

MEMORY THEORY AND JESUS RESEARCH

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Gospels scholarship still works with conceptions of memory long abandoned by those who study memory in its social, cognitive, and cultural aspects. The “passivist” model of memory is described by Edward Casey as “the view that all memories of necessity repeat the past in a strictly replicative manner. The contribution of the remembering subject... is nugatory.”¹ The cognitive theory associated with this approach likens memories to traces, “stored up like so many definite impressions, fixed and having only the capacity of being reexcited.”² Memory is thereby reduced, in Casey’s words, “to being an inert sedimentation, a mere residuum.”³ This epitomizes the conception of memory operative in the model of tradition that has been bequeathed to historical Jesus scholarship by classical form criticism. However, at least as early as F. C. Bartlett’s seminal work in 1932, virtually contemporaneous with the second German edition of Bultmann’s *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, memory theorists were beginning to approach memory as an active, constructive faculty.

1. *Form Criticism and Memory*

The form critics equated memory with individual eye-witness recollection. While memory traces of this sort lay at the origins of the tradition, they were a residuum, largely inert with respect to developments in the tradition itself. The salient image was of so-called authentic memories of Jesus coming to be buried under multiple layers of “tradition.” Tradition, in other words, had little to do with memory. William Wrede’s

¹ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 269.

² Frederick C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (1932; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 214; also George A. Bonanno, “Remembering and Psychotherapy,” *Psychotherapy* 27 (1990): 175–186, esp. 175.

³ Casey, *Remembering*, 277.

bifurcation of Markan tradition into surviving elements of empirical history on the one hand and Easter-engendered dogma on the other, with the latter occluding the former, was precursor to the form critics' model. Of a "historical view of the real life of Jesus," wrote Wrede, only "pale residues" survive.⁴ The analytical task, therefore, was like refining metals from slag: "[H]ow do we separate what belongs properly to Jesus from what is the material of the primitive community?"⁵ Bultmann adopted this view of the tradition, positing, for example, that underlying the passion narrative there existed "a short narrative of historical reminiscence about the Arrest, Condemnation, and Execution of Jesus," which had been overgrown and "disfigured" by legend.⁶ Martin Dibelius correlated the "Paradigms" chronologically with the period of the eyewitnesses, with eyewitness recollections assigned a role, not in the formation of the tradition itself, but as a sort of external control.⁷

Bultmann connected the formation of tradition with recurrent social settings associated with the life of the early communities. In attributing crucial importance to a community's present social realities in its conceptualizations of the past, Bultmann's approach aligned with a central postulate of memory theory (see below). However, correlating form closely with sociological function, and assuming that the eschatological communities lacked a constitutive orientation to the past, he inferred that contemporary social dynamics were the primary factor in generating the tradition. The gospel tradition was thus construed as a bifurcated entity: fabricated tradition coming to overlay diminishing residues of memory, for their part more or less inert with respect to the traditioning process itself. Tradition thus conceived primarily gave expression to the contemporary debates, predicaments, and developments of the early church.⁸

⁴ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (London: James Clarke, 1971), 131. Analysis of this trend can be pushed back to D. F. Strauss; see Jens Schröter, "Von der Historizität der Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion um den historischen Jesus," in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektive der gegenwärtigen Forschung*, ed. Jens Schröter and Ralph Brucker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 163–212, esp. 169–173.

⁵ Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 4.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 273–274.

⁷ Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (London: Redwood, 1971), 61–62.

⁸ Bultmann acknowledged in a footnote that "memories of Jesus, his words and deeds played their part in the literary productions of the early Church" (*History*, 48 n. 2), but it is clear he assigned these—viewed as individual recollections—no significant role in the formation of the tradition.

Bultmann's analysis was in fact characterized by a programmatic *disconnect* between memory and the growing tradition, his occasional gestures to "reminiscence" notwithstanding. This was the consequence of according to memory little agency and instead locating the decisive generative forces for tradition in contemporary social factors. In Bultmann's additive model, dominical sayings were the tradition's primary point of departure. But authentic sayings, in his view, exercised only an anemic influence upon the expanding tradition, and accordingly he found it "difficult to believe that the changes and revaluation of such *meshalim* as are to be found in the tradition have in fact retained some reminiscence of such changes and revaluations by Jesus."⁹ Moreover, this inertness made possible, indeed necessary, the large-scale incorporation of inauthentic sayings into the Jesus tradition to meet the challenges of contemporary social realities.¹⁰ In consequence, Jesus' radically distinctive message could now be heard only faintly. Bultmann was far from denying all continuity whatsoever between authentic sayings and developments in the tradition. Extraneous materials and community practices often displayed significant congruence with dominical pronouncements. The dogmatic belief in Jesus as Messiah, moreover, did not eradicate the memory of Jesus' "actual work as a teacher of the Law," and this inspired confidence that many of Jesus' sayings about the Law had been preserved.¹¹ However, on this point also Bultmann's conception of memory—its trace-like existence and marginality vis-à-vis other forces generating the tradition—emerged, for this "picture [of Jesus as rabbi], which must have been distinctly impressed on their memory... was gradually thrust into the background by the figure of the Messiah."¹²

Bultmann accordingly construed the history of the gospel traditions as a sequence of "stages."¹³ Each stage generated its own tradition and subsequent stages stood in discontinuity with preceding stages. Hence Bultmann's analytical project was to "clearly distinguish," "separate" the tradition in accordance with these stages.¹⁴ Again, such a procedure was entailed in locating the decisive forces in the creation of tradition in the

⁹ Bultmann, *History*, 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 125–126.

¹² Bultmann, *Jesus*, 126.

¹³ Bultmann, *History*, 155.

¹⁴ Bultmann, *Jesus*, 12.

changing social contexts of the various communities. Particularly notable was his distribution of the tradition into Palestinian and Hellenistic stages respectively, traditions from the latter standing in “distinction” from those of the former.¹⁵ The social and cultural realities of the Hellenistic milieu generated corollary traditions that superimposed upon the older Palestinian tradition, “impressing it with a meaning such as it needed in the Hellenistic Churches...”¹⁶ Notable, in other words, was the inertia of the Palestinian tradition as it and its particular portrayal of Jesus were commandeered by the *religionsgeschichtliche* forces of syncretistic Hellenism. The Gospel of Mark was the resulting artifact: a “cult legend” that combined the κύριος Christ-myth of the Hellenistic cult “with the tradition of the story of Jesus.”¹⁷ Accordingly, “the Christ who is preached is not the historic Jesus, but the Christ of faith and the cult.”¹⁸ In its terminal point in Mark the tradition had moved a distance quite remote from the memory traces that lay at its origins. Given this scenario the task of historical Jesus research was to move back through the developmental stages of the tradition, bracketing materials that could be designated “Hellenistic” as well as other materials that expressed the interests of the church. With the goal being “to distinguish the oldest layer,”¹⁹ the form critics’ procedure was to identify and discard accreted materials and arrive at the authentic residue through application of the dissimilarity criterion, the “original form” axiom, and the so-called laws or “tendencies” of the tradition.

Bultmann put a great deal of effort into defining these tendencies that, in his view, had likewise been key factors in the creation of tradition, for isolating the auto-operations propelling the tradition’s “immanent urge to development”²⁰ gave him precision tools for further unraveling its history, in particular prior to its fixation in the written sources. These included, for example, the attribution of specific names and labels within a tradition originally marked by anonymity. Others could be sub-categorized under a broad evolutionary tendency of the tradition to develop from simple to complex forms, and apophthegms

¹⁵ Bultmann, *Jesus*, 13; idem, *History*, 239.

¹⁶ Bultmann, *History*, 347.

¹⁷ Ibid., 347–348.

¹⁸ Ibid., 371; also Dibelius, *Tradition to Gospel*, 297–300.

¹⁹ Martin Dibelius, *Jesus*, trans. Charles B. Hedrick and Frederick C. Grant (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949), 34.

²⁰ Bultmann, *History*, 373.

had a tendency to differentiate into variants.²¹ This positing of innate tendencies reflected the form-critical conception of the tradition as a development away from original memory traces under the impulse of not just external but also immanent forces. *The development of the gospel tradition, in other words, was driven by virtually every force except the salient past itself.*

Little of this tradition model can survive scrutiny in light of advances in research on the phenomenology of tradition. The primary factors producing tradition variants are not innate tendencies but social and cultural variables inhering in the settings in which tradition is repeatedly enacted. On these grounds alone the confidence that knowledge of the tradition's "tendencies" opened up paths allowing the critic to move back through its oral stages to isolate earlier forms and perhaps even an authentic residuum was misplaced. Moreover, Bultmann grounded the tendencies of the oral tradition in evidence from written sources. The "tendency of the tradition to enlarge upon older sayings" was established by reference to Ben Sirach, who "combined and enlarged" collections of popular sayings.²² As regards his claim that proper names and specific labels displace primitive anonymity in the transmission of apophthegms, Bultmann connected up Mark, Matthew, John, and then novelistic developments in the apocrypha into a trajectory to infer this as an inherent tendency of the oral tradition.²³ His derivation of oral tendencies from redactional operations was predicated on his view that "there is no difference in principle" between oral and written processes.²⁴

The oral-written juncture, however, is better construed as a break than a continuum, in Jens Schröter's words, "als eine Veränderung im Überlieferungsprozeß."²⁵ John Miles Foley characterizes writing and orality as distinct communication "channels" or "media."²⁶ Literary trafficking with oral tradition entails a displacement of oral dynamics, even if the written artifact is composed for oral enactment. The written medium enables new ways for working with tradition, such as incorporation

²¹ Bultmann, *History*, 52–53, 62–68, 85–89, 199.

²² *Ibid.*, 88–89.

²³ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 87.

²⁵ Jens Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas*, WMANT 76 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 464.

²⁶ John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 4.

within comprehensive literary frameworks and reworking not under the immediate exigencies of performance settings but in the service of mediated redactional programs. The emblematic multiformity of oral tradition arises from enactment and transmission strategies equal to the immediacy and immateriality of oral communication. Literary editorial operations, therefore, are not prescriptive for the oral medium, and to take them to be so, as Bultmann did, was regrettably to inject into scholarship some quite misleading notions about the history of the gospel tradition.²⁷ Tradition histories are only possible where the existence of parallel traditions in written sources permits analysis of priority. This is to say that the oral tradition and its history cannot be viewed except through the opacity of the written medium; in other words, "one cannot go beyond the different versions and contextualizations of a saying into the oral phase of transmission."²⁸ This spells the end of the form-critical project of arriving at memory traces of the historical Jesus thought to lie near the bottom of a multilayered oral tradition.

Critique of the form-critical model for tradition is hardly a novel enterprise. Our approach has been to assess the model, which in its various permutations still functions as the cognitive framework for much historical Jesus research, in terms of its operative conceptions of memory. We have seen that the form critics, to the extent they reflected on it at all, associated memory with individual eyewitness recollections. These lay as inert traces at the origins of a tradition whose formation and development took place at the primary behest of other factors. Hence the distinguishing of so-called authentic memory from fabricated tradition is the hallmark of historical Jesus analyses indebted to the form-critical model.

The next section will offer a *précis* of social and cultural memory approaches that subsequently will be integrated with our discussion of

²⁷ In the new introduction to his classic work that first comprehensively articulated this critique, Werner Kelber summarizes the form critical conception of the history of the gospel tradition with its underlying "print mentality" thus: "[T]he gospel composition is imagined as a revision of antecedent texts carried out with such literary precision and ideological correctness that it enables us to retrace tradition, stratum by stratum" (*The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* [1983; repr., with a new introduction by Werner Kelber, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997], xxii). Kelber also has been the pioneer in recognition of the essential connection between memory and tradition.

²⁸ Jens Schröter, "The Historical Jesus and the Sayings Tradition: Comments on Current Research," *Neot* 30 (1996): 151-168, esp. 157.

research on the cognitive aspects of memory.²⁹ We will see that memory theory gives firm methodological grounding to Jesus research by supplying it with a defensible account of the origins and history of the gospel traditions.

2. *Memory, Identity, and Community*

Social memory studies originated with Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945), a disciple of Emile Durkheim.³⁰ Halbwachs argued that memory is constituted by social frameworks, which is to say that the social realities and communicative practices of communities give substance, shape, and duration to the memory of the people belonging to them. Memory emerges in coherent, durable form to the extent remembrances find articulation in communicative interaction within a group; conversely, individual remembrances fade to the extent they are not pertinent to the groups that individuals are affiliated with. Correspondingly, a community bears a complex of memories constitutive of its very existence. “Genuine communities,” writes Jeffrey Olick, “are communities of memory that constantly tell and retell their constitutive memories.”³¹ A community marks certain elements of its past as being of constitutive significance, in particular, memories of its origins, “the event that marks the group’s emergence as an independent social entity.”³² Both identity and continuity, in fact the very survival of a community, depend upon its constant revitalization of these memories.³³

²⁹ For a fuller survey of contemporary social and cultural memory theory see Alan Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” in *Memory, Tradition, Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, *Semeia Studies* 52 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 1–24.

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), originally published as *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1950); idem, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), originally published as *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1952; 1st ed. 1925).

³¹ Jeffrey K. Olick, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 333–348, esp. 344; also James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 25.

³² Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4–7.

³³ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 132–133.

Accordingly, *commemoration* is a core activity of viable communities. Commemorative practice counteracts the danger of rupture between a community and its past, the loss of memory that spells the unraveling of its identity and hence its dissolution.³⁴ Commemoration, in Kirk Savage's words, attempts "to fix the meaning and purpose" of the past (emphasis added).³⁵ Commemoration picks up "bedrock events experienced with powerful immediacy" but whose meaning and significance must be discerned, precisely through commemorative activities.³⁶ This entails that through its commemorative activities a community fashions its representations of its formative past.³⁷

That memory is highly active and constructive should now be clear. Memory "acts to organize what might otherwise be a mere assemblage of contingently connected events."³⁸ Its configurations, however, do not thereby assume immobile form. The activity of memory in articulating the past is unceasing because it takes place within the social frameworks of the ever-shifting present. Halbwachs argued that to remember is not to *retrouver*, but to *reconstruire*, to align the image of the past with present social realities.³⁹ Differential attribution of meaning to the past, a core activity of memory, proceeds from and serves the conditions of the present. Barry Schwartz points out that collective memory thus becomes "a social fact as it is made and remade to serve changing societal interests and needs."⁴⁰ However, it is by constantly bringing its commemorated past into alignment with its open-ended series of "presents" that a community maintains continuity of identity across time, a sense of always being vitally connected to its past.⁴¹

³⁴ Casey, *Remembering*, 224–225; also Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 94; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70.

³⁵ Kirk Savage, "The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Movement," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 127–149, esp. 127.

³⁶ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of Memory in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 67.

³⁷ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 306.

³⁸ Casey, *Remembering*, 291.

³⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

⁴⁰ Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *ASR* 61 (1996): 908–927, esp. 909.

⁴¹ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 40–42, 88.

Powerful forces are at work in the present contexts of a community to shape particular versions of its formative past. In a manner reminiscent of the form critics, some theorists go so far as to suggest that constructions of the past may in all important respects be understood as projections of the ideological factors of the present.⁴² However, it is doubtful that strong constructionist approaches of this sort can be generalized into paradigmatic models for memory and tradition. Such tend *a priori* to exclude inquiry into the diachronic question, namely, how the depth of the past might inform, shape, and constrain the dispositions and actions of those situated in the present.⁴³ Arjun Appadurai argues that the past is not just “a limitless and plastic symbolic resource, infinitely susceptible to the whims of contemporary interest and the distortions of contemporary ideology.”⁴⁴ While communities (and for that matter individuals) view and shape their past from perspectives and identities grounded in their present contexts, that identity has emerged from the diachronic depth of memory.⁴⁵ It is this identity that orients to the experiences of the present and that encompasses the *predispositions* for a community’s continual reassessment of its own past.

This may be stated as follows: The past, constellated by the work of commemoration and immanent in the narrative patterns in which it has become engrained in the social memory, provides for a community and its members the framework for cognition and interpretation of the experiences of the present.⁴⁶ Social memory makes available the moral and symbolic resources for making sense of the present through what Schwartz refers to as its “keying” of present experiences and predicaments to archetypal images and narrative representations of the commemorated past.⁴⁷ This entails that *both* present social realities *and* the salient past are potent variables in these semiotic constructions constantly occurring in social memory.⁴⁸

⁴² John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.

⁴³ Schwartz, “Memory as a Cultural System,” 910; Jeffrey K. Olick and Daniel Levy, “Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics,” *ASR* 62 (1997): 921–936, esp. 922.

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “The Past as a Scarce Resource,” *Man* NS 16 (1981): 201–219, esp. 201.

⁴⁵ Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 126.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51; Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 2.

⁴⁷ Barry Schwartz, “Frame Image: Towards a Semiotics of Collective Memory,” *Semiotica* 121 (1998): 1–38.

⁴⁸ See Olick and Levy, “Collective Memory,” 923.

A community's commemorated past exerts powerful *normative* force. This is to say that its images of archetypal persons and events embody a group's moral order and thus are mnemonic of group-defining norms.⁴⁹ The normativity of the past is central to what Jan Assmann refers to as the "*mythomotorisch*" effect of the cultural memory, driving a community's continual articulation of itself, along the lines of its constitutive norms, in the midst of changing realities and in the face of emerging crises.⁵⁰ Hence a synergistic relationship exists between *commemorative* and *hortatory* activities. Deaths of significant persons call forth commemorative activities focused in a particularly intense way upon the norms and virtues these individuals embodied in life and in their death. A martyr's death is instrumental in establishing the urgent normative claims of the virtues he or she embodied and died exemplifying, and in mobilizing a social movement cohering around those norms.⁵¹

Commemorative activities, therefore, drive the formation and transmission of cultural identity. Social memory fashions a "Symbolsystem," which is to say that in commemorated persons, commemorative narratives, and related artifacts and practices, it objectifies a community's archetypal, axiomatic meanings and norms. Through commemorative transposition a community elevates to symbolic, identity-constituting status marked elements of its past. The "symbolische Figuren" of culture are in effect "Erinnerungsfiguren" (memory configurations).⁵² These commemorative symbols seem inexhaustibly responsive hermeneutically to complexity and change in a community's social realities. The revisionist and socialist camps within early Zionism, for example, debated fiercely whether the martyrdom of the settler Trumpeldor authorized the sword or the plough, armed resistance or settlement and agriculture as a program for national revitalization. "It was not the historical event per se, but rather the encoding of its symbolic meaning that provided fuel to this controversy."⁵³ It is this hermeneutical responsive-

⁴⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 59; Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 16–17; idem, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 127–128.

⁵⁰ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 79–80, 168–169.

⁵¹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 175; Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 28–29; Conner, *How Societies Remember*, 43.

⁵² Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 52–59, 139–140; also Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, x–xi, 17–18; idem, "Frame Image," 25–26; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 59; Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 188–189.

⁵³ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 157.

ness of commemorative symbols that gives rise to the sentiment that salient pasts are little more than ideological projections of the present. However, commemorative projects are dependent upon the core realities they take up, though the nature of this dependence from case to case cannot be *a priori* prescribed. Robin Wagner-Pacifici points out that memorializing activities are ignited by "ordering" persons and events, that is, "fraught with conflict and significance" on the larger social scale.⁵⁴ Persons and events of this sort form the "adamantine core" of commemoration, generating and shaping the interpretations that can be produced upon them across time.⁵⁵ Wagner-Pacifici further argues that commemorative artifacts emerge from the interaction among three factors, namely, "the social realities of empirical events, the cultural realities of modes of generic encodings, and the political and aesthetic realities of the work of translators," the latter being those who effect the transformation of empirical realities into the various artifactual forms of cultural memory.⁵⁶

Social memory, to borrow Appadurai's phrase, may therefore be understood as the "symbolic negotiation between 'ritual' pasts and the contingencies of the present."⁵⁷ Olick and Levy express this principle as follows: "Collective memory is this negotiation, rather than pure constraint by, or contemporary strategic manipulation of, the past.... The relationship between remembered pasts and constructed presents is one of perpetual but differentiated constraint and renegotiation over time, rather than pure strategic invention in the present or fidelity to (or inability to escape from) a monolithic legacy."⁵⁸ Schwartz describes memory as being simultaneously a "model of" and a "model for" society.⁵⁹ "In its reflective (model of) aspect, memory is an expressive symbol—a language, as it were, for articulating present predicaments; in its second (model for) aspect, memory is an orienting symbol—a map that gets us through these predicaments by relating where we are to where we have been."⁶⁰

The pertinence of social and cultural memory analysis for clarifying the phenomenology of the gospel tradition should be evident. Along

⁵⁴ Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Memories in the Making: The Shape of Things that Went," *QS* (1996): 301–321, esp. 302–303.

⁵⁵ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 309; also Casey, *Remembering*, 286.

⁵⁶ Wagner-Pacifici, "Memories in the Making," 308–309.

⁵⁷ Appadurai, "Past as a Scarce Resource," 218.

⁵⁸ Olick and Levy, "Collective Memory," 934.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 18; similarly Casey, *Remembering*, 284.

⁶⁰ Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 910.

with its negation of passivistic and individualistic models for memory, it rules out the sharp distinction the form critics made between memory and tradition. Rather, the gospel tradition may be understood as *the artifact of memory*, of the continual negotiation and semantic engagement between a community's present social realities and its memorialized past, with neither factor swallowed up by or made epiphenomenal of the other.⁶¹

Memory approaches, therefore, make it possible to overcome the polarities of constructionism (tradition as the product of a community's present social realities), and passivism (tradition as a transparent representation of empirical events of the past). By the same token, a social memory model accounts for the proliferation of transformations in the tradition, for as the artifact of memory dynamics tradition is responsive hermeneutically to the social frameworks of its reception. What memory analysis rejects, however, is the denial or even downplaying of vital connections between developments in the tradition and a community's salient past. Rather, it analyzes these very transformations in terms of the charged engagement of that normative past, laid down in tradition, with the present social frameworks of the tradent community. Bultmann, for example, attributed the tense dialogue about forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:5–10), an interpolation into the more primitive story of the Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1–12), to the desire of the "Church... to trace back to Jesus *its* own right to forgive sins."⁶² The secondary element, that is, was generated by the present interests of the church. But criticism informed by memory approaches, while perhaps not disputing *per se* this tradition-history, would question whether the community's right to forgive sins could be accounted for apart from some reference to the salient past. This would entail inquiry into how the community's salient past has furnished it with the moral and symbolic resources for perceiving and mastering its contemporary crises and predicaments.

Social memory analysis, therefore, hardly amounts to drawing naïve correspondences between "memory" and "history." Rather, it provides a research framework for assessing the origins and transformations of the gospel tradition in terms of the constitutive orientation of the Jesus-communities to a commemorated past. The pressing historiographical question, however, is how one might move from memory, of which tra-

⁶¹ See Schröter, *Erinnerung*, 463.

⁶² Bultmann, *History*, 15–16.

dition is the multiform artifact, to history. A methodological response to this problem has been attempted by Jens Schröter. Schröter's approach is predicated upon the semantic vigor of the constitutive past and the effect of present social realities that give particular refractions to that past, as well as upon recognition that the past is accessible only through those refractions. Consequently, one cannot speak about the historical Jesus apart from the acts of reception in the early communities.⁶³ Common traits perduring in Mark, Q, and *Thomas* as well as the acts of reception themselves become the basis for Schröter to draw inferences about the lineaments of a historical past that exerts a charged influence upon all three reception contexts.⁶⁴ Aware that every act of traditioning is an act of remembering in which past and present semantically interact, Schröter's approach instead of discounting exploits interpretive reconfigurations of the tradition to draw inferences about Jesus.

Schröter restricts himself to a triangulating analysis of complexes of tradition found in the written sources. Mark and Q nevertheless stand near the threshold with orality. In them oral tradition, to be sure worked over within new literary contexts and hence with earlier reception-contexts effaced, is to an extent still visible.⁶⁵ Working back diachronically through "stages" of the oral tradition, we have seen, is nonsensical. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to turn away prematurely from the oral gospel tradition, such as we have it. Memory theory has a great deal to say about the formation and transmission of oral tradition, as well as about the crux problem of the transition from oral to written media. At this point, research on the cognitive aspects of memory becomes pertinent.

3. *Cognitive Approaches to Memory and Tradition*

Gospels scholarship, to the limited extent it even reflects upon memory and the transmission of tradition, tends to conceive it in terms of serial communication along chains of isolated individuals, in accord with its

⁶³ Schröter, "Historical Jesus," 165.

⁶⁴ Idem, *Erinnerung*, 142, 483–485.

⁶⁵ John Miles Foley's category *oral-derived texts*, which designates written artifacts characterized by complex interactions of orality and literacy, is pertinent here. See *Homer's Traditional Art*, 4; and idem, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 210–211.

conception of memory as individual recollection. We need only to reference the serious comparison of the transmission of gospel traditions to the children's game "Telephone" made by Bart Ehrman in his widely used college introduction to the New Testament to give a sense of the current understanding of this problem in gospel scholarship.⁶⁶ In fact, remarkably little attention is paid to how this individuals-*seriatim* model might be coordinated with the account of the formation and history of the gospel tradition worked out by the form critics and in important respects still standard in the discipline.

Occasionally one finds attempts to support the individuals-*seriatim* model by reference to studies on the cognitive operations of memory, and in particular to experiments by F. C. Bartlett.⁶⁷ Bartlett tested individual recollection by asking individuals to reproduce a story, after one or two exposures, multiple times at lengthening intervals. He concluded that "remembering is rapidly affected by unwitting transformations: accurate recall is the exception and not the rule."⁶⁸ He also tested "serial reproduction" along a chain of individuals, with this result: "[S]erial reproduction normally brings about startling and radical alterations in the material dealt with... nearly every possible variation seems as if it can take place, even in a relatively short series." He concluded, quite rightly, that human memory "is normally exceedingly subject to error."⁶⁹

Bartlett's results from his transmission experiments, however, are hardly pertinent to the gospel tradition. They correspond to the artificial lab environment of *seriatim* transmission of random information down a chain of randomly selected individuals with no social connections to one another and, therefore, as David Rubin states, tell us more about rumor transmission or "party games" than about the cultivation of

⁶⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46–47. Robert Funk and Roy Hoover may also be taken as typical: "The evidence provided by the written gospels is hearsay evidence. Hearsay evidence is secondhand evidence. In the case of the gospels, the evangelists are all reporting stories and sayings related to them by intermediate parties; none of them was an ear or eyewitness of the words and events he records. Indeed, the information may have passed through several parties on its way to the authors of the first written gospels" (*The Five Gospels* [New York: Macmillan, 1993], 16). Out of this are worked up weighty "rules of evidence" of the sort relevant to cross-examination of individual recollection in a courtroom setting.

⁶⁷ John Crossan appeals to Bartlett's experiment (*The Birth of Christianity* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998], 82).

⁶⁸ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 61.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

memory and tradition within communities.⁷⁰ Rubin points out that “transmission in oral traditions... is much more complex and much more conducive to stable transmission.”⁷¹ In contrast to the one or two exposures that initiated the lab experiments in recall, cultivation of oral traditions is characterized by “overlearning,” that is, “numerous intermittent repetitions by different members of the group,” by “recitation” in performance mode, and by “spaced practice,” all of which have been experimentally shown to be “important factors in improving long-term retention.”⁷² In addition, cultivation of tradition is an enterprise of communities, not isolated individuals. Tradition is enacted within a group knowledgeable of and existentially identified with it; its performance is a shared ritual rehearsal of the cultural memory.

The social dimension of memory and tradition entails, moreover, that transmission does not occur down *seriatim* “chains” of individuals at all, as Bartlett’s experiment had it, but along far more complex “nets” the very complexity of which, Rubin states, “leads to greater stability of transmission than would be expected from laboratory research.”⁷³ He explains the distinctions as follows:

For a single individual, the chain [model of transmission] would have a single line leading in and a single line leading out. In contrast, for a single individual, the net would have an indefinite number of lines leading in and out.... That is, the difference between chains and nets is that in a chain an individual hears only one version and transmits it to only one other person, whereas in a net individuals can hear and combine many versions before passing on their own version any number of times to any number of people.⁷⁴

This has a mnemonically reinforcing and stabilizing effect: “The main advantage of a net over a chain is that if the version transmitted by one singer omits parts or introduces changes that are outside the tradition, then other versions can be substituted for these lapses.... Multiple versions from many sources serve another purpose. They allow a listener to

⁷⁰ David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 122. Bartlett readily acknowledged that “much human remembering is influenced directly and strongly by factors which are social in origin. The influence of these factors may be obscured by the ordinary laboratory methods of the study of memory” (*Remembering*, 95).

⁷¹ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 132.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 129, 154, 228.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

learn the range of acceptable variation.”⁷⁵ Transmission along nets, taken with its overall community contextualization, leads to the insight that the precariousness of memory and tradition exists not at each of the multiple points of a putative individual-to-individual *seriatim* chain but chiefly in the crisis brought about by a community’s *generational* succession, a threshold that Assmann designates as a “Traditionsbruch” that constitutes a “Krise in der kollektiven Erinnerung.”⁷⁶ We will return to this subject below.

Far from being helplessly exposed to the frailties of human memory so well documented in Bartlett’s experiments, oral tradition is better viewed as a set of strategies calibrated precisely to *counter* these frailties.⁷⁷ At stake is nothing less than cultural survival. As the deposit of a community’s formative narratives and normative wisdom,⁷⁸ tradition must be proof against the limitations of human memory. In Rubin’s words, “Oral traditions must, therefore, have developed forms of organization (i.e., rules, redundancies, constraints) and strategies to decrease the changes that human memory imposes on the more casual transmission of verbal material.”⁷⁹ In addition to the learning and retention strategies that have already been mentioned, the *formation* of oral tradition can be understood in terms of memory’s cognitive operations that render memory an extraordinarily efficient faculty.

Researchers have pointed to memory’s radical *economizing* activity. Bonanno states, “[T]he myriad of possible experiential stimuli necessitates that the memory system be prudent. For the purposes of economy, experiences are catalogued schematically into categories, scripts and prototypical units of knowledge.”⁸⁰ Exact recall of experiences would entail unmanageable surfeits of detail, inducing, as Casey puts it, “that state of clutter and confusion which Luria’s subject... reported as a living nightmare.”⁸¹ Memory in other words is in the literal sense a cognitive *artificer* that renders the raw material of experience and perception

⁷⁵ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 134.

⁷⁶ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 218.

⁷⁷ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 144.

⁷⁸ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 141–142.

⁷⁹ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 10.

⁸⁰ Bonanno, “Remembering and Psychotherapy,” 177.

⁸¹ Casey, *Remembering*, 285, referring to A. R. Luria’s study of an individual with *savant* capabilities of exact recall, in whom external sensory cues triggered overwhelming cascades of detailed remembrances, inducing a kind of cognitive paralysis; see *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, trans. Lynn Solotaroff (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

into manageable, efficient memory artifacts. Bartlett observed this cognitive tendency towards the rapid condensation of remembered stories into concise, economical units through the elimination of details.⁸² Rubin compares the newspaper report of an actual train wreck with its commemorative version in the ballad *The Wreck of the Old 97* and its variants: "The article was divided into 100 facts. . . . On the average, only 6 of these 100 facts appeared in each ballad, producing ballads in which only the essentials were preserved."⁸³ Rubin points out that memory operates "to abstract and remember the structure from many similar events," that is, memory *compounds* multiple related remembrances into single, frequently composite memories that take on emblematic, representational functions.⁸⁴ This economizing activity of memory likewise accounts for the fading out of precise times, durations, and locales of discrete experiences into more indeterminate spatio-temporal frameworks, for example, "last year. . ." *Locales* for their part act as clustering points and hence important mnemonic cues for emblematic memories associated with them. This accounts for what Casey describes as the "pastiche" character of memory's representations of the past: "Between and around the stably situated and relatively well-defined locales of memories are undefined and unlocalized patches of space. . . . Thanks to their very gappiness, memories can be considered *pastiches* of the past—never its full spatial re-presentation."⁸⁵

Another cognitive operation performed by memory is *conventionalization* or *schematization*, which refers to the rapid reduction of diffusely complex experiences to stereotyped forms and scripts that act as mnemonic mechanisms for their reproduction as memory.⁸⁶ This works in close tandem with condensing operations, for as memory reduces empirical remembrances to a type, details "not . . . adding to the representational significance of the whole" are dropped.⁸⁷ Rubin's case study cited above is illuminating in this regard: "Almost 60% of the lines produced could have occurred in a ballad about another train wreck. . . . Thus much of the text of the generated ballads followed a general pattern,

⁸² Bartlett, *Remembering*, 126–127.

⁸³ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 284.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7; also Larry R. Squire and Eric R. Kandel, *Memory: From Mind to Molecules* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1999), 46.

⁸⁵ Casey, *Remembering*, 72–75.

⁸⁶ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 53–54, 63, 83, et passim.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106–107.

including just enough facts that fit the existing ballad pattern to keep the song unique.”⁸⁸ We see that assimilation to a type entails significant distancing from the actual empirical realities. It must be stressed though that this distancing is itself a mnemonic and pragmatic strategy. The human mind as we noted is exceedingly inefficient at retaining and reproducing the details of uninterrupted streams of experience. “Memory work,” writes Schwartz, “like a lens filters extraneous materials the better for us to see the kinds of recollecting relevant to our purposes.”⁸⁹ We have seen that memory’s radical reduction of detail is what makes possible its efficient operation in the first place. Conformity to formulaic types gives memories simplicity and coherence, enables their categorization, and thereby aids their subsequent recollection. Likewise, with conventionalization of memories comes their greater impregnability to change.⁹⁰

This review of the cognitive operations of memory brings to mind salient features of oral-traditional genres. Here we find ourselves at the place where *the cognitive functions of memory intersect with social and cultural memory dynamics*. Rubin in fact analyzes genres of oral tradition precisely as mnemonic strategies. Before continuing with this line of inquiry, however, we may pause to bring out more clearly the pertinence of this research to analysis of the gospel traditions. Cognitive operations of memory, such as economy of presentation, compounding, temporally indeterminate framing, and schematizing in a typology of forms correspond to characteristic features of the synoptic tradition. These were acutely observed and catalogued by the form critics.⁹¹ Bultmann noted the “gappiness” or “pastiche” (to use Casey’s terms) effect resulting from these modes of representing the past, persisting even beyond the efforts of the evangelists to create contiguity.⁹² Both Bultmann and Dibelius posited the existence of initial processes from which the tradition, particularly in its definitive form of the pronouncement story, emerged. But having discounted vital connections of tradition

⁸⁸ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 284. It is important, however, to avoid relapse into notions of “historical residue” or “abbreviated history” as models for the relationship of the tradition artifact to history. Memory transformations are more like alchemy (see below).

⁸⁹ Barry Schwartz, “Jesus in First-Century Memory—A Response,” in *Memory, Tradition, Text*, ed. Kirk and Thatcher, 249–262, esp. 251.

⁹⁰ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 83–93.

⁹¹ Bultmann, *History*, 188–190.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 307.

with memory, they could not offer a satisfactory account of these processes. Bultmann made vague reference to “the relatively rapid precipitation of a somewhat fixed tradition” in traditional Jewish genres, while Dibelius located the formation of the “Paradigm” in the pragmatics of preaching.⁹³ Particularly ironic, though, was Bultmann’s inclination to view the tradition’s distancing from empirical realities, in fact the effect of mnemonic strategies, as evidence that it had come untethered from memory and history.⁹⁴

The *variability* of the tradition is also closely aligned with memory’s cognitive function. Research brings to light the fact that memory as a crucial cognitive resource gives an organism the capability to respond successfully to new environments. In memory the data of experience are shaped into these economical patterns, or “schemas,” that, as Bartlett puts it, “render a specific adaptive reaction [to present and future situations] possible.”⁹⁵ The busy-bee condensing, compounding, and conventionalizing activities of memory described above, accordingly, are not merely for the purpose of enhancing memory’s retentive capacities, but to enable its key function as a rapid-response strategy for comprehending and mastering new situations.⁹⁶ This occurs through memory’s capacity to perform analogical operations, that is, to cue present experiences directly “to that portion of the organized setting of past responses which is most relevant to the needs of the moment.”⁹⁷ The cognitive capacities of memory extend thereby to intellection of and assigning meaning, “a name,” to present experiences, which in turn facilitate the integration of these experiences in their own right into organized, active memory.⁹⁸ Casey describes this dynamic as follows, and, moreover, in terms redolent of Schwartz’s characterization of the functions of social memory for a community:

Rather than a mere repository *of* experience, remembering becomes thereby a continually growing fund *for* experience: a source itself, indeed a resource, on which not only future acts of remembering but many other experiential modes can draw as well. . . . It also supplies a supportive *Hintergrund* for ongoing experience: a backdrop which at once unifies and

⁹³ Bultmann, *History*, 368; Dibelius, *Tradition to Gospel*, 65.

⁹⁴ Bultmann, *History*, 63–64.

⁹⁵ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 208.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44–45; Bonanno, “Remembering and Psychotherapy,” 177.

⁹⁷ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 206.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32, 200.

specifies what comes to appear in the foreground. Any experiential scene... possesses such a background, which contributes depth to an otherwise shallow setting.⁹⁹

Memory, being an active cognitive capacity of this sort, never amounts to mere retrieval of stored "traces" of the past. Rather, memory manifests itself as a "formulation" expressive of the active relationship that the past—as it has come to be configured in memory—enters into with the circumstances of the present for which it has its particular cognitive salience.¹⁰⁰ This is not construction of the past, but *reconstruction*: items are "picked out of [memory] schemes, reshuffled, and used to aid adaptation towards conditions which have perhaps never occurred before. The items picked out are the distant events; the immediate situation sets the problems which they are to help solve."¹⁰¹ Casey refers to this as the "thick autonomy of memory"—autonomous with respect to the empirical past because not bound to direct recall, but rather to remembering "the *same* past *differently* on successive occasions."¹⁰² Memory nevertheless "is enmeshed in its origins even when it seems to be functioning independently of them"; it retains "a commitment to truth concerning the past, a truth that reflects the specificity of the past even if it need not offer an exact likeness of it."¹⁰³

Analysis of the cognitive dynamics of memory, the focus of experimental psychology or phenomenological studies like Casey's, naturally takes human memory as embodied in its neural substrate as its object. But that these same dynamics play out in the social context of groups should not be surprising, for as we noted earlier, the locus of communal memory is the memories of individuals whose identities are bound up in their affiliation with a particular community. Social memory, the appropriation of a commemorated past within the frameworks of present social realities, fulfills for a community the cognitive function of memory that Bartlett describes as "the utilisation of the past in the solution of difficulties set by the present."¹⁰⁴ The "keying" (Schwartz) or

⁹⁹ Casey, *Remembering*, 284.

¹⁰⁰ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 225.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁰² Casey, *Remembering*, 286.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 280, 283; on this point see also Martin A. Conway, "Autobiographical Knowledge and Autobiographical Memories," in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67–93, esp. 88.

¹⁰⁴ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 225.

“analogic mapping” (Malkki) operations of social memory reproduce the “effort after meaning” that Bartlett designates as the salient feature of memory cognitively brought to bear upon present situations.¹⁰⁵ The import for the phenomenology of tradition likewise is obvious. Above we suggested that the forms of oral tradition reflect the schematizing, compounding, and transmuting activities of memory and that, accordingly, oral genres can be viewed as pragmatic mnemonic strategies. Tradition, as a community’s deposit of its formative narratives and normative wisdom, is the artifactual manifestation of its cultural memory. The semantically dense, image-rich, formulaic properties of tradition artifacts enhance their utility for cognitive search-and-cue operations that bring apposite aspects of the commemorated past to bear upon a community’s present predicaments.

4. *Oral Genres as Memory Strategies*

Oral tradition can be arranged in culture-specific genre typologies. These genres are strategies that maximize the memorability and therefore the stability of the tradition while simultaneously enabling the flexibility that renders tradition responsive to new situations. Rubin characterizes each genre as “a different solution to the problem of stability.”¹⁰⁶ In cultural environments in which orality predominates, it is a matter of necessity that the normative resources of the community be retained in and transmitted in the medium of memory. Tradition, therefore, may be understood as a collocation of mnemonic strategies that circumvent the natural limitations of human memory while exploiting its remarkable strengths.¹⁰⁷

Mastery of oral tradition proceeds along lines quite other than rote, verbatim memorization, the goal of the latter being identical recall across numerous enactments. Memory is notoriously inefficient at such tasks, and static formations of this sort typically require the support of the written medium. Rather, oral traditional genres are “systems of multiple constraints” that on the one hand supply cues to memory and on

¹⁰⁵ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 232; Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 121; also Bartlett, *Remembering*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 251; also Bartlett, *Remembering*, 81.

¹⁰⁷ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 10, 309–319.

the other place limits on variation by limiting choice.¹⁰⁸ Constraints include the schematic form of the genre itself, theme, imagery, association, and (depending on genre) assonance, rhyme, and rhythm. Though their joint operation is a dynamic rather than static process, its outcome is stability in the tradition, or better, a genre-relative equilibrium between stability and variation. Constraints and cues combine to relieve memory of the impossible burden of exact memorization of masses of detail.¹⁰⁹ "Memorization" applied to oral tradition, therefore, does not signify verbatim mastery and rote reproduction, but accurate recall through competency in a system of constraints and cues.¹¹⁰ Multiformity is an index feature of oral tradition because genre-embodied configurations of constraints and cues permit more than just a single, exact solution.¹¹¹ Genres, moreover, vary amongst themselves in the number of interacting constraints each characteristically exhibits. The result is a spectrum running from low-constraint genres that enable a wider range of variation in performance to high-constraint genres that permit minimal variation, perhaps even something approaching verbatim reproduction from performance to performance, though Rubin stresses that "in all genres the overall constraints are enough to prevent drift beyond local variation."¹¹² The inherent flexibility of genre-based multiple-constraint systems enables a community to adapt its foundational traditions to its changing social realities. This points, as Rubin puts it, "to the importance of learning the general organization, constraints, or rules of a genre as opposed to the rote learning of a collection of instances without the ability to extend them to new situations."¹¹³ We observe again the intersection of *cognitive memory* strategies with *social memory* forces operative within a community.

Let us look at how multiple constraint systems work in practice, and then bring this to bear upon selected genres of the gospel tradition. Genres themselves are culturally-inculcated patterns of organization, or scripts, that operate cognitively as memory schemas; in other words, the recurrent pattern definitive of a particular genre functions as an aide to memory. Competence in the conventions of a genre facilitates both

¹⁰⁸ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 119, 300, et passim.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 90, 101.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 284–285.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 300.

¹¹³ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 143.

learning and reproduction of multiple traditions cast in that genre. To the extent that genre patterns cause recitation of a given tradition to unfold in a conventional, scripted order, its individual elements cue one another sequentially. Moreover, component elements of a genre frequently stand in conventional relationships to one another. In the ancient administrative genre of the *petition*, for example, the concrete petitions always follow upon an inaugural honorific address. We see this in the Our Father, which conforms to this genre.¹¹⁴ Conventional *narrative* scripts may organize sets of motifs constitutively operative within a particular genre, as in the case of healing stories.¹¹⁵ Interwoven with a genre's infrastructure, accordingly, are *meaning* and *imagery*, which constrain and cue the specific content of a given tradition. "Meaning" designates specific themes conventional to a particular genre. This may include a set of motifs or a plot conventionally constellated with a particular theme, and so cued associatively with the invocation of the theme. Requests for subsistence food and debt relief, for example, are highly recurrent in the ancient petition genre. The powerful mnemonic properties of *images* have long been recognized, and so it is not surprising that oral tradition is characteristically rich in both descriptive and spatial imagery. This (spatial imagery in particular) provides *loci* that cue motifs and—in a non-rote manner—the verbal component of the tradition.¹¹⁶ That imagery forms the leading edge of the cuing properties of tradition is clear from the fact that it facilitates the searching and combining operations of memory.¹¹⁷ It emerges that tradition-artifacts are memory-artifacts, systems of "constraints that combine to limit choices for recall and increase stability."¹¹⁸ Rubin points out that most of these bundled constraints have "their own neural substrates," a testament to the capacity of tradition to muster and combine all the cognitive resources of the brain for the exigency of remembering.¹¹⁹

An important goal for research is analysis of the different genres of the gospel tradition as memory strategies. We will focus here on what both Bultmann and Dibelius viewed as the queen of the tradition, the

¹¹⁴ See A. Kirk, "Peasant Wisdom, the 'Our Father,' and the Origins of Christianity," *TJT* 15 (1999): 31–50.

¹¹⁵ See Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 36, 304; Casey, *Remembering*, 74–75.

¹¹⁶ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 18–19, 48, 94–95, 305.

¹¹⁷ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 219.

¹¹⁸ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 101.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

pronouncement story. Bultmann observed the *economy* of the form, for instance, its *dramatis personae* portrayed as emblematic types.¹²⁰ Both Bultmann and Dibelius in isolating and classifying the genre recognized its distinctive *organizing schema*. This sets the constraints and cues for enactment in all the genre's discrete exemplars: brief narrative contextualization, frequently with conventionalized syntax, culminating in a pungent saying, itself formulated in accordance with cultural conventions for proverbs and maxims for maximum memorability. To assess the pronouncement story's utilization of additional constraints to cue specific content we can take Mark 3:31–35, the Family of Jesus, as an example. The narrative contextualization that inaugurates the unit is dense in *descriptive* and *spatial imagery* (vv. 31–32). The dominant image is “family,” and it is important to note that the imagery cues wording, in a generative, non-rote manner, for the brief lead-in narrative. The image of Jesus' family (mother and brothers), moreover, cues the *theme*: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (v. 33) The image and the theme are simultaneously a mnemonic for the climactic aphorism: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (v. 35). The image of “mother and brothers” recurs in each component of the unit. Likewise, the image and the aphorism reinforce each other mnemonically, which is to say that the narrative portion could for its part be cued from recollection of the memorable aphorism. In short, the unit is a system of cues that together eliminate the burden of exact recall, that is, of carrying the story around verbatim in one's head as a condition for reproducing it from occasion to occasion. It also renders it capable of variation.

Though an acute observer of the features of the genre, Bultmann failed to recognize its mnemonic orientation and integration. Consequently, he viewed the narrative settings as owing their existence primarily to pedagogic and aesthetic impulses—they were “pictorial concretions” of “universal truths” expressed by the dominical sayings, giving “vividness” or “lively” expression to the latter.¹²¹ This assessment naturally induced him to view narrative settings as secondary derivations of the sayings. Taken with the fact that many sayings had the capacity to circulate inde-

¹²⁰ Bultmann, *History*, 309.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 32–47. Bultmann supported these opinions, moreover, by reasoning from literary analogies (see 61). Dibelius for his part put the origins of the narrative settings of the Paradigms down to the “edifying tendencies” of the sermon, and their narrative economy he attributed to the concern of the preachers that the listeners not be “distracted from the sermon” (*Tradition to Gospel*, 26, 48).

pendently, this led him to isolate dominical sayings as the primary datum of the gospel tradition.¹²² Correspondingly, he construed the fact that the *dramatis personae* were ideal, symbolic types as evidence that the scenes were imaginary, that is, generated by the respective saying. While acknowledging that in some cases scene-construction might have drawn upon traditional materials, he viewed this as incidental.¹²³ This assigning of priority to sayings over narrative, and its corollary, that sayings were the generative seeds of the tradition, were crucial to Bultmann's evolutionary conception of history of the gospel tradition.

Nothing is easier than to show that dominical sayings could and did indeed circulate separately, that individual sayings might subsequently have narrative settings attached to them, or conversely become independent of narrative settings. Nor is there anything to be gained denying that the narrative settings reflect pedagogic and aesthetic concerns, or that sayings influenced the shaping of their narrative frames. By the same token there can be no naïve construing of the ideal-type narratives as simply abbreviated versions of discrete historical occasions on which sayings were pronounced—the relationship between history and the representational powers of memory is far too complex for that (see below). What memory analysis does, however, is destroy Bultmann's grand evolutionary tradition-history inferences, for it shows that memory strategies, enacted in various genres, are an inherent property of the tradition.

As just such a constellation of memory strategies, tradition expresses a community's fundamental orientation to its salient past, its resolute determination to remember. Likewise, as a system of constraints and cues that enable variation in reproducing that past, rather than a technology of static verbatim repetition, tradition speaks in fresh ways to the present social realities of a community without diminishment of the animating moral authority of the salient past. Here we may reiterate our earlier point that enactment of tradition takes place where *social and cultural memory* forces intersect with the *cognitive memory* strategies formative of the tradition itself and enabling its reproduction.

A community's constitutive mnemonic efforts, however, are directed toward remembering the *tradition*. In other words, the historiographical question of the relationship of memory, tradition, and history needs to be posed once again.

¹²² Bultmann, *History*, 47–49.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

5. *Memory, Jesus Tradition, and History*

We return to our earlier discussion of memory's cognitive conversion of experience into memory artifacts. We saw that memory forms the undifferentiated streams of experience into conventional patterns, scripts, and types. While the purpose is mnemonic, the effect is to conform events to the representational type. Elements consistent with the pertinent memory schema are assimilated to it, while "discrepant information is ignored or devalued."¹²⁴ Rubin describes this process as follows: "Changes in the recall of a particular piece will make it more like the schema, both in order and content. If a detail cannot be recalled, a common substitute from the schema will often be used. . . . Aspects of a piece that are more central or important to a schema will be recalled more quickly than aspects that are not."¹²⁵ By way of example Rubin refers to another balladic commemoration, this time the 1896 murder of Pearl Bryan: "[T]he events could fit into either of two existing [narrative] patterns of ballads: the murdered-girl pattern or the criminal-brought-to-justice pattern. . . . The actual murder has enough details to fill both patterns, but the traditional ballad must follow one or the other; it is either the victim's story or the murderer's."¹²⁶ The result of these sorts of complex cognitive conversions is memory artifacts in which an exact redescription of the past has been exchanged for enormous mnemonic advantage.

Casey refers to this as "*intensified* remembering" and draws attention to its correspondence to the dynamics of commemoration:

One way to intensify something is to give it a thicker consistency so as to help it last or to remain more substantively. Such thickening is surely the point of any memorialization, whether it be ceremonial, sculptural, scriptural, or psychical. Every kind of commemoration can be considered an effort to create a lasting "remanence" for what we wish to honor in memory—where "remanence" signifies a perduring remainder or residuum (as in the literally thick stone of war memorials or grave markers).¹²⁷

The cognitive activity of memory, in other words, is not just about achieving mnemonic efficiency. Rather, as is the case with all commem-

¹²⁴ Bonanno, "Remembering and Psychotherapy," 177.

¹²⁵ Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 22.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 280–281. Rubin draws upon A. B. Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl: The Murdered-Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973).

¹²⁷ Casey, *Remembering*, 273.

oration, it carries out a thorough-going *signification* of the past. Drawing upon all the symbolic resources of the culture, memory infuses past events with *meaning*; it converts them into symbolic forms artficed to be bearers of the truths, moral judgments, and norms perceived to be immanent in the actual empirical events.¹²⁸

This accounts for important features of the Jesus tradition. The tradition is inherently neither calibrated nor concerned for a direct redescription of empirical events. Rather, through complex mnemonic, commemorative operations, it amounts to the conversion, or transmutation, of the diffuse actualities of historical events into mnemonically efficient, image-rich verbal artifacts designed to bear the axiomatic meanings and norms—the emerging cultural memory—of the Jesus-communities. Stated differently, in the Jesus tradition the past is marked and represented in such a way as to enable it to exercise culture-symbolic power for the tradent communities. Malkki's characterization of the formation of tradition in Hutu refugee camps in Tanzania following their flight from the 1972 genocide in Burundi is apposite: "It was most centrally concerned with the reconstitution of a *moral order* of the world. It seized historical events, processes, and relationships, and reinterpreted them within a deeply moral scheme of good and evil."¹²⁹ Rehearsal of the tradition thereby constitutes the community in its identity as a moral community. A community's commemorative activity productive of its tradition always occurs, it must be emphasized, in the crucible of its present realities and crises, and by the same token, "it contribute[s] to structuring social action in the present."¹³⁰

The normative concerns driving the formation of tradition, accordingly, account for the prominence of dominical sayings and pronouncement stories in the Jesus tradition. The "ideal types" of narrative settings (Pharisees, Scribes, Disciples, Crowds, Tax Collectors, etc.) function not just as mnemonic shorthand, but as categorical moral types. Typification of narrative scenes and their tight coordination with authoritative sayings reveal the investment of the early communities in the normative dimension of their commemoration of Jesus. The observable form of the

¹²⁸ Casey, *Remembering*, 51, 283; also Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 242–244; Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 52–59, 139–140; Schwartz, "Frame Image," 25–26; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 59; Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 188–189.

¹²⁹ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 56.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

pronouncement story is an artifact of this guiding interest in normative memory, exhibiting, moreover, the convergence of mnemonic strategies with normative goals. The form critics themselves constantly remarked on the tradition's heavy investment in norm inculcation vis-à-vis historical description.¹³¹ Moreover, in Bultmann's repeated characterization of narrative settings as "ideal and symbolic" there lurks a fundamental insight into the phenomenology of tradition, and in this vein it is hard to improve, for example, upon his observation that "Mk. 1.16–20, 2.14 condense[s] into one symbolic moment what was actually a process."¹³² Lacking adequate models for memory and tradition, however, and handicapped by superannuated historiographical assumptions,¹³³ Bultmann failed to recognize the essential memorializing connection of the forms of the tradition with the life of Jesus. For Bultmann, symbolic representation and historical representation were mutually exclusive. The Calling of the Disciples (Mark. 1:16–20), for instance, "is *in no sense* an historical record, but a description of an ideal scene" (emphasis added).¹³⁴ The question Bultmann puts in stark terms to Mark 11:28–30 (Challenge to Jesus' Authority) is "*whether* it is an historical record or a creation of the early Church, designed to disarm its opponents of their weapons" (emphasis added).¹³⁵ "Ideal," accordingly, is for him largely synonymous with "imaginary." Vague chronological and geographical data suggest to Bultmann that the tradition has lost its moorings in history.¹³⁶ "Religious and edifying" is contrasted with "historical."¹³⁷ History in his view is in principle accessible apart from symbolic mediation, albeit meagerly, through "historical record[s]," "reports of historical occasions," and "actual historical reports" excavated from the tradition.¹³⁸

Memory analysis suggests skepticism towards this understanding of the tradition and also brings important contributions to the historiographical discussion. Tradition being the product of memory dynamics, we have seen, rules out that it transparently redescribes empirical events.

¹³¹ E.g., Bultmann, *History*, 63; Dibelius, *Tradition to Gospel*, 65.

¹³² Bultmann, *History*, 57.

¹³³ See David S. du Toit, "Der unähnliche Jesus: Eine kritische Evaluierung der Entstehung des Differenzkriteriums und seiner geschichts- und erkenntnistheoretischen Voraussetzungen," in *Der historische Jesus*, ed. Schröter and Brucker, 89–130.

¹³⁴ Bultmann, *History*, 28.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29–30, 39–41, 48, 57.

Genre-based mnemonic strategies, moreover, are directed to recalling and enacting the *tradition*. Nevertheless, to return to the point made earlier, the gospel tradition has an essential relationship to the empirical past, one that is *mediated by commemoration*. The tradition may be viewed, in other words, as a commemorative representation of historical events. To deny this historical dynamic to the Jesus tradition would be equivalent to claiming that the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C., because it is the product of politically charged commemorative debates of the 1980's,¹³⁹ has no historical relationship to the Vietnam War, or likewise that the Lincoln Memorial, reflective as its design is of the preoccupations of the pre-Civil Rights era,¹⁴⁰ has nothing of historical value to tell us about the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and the events of the American Civil War. To the contrary, the changing, even conflicting, interpretations of landmark events evident in these commemorative enterprises amount to the reverberative effects of foundational events into new social contexts and thus are historically informative in their own right. As regards the Jesus-traditions this entails a historiography of reception along the lines sketched out for example by Schröter, summarized above, and one that addresses the relationship between historical events and their symbolic representation.¹⁴¹

Memory analysis also traces the social processes through which communities transmute formative historical experiences into commemorative artifacts like tradition. Halbwachs showed that memory is forged in the communicative dynamics of groups. Rosenzweig and Thelen, in a major survey of popular uses of memory, reported of their respondents that "with individuals they trusted... they probed experiences and constructed the traditions they wanted to sustain. In these relationships they... shaped and reshaped memories into trajectories... and generally created the perceptual world they wanted to inhabit."¹⁴² Malkki refers to this as "collective discursive practice" and observed its operations in Hutu refugee camps, where the experience of genocide was

¹³⁹ Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *AJS* 97 (1991): 376–420.

¹⁴⁰ Savage, "Politics of Memory," 127–149.

¹⁴¹ See Schröter, "Von der Historizität der Evangelien," 184–206; and Michael Moxter, "Erzählung und Ereignis: Über den Spielraum historischer Repräsentation," in *Der historische Jesus*, ed. Schröter and Brucker, 67–88. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellaur (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴² Rosenzweig and Thelen, *Presence of the Past*, 196.

forged into an enduring tradition under the influence of the present social realities of the camps.¹⁴³ Experimental psychologists have observed that stories are transformed into condensed, durable versions conforming to culturally available genres in the course of multiple retellings.¹⁴⁴ Malkki notes that it was by this means that the Hutu stories took on their mnemonic and didactic-symbolic contours:

Accounts of these key events very quickly circulated among the refugees, and, often in a matter of days, acquired what can be characterized as “standard versions” in the telling and retelling. These “standard versions” were not simply isolated accounts of particular events, told for the sake of telling and soon to be forgotten. Rather, they were accounts which, while becoming increasingly formulaic, also became more didactic and progressively more implicated in, and indicative of, something beyond them. In this sense, the “standard versions” acted as diagnostic and mnemonic allegories connecting events of everyday life with wider historical processes impinging on the Hutu refugees.¹⁴⁵

These social processes render landmark historical events into the commemorative artifacts of tradition which, we have seen, are open to fresh transformations in new social contexts of enactment.

6. *Orality, Writing, and Memory*

This essay has focused a great deal on the properties of oral tradition. There is a danger that the abandonment of the form-critics' project of working back through the oral tradition to its so-called earliest layers may have the collateral effect that scholarship comes to view the oral tradition as inaccessible and hence simply not relevant to analysis. Schröter in fact argues that a reception-based historiography must focus

¹⁴³ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 242; also Gérard Namer, *Mémoire et société* (Paris: Méridiens Lincksieck, 1987), 140–157, on survivor groups supplying the social contexts for Jews, who had been deported to the death camps, to forge a collective memory of their experiences.

¹⁴⁴ Bartlett, *Remembering*, 63, 83, 95; Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, 131, 281–282; Jerome Bruner and Carol Fleisher Feldman, “Group Narrative as a Cultural Context of Autobiography,” in *Remembering our Past*, ed. Rubin, 291–317, esp. 293; Mary Susan Weldon and Krystal D. Bellinger, “Collective Memory: Collaborative and Individual Processes in Remembering,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 23 (1997): 1160–1175; Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 60, 86.

¹⁴⁵ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 106.

on the written sources because earlier reception-contexts for the oral tradition are simply irrecoverable.¹⁴⁶ This is true if by analysis is meant de-layering on the form-critical model, but the form critics' notion that the oral tradition is layered or a sequence of diachronic "stages" was a great misunderstanding. Others, however, draw attention to the fluid nature of oral tradition, hence the difficulty of getting an analytical fix on it except as it has survived into the medium of writing.¹⁴⁷ To be sure, reconstructing a history of the performances of the oral tradition is out of the question. Memory analysis, however, throws a great deal of light upon this period that post-form-critical scholarship is prone to view as impenetrably obscure.

This is not just because the genres of oral tradition are mnemonic strategies calibrated, moreover, to bring stability and flexibility into equilibrium. These give us no royal road to the historical Jesus. We have seen that built right in to oral genres, precisely as mnemonic strategies, is not just autonomy from the empirically-described past, but also capacity for variability in recall and, accordingly, for enactments adaptive to diverse social contexts. To be sure, the fact that oral tradition is mnemonically configured is a warning against exaggerating its fluidity or underestimating a community's resolute dedication to remembering its past. What memory analysis does, however, is negate descriptions of the oral history of the gospel traditions as a *diachronic* transmission through multiple stages—a sort of complex regress from the gospels that is simply incapable of reconstruction. According to such accounts, each stage constitutes a caesura, a crisis, and cumulatively a progressive breakdown in transmission, much as in the individuals-*seriatim* model.

Memory analysis, in contrast, indicates that the sphere of oral transmission of the tradition, even given the realities of a community's multiple performance settings and shifting social contexts, is a *synchronic* space defined by a community's generational life-cycle. Stated differently, the crisis in tradition is first significantly triggered by the *generational succession* within an emergent community. This is because foundational memories and their artifact, tradition, are shaped socially and discursively by the community. Moreover, consistent with its social origins and emplacement, tradition circulates *along* nets, not *down* chains, within the ambient context of the entire community and within this generationally-defined

¹⁴⁶ Schröter, "Historical Jesus," 165; idem, *Erinnerung*, 483–485.

¹⁴⁷ du Toit, "Der unähnliche Jesus," 123.

temporal space. Cast in genres that enable flexibility and multiformity, the tradition is affected by the community's shifting social realities without thereby becoming severed from foundational memories collectively forged and over which the community exercises collective proprietorship. This scenario is supported by sociological research that demonstrates that a generation is defined by shared memories of autobiographically experienced formative events. Formative memories, that is to say, are borne through the life-cycle of the generation, and absent successful strategies for cross-generational transmission they tend to fade with their tradent cohort.¹⁴⁸

How then does a community respond to the grave crisis generational succession poses for its survival? Jan Assmann's analysis of the transition from "communicative memory" to "cultural memory" illuminates this problem. Broadly conceived, communicative memory encompasses all dimensions of face-to-face communication in predominantly oral societies: "Dieses Gedächtnis gehört in den Zwischenbereich zwischen Individuen, es bildet sich im Verkehr der Menschen untereinander heraus."¹⁴⁹ This draws upon Halbwachs's insight that the social realities and communicative practices of communities give substance and duration to the memory of the people belonging to those communities. Hence communicative memory includes those communicative and cognitive operations through which oral traditions coalesce in emergent communities. *Traditionsbruch* is the term Assmann uses for a serious breakdown of the communicative frameworks enabling transmission of tradition. This confronts a community with loss of connection to memory and hence with the crisis of its own dissolution. It forces it to turn toward more durable media capable of carrying memory in a vital manner across generations, that is, toward the artifactual forms of cultural memory, and in particular, writing.¹⁵⁰

For emergent communities a *Traditionsbruch* arises out of a breakdown in communicative memory directly connected with its generational lifespan: "Dieses Gedächtnis wächst der Gruppe historisch zu; es

¹⁴⁸ Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, "Generations and Collective Memories," *ASR* 54 (1989): 359-381.

¹⁴⁹ Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 165, 218-221, 275; also idem, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 53-54, 87-88. Assmann's model suffers from a certain ambiguity at this point that in my view is due to "communicative memory" and "cultural memory" being positioned in too categorical a distinction to each other. Assmann wants to reserve

entsteht in der Zeit und vergeht mit ihr, genauer, mit seinen Trägern.... Dieser allen durch persönlich verbürgte und kommunizierte Erfahrung gebildete Erinnerungsraum entspricht biblisch den 3–4 Generationen....”¹⁵¹ The outer limit for the operations of communicative memory, in other words, is the cohort of those still able to claim direct contact with those who knew the first generation, hence three or at the most four generations.¹⁵² Assmann argues that the limitations of communicative memory force themselves upon an emergent community as a *crisis of memory* at approximately the forty-year threshold, that is, when it is becoming apparent that the cohort of its living carriers—the generation that experienced the charismatic period of origins—is disappearing. It is at this point that the community, if it is not eventually to dissolve along with its memory, must accelerate the transformation of communicative memory into the enduring artifacts of cultural memory, a process Assmann characterizes as “die Objektivationen gemeinsam erinnerten Wissens in Gestalt kultureller Formen.”¹⁵³ Moreover, “[w]enn wir den typischen Dreigenerationen-Zeitrahmen des kommunikativen Gedächtnisses als einen synchronen Erinnerungsraum auffassen, dann bildet das kulturelle Gedächtnis anhand weit in die Vergangenheit zurückreichenden Überlieferung eine diachrone Achse.”¹⁵⁴ The exigency is the securing of long-term cultural viability in the face of the collapse in the social frameworks, in this case the generational framework, for

“cultural memory” to refer to new artifactual forms of memory that arise after the breakdown in “communicative memory.” But as we have seen, oral traditions are themselves cultural artifacts forged in the crucible of oral practices Assmann associates with communicative memory. Assmann is nonetheless clear that “eine mündliche Überlieferung gliedert sich genau so nach kommunikativer und kultureller, alltäglicher und feierlicher Erinnerung wie die Erinnerung einer Schriftkultur” (*Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 59). Assmann softens the distinction in a recent essay in which he analyzes tradition as a cultural artifact (“Form as a Mnemonic Device: Cultural Texts and Cultural Memory,” in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006], 67–82).

¹⁵¹ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 50.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 37. Rosalind Thomas’s study of Athenian family traditions is a striking confirmation of the three to four generation life-span of communicative memory (*Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 125–129).

¹⁵³ Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 117; also *idem*, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 11, 32–38, 50–56, 218–221. See also Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 197–213.

¹⁵⁴ Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 19, drawing here expressly upon Aleida Assmann’s *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999).

oral transmission of normative and formative tradition.¹⁵⁵ The large-scale programmatic shifting of tradition from oral to written media arises out of the crisis of memory.

The gospels (particularly Mark and Q) as oral-derived texts are artifacts of this crisis of memory triggered by generational succession in the Jesus movement. This means, moreover, that the oral tradition therein incorporated has freshly emerged from the synchronic space of memory, namely, the social frameworks constituted by the foundational generation, in whom those memories were autobiographically vested. It is important to emphasize in this regard that the written sources are by no means passive transcriptions of the traditions emerging from the first generation. They constitute fresh acts of memory, fresh enactments of the tradition in their own contemporary social and cultural frameworks, forging in the process a new kind of connection with the past, one that reconstructs it from quite different vistas, from across the *Traditionsbruch*.¹⁵⁶

7. Conclusion

Memory theory does not offer facile solutions to the historiographical challenges of Jesus research. Its initial effect, in fact, should be methodological complication as it is brought into more specific engagement with existing research approaches where with some notable exceptions the category "memory" is remarkably absent. We have seen, however, that memory analysis puts the proper complexion on the core datum of research, the gospel traditions. They are artifacts of memory; they have circulated along memorializing pathways; and by finding their way into the written medium they have navigated the major crisis of memory. The gospels, we might say, are the deep pools of early Christian memory.

¹⁵⁵ Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, 29–30.

¹⁵⁶ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 274.