Ritual, Memory and Writing in Early Christianity[1]

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Abstract

The article examines ways in which the views of biblical scholars as to the transmission of early Christian traditions, especially the Jesus traditions, have been revolutionized by so-called orality/literacy studies since Werner Kelber's seminal *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (1983). In the 2000s, an important turn in the study of orality and literacy in early Christianity took place with the discovery of memory. This has given rise to a focus on theories of collective memory and more recently on the cognitive aspects of individual memory, producing fresh new insights into the close intertwining of orality and literacy in ancient literary activity. The last part of the article brings up the role of ritual in the transmission of early Christian traditions, an aspect that has received less attention in the discussion. For purposes of further analysis, three perspectives on the role of ritual in the study of orality and textuality in early Christianity are highlighted and elaborated. The first underscores the need for a fresh analysis of the numerous liturgical passages in the New Testament identified by the generation of form critics. The second focuses on oral-aural ('liturgical') aspects of early Christian literature as part of the larger phenomenon of Greco-Roman literary culture, in which literacy was defined by public performance and recitation to a degree that differs substantially from the modern use of printed books. The last perspective highlights the important question of ritual's capacity to function as an instrument of religious teaching and doctrinal consolidation.

Keywords: *orality and literacy, textuality, scribality, memory studies, collective memory, biological memory, cognitive theories, oral traditions, sociology of reading, liturgy, Gospels, doctrinal religions, imagistic religions*

A connection has often been proposed between histories of religion and the mode of the transmission of religious ideas. The German Egyptologist and cultural critic Jan Assmann, for example, distinguished between two types

of religion: cult religions and book-based ones. In the latter, the literary texts, in the form of a body of canonical writings, become 'the pivotal factor, and ritual is left with only a framing and accompanying function' (Assmann 2006, esp. 122). In cult religions, by contrast, the transmission of religious knowledge is based primarily on the principle of ritual repetition and the text – if a culture is literate – is embedded in the ritual and subordinated to it.

The relationship between ritual and writing in the history of the world's religious traditions and societies is a complex issue and cannot be discussed at full length here (see e.g. Goody 1986; 1987; 2000; Pyysiäinen 1999; 2004, 160–71; Whitehouse 2000; 2004; Yunis 2003). There is, however, no denying that, from its earliest beginnings Christianity was deeply engaged in the careful study and interpretation of the Jewish scriptures and also, almost immediately, in producing its own texts (Gamble 1995). Part of these texts eventually came to constitute a Christian canon, that is, a list of books that were acceptable for public reading (Gamble 1995, 215). Although we have relatively little evidence as to what specific role Christian books played in the religious life of early Christians during the first hundred years or so of the movement, it is clear enough that writing was an important medium by means of which Christian ideas were transmitted and consolidated among members of the movement. In the second century at the latest, according to the testimony of Justin Martyr, the public reading of 'the memoirs of the apostles' was a vital part of the weekly assembly, along with the reading of the 'writings of the prophets' and the celebration of the Eucharist (*Apol.* 1.67). As a religious movement relying heavily on literacy, Christianity differed from some other Greco-Roman cults, such as Mithraism, in which writing and sacred texts did not play a major role and the transmission of religious knowledge was based largely on ritual practices and iconography without emphasis on an authoritative body of sacred texts (Beck 2004; Martin 2005).[2]

The broad distinction between book-based and cult religions, however, leaves open some intriguing questions. Is there any way to specify the role played by writing and textuality/scribality in the emergence of early Christian religion? How is the transmission of religious knowledge through written texts related to the consolidation of religious traditions by means of ritual repetition and ritualized transmission in the history of early Christianity? Can we define the role of ritual in a more nuanced way than the simple

2   On the other hand we do have information about the use of sacred texts in some other Roman cults, for example, in the cult of Isis. For sacred texts and canonicity in Greece and Rome in general, see Hultgård 2004 and Potter 2004, respectively. See also Müller 1993 and, for Greek religion, Henrichs 2003.

dichotomy of book-based and cult religions allows? It is not likely that the function of ritual in the transmission of Christian traditions was merely one of 'framing and accompanying'. After all, mere scribal activities, without any kind of ritual transmission, would hardly have rendered possible the spread of Christian beliefs and teaching.

It is now generally recognized that the cultural environment in which the Christian movement spread was predominantly an oral one; whatever impact written texts had on the formation of what later became Christianity, the development must be understood against the background of an ancient oral-aural manuscript culture which differed significantly from the way in which printed books have been used in the modern Western world. Fortunately, orality-literacy studies, now expanded into what has been termed orality-scribality-memory studies, have produced a significant amount of new insights and comparative evidence which have facilitated unprecedented progress in understanding the media culture of the early Christian world. Here I first summarize what I see as the most significant achievements in the study of early Christian media culture since the publication, more than a quarter of a century ago, of Werner H. Kelber's seminal *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (1983). I then raise the issue of ritual transmission, i.e. the role of ritual in the transmission of early Christian traditions. My focus is especially on traditions about Jesus. This is natural, since much of the discussion of orality in early Christianity has centred on the gospel traditions. The application of ritual approaches to the study of early Christianity is still in its infancy (DeMaris 2008; Uro 2010), and any conclusions as to the relevance of ritual theorizing and ritual studies to understanding the transmission of the Jesus traditions are therefore of necessity tentative.

Orality and Literacy Studies: Early Phases

Kelber's groundbreaking work, published in 1983, still stands as a milestone of early Christian studies. It powerfully drew the attention of scholars to the problematic nature of some of the most cherished form-critical ideas (form criticism, popular in the first half of the twentieth century, focused on genres of biblical traditions and their oral transmission), such as 'original form', linear growth, and *ipsissima vox* (the authentic voice of Jesus, separated from the accretions of later tradition). Above all, it highlighted the relevance of orality/literacy studies to the study of Christian beginnings (the works that influenced Kelber most were Lord 1960; Havelock 1963; and Ong 1982). To be sure, Kelber was not the first to question the tenets of form criticism (see

Gerhardsson 1961; Güttgemanns 1970), but it was Kelber's cross-disciplinary move towards orality/literacy studies that won the day and opened up a new path for later studies in several branches of New Testament and early Christian studies.[3]

Kelber's early works reflected what sometimes has been called the Great Divide theory, a tendency to emphasize sharply the distinction between oral and literary forms of communication. Very soon, however, such views as to a deep chasm between oral (prophetic) hermeneutics and 'textual still life' – to use Kelber's own expressions (1983, 91) – were replaced with more nuanced views of the interplay between orality and literacy in the early Christian world; a world which, in spite of its wide exploitation of manuscripts and other literary technologies, had retained strong residual orality (e.g. Goody 1987; Graham 1987; Finnegan 1977; 1988; Andersen 1991; Henaut 1993; Kelber 1994; Horsley & Draper 1999). My own earlier studies on orality and textuality in the *Gospel of Thomas* belong to this phase of orality studies. Among other things, I highlighted the phenomenon of 'secondary orality' as one possible explanation for certain synoptic sayings and their parallels in *Thomas* (Uro 1993; 1998), and attempted to show how the author of *Thomas* used the rhetorical techniques of his day to elaborate Jesus' sayings (Uro 2003, 106–33; relying on Robbins 1993 and Asgeirsson 1998). It goes without saying that research into the use of literacy in Greco-Roman antiquity and the culture of reading (or what has been called the 'sociology of reading') are/should be an essential part of understanding the literary activities of the early Christians (e.g. Harris 1989; Beard *et al*. 1992; Bowman & Woolf 1994; Gamble 1995; Johnson 2000; Johnson & Parker 2009).

Some recent contributions to the discussion on orality and literacy in early Christianity, however, have emphasized the oral dimension of the transmission to a degree that seems to underplay or even question the literary composition of early collections of sayings, such as Q and *Thomas* (Dunn 2003; Horsley & Draper 1999; Horsley 2006). For example James Dunn's vigorous criticism of the literary 'default setting' or mindset that prevails in the scholarship on the gospel traditions, although to the point in many respects, seems to lead to the conclusion that much of the so-called Q traditions in Matthew and Luke is based on oral tradition rather than deriving from a literary source (Dunn 2003). Richard Horsley and Jonathan Draper appear to think that Q is an 'oral-derived text' – a document that was both composed (that is, transcribed from oral performances) and performed orally

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3 For a recent volume summarizing Kelber's contribution and significance in biblical studies, see Thatcher 2008.

(Horsley 1999, 6). Similarly, April DeConick has strongly argued that the *Gospel of Thomas* is 'an orally-derived text' (DeConick 2005), although she suggests that the orally performed speeches which lay behind the complete gospel were written down 'at critical moments, when the eyewitnesses were dying' (2005, 36).

Should we, then, be ready to reconsider certain time-honoured source-critical theories in biblical studies, such as the Two-Document Hypothesis (i.e. the hypothesis that Matthew and Luke used Mark and a lost Sayings Gospel, 'Q', as sources), not because they should be replaced by some other theory about the literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Goodacre 2002) but because recent findings in orality/literacy studies are pushing us in a quite different direction? I will argue below that this is not necessarily so. First, however, let us move on in our survey of recent studies on orality and literacy in early Christianity.

Memory and Cognition

An important turn in the study of orality and literacy in early Christianity was the discovery of memory. It is indeed surprising how long New Testament scholars wrote about and discussed oral Jesus traditions with no reference to memory as a social phenomenon, much less to memory as a cognitive process or how memory actually functions in human brains. Needless to say, the situation has now completely changed. In the 2000s, memory, in particular social or cultural memory, has become a popular theoretical framework for understanding how groups and societies construct and deal with the past.

Many of the recent contributors to the study of Jesus traditions rely on the theory of social or collective memory advanced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1980; 1992), a disciple of Émile Durkheim, who published his most important works in Strasbourg in the 1920s. Halbwachs' studies have lately received increasing attention among social scientists, cultural critics, and now also among biblical and early Christian scholars (see e.g. Connerton 1989; Castelli 2004; Assmann 2006; Kirk & Thatcher 2005; Horsley & Draper & Foley 2006; Duling 2006; Kelber & Byrskog 2009). The basic idea of Halbwachs' theory is very simple and easy to accept by those who have been influenced by various social theories and cultural studies. People do not create memories as isolated beings but as members of a society. Memory, therefore, depends heavily on the social environment. As Halbwachs says, 'the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the

basis of the present' (1992, 40). To put this as simply as possible: memory is a social construction. In some general sense, this claim is not radically different from the basic assumption of those earlier biblical scholars, form and redaction critics, who argued that traditions about Jesus were heavily shaped by the needs of early Christian communities. It is nevertheless obvious that ideas as to the social dynamic and situation of the early Christian communities advanced during the form- and redaction-critical era of gospel research were little informed by the social sciences.

I will not, however, delve into a comparison between social memory studies and form criticism, or into the philosophical issue raised by the strong constructionist claims of the social memory movement (see Kirk 2005; for a general philosophical analysis of constructionism, see Hacking 1999). Instead, I take notice of the relationship in Halbwachs' discussion between individual and collective memory. Although Halbwachs strongly emphasizes the social as a primary source or site of memory, he does not resort to a Durkheimian idea of a collective consciousness or a mystical group mind (Coser 1992, 22). Rather, he admits that 'while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is *individuals* as group members who remember' (Halbwachs 1980, 48; my emphasis). This means that whatever we may think about the role of present circumstances in the formation of memories and our ideas about the past, memories are not something located outside human individuals (cf. the popular idea of culture as a 'text' or 'discourse'); they are always stored and carried by human brains and transmitted from one individual brain to another or others.[4] This entails the conclusion that individual psychology and memory research cannot be excluded from the study of social and collective memory. To be able to understand how 'societies remember' (Connerton), we have to know something about how the human mind works and how our brains store – and, too often, distort – information (Schacter 1996; Tulving & Craik 2000; Baddeley & Aggleton & Conway 2002; Kandel 2006). Halbwachs himself was not too enthusiastic about explanations based on 'cerebral processes' (1992, 39), but now, after more than eighty years, we may be much better equipped to enrich our historical studies with psychological and cognitive theories about the mental processes we call memory.[5]

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4 It may be particularly problematical to speak of 'collective memory' in oral cultures (see Goody 2000, 43).

5 An important new volume (Boyer & Wertsch 2009) combines the most recent results of cognitive memory studies with studies in history and anthropology. Unfortunately I gained access to this book only at a very late stage of the writing process.

Some promising steps have indeed been taken toward combining on the one hand the findings of memory research and cognitive-psychological studies, on the other the existing knowledge about orality and literacy in the ancient world (Small 1997; Gavrilov 1997; Saenger 1997; Johnson 2000). Biblical scholars working on social memory theory have also been eager to integrate cognitive aspects of memory with their theorizing (e.g. Kirk 2009; 2010). A few have been bold enough to design their own memory experiments, in the hope that the results would enlighten the study of the Jesus traditions (McIver & Carroll 2002; DeConick 2008). The most comprehensive theory of early Christian literacy drawing on *both* socio-cultural studies *and* psychological research has in my opinion been advanced by István Czachesz in a recent article (Czachesz 2010b).

Czachesz gives first a helpful summary of the major findings of recent studies on reading and writing activities in antiquity. He points out, for example, the aesthetic and decorative nature of ancient books, and the omission of word spacing, i.e. *scriptio continua*, which was quite unsuitable for such literary activities as emending, editing, expanding, excerpting texts, or using multiple sources. Moreover, the scribes did not use writing desks on which several scrolls could be laid side by side (for the absence of desks in antiquity, see Metzger 1968; Gamble 1995, 90; Small 1997, 150–9). One could of course have a slave or assistant read one of the texts, but for a solitary reader the most likely solution was to rely on memory. In either case memory was an important factor, since listening to a recitation requires that one retains words in the short-term (working) memory until the whole phrase or longer stretch of text is read out. As a general rule, Czachesz argues, 'ancients tended to rely on their memory rather than opening and searching through scrolls' (2010b, 430–1; for a similar argument, see Small 1997, 185).

Czachesz then turns to memory research in search of more specific theories which could explain how memory worked in the context of ancient literary activities. As relevant theoretical frameworks for explaining ancient literacy, Czachesz refers to script theory and to the model of serial recall. Briefly, script theory, developed by Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson (1977), is a more advanced version of an idea proposed by Frederick Bartlett in his classic memory study (Bartlett 1932). Analyzing the results of his famous 'War of the Ghosts' experiment, Bartlett concluded that students used cultural 'schemata', i.e. pre-existing knowledge structures, to remember the story. When we receive new information, we always compare it with schemata we already possess to find something that is meaningful and familiar.

If the information does not fit any of the existing schemata we have more difficulties in remembering it, and the information is usually distorted or forgotten. Building on Bartlett's findings, Schank and Abelson developed the concept of the script, a predetermined, stereotypical sequence of actions that defines a familiar situation. A script can be activated whenever relevant information is available. The famous example by Schank and Abelson is the restaurant script (actor goes to restaurant, actor is seated, actor orders meal from waiter etc.). Any part of the script evokes the whole thing, and the narrator can rely on the audience's general knowledge of the restaurant scheme. Czachesz refers to several narrative scripts that can be identified in the early Christian literature, such as the martyrdom script, the gospel script, the healing script, and the divine call script. The form critics were apparently on the right track after all.

A theory of serial recall was advanced by the Duke psychologist David Rubin in his pioneering book on *Memory in Oral Traditions* (1995). Rubin deals with epic, ballads and counting-out rhymes, but his results are relevant to the study of early Christian traditions as well. Rubin notes that oral traditions, like all oral language, are sequential:

> Pieces from oral traditions are recalled serially, from beginning to end. What is recalled early in the piece can be used to cue later recall; the 'running start' provides 'extra stimulation' or 'reminders' increasing cue-item discriminability. (Rubin 1995, 175–6.)

One cue evokes one memorized item, which, in turn, provides a cue for another item, etc. According to Czachesz, Rubin's theory of serial call is complementary to the schema/script theory. In addition to cultural schemata or scripts, serial recall plays an important role in the retrieval of traditional materials but also in creating novel patterns and combinations. As Czachesz concludes, 'when reciting the narrative in oral performance, the actual story emerges from a delicate interplay of scripts, traditional vocabulary, and innovation' (2010b, 435; see also Pyysiäinen 2000). In a culture which is literate but which retains strong residual orality, such as the culture of the early Christians, the transmission of traditions in written format may carry some of these oral performance techniques. For early Christian authors, faithful transmission did not necessarily mean verbatim recall of fixed texts (Uro 2003, 101–2; cf. Pyysiäinen 2000).

Imagine Matthew sitting in his chair and writing his gospel. Remember that there were no desks on which the scrolls of Q and Mark could be laid

side by side (let's assume that they were scrolls not codices; the latter would complicate but probably not ruin my thesis). He could have an assistant read the texts of his source gospels while he was writing or he may have worked alone, but in either case he had probably been using and studying his sources for a period of time before the actual writing process. What is important is that he relied largely on memory, not on constantly opening and searching through scrolls. The script theory can explain why passages retrieved from Mark or Q and reproduced in Matthew's text often retain their general outline. Consult for example the parallel texts of Jesus' Inaugural Sermon and the Mission Speech in the Synoptic Gospels. We can infer that there was for instance a 'mission script' developed among the early tradents of Jesus traditions: Jesus sends his disciples to preach and heal, gives instructions about equipment and behaviour in houses and towns (Uro 1987). All four variations of the Mission in the Synoptic Gospels reveal this general pattern (Mark 6:6–13; Luke 9:2–6; 10:1–16; Matt. 10). The phenomenon of serial recall, in turn, is palpable in Matthew's treatment of the Q units, such as the Inaugural Sermon (Matt. 5–7/Q 6:20b–49) and the Mission Speech (Matt. 10). While retaining the general gist or pattern of the speeches, Matthew greatly elaborates them by adding a number of thematically relevant materials, memorized texts (from Mark and Q), earlier oral performances and innovative formulations (for a detailed demonstration of Matthew's composition of the Sermon on the Mount, see TABLE). The script/schema theory and the serial call technique analyzed by Rubin would explain Matthew's editorial process quite well. Working like a 'singer of tales' (Lord 1960), however, Matthew is not relying on oral traditions alone, but by and large on written texts which he uses by trying to recall what someone had read aloud or what he himself had read and memorized. There is thus no need to distinguish between the use of a written source, with a high degree of verbal agreement between parallel texts, and the oral retelling of a story, where verbal agreement is low (*pace* Dunn). The gospel versions are *always* oral retellings of a tradition, irrespective of whether a literary source is used or not. In ancient literary activity, orality and literacy were intertwined with each other in a way which is hard for us to imagine.

Ritual, Memory and Writing

While memory has become a central topic in the discussion of orality and scribality in early Christianity, studies on the transmission of the Jesus traditions have less often focused on the role of ritual. The form critics, of

course, made some suggestions as to the ritual settings of oral gospel tra-
ditions, referring for example to sermon, baptism, baptismal teaching and
the Eucharist (e.g. Dibelius 1933), but their discussion of the role of ritual
in transmission went little beyond such general hypotheses and guesses.
Theorists of social memory have recognized the power of commemorative
ceremonies in maintaining the identity of the group, which is recalled in
the group's 'master narrative' (Connerton 1989). 'If there is such a thing as
social memory', Connerton argues, 'we are likely to find it in commemora-
tive ceremonies' (1989, 71), but also in what Connerton calls 'bodily prac-
tices' (specific gestural postures expressing rank, gender, etiquette etc.)
(1989, 72–104). Georgia Masters Keightley has applied Connerton's insights
about social memory to the Pauline evidence and has explored the way in
which ritual functioned as a 'site of memory' in early Christian communi-
ties (Keightley 2005). Keightley argues that 'vivid memories of Jesus' (both
explicit and affective) 'came to be embedded in the commemorative rituals
of baptism and eucharist', and 'memories of some of the significant things
Jesus said and did were dramatically brought into consciousness' (Keightley
2005, 146). This is undoubtedly true, although we have notoriously little
evidence as to what kind of memories of Jesus actually were cherished in
Paul's communities, except perhaps for the tradition of the last meal (1 Cor.
11:23–25). The question of the relationship between ritual, writing and the
early Jesus traditions, however, is even greater than the commemorative
aspect of ritual practices. In the following, I elaborate three perspectives or
approaches, which I think are relevant for further discussion and analysis
of ritual and writing in Early Christianity.

The first approach is to try to identify liturgical passages in early Christian
texts. The New Testament and other early Christian writings contain several
passages that have been identified by scholars as baptismal formulas, creeds,
doxologies, and hymns (e.g. Matt. 28:19; John 1:1–4, 8–14, 16–18; Acts 2:38;
8:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–5; Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; Eph. 1:3–14; 5:14; 1 Tim. 3:16;
Heb. 5:7–10; 2 Pet. 2:22–24). The most frequently discussed passages in the
gospels are the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:7–15/ Luke 11:1–4; Did. 8:2) and the
words of the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14: 22–25; Luke 22:17–20; 1
Cor. 11:23–26). In assessing such texts, it is important to remember that there
is a two-way traffic between the traditions about Jesus and ritual practices.
Although memories of Jesus were certainly kept alive, consolidated and
elaborated in ritual settings, as Keightley argues, it is equally clear that the
ritual life of early Christian communities had a vivid impact on stories and
traditions about Jesus. The Buddhist scholar John S. Strong makes a similar

point with regard to stories about the Buddha's life (Strong 2001). Strong demonstrates how stories were recited and re-enacted on ritual and festival occasions, and how certain events in the Buddha's life directly correlated to particular ritual acts (cf. the story of Jesus' baptism in the gospel tradition). Ritual practices influenced sacred stories and vice versa. Sometimes a story may have arisen out of a ritual, while in most cases rituals facilitated the transmission of the sacred stories. The accounts of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul are a classic Christian example of interaction of some sort between story and ritual practices (for an introduction to the discussion see Bradshaw 2004). Scholars have long debated the question whether the tradition of the Last Supper should be understood as a 'cult legend', some kind of replica of or model for early Christian Eucharistic practices, or a reminiscence of an actual meal that Jesus had with his disciples before his death. It may be extremely difficult to trace the actual historical roots of the Eucharist or to reach any certainty as to the historicity of Jesus' last meal. A more fruitful avenue for investigating the relationship between ritual and Jesus traditions is to focus on Hellenistic meal practices as the general background of the social formation and ritual life of early Christians (Nielsen & Nielsen 1998; Smith 2003; Taussig 2009). We should not ignore the fact that the most natural social setting for the oral performance of the gospels was a shared meal (more specifically the symposium part of it) – for the simple reason that the meal was the most important form of social gathering among the early Christians (Smith 2003, 1–2; Taussig 2009, 21). It would be strange if this had left no traces in the stories themselves.

Secondly, in addition to the identification of some passages as liturgical, we should broaden our view and realize that in a certain sense most if not all of the earliest Christian literary works surviving today functioned early on as 'liturgical' texts, since they were read aloud in the gatherings of early Christians.[6] Although the once widespread view that silent reading was rare in antiquity has now turned out to be erroneous or exaggerated (Gavrilov 1997; Saenger 1997; Johnson 2000; Parker 2009), it is still arguable that in the context of early Christianity, in which many members of the local communities were illiterate or at least could not afford their own copies of Christian texts, the content of books was made known mainly by public performance. Many New Testament texts include references to the public reading of the texts (1 Tess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3). While Paul himself did not intend to write scriptures as he dictated his let-

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6   For a general argument for 'scriptural orality' in many religious traditions which revere sacred books, see Graham 1987.

ters, scholars usually consider that by the time Colossians (a post-Pauline work) was written Paul's letters had probably begun to acquire scriptural aspects and continued to be read aloud before Christian assemblies (Gamble 1995, 206). Moreover, the apocalyptic section of the earliest gospel (Mark 13: 1–37) has a cryptic aside, usually translated 'let the reader understand' (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω; Mark 13:14), which most likely does not refer to a solitary reader reading silently in private (Best 1989; Fowler 1991, 83–4; Yarbro Collins 2007, 596–8). A plausible explanation for this parenthetical comment is that it may have functioned as an exhortation to an *anagnostês/ lector*, who is called upon to internalize and enact the most dramatic events in Jesus' apocalyptic speech (Best 1989; Yarbro Collins 2007). Another possibility is that the 'reader' here refers to someone listening to someone else performing the gospel (Shiner 2003, 176–7). In any case, professional readers or lectors, primarily educated slaves and freedmen, were widely used in the Greco-Roman world, and it is natural to assume that early Christian reading practices somehow reflected the model of the larger society (for the role of the lector in the Greco-Roman world, see Shiell 2004, esp. 9–33).[7]

It is the oral aspect of early Christian texts that is so often lost for us when we work with our edited texts, synopses, written commentaries and computer programs. Voice, tone, intonation, gesture, mimicry, acclamation of the audience and other similar practices were all part of what the ancients understood to be the oral performance of a written text (Aldrete 1999). Even putting religious elements aside, 'reading' in antiquity is much closer to what we recognize as 'liturgy' than to our modern reading sensibilities.

My third and last perspective is the relevance of ritual theory to the study of the transmission of the Jesus traditions. Memory has become an issue in ritual studies since the British anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse introduced his theory of two modes of religiosity, the imagistic and the doctrinal (Whitehouse 2000; 2004). Elsewhere I have discussed this theory more extensively (Uro 2007). Whitehouse argues that all religious traditions of the world tend to gravitate toward two attractor positions: either toward large-scale organizations characterized by orthodoxy and unemotional ritual routine (the doctrinal mode) or toward small-scale communities, placing an emphasis on emotionally arousing, infrequently repeated rituals without any sanctioned interpretation of their meanings (the imagistic mode). Memory plays an important role in this theory, since Whitehouse sees rituals as a means of maintaining and transmitting religious traditions. More specifi-

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7 I thank Dan Nässelqvist for drawing my attention to Shiell's study.

cally, he suggests two ways in which religious traditions are encoded in people's memories: they are codified either in episodic memory (imagistic mode) or in semantic memory (doctrinal mode).

Whitehouse's theory has aroused lively debate, testing and criticism (see e.g. the articles in Whitehouse & Laidlaw 2004; Whitehouse & Martin 2004; Whitehouse & McCauley 2005). Suffice it to note here that it has by now become obvious that 'modes of religiosity' does not work as a grand theory, and that in view of recent memory research the distinction between the two modes of codification is overly simplistic (for the latter point see especially Czachesz 2010a). But a theory should not be assessed merely according to how well it passes testing. A theory may prove to be wrong and still productive of further work. And Whitehouse's two modes do capture something essential. His doctrinal mode directed scholarly attention to ritual's capacity to function as an instrument of religious teaching and of doctrinal consolidation; an aspect that has often been ignored by ritual scholars, who (following Durkheim) have focused on the collective 'effervescence' of rituals (cf. the imagistic mode). Both aspects oscillate in the history of early Christianity (Uro 2007, 133–4), although it may be possible to argue that Christianity in general became a religion characterized by ritual repetition and the forceful inculcation of beliefs with systematic teaching (e.g. in the form of baptismal teaching). Early Christian books are also part of this story, although Whitehouse is somewhat reluctant to couple literacy and the doctrinal mode of religiosity (2000, 172–80). Other scholars are more inclined to argue that literacy enables doctrinal religiosity (e.g. Boyer 2002; Goody 2000, 45; Pyysiäinen 2004, 161). As Goody (ibid.) rightly points out, 'there can be no true orthodoxy without a "fixed text"'.

The frequent repetition of religious rituals and the constant teaching of doctrines no longer relevant to the audience may lead to what Whitehouse calls a 'tedium effect'. This in turn may give rise to imagistic revival movements, which, however, regularly subsume doctrinal elements in their ritual life. The history of Christianity is replete with examples of such a process. But such examples also show that Whitehouse's modes of religiosity cannot work as a grand theory of ritual, which in any case should not be our aim (Kreinath & Snoek & Stausberg 2008, xxiii). Early Christianity, like many other religious traditions, was able to foster *both* intense religious episodes (e.g. nightly baptisms, mystical revelations, pilgrimages, experiences of healing) *and* more frequent and less emotionally intense rituals (pre-baptismal teaching, daily prayer, weekly service, annual festivals). What we find in the history of Christianity (and presumably in most other large-scale reli-

gious traditions) is a varied degree of interaction between these two kinds of ritual (cf. Whitehouse 2000, 125–46), not a gravitation toward one single type of religious behaviour.

Conclusion

Studies on orality, literacy and most recently on memory have offered new knowledge and fresh insights into the transmission of early Christian traditions and into the emergence of early Christianity in general. The ritual aspects of early Christian literacy and transmission have received less attention. In this article I have highlighted and discussed three perspectives on the role of ritual in the study of orality and textuality in early Christianity. The first perspective underscores the need for a fresh analysis of the numerous liturgical passages in the New Testament identified by the generation of form critics. How many of the hymns, baptismal formulas, creeds etc. would withstand a rigorous stylistic and rhetorically informed exegetical analysis?[8] How much do they add to our knowledge of the ritual life of early Christians? The second perspective focuses on oral-aural ('liturgical') aspects of early Christian literature as part of the larger phenomenon of Greco-Roman literary culture, in which literacy was defined in terms of public performance and recitation to a degree that differs substantially from the modern use of printed books. In addition, the phenomenon of 'scriptural orality' (Graham 1987) should be taken into account in the history of biblical texts.

The last perspective highlights the important question of ritual's capacity to function as an instrument of religious teaching and the doctrinal consolidation. Whitehouse's contribution is significant here, even though gravitation toward one of the two modes suggested by Whitehouse can hardly be substantiated by ethnographic and historical analyses. In the formation of early Christianity, literacy and ritual reinforced each other in the transmission of religious knowledge and were intertwined in various ways.

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8   For a recent stylistic analysis of one New Testament passage which has often been labelled hymnic, the Prologue of John (1:1–18), see Nässelqvist 2010. His analysis casts some doubt on the view that the author of the gospel had used a traditional Christological hymn.

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Appendix. Table: Comparing Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain.
Table illustrates how Matthew composed the Sermon on the Mount by retaining the basic structure of the Q Sermon (preserved approximately in Luke's Sermon on the Plain, Luke 6:20–49; see passages printed with larger font size) and inserting other sayings from Mark, Q and special material. The Q texts are cited by Lukan versification, prefaced by the symbol 'Q' (from the German word 'Quelle').

The Beatitudes	Matt. 5:3–12	Luke 6:20–23
		Luke 6:24–26 (Woes)
The Salt of the Earth	Matt. 5:13 (cf. Mark 9:49–50 and Luke 14:34–35)	
The Light of the World	Matt. 5:14–16 (Mark 4:21 and Luke 8:16)	
On the Law and the Prophets	Matt. 5:17–20 (Q 16:16–17)	
On Murder and Wrath	Matt. 5:21–26 (Q 12:57–59)	
On Divorce	Matt. 5:27–32 (Q 16:18)	
On Oaths	Matt. 5:33–37	
On Love of One's Enemies	Matt. 5:38–47	Luke 6:27–35
On Retaliation	Matt. 5:38–42	Luke 6:29-30
On Love of One's Enemies	Matt. 5:43–48	Luke 6:27–28, 32–16
On Judging	Matt. 5:48 (7:1–2)	Luke 6:36–38
		Luke (Q?) 6:39–40 (Blind Guides, Teachers, and Pupils)
On Almsgiving	Matt. 6:1–4	
On Praying	Matt. 6:5–6	
The Lord's Prayer	Matt. 6:7–15 (Q 11:1–4)	
On Fasting	Matt. 6:16–18	
On Treasures	Matt. 6:19–20 (Q 12:33–34)	
The Sound Eye	Matt. 6:22–23 (Q 11:34–35)	
On Serving Two Masters	Matt. 6:24 (Q 16:13)	
On Anxiety	Matt. 6:25-34 (Q 12:22–32)	
On Hypocrisy	Matt. 7:3–5	Luke 6:41–42
On Profaning the Holy	Matt. 7:6	
God's Answering of Prayer	Matt. 7:7–11 (Q 11:9–13)	
The Golden Rule	Matt. 7:12 (Luke 6:31)	
The Two Ways	Matt. 7:13–15 (Q 13:23–24)	
By Their Fruits…	Matt. 7:15–20 (12:33–35)	Luke 6:43–45
The Parable of the Builders	Matt. 7:21–27	Luke 6:46–49
The Effect of the Sermon	Matt. 7:28–29	Luke 7:1