The Reformed Theological Review* 22.2 (June 1963): 44. The importance of the liturgical use of the Scriptures was Sasse's continual cry. See also idem, *Zeugnisse: Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden 1933-1944*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1979), 54: "Er [1. Petrus] war ja nicht nur zu stiller Privatlektüre bestimmt, sondern wie alle Gemeindebriefe des Neuen Testaments, ja wie die ganze Heilige Schrift zum lauten Vorlesen in der Gemeinde, und das heißt im Gottesdienst."

[303]Yet even the Roman position must be understood. The counter-Reformation prohibition of private reading may have been an attempt to quash further attempts at reform, but the earlier, medieval use of the Bible was different. The laity could not use the Scriptures in their hands due to wide-spread illiteracy, and they simply did not need the Scriptures in their hands, for they had them in their ears. Ong, *Presence*, 268, illustrates this by way of an extreme example, the theological student:
> The bible was indeed present to the Middle Ages, but present in the way it could be present to a society still, to our way of thinking, impossibly oral despite its possession of and fixation on writing. Being "in the Bible" in such a culture meant being present via the largely oral tradition through which the society still functioned. If a medieval theological student listened for twelve years (the theology course at Paris once lasted this long) to endless disputations built around the Scriptures and at the same time attended countless sermons quoting incessantly from the Scriptures, he could very well get by without much reading of the Bible, especially since the culture had trained his memory for oral assimilation. The air was filled with the word of God.

Place every book of Scripture in the hands of children is an instruction of the fourth-century Apostolic Constitution ... . Besides being read in church, the Bible is distributed by sales says Augustine ... . The principle is plain: in the formative years of the Christian Church, the Bible was available in the vernacular ... . [T]he laity: men, women, and children were expected to hear it read in church and to read it for themselves at home.[304]

Over against the radical reformers, this was clearly also the teaching of Luther. Print was not a substitution for the proclaimed Word, but a servant of it. Eisenstein's assessment is right on the mark:

Compared to the Priors of the *Grande Chartreuse*, Luther was much more committed to the power of the spoken word and much less prepared to detach the work of the mouth from that of the hand. Printed publicity served preaching as it served vocal performances of many other kinds. This point is worth keeping in mind as a warning against oversimplifying the impact of printing and jumping to the conclusion that it invariably favored sight over sound, reading over hearing. "To Luther (who wrote a good deal!) the Church is not a pen house but a mouth house. The Gospel proclaimed viva voce has converting-power; preaching is a means of grace; Word and sacrament must not be sundered." It is because the printed page amplified the spoken word and not because it silenced it that Luther regarded Gutenberg's invention as God's "highest act of grace." To set press against pulpit is to go against the spirit of the Lutheran Reformation.[305]

Eisenstein's sober judgment, in accord with Graham's, is a fitting summary of the relationship between the oral and written aspects of the Word.[306]

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[304]Greenslade, quoted in Eisenstein, 1:343. The reading of the Bible at home is, of course, a luxury which only the rich could have afforded. Green, 277, is adamant that orality and literacy not be made into alternatives. He speaks of "the intermediate mode of reception, widespread in the Middle Ages, in which a work was composed with an eye to public recital from a written text, but also for the occasional private reader. One of the pointers to this intermediate mode is the formula 'to hear or to read,' originally at home in classical Latin literature, but also to be found in medieval Latin literature, in legal practice, and in the various vernaculars." This medieval mode is true also of biblical culture, although private reading was probably practiced to a lesser degree.

[305]Eisenstein, 1:374. "The Priors of the *Grande Chartreuse*" were the Gideons of the Middle Ages, monks sworn to silence who attempted to "preach with their hands." The quotation in the middle is from Greenslade, "Epilogue," 485. On the other hand, Luther did understand the power of books: "When Martin Bucer of Strasbourg somewhat priggishly urged the Wittenberg theologians to get out into the world and preach, Luther replied in the pregnant words: 'We do that with our books.' He knew his century" (Eisenstein, 1:373, quoting Dickens, *Reformation and Society*, 86).

[306]On occasion, however, Eisenstein resorts to accusations of clericalism and power struggles, pitting liturgical use against home use. E.g.,: "one might compare the effects of listening to a Gospel passage read from the pulpit with reading the same passage at home for

One of the great weaknesses of mainstream oral theory is that it has pursued orality only at the **source** of scriptural production. Oral theory, which rightly is part of the historical task, then becomes **only** an historical task. Although it is certainly helpful to learn how Christ in His teaching and biblical writers in their composition used established oral techniques, it is evident that the **contemporary** oral character of the Scriptures needs further attention. By hermeneutical consensus, the meaning of a text is not to be found in the words in isolation; rather, words cooperate in context to give up their treasures. In the past two hundred years especially, the context of biblical study has gradually changed. This chapter has moved from a study of oral composition to oral production and reception. The two must not be sundered. The context of the Scriptures is primarily proclamation in the liturgy, and then, historically at least, private (vocalized) reading in support of the faith.

Addendum 1: "Letter" and "Spirit" in 2 Corinthians 3

The significance which 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 holds in oralist writings demands that we pursue a clear understanding of this passage. We have already heard Werner Kelber appeal to 2 Corinthians 3:6 as a "full-blown hermeneutic" of the superiority of orality (see p. 187 above). Walter Ong placed the same passage at the center of a tirade against text in an essay whose title itself is telling: "*Maranatha*: Death and Life in the Text of a Book." A selection of quotations is illustrative:

> In oral or oral-aural communication both speaker and hearer must be alive. Without the speaker's living action, there are no real words ... The case is quite different with writing. Once I have put a message into writing, it makes no difference so far as the text goes whether I am dead or alive. Once a poet has written out a poem, so far as the poem goes, his own continued existence is irrelevant.[307]

> A corpse cannot die, for it has already passed through death, the ultimate change. ... In a written work, the author's words are mortmain. They will never die because when he put

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oneself. In the first instance, the Word comes from a priest who is at a distance and on high; in the second it seems to come from a silent voice that is within" (1:428). Her tone suggests that she does not believe it to be a positive thing that the Word comes to one from outside oneself.

[307]Ong, "*Maranatha*," 422.

them down, he fixed them for good. They are a "mortification" because writing them down killed them, as Plato protested in his Seventh Letter and in the *Phaedrus*.[308]

This presence of death in the text has been suggested not merely in countless secular texts, as sampled here, but abundantly in biblical texts as well. We read, for example, in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "The letter kills but the spirit gives life." The "spirit," *pneuma*, is of course breath, which gives being to the sounded words, spoken words, the only real words there were or are or ever will be.[309]

Can Ong get away with this interpretation of Paul? Is it possible that Paul should attack **in writing** the written-ness of the Old Testament? Ong himself goes on to draw the data from the New Testament for the opposite conclusion, that life can indeed come from Scripture:

> The Bible itself ... associates writing not only with death but also quite explicitly with redemption, liberation, and exuberant life. The Gospel according to John states at its close (20:31) that "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."[310]

One could multiply such references; but it should be beyond doubt that the New Testament holds the Old Testament Scriptures in high regard, and has a strong opinion of itself, as well.

Hermann Sasse has traced the historical roots of this exegesis of 2 Corinthians 3 and the false alternative it poses between written and oral:

> "*Qui locutus per prophetas*" does not mean only that the Holy Spirit has once upon a time spoken. He speaks today through the prophetic books (see "*secundum Scripturas*" in the same creed, cf. 1 Cor. 15:3f.). ... The distinction between the living oral word and the "dead" written word goes back to the young Schleiermacher for whom every sacred scripture is "a mausoleum of religion," a proof that there has been a living experience in the past. This distinction resounds in modern Protestant theology which has found it in 2 Cor. 3:6. But the "letter kills" refers to the Law, not to the written Word as such.[311]

Sasse raises in response the classic Lutheran understanding of this passage as distinguishing Law and Gospel. Is this interpretation any more defensible from the text?

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[308]Ibid., 423.

[309]Ibid., 424.

[310]Ibid., 435.

[311]Hermann Sasse, "Sasse's Footnotes to Letter 14 (1967/69)," in *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series, no. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995), 106.

What we can deduce from the text is that Paul's standing among the Corinthians has been compromised by his continued absence (which he defends in 1:12-2:2 & 2:12-13), by the tone of a letter he wrote (2:3-4), and by the sinful activity of a nameless offender (2:5-11). But the immediate context of this passage is the problem of false teachers, "peddlers" of a false message (2:17), who apparently have infiltrated the Corinthians on the basis of "letters of commendation" (3:1). Paul's authority as an apostle comes directly from God (1:1), for which reason he carries no written authorization.[312] The question of written commendation prompts a comparison of the old and new covenants on the basis of writing. One must assume that the "peddlers" peddle a judaizing message, brandishing the tablets of the Law together with their letters of commendation.[313] It should be sufficient to debunk Ong's exegesis by noting that Paul challenges the false teachers with his own **writing**. Paul does not think the Gospel is diminished by committing it to papyrus. But he takes up the image of writing in order to contrast the two different ways in which the Law[314] and the Gospel were written: the letters of commendation

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[312]Apollos—not an apostle—does carry such written commendation (Acts 18:27). On letters of commendation, see chapter four.

Other passages could be cited here which impact upon the relationship between apostolic word, office, and presence. Chief among them would be: "The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and the one who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Lk. 10:16; cf. Mt. 10:40; Jn. 13:20; Gal. 4:14; Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 6:1). Here one has a glimpse of the oral world's perception that the spoken word conveys presence and power, that what is said is real. Werner Kelber comments:

> Because medium and referent, form and content, seem to coincide, sounded words and their subject matter are assumed to be partaking in the same level of reality. ... When one encounters, therefore, in John's gospel the notion of the authorial presence and present efficaciousness of words, one has to do with a perception of language which is rooted in oral sensibilities (Werner Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words: The Apotheosis and Narrative Displacement of the Logos," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58.1 [Spring 1990]: 76.)

The reader, however, must wait for a full discussion of ἀπόστολος and all it touches until chapter four of this study.

[313]Are the letters real, perhaps coming from Jewish authorities in Jerusalem? Cf. Saul's letter in Acts 9:2; 22:5; 26:10.

[314]Manifestly he is speaking of the Law here, for what else was written on stone? Certainly not the whole Torah, or the whole Old Testament.

were written with ink; the Law was written on stone; the Gospel was written by/with the Holy

Spirit on their hearts (3:3).[315]

Through this comparison of letters with stone, Paul sets out to attack the false teachers

by attacking the Law. The reference to the Spirit written on the heart is not to direct men inward

for their confidence, but rather to the external God who has given this Spirit in Christ (3:4-5). He

then makes the Old Testament / New Testament distinction explicit by naming the new (3:6), and

then the old (3:14). Paul has set up a multi-faceted contrast between his apostolic teaching and

the peddlers' false teaching, involving the following oppositions:

"paper" letter	⇔	human letter
ink	⇔	Spirit
stone	⇔	heart
Old Testament	⇔	New Testament[316]
letter	⇔	Spirit
death	⇔	life
fading glory	⇔	enduring glory
condemnation	⇔	righteousness
Moses	⇔	Christ
veiled face	⇔	unveiled face
[slavery]	⇔	liberty

Anything on the left can become shorthand for the old, what is past, to return to which is to

choose death over life. Although he does not explicitly mention it, the distinction between Law

and Gospel is certainly apropos—although one must not equate the entire Old Testament in its

own context with Law, for Paul is speaking of returning to the old when the new has already

come, which is to reject Christ and turn to slavery (cf. the argumentation of Galatians [and of

Hebrews]). In the context of such a rhetorical argument, γράμμα (3:6) can be seen as simply a

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[315]Paul is probably thinking of Jer. 33:31-34 (quoted also in Heb. 8:8-12), which speaks of the new covenant being written on their hearts. These examples might commend the less common understanding of Rom. 2:15—τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, not "what the Law demands [that is, the Law itself]" but "[the judgment] which the Law makes is written on their hearts."

[316]Not as such the distinction between two halves of the Bible as book, but the two ways in which God has dealt with His people through history—although in 3:14 what is read in the synagogue is called the "Old Testament."

handy shorthand for Law,[317] not "the one quality of the Law that is a principal key to Paul's antinomianism."[318] The Gospel message is not itself a hermeneutical discussion of the merits of written versus oral communication. Both testaments, old and new, can exist in writing and be quickened by public proclamation.[319] The "letter" brings death because of **what** is written and how it is being used, not simply because it is written.

Addendum 2: Hearing and Understanding in the Parable of the Sower

Whereas the modern man would commonly assent to the dictum, "**seeing** is believing," the ancients would not be so quickly convinced. Rather, in a culture with heavy oral influence or residue, knowledge and understanding is more directly connected with the custom of public, **oral** reading and **hearing**. In the New Testament the connection of hearing and understanding is pressed further in service of faith. This is a special emphasis of Matthew's Gospel. Where hearing produces the expected or desired goal of understanding, there is faith; where the "oral synthesis" has broken down, there is rejection. The ancient, oral, "philosophical" connection between hearing and understanding has been given a theological significance. A hearing without faith borne from understanding is no real hearing at all. This faith kind of hearing distinguishes the disciple from the crowds. Thus, "understanding" can become equivalent to faith borne from hearing. The parable is the scalpel which divides faith hearing from non-faith deafness.[320] When

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[317]Paul uses this shorthand again in Rom. 7:6, where Gospel is compared to Law as Spirit to letter. Cf. Rom. 2:29.

[318]Kelber, 159.

[319]The Old Testament is also proclaimed orally, by Paul's own assertion (2 Cor. 3:14-15). In Rom. 10 Paul argues that faith comes from hearing on the basis of the Old Testament itself, marshaling his evidence from the Torah (Deut. 30:11-14; 32:21), the prophets (Is. 28:16; 52:7; 53:1; 65:2; Joel 2:32), and the writings (Ps. 19:4). See our earlier discussions of Romans 10 on pp. vii and 247 above.

[320]Werner Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words: The Apotheosis and Narrative Displacement of the Logos," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58.1 (Spring 1990): 72, stresses that it is the parable which epitomizes the oral capability of engaging or disengaging the hearer:

Jesus cries out for his hearers to understand, ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω "the one who has ears, let him hear,"[321] He has the prophecy of Isaiah in mind:

> And the disciples came and said to Him: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And answering He said to them: "To you it has been given to know [γνῶναι] the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but it has not been given to those. ... For this reason I am [in the habit of] speaking to them in parables, because though they are seeing they do not see and though hearing [ἀκούοντος] they do not hear or understand [ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνίουσιν]. And with reference to them is being fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah [6:9-10], which says [ἡ λέγουσα]:
>
> > With the ear you will hear [ἀκοῇ ἀκούσετε[322]] and you will certainly not understand [συνῆτε], and though seeing you will see [βλέποντες βλέψετε] and you will certainly not know [ἴδητε].
> > > For the heart[323] of this people has become dull,
> > > > and with the ears [τοῖς ὠσὶν] they have scarcely heard [ἤκουσαν]
> > > > > and they have closed their eyes,
> > > > > lest they should see with the eyes
> > > > > and hear with the ears [τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν]
> > > > and understand [συνῶσιν] with the heart
> > > and return and I heal them.
>
> But blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see and they did not see, and to hear what you hear and they did not hear [ἀκοῦσαι ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσαν]." (Mt. 13:10-17)

In all three Synoptics, this quotation from Isaiah is framed by the parable(s) of the Sower. The parable is about hearing or not hearing the scattered seed of the Word. The connection of hearing and understanding explains also the way Jesus introduces His "explanation" of the parable: "You

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Parables, in other words, were rarely self-explanatory. They challenged hearers to examine their own constructions of the world in light of the parabolic logic, and vice versa. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This formula placed at the end of a number of parables in the tradition, discloses their open-endedness toward the audience. Their real purpose lay not in themselves as finished stories, but in their ability to engage hearers.

The parable demonstrates that neither understanding nor the "oral synthesis" is an automatic result of hearing. Oral language has the ability either to connect or disconnect the hearer. On the other hand, apart from hearing there can be no understanding or faith—in New Testament oral thought.

[321]Mt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; 25:29 (critical apparatus). Parallels in Mk. 4:9, 23; 7:16 (app.); Lk. 8:8; 12:21 (app.); 14:35: 21:4 (app.). In these parallels, which influence some manuscripts of Matthew, ἀκούειν is added: "ears to hear."

[322]Although we translate the Greek, the repetition of the verb at the beginning of the first two lines reflects the use of a Hebrew infinitive absolute in Is. 6:9.

[323]The heart is the seat of understanding.

yourselves, then, **hear** [ἀκούσατε] the **parable** of the Sower" (Mt. 13:18). As His disciples,

their hearing of the "explanation" is equivalent to hearing the parable with **understanding**; that

is the unspoken implication. In the second telling and the second hearing, all becomes clear.

The parable itself interacts intertextually with Isaiah's prophecy which it frames.[324]

Those who hear but do not understand in Isaiah 6 are analogous to the ground beside the road,

which never takes the seed to heart, and from whom the seed of the Word is snatched away—

"From the one **hearing** [ἀκούοντος] the Word of the kingdom and not **understanding**

[συνιέντος] the evil one comes and snatches what has been sown in his heart" (Mt. 13:19).

Forming an *inclusio* at the other end of the parable/explanation is the contrast: "the [seed] sown

upon the good soil—this is the one **hearing** [ἀκούων] the Word and **understanding** [συνιείς]"

(:23).[325] The connection between faith (understanding) and hearing is worked out by St. Paul in

Romans 10, which, though it specifically mentions neither this parable nor Isaiah 6, might be

seen as a midrash on these words. The context of "the Jews' unbelief even though the words have

struck their ears" is the same. The problem of hearing is extended by Paul to include the

Gentiles,[326] in the same way that Jesus' parable, once recorded in the Gospel narrative, calls also

for all readers/hearers of the Gospel to understand and believe. "The one who has ears, let him

hear" speaks also from the narrator to the audience down through the ages. The parable of the

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[324]The tendency of lectionaries to skip the middle and jump to the explanation obscures the connection which Christ would have us make with Isaiah 6.

[325]The Marcan and Lucan parallels lack this specific vocabulary of understanding which is prominent in Matthew.

[326]In Acts 28 Paul quotes Is. 6:9-10 to justify the Gospel turning from Jew to Gentile. See also his quotation of Is. 52:15 (LXX) in Rom. 15:21, in which he expresses his desires that those who have not yet heard [οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν] might understand [συνήσουσιν]. In 2 Cor. 4:13, Paul connects faith with speaking at the preacher's end of the equation, quoting Ps. 115:1 (LXX): ἐπίστευσα, διὸ ἐλάλησα "I believed, therefore I spoke." The author of Hebrews notes that the Hebrews in the wilderness had "the Word of hearing" [ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς] preached to them, but it was not co-mingled with faith, and so did not benefit them (Heb. 4:2).

Sower, as it appears in all three Synoptics, offers a powerful analogy for the reading experience in an oral/aural world.

CHAPTER 4

EPISTLES, APOSTLES, AND ORALITY

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught,
whether by speech or by our letter. (2 Thess. 2:15)

For letters are worth a great deal and are not inferior to conversation with people actually
present. (Diogenes to Hipparchia, 3rd Cynic Letter of Pseudo-Diogenes)[1]

Introduction

As we observed in surveying recent exegetical appropriation of orality research in

chapter three, the most immediate application of this work to the New Testament has been in the

Gospels. The origins of orality research in folklore studies, beginning with the Greek epic, made

its relevance to the narrative portions of Scripture quite obvious. Aside, however, from Werner

Kelber's treatment of Paul's letters[2] there has been little progress beyond the Gospels into the

rest of the New Testament. In this chapter we will take up the epistles as a case study in oral

interpretation. The primary oral data which will be developed are the importance of the

performance of a text and the role of the lector, the "dialogue" character of the epistles and other

such oral/rhetorical characteristics, the distrust accorded to the written word alone, and the living

"presence" of the word brought about by the oral synthesis. These elements of the preceding

study will be fleshed out in order to present a picture of the epistles which goes beyond

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[1]Quoted in Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 38.

[2]Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 140-83. See our discussion of the same on pp. 185ff. above, and in the addendum beginning on p. 241.

traditional formal analysis in order to examine the function and setting of the epistles in the life of the early church, and their relationship to the work of the apostles within the same.

Traditional Theories of Epistolary Genre

The discernment of a specific epistolary genre in the ancient Hellenistic-Roman world is far from recent. The data have been available ever since Cicero's 931 letters were posthumously published in the first century A.D.[3] Since the 1880s, such literary collections have been supplemented by everyday correspondence uncovered by archeologists in the papyri and ostraca. From these examples, it is clear that a standard epistolary format was observed, which rather invariably included the following items, as William Doty's standard study summarizes them:

> Introduction (prescript or salutation)
>> including: sender, addressee, greetings, and often additional greetings or wish for good health
> Text or Body, introduced with characteristic introductory formulae
> Conclusion
>> including: greetings, wishes, especially for persons other than the addressee; final greetings or prayer sentence; and sometimes dating.[4]

Such letters were found to be formal, not chatty, stylized, somewhat impersonal, and brief (especially in the case of lower class ostraca, by constraint of the material).

Yet, ever since the literary form of the Hellenistic letter was first applied to the New Testament epistles as a norm, there has been discomfort. Kümmel's standard critical introduction to the New Testament professes despair at the attempt to fit the twenty-one epistles into such a mould:

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[3]See the discussion of this collection in William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 2-3.

[4]Doty, 14. Doty, 13, suggests that this format remained in use from the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd A.D. See also the more detailed discussions in David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 163-69 & 183-91; and Stowers, 20 and throughout.

But not all are really letters, that is, a writing on a particular occasion directed to a specific person or circle of persons, written with the aim of a direct communication with no thought of any wider distribution. ... Closest to the ancient private letters stand Phlmn and II and III John. But ... they are not private correspondence, but the instrument of early Christian missionary work. ... [T]he boundary between actual and artificial letters in the NT cannot always be sharply drawn. ... Not even the form of the less private letters in the NT can be bracketed immediately with the Hellenistic epistle (cf. Epicurus, Seneca) or with the Jewish-Hellenistic letters (e.g., Letter of Aristeas).[5]

Kümmel is clearly working with the overly-narrow definition of the ancient letter prevalent in his time. The restriction of the form to specific, occasional, private correspondence is manifestly false.[6] The New Testament epistles do not conform to models of private correspondence because, with few exceptions, they are not private correspondence!

More recent intensive study of ancient letter-writing handbooks has broadened our understanding of the diverse form and function which the epistle took. These handbooks detailed many types of letter beyond the private—although the categories are necessarily somewhat artificial.[7] There are, of course, business letters, paralleling on a more formal level the lists and

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[5]Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th ed., trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 248-49.

[6]Doty, 3, writes of the results which the publication of Cicero's letters brought: "Soon letters of the empire were written as much for public consumption as for conveying direct information to individuals. And along with this development went increasing use of the letter form for philosophical and moral exhortation, a tradition which can be found earlier in letters (some genuine) of Plato and Isocrates, Aristotle, Demosthenes, and Epicurus. Horace wrote poetically formed epistles dealing with historical, legal, and grammatical topics; Seneca, Pliny, and Quintillian wrote brief treatises with epistolary features." Aune, 158, opens his discussion of the epistle: "The letter form exhibited great flexibility in the ancient world. Virtually any type of written text could be sent to individuals or groups in an epistolary format."
It is possible that Kümmel is reacting to Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* trans. L. R. M. Strachan, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 290-302, who insisted on a distinction between "epistle" (a highly literary production, intended for publication) and "letter" (a personal, occasional communication). Deissmann, in his love affair with the papyri, placed Paul's letters into the latter category—a judgment and distinction which is mostly rejected today. See Doty, 24-25; Aune, 160; Stowers, 17-20.

[7]On the handbooks, see Doty, 8-11; Aune, 161; Stowers, 32-35. The handbooks identify a plethora of types (Demetrius has 21, Proclus [=Libanius] has 41), many of which form sub-genres of importance within the larger letters of the New Testament (such as the "letter of commendation" which parallels Paul's frequent words concerning his companions; see below). These types corresponded closely to aspects of the three species of rhetoric delineated by Quintilian.

receipts found by archeologists on scraps and fragments of pottery. But more relevant to the New Testament—and more enlightening for our study of the apostolic use of the letter—are what Doty describes as "official letters":

> The official letter was of great significance, carrying as it did the sense of the presence of the ruler in epistolary form, and being often intended to establish a new situation or at least to convey directions or information to a large body of persons at once. In addition to readings in the administrative centers, some official letters were posted for public perusal.[8]

Such letters paralleled the New Testament epistles in that they contained τὰς ἐντολάς "instructions" sent down from above, from one in authority, and in being general, weighty, and public. Of similar interest are the letters labeled "public" by Doty. These date back to Isocrates (463-338 B.C.), who sought through them to influence public opinion and unite the four Greek states. Similar open letters were frequent during Roman Hellenism. A third type of interest to us is the "discursive letter," which is close to an essay. This "letter-essay" included scientific communications, but also "paraenetic-didactic letters, with their advice on 'how to live' (the classical example came to be Seneca's Letters to Lucilius)."[9]

Such study has begun to ease somewhat the discomfort resulting from the strict constraints of earlier analysis. This new awareness of the epistle's diverse form and broad social function is certainly a step in the right direction. Yet epistolography remains a field overly concerned with literary structure. One area which perhaps demonstrates the failure of traditional analysis is the question of authorship. If, indeed, Paul was the real author of all the epistles which bear his name (and yet modern techniques of criticism continue to contradict that assertion), perhaps the fault lies in the method rather than in the epistle. That is to say, the application of

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[8]Doty, 6. See also Aune, 164-65.

[9]Doty, 7. See also Aune, 165-66.

overly-strict formal criteria results in a mechanical Paul, who cannot deviate from a purported standard form.[10]

The example of Hebrews is also instructive of the failure of traditional epistolary theory. How can it be an epistle when it lacks the standard prescript, scholars have asked?[11] Various theories have been produced suggesting that it is a sermon, not an epistle.[12] The theory

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[10]Terence Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 95, notes how the analysis of reader-response theory can help to explain the differences between Pauline and so-called non-Pauline writings:

> The possibility of having diverse implied authors with one and the same real author is actually what is involved in much of the discussion about the authorship of the pastoral letters. ... The few scholars who hold for Pauline authorship argue that the differences can be accounted for because at the time Paul would have written the pastorals he was considerably older, his ideas had matured and he was tired and worn out. In sum he was writing as a different person. In effect these scholars are saying that the implied author of the pastorals is indeed very different from the implied author of Romans, but the real author of both was one and the same person.

Unfortunately, Keegan prefers to maintain the respect of his critical guild by rejecting this analysis. The distinction between "real author" and "implied author" which derives from Wolfgang Iser and his reader-response disciples (see the standard diagram on p. 17 above) thus proves to explain the data better. Might not a further modification of reception theory in the direction of orality research offer even more promise?

[11]The latest research on epistolary style leaves room for such loose examples, especially in the categories of the "Letter-Essay" and the philosophical treatise in letter form. Aune, 167, writes: "Letter-essays are treatises that make only a limited use of some epistolary conventions, particularly opening formulas." However, the complete lack of a standard prescript (author, recipient, greetings) in the case of Hebrews seems unusual, though not without precedent. Yet, this case shows the weakness of defining the epistle merely **formally**. What makes Hebrews a letter is that it was **sent**.

[12]Hebrews certainly understands itself to be sermonic: Παρακαλέω δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἀνέχεσθε τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως "I exhort you, brothers, listen willingly to the/this word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). See below, p. 264, as well as the literature: E. F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Doctrine and Significance* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1923); J. Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924); H. Thyen, *Der Stil der jüdisch-hellenistischen Homilie, FRLANT* 47 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955); E. Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief 1938-1963," *ThR* 30 (1964): 138-236; H. W. Attridge, "Paraenesis in a Homily (λόγος παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews,'" *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211-26. There is an especially thorough discussion in William Lane, *Hebrews, Word Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), lxx-lxxv. Aune, 213, argues wisely that Hebrews originated as a sermon, which was then given an epistolary conclusion in order to be circulated.

that the one bringing the letter supplied the prescript as it made its rounds[13] is certainly in keeping with our discovery of the epistle's place in the liturgy,[14] with prescript and postscript accommodated to local custom. Nevertheless, although Thyen in his ground-breaking work called Hebrews "the only example of a completely preserved homily,"[15] it is difficult to see that any of his criteria for the "Jewish-hellenistic homily" genre are unique to Hebrews: the author's use of a communal "we,"[16] the use of ἀδελφοί "brothers" to address the congregation, inferential particles and phrases (διό, διὰ τοῦτο, οὖν), the use of second-person plural to address the congregation directly, a personal warm tone, the use of *exempla*, heavy use of the LXX, rhetorical devices of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe, and concluding paraenetic instruction.[17] If these make Hebrews a sermon, they make **all** the epistles sermons!

Similarly, when William Lane comments with unique sensitivity on the effects of the oral/sermonic character of Hebrews, one must admit that these effects are not unique to this epistle:

> The writer skillfully conveys the impression that he is present with the assembled group and is actually delivering the sermon he has prepared. Until the postscript (13:22-25), he studiously avoids any references to actions like writing or reading that would tend to emphasize the distance that separates him from the group he is addressing. Instead he stresses the actions of speaking and listening, which are appropriate to persons in conversation, and identifies himself with his audience in a direct way: [Lane here cites 2:5;

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[13]T. Zahn, "Hebräerbrief," *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3d ed., (Leipzig, 1896-), 7:492-506; E. Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 3rd ed., *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 14 (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922).

[14]See the section entitled "Oral performance: Liturgical pieces and references," beginning on p. 212, above.

[15]Thyen, 106, as quoted in Lane, lxxi.

[16]Although in Paul, the "we" is frequently a reference to himself and his pastoral cohorts in distinction from the laity in the congregation, Paul also uses "we" communally, as in his famous rhetorical questions: "What then shall we say?" (Rom. 6:1).

[17]As summarized by Lane, lxxi. Lane, lxxii, cites later literature which establishes the "word of exhortation" sermonic pattern in other parts of the New Testament.

5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:31.] ... By referring to speaking and listening, **he is able to establish a sense of presence with his audience.**[18]

This sermonic approach is carried on through Lane's commentary in places. Yet, once again, the same characteristics can be found in all of the epistles.[19] In the case of Hebrews, the simple lack of a conventional prescript has led scholars to take note of these features. Perhaps the line between epistle and homily has been drawn too sharply.[20] If the other epistles contain the same features, then they, too, can be considered sermons, which are simply packaged and addressed for distant circulation using conventional features. Thus, **sermon + prescript/postscript = NT epistle.**

The Epistle as an Oral Genre

George Kennedy, an expert from the field of classical rhetoric who has crossed the divide into the New Testament, has drawn a similar conclusion:

> Though the New Testament epistles observe conventions such as the salutation, it may be a mistake to try to classify individual epistles within a traditional scheme of classical letter forms ... . In general, the identification of genre is not a crucial factor in understanding how rhetoric actually works in units of the New Testament.[21]

In other words, Kennedy argues that the **formal structure** of the epistle, i.e., the fact that it falls into standard letter-writing form, does not in itself establish the **rhetoric** as "epistolary"—for rhetoric is more concerned with **function.** Furthermore, even when examined by formal criteria, the epistles have as much in common with the **oration** as the letter form. Kennedy continues:

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[18]Ibid., lxxiv-lxxv. Emphasis added.

[19]In chapter three, we noted many examples of "speaking" and "hearing" language in the epistles, by which the author "fictionalizes" an oral address to his audience. See "Auditory Analogies," pp. 224ff.

[20]In fact, they are not direct alternatives. "Epistle" may be a **formal** label where the structure of the epistolary genre is present, but it is **functional** whenever it is applied to a text which is sent. "Sermons" may have common **formal** characteristics, but it is more clearly a **functional** label, referring to the function of the text in divine service.

[21]George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 32-33.

There has always been a close formal connexion between the oration and the epistle. ... Although an epistle requires a salutation and a complimentary close, its body can take the form of a deliberative, epideictic, or judicial speech with the traditional parts and all the inventional and stylistic features of an oration. On delivery a letter was usually read aloud; thus audience perception of its contents followed the pattern of speech.[22]

The immediately obvious formal characteristics can be deceptive, leading the interpreter to ignore the rhetorical characteristics of the body—a portion of the letter which has remained an undifferentiated mass in traditional epistolary analysis (note Doty's outline on p. 250).

This modeling certainly justifies the recent renewal of interest in a rhetorical approach to the interpretation of the epistles.[23] Yet the specific connection of letters with oral proclamation is rarely given due attention.[24] Rhetoric is, after all, not about writing but about speech.[25] So, too, writes Walter Ong, is epistolary rhetoric:

Even the art of letter-writing, maximized in the highly literate culture of the Middle Ages, was conceived of by analogy with oration: ... the letter commonly began with the equivalent of the oration's exordium, next set down the *petitio* or statement of what was to

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[22]Ibid., 86-87.

[23]See chapter one. Doty is reluctant throughout his survey to admit heavy rhetorical influence on the epistles, illustrating the chasm which traditionally exists between epistolary theory as a **literary** endeavor and the results of orality research. Doty will only admit that "Paul frequently breaks into the rhetorical structure with exclamations, quotations, and additional observations" (45). Doty seems to work from the now debunked view of rhetoric as a merely stylistic art (see pp. 50-51). Aune, on the other hand, understands that "rhetoric had come to exert a strong influence on the composition of letters, particularly among the educated. Their letters functioned not only as means of communication but also as sophisticated instruments of persuasion and media for displaying literary skill" (160). On pp. 203-22 Aune provides a brief rhetorical categorization of all the New Testament epistles, as well as a few from the apostolic Fathers.

[24]Aune, 158, seems an exception: "The letter is therefore a substitute for oral communication and could function in almost as many ways as speech." Recently there has been interest in comparing the "diatribe"—the rhetorical form of the Cynic-Stoic street preachers—to the epistles, a most instructive comparison. See Aune, 200-2, and, e.g., Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

[25]We recall that rhetoric is essentially **oral**. Walter Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 261: "Rhetorical culture is basically oral culture shrouded in writing. It is an oral culture whose institutions (in the sociological sense of this term, ways of doing things, patterns of behavior) have been codified, put into manuals, made the object of reflective training, and thus both artificially sustained and reinforced by writing—the very instrument which was ultimately to make these institutions obsolete."

be asked for (corresponding to the oration's *narratio*, or statement of what was to be proved), the reasons or "proofs" bearing on the *petitio*, the refutation of counter-reasons (in the oration, refutation of adversaries), and the conclusion.[26]

The art of letter writing, part of the *ars dictaminis* developed in the medieval schools for notaries and officials, had picked up this oratorical structure and applied it to letters. These were to have, after the proper *salutio*, in succession an *exordium* or *benevolentiae captatio* (the winning of good will), a *narratio* or statement of the fact, a *petitio* or request (corresponding to the proof in the oration), and a *conclusio*. Moreover, even the classification of kinds of letters most often echoed the kinds of oration: in Erasmus' *De ratione conscribendi epistolas*, a common schoolbook after 1521, we find letters divided into persuasive (deliberative), laudatory (demonstrative), and judicial, plus a fourth type, which was non-oratorical, the familiar.[27]

A more helpful epistolary theory must begin precisely with this fact: that letters fell under the jurisdiction of rhetoric.[28] The rhetorician was not willing to sacrifice his art simply because he could not be present to read his work personally. Loveday Alexander discusses the relationship between the orator's speech and text:

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[26]Ibid., 3.

[27]Ibid., 54; cf. pp. 73-74. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 89, argues that drama is the first genre controlled by writing. He specifically passes over the epistle in this conclusion, for it was "often orally formulated for subsequent transcription."

[28]Stowers, 22, argues that traditional epistolary research has concentrated on the structural features which are unique to epistles: the opening and closing. They have been unable adequately to explain the body because it is not unique: it simply follows general rhetorical practice. Ancient epistolary handbook writers spent no time on the opening, but concentrated on the **content, function,** and **purpose** of the epistle—rhetorical concerns.

The standard rhetorical handbooks do not deal with letter-writing. Yet this fact has been misinterpreted. It is not that epistolography fell outside of their domain, but that letter-writing was not considered to be a distinct form of composition. The rules for speech were simply adapted for use in letters. See also Stowers comments on p. 34. Yet Stowers, 52, argues the opposite:

> The classification of letter types according to the three species of rhetoric only partially works. This is because the letter-writing tradition was essentially independent of rhetoric. Furthermore, many of the letter types correspond to kinds of exhortation (paraenesis), and exhortation was only tangentially related to rhetorical theory. In fact, the most systematic treatment of exhortation was in moral philosophy.

With this last comment, Stowers points towards a resolution. For the age-old schism between rhetoric and philosophy most likely explains why the rhetorical handbooks do not deal with paraenesis or the diatribe. Yet the moral philosophers made extensive use of letters to mentor their distant students, so that philosophical "rhetoric" was also found in letters.

Ancient rhetoric was first and foremost the art of *speaking* effectively in public: it was a "performance art", and as such fought long and hard to maintain the superiority of the truly "live" performance over the exercise of verbal skill in writing. Isocrates is credited with being the first to compose "written speeches", and sending (rather than reciting) them to his chosen target: cf. *Ad Philippum* 25-27. He had to defend this practice against spirited attacks, and rhetoric continued to preserve not only the conventions of oral discourse ("speaking" and "hearing" as against "writing" and "reading"), but also **the conviction that a speech should be delivered in person, and should at least give the impression of *ex tempore* composition.**[29]

The rhetoric of a Pauline epistle, for instance, was therefore intended to be "brought to life" by the lector at the receiving end. To a true rhetorician, this situation is, at best, a compromise, but the possibility of his art being read in silence was unthinkable. The epistle was a speech which he would have preferred to give personally, but other circumstances prevailed.[30]

Another analogy is also appropriate. As we have learned from Plato, the true teacher does not trust his work to writing.[31] If it must be written down, the text serves only as a reminder of what has already been taught. Such also were Galen's thoughts:

> For Galen the production of a book was not an inevitable, or even necessarily desirable end in itself: books are secondary to oral teaching, and the ideal method of learning is to use the book under the guidance of a teacher. Many of Galen's books are in fact extended (or in some cases summarized) versions of lectures and demonstrations he had already given, sometimes circulated simply among his "friends" (*hetaroi*) as a "reminder" of teaching already given orally . . . .[32]

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[29]Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. David Clines, Stephen Fowl, and Stanley Porter, *JSOT Supplement Series no. 87* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 226. The latter emphasis is added.

[30]See also P. J. J. Botha, "Letter Writing and Oral Communication in Antiquity: Suggested Implications for the Interpretation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *Scriptura* 42 (1992): 24: "[O]ne must reckon with the letter as having been prepared for a careful performance, and [with the fact] that eventually the letter was delivered like a proper speech."

[31]See the discussion of Plato's *Seventh Letter* on p. 52, above.

[32]Alexander, 231. Later she writes: "In many cases it seems clear that the written text was regarded simply as a more permanent form of the teaching already given orally, and distributed by a teacher to people who had already heard this oral teaching" (234). He cites a fascinating statement from Hermogenes *De inventione* III (2d cent. AD):
> This is now my third compilation [σύνταγμα], most excellent [ὦ κράτιστε] Julius Marcus, about the subject [περὶ ὧν] on which I have often already given you a systematic instruction myself.

This is often true of Paul's epistles: they do not convey new information, but are intended to recall the hearers to what they had already been taught.[33] There are many examples of this:

> But I have written to you more boldly in some places, [working from the presupposition that I am] reminding [ὡς ἐπαναμιμνῄσκων] you,[34] because of the grace that was given to me by God that I might be a liturgical minister [λειτουργὸν] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving up as a priest [ἱερουργοῦντα] the Gospel of God, in order that [my] offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:15-16)

> For this reason I have sent[35] you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind [ἀναμνήσει] you of my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach always in every church. (1 Cor. 4:17)

> Now I make known to you, brothers, the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, by which you are saved, if you hold fast to the word which I preached to you. (1 Cor. 15:1-2)

> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you something other than what we preached to you, let him be anathema. As we said before [προειρήκαμεν] also now I say again [καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω]: if anyone preaches to you something other than what you received [παρελάβετε], let him be anathema. (Gal. 1:8-9; cf. 5:21)

> But you were not taught Christ in this way, if/since indeed you have heard [ἠκούσατε] Him, and were taught by Him. (Eph. 4:20-21; cf. Col. 2:7)

> For many walk, of whom I used to speak often to you [οὓς πολλάκις ἔλεγον], and now I say [again] even weeping [νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω], [that they are] enemies of the cross of Christ. (Phil. 3:18)

Notice the remarkable similarities to Luke's introductions to his own two works:
> "it seemed fitting to me ... to write for you, most excellent [κράτιστε] Theophilus, in order that you might know the exact truth concerning the things [περὶ ὧν ... λόγων] you have been [already] taught" (Luke 1:3-4).
> "the first account [λόγον] I made concerning all these things [περὶ πάντων], O [ὦ] Theophilus" (Acts 1:1);

Luke sounds suspiciously like a teacher sending on his completed textbook to one who has already been catechized [κατηχήθης (Lk. 1:4)].

[33]Exhortation to hold fast to what was taught is oral traditionalist language. See chapter three, p. 216ff.

[34]See note 117, below.

[35]Or: "am sending with this letter" [epistolary aorist].

... on account of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before [προηκούσατε] in the message of the truth of the Gospel which [Gospel] came into your presence [τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς], ... since the [day] you heard and came to know [ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε] the grace of God in truth. (Col. 1:5-6; cf. v. 23)

For indeed when we were with you [ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν] we kept telling you in advance [προελέγομεν] that we were going to be afflicted, just as has now happened and you well know. (1 Thess. 3:4)

For you know what instructions [παραγγελίας] we gave to you through the Lord Jesus. (1 Thess. 4:2; cf. v. 6)

Now concerning the times and epochs, brothers, you have no need [for anything] to be written to you, for you yourselves know full well [ἀκριβῶς οἴδατε] that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night . . . . (1 Thess. 5:1-2)[36]

Do you not remember that while I was still with you [ἔτι ὢν πρὸς ὑμᾶς] I was telling you these things? (2 Thess. 2:5; cf. 3:10)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught [τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε], whether by speech, or by our letter [εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς]. (2 Thess. 2:15; cf. 1 Jn. 2:27)

In each case Paul goes on to teach them what he claims they already know, what he has already taught them, what he has no need to repeat. The epistle is a follow-up to—and reminder of—his personal, oral instruction. In fact, he warns his hearers against accepting a new message (Gal. 1:8), even if it comes in a letter purporting to be from him (1 Thess. 2:2). Not only is the Gospel unchanging, but a letter is not the place where Paul would introduce new teaching. Yet the very fact that false teachers would forge letters from Paul (2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17) indicates what authority his letters bore—such that Paul had to go to great lengths to explain what relationship they held to his teaching in person.

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[36] 1 Thessalonians in particular contains repeated references to what Paul taught them while he was with them. See also: 1:5, 9; 2:1, 7, 9, 13; 4:1, 9, 11. And, it is this letter which contains the clearest admonition that the letter be read aloud to all the brothers (5:27). Such exhortation to hold fast to what was taught was also characteristic of *paraenesis*, the hortatory literature of the philosophers. On this basis, Abraham J. Malherbe, in "Exhortation in First Thessalonians," *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983): 238-56, and *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), identifies 1 Thessalonians as the prime New Testament example of the hortatory style. It contains not just a concluding section of *paraenesis*, but the entire epistle is interwoven with it.

Paul's constant references to travel plans reflect the fact that the epistle is a substitute for a visit.[37] He deals in letters only with issues which cannot wait for himself to be personally present.

> But as for the remaining matters, when I come I will give instructions [τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ ὡς ἂν ἔλθω διατάξομαι]. (1 Cor. 11:34)

In writing to Timothy, Paul makes clear his fear of being delayed:

> These things I write to you, hoping to come to you swiftly [ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐν τάχει]. But if I should delay [ἐὰν δὲ βραδύνω], [I write] in order that you might know [ἵνα εἰδῇς] how it is necessary to conduct oneself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:14-15)

Almost every one of his epistles includes a reference to travel plans of this sort.[38]

St. Peter understands his epistles to have the same function of "bringing to mind" what things he has previously taught in person:

> Therefore, I intend always to remind you [ὑμᾶς ὑπομιμνῄσκειν] concerning these things, although you already know [εἰδότας] and have been established in the truth which is present. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by way of reminder [ἐν ὑπομνήσει], knowing that the putting off of my tent is imminent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me, and I will make every effort that also at any time after my departure you are able to call these things to mind [ἔχειν ὑμᾶς ... τὴν τούτων μνήμην ποιεῖσθαι]. (2 Pet. 1:12-15)

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[37]See "Apostolic Presence," p. 292, below. Doty, 44, draws the same conclusion: "The Pauline letters were at best a makeshift substitute for Paul's presence with the addressees. The inclusion of the travelogue may be an element reminding us that Paul would rather have conveyed his information in person than in letters." See also Terrence Y. Mullins, "Visit Talk in New Testament Letters," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1973): 350-58. The travelogues reflect the commonplace of "the letter as substitute for personal presence," discussed further below. Demetrius' handbook, e.g., gives a sample "consoling" letter, in which he writes: "Since I did not happen to be present to comfort you, I decided to do so by letter" (Stowers, 144).

[38]Rom. 1:11-13; 15:22-33; 1 Cor. 4:17-21; 16:5-7; 2 Cor. 1:15-16; 2:1-4; Phil. 1:26; 2:24; 1 Thess. 2:17-18; Phlmn. 22. See also Heb. 13:23; 2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 13-14. See the further discussion under "Apostolic Presence," below. The seven letters of Revelation also contain such elements. Christ threatens with the power of His presence: ἔρχομαι σοι ... ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς "I am coming to you ... if you do not repent" (Rev. 2:5; cf. 2:16, 25; 3:3, 11). The picture "I stand at the door and knock" is as vivid as any in illustrating the threatening presence which Christ brings through these letters. Likewise, in the "letter" of Revelation as a whole, Christ is the speaker, who promises his παρουσία repeatedly (16:15; 20:20).

Beloved, this is already the second letter I am writing to you, in [both of] which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder [ἐν ὑπομνήσει], that you remember [μνησθῆναι] the words spoken before [τῶν προειρημένων ῥημάτων] by the holy prophets and the instruction [ἐντολῆς] of our Lord and Savior [spoken before by] your apostles. (2 Pet. 3:1-2; paralleled in Jude 17)

There is strong overlap in these statements with the language of traditionalism. Enrique Nardoni comments:

> The subsidiary role of the written text is clearly stated by 2 Peter, according to which it is the role of the apostle and his successors to remember what has been received, to remind the people about it, and to keep it alive (1:12-15). The two letters of Peter, indeed, have been written to this effect. They are meant to keep operative the authentic remembrance of "the predictions of the prophets and the commandment of the Lord given through the apostles" (3:1-3).[39]

St. John, according to tradition writing in the latter years of his life, makes the same comparison of what he writes with the teaching which has been inherited:

> Beloved, I do not write a new [=different] instruction [ἐντολὴν καινὴν] to you, but an old instruction [ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν], which you had from the beginning. The old instruction [ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά] is the Word which you heard [ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε]. On the other hand [πάλιν] I do write a new instruction [ἐντολὴν καινὴν] to you, which is true in Him and in you, that [or "because"] the darkness is passing away and the true light already shines. (1 Jn. 2:8-9; cf. 2 Jn. 5)

In John's enigmatic way, he draws out the connection between the apostolic instruction in writing and the Word passed down from the beginning from the Lord. What he writes is nothing new. He simply preserves faithfully what was entrusted to him. To keep faithfully [τηρέω] Christ's instructions [τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ]—traditionalist vocabulary—is the mark of the true teacher and true disciple.[40] And yet it is "new" instruction (v. 9) in that the apostle has the mandate of drawing out the meaning of Christ's words for His people. New and old at the same time (cf. Mt. 13:52). This is what the epistles always are.

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[39]Enrique Nardoni, "Interaction of Orality and Textuality: Response to Arthur J. Bellinzoni," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9.4 (Winter 1992): 266. Nardoni's translation is unfortunate in narrowing the prophetic word to "predictions" and the apostolic to "commandment."

[40]See 1 Jn. 2:3-5; cf. vv. 24, 27; also Rev. 3:3.

St. John, more than any other apostolic writer except perhaps St. Paul, values the spoken word. The brevity of his letters is explained by a concluding note in his second and third:

> Although I have many things to write to you, I do not wish to do it through papyrus and ink [διὰ χάρτου καὶ μέλανος], but I hope to be with you and to speak mouth to mouth [στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλῆσαι], in order that our joy might be fulfilled. (2 Jn. 12; repeated almost verbatim in 3 Jn. 13-14)

It is as if he just dictated a short note to tide them over until they might have his full presence through the word of his mouth in person.

Thus, one should not be surprised that the epistles evidence "delayed dialogue."[41] Sometimes it appears that the congregation has posed questions to the apostle which he desires to answer. The Corinthians, for instance, have presented them in a letter of their own,[42] which was most likely carried to him by Chloe, who filled in the details orally (1 Cor. 1:11). Numerous letters have been exchanged in this continuing "conversation."[43] Paul, according to his office as their father in the faith (1 Cor. 4:15), as apostle (1 Cor. 1:1) and teacher (1 Cor. 4:17), responds in authoritative speech to their questions, writing what he would say if he were able to be there in person, and yet aware that some things must wait until his arrival. Although the "conversation" resides in letters, Paul himself couches his letter in the language of an oral debate: "I speak [λέγω] as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say [φημι]" (1 Cor. 10:15); "I hear [ἀκούω] that there are divisions among you" (1 Cor. 11:18). Similar examples in other epistles include:[44]

> For this reason also I, since I have heard [ἀκούσας] of the faith in the Lord Jesus among you ... (Eph. 1:15)

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[41]One of the earliest comments on letter writing comes from Demetrius' handbook *Περὶ ἑρμηνείας* [*On Style*], which quotes the opinion of one Artemon (II or IV B.C.): "that a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, a letter being regarded by him as one of the two sides of a dialogue." Quoted in Doty, 8. Demetrius disagrees, evidencing a shift towards greater literary style by his day. Yet, the handbook of Proclus (Libanius) lists "conversation" as a commonplace of the friendly letter type. See Stowers, 60.

[42]"Now concerning the things you wrote" - 1 Cor. 7:1; cf. 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1.

[43]1 Cor. 5:9, 11; cf. 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 9; 7:8, 12.

[44]For further examples, see the section, "Auditory Analogies," pp. 224ff., above.

... having heard [ἀκούσαντες] of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have towards all the saints ... (Col. 1:4; cf. v. 9: "from the day we heard [ἠκούσαμεν]")

For we hear [ἀκούομεν] that some among you are living in idleness ... (2 Thess. 3:11)

I give thanks ... , hearing [ἀκούων] of your love and faith ... (Phlmn. 5)

For I was rejoicing greatly when the brothers came and were testifying to your truth, how you yourself are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, that I hear [ἀκούω] that my children are walking in the truth. (3 Jn. 3-4)[45]

Such evidence accords well with theories which compare the epistles to the diatribe. The "diatribe" of the wandering Stoic-Cynic philosophers had its roots in the Socratic method of teaching by dialogue.[46] Yet in the epistles, the conversation is not imaginary; it is more than a contrived device.

We draw near to discovering the essential genre of the epistles when we consider one last verb. When the apostle consciously reflects on what he is doing, one should pause and take note.[47] One significant verb which the epistle-writers frequently use has rarely been mined for its oral implications:

παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς "Therefore, I am exhorting you" (Rom. 12:1)[48]

Certainly, the verb παρακαλέω has a long history in the moral exhortation of the philosophers.[49]

Yet Paul's frequent attempts to distance himself from that sort of sophistry should warn us not to

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[45]From a more profound theological perspective, the conversation is between the Holy Spirit and the faithful. John's Revelation contains seven compact, model letters to churches, each of which ends with an exhortation to hear what the **Spirit** is saying:

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις "The one who has ears, **let him hear what the Spirit is saying** to the churches." (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)

[46]The diatribe style fills Romans, appearing also in sections of other epistles (1 Cor. 15:29-41; Gal. 3:1-9, 19-22; Jam. 2:1-3:12; 4:13-5:6). See Stowers, *The Diatribe*, mentioned above.

[47]We note below the use of both speaking and writing verbs, for he is speaking **through** his writing. See "Auditory Analogies," pp. 224ff., above.

[48]Cf. Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor. 6:1; 10:1; Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 13:22; 1 Pet. 2:11; 5:1.

[49]See the works of Abraham Malherbe, cited above, on the paraenetic species. παρακαλέω also is common language in Hellenistic letters for making "requests," begging

equate Paul's "exhortation" with the moralism of Greek philosophy. These words should instead

be understood according to what Paul writes two verses later:

Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν "For I am speaking though the grace which was given to me to every man among you" (Rom. 12:3)

The "grace" which was given to Paul is the "gift" of his apostolic office in relationship to the

people to whom he writes.[50] This grace transforms the παράκλησις which he utters into

something other than bare moral exhortation.

For παράκλησις/παρακαλέω is the language of **preaching**. Recall again Paul's

description of the Ministry of the Word in its three aspects: "Until I come, devote yourself to the

public reading [τῇ ἀναγνώσει], to the **exhortation** [τῇ *παρακλήσει*], to the teaching [τῇ

διδασκαλίᾳ]" (1 Tim. 4:13). An even clearer description of παράκλησις emerges from the

synagogue in Acts. Paul and Barnabas begin their evangelization of Pisidian Antioch in their

customary way: they enter the synagogue on the Sabbath.

> And after the reading of the Torah and the prophets [τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν], the synagogue officers sent for them, saying, "Men, brothers, if there is among you any message of exhortation [εἴ τις ... λόγος παρακλήσεως] for the people, speak [λέγετε]!" And Paul arose and motioned with his hand and said: "Men, Israelites, and those who fear God, listen [ἀκούσατε]. ... " (Acts 13:15-16)

Paul proceeds to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Son of David promised in the Scriptures. For this

was precisely what was expected from a λόγος παρακλήσεως: it was to be a proclamation based

on and expounding the Word of God. This "message of exhortation" always followed the reading

of the Scriptures in the synagogue, as it did from the beginning in the Christian church.

When, therefore, a letter in totality is called παράκλησις a new equation has been

formed. The author of Hebrews concludes his lengthy treatise:

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favors, the most common reason for writing a letter. Stowers, 24, indicates that παρακαλέω had a much broader use in Greco-Roman letters than most exegetes today allow, and should not be unduly restricted.

[50]On the grace (gift) of office, cf. Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:5, 10; 2 Cor. 13:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2,7-8; [4:7;]; Col. 1:25.

Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἀνέχεσθε τοῦ λόγου τῆς *παρακλήσεως*, καὶ γὰρ διὰ βραχέων *ἐπέστειλα* ὑμῖν. "Now I **exhort** you, brothers, listen willingly to this message of **exhortation**, for I have **written** to you rather briefly." (Heb. 13:22)

With these words, the author himself defines the epistle to the Hebrews as a sermon.[51] And while the letter from the Jerusalem council giving its pronouncement against Judaizers could scarcely be called a "sermon" properly speaking, the congregations throughout the world who **heard** the letter **read** to them received it as such. Of Antioch it is reported: "And reading it, they rejoiced at the **exhortation** [ἐπὶ τῇ παρακλήσει]" (Acts 15:31). In both cases, a letter is referred to as παράκλησις.

Thus, also these data propel us to the conclusion that **the epistle functioned as a sermon.** David Aune comes very close to drawing this conclusion—although his work is hampered by his uncertainty regarding the liturgical setting and function of the epistles.

> Modern scholars have labeled many early Christian compositions as "sermons" or "homilies." Yet these interchangeable terms are not really labels for a literary genre, since New Testament scholarship has not yet been able to define what a sermon is. ... Some sermons (i.e., compositions with a generally didactic character) are framed as letters (Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, *1 Clement, Barnabas*), while others lack formal epistolary features (1 John, *2 Clement*). Some were written responses to a particular situation (Hebrews, 1 Peter, *1 Clement*), while others were written for Christians generally (James, *Barnabas, 2 Clement*).[52]

Once again, a preoccupation with style and structure has held him back from making a decisive judgment. **For "sermon" is surely not a genre determined by its conforming to certain literary conventions, but rather defined functionally.** This is confirmed by the "social" context of the Christian congregation.[53] Paraenetic items of diverse literary **form** (and medium)

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[51]See the discussion of Hebrews as a sermon on p. 253, above.

[52]Aune, 197-98. Aune is caught in the "either-or" dilemma. He does indeed admit here that some epistles are really sermons, but cannot envision them as both. Again he writes: "First John is a deliberative homily rather than a letter" (218).

[53]Both Aune and Stowers steer clear of the terms "church" or "congregation," preferring to speak of "community" and "community assemblies." This is evidence of a more secular view of the social context of the letters and early Christianity.

would **function** as exhortation (παράκλησις) in a liturgical context; that is, written letters, oral commentaries on readings, and so on, could all serve as the sermon in the setting of worship.

In the unfolding of our study, this social setting has been the primary clue to determining the function which the epistles held. In summary, the conclusion that **all** the epistles should be treated as sermonic is the result of a number of facts in the following line of reasoning:

1. The epistles contain repeated admonitions that they be read publicly in the assembled congregation.

2. The epistles show evidence in their openings and closings of their location in the liturgy. The formulaic close served as a bridge into the liturgy of Holy Communion, which would, therefore, have followed immediately thereafter.

3. The order of service suggested by Acts 2:42 and confirmed by Justin Martyr is: Scripture readings, preaching, Sacrament of the Altar, church prayers.

4. The practice of the synagogue was for exposition of Scripture to follow immediately upon its reading.

5. All of the above suggests that, at least when it was first received, **the epistle was read in its entirety to the congregation in the liturgy in place of the usual exposition of Scripture known as the sermon.**

6. This practice explains how it came to be that the epistles, as they themselves eventually proved to be Holy Scripture, were merged into the Scripture reading section, and themselves became the object of preaching.

What were these epistles-as-sermons used for, precisely? That is the question to which we will turn following the next section.

Addendum 3: Oral Formulary Characteristics in the Epistles

There is certainly no complete agreement concerning what precisely is characteristic of oral style—as we have discussed in chapter two. However, certain basic rhetorical characteristics have come to light, which, when noted in the epistles, support the identification of an oral genre for the epistles which we have suggested. The following investigation is not intended to be an exhaustive listing of oral formulary characteristics, nor a technically precise analysis—we leave that to the experts in the field. Rather, in a brief survey of the letters of the New Testament we

will point out, on the one hand, how exegetes might modify their analysis of texts in light of oral research, and, on the other, how pervasively oral flavor permeates these epistles.

Commonplaces, κοινοὶ τόποι

The ancient and medieval use of τόποι or "commonplaces" was detailed in chapter two.[54] Whether existing in books (as especially in the Middle Ages), or learned from the rhetorical schools and gleaned from the common consciousness of society, these commonplaces provided a resource for the author who wished to exercise epideictic rhetoric. That is, if one wished to praise or blame someone or something, there were standard ways of doing it which could be drawn upon and modified for one's present purpose.[55] Although this became a rather bookish pursuit in the Middle Ages, whereby commonplace textbooks grew to a length beyond memory's capacity, in the New Testament era the orator would be expected to commit such lists to memory, that he might draw upon them freely in public speaking or in the process of dictation to his scribe.[56]

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[54]There we noted the breadth of usage of this term. Earlier in this chapter we have dealt with epistolary commonplaces—the standard topics and formulas gleaned from the handbooks and letters themselves.

[55]Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972): 23, wisely note: "Since the listing of virtues and vices in tabular form is a widespread form of presentation, one must not see the list as referring to actual contemporary events or as closely related to the historical or fictitious situation of the Epistle." On the other hand, David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 173, cautions: "The view that *topoi* are stereotyped and have universal applicability is sometimes understood to mean that they do not fit the specific situation to which they are applied. However, the arsenal of motifs that the rhetoricians propose under each *topos* suggests the opposite. A large stock of motifs equips the orator to adjust his remarks to the rhetorical situation (Cicero, *Divisions of Oratory* 3.8)." Aune, 194-96, has an excellent summary of vice and virtue lists.

[56]Obviously, these lists were modified in the Christian context by the impact of Law and Gospel. Our Lord, for instance, would produce a list of vices by summarizing the Ten Commandments (Mt. 15:19). In the Greek world of the epistles, the Decalogue subtly infiltrates the use of commonplaces. The purpose also is different. The apostle uses lists of virtue and vice not to improve his audience morally, but to produce repentance and to turn the hearer to the Gospel by which the Spirit bestows such things as a gift. Cognizant of this purpose, one often

St. Paul in Romans 1:29-31 attacks the Gentile sinner with a classic list of vices,[57]

whose structure is also particularly suited to the ear:

1. being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil;
   [ἀδικίᾳ, πονηρίᾳ, πλεονεξίᾳ, κακίᾳ]
2. full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice;
   [φθόνου, φόνου, ἔριδος, δόλου, κακοηθείας]
3. [they are] gossips, slanderers, God-haters,
   [ψιθυριστὰς, καταλάλους, θεοστυγεῖς]
4. insolent [ones], arrogant [ones], boastful [ones];
   [ὑβριστὰς, ὑπερηφάνους, ἀλαζόνας]
5. contrivers of evil, disobedient to parents;
   [ἐφευρετὰς κακῶν, γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς]
6. senseless, faithless, loveless, merciless;
   [ἀσυνέτους, ἀσυνθέτους, ἀστόργους, ἀνελεήμονας]

The catalogue of vices is grouped into three and fours. On the one hand, there is extensive aural

patterning. Line one contains four dative singulars ending in -ιᾳ. Line two lists five genitive

singulars—three end in -ου,[58] and the fifth pivots by its similar ending into line three's plural

nouns. The six words in lines three and four all end with an "s" sound. Line five has two sets of

paired nouns, giving a poetic rhythm. Line six ends the list with an alliterative set of alpha-

privative adjectives. On the other hand, there is also "mental" parallelism in the grouping of the

words by "grammatical" categories, as it were: each line groups words of similar case, number,

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notes that the "vice lists" progress from gross sins to mundane, from homosexuality and murder to gossiping and coarse jokes. The hearer who thinks he knows this standard list is suddenly shocked when things get personal. His attention is subtly diverted from the sins of others to his own sins, and thus to repentance. (For this insight we are indebted to Rev. William Cwirla, who presented a paper—as yet unpublished—to the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Theological Symposium, May 1994.) In the same way, the Ten Commandments themselves move from gross idolatry and immorality to common vices like lying and coveting, leaving no stone unturned.

[57]In this and other catalogues, *BAGD* provides under each vocable's lexicon entry references to contemporaneous virtue and vice lists. Dibelius and Conzelmann also provide quite specific references for the Pastorals.

[58]Although ἔριδος has a different-sounding genitive ending from the other three in -ου, its rhythm certainly adds to the aural impact.

or part of speech. Line four, for instance, includes three plural substantivized adjectives. St. Paul

has made admirable use of existing material, grouping it to please the ear and make his point.[59]

Just as the catalogues of vices are not strictly derived from the Decalogue or any other

part of the Old Testament Law, so also the lists of virtues are rarely uniquely "Christianized."

What makes Christian virtues God-pleasing is that they are "in Christ," not that they are

necessarily different virtues (although secular culture may seek virtues which the church cannot

praise). Thus, St. Paul writing to the Philippians draws upon material which must have been quite

familiar to his audience:

> Finally, brothers,
>> whatever [ὅσα] is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,
>>> whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute,
>> if anything is excellent [εἴ τις ἀρετή] and
>> if anything worthy of praise [εἴ τις ἔπαινος],
> ponder these things. (Phil. 4:8)

The ordering of adjectives is not peculiar, but the constant hammering of ὅσα "whatever is ..."

impacts upon the ear, and is brought to a close with the dramatic repetition of εἴ τις "if

anything ... ." The vocabulary itself is of epideictic rhetoric, drawing upon the standard

Hellenistic virtues.

Such rhetoric is brought to bear also on the praise of "love," what Paul presents in 1

Cor. 13:4-7 as the pre-eminent Christian virtue, above what the Hellenists would consider most

praiseworthy:

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[59]Other such catalogues of vices are found in: 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-10 (where the list is broken up by the grouping of seven οὔτε's, then two οὐ's, then finally one οὐχ); 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31 (brief list connected by καί's); Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:9-10 (which shows admirable aural composition); 1 Tim. 6:4b-5; 2 Tim. 3:2-5 (a list which is manifestly standardized, similar in many points to Rom. 1:28-29, right down to "disobedient to parents," a strange charge to raise against false teachers if it were not a standard vice; this list almost appears to be in alphabetical order, as if drawn straight from a source book!); 1 Pet. 4:3.

Dibelius and Conzelmann, who are most cognizant of this commonplace technique, pay little attention to the oral-aural formulation, except to note in reference to 2 Tim. 3:2-5 "the coupling of adjectives ... by means of assonance either at the beginning or at the end of words" (115-16).

1. Love is patient, love is kind;
   ['Η ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ, χρηστεύεται ἡ ἀγάπη]

2. [It is] not jealous, it does not brag, it is not puffed up, it does not act disgracefully,
   [οὐ ζηλοῖ, οὐ περπερεύεται, οὐ φυθιοῦται, οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ]

3. it does not seek its own, it is not provoked, it does not take account of a wrong,
   [οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς, οὐ παροξύνεται, οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν]

4. it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
   [οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ]

5. it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
   [πάντα στέγει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπιζει, πάντα ὑπομένει]

Aural qualities in this list include the direct chiasm using ἀγάπη to frame line one, the subtle aural and "mental" chiasm of "active passive X passive active" in line two, the forceful repetition of the negative particle in lines two and three, the rhythmic alternation in line three, the rhetorical opposition in line four, and the repetition of πάντα four times in line five. It is gratifying that St. Paul has devoted as much effort to praising virtue as to shaming vice![60]

Chiasm and inclusio

The techniques of chiasm and *inclusio* (large scale chiasm) have been amply documented for the Gospels.[61] One might assume from studies, however, that these were exclusively Semitic phenomena. On the contrary, they are well-established rhetorical techniques also in the Greek world, through which the author could mark out structures and highlight themes. Chiasm on a small scale is ubiquitous, even in the epistles. The larger patterns framed by *inclusio* are more difficult to discover. Two examples should serve to spur the imagination.

The opening sentence of Romans is the longest of any epistle. It moves beyond the conventional pattern of "sender to receiver, greetings." Rather, framed within the address is an

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[60]Other catalogues of virtues appear in: Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:32; and Col. 3:12. Jas. 3:15-18 praises the "wisdom from above" in a way similar to Paul's praise of love. One might also include St. Paul's lists of virtues to be sought in a pastor, most of which are not specific to the office, but are standardized (1 Tim. 3:2-4; Tit. 1:7-8; cf. 1 Tim. 3:8 & 11; see Dibelius-Conzelmann, 50-54, as well as the texts of two extensive virtue catalogues in appendices 3 & 4, pp. 158-60). Paul also lists the virtues a rich man should seek in 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

[61]See Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 403-35, discussed in chapter three; and Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*, combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

almost Johannine mini-prologue, in which Paul not only defends his apostleship but also explicates the Gospel which will be the topic of the entire diatribe.

> Paul, a *slave* of **Christ Jesus**, a **called** apostle, set apart for the **Gospel of God**—
> > **which** He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures
> > concerning His **Son**,
> > > who came from the seed of David according to the flesh,
> > > who was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Holy Spirit
> > > > > [by the resurrection of the dead,
> > *Jesus Christ our Lord,*
> >
> > through whom we received grace and apostleship
> > > for the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,
> > > among whom also you are called by Jesus Christ
> —to all those who are beloved of God in Rome, **called** saints,
> grace to you and peace from **God** our Father and the *Lord* **Jesus Christ**. (Rom. 1:1-7)[62]

The structure might, of course, be analyzed differently, and visual patterns can only suggest audible features. Yet it seems clear that the *inclusio*, which begins as an excursus on the Gospel, focuses on "Jesus Christ our Lord" as its central feature. The lector could be expected to discover this pattern in his preparation of the text and then to set the words apart audibly. What appears an overloaded sentence in English (especially as good Anglo-Saxon-rooted English favors short sentences with finite verbs over complex Latinate subordinations), can be clearly articulated once its patterned is uncovered. Furthermore, there is meaning in the pattern itself. The excursus has creedal features, presenting the two natures of Christ and His resurrection from the dead. Such language might itself be standardized, especially since the Apostles' Creed finds its roots in Rome. Finally, the patterning presents an "opposition," or, perhaps better, a careful balance, between Paul's calling to apostleship and the Gentile saints' calling to faith. This opposition is presented more than once in the outline. Finally, Paul's slave-ship and Christ's Lordship, as well as the names of God and Christ, also frame the *inclusio*.

Another example from the epistles indicates how such patterns function semantically through the ear. The following words of John do not follow a strict chiastic structure.

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[62]This over-literal translation is meant only to expose the verbal parallels of the Greek.

Nevertheless, they are patterned with a remarkable intricacy. The repetition of key vocabulary

has a strong aural impact, stressing the themes to be unpacked in the epistle.[63] Yet notice how the

"external *inclusio*" marks off the parenthetical statement in verse two, and then indicates the

return—both grammatically and thematically—to the opening statement.

> What was from the beginning,
>> what we have **heard** [ἀκηκόαμεν],
>>> what we have **seen** [ἑωράκαμεν] with our eyes,
>>>> what we have observed and our hands have touched
>>>> concerning the Word [τοῦ λόγου] of **life** [τῆς ζωῆς]
>>>>
>>>>> —and the **life** [ἡ ζωή] was manifested, and we have seen [ἑωράκαμεν] and we testify and we **announce** [ἀπαγγέλομεν] to you the eternal **life** [τὴν ζωήν] which was with the Father and was manifested to us—
>>>>
>>>> what we have **seen** [ἑωράκαμεν]
>>>> and we have **heard** [ἀκηκόαμεν],
>>> we **announce** [ἀπαγγέλομεν] also to you, that also you might have fellowship with us.
>>> And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
>>> And these things we write, in order that our joy might be fulfilled. (1 Jn. 1:1-4)

Such a structure is not only an ancient substitute for typographical conventions such as we have

used here to mark out the structure visually. The structure (which itself gives meaning) was to be

audible. The *inclusio* sets the "digression" apart, indicating that it is, in fact, not a digression but

the central point. This center is connected to the top half of the structure by the word "life,"

which serves as a pivot into the parenthetical remark. The repetition of the key vocables

ἑωράκαμεν and ἀκηκόαμεν at the beginning of verse three indicate for the hearer that the

"digression" is over. But to show again that it was not really a "digression," the word "announce"

[ἀπαγγέλομεν] connects the center of the structure to the bottom half.

Lists

Just as chiasm and *inclusio* mark out respectively small- and large-scale structures for

the ear, so also authors appear to have used techniques to mark the conclusion of lists. Perhaps

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[63]See the discussion of this prologue in chapter three, p. 223, above.

half of the lists in the New Testament are concluded by some change in pattern. In the other lists,

the next sentence usually begins in such a clear way as to serve the same function.

Some lists evidence the kind of oral patterning which we noticed above in the

commonplace lists. A list of six α-declension feminine nouns is patterned with a pleasing sound:

singular, singular, plural; singular, singular, plural:

> ... who are Israelites, of whom is
> the adoption and the glory and the covenants
> [ἡ υἱοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθῆκαι]
> and the Law-giving and the worship and the promises ...
> [καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι] (Rom. 9:4)

Another list shows both internal grouping and a frame:

> For all things are yours [πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστιν]:
> whether [εἴτε] Paul or [εἴτε] Apollos or [εἴτε] Cephas,
> whether [εἴτε] world or [εἴτε] life or [εἴτε] death,
> whether [εἴτε] things present or [εἴτε] things to come,
> all things are yours [πάντα ὑμῶν].   (1 Cor. 3:21-23)

The Greek can simply repeat the conjunction εἴτε, whereas English requires the construction

"whether ... or ... ." Our choice to repeat the "whether" three times displays the grouping of the

original into three names, three nouns, two participles. The change in number from three to two

in the last line serves to bring the internal list to a close. A similar example of framing a list to

mark its beginning and end occurs in Revelation: "I know **your** works and love and faith and

service and **your** endurance [οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν

διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου]" (Rev. 2:19).

The patterning in another list from Romans suggests a re-evaluation of the meaning and

reference of several terms:

And having different gifts according to the grace given to us [, let each act accordingly]:

> if [εἴτε] prophecy, in right relationship to the faith;
> [κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως]
> if [εἴτε] ministry, in his [particular] ministry;
> if [εἴτε] the one who teaches [ὁ διδάσκων], in his teaching;
> if [εἴτε] the one who exhorts [ὁ παρακαλῶν], in his exhortation [=
> "preaching"];
>
> the one who shares [ὁ μεταδιδοὺς], with generosity;
> the one who leads [ὁ προϊστάμενος], with diligence;
> the one who shows mercy [ὁ ἐλεῶν], with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:6-8)

The division of the seven-element lists into two parts cannot be ignored. The first half marks each element with εἴτε, the second half uses no conjunction, but relies on the participial construction to mark each. The two halves which result divide the list into Office of the Ministry and laity. Paul exhorts each to serve in his particular vocation: if a pastor, then in the work of a pastor; if a layman, then in the fruits of faith and the tasks which are given.[64]

Some lists work like English, piling up the elements and then marking the last with καὶ (see Col. 3:5). But many have more elaborate conclusions such as:

> ... nor any other created thing [οὔτε τις κτίσις ἑτέρα] (Rom. 8:38-39)
>
> ... and if there is any other commandment [καὶ εἴ τις ἑτέρα ἐντολή] (Rom. 13:9)
>
> ... and anything else which is contrary to sound doctrine
> [εἴ τι ἕτερον τῇ ὑγιαινούσῃ ἀντίκειται] (1 Tim. 1:10)
>
> ... if she has devoted herself to every good work
> [εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν] (1 Tim. 5:10)

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[64]This pattern is often missed when παρακαλέω is not seen as a term for preaching (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13), and when διακονία is understood as general Christian service. The grouping with the εἴτε pattern would suggest that the clerical meanings be understood in this context. A potential problem is that ὁ προϊστάμενος appears frequently in the apostolic Fathers as "the presider," another Office of the Ministry term. However, in the New Testament this usage is not established.

1 Cor. 12:28 has a similar list, likewise divided into two halves: pastoral gifts, and general gifts: "First apostles, second prophets, third teachers—then [ἔπειτα] mighty deeds, then [ἔπειτα] gifts of healings, helpful deeds, administration, kinds of languages." The enumeration of the first three together with the repetition of ἔπειτα emphasizes the priority Paul gives in this context to the Means of Grace offices and gifts. The absence of any conjunctions after that suggests that the second half of the list is open-ended, citing only a few examples.

... and things similar to these [καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις] (Gal. 5:19-21)

... and every name that is named [καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου] (Eph. 1:20-21)

The frequency with which these constructions occur indicates that this was a common way to mark the end of the list, a way of saying "*et cetera*." Various other examples include: ending a list of datives with a solitary accusative (Rom. 12:10-13); and ending a list of prepositional phrases with no preposition before the final element (1 Cor. 14:6).[65]

Two final examples of listing devices suggest the resolution of long-standing exegetical problems:

And He Himself gave:
apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers
[τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελίστας, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους]   (Eph. 4:11)

The explanation that "pastors and teachers" must be referring to the same office because of the change of conjunction does not hold. This is more likely a structuring technique whereby the beginning of the list is marked by μέν, the elements of the list are separated by the corresponding δέ, and the end of the list is indicated by switching to the synonymous καί, and by leaving out the definite article. The definite article, unnecessary in this context in Greek, was used only because the conjunction δέ is a post-positive, requiring two vocables in each element of the list. When the switch is made to καί, the article is no longer required. This suggests that "pastor" and "teacher" are indeed separate offices.[66]

This explanation of Eph. 4:11 may apply also to Paul's listing of the effects of the Gospel before God in Gal. 3:28-29. The first two pairings of the list are separated by οὐδὲ, a

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[65]The preposition ἐν is added at the end by some manuscripts, whose scribes must not have understood the omission.

[66]The ensuing issue in Eph. 4:12 cannot be resolved so easily. The three prepositional phrases are ordered πρός ..., εἰς ..., εἰς ... —the reverse of what we would expect. The explanation likely lies elsewhere, that Paul varies his preposition for stylistic reasons. See James Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 132-33 & 136-37, and the literature cited there, for a discussion of this complex problem.

compound of δέ. The final pair is separated by καί: "male and female [ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ]." This has been explained as being a quotation of Gen. 1:27—which indeed it is (cf. Mt. 19:4; Mk. 10:6). But it may also (or simply) be a natural way to close off the list. Rather than translating, "There is no longer Jew **or** Greek, slave **or** free, male **and** female," as if the last were unique, perhaps all three should be translated the same: "There is no longer Jew **and** Greek, slave **and** free, male **and** female."

Repetition

Inasmuch as oral performance is linear by nature, there is no opportunity for the listener to "flip pages," to check back on what he missed, to linger over a difficult passage, rereading until it comes clear. For this reason, oral composition is characteristically repetitive.[67] This feature explains the so-called "doublets" of narratives like the Gospels (as well as in Old Testament narrative)—in fact, the very existence of **three** Synoptic Gospels is evidence of the oral penchant to be telling and retelling a story.[68] But it also explains the laborious repetitiveness

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[67]George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 37: "It should be kept in mind that a speech or a text read aloud is presented linearly; the audience hears the words in progression without opportunity to review what has been said earlier, and an orally received text is characterized by a greater degree of repetition than is a text intended to be read privately. The New Testament was intended to be received orally and abounds in repetition."

[68]Kennedy, 68, comments on the apparent conflict between two versions of Jesus' great sermon, one on the Mount (Matthew) and one on the Plain (Luke):

Jesus was a teacher who conveyed his message orally to a variety of audiences. Most speakers who present a cause to differing audiences at different places, as Jesus did preaching in Palestine, develop a basic speech which encapsulates their main views in a way that proves effective. When presenting the speech to different audiences, the speaker may elaborate or shorten it as conditions seem to require, sometimes inserting topical references, sometimes borrowing portions of the speech to use in other contexts. This is a common practice among modern political candidates (reporters get used to hearing essentially the same speech at each stop), and it is true of modern evangelists as well. So viewed, the occurrence of two versions of Jesus' teaching, one set on a hill and one on a plain, is not surprising. ... [I]f a speech was repeatedly delivered in slightly different versions in the presence of the disciples, given their devotion to Jesus and the striking nature of what he said, few of them would have had difficulty in dictating a version at some later time for readers who had not personally heard Jesus.

of certain parts of the epistles. While this necessarily involves subjective judgment (how much is too much?), some examples are clear. For instance, there is the endless "tango" between the "one" and the "many" in Rom. 5:12-21, comparing what Adam brought to the world with what Christ brought. The especially difficult statement in 5:16—confusing to the ear, but understandable on rereading—comes clear in the ensuing repetition. Similar is Rom. 14:1-9, in which eating and not eating, observing and not observing, dying and living, revolve at such velocity as to leave the head spinning.

One might apply the same verdict to the entire first epistle of St. John. The repetition of love, hate, light, darkness, confessing, denying, and so on, does not bear well under repeated reading, but on one continuous hearing spins a magnificent web. One is struck also by the repeated quotation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews chapters three and four. From this psalm, the key phrase "to enter [My] rest" occurs in some form eleven times, and the word "rest" alone three more. Such repetition is unnecessary for the reader, who can refer back to the quotation. But the congregational hearer—where there are no "pew Bibles"—does not have this luxury. So the author repeats *ad nauseum* to remind and to make his point. And one could cite numerous other examples. Even the striking and extensive verbal parallels between separate documents, such as between Ephesians and Colossians, are natural and explicable when one has in mind the orator's tendency to repeat what works, what needs to be said, what has taken great thought to prepare and refine. Theories of textual cross-fertilization are unnecessary.

The Messenger in the OT and ANE

The letter was never a free-floating piece of literature with a life and strength of its own. This is suggested first by what Walter Ong called the "oral synthesis," that intimate and

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See also Werner Kelber, "Jesus and Tradition: Words in Time, Words in Space." *Semeia* 65 (1994): "reiteration and variation of words and sotries must be assumed for Jesus' own proclamation. Multiple, variable renditions, while observable in tradition, are highly plausible in Jesus' own oral performance. Hence, both Jesus and tradition operated on the principle of multiple attestation" (146).

unbreakable connection of a text in the oral world with its speaker/author and recipients. We have also learned of the distrust which was accorded to writing in the ancient world.[69] One method by which letter writers overcame the perceived weakness of the medium and the fragility of the autonomous text was to commit the letter and its contents to a human messenger.

Already in the Semitic context of the Old Testament, the custom of entrusting an official letter to an authorized messenger is well established.[70] For this, the prophet Jeremiah's case is exemplary. Jeremiah, as a prophet and messenger of Yahweh (Jer. 1:4-10), maintains contact between himself in Jerusalem and his flock in Babylon via letters (see Jeremiah 29)[71]—which makes his case particularly interesting. At the command of Yahweh, he writes a letter advising the exiles to settle in, contradicting the false prophets' message that the exile will be brief, and sends the letter to Babylon via "Elasah, the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah, the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (Jer. 29:3). What is the purpose of Jeremiah's careful recording of these details? Such an elaborate description would be out of place if these were simply couriers. But by recording their

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[69]See, as we have already discussed, Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts."

[70]Although the specific institution of the שָׁלִיחַ as understood and practiced in Rabbinic Judaism is a later phenomenon, the roots of the process can be tracked down wherever the verb שׁלח occurs, especially when it is in combination with מַלְאָךְ. For messengers of men see Gen. 31:4; 32:3; 41:8, 14; Num. 20:14; Josh. 7:2; Judg. 6:35; 7:24; 9:31; etc. For messengers of God see 2 Chr. 36:15; Mal. 3:1. The giving of a commission to the sent one is illustrated in Gen. 12:1-3; 24:1-9. Is. 6:8-13 is most instructive of the sending of a prophet; see also Ex. 3:10; Judg. 6:8, 14; Jer. 1:7; Ezek. 2:3; Hag. 1:12; Zech. 2:11; 4:9; Mal. 4:4.

The fullness of the role of messengers in an Old Testament context has been explored in a way which would be digressive to us by John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East. Oral and Written Communication in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures: Communicators and Communiqués in Context* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989). In this section we intend simply to demonstrate the relationship of the messenger to the letter from one specific case on the basis of the biblical text alone.

[71]The apocryphal "Letter of Jeremiah" (= Baruch 6) is rather different in content, concentrating on idolatry. But its independent existence testifies to the importance which authoritative epistles held already in Judaism.
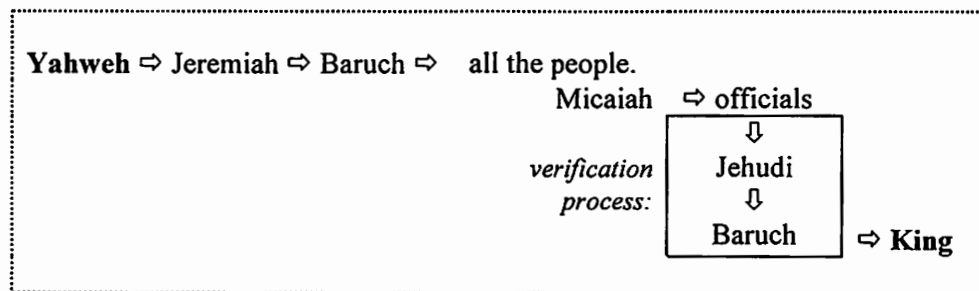
status first as ambassadors of the king and then as bearers in return of his letter, Jeremiah seems to be testifying to their authority in relationship to himself and the message contained in the letter. The envoys could, on the other hand, attest to the exiles that the message they carried was genuine, and that Jeremiah had, indeed, written it. One might also postulate, by analogy with the Rabbinic and Greek evidence cited below,[72] that they would have been entrusted with giving an authoritative explanation of the message. The letter, therefore, carries a message which is not to be believed simply because it is in writing (as moderns think). Rather, its message is attested to by a long chain of authority, in which the letter of chapter 29 places just one part:

Yahweh ⇨ Jeremiah the prophet ⇨ Elasah and Gemariah, the messengers ⇨ exiles

Jeremiah 36, when viewed in light of chapter 29, paints the same picture for Jeremiah's entire work of prophecy. In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, Yahweh instructs Jeremiah to write out on a scroll all the words He has given him concerning Israel and Judah from the very beginning (36:2-3). Jeremiah calls his scribe Baruch to take dictation of this massive work (:4). But because Jeremiah's movements are restricted by the hostile authorities, he must designate Baruch as his representative to carry the scroll of prophecy to the Temple and proclaim it (:5-7). Baruch is faithful to the mandate given him by Jeremiah in this sending (:8). Once again, the chain of authority is made exquisitely clear. At this public reading, Micaiah appears as the authorized representative of the Judaean officials; after hearing the prophecy, he returns to the king's house and declares to all those gathered there what he has heard (:11-13). Another messenger, Jehudi, is sent to Baruch, instructing him to bring the scroll and proclaim it in person (:14). The officials are concerned to verify the message before they relay it to the king (:15-16). They want to be certain that the chain of authority in the giving of the message has not been

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[72]See the following section, ἀπόστολος / שָׁלִיחַ, beginning on p. 285, including also the role of the emissary in Greco-Roman society. See also Birger Gerhardsson's comments on p. 282, below.

compromised. They ask Baruch: "Tell us, please, how did you write all these words? From his [Jeremiah's] mouth [מִפִּיו= dictation]?" (:17). Baruch confirms this with elaborate detail: "From the mouth [מִפִּיו] he proclaimed [יִקְרָא] all these words to me and I wrote them down on the scroll with ink" (:18). Now that the trustworthiness of the letter has been established by the mouth of a witness—in fact, by the authorized messenger—the message is carried to the king. The attribution of the text to Jeremiah (and thus to Yahweh, who sent him) by its written witness alone is not sufficient. The messenger system carries authority from sender to recipient by careful procedure. A rather more elaborate schematic obtains this time:

Yahweh ⇨ Jeremiah ⇨ Baruch ⇨ all the people.

Micaiah ⇨ officials

⇩

verification Jehudi
process: ⇩
Baruch ⇨ **King**

The point is not to establish a neo-Ramist pseudo-mathematics, but to indicate clearly the lines of authority through which messages were transmitted. There was an intimate connection between the letter's message and the (authority of the) persons who wrote and carried it.

This pattern occurs once more with Jeremiah's final "letter,"[73] the scroll he sent to Babylon containing the prophecy of her destruction in 51:59-64 [=LXX 28:59-64]. Yahweh instructs Jeremiah to write down the words of prophecy on a scroll. This he entrusts to Seraiah, who would accompany King Zedekiah to Babylon. Jeremiah gives specific instructions to Seraiah: he is to proclaim the words aloud, and then tie a rock to the scroll and sink it in the river.

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[73]The Hebrew of chapter 29 does not contain the specific word "letter." The Greek tradition, however, refers to this as an ἐπιστολή. See Jer. 36:1 [LXX]. The scroll sent in chapter 51 could as easily be called a letter.

Through the scroll and the messenger, Jeremiah's prophetic reach is authoritatively extended to

Babylon.

This cooperation of written and spoken word is quite at odds with Walter Ong's

extreme position on the gap between oral and written communication:

> Looking more closely at the psychodynamics at work in writing, we may note that,
> however unobstrusively, death presides at both ends of a writing operation. The basic
> reason is that the person being addressed as present is in fact absent and because,
> obversely, the author is not present to the reader although his words will be. The writer of
> the letter may even be dead by the time his words arrive at the locale to which they are
> sent. Or the reader presumed to be at the receiving end of the scribal operation may
> already be dead and buried when the letter is being penned to him by an unaware
> correspondent.[74]

No ancient oriental would think this way. The use of authorized messengers was part of a system

of keeping the word **alive**.

Birger Gerhardsson, in exploring the relationship between the fixed and the flexible in

Jewish traditionalism, suggests that it was the messenger (functioning as lector) who was

responsible for preserving the authoritative understanding of the text—thus placing a control

upon oral flexibility. The model he suggests is one of "text and commentary":

> When anyone in antiquity read a book aloud for others, the reader or some other expert
> had to be prepared for questions: the obscurities of the text were to be mastered by re-
> reading, clarifications, comments and perhaps exposition.[75]

This oral method is found already in Jesus' use of parables. Gerhardsson argues against the

principle of form criticism that the "explanations" of Jesus' parables are secondary, added by the

later church. Some oral theorists, we have seen, echo form criticism in attributing the

explanations to written language's preference for "fixity." That is, while the oral world could

tolerate the openness of the parables, the written Gospels could not. Gerhardsson, on the other

hand, argues that the picture of a flexible oral period followed by the rigid tyranny of the text

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[74]Ong, "*Maranatha:* Death and Life in the Text of a Book," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45.4 (1977): 425.

[75]Birger Gerhardsson, "The Gospel Tradition," in *The Interrelationships of the Gospels*, ed. David L. Dungan (Leuven: University Press, 1990), 524.

does not fit the witness of the Synoptics themselves. Jesus' method of teaching by parable or "mashal" as a matter of course included the explanation:

> When in the Gospels we see that Jesus must explain what he has said in a mashal, this must not be a secondary feature in the tradition. Nobody can express puzzling proverbs and amazing parables without being questioned or feeling himself that something needs explanation.[76]

Jesus' standard oral practice was no different from what was expected of the authoritative reader, according to Gerhardsson. For the reader was also entrusted with the interpretation of the text he proclaimed in an oral context.

The "Royal Edict Proclamation"[77] is a sub-genre, so to speak, which illustrates most compactly these elements of authorized sending which the messenger with his letter comprehends. Such cultural institutions grew with time in Israel and the Ancient Near East. The clearest examples of royal proclamations, therefore, occur in the post-exilic period. Consider the actions of King Cyrus in bringing to an end the exile of God's people:

> Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the Word of Yahweh from the mouth of Jeremiah, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he sent the proclamation [וַיַּעֲבֶר־קוֹל="let his voice go out"] through all his kingdom— and also in writing [וְגַם־בְּמִכְתָּב]—saying: "Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, 'Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ... '" (Ezra 1:1-2)

Cyrus carefully establishes the grounds of authority for what he is about to proclaim; his authority comes from the true God Himself. The message goes out **orally** throughout the realm,

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[76]Ibid., 526.

[77]See Greene, *op. cit.* In England, this would later be known as the King's Writ. See Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 74: "The decision [of the king or council] needs some shape, however general. In early Europe, after literacy, it took the form of a rescript, ordinance, decree, or just 'the King's writ.' The terms of the directive were available in writing, which could be read aloud to an illiterate populace by heralds or criers." Rengstorf, "ἀποστέλλω, κτλ.," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [*TDNT*], trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:399, refers to the standard Greek expression: "Already the formula ἀπεσταλμένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως links with the thought of sending the further thought of the associated authorisation of the one sent. The men thus described are representatives of their monarch and his authority."

as a "proclamation [קוֹל]." What is written is an accompaniment to the oral message, a control upon what is said. It is placed in writing particularly so that it might be posted publicly in each place, that those who miss the official reading may still receive the message. When the word is proclaimed, the edict is put into effect. The reading comes with authority. The reader is an official representative of the king, within whose specific mandate he has the king's full authority. No one may countermand this representative on this issue without attacking the king himself.

In 1 Maccabees there are further examples of such proclamations. Antiochus confirms by edict that Jerusalem will remain free, as his father Demetrius had first proclaimed. With the reading of the edict, he remits all their debts, and confirms their right to maintain an army and to continue the Temple worship (1 Macc. 15:1-9). Lucius, consul of the Romans, later confirms this proclamation with an edict of his own, circulated in all relevant areas (1 Macc. 15:15-24).

On the other hand, there are royal proclamations which serve mainly to give further authority to the messenger to act on behalf of the king. That is, the letter can not only confirm the **content** of the oral proclamation, but also bestow the right to carry out further action, whose details are only loosely indicated in writing. Earlier in 1 Maccabees, Jonathan receives the authority from King Demetrius to raise an army, which Jonathan begins to undertake by reading the royal edict publicly in Jerusalem. The letter confirms his authority to act in the name of the king on this matter (1 Macc. 10:1-9). A similar letter from King Alexander bestows upon Jonathan the office of high priest (1 Macc. 10:17-20).

Such evidence illustrates the way in which the authority of the messenger was related to the written edict. Once the authority of the messenger carrying the official proclamation was proved to be authentic, neither it nor he was to be questioned. There is a hint of this ancient background whenever a writer appeals to the authority by which he acts. For instance, the seven letters to the seven ἄγγελοι "messengers" of the seven churches are best understood as royal

edict proclamations.[78] With the familiar concluding words, God, the King, indicates that He is speaking through these messengers: "The one who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."[79] The Spirit is God's Spirit. The "messengers" in each church are thus authorized to carry out the message of reproach or encouragement which the King proclaims; the hearers, by the same token, are admonished to hear the messengers as if the King Himself were speaking (which He is).

ἀπόστολος / שָׁלִיחַ

By the time the New Testament was written, the function of the authorized messenger had become concretized in both Jewish and Greek culture. In order to understand the connection of the epistle with the apostle's office, we must consider in what way the role of ἀπόστολος was related to both its Jewish forebears and to its Greco-Roman counterparts.

Rengstorf's classic and influential study argues that ἀπόστολος rarely appeared as a noun in Classical Greek and Hellenism,[80] and, therefore, that the New Testament has coined a new usage, depending heavily upon the Rabbinic institution of the שָׁלִיחַ.[81] While his linguistic conclusions might be challenged,[82] the freight of the שָׁלִיחַ is certainly carried into Greek by

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[78]Aune, 159: "The seven embedded 'letters' in Rev. 2-3 are not really letters but prophetic proclamations patterned after ancient royal and imperial edicts." Of course, these are letters, too.

[79]Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

[80]Rengstorf, *TDNT,* 1:407.

[81]Manifest differences include: that Jewish **missionaries** were not called by the term שָׁלִיחַ, for they were not sent with official sanction; a Rabbinic שָׁלִיחַ was given a specific and limited mandate; nor did Jewish writers translate שָׁלִיחַ into Greek as ἀπόστολος. Though Christian usage was based on Jewish, the terms remained distinct. See Rengstorf, *TDNT,* 1:418.

[82]Rengstorf, *TDNT,* 1:399, 408-13, discusses the Cynic philosopher, who spoke of himself as ἄγγελος ἀπὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἀπέσταλται, or as an ἀποσταλείς, and in this sense a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος. The distinction between the verb and the noun must not be drawn too sharply. If Greek messengers spoke of themselves as "sent" using the verb ἀποστέλλω, the related

ἀπόστολος. The data are well known, yet worth reviewing for the sake of their impact on the present study. Rengstorf suggests that the institution reached this final form by the first century:

> What characterises the שְׁלוּחִים of all periods is their commissioning with distinctive tasks which take them greater or lesser distances away from the residence of the one who gives them. Thus the point of the designation שְׁלוּחִים is neither description of the fact of sending nor indication of the task involved but simply assertion of the form of sending, i.e., of authorisation. This is the decisive thing.[83]

The legal consequences of this sending with authorization were comprehended primarily in the messenger as **representative**:

> The man commissioned is always the representative of the man who gives the commission. He represents in his own person the person and rights of the other. The Rabbis summed up this basis of the שָׁלִיחַ in the frequently quoted statement: שְׁלוּחוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם כְּמוֹתוֹ, "the one sent by a man is as the man himself" (Ber., 5,5), [footnote 57: For further instances, cf. Str.-B., III,2] i.e., the שָׁלִיחַ is as good as the שֹׁלֵחַ in all that he says and does in execution of his commission.[84]

The ways in which a שָׁלִיחַ could act in place of his sender include even the execution of betrothal, divorce, and other legal transactions.[85]

Of further interest is the Rabbinic application of the term שָׁלִיחַ in retrospect to specific messengers of God in the Old Testament Scriptures:

> Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel are called שְׁלוּחִים because there took place through them things normally reserved for God. Moses causes water to flow out of the rock (bBM, 86b); Elijah brings rain and raises a dead man; Elisha "opens the mother's womb" and also raises a dead man; and Ezekiel receives the "key to the tombs at the reawakening of the dead" according to Ez. 37:1ff. (Midr. Ps. 78 § 5; cf. bTaan. 2a; bSanh., 113a).[86]

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substantive—even if its use was influenced by the noun שָׁלִיחַ—would not have appeared so strange.

[83]Ibid., 1:414-15.

[84]Ibid., 1:415.

[85]Thus we see the continuation of the messenger in the Old Testament, who contracts marriages in Genesis 24 and 1 Sam. 25:40-41.

[86]Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:419. The Rabbis do not otherwise refer to prophets as שְׁלוּחִים.

The Rabbis noticed these men performing such things which would be blasphemy for any man to claim—as Jesus is charged with for claiming to forgive sins (Mk. 2:7 and parallels; cf. Lk. 7:49). But it was precisely this quality which the Rabbis saw as a mark of God's plenipotentiary. God was actually present through these men to perform what only God could do.[87] This is the highest example of the Rabbinic שָׁלִיחַ. The fact that these four men and no others were referred to as God's שְׁלוּחִים, indicates that "being sent" was not enough for this technical term. There had to be the "real presence" of the sender in the שָׁלִיחַ to accomplish an activity on his behalf.[88]

J. Duncan M. Derrett, with his expertise in the area of oriental law, provides more data on Jewish Agency:

> The three great maxims of the Jewish law of Agency (*shᵉliyḥut*) are:
> 1. *sheliyho shel 'ādām kemoto*: A man's agent is like himself.
> 2. *'eyn 'ādām shāliyaḥ lidᵉvar 'averāh*: There is no agency for wrong-doing,
> 3. *ḥazākāh she sheliyaḥ 'oseh shᵉliyḥuto*: It is presumed that an agent executes his commission.[89]

The second maxim protects the sender under Jewish law from criminal activities perpetrated by the שָׁלִיחַ in the name of his master. In this case the שָׁלִיחַ is personally responsible, not the sender. On the other hand, the third maxim binds the sender to the actions of his representative

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[87]Paul's frequent appeal to "signs and wonders" which he has performed is thus an appeal to traditionally accepted marks of being God's שָׁלִיחַ. See Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:5; 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 2:4. See also Mk. 16:17-18. Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:433, argues similarly that the miracles recorded in Acts are not about glorifying the apostles as men: "At all points there is firm belief that Jesus Himself stands behind the miracles, that in them He displays His power through His messengers and that He thus endorses His messengers as such. If the messenger of a man is as the man himself, and if the NT apostolate is based on this principle, the absence of miracles would signify no less than the invalidity of the apostolic claim."

[88]Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:420, correctly notes that the Rabbis misunderstood prophecy, for God really was speaking/acting through all the prophets (see Heb. 1:1) as his representatives.

[89]J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970), 52. The brief discussion and detailed documentation he offers on pp. 52-55 are invaluable.

whether he agrees with them or not, so long as the representative is acting within bounds of his given mandate. He has full authority to make decisions and act on behalf of his principal.

When Jesus speaks in the following way to His apostles, one cannot help but conclude that there is a conscious allusion to this שְׁלִיחַ institution:

> Ὁ ἀκούων ὑμῶν ἐμοῦ ἀκούει, καὶ ὁ ἀθετῶν ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ ἀθετεῖ· ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ ἀθετῶν ἀθετεῖ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με "The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and the one who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." (Lk. 10:16)[90]

> Ὁ δεχόμενος ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ δέχεται, καὶ ὁ ἐμὲ δεχόμενος δέχεται τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με "The one who receives you receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives the One who sent Me." (Mt. 10:40)

> ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ λαμβάνων ἄν τινα πέμψω ἐμὲ λαμβάνει, ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ λαμβάνων λαμβάνει τὸν πέμψαντά με. "Truly, truly I say to you: the one who receives anyone I should send receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives the One who sent Me." (Jn. 13:20)

St. Paul's understanding of himself as ἀπόστολος, then, is in the same tradition, as he explicitly states to the Galatians:

> ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν "as a messenger of God you received me, as Christ Jesus [Himself]" (Gal. 4:14)

The early Father, Ignatius, similarly compares the bishop in his office with the authorized representative of a householder:

> For everyone whom the master of the house sends [ὃν πέμπει ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης] to do his business ought we to receive as him who sent him [αὐτὸν δέχεσθαι, ὡς αὐτὸν τὸν πέμψαντα]. Therefore it is clear that we must regard the bishop as the Lord himself [ὡς αὐτὸν κύριον δεῖ προσβλέπειν]. (Ignatius, *To the Ephesians*, 6:1).[91]

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[90]The sending of the apostles two by two (the twelve in Mk. 6:7; the seventy-two in Lk. 10:1) reflects Rabbinic practice of laying on hands and sending ordained Rabbis out on a mission two by two. Rengstorf, *TDNT,* 1:417.

[91]From both this passage and Jn 13:20 it is apparent that ἀποστέλλω is interchangeable in this context with πέμπω.

Clement writes in addition: "The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ was sent [ἐξεπέμφθη] from God. Christ therefore [is] from [ἀπὸ] God and the apostles from [ἀπὸ] Christ" (*1 Clement* 42:1-2). Clement continues in v. 4 to describe how the apostles passed on this authority to bishops and deacons.

Though there certainly is a wealth of material concerning this institution on which to dwell, let this suffice to indicate what of the שְׁלִיחַ may be carried over into our understanding of the apostolic office.

The connection between the apostolate and the Jewish שְׁלִיחַ institution having thus been made, we must proceed to examine how both of these are related to the practice of sending letters. Within Rabbinic Judaism, firstly, the letter was often explicitly entrusted to a שְׁלִיחַ. David Aune, while arguing that the New Testament epistles depend more heavily on Hellenistic conventions than oriental, nevertheless cites evidence of the same to demonstrate that the שְׁלִיחַ was the one strong element of Jewish influence:

> Yet one important type of Jewish letter, the *encyclical*, had an important influence on early Christian epistolography. Such letters were carried by envoys (*šaliaḥim*) and were a major means whereby Jewish authorities in Palestine communicated with Diaspora communities (cf. Acts 9:1; 28:21). Encyclicals were used for many administrative purposes, including the regulation of holy day observances. Messengers were sent from Palestine with letters announcing the appearance of the New Moon in six important festival months so that the festival days might be accurately fixed (M. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1.3-4; 2.2). The texts of some of these letters are preserved in T. *Sanhedrin* 2:6. The more general *festal letter* encouraging observance of various holy days was also common (2 Macc. 1:1-10; 1:11-2:18; Esth. 9:20-32).[92]

The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem used such authorized scribal messengers in order to maintain contact with the faithful in the Diaspora, to make their presence known throughout the world. The carrying of such letters was a method of visitation.[93]

Secondly, in the Greco-Roman world there were similar "representational" or ambassadorial offices,[94] to which letters were connected. It was customary to establish a

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[92]Aune, 180. The letter of the Jerusalem council fits this mould (Acts 15:22-31). Such letters were likely carried by the Judaizers who harried Paul (cf. the mention of "new moons" in Col. 2:16-17). See Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:416, for further details. One such letter has been discovered (c. A.D. 280): "Lo, we send (שְׁלַחְנוּ) you a great man (אָדָם גָּדוֹל) as our envoy (שְׁלוּחֵנוּ), equal to ourselves until he come to us" - Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:417.

[93]Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:417. Before his conversion, Paul had functioned as such a שְׁלִיחַ of the Sanhedrin in his journey to Damascus (Acts 9:1-2).

messenger as the sender's authorized representative by means of a "letter of commendation" (the

Roman term) or "of introduction" (the Greek term).[95] The language used is illustrated by this

second-century Latin letter:

> To Julius Domitius, military tribune of the legion, from Aurelius Archelaus, his *beneficarius*, greeting. I have recommended my friend Theon to you before, and now I ask you, lord, to look upon him as if he were myself.[96]

As Stowers suggests, this is remarkably similar to Philemon, a letter of commendation for the

runaway slave:[97] "If then you consider me a partner, accept him as me [προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς

ἐμέ]" (Phlmn. 17).

Both Rabbinic and Greco-Roman practice, therefore, come to mind when one notes the

New Testament epistles so frequently giving such authority to the letter-carrier as the

representative, the ἀπόστολος/שָׁלִיחַ of the letter-writer:

> And in order that you too might know my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus will make all things known to you [πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν], who is the beloved brother and faithful minister[98] in the Lord, whom I am sending to you for this very purpose: that you might know our circumstances and that he might exhort your hearts [ἵνα γνῶτε τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ παρακαλέσῃ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν]. (Eph. 6:21-22)

> But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send [πέμψαι] Timothy to you soon, in order that also I might be glad in knowing your circumstances. For I have no one else of like mind, who would genuinely be concerned about your circumstances. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Christ. But you know his proven worth [δοκιμὴν], that as a child to a father he slaved with me for the Gospel. Therefore, I hope to send this man as soon as I

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[94]The role of an ambassador or "emissary" in Roman culture is explained in more detail by Margaret Mitchell's study, which we discuss below, p. 301.

[95]On "letters of commendation" see especially Stowers, 153-65; and Aune, 166-67.

[96]From Stowers, 157.

[97]See also Aune's analysis, pp. 211-12. In the case of Philemon, the context of the letter limits greatly the way in which Onesimus would serve as Paul's representative.

[98]Tychicus is here referred to as διάκονος either in his capacity as a "minister" of the church of Christ, or as "ambassador," delegated for the particular task of delivering this letter and its news, for διάκονος refers to a servant given authority to accomplish the terms of a particular mandate.

see how things go with me; and I am confident in the Lord that also I myself will come soon.

And I thought it necessary to send [πέμψαι] to you Epaphroditus, my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, and your envoy and servant [ἀπόστολον καὶ λειτουργὸν][99] for my needs, since he was longing for you all and distressed, because you heard that he was ill. For indeed he was ill even to the point of death; but God had mercy on him, and not on him alone but also on me, lest I should have grief upon grief. Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly, that seeing him you might rejoice again and also I might be less anxious. Therefore, receive [προςδέχεσθε] him in the Lord with all joy and hold such men in honor [ἐντίμους], for it was for the work of Christ that he drew near to death, risking his life that he might fill up what was lacking in your service [λειτουργίας] towards me. (Phil. 2:19-30)

[Epaphras has been the messenger from Colossae to Paul (cf. Col. 4:12):]
We thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we have heard [ἀκούσαντες] of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints ...
... just as you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, who is faithful minister [διάκονος]of Christ on your [or "our"?] behalf[100] (Col. 1:3-4, 7-8)

[Col. 4:7-8 reproduces Eph. 6:21-22, to which Paul now adds:]
... together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known all things going on here [πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε]. (Col. 4:7-9)

[Like Philemon, 3 John in its entirety might be considered a letter of commendation for its bearer, likely Demetrius:]
Demetrius has been favorably testified to by all and by the truth itself; and we ourselves give favorable testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. (3 Jn. 12)[101]

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[99]One can see here how both ἀπόστολος and λειτουργός both have as core components of meaning the bestowal of a mandate for a specific commission, the former emphasizing the "being sent" and the latter the task or service. Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 1:398, defines ἀπόστολος in such a context as "one who is on the way with a commission." Paul thus refers to Epaphroditus as the Philippians' שָׁלִיחַ, just as Timothy is Paul's שָׁלִיחַ in return. (See also the ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν "messengers/representatives of the congregations" in 2 Cor. 8:23.) The question is not whether "apostle" is used in a "broad" or "narrow" sense, but what the "external entailments" are: **whose apostle one is, who has sent one.** (On external entailment see James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1995], 188-90.) Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ; Epaphroditus is not. In the early Fathers, the use of the noun ἀπόστολος for a general messenger/envoy fades, likely in consciousness of it having become a technical term in the Christian church, and is replaced in such contexts by the passive participle: ὁ ἀπεσταλμένος (see, e.g., *1 Clement* 65:1).

[100]The same problem concerning διάκονος pertains here as in Eph. 6:21 (n. 98, above). Furthermore, the textual problem concerning the possessive pronoun compounds the issue. It seems that ὑμῶν is logically correct (Epaphras has come from Colossae to Paul, and remains with Paul, Col. 4:12)—which, of course, makes ἡμῶν the more difficult reading!

With these New Testament examples the relevance to the epistles of the previous discussion of plenipotentiaries in Jewish (and Greco-Roman) culture becomes clear—and an oral component of the epistles reveals itself. When Paul comments about the messenger bringing more information, he reflects the widespread custom of entrusting part of the message only to the messenger—for the postal system was notoriously unreliable,[102] and the letter might fall into the wrong hands. In some Hellenistic letters, the message itself is not even included in the letter; the messenger is expected to give it orally.[103] The messenger was, thus, far more than a letter-carrier. He embodied the sender as his fully-authorized representative within the context of this particular task. He carried the apostle's written words, he elaborated upon them with added commentary, he answered questions concerning the proper interpretation of the letter. He was commended to the congregation as the apostle's שָׁלִיחַ.

Apostolic Presence

Through the authorized messenger bearing his letter, the apostle, therefore, had a means by which he could extend his presence to congregations under his care which were geographically distant. For, on the one hand, this was the very purpose of commissioning a representative: to act on one's behalf when and where one cannot be personally present. Thus, upon first reading, the messenger bearing the letter functioned as the apostle's שָׁלִיחַ. Yet, on the other hand, the presence of the apostle was not exhausted by the work of the emissary. For the

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[101]Other letters of commendation are found in: Acts 9:2; 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:3, 10-11 [15-18?]; 2 Cor. 3:1-2; Phil. 4:2-3; [1 Thess. 5:12-13?].

[102]Doty, 45.

[103]See Doty, 16, 30, 45-46. He comments: "We also gain a sense of the importance of his emissaries or letter carriers: they receive authority to convey the letters, to expand upon them, and to continue Paul's work" (37). This was apparently the historical roots of the ἐπιστολή, as Aune, 158, notes: "an *oral* communication sent by messenger (Herodotus 4.10.1; Thucydides 7.11.1)" - emphasis original.

letter remained. In the oral world in which Paul resided,[104] the quickening of the written word by

a lector was understood to continue bringing about the presence of the author, as we have

seen.[105] Conscious of this important function of the reading in relationship to the apostles'

authority among them, the church placed great value on the reading of the apostolic word and

quickly sought to regularize it.[106]

The value attributed to this activity certainly accorded with the appreciation given to

the oral word in the ancient world. Yet because the line of apostolic authority brought to bear by

the reading of the letter was traced by the apostle himself directly back to Christ, the church

recognized that an even more lofty event was occurring. For even as the lector represented the

apostle, the apostle represented Christ; thus, his word was Christ's word, and his presence was

Christ's presence. Paul argues this point with the Ephesians: that as he taught them, they were, in

fact, taught by Christ Himself:

> But you yourselves did not learn Christ in this way, **if/since indeed you heard Him and were taught by Him** [εἴ γε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε], just as the truth is in Jesus ..." (Eph. 4:20-21).

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[104]Ong, "Text as Interpretation: Mark and After," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 15, comments: "Kelber notes that whereas the narrator Mark retreats behind his narrative text so as virtually to disappear, Paul himself very much emerges in the text of his letters, which are thus more closely linked with orality than written narrative is."

[105]This element of the "oral synthesis" was particularly apparent in the discussion of rhetorical practice in chapter two, as well as in the debate over Isocrates; see p. 258, above.

[106]In earliest times the reading was the responsibility of the pastor, the one who himself was a שָׁלִיחַ of Christ, and thus fit to represent the apostle to the congregation. See 1 Tim. 4:13; Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, 67. Soon a separate office is established. Early mention of a "lector" is found in *2 Clement* 19:1, although it is unclear whether this refers to a separate office, or to the pastor as lector. By the time of *Apostolic Constitutions* 8:22, it is definitely a distinct office. On the history of the lectorate, see the monumental study: Paul Glaue, *Die Vorlesung heiliger Schriften im Gottesdienste* (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1907).

Eugene Boring has traced the same blending of the apostolic voice with the voice of Christ in the Revelation to St John.[107] It is this consciousness that the apostle speaks for Christ as His representative which underlies the premium placed on the reading of the apostolic word itself.

The apostle was, therefore, concerned to be present with his people because of their need to have Christ in their midst. Hermann Sasse reminds us of the liturgical data we have reviewed,[108] and goes on to suggest that the liturgical reading of the epistle served as a substitute for the presence of the apostle in the divine service:

> Schon längst ehe es geschriebene Evangelien gab, hat man die Briefe des Paulus im Gottesdienst verlesen, und zwar immer und immer wieder. Sie waren ja von vornherein zum lauten Vorlesen im Gottesdienst vor der Gemeinde **als Ersatz für die mündliche Rede des Apostels gedacht**. Das geht schon daraus hervor, daß sie mit den ältesten Formeln der christlichen Liturgie schließen. So findet sich am Schluß des 1. Korintherbriefes das älteste Stück der christlichen Abendmahlsliturgie. Und wenn es am Schluß unseres Briefes [1 Peter] heißt—ähnlich wie am Schluß des 1. Korintherbriefes—: „Grüsset einander mit dem heiligen Kuß der Liebe", dann ist das ein Hinweis auf die Feier des Abendmahls, die sich an die Verlesung anschließt. Begann doch das Abendmahl mit dem Friedenskuß, den die Bischöfe und Diakonen einander gaben, die Männer untereinander und die Frauen untereinander.[109]

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[107]M. Eugene Boring, "The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 34.4 (1992). His study is driven by the way in which the voices in Revelation blend into each other, so that it is unclear whether the Father, Christ, John, or another person is speaking. "John's model is taken from the prophetic books of the Old Testament, where the voice of YHWH and the voice of the prophet sometimes fade into each other, even in the sections with clear כה אמר יהוה formulae (e.g., Isa 3:16f; 41:20; Hos 4:11-13, 14b; 12:12f; 13:1-3)" (351). Boring's language unfortunately slides into talk of charismatic gifts rather than apostolic office. Nevertheless his comments are revealing:

> As in the Pauline letters, the letter served to make the voice of John present in the congregation. The "voice of John" is the voice of the Christian prophet. This means that when a letter substituted for the presence of the prophet in the worship service, in the oral/aural experience of the hearers, **the voice that is heard within the assembly room is not a text, but is at one and the same time the voice of the lector and the voice of John**. But precisely because the voice of John is the voice of a Christian prophet, this means that **his voice is also the voice of the Spirit** that speaks in the charismatic worship of the Asian congregations, **which is the voice of Jesus, which ... is the voice of God**. (350) [Emphasis added]

[108]See chapter three, "Oral performances: Liturgical pieces and references," pp. 212ff.

[109]Hermann Sasse, *Zeugnisse: Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden 1933-1944*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1979), 55. Emphasis added.

The apostle transcends time and space with his epistle. As it is read to the congregation, the apostle's own voice is heard and he is present, together with that whole fellowship of the church to which his lengthy greetings give expression. As the letter is read, Sasse argues, the geographically scattered church is united as the Body of Christ:

> Der Schreiber eines solches Briefes und die Gemeinden, deren Grüße er übermittelt, sind dann **gleichsam im Geiste gegenwärtig**. Sie schließen sich in die Gemeinschaft der Gemeinde, die in der Ferne um den Tisch des Herrn sich sammelt, ein, so wie wir, die wir viele Jahrhunderte später leben, uns in diese Gemeinde einschließen, wenn wir die alte Epistel in Andacht lesen oder hören. Es ist die große Gemeinschaft der Heiligen, in der die ganze Kirche Gottes zu allen Zeiten und an allen Orten eins ist. Eine Gemeinschaft, die deswegen etwas ganz anderes ist als alle sonstige Menschengemeinschaft, weil sie die Gemeinschaft des Leibes Christi ist.[110]

As the epistle is read, the apostle's word creates a unity which leads directly into the "communion" of the Lord's Supper which ensues; thus, the congregation is united with the apostle, the whole church, and with Christ Himself.

J. A. T. Robinson's iconoclastic treatment of New Testament origins uses precisely this purpose of the apostolic writings to defend much earlier dates for the epistles. He attacks traditional critical thinking on the relationship between oral and written teaching, and in the process brings new light to the purpose and use of the New Testament writings in the earliest period. He is concerned with the dangerous critical presupposition "that the writing down of traditions did not begin until *after* a considerable stretch of oral transmission—the transition being marked, it is also often *assumed*, by the passing of the first apostolic generation or by the fading of the hope of an early *parousia*."[111] The usual critical assumption was that the written Scriptures took the place of the oral proclamation **after the death of the apostles**. Earl Ellis points to the fallacy in this assumption:

> ... the circumstance that gave rise to written teachings in early Christianity was not chronological distance but geographical distance. This is evident in the case of Paul's

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[110]Ibid., 55. Emphasis added.

[111]John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 346. Emphases original.

letters and of the Jerusalem Decree (Acts 15), but a similar situation on a smaller scale was also present in the mission of Jesus.[112]

The fact which necessitated the production of apostolic Scripture was not that the apostles were all dead and gone but that they could not be everywhere at once.[113]

We might now recall that the letter as "substitute for the presence of the author" was a commonplace of the Hellenistic letter.[114] This feature is seen by Heikki Koskenniemi as the fundamental purpose and characteristic of such epistles. Doty summarizes three aspects of this characteristic feature, following Koskenniemi:

> The first aspect ... is what Koskenniemi identifies as *philophronesis*, that is, that the letter served the purpose of expressing "the friendly relationship between two persons. ... Hellenistic letters were to reflect the giving of oneself found in oral meetings. ...
>
> The second aspect, *parousia* or "presence," Koskenniemi takes to express the special purpose of writing: a letter was intended to revive the existence of a friendship when the correspondents were physically separated. So for instance, Proclus ([paragraph] #2) mentioned that a letter writer should write "to someone not present as if he were present." ...

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[112]E. E. Ellis in G. Strecker, ed., *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie: Neutestamentliche Festschrift für Hans Conzelmann zum 60. Geburtstag* (Tübingen, 1975), 304, 306, 309; cited in Robinson, 346. The thesis that Jesus' teachings were written down already during his lifetime, and circulated in fragments long before the creation of the Gospels, is pursued in particular depth by Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

[113]See also Sasse, 54: "Aber nur stelle man sich einmal diese durch die mündliche Predigt gesammelten Gemeinden vor—zerstreut inmitten der Millionenmasse der Bevölkerung des Reiches, ständig in der Versuchung, wieder abzufallen vom christlichen Glauben, ständig bedroht durch Irrlehrer, die das Evangelium verfälschen. **Nur selten konnte ein Apostel bei ihnen sei,** ganz zu schweigen von der Tatsache, daß die Generation der Apostel ausstarb. Auch Propheten und Lehrer, die ihnen mit dem Worte dienten, waren nicht immer da. In solchen Lagen wurde ein apostolischer Brief oder ein prophetisches Buch, wie die Offenbarung Johannis, oder die Schrift eines Lehrers, wie der Hebräerbrief, zum **Ersatz für die lebendige Stimme der ersten Verkündiger.** So fing das Neue Testament an, Schrift zu werden in den Briefen der Apostel." Emphasis added.

[114]Stowers, 58, 69, 144.

To designate the main function of the letter, the continuance of a dialogic conversation in writing, Koskenniemi chooses the term *omilia*, "homily," a term used along with *dialogos*, "dialogue," in later Hellenistic texts to describe the tone of epistolary discourse.[115]

The Greco-Romans, too, believed that through the letter, the author was really present with them.[116]

An examination of St. Paul's letters reveals the same commonplace, but with the added dimension of a reality created by Christ's Word through the Holy Spirit.

> For I myself, though absent [ἀπὼν] in body but present [παρὼν] in spirit [or "by the Spirit"], have already judged the one who has done this, [working from the presupposition that] I am really present [ὡς παρὼν]: in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you and my (S)spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus are gathered together, [my judgment is] to hand such a one over to Satan ... (1 Cor. 5:3-5)[117]

> Let such a one consider this, that what we are in word through letters when absent [ἀπόντες], such we are in deed when present [παρόντες]. (2 Cor. 10:11)[118]

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[115]Heikki Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (Helsinki: Suomalaien Tiedeakatemie, 1956), as summarized in Doty, 11-12. Doty himself comments on p. 27, "we often have a sense that Paul is preaching as if he were there in person." See also Aune, 172.

[116]In a fourth century parody of the friendly letter, "Julian to Iamblichus," the author exaggerates the commonplace "joy at the experience of receiving a friend's letter," including every possible element for didactic effect. Near the beginning he writes, "You have indeed come, even though absent, by means of your letter" (Stowers, 65). Achillion writes to Hieracapollon (A.D. III): "we shall have the impression, through our letters, of seeing one another face to face" (Stowers, 72).

[117]The force of the participial phrase ὡς παρὼν is often weakened to something like "as if present," implying a hypothetical case or fiction. Such constructions give, rather, the writer's **actual** presupposition, the foundation for what he is about to say, as we have translated. See Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 503: "ὡς frequently denotes a reason imagined to be true by the principal subject and treated by him as a fact." In the next phrase, Paul gives the reason why he can be present with them: the power of Christ to accomplish this is present where His name is invoked. As this word of Paul's is proclaimed, Paul is indeed present by the power of Christ, who is the Word.

[118]The commonplace of lamenting over one's absence from the addressee is also evident in Paul, reflecting to a lesser degree the purpose of the letter in ameliorating his absence. See 2 Cor. 13:10. Also:
> Therefore, my beloved, just as you always heeded, not only when [you were] in my presence [ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου] but now even more in my absence [πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου], work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12)

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, in order that whether coming and seeing you [εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς] or being absent [εἴτε ἀπὼν], I may hear things about you [ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν], that you stand firm in the one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel. (Phil. 1:27)

This I say in order that no one should deceive you with persuasive speech [πιθανολογίᾳ]. For if indeed I am absent in the flesh [καὶ τῇ σαρκὶ ἄπειμι], nevertheless in spirit [or "by the Spirit"][119] I am with you [τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι], rejoicing and seeing the proper order and steadfastness of your faith in Christ. (Col. 2:4-5)

If anyone does not heed our word through the letter [τῷ λόγῳ ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς], mark this one that you have nothing to do with him, that he be put to shame. (2 Thess. 3:14)[120]

Craig Blomberg has identified this theme of apostolic presence as a distinct field of study in genre criticism of the epistles today,[121] pointing to Robert Funk's seminal study of 1967.

The close of this statement can be explained by analogy with the philosophical mentor who guides his now-separated student in carrying through his life the philosophy he has been taught. As Diogenes writes to his student Hipparchia, in the third Cynic letter of Pseudo-Diogenes: "But be earnest to bring to a finish what you have begun" (Stowers, 37).

[119]Paul gives theological weight to a commonplace of the "letter of friendship," the most important type of ancient letter. In such a letter the writer asserts that separation from his friend is only bodily, while in mind and heart they are united (cf. 1 Thess. 2:17). See Stowers, 59. Demetrius' handbook, e.g., begins a sample letter: "Even though I have been separated from you for a long time, I suffer this in body only" (Stowers, 58). In Col. 2:5 and 1 Cor. 5:3, Paul elevates this sentimental thought to the level of reality by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, and the nature of his office as apostle of the Christ, whose fullness is the church. Jerome writes to Florentius (A.D. 374): "as I cannot come in person I send you a letter instead; and thus, though absent in the body, I come to you in love and in spirit" (Stowers, 69). These remarkably similar words, though certainly expressing a commonplace, might nonetheless be an allusion to St. Paul.

[120]Paul's word through the letter is able to excommunicate one who rejects his teaching just as authoritatively as his word in person. Cf. 1 Cor. 5:3-4 above. Perhaps also the excommunication of Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Tim. 1:20 might be adduced, although it is unclear whether the act of excommunication occurs in the writing and proclamation of the letter (παρέδωκα as an "epistolary" aorist), or whether Paul might be referring to something he did in the past. In light of the parallels, the former seems more likely.

The analogy of excommunication with "shame" is appropriate to Greco-Roman culture, in which shame was the lowest state. The most common use of letters lay in the realm of epideictic rhetoric: giving praise or assigning blame.

[121]Craig L. Blomberg, "New Testament Genre Criticism for the 1990s," *Themelios* 15.2 (January-February 1990): 43. The premier epistolary scholar of recent times, John L. White, writes: "Regarding the similarity of social setting, the body of the letter seems always to have been conceived as a substitute for Paul's oral presence with the congregation. ... [T]here is surely warrant for considering the letter as Paul's written equivalent for his actual presence and

Funk's studies of the travelogues led to the conclusion that Paul was less concerned with travel arrangements than with his ability to be present with his congregations:

> Paul regarded his apostolic presence (in Greek: *parousia*) to his congregation under three different but related aspects at once: that of the letter, that of the apostolic emissary, and that of his own personal presence. All three are media through which Paul made his apostolic authority effective in the churches. The underlying theme is therefore the apostolic *parousia*—the presence of apostolic authority and power—of which the travelogue in the narrow sense is only one element.[122]

Within Paul's travelogues, Funk observes, Paul often connects his own movements and visits with those of his companions (see esp. 2 Cor. 12:14-18), indicating that his "emissaries" are in some way substitutes for his own presence. Funk identifies a number of classic passages which exemplify the "apostolic *parousia*,"[123] many of which we have already mentioned in connection with the same themes. From a detailed study of these, Funk derives both a formal structure and theological significance.

The structure itself is only of minor interest; yet it indicates the connection between what otherwise appear to be disparate items:

(1) γράφω (ἔγραψα) ὑμῖν, ... stating Paul's (1a) disposition (participle) or (1b) purpose (ἵνα-clause) in writing.
(2) The basis of Paul's apostolic relation to the recipients.
(3) Implementation of the apostolic presence.
   (3a) Desire, eagerness to see (come to) them (ἐπιποθέω, σπουδάζω and cognates).
   (3b) Hope (ἐλπίζω), wish (θέλω), intention (προτίθεμαι) to see (come to) them.
   (3c) Hindrance to his coming (ἐνκόπτω, κωλύω), or delay.
   (3d) "To be sent on by you" (προπέμπω).

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for thinking that the assembled congregation was his envisioned recipient." "Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 439.

[122]Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 81. The relevant chapter was edited from its first appearance as "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, & R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967), 249-68.

[123]Primarily Rom. 15:14-33; Gal. 4:12-20; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; 2 Cor. 12:14-13:10; 1 Thess. 2:17-3:13; Phil. 2:19-24. See Funk, 82.

(3e) Dispatch of an emissary, which takes the form: (a) "I send to you ..." ἔπεμψα ὑμῖν (name); (b) "who ..." ὃς (credentials); (c) "in order to ..." ἵνα (or infinitive: purpose).[124]

(3f) Apostolic presence, which takes the form of an announcement or promise of a visit, or expresses that a visit is expected, hoped or prayed for (cf. 3b, 4a).

(4) Invocation of divine approval and support for the apostolic presence.

(4a) The prayer for his presence may be a request for prayer, their prayer, his own prayer.

(4b) The convention "if God wills."

(5) Benefit from the apostolic presence accruing

(5a) to Paul

(5b) to the recipients

(5a-b) to the two mutually.[125]

Funk has thus summarized the elements we have already found to be of significance: Paul's concern that he has been hindered from visiting his flock; the letter as a temporary substitute for his visit; and the messenger sent as an authoritative representative to mitigate his absence.

Funk himself summarizes which items contribute directly to the presence of the apostle: "Items (1) (letter), (3e) (dispatch of emissary), and (3f) (Paul's presence) represent the implementation of the apostolic *parousia* in ascending order of significance."[126] To argue for the apostolic presence through letter or emissary is not to lessen the importance of his actual presence, but to highlight the former's relationship to his personal and official presence. The personal presence is certainly primary, Funk argues; yet he also illustrates the importance of the letter-carrier as Paul's representative (שָׁלִיחַ). Because the dispatch of the emissary stands immediately before mention of Paul's personal presence in the structure, Funk argues, the "structure reveals the rank of the apostolic emissary: he substitutes for the apostle himself,

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[124]The form of the emissarial dispatch is unfolded in excessive detail by Funk, 87-92. Suffice it to say that these three elements are often greatly elaborated. It seems that name, credentials, and purpose, are simply the three material elements of a letter of commendation (as discussed above), rather than a formal structure.

[125]Funk, 84-85, derives this structure primarily from 1 Cor. 4:14-21 and 1 Thess. 2:17-3:13, with reference also to Rom. 15:14-33. He then applies it also to Rom. 1:8-15; Phlmn. 21-22; 1 Cor. 16:1-11; 2 Cor. 12:14-13:13; Phil. 2:19-24; Gal. 4:12-20; 2 Cor. 9:1-5; 8:16-23; Phil. 2:25-30; 1 Cor. 16:12.

[126]Funk, 92-93.

whereas the letter is at best written authority for what the emissary has to say. Because Paul gives precedence to the oral word, the written word will not function as a primary medium of his apostleship."[127]

In the end, Funk's study moves little beyond a formal analysis—and in the last sentence of the preceding quotation we see the inadequacy even of his theological explanation. Margaret Mitchell has recently challenged the assertion that Paul considered letters and emissaries inferior to his personal presence:

> In fact, we know from 2 Cor. 10:10 that those far closer than we to the Pauline presence (in all of its manifestations) noted the gross inconsistency between these forms of apostolic presence, testifying through their charge to the superior power of his epistolary communiqués over his bodily presence. I would like to argue that we must question the assumption that Paul sent envoys and wrote letters as only "inadequate substitutes" for his own physical presence because of the busyness of his schedule. Is it not more likely the case that in certain instances Paul sent envoys or letters (or both) to represent him because he thought that they might be *more effective* than a personal visit in dealing with a particular situation that was facing a church?[128]

At first glance this appears to be fallacious, in that the travelogue sections make it clear that Paul did wish to be present in person. Yet Mitchell strikes at the importance of the letters as a legitimate mode of presence for Paul's apostolic work. And in the case of 2 Corinthians, there is some evidence that Paul **chose** not to come in person (2 Cor. 1:23; 12:20-21), and perhaps sent Titus as his envoy (7:5-16) in order to effect a reconciliation.[129] Thus, she concludes: "The

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[127]Ibid., 94. The second half of this statement is somewhat contradictory. The work of the emissary in bringing Paul's presence to bear is carried out first through the very reading of the letter. While some ancient letters were merely commendation, with the real message entrusted only to the emissary, an examination of the letters of Paul shows that they are far more. Even if the emissary had more instruction to give, the letter was not thereby reduced in value.

[128]Margaret M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111.4 (1992): 642. Emphasis original.

[129]Ibid., 642. She argues that written communication was considered by Paul to be superior to a visit in the cases of Romans, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Corinthians, as well. She astutely notes that "Romans is not a 'substitute for Paul's presence,' but rather a prerequisite for his presence, an announcement of his intended visit and an outline of his mission theology as his plea for financial support for his mission to Spain" (643 n. 7).

evidence indicates that there may have been no fixed hierarchy of presence, but that in each situation Paul chose which of the three—a letter, an envoy, a personal visit (or some combination)—would be most effective."[130]

Mitchell's study demonstrates further that the role of the emissary in carrying a letter on his mission had a strong history in Greco-Roman culture as well as in Rabbinic Judaism. That is, the שְׁלִיחַ is not the only way to explain what is happening through the apostolic use of emissaries. As she argued in the case of 2 Corinthians, such an envoy could function as an intermediary in carrying a "letter of reconciliation."[131] This diplomatic function is very similar to the Rabbinic institution. In fact, the conventions of Greek diplomacy[132] dictated that the envoy be treated "like the one he represents"; rejecting him was rejecting the sender. Mitchell notes the sort of language used: "The παρουσία of the envoy becomes indeed the παρουσία of the one who sent him."[133] Mitchell's documentation of these conventions is extensive.

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[130]Ibid., 643. "[N]o fixed hierarchy of presence" is probably the wrong assertion. In light of what we have been arguing, we must continue to maintain that Paul's personal presence with his congregations was the ultimate desire. The fact that he might have been forced by circumstances to delay his coming and thus substitute a letter or emissary—however good the reason—does not indicate that personal presence was less important. We have cited Mitchell to demonstrate mainly how strong a substitute the letter or emissary could be.

[131]The "rhetoric of reconciliation" was the subject of Mitchell's Tübingen dissertation.

[132]Paul uses Greek terminology in referring to himself as an "ambassador [πρεσβεύομεν]" (2 Cor. 5:20), and likely also in the use of ἄγγελος as "messenger" (Gal. 4:14).

[133]Mitchell, 651. Where the Greco-Roman envoy differs from the שְׁלִיחַ is in the unique Greek concern for establishing or confirming a **friendship** relationship through the letter. Reconciliation is connected with the envoy's first task of confirming and reaffirming this friendship between the parties. Mitchell, 60, describes this: "One way this is done is by their proper reception. The arrival of the envoys gives the second party the opportunity to demonstrate to the absent party their regard for them. Thus the envoys can testify to the way they were treated and the general disposition of the second party for the one by whom they were initially sent. That first party must in turn respond to the display of loyalty and affection with an affirmation of his own regard, as evidenced by the way in which he received the envoys back with their message."

Richard Ward's analysis of the rhetorical situation in 2 Corinthians 10-13 combines elements of both analyses. Paul's "presence" had been challenged by the "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 10:10):

> I believe that the **recitation** of Paul's four-chapter letter (2 Cor 10-13) was a counter **performance** through which Paul shrewdly and creatively re-established a powerful parousia in the Corinthian church. This event helped to form a basis for reconciliation between Paul and the Corinthians by refurbishing Paul's credibility as a Christian apostle.[134]

Ward, as an historian of performance, highlights the role of the reciter's skill in the success of Paul's literary endeavor.[135] The emissary was to embody the apostle in his oral recitation. Ward refers to Alla Bozarth-Campbell's "incarnational" metaphor:

> When it is rendered orally, the form of the letter is transformed into a presence that is embodied by the reciter. ... For Bozarth-Campbell, the oral performance of any text is a process that creates a "new being by bringing two separate beings together in an incarnation" and "this process leads to an event which constitutes a transformation of all who participate in it" (13). In other words, the body of the performer meets with the body of the text through the mediums of speech and movement in order to create the new body of the text-in-performance.[136]

The epistle was the vehicle of presence for Paul through the body and voice of the emissary-performer. Thus, Ward agrees that the letter could be an effective instrument for Paul's work, and with the right choice of reciter, perhaps a preferred instrument in this situation.[137]

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[134]Richard F. Ward, "Pauline Voice and Presence as Strategic Communication," *Semeia* 65 (1994): 96. Emphasis added.

[135]Ibid., 104: "Paul must have carefully considered the ability of his reciter to render his text in accordance with the standards of excellence of the time. Titus or some other emissary, through the skillful rendering of Paul's letter, intended to guide the audience through an *experience* of the situation from Paul's perspective."

[136]Ibid., 103, quoting Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *The Word's Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Interpretation* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press), 1979.

[137]Ward, 105: "The performer of Paul's letter became an icon for the apostolic presence of Paul, a presence deemed powerful by both the Corinthians and Paul's opponents. The letter-in-performance demonstrated to the Corinthians that Paul's voice and presence could be very strong indeed and certainly quite different from the poor self-presentations Paul had given during his visits."

Funk, Mitchell, and Ward confirm in their own way the thesis that the oral proclamation of the epistles by the representative is a method of bringing the apostolic presence to bear on the congregations under his care. The messenger carrying and proclaiming the letter had a commission to serve as the apostle's personal representative after the manner of the Rabbinic שָׁלִיחַ or the Greco-Roman ambassadorial emissary. Through the letter and the word of mouth of the emissary, the apostle could be present where he could not or would not physically be. Yet, Paul moves well beyond the conventions of his day. He speaks of his apostleship as grounded in his being sent by Jesus Christ, who was first sent by the Father. While the New Testament writers can describe this eternal sending in familiar terms, there was a greater reality in Christ's relationship to the Father. Christ is not just "like" the One who sent Him; "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30).

So also the apostle is not just "like" the One (Christ) who sent him. In a unique theological way, Christ is "in" the apostle, exhorting through him (2 Cor. 13:3),[138] acting through him. This reality is what truly lies behind Paul's concern that he be present to the congregations of Christ: for as he is speaking to them, so also is Christ speaking to them. The epistle is a means of accomplishing this. The apostolic word in the epistle brings along the One who is the Word. The apostolic representative must receive apostolic commendation because the line of proper authority is vital in continuing the relationship of Christ to His flock. It is a ground of certainty for the hearers to know that the one speaking to them carries the authority of the apostle, and thus also of Christ. Paul therefore does not choose his emissaries arbitrarily (any more than a Roman would choose just any man to convey his good will, any more than the Sanhedrin would choose just any man to carry official instructions to the Diaspora). Chief among his emissaries are Paul's fellow ministers, his coworkers, those who with Paul are called συνεργοί of God (1 Thess. 3:2),

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[138]"It was the common conviction of early Christianity not only that Jesus continued to live, but that he continued to speak" - Boring, 334. Cf. idem, *The Continuing Voice of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

principally Timothy and Titus, later recipients of "**pastoral** epistles." These men with his letter in hand, carry his word and presence through their mouths to the children in the faith he would so dearly visit.

Conclusion

The theme which draws together this disparate material regarding epistolary theory and apostolic presence is **orality**. An oral world is concerned about living, personal presence, what is conveyed most substantially by word of mouth. The path to the authentic interpretation of the epistles lies in appreciating their oral quality. Modern studies of ancient letter-writing have finally demonstrated that the letter could serve an enormous range of functions. We have shown evidence that the epistles fit well into that place in the liturgy where the sermon would fall. Orality research, which so intimately connects writing to oral proclamation in the ancient world, has opened up the possibility of a letter serving such a function. A "sermon with an epistolary prescript" is now not so odd as once thought. The apostle understood himself according to his divine commission as exhorter and consoler, as teacher and proclaimer of the Word of God. Where his personal presence to accomplish this mandate was hampered by distance, time, or other considerations, the epistle became the venue to continue his God-given task.

When the epistle was read in the service, bridging the gap between the proclamation of God's Old Testament Word and His sacramentally-enfleshed Word, the apostle himself was preaching, with his own presence bringing the presence of the Christ who had sent him. In this activity, old and new were joined. For, on the one hand, his preaching linked the hearers back to Christ through the "tradition," the confession of faith which was treasured and carefully passed down. Yet the apostle also authoritatively applied the faith to the present circumstances of his flock. His apostolic presence through the reading of the epistle served to recall the hearers to the Word he had once proclaimed to them in person, and then to connect their catechization to their current crisis. This is one conclusion aided by the renewed consciousness of orality which has come to light in this study. The **first** reader of the epistle was the designated messenger, who is

usually commended in writing by the apostle. The **subsequent** reader of the epistle, however, the

lector, is no less concerned with enfleshing the apostle for his hearers—such a high appraisal did

the ancient world give to an authoritative public reading. This specific connection of the various

chapters of this study will be drawn out in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading, to the exhortation, to the teaching"
(1 Tim. 4:13).

The Value of Oral Theory for Exegesis

Biblical exegesis is by nature a conservative beast. The history of hermeneutics is the story of cross-fertilization among the disciplines, the slow filtration of techniques and conclusions developed in the study of profane literature, in classics, history, philosophy, sociology, and other fields. This is nothing new. Although for a time theology was the queen of the sciences, having more impact on others than she received in return, from the Fathers down to the present day theologians have observed and learned—always remaining generations behind, waiting to see whether the fruits be foul or fair.[1]

Already when Western civilization had reached its pinnacle of bookishness, with Ramism entrenched in the curricula, print having spawned its Gutenberg Galaxy, scholars in diverse disciplines were uncovering folklore and folk ways—what varying perspectives labeled either as savage or noble. Classicists found the key to understanding Homer in the peasant villages of Russia and the Balkans. Anthropologists linked literacy with progress by examining the ancient crucibles of deepest Africa and southeast Asia. These and other insights into the ancient world have had immense indirect impact upon biblical studies of the past two centuries. Source criticism, *Formgeschichte*, and other synoptic studies, each depended in some way upon

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[1]See Terence Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 14-23, where he discusses the history of critical methods derived from profane studies, and pp. 73-75, where he discusses the "literary" critical techniques borrowed in the last century and a half. See also Werner G. Jeanrond, "History of Biblical Hermeneutics," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:433-43. See also chapter one, pp. 30ff., above.

the ground-breaking work done in the related discipline of folklore studies.[2] It was part of the ongoing struggle to step outside oneself and weigh one's own baggage, to identify the cultural mix from which one operates in order to know what is unique in the culture one is examining.

The modern field of "orality research" cannot justify its name by asserting that a radical new discovery has been unearthed. The reader of this study perhaps grunted time and again, "I knew that." Because of the eclectic character of biblical hermeneutics, it is true in many fields of exegesis that data long ago established in other disciplines are only now gaining acceptance. In the case of orality, it is a rediscovery of what was obvious or implicitly known long ago. A German proverb asserts: "Das Wahre steht schon längst gefunden." What remains for the exegete, in his never-ending process of hermeneutical re-evaluation, is rediscovering these data in order to adjust the "matrix" of his hermeneutic. How does the dating of the Greek alphabet relate to Plato's comments on poets in his utopian republic? What does Greek democracy of five centuries earlier have to do with rhetorical patterns of the first century? How does a wandering philosopher's diatribe explain Paul's letter to the Romans? How did monasticism lead to scholasticism and then perhaps to higher criticism? What role did the printing press play in the Reformation? And so on.

These wide-ranging questions are all part of the web whose strands are spun of the distinction between the spoken and the written word. Despite centuries of indirect percolation, the latest generation of biblical scholars are the first to expose the oral/written matrix to intense examination—and this may well be happening because of the radical changes in media which our world has experienced in this century. In the circles of confessional, orthodox Christianity, the Scriptures have perhaps not suffered the complete silencing which has occurred in the critical academy. Yet, precisely because of the centrality of the spoken Word to the worship and

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[2]See, for instance, Werner Kelber's discussion of Bultmann's debt to folklore studies in *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 2-8. See also the discussion on p. 41, above.

confession of the church, we cannot afford to ignore this work. The church's confession is itself an exercise in matrixing ancient data—Scripture interprets Scripture; but **which** Scripture interprets **which** Scripture is the content of the confession. So also in hermeneutics. Data which are established by accepted techniques of historical inquiry nevertheless need to be organized into a workable framework, enlightened by and enlightening the church's confession. This study necessarily began with a survey of the more or less established pieces of data in a field of inquiry which is new, at least in confessional Lutheran circles. It then proposed a matrix of the facts which serves to enhance our appreciation of the origin and function of the Scriptures as oral Word in the Christian church and specifically in the field of exegesis. It concluded by presenting a more specific application of the theory to the genre of the epistles, their oral function, and their relationship to the apostolic office. These conclusions are summarized in the following pages. We hope that other confessional Lutheran scholars will be moved to pursue other avenues and draw further conclusions from this vigorous field.

Placing the Scriptures on the Oral-Literate Continuum

How oral are the Scriptures? A paradoxical question, in that "scripture" is (by etymology, at least) a constitutively text-based label. The phrasing of the question indicates that we are tottering on the edge of an interface. Where text arises from the spoken word, where texts function in an auditory context, where texts arise in a world for which writing is new technology, there is an interface. The effect of writing upon society—whether as a technology, a cultural force, or a communications medium—has been the focus of the innumerable studies we charted in chapter two. All are in agreement that writing or literacy has a dramatic impact upon cultural institutions, thought patterns, "literature," even politics and the fundamental constitution of society. But whether the changes come instantly with the spread of the new medium, or whether the effect is delayed by natural conservatism, is a question each scholar debates within the context of his own inquiry. Whether writing replaces oral conventions, absorbs them, or supplements them, again depends on the society being studied and the questions being asked.

When did the West become "literate"? Eric Havelock, for example, would say when the Greek alphabet was developed.[3] Rosalind Thomas argues for a later date, when general literacy met with the Greek democracy of the fourth century B.C.[4] Scholars more concerned with the Middle Ages, in the tradition of Walter Ong, point to monasticism, Ramism, the decline of rhetoric and other factors.[5] Media specialists such as Marshall McLuhan and Elizabeth Eisenstein insist that the printing press was far more influential than scribal-era writing.[6] One might even argue that the development of public education in the 19th century leading to general literacy, coupled with the silencing of the reading experience, brought the most dramatic shift in western thought.[7] In the study of the Christian church, one might stress the production of the first Gospels, or the Constantinian establishment, or Carolinian and later scholasticism, or the Reformation, or the age of orthodoxy, or modern American Protestantism and fundamentalism.

If there is any consensus emerging among oral specialists, it is that the extreme dichotomy between oral and written language and thought patterns posited by the first generation

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[3]Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963); idem, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

[4]Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[5]See especially Walter J. Ong's works: *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1967); *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), and his most recent summary, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

[6]See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[7]See, for instance, William Nelson, "From 'Listen, Lording' to 'Dear Reader,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 46.2 (Winter 1976-77): 110-24. See also the literacy studies we have cited in chapter two.

of scholars in this century is most certainly overdrawn. Literacy itself brings no sudden cultural

revolution. The use to which writing is put in a given society is far more relevant.[8] Even the

printing press at first was used to reproduce important works from the Middle Ages, only later

becoming the tool of modernism. Likewise, the postulate that oral and written institutions are

utterly incompatible and irreconcilable has been replaced today by the study of their rocky

relationship, what has been called an interface.[9] When Eric Havelock now reflects on the advent

of Greek literacy, he suggests that a great period of overlap appears, in which writing remains a

servant of the oral world it invaded:

> In the Greek case then we face the paradox that, whereas the alphabet by its phonetic
> efficiency was destined to replace orality by literacy, the first historic task assigned to it
> was to render an account of orality itself before it was replaced. Since the replacement was
> slow, the invention continued to be used to inscribe an orality which was slowly modifying
> itself in order to become a language of literacy.[10]

Oral theorists continue to talk past each other because each is concerned with the impact of

writing upon his specialty. When, for example, Havelock perceives that literacy brought dramatic

changes to Greek culture and thinking in the journey from Homer to Plato to Aristotle, this is not

to say that its influence on western civilization was exhausted.

For, the process of textualization continued. Walter Ong, though himself concerned

primarily with the Middle Ages, draws such a broader picture of these gradual changes in

western history:

> At first, the situation after writing is much like that in an oral culture. What is put down in
> writing is in effect oral performance. The first age of writing is the age of scribes, writers

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[8]These arguments are most characteristic of Ruth Finnigan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); and Jack Goody's later works: *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[9]See Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), and Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[10]Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 90.

of more or less orally conceived discourse. The author addresses himself to imagined listeners at an imagined oral performance of his, which is simply transcribed onto a writing surface. The next age, arrived at gradually of course, is the age of true authors, in today's ordinary sense of author, a person who composes in writing and, later, for print. At this point, the writing surface enters into the thought processes, just as the computer has entered into thought processes today. The new technology does not merely help answer old questions: it makes it possible to conceive of new, different kinds of questions. As compared to the scribe, the author no longer imagines a recitation or direct oral address at all, but only the transaction with the paper and the putative, always absent, reader in whatever role this reader can be cast. Although oral residue persists in patterns of thought and expression not only for millennia after writing but also for centuries even after the invention of letterpress alphabetic print, the new literary, authorial patterns would pretty definitively have won out by the end of the eighteenth century.[11]

The precise date Ong finally postulates is important only for the question he is asking (concerning the role of the author). But Ong's sketch of history is most helpful in gaining perspective on the mass of data describing the variety of influence which writing and literacy have had.

If we wish to place the Holy Scriptures onto the spectrum from primarily oral culture with no knowledge or use of writing down to the present "post-literate" age, we are now resourced to make some observations. The Old Testament has for the most part fallen outside of the present study's jurisdiction. There is much work that could be done here. Orality studies certainly call into question the methodologies of source criticism which cast doubt on Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.[12] The liturgical function of the Psalms, poetic analysis, even "deliberate ambiguity,"[13] all depend on oral models. What an Old Testament study would have to

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[11]Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 281-82.

[12]What we have considered about doublets in the Synoptics applies equally to the Pentateuch. Redundancy and repetition from alternate perspectives are characteristic oral story-telling techniques. Furthermore, the myth that Moses could not have been literate has been decisively disproved. Although classical Greek literacy dates only from the eighth century B.C., the "Linear B" script was in general use in Greece half a millennium before, and Phoenician, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian literacy date back at least another millennium. Not only was Moses well-educated and literate, but so probably was Abraham long before.

[13]Paul Raabe, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 213-227.

account for would be the significance of a thousand years between the first book and the last. What were the vicissitudes of literacy and oral culture throughout this span?[14]

The present study has been most concerned with the New Testament Scriptures, written in one generation in the Greco-Roman world, with significant influence from the Old Testament and Jewish background of their authors and communities. Christians inherited an oral approach to the Scriptures from their Old Testament heritage. The Scriptures were to be proclaimed, sung, recited, and heard in the context of the divine service. Without exception, however, the New Testament books were written in Greek, and so the studies of Greek literacy are deeply significant. Literacy was widespread by the Christian era, although the scribal system was indispensable. The production of texts was a job for professionals. Even those who could write would make use of a scribe in order to compose in the oral manner which was natural and efficient. The reading process was also usually handled by professionals. The upper classes had servants schooled to act as household lectors. There was a flourishing book trade, daily transactions required bills and receipts, letter-writing was popular—the use of writing had permeated the society.

Yet, both the Jewish and Greek cultures had a high level of what Ong calls "residual orality" at this time. Writing was a servant of speaking. It served as an *aide memoire*. Note-taking occurred so that the speech could be reproduced later. Manuscripts were prohibitively expensive; the normal way to reach a large "readership" was to "publish" in the public square, reading one's creation out loud. The process of dictating to a scribe, distributing the manuscript, and then having a lector bring the words back to life again for an audience—the process behind every

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[14]One would also have to account for the emergence of Massoretic work on the text of the Old Testament. Counting letters, syllables, and words, finding the mid-point of each text, etc., are highly textual endeavors. How is it possible that such textuality could arise in a Judaism which valued so highly the orally proclaimed Word of God? See above, p. 90, as well as the Boomershine quotation on p. 317, below.

New Testament book—means that the New Testament is chock-full of oral characteristics. It was produced in an oral environment, using the conventions of an oral world.

Summarizing the oral characteristics of the Scriptures is a perilous undertaking. No list is complete, and much is debated. Yet the following data and conclusions have been important in the course of this study:

1. *Theologically, the "Word" is oral:* "Faith comes from hearing." Christ is the utterance [ῥῆμα] or discourse [λόγος] of the Father. The Word of God is conceived primarily as spoken language. There is frequent explicit discussion of this topic. The Scriptures are not "bookish" in their opinion of themselves.

2. *The written Scriptures are part of a process of oral traditionalism:* They cannot be considered apart from established techniques of handing down faithfully what teaching has been entrusted. There are both Jewish and Greek precedents for this. Thus, writing is part of the process of preserving what has been passed on from mouth to ear.

3. *The oral/aural reading experience is explicitly described:* One finds references to the lector, the audience as "hearers," instructions for when and where the text is to be read.

4. *The Scriptures are at home in the liturgy:* Both the **origin** and the ongoing **function** of the Scriptures are liturgical. The authors were conscious that they were producing something for use in the divine service. The Gospels provide catechetical and liturgical material. The epistles were read between the Old Testament readings and the Sacrament of the Altar.

5. *The epistles display homiletical characteristics:* The apostle seeks to "persuade" his audience using methods akin to what is found in the rhetorical handbooks and in the use of the philosophical preachers—although he is keen to distance himself from the manipulative sophistry and self-centered philosophies of common charlatans. Furthermore, characteristics of Hellenistic-Jewish synagogue homilies appear, especially in the use of extended exegesis of the Old Testament.

6. ***Oral formulary characteristics abound:*** Techniques which aid an orator in composing "on the fly," and which help the hearer to absorb themes and structures are in abundance. These include the use of commonplaces (standard topics of discussion, catalogues of virtues and vices, etc.), patterning with chiasm and *inclusio*, formulaic phrases, and repetition. An oral thought world gives preference to auditory analogies and figures of speech.

7. *The "author" and "reader" are involved in a dialogue mediated by the text:* The New Testament does not appear like a modern missive to a fictionalized readership. The hearers are addressed in the second person. The author "speaks" to those who "hear" him. He responds to questions which have either come to him through letter or emissary, or are postulated in the way of a persuasive orator.

8. *The author of the epistle, or the Christ of the Gospels, is present in a unique way through the reading of the text:* The ancient world believed that there was life in the spoken word. The speaker could be present across distances by having his words proclaimed by an authorized representative. So also Christ claims to be with his apostles always as they go about baptizing and teaching (Mt. 28:20). And St. Paul is present with his flock when his words are proclaimed to them.

"Oral Exegesis"?

The tragedy of twentieth-century exegesis is its reduction to the mechanical application of mutually-exclusive critical "methodologies." "Oral exegesis" must not become the next in line, simply the victor to emerge from a host of competing criticisms vying for the crown of "heir to redaction criticism."[15] The current disarray in the critical camp suggests that such a hope would, in any case, be folly. **"Orality," rather, is a characteristic of the Scriptures both in their origin and in their function which simply must be accounted for in the exegetical enterprise.** It is the recovery of ancient sensitivities through long and arduous research. It is overcoming the distortions which have changed the face of western critical Protestant exegesis since the so-called "Enlightenment."

If "oral exegesis" is in any way a "new criticism," it is so in relationship to the entire historical-critical establishment of the past two centuries. In the course of this study we have mentioned a number of ways in which oral theory subverts the higher-critical reign. For one, together with certain other modern methods, it asks the critic to take the text seriously, rather than treating it as mere pretext to the layers behind. Secondly, it warns against a kind of cultural imperialism which makes modern democratic literacy the touchstone of civilization and intelligence, while labeling less print-oriented societies savage or primitive. Certainly there has been some debate in this realm, especially over the supposed differences between the "oral" and

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[15]Cf., for instance, the question posed almost thirty years ago by James Muilenburg, "After Form Criticism. What?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

"literate" mind.[16] The view persists even among oral theorists that oral cultures have no understanding of history. Thomas Farrell performs "oral exegesis" on Genesis and concludes:

> But the Bible is not a history book in the modern sense, even when historical events may have contributed to the making of the biblical narratives. For even the historically-based narratives were not intended to be historical in the modern sense of the term, because the primary oral mentality used the past (the historical element) to express what Bruno Bettelheim (1976:37, 39) calls a superego-ideal. This is even true of the four evangelists. The modern sense of history developed with the sense of the past as past fostered by print culture. The gospels do not express a sense of the past as past because they are the products of the primary oral mentality which simply had not developed a sense of the past as past.[17]

Obviously, these comments are based on the studies of **non-literate** primitive tribes performed in the last century. While it is true that **primary** oral societies have an historical sense quite different from our own, if any, **secondary** oral culture such as the biblical culture had a highly developed historical sense—though clearly not equivalent to the modern era's.[18] One need simply read the author's claims in Lk. 1:1-4 or 1 Jn. 1:1-4, or note how Paul argues from history to faith in 1 Corinthians 15, or even examine the New Testament view of "witness," especially as it was a prerequisite for the office of apostle.[19] One cannot rule out *a priori* certain mental functions on the basis of oral theory (or historical criticism).

The work of Birger Gerhardsson,[20] representing as it does the school of oral traditionalism, would counter Farrell's picture. The ancient, heavily-oral world had a very strong sense of history and of passing it down with absolute fidelity to succeeding generations. This penchant of oralism flatly contradicts the presuppositions of form criticism, which used oral

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[16]This is the theme of Goody's, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*.

[17]Thomas J. Farrell, "Kelber's Breakthrough," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 34.

[18]The use of history by the scriptural writers was certainly **tendentious**, as they were not writing history for its own sake. Their goal was faith (Jn. 20:31; 1 Jn. 5:13; etc.). Nevertheless, if there is no fact in history, that faith is "in vain" (see 1 Cor. 15:14).

[19]E.g., Jn. 15:27; 19:35; 21:24; Acts 1:21-22; 2:32.

[20]See the works cited in our bibliography.

theories to establish a period of free development of the tradition. Ironically, form criticism

pursued its investigation of the period in a highly text-oriented manner, dissecting the three

Synoptics letter by letter, side by side, assuming that they had been produced in the same

document-centric manner. Insofar as higher criticism is the "quest for the historical Jesus," or the

search for the "original" under layers of accretions, it remains text-bound. Orality theory breaks

entirely from this paradigm. For, together with its emphasis on faithful tradition, it warns that the

idea of one *Urtext* or *Urwort* is foreign to the oral mind. Werner Kelber suggests just one

application of this discovery:

> The concept of the autonomy and authenticity of speech has important implications for
> oral hermeneutics. When Jesus, the aphoristic, parabolic teacher, narrated a story at one
> place, and then proceeded to retell it, with modifications, at a different place, he was not in
> this second instance rendering a variant of the so-called original. He was rather in both
> instances presenting an authentic version of the story.[21]

If, therefore, the Gospels faithfully transmitted such a full and varied tradition, then the historical

critical enterprise is exposed as anachronistic.[22]

Thomas Boomershine warns that it is the **context** within which biblical criticism occurs

which can lead to such a clash of cultures:

> The recognition of the role of the medium in contemporary Biblical scholarship may shed
> light on the long stream of reaction against the documentary hypothesis on the part of

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[21]Werner Kelber, "In the Beginning Were the Words: The Apotheosis and Narrative Displacement of the Logos," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58.1 (Spring 1990): 73. Herein lies the meaning of his humorous title. In the beginning there was not one **word**, but a plurality of **words**. "Our unceasing search for the 'original' message of Jesus indicates how alien and virtually inaccessible oral hermeneutics is to our textually informed consciousness" (73). Instead, he appeals to Heidegger's notion of *Gleichgültigkeit* "equiprimordiality" of constitutive items. "Every word spoken by Jesus was equiprimordial with every other one" (74).

For all his clarity of thought on this matter, it is remarkable that Kelber nevertheless perpetuates in his work the hyper-textual source theories of Gospel origins. After all, is not the theory of Q—which Kelber endorses—based on the idea that one can recover the "original" words of Jesus among the variations of the canonical Gospels and their (written) sources?

[22]This hermeneutic, of course, cuts both ways. For it is equally destructive of traditional Gospel synopsis/harmony attempts, which in many cases suffer from the same document-centric approach. Gospel harmonies usually assume that Jesus said or did something only once or twice, rather than repeatedly, with continual variety, as oral theory pictures.

Jewish scholars. One of the differences between Jewish and Christian scholarship on the Pentateuch is the medium in which Jewish scholars have experienced the Biblical literature. Jewish scholars have continued to hear the Pentateuch read aloud during each liturgical year. Christian scholars, on the other hand, have primarily studied the texts as silent documents. Many of the differences in the assessment of phenomena such as frequent parallelism in the Pentateuchal tradition may be related to this radical difference in the medium in which it is experienced.[23]

The warning is for Christian scholars to interpret the Scriptures within the church, in the place for which they were written, in the manner in which they were meant to be received. Boomershine throws down the gauntlet: "Can we rightly perceive that tradition and assess the role of telling, reading aloud, remembering, and hearing stories if we continue to study that tradition in our studies alone and in silence?"[24]

The context of biblical studies must be that oral world in which the Scriptures were produced and for which, by their own testimony, they were intended to function. The great disappointment of James Sanders' and Brevard Childs' work on "canonical criticism"[25] is that they view the ecclesiastical and canonical context of the Scriptures purely historically. That is, they study the meaning and function Scripture has had through church history, how it has moulded the church, how it has come to be "Scripture" within the church. Yet they continue to study it from outside the church, from the university chair. **"Oral exegesis" must, rather, be exegesis which comes from within the church, from the place to which the Scriptures were given, in the context in which the Scripture reading continues to function.**

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[23]Thomas Boomershine, "Peter's Denial as Polemic or Confession: The Implications of Media Criticism for Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 63.

[24]Ibid., 65.

[25]For a summary of this field and a basic bibliography, see Terence Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 131-44. Keegan's own proposal in the succeeding chapter defines the ecclesiastical context as the hierarchical magisterium. He, too, falls short of appreciating the function of the Scriptures in creating their confessional community through liturgical proclamation.

Addendum 4: "Protestants," "Catholics," and the Word of God

Here and there in this study it has become apparent that the **confessional** context within which the Scriptures are used and interpreted determines to a great degree the amount of residual orality in the church's approach. Father Walter Ong devoted a substantial portion of his premiere opus to the proposition that "Catholics" have preserved the spoken Word while "Protestants" have reduced it to "Bible," a silent, confined book.[26] He finally asserts that the Catholic church **is** the presence of the Word.[27]

Similar gross dichotomies are often presumed by media critics who attribute the Protestant Reformation itself to the liberating epistemology of the printing press. David Olson writes:

> Scripture, at the time of Luther, had just such a status. It consisted in part of statements shaped to the requirements of oral comprehension and oral memory. Scripture had authority, but since the written statements were shorn of their oral contexts, they were assumed to require interpretation. The dogma of the Church, the orally transmitted tradition, had the authority to say what the Scripture meant. In this context Luther's statement can be seen as profoundly radical. Luther claimed that the text supplied sufficient context internally to determine the meaning of the passage; the meaning was in the text. What would have led Luther to make such a radical claim? My suggestion is that his claim reflected a technological change—the invention of printing—one in a series of developments in the increasing explicitness of language ... .[28]

Is this, however, a coherent explication of the Reformation?

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[26]Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1967), especially pp. 265-83. Ong perpetuates the characterization of Protestantism as textually biased in "Text as Interpretation: Mark and After," *Semeia* 39 (1987): 24: "Twentieth-century studies have shown how these earlier [Reformation era] theologians tended to conceptualize oral tradition itself by implied, and unnoticed, textual analogies, as though tradition itself were a kind of second volume of the Bible which Catholics kept and Protestants had abandoned. ... Here the same preemptive chirographic mindset evident in Protestant attitudes toward *sola scriptura* manifested itself in a more subtle way. On the other hand, Protestants showed evidence of orality-literacy tensions in counterbalancing their heavy textual investment in *sola scriptura* with a stress on oral preaching ... ."

[27]Ong, *Presence*, 320.

[28]David R. Olson, "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing," *Harvard Educational Review* 47.3 (August 1977): 264.

Once again, reflection on one's perspective is crucial. William Graham,[29] we observed, characterized modern Christianity on the basis of American Protestantism as a silent book religion, and was duly chastised by an Orthodox reviewer.[30] For, the reviewer noted, Orthodoxy hears the scriptural Word as one way in which the enfleshed Word, Jesus Christ, comes to the faithful. The Word continues to function orally in this deeply liturgical confessional group. Graham's own work exposes the data which counter this mass caricature of "Protestantism," for he argues extensively that Martin Luther above all viewed the Word as *viva vox*, as proclaimed Gospel.[31] Luther was a medieval man, not a renaissance humanist, and it is a deadly error to assume from the extensive publication of his writings that his mindset was patterned after the new invention. Finally, it is Walter Ong's own study of Peter Ramus—whose 16th-century epistemology replaced dialectical reasoning with visually organized charts and tables of knowledge—which notes that Calvinist systematicians picked up on Ramism while the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans ignored him![32]

A genuinely-confessional Lutheran theology of the Word of God is deeply oral. The reified, bookish approach to the Bible as a silent Word of purely informational value which Graham attributes to American Protestantism may have some application to a Reformed theology which lacks a strong confession of Means of Grace. And the textualization of tradition as a second volume to be accepted or rejected is hardly consistent with the way the Lutheran Reformers valued the creeds and confessions of the early church, and the testimony of the ancient liturgies to the meaning of the Gospel and Sacraments. Valuing the Scriptures as spoken

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[29]William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[30]George H. Bebawi, "Bible East and West," a review of *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, by William Graham, in *The Expository Times* 100 (1989): 107.

[31]Graham, 141-54.

[32]Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 168.

Word is recognizing in them the power of the Gospel for the salvation of all who believe (Rom. 1:16)—a Lutheran approach, certainly.

Addendum 5:
The Scripture Reading, the Ministry of the Word, the Office of the Holy Ministry

In chapter four we have argued at length that the bearer of an epistle carried specific authority from the sender to read that letter publicly, to give an authoritative explanation thereof, and perhaps to convey additional information which the author was hesitant to put into writing. In this way the messenger was more than just a courier; he was an envoy, ambassador, or שָׁלִיחַ of the sender. Furthermore, because the reading of another man's words was thought to bring about his presence for the audience, lectors were chosen with care to carry out this task, and the reading of the apostolic word on subsequent hearings was still accorded high honor.

The role of the lector/ἀναγνώστης should, therefore, be understood in relationship to the apostle whose words he proclaims. Just as through the ἀνάγνωσις "public reading" the apostolic writer is present to the congregation as his word is brought to life, so also the ἀναγνώστης in this action represents the apostle in his office and function. The ἀναγνώστης "lector," as a representative of the one whose words he reads, is thus himself also ἀπεσταλμένος "sent." The apostle explicitly names his representative at the first sending of his epistles to the congregations of their first reading. This man is his envoy or messenger, commended by the apostle to bring news and authoritative words from their spiritual father. Yet the proclamation of the epistles, like the other Scriptural books, continues beyond the first reading. This happens by St. Paul's express instructions (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16). And Paul is concerned that Timothy, in his office as pastor, devote himself to this task: ἕως ἔρχομαι πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading, to the exhortation, to the teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13).[33]

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[33]The view that Paul is only admonishing Timothy to personal, devotional Bible study has been disproved in our analysis of ἀναγινώσκω and its cognates in chapter three, pp. 200ff. A

If, then, the public reading of the apostle's word brings about his presence, and if Paul gives this task to pastors such as Timothy to continue in his absence, then this study lends credence to the view that pastors hold their office in continuity with the office of apostle. If, furthermore, the apostolic office is connected to the work of Christ Himself, as we argued in chapter four, then the pastoral office is likewise connected. When we found the apostles (especially Paul) using שָׁלִיחַ language of their office and work in relationship to Christ—that through their speaking and teaching Christ was present in them—we concluded that Christ's words to the apostles could be understood in the same manner, as bestowing upon them the office of being His שָׁלִיחַ.[34]

Such a view is then in continuity with Christ's view of His own messianic office. For He expressly understands Himself to be the first ἀπόστολος / שָׁלִיחַ of God the Father. The sending of the twelve ἀπόστολοι continues the work given Him from the Father: καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς "Even as the Father has sent Me, also I am sending you" (Jn. 20:21). Those of Jewish background would understand the authority invested in one who is sent as another's שָׁלִיחַ. Hellenists likewise can understand how an ambassador or envoy (which language Paul appropriates to describe his office) represents the one who sent him. And both institutions are rooted in a common oral sensibility which hears the spoken word of an

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second popular view is that Paul merely encourages Timothy to "see to" the reading of Scripture in a supervisory capacity. See, for instance, Daniel Fienen, "Lay Readers in Public Worship," *Concordia Journal* 21 (October 1995): 400-14. This, likewise, is untenable. For, first of all, this "supervisory" meaning is not within the normal usage of the verb προσέχω, which signifies paying intimate attention to a thing or a person, or occupying oneself with or devoting oneself to an action. Secondly, one would have to argue then that also "exhortation" and "teaching" are items which Timothy is to "supervise" or "arrange." Yet the two letters to Timothy are replete with admonitions from Paul that Timothy **himself** teach and exhort rightly: 1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 16; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2. Cf. the connection of "teaching" to the pastoral office in 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; and Tit. 1:9. If teaching and exhortation are what Timothy is to be doing, then also the reading of Scripture is his task.

[34]See pp. ff., above. One could then understand the "commissioning" language at the end of each Gospel (Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15-20; Lk. 24:44-49; Jn. 20:19-23) as the granting of שָׁלִיחַ authority to the apostles, through whom Christ would then continue to be present, as He says: "Lo, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

authorized representative as the living presence of the one whom he represents. Ὁ ἀκούων ὑμῶν ἐμοῦ ἀκούει, καὶ ὁ ἀθετῶν ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ ἀθετεῖ· ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ ἀθετῶν ἀθετεῖ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με "The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and the one who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Lk. 10:16).

Just as we have understood the epistles as a means by which the apostle could extend his presence and work to areas beyond his geographical reach, so also can the ongoing pastoral office be understood as the continuation of the apostolic work in times beyond their life-span.[35] For these were the purposes of authorizing an emissary. When Paul charges Timothy with the continuing reading of the scriptural Word, as well as preaching and teaching based upon it, he is, therefore, connecting the pastoral office with this Ministry of the Word. The apostolic παρουσία is then connected to this faithful devotion to the proclamation of the apostolic word. The pastor's occupation with lectoring, preaching, and catechizing, substitutes for the presence of the apostle himself. When Father Walter Ong named his ground-breaking treatise on the relationship of orality research to the Christian faith *The Presence of the Word*, he hit upon "presence" as the vital construct of the oral world. Through this Ministry of the Word, Christ Himself, who is the utterance of the Father, is really present.

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[35]The continuation of the apostolic ministry through successors in the pastoral office can be found to be part of Christ's original plan. For, on the one hand, Christ's commission evidently extends beyond the life-span of the apostles, as He says: Lo, I am with you **all the days, until the consummation of the age**" (Mt. 28:20). Furthermore, the parallel sending in the Gospels of the **twelve** (Mt. 10:1-42; ‖ Lk. 9:1-6; Mk. 6:7-13) and the **70/72** (Lk. 10:1-24) suggests Christ's intention that a greater circle than the twelve should join in this proclamatory work. Thus, when St. Paul extends his office by adjuring Titus to "set in order what is lacking" among the churches of Crete by appointing pastors (καταστήσῃς … πρεσβυτέρους; Tit. 1:5), he is not speaking from his own authority. And it was St. Paul himself who placed Timothy into the office of pastor μετὰ ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου "with that laying on of hands which is for the presbyterial office" (1 Tim. 4:14; cf. 2 Tim. 1:6). For rabbinnic parallels and arguments in support of this translation, see J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963), 106-8.

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