

CHAPTER 4**A MEANDER DOWN MEMORY LANE: J D G DUNN**

In a study as extensive as the one by Dunn, it is essential to ascertain that one's North Star is still visible in the firmament among the array of facts and the wealth of information offered by this author:

- Dunn spends time plotting the route he is about to take. He examines Christianity in an attempt to grasp the mission and message of Jesus and the scope of their influence. He likewise investigates scholarship on this subject to avoid the pitfalls and build upon the strengths of the past. We sit in on this examination to be able to evaluate later whether the road that leads to his conclusions is a legitimate one.
- He examines an extensive range of sources as all, according to him, shed light on how Jesus was remembered and what impact he had had on his followers. These sources offer glimpses into the earliest phases of the traditioning process and Dunn believes them to have retained a greater portion of stability and continuity within the Jesus tradition than has previously been believed, thanks to the pattern and technique of oral transmission. Among the sources examined is, for instance, the Gospel of Thomas, over which there is a hanging jury as to its origin, with some scholars opting for its knowledge of and dependence upon the synoptic Gospels as sources, and others believing it to be earlier than and independent of these Gospels. Do any of these sources show that Jesus was remembered as prophet?
- The sources lead to a summary of the background of Jesus' life and mission. Do we see here the germination of a prophetic awareness? Imbedded in this phase of Dunn's argumentation is the literacy/illiteracy debate. We briefly enter into the fray to answer questions such as whether, if Jesus had been illiterate and unable to read, for

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

instance, the words of the earlier prophets, it would detract from the likelihood that he had been a prophet himself?

- Geography takes up some of Dunn's time as he gleans whatever information he can from the topography of Jesus' mission. For example, he examines the validity of Horsley's statement that the Q-material with its prophetic overtones possibly originated in Galilee. Dunn further investigates Horsley's conviction that this point of origin attuned the Q audience to the possibility that Jesus in Q is denouncing the ruling house, scribes and Pharisees in a way particularly reminiscent of that of the prophets. Is the reader justified in detecting a thin line of provincial bureaucracy in Caesarea-Philippi and was this evocative of the turning point suggested to have hinged on Caesarea-Philippi in the mission of Jesus? These possibilities definitely seem worth investigating in the current study.
- In Dunn's examination of the gospel genre, which, according to him, attests to a lively interest among first Christians to know about Jesus, to preserve the memory of his mission and to learn from his example, useful information is offered as to the possibility that these memories include recollections of prophetic awareness and behaviour.
- As with Horsley, the oral traditioning process comes under the spotlight as an important contribution to the validity of the road leading to the conclusions of who Jesus was and what role he had assumed.
- Dunn subsequently examines the Kingdom of God theme in Jesus' mission, a theme pertinent to the prophetic message since time immemorial.
- Is Jesus' invitation to all and sundry to participate in open table-fellowship with him a flashback to the symbolism inherent in Old Testament prophecy?
- What does discipleship entail in the message delivered by Jesus and can any prophetic overtones be detected in these requirements?

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

- Among the roles such as messiah and sage which, according to Dunn, seem likely to be suitable for Jesus, does the role of prophecy feature at all, and if so, why?
- “Apocalyptic” and “eschatology” are two terms which are often mentioned in conjunction with the prophetic message. We join Dunn as he clarifies the distinction and overlap between these terms.
- Was the end of Jesus’ life reminiscent in any way of the end generally met by prophets?

4.1 Preparing for the journey:

Dunn, in his search for an authentic, original view of Jesus, makes use of an alternative route which enables him to appreciate a familiar view from an angle which allows the viewer greater scope and clarity. Meandering with him the mental image of the familiar portrait of Jesus gets stripped of many obscuring layers till eventually the fog clears and the person behind the portrait emerges into view, multi-dimensional and in full colour. One, and certainly not the least of the dimensions that come into view, is that of Jesus the Prophet.

In his work, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, he aims to give a comprehensive overview of Christianity as the most enduring and important influence to mould the character and culture of Europe, and indeed the West, over the last two millennia. In doing so he is engaging in the essential and continuing challenge of *attempting to gain a better understanding of the unique character and core elements of Christianity*, and in particular the beginnings of Christianity, all of which contributed towards making its beliefs and values so influential. At the basis of his work is his desire to understand the writings of the New Testament in their historical context, as well as an “...instinctive hermeneutical awareness that the part can be understood only in the light of the whole, just as the whole can be comprehended only through a close understanding of the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

parts” (Dunn 2003:xiii). All of these bode well for a sound methodology as the way by which to gain proximity to the truest picture of Jesus.

In his thoroughgoing scrutiny of the sources at hand as well as the history of research on his subject, Dunn lists some criteria which, for him, have been pinnacles to aim for as he waded his way through landscapes of material. He upholds that three recent developments in particular have to be taken into account when attempting an investigation such as this. Firstly, in terms of methodology, there is the crisis that post-modernism brought upon the historical-critical method of analysing sources and traditions. Secondly, there are the new insights gleaned by critically taking into account the light that social-scientific disciplines, sociology in particular, may cast on the New Testament texts and Christianity’s beginnings, and, thirdly, there is the discovery of new texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices which have “...undermined the older wisdom which had previously determined scholarly views on the emergence of Christianity in its distinctiveness from its Jewish matrix and within the religious melting-pot of the first- and second-century Mediterranean world” (Dunn 2003:3).

He considers three questions to be of paramount importance when researching the beginnings of Christianity, namely:

- Why did Jesus make such an impact on his disciples and why was he crucified?
- Why did the Jesus-movement not remain within first-century Judaism and why had it been unacceptable to the emerging rabbinic Judaism?
- Was the Christianity of the second century (a predominantly gentile religion) the same as that of the first century?

All three of these are, in his opinion, large-scale issues, the second and third having as a matter of course impacted back on the first, namely the

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

attempt to grasp the mission and message of Jesus and the scope of their influence (Dunn 2003:5). Moreover, the search for answers to all three questions may shed light upon the way in which Jesus and his mission were interpreted by his peers - both followers and opponents - as well as by those who carried his torch after his death. What mantle did they drape over his shoulders as they either followed in his footsteps and/or perpetuated his memory, or plotted against him?

Baur (1845:3) had already commented on the importance of the subject matter of the second question, which, in his opinion, cannot be over-emphasized. According to him, the way in which Christianity freed itself from the confinement of the national Judaism to realize itself historically and universally as separate and independent, "...and took its stand as a new enfranchised form of religious thought and life, essentially differing from all the national peculiarities of Judaism is the ultimate, most important point of the primitive history of Christianity." Dunn's critique of Baur's formulation of the issue (Dunn 2003:4) does not cloud the recognition he extends to him for setting the stage for "...attempts to clarify the history of primitive Christianity for the rest of the nineteenth century." The reappearance of the subject of the emergence of Christianity from Judaism in the second half of the twentieth century is considered by Dunn to be of vital importance for gleaning insight into the formative stages of Christianity as well as Judaism.

On the subject of the answer to the third question, Dunn examines the multitude of other influences upon Christianity as it Hellenizes upon emerging into the Greco-Roman world (the main focus of the *religionsgeschichtliche* school). The disparity between Paul and Jesus is mentioned with a reminder of Wrede's (1908:180) remark that Paul had been the second founder of Christianity, his influence having been stronger, but not better, than that of the founder. That this remark holds water is obvious from the obscurity to which the life, programme and words of Jesus have over the years become relegated, starting when Paul shunted the engine of the virgin faith onto the somewhat different track of a

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Christianity based more or less solely upon the post-Easter dogma of the crucified, risen and ascended Christ.

Walter Bauer's (1934) exposition leads up to the conclusion that in several of the major Mediterranean cities the earliest forms of Christianity may very well have been what subsequent "orthodoxy" would have regarded as "heresy". Dunn calls his work a breakthrough (Dunn 2003:5), adding in agreement that Christianity strikes one as much more of a "mixed bag" than had previously been imagined and wondering if there had ever been a "pure" form. He ponders the possibility that the pluralism detected by Bauer may have been present at the outset, when the very first audience had listened to Jesus preach.

Harnack (1904:203) described the influence of Hellenism as a feature of the second century and Dunn wonders if traces of this influence are already to be detected in the teaching of Jesus:

A history of earliest Christianity can no longer treat the mission and message of Jesus simply as prolegomenon, nor confine itself to the period and documents of the NT. Unless the major transitions, from Jesus to Paul, from the NT to the early Fathers ... are also appreciated, neither the significance of Jesus nor that of Paul, neither the Christianity of the NT writings nor that of the early Fathers can be adequately comprehended or fully grasped. In other words, what is envisaged... is the attempt... to give an integrated description and analysis, both historical and theological, both social and literary, of the first 120 or so years of Christianity (27-150 CE).

(Dunn 2003:5, 6)

4.2 Tripping the well-trodden road of Jesus-scholarship

4.2.1 As the crow flies

In this volume Dunn spans the first hundred and twenty years of Christianity (27 – 150 CE).

Regarding issues of fundamental perspective and method he asks what the starting point of such study should be. He proceeds to take the reader on a comprehensive tour of New Testament scholarship and concludes with what useful lessons may be gleaned from the insights of various scholars and movements. The following is an attempt to follow his train of thought on this as succinctly as possible:

- Reimarus and Harnack - There exists a gap between Jesus and his followers, especially Paul (in Dunn 2003:65);
- Harnack (*Die Christliche Welt*) – Theology can be defined historically, the simple gospel of Jesus historically rediscovered and applied “to the believer’s knowledge of Jesus: If the person of Jesus Christ stands at the centre of the gospel, how can the basis for a reliable and communal knowledge of this person be gained other than through critical historical study, if one is not to trade a dreamed-up Christ for the real one” (in Robinson 1959:45).
- Strauss - Miracle narratives should be taken seriously;
- Liberals and Neo-Liberals - Tradition should be checked against sources, so that the sources may be tracked;
- Schleiermacher - There is an important experiential rapport between interpreter and text;
- Liberals - The ethical outcome of beliefs should be taken seriously;
- Schweitzer - The danger in modernizing Jesus is that it contributes to a failure to recognize his otherness especially in terms of apocalyptic teaching ;

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

- Kähler (1964:74) - Faith has, from the very beginning, been important in shaping tradition, “Historical facts which first have to be established by science cannot as such become experiences of faith. Therefore Christian faith and a history of Jesus repel each other like oil and water.”
- Theissen, Horsley - The social context of Jesus and his movement is of the utmost importance;
- Willhelm Hermann (1971:72) - “Jesus himself and his power over the heart is the vital principal [sic] of our religion”, “The traditional record may appear doubtful; but the essential content of that record, namely, the inner life of Jesus, has the power to manifest itself to the conscience as an undeniable fact. That means everything” (Hermann1971:235-236).
- Koester, Crossan - It is important to search beyond that boundaries of the canon for sources of Jesus’ teaching;

Other critiques and comments upon the research process which he highlights and which, together with the former, profoundly influence his work, are:

- “...emphasis on the reality and power of religious experience, over against an understanding of faith primarily in terms of uniform dogma, is to be welcomed”;
- Lessing - Enlightenment - Religious truth differs from historical truth and the former does not depend upon the latter;
- Kähler (1964:72-73, 109-110) – Is faith then to depend on the findings of a few scholars? Are critical historians to become the new priests and pope of Christian faith? No! To tie faith to the historical accuracy of this or that detail, would wholly undermine faith. Faith looks only to the historic Christ, the biblical Christ, the “Christ who is preached.”

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

- Braaten – “The biblical Christ is the ‘invulnerable area’ from which faith can gain its certainty without relying on the heteronomous guarantees of external authorities” (in Dunn 2003:72).
- Barth – Although historical criticism has its rightful place, it also has its limitations – it can deal with the words of Paul, but it cannot get to the word of God within Paul’s words (in Robinson 1959:45).
- “In an outcome that reflects the influence of Hermann and Kähler, Bultmann was able to find secure refuge for faith in the moment of existential encounter with the word of proclamation, an area for faith invulnerable to the challenge and assets of historical criticism”;
- History and faith make uncomfortable bed-partners but history and hermeneutics are twins, the latter too little acknowledged third partner. But there is no progress unless inter-dependence of history and hermeneutics are recognized. “The foundation for the study of history is hermeneutics” - Gadamer (in Dunn 2003:99);
- An effective historical method and use of historical texts cannot be reduced to a single principle. We are faced with the unavoidable task of balancing and integrating different and at times competing emphasis (Dunn 2003:100);
- “For the incarnation, by definition, means the commitment of God to self-manifestation in Jesus at a particular time and place within human history, and thus places a tremendous weight of significance upon certain events in the years 28-30 of the common era” (Dunn 2003:101);
- The otherness of the past should be taken into account. If Jesus does not come to us as a “stranger and enigma” (Schweitzer – see chapter 1) we must know we have modernized him.
- Should we expect certainty in faith? Is faith an absolute? Faith deals in trust, not mathematical calculations. Faith is commitment, not just conviction. Faith can live more comfortably with the uncertainties of human testimony than Lessing or Troeltsch thought” (in Dunn 2003:104,105);

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

- “[A] faith perspective can be and has to be self-critical, but historical method which lacks empathy with the subject-matter is unlikely to enter far into the lived experience of the historical characters being studied (Dunn 2003:106)”;
- “The task of seeking to describe and evaluate data and reach some sort of judgment regarding the facts which is not nearly subjective may demand proper critical respect, not only viable, but, in case of Jesus, necessary. In particular, the model of historical study as a dialogue between present and past, between historian and history, is one which has always appealed to me, not least because it recognizes that history not only asks questions, but in genuine engagement with the subject-matter often finds him/herself put in question” (Dunn 2003:111). So the model of critical realism is mediated to us primarily through historical texts.²⁹
- The principle of respecting a text and allowing it as far as possible, using all the tools of historical criticism, to speak in its own terms, is still valid. Any less a goal for exegesis would be self-condemned.
- Plain meaning should be given priority and is gained by properly respecting the text and listening to it breaking through previous understandings and calling for their revision.

Armed with the benefit of insight gleaned from great scholars and scholarly movements of the past, he now proceeds to his own contribution.

²⁹ Bernard Lonergan (in Dunn 2003:110) wrote: “the criteria of objectivity are not just the criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging, and of believing. The reality known is not just looked at; it is given in experience, organized and extrapolated by understanding, posited by judgment and belief.” His work has been perpetuated by Ben Meyer (see Dunn 2003:110): The hallmark of critical realism is its insistence on the empirical (data), the intelligent (questioning and answering), the rational (the grasp of evidence as sufficient or insufficient, the personal act of commitment) as – all of them together – entering into true judgment.” Wright, on critical realism, suggests: “This is a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence ‘critical’).” DH Reinstorf ((2002:21) sums it up: “The critical realist conceives literature as the articulation of worldviews, or better still, the telling of stories that bring worldviews into articulation. In the process of reading, the reader enters into conversation with the text. Knowledge takes place within the larger framework of both the worldview that is articulated by the text and the worldview of the reader engaged in dialogue with the text. When pieces of this puzzle fall together for the reader, that is, when things start to fit within the framework of the readers (sic) own story or the stories they are accustomed to, there is knowledge.”

4.3 Road maps and starting lines

4.3.1 *Where to start and what sources to use*

There are a few other questions with which Dunn grapples before embarking on his own search for an authentic picture of Jesus. These include the questions of what should count as sources for the earliest phases of the Jesus-tradition; what conception of a traditioning process one should operate with; whether the implications of Jesus' particular setting in Galilee are being taken into account adequately and what is realistically attainable in such a study.

To enable him to achieve his research goals, he examines all available sources but especially the gospels (and primarily the synoptic gospels) to detect how Jesus was remembered in the impact he made on his followers. He pays special attention to the historical context of Jesus' mission and the suggestion that the pattern and technique of oral transmission ensured greater stability and continuity of the Jesus tradition than had previously been imagined. He furthermore investigates claims that there had been diverse and alternative forms of Christianity as early as those attested in the New Testament.

“The first task in any historical investigation is to ascertain what the *sources* are on which the historian can draw, and to ask how reliable these sources are. In this case our sources are almost entirely limited to those which evidence direct influence from Jesus at one remove or another” (Dunn 2003:140).

A starting point for all the quests always has to be the Jesus-tradition in the synoptic gospels, but in order to detect how Jesus was remembered in the impact he made on his followers, he examines not only the synoptic gospels but also all available sources, paying special attention to the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

historical context of Jesus' mission and referring to the current debate, archaeology and sociology.

4.3.2 External sources

The paucity of these sources notwithstanding, they are well known and on the whole uncontested in terms of veracity, lack of bias and general reliability.

Looking outside of traditions immediately influenced by Christianity, the first source to be examined would be Josephus the Jewish historian. Dunn considers the translations done by Meier in his work, *Marginal Jew*, of Josephus' references to Jesus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, to be superior to those of the Loeb editions and therefore uses these in his perusal of the external sources (see Dunn 2003:141).

Antiquities 18:63-64, as translated by Meier (1994 [1]:59, 60), reads as follows:

As it stands in the Greek text of *The Antiquities* (the so-called "Vulgate" text) the Testimonium reads thus:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who received the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.

Vermes (1987:1-10) points out that the two key phrases in these passages, namely "a wise man" and "a doer of startling deeds" are both characteristic of Josephus and thus unlikely to be Christian interpolation.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

In Antiquities 20: 200 a brief description of the execution of one James in 62 CE alludes back to the first passage by describing James as the “brother of Jesus who is called Messiah”.

The other external source, Tacitus, the Roman historian who wrote in the early second century, identifies the scapegoats used by Nero to take the blame for causing the great fire, as people known to the hoi polloi by the name of “Christians”, explaining further: “Their name comes from Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate” (Annals 15.44).

He also refers briefly to Suetonius and the Jewish rabbinic sources without attaching much importance to them as sources in this particular enterprise (See Dunn 2003:142).

One of the few contrary voices to be heard saying that Jesus never existed and that all talk about him has been an invention on a large scale, is GA Wells (1999) and Weaver talks about the very fine line of thought about the “unhistorical Jesus” (Weaver 1999:45-70).

4.3.3 The earliest references to Jesus

The earliest sources of Jesus as a person in history are the letters of Paul, beyond reasonable doubt the earliest Christian documents available. 1 Corinthians 15:3 teaches “...that Christ died...”. Dunn (2003:142, 143) estimates Paul’s conversion to have taken place approximately two years after the death of Jesus, the obvious conclusion from the catechism in this verse being that, in the early thirties Paul had been taught that a person called Jesus had died more or less two years before.

In his letter to the Galileans (Gl 1:18-20) Paul recollects his first visit to Jerusalem succeeding his conversion. If Dunn’s (2003:143) estimate of Paul’s conversion having taken place approximately two years after the crucifixion of Jesus is correct, then his visit to Jerusalem had to have taken

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

place no later than five years thereafter. He recounts meeting with James, the brother of the Lord, and later refers to “the brothers of the Lord” (1 Cor 9:5), both of which references are in accordance with that in *Antiquities* 20:200.

From this evidence Dunn justifiably concludes: “It is a work of some desperation which denies the obvious deduction from these references, that there was a man called Jesus whose brothers were well known in the 30s to 60s” (Dunn 2003:143). Paul Barnett emphasizes the value of the epistles of the New Testament, and especially the Pauline letters, in an assessment of Jesus as teacher on both pre- and post-Ester Christianity. He lists fifteen pieces of information which may be gleaned from the letters of Paul, such as his descent from Abraham, his direct descent from David, that he was “born of a woman” and lived in poverty and his institution of a meal of memorial before he was betrayed (see Barnett 1997:57-58). Dunn is in complete agreement with him on this score, warning the scholar against starting from the assumption that a great gulf separates the Jesus-tradition and the Pauline epistles. But he qualifies, in my opinion correctly so, that

[I]t is true, of course, that if we had nothing but Paul’s letters to depend on for our knowledge of Jesus’ Galilean and Judean mission we would know very little about him. Nevertheless, in letters not intended to provide biographical details, the number of allusions is probably enough to confirm both Paul’s knowledge of and interest in Jesus prior to his death and resurrection.

(Dunn 2003:143)

4.3.4 The Gospels

Dunn (2003:6) believes that “...the Gospel traditions provide a clear portrayal of the remembered Jesus since they still display with sufficient

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

clarity for present purposes the impact which Jesus made on his first followers.” A starting point for all quests always has to be the Jesus-tradition in the synoptic gospels. Although Dunn asserts that the Markan hypothesis still stands secure, he also, in an innovative way, considers the Gospel of John to be an important source to be taken seriously in research even though it cannot be valued as a source at the same level as the synoptic tradition which has provided us with a norm for distinguishing the earliest tradition. The value of the Gospel of John lies rather in the window it opens upon the way in which the Jesus-tradition was used as early as the first century considering that it both worked heavily upon and is well-rooted in the earlier Jesus-tradition. As a secondary source it supplements and corroborates the testimony of the Synoptic tradition.

Holtzmann had, as early as 1863, established the two-source hypothesis for German scholarship, although not referring to “Q” but to a “*Spruchsammlung*”.

In English-speaking scholarship, working independently from Holtzmann (nowhere is he listed in any of their indices), the Oxford scholars J C Hawkins (1898) and W Sanday (1911) were establishing theories in similar vein. Streeter (1924) was to build on their work in 1924 to deliver what became in English-speaking theological circles the normative work on this topic and currently theologians such as Fitzmyer and Styler “...have become classic restatements” (Dunn 2003:144).

4.3.4.1 The Gospel of Mark

In Dunn’s opinion the Holtzman-hypothesis still stands secure and he reminds the scholar of the remarkable fact that virtually all that is distinctive in Mark also appears in Matthew, leaving no clue as to who depended upon whom. Older theories had assumed Mark to have been an abbreviation of Matthew, but synoptic analyses have shown the coinciding episodes to be more lengthy on the whole than those of Mark and so put

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

paid to the older theory. Besides, as Dunn (2003:145) points out, why would an evangelist taking such care to paint a picture of Jesus as a teacher omit great quantities of the teaching material that occurs in Matthew, such as for instance the Sermon on the Mount and the kingdom parables? All of this leads to a conclusion of Markan priority and that Matthew had actually abbreviated Mark in order to accommodate all the other sayings material at his disposal in his gospel.

Dunn (2003:145,146) briefly enters into the debate on whether an *Ur-Markus* or earlier edition of Mark had existed and been sourced by the evangelists of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Koester (1990:284-286) as well as Theissen & Merz (1998:26) argue the case for different editions of Mark. Koester, speaking of the “Urmarkus”, writes: “External evidence for two different versions of Mark circulating at an early date can be derived from only the observance that Luke does not reproduce Mk 6:45 – Mk 8:26.” And Theissen and Merz write about the Gospel of Mark: “There are indications that the version which became canonical and is first attested by manuscripts from the third century is not the only form of the text that was in circulation.” These indications are, according to them, the instability of the text, that the Secret Gospel of Mark³⁰ had probably been longer, with more early material from tradition, as well as minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark in texts which they have taken over from Mark could indicate a common original which diverged from canonical Mark. The Markan “special material”, that is the Markan material which neither Mark nor Luke use without giving any reason for omitting it, may perhaps not have been included in the “original” Mark which they used.

Dunn’s (2003:145, 146) argumentation on the matter is twofold. Firstly he remarks on the persistent doubt as to whether the Gospel of Mark had in actual fact been the source used by the other two Synoptic Evangelists.

³⁰ “*The Secret Gospel of Mark*” refers to a version of the Gospel of Mark regarded by Clement of Alexandria to be a “more spiritual” elaboration of canonical Mark, further amplified by the Carpocratians, a second-century Gnostic sect. Inserted after Mark 10:34 and 10:46a respectively, is a longer account of the raising of a young man, presumably a variant of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, and a brief account of Jesus’ encounter with the mother and sister of said young man and with Salome. Crossan (1985:98-100) provides interesting and detailed information on this subject.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

This hesitance leads to the question of whether we should rather speak of an early Mark (*Ur-Markus*), or of different editions of Mark? The majority of scholars agree that the Matthean and Lukan source was as near to the canonical Mark as makes no difference.

Secondly Dunn (2003:146) touches on the issue of orality in what I consider to be valuable insight into the traditioning process, advising that the suggestion of different “editions” invites a word of caution. He readily concedes that, as textual criticism has made us all too aware, any act of copying will have introduced variants, both deliberate and unintended. Similarly he is open to the probability that documents were absorbed and redacted by others. But the extensive recension which Koester (in Dunn 2003:146) seems to imply in his examination of Mark, raises the concern in Dunn’s mind that the processes at work in the formation of the documents may be retrojections of the modern literary pattern of a book in several editions.

Should we not rather be attempting to adjust our thinking away from the literary mindset of the modern world and to re-envisage the situation in terms of oral tradition? The point then being that much of the traditioning process would include oral variations of the traditions used by Mark, as also oral memories of those who heard readings from Mark’s version of the Jesus tradition. More attention needs to be given to the possibility that Evangelists were able to select the version of tradition they used from more than one version, written or oral.

(Dunn 2003:146)

It is of considerable interest to note the words of Papias:

Regarding Mark, the writer of the Gospel,...: The Presbyter used to say this also: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter³¹ and

³¹ *Hermeneutes*.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)
 wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that he remembered³²of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, a follower of Peter. Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord’s sayings, so that Mark did not err in writing down some things just as he recollected them....”

(Eusebius [1953], H E 3.39.5)

This seems to fit in with texts such as 1 Peter 5:13 where Mark is referred to as Peter’s “son”, and Dialogue 106:3 where Justin refers to ‘Peter’s memoirs’ as containing a passage found exclusively in Mark 3:16-17 but he does not consider the evidence sufficient to substantiate hypotheses on the matter.

In conclusion he says that “...a very large consensus of contemporary scholarship” (Dunn 2003:146) dates Mark somewhere between 65-75 C E. He adds that Mark’s gospel is beyond reasonable doubt the oldest surviving written gospel, having solidified traditions about Jesus which had circulated in the generation prior to this date into a gospel form and dating from approximately forty years after the crucifixion.

4.3.4.2 Q

Of further importance as a source, of course, is Q, although all the uncertainties have to be borne in mind constantly. The close verbal similarities between Matthew and Luke point to literary dependence on a source already translated into Greek and are difficult to explain in any way other than the second conclusion of the two-source hypothesis. A “substantial majority” of scholars build upon this conclusion as a “persuasive working hypothesis” (Dunn 2003:147). These scholars include Kloppenborg (1987:51-64; 2000:72-80), whose work includes the

³² *hosa emnemoneusen, akribos agrapsen, ou mentoi taxei.*

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

“unavoidable conclusion that Q was written in Greek” (Dunn 2003:147) and D Catchpole (1993:1-59) “who argues overall persuasively that in sixteen shared pericopes Luke has preserved the original form” (Dunn 2003:147). Catchpole (1993:6) mentions “...the discovery in directly related Matthew/Luke traditions of a substantial number of examples of verbal variations in which Luke has preserved the original form” and writes: “The suggestion will be that all traditions in the sample provide evidence that Luke gives us access to an earlier version than that in Matthew...” (Catchpole 1993:7).

However, there are still a minority of scholars arguing against this conclusion and voting for either of these gospels relying on the other as source, the majority of these arguing for Matthew having been sourced by Luke. Flusser (1998:21-22, 221-250) is one of the few who considers Luke to be the oldest gospel and Hengel (2000:178, 206) is convinced that Matthew was dependent on (Mark and) Luke as source and can't contemplate the possibility of a sayings source. A revival of interest in Q has its origin largely in the strand of Bultmanian studies under the leadership of Gunther Bornkamm.

Dunn (see 2003:148) would have preferred to see the Matthean and Lukan common material labelled as “q” with “Q” reserved for the “hypothesized written source” to avoid confusion and he reminds his readers that Matthew used some parts of Q that Luke ignored and vice versa. Streeter (1924:183) argues that a substantial portion of the 200 verses in question were probably derived from some other (oral) source than Q, that some passages from Q were probably preserved by Matthew only or Luke only, that some of the common material may have been proverbs circulating independently, and (1924:229) that the author of Q “wrote to supplement, not to supersede, a living oral tradition.” In Q research he finds it difficult to see the forest for the trees: “In other words, the very definition of ‘Q’ (material common to Matthew and Luke) prevents us from seeing the true extent of the hypothesized source” (Dunn 2003:148).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

He questions two arguments on this topic, namely, a) that Q/q material displays a constant unity which implies a coherent compositional strategy, a statement that had been made earlier by Manson (1949:15-16) and has now been revived by Jacobson (1982:365-389) and b) that q, the material used by Matthew and Luke, makes use of most of Q. His concerns with these are that there are significant variations in wording in the corresponding texts and before jumping blithely from q to Q one has to bear in mind the possibility of editorial modification on the parts of Matthew and Luke.

Can immediate access to the historical Jesus be gained through Q? Dunn believes that an answer to this question hasn't been sought satisfactorily in the current revival of interest in this source.

Dunn addresses three issues that he labels "fallacies" and strongly argues against a fourth:

Remarking on Kloppenborg's hypothesis that behind the Q-document one may catch glimpses of a Q-community (indeed, Kloppenborg (2000:354-363) comments that, form-critically speaking, the tradition can hardly be anything other than community tradition), Dunn says that a question to consider would be whether this document originated in such a community as a deposit of its tradition or whether it was addressed to it, as well as whether it may be typified as merely a collection of community tradition or as a carefully constructed composition (Dunn 2003:150). What concerns Dunn is that this theory may assume that Q defines the community as being the only Jesus-tradition such a community possesses and that it belonged to only one community, bordering them in, defining them and distinguishing them from other communities, each with their own distinguishing documents. He calls this "*the 'one document per community' fallacy*" (Dunn 2003:150) and refutes it by pointing out the lack of evidence that this document was the sole document or traditional material of a community.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Dunn (2003:151) insists that the Dead Sea Scrolls should have illustrated that communities did not limit themselves to possessing and treasuring only one document or tradition genre. Similarly the life and identity of any community of Jesus' earliest followers was unlikely to depend solely on the written traditions it possessed, let alone on a single document. Therefore the absence of various themes such as purity issues and the Torah from Q should not necessarily be taken as evidence of the Q community's limited concerns, but may rather serve to indicate that Q does not represent the totality of the concerns of the Q people.

In a further point of interest Dunn (2003:150, 151) writes: "Where documents have different purposes, the lack of cross-reference between them tells us nothing as to whether both documents were known or unknown to the writers or recipients of each." Lindemann (2001:13-17) expressed an opinion that Q belongs to a *Gattung* different from that of Mark, a *Gattung* other than "Gospel".

The second fallacy regarding Q is that the absence of reference in this source to the Passion kerygma or narratives automatically equals a Q-community ignorant of Passion kerygma or stories and, within these communities, a christology at odds with that of the canonical gospels. Meadors (1995:316) considers it to be highly unlikely that Matthew and Luke would both amalgamate two christologically incompatible sources in their gospels. The core of his reasoning is indeed that Mark and Q are "utterly compatible" with each other. The argument is thus reduced to illuminating places in Q where it could have borrowed from Passion kerygma or narratives, but consistently failed to do so. Dunn, however, believes that Q does show an awareness of Jesus' death. Indeed it seems impossible to envision groups in Galilee who cherished the teaching of Jesus, but were either ignorant of or unconcerned with his execution. Considering evidence pertaining to second-century Jewish-Christian

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

groups, it seems as though this was not only probable, but in actual fact a reality that such groups, for example the Ebionites,³³ existed.

Another argument to refute these claims compares this issue to that of miracle references in Q and rests on Kloppenborg's argument that Q hints at a knowledge of more miracles than those it actually recorded. He argues: "...the appeal to wonder-working would be largely irrelevant to the formative stratum, since it is not concerned to defend a particular portrait of Jesus, but to promote an ethic based on the providential care and loving surveillance of God" (Kloppenborg 1996:330). Dunn questions this, saying:

One might simply observe that the limited purpose of a particular collection of Jesus' sayings should not be taken as indication that this purpose encompassed the full extent of the concerns and knowledge of Jesus tradition on the part of those who compiled or used the collection.

(Dunn 2003:151)

Dunn (2003:151) adds that Paul, for instance, uses several metaphors and that they are by no means all completely consistent with each other:

"[T]here are different ways of presenting and understanding Jesus' death in the NT writings; they are not mutually exclusive, nor do they testify to ignorance of others."

In the pattern of suffering-vindication that Dunn believes is to be found in evangelistic sermons in Acts, where once again no soteriological function is attached to Jesus' death, he finds similarities with the implications of his death in Q.

The third fallacy is that disciples formed communities that were isolated and disjunct from one another and that teachers apparently, after having taught a certain body of tradition for many years, suddenly found it

³³ The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian sect, their name being derived from the Hebrew *ebjoon* which means "poor". Epiphanius, Saint, Bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, writes about them in his *Panarion*, as translated and commented on by Koch, G A (1976).

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

necessary to write these teachings down, but for their own community exclusively. Dunn refutes this, saying that these claims are unsubstantiated. Evidence seems rather to point to ongoing communication between the communities and it is more than likely that tradition was written down for the exact purpose of sharing it with other communities.

Against the fourth issue he argues the most forcibly but without labelling it a fallacy. Kloppenborg (2000:146) builds on the foundation laid by Helmut Koester (1997:145) and James M. Robinson (1991) and has invested much work and research in constructing a theory of layers in Q. He starts from the assumption that Q must have been compiled of different strata and because "...of course one cannot assume that the compositional themes governing one section of Q were those of the final redactor," the opposite has to be true: "Hence it is necessary... to reconstruct one or more redactional stages." (Kloppenborg 1987:98). His working hypothesis is that Q is a carefully structured document. He discerns a Q1 which is an earlier wisdom layer, Q2; a secondary prophetic redactional layer and a tertiary level into which material such as the temptation narrative has been interpolated.

Dunn's criticism is that Kloppenborg's demarcation of Q1 as belonging to the sapiential genre confuses rather than clarifies (see Dunn 2003:153,154). Whereas Kloppenborg (1987: 31) says that sayings are appropriate to different genres, Dunn seems to believe that one should move away from the old form-critical concept of "pure" forms which forced its adherents to also create the concept of "mixed" forms for various synoptic pericopes, also that one can conceive of the wisdom genre "permitting" apocalyptic forms (Dunn 2003:153). However, Christopher Tuckett (1996:345-48, 353-354) points out that because the sayings seem to be of a wider range than would normally be understood under "wisdom", Kloppenborg, in defining these sayings as such gives such a width of definition to "wisdom" that it diminishes its usefulness as distinguishing category. At several points he considers texts labelled "sapiential" by Kloppenborg to be rather "unsapiential", and he concludes: "Although there

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

may be similarities between the structure and form of Q and that of other 'instructions' or other sayings collections, the actual *contents* of the specific instructions given seem to differ significantly and it is only at a high level of abstraction that Q can be called 'sapiential'" (Tuckett 1996:348). On the whole, attempts to identify and demarcate Q and its surmised layers into different genre-types are in the opinion of Dunn too fraught with uncertainty to be of any help (Dunn 2003:155).

He also finds Kloppenborg's theories on redaction contentious and questions the methodology which led to such conclusions. If the Gospel of Mark may be used as a parallel case study, determining redaction in this existing, written source has proven extremely difficult. How much more difficult, if not impossible, would it not then be in a hypothetical document to distinguish initial composition from redaction. Besides, how is it possible to argue simultaneously for two conflicting arguments, namely for coherence and unity in Q, and at the same time for inherent tensions that indicate disunity, as Streeter (1924:235-238) also points out. Although some redaction is plausible in Q, textual tensions are not necessarily indicators of redaction, for no texts are completely devoid of tension.

On the matter of Q1, Dunn detects an obscurity in Kloppenborg's (2000: 159, 197, 200, 208-209; pp 154-159) definition of Q1 as to whether it was also a document, though he assumes it. He similarly fails to indicate whether it ever functioned as a single document or stratum, merely indicating the possibility that a series of sayings-clusters might have been taken over and redacted for the formation of Q or Q2 (Kloppenborg 2000:144-146). Dunn (2003:156,157) remarks on the absence of any unifying motif or redactional theme in these clusters, finding no plausible reason for considering it to be a single document: The material in question is Q 6:20-23, 27-49; 9:57-62; 10:2-11, 16; 11:2-4, 9-13; 12:2-7,11-12; 12:22-31, 33-34; 13:24; 14:26, 27, 34, 35; 14:34, 35. Dunn (2003:157) writes:

It looks in fact more like the sort of teaching material which was no doubt rehearsed in the Q communities in their regular

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

gatherings, some individual items already grouped (different clusters) for convenience and as good pedagogical practice. If we follow this line of reasoning, then the rationale for two distinct compositional layers is undermined, and the related hypothesis that a single document (Q1) represented the sole concerns and interests of the Q people... makes even less sense. The evidence is fully satisfied by the alternative hypothesis of a single compositional act, when the Q author/editor pulled together these different clusters, adapted them (the redactional interpolations), and knitted them into the larger single collection Q (or Q2).

Tuckett (1996:70) comments on this aspect of Kloppenborg's work: "Kloppenborg makes a strong case for the existence of some secondary additions modifying earlier traditionsBut it is a big step to jump from earlier (possibly disparate) material to a unified collection of sapiential speeches in a Q1." And furthermore:

In conclusion, Kloppenborg's detailed stratification model may be not quite as securely founded as some have assumed. Certainly his model is perhaps the most detailed and well-argued one that is available in the present debate. However, I remain unpersuaded by certain aspects of it. If, as I have tried to argue, it is unnecessary to postulate a Q3 subsequent to Q2, and if the pre-Q2 material is perhaps rather more disparate, and the alleged "Q1" stratum not necessarily capable of being shown to have existed as a literary unity in its own right before Q2, then we may have a rather simpler model, viz. a Q-editor taking up and using (possibly a variety of) earlier materials.

(Tuckett 1996:73)

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper [1999:5]), comments that one would struggle to find in Q the criteria by which the two principal strata namely the sapiential and the prophetic and apocalyptic, have been determined. "...[F]or all its sophistication and generation of scholarly energy, this

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

hypothesis appears to be based primarily on modern theologically rooted scholarly assumptions and concepts” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:5).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper, 1999:67) writes on the subject of Kloppenborg’s elaborated hypothesis of Q strata, that they do not stand up to critical scrutiny. The common features that supposedly characterize the sayings clusters assigned to the different strata either fail to appear in the clusters or do not appear consistently across the various clusters. Horsley summarily announces that the hypothesized layers cannot in fact be differentiated according to the stated criteria of these features.

Dunn (2003:158) points out the snowball effect of the problem, saying that different layers represent different understandings of Jesus - “asymmetrical kerygmas” (Kloppenborg 1987:21-22), and different circles of discipleship, that tensions within Q become tensions between the redactional levels, between different *Sitze-im-Leben*, added to the tension between Q and the circles focusing on cross and resurrection. This is then used as proof that the earliest responses to Jesus were far more diverse than had previously been recognized, and that the historical Jesus was first remembered as a teacher of wisdom. “But, as Kloppenborg himself has pointed out, ‘tradition-history is not convertible with *literary* history’: tradition brought in at a redactional stage might be as old as or older than the tradition redacted” (Dunn 2003:158, referring to Kloppenborg 1987:244-245).

Overall, Dunn (2003:158) judges it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the leap from Matthew’s and Luke’s common material (‘q’) to ‘Q’, to a ‘Q community’ with markedly different stages in its development, and thence to a wisdom-teaching/non-apocalyptic Jesus, is too much lacking in visible means of support. In Dunn’s opinion the various attempts to build hypothesis upon presupposition upon hypothesis fails to inspire confidence in the outcome. He states categorically that he will use the Q hypothesis as a working hypothesis, but not assume a stratified Q (Q1, Q2, Q3).

Downing (1996:48) agrees with Dunn:

If then,...the Q community was as important in the oral formation of the collection as this oral social composition model suggests, the arbitrarily imposed “strata” of much recent discussion seem very implausible. Then if there were “wisdom” and “apocalyptic” and/or “deuteronomic” strands, they could anyway have lain happily intertwined from the start (as indicated, incidentally, by Paul in Romans), demanding no complex explanation in terms of successive radical revisions.

Dunn (2003:237) concludes that he wishes neither to deny the priority of Mark nor the existence of a Q document. However, in the case of ‘q’/Q’ material we are repeatedly confronted with traditions within different synoptic gospels which are clearly related (the same basic teaching), and which were evidently remembered and valued as teaching of Jesus. Moreover, in these cases the relation is not obviously literary with each version derived by editing some written predecessor. The relation much rather lends itself to being conceived as taking place at the oral level. That could imply, according to Dunn (2003:237) that “these traditions were known to the Evangelists not (or not only) in a written form, but in the living liturgy or communal celebration of the remembered Jesus.” Alternatively it could mean that they knew the tradition from Q, but regarded Q as a form of oral retelling (that is, they had heard Q material being read/performed), so that their own retelling still displayed the oral characteristics of the traditioning process.

4.3.4.3 The Gospels of Matthew and Luke

In research the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are often neglected as sources while Q and Mark steal the limelight as older and therefore superior sources. Dunn (2003:160), however, reminds us that these two Gospels are sources to be valued, not only for the light they cast on the two-source hypothesis, but also for their *Sondergut*. And it is indeed from their *Sondergut* that he concludes that there must have been a much richer

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

collection of Jesus-tradition than could have been used by any one evangelist and that the evangelists had been selective in their choice of material. The slight discrepancies between Matthew and Luke has, in some cases at the very least, to imply that common oral tradition with which they were familiar, was known to and used by both evangelists. As a matter of fact, he suspects and opens the mind of the reader to the possibility that there must have been a “fairly lively oral tradition” (Dunn 2003:172) of the sayings of Jesus which continued to be circulated alongside the canonical gospels. He further cautions against deeming material to be of lesser value as a reminder of Jesus because it occurs only once.

Would that we knew how wide was the ‘pool’ of Jesus tradition and how widely known. But we don’t. At least, however, we need to be conscious of the likely breadth and dispersal of the Jesus tradition and suspicious of the too simplistic rule of thumb that tradition only once attested is therefore necessarily of less value as a remembrance of Jesus.

(Dunn 2003:161)

This is directly contrapunctal with the working criterion of Crossan (1991: xxxi-xxxiii) to use material only if attested to more than once. Dunn thinks that his criterion would definitely subtract from the clarity of the picture presented of Jesus.

4.3.4.4 The Gospel of John

Years ago, Baur (1847:137-138) conceded that every gospel has its own *Tendenz*, but produces convincing argumentation for his conclusion that the Gospel of John had never been intended as “a strictly historical Gospel”. Inevitably the result of his argumentation was that scholars considered the Gospel of John to have been determined more by John’s own theological than by any historical concerns and therefore that the Synoptic gospels are superior to John as historical sources. “Like the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

miracles of Jesus, though not quite so decisively, the Fourth Gospel had been effectively knocked out of the quest” (Dunn 2003:41).

Wrede (1901) made the observation, which petrified all efforts to renew the quest for the “historical Jesus”, that neither Mark, nor for that matter any of the synoptic gospels, should be relied upon heavily as sources for objective history for the primary intention of their authors had been to write, not documents of history, but documents of faith. They were portrayals, not of Jesus the historical person, but of Jesus as seen through the eyes of his disciples. This means that the synoptics were just as theological as the Gospel of John. Wrede’s insights made the rift between John and the Synoptics, just as between theology and history, less jagged and pronounced, but this gospel mostly suffered from a serious lack of consideration and recognition as a source.

Dodd (1963:355-8), however, argues convincingly that both narrative and discourse material contain good, early tradition.

In particular, John’s account of the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry probably contains information which the Synoptics passed over; geographical details provided by John are best explained as remembered details; and many are persuaded by John’s assessment of the length of Jesus’ ministry (three Passovers), the indication of more frequent visits by Jesus to Jerusalem, and the chronology of the last week of Jesus’ life.

(Dunn 2003:166)

The dating of the Gospel of John according to general consensus is more or less 100 CE.³⁴

J A T Robinson’s (1976) is a lonely voice arguing for a dating of around 70 CE without winning much support.

³⁴ See Koester (1990:267), Schnelle (1998:476-477), Brown (1997:374-376).

Summarily Dunn considers the Gospel of John to be an important source, one to be taken seriously in research (even though it cannot as a source be valued on the same level as the synoptic tradition), which has provided us with a norm for distinguishing the earliest tradition. The value of the Gospel of John, according to him, lies in the window it opens upon the way in which the Jesus-tradition was used as early as the first century, considering the fact that the tradition is both heavily worked upon and well-rooted in the earlier Jesus-tradition. As a secondary source he values the contribution made by this gospel in supplementing and corroborating the testimony of the synoptic tradition.

4.3.4.5 The Gospel of Thomas

As commented by Dunn (2003:161), “[t]he amount of credibility invested in the *Gospel of Thomas* by Koester and the neo-Liberal questers makes the issue of *Thomas’s* value as a source for the teaching of Jesus particularly sensitive”. Initially publicised in 1959, this document cleft opinions regarding its origin in two, with some opting for a solution in which The Gospel of Thomas knew the synoptic gospels (and John) and sourced these, and others, for a knowledge and sourcing of a form of Jesus tradition earlier than the synoptics and independent of them.

Koester (1990:84-85) points out that a number of studies have shown that in many cases a saying or parable has been preserved in a more original form in the Gospel of Thomas than any of its canonical parallels, thereby ruling out the possibility of dependence on any of these gospels.

Contrarily, Meier’s (1991:128-30) opinion, after considering the possibilities, is as follows: “With all due hesitation, I incline to the view that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on the Synoptic tradition” (Meier 1991:130) and later: “In view of all this, I conclude that the more probable

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

hypothesis is that the Gospel of Thomas knew and used at least some of the canonical Gospels, notably Matthew and Luke” (Meier 1991:138,139).³⁵

Patterson (1993:110) has as central theme that Thomas is the product of a tradition history “basically independent of the synoptic tradition“ and reaches the conclusion that “Thomas is the offspring of an autonomous stream of early Christian tradition.” Dunn believes this statement to border on an oxymoron given the substantial overlap between the Gospel of Thomas and synoptic tradition (see Dunn 2003:162).

This area of research is fraught with hazard to the extent that Tuckett (1988:132-57) concludes that “the problem of the relationship between Th[omas] and the synoptics is probably ultimately insoluble”.

Dunn issues a twofold warning when seeking to solve this problem: Firstly he believes that the issue of the value of the Gospel of Thomas as a source, has become ensnared in the ongoing search for evidence of pre-Christian Gnosticism because of its obvious propensity towards Gnosticism. An early dating of the material would carry the implication that one of the earliest responses Jesus met with, had been Gnostic, and therefore that a Gnostic Christianity as old as or at least as deeply rooted in the Jesus tradition as the Christianity of the canonical gospels. However, Dunn believes that the older view should rather be upheld, namely that it would be more correct to define Gnosticism as a Christian heresy of the second century, and indeed that the overall perspective of the document bears the stamp of second-century Gnosis.

Secondly he labels as a fallacy the equation of “independent” with “more original”. Because “...the ancient Mediterranean world was a melting pot for many religious traditions and philosophies”, “...’independent’ may simply mean ‘independent of Christianity’ rather than ‘earlier than Christianity” (Dunn 2003:164) and Crossan (1985:35) likewise warns:

³⁵ Dunn (2003:162) believes Meier to be overconfident in this conclusion, although he is supported by scholars such as Feiger (1991), Meier (1999:464) and Charlesworth and Evans (1994:479-503).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

“...independent does not necessarily mean earlier.” He himself treads safe ground, remarking: “At the very least, then, *Thomas* provides evidence of the different forms or versions which particular sayings could and did take, and possibly from an early stage of the traditioning process” (Dunn 2003:162).

Neo-Liberals have pounced on the absence of apocalyptic sayings in *Thomas* as proof of an early dating, just as a supposed non-apocalyptic layer in Q would indicate a pre-apocalyptic Q1. Dunn believes that the propensity to date this document early, such as shown by scholars such as Crossan (1991:427-429) who confidently dates this gospel between 30-60CE and Patterson (1993:120) who estimates a dating of 70-80 CE, tells of a theory of tradition history which opts for literary strata/editions above or to the exclusion of oral retellings or performances (Dunn 2003:165).

He values the Gospel of *Thomas* for its attestation to the different forms assumed by the Jesus-tradition, his criterion always being to give precedence to the consensus of the synoptic tradition in the case of marked dissimilarity, for “...the likelihood will usually be that the synoptic tradition is closer to the earliest remembered sayings of Jesus than is the Gospel of *Thomas*” (Dunn 2003:165). While saying this, he accedes to the possibility that a particular saying from the gospel in question may have captured an earlier version of a saying than has the synoptic tradition or that an unparalleled saying from it is as early as the earliest synoptic tradition, but “...it will always be the undoubtedly early Synoptic tradition which provides the measure by which judgment is made on the point” (Dunn 2003:165). He motivates his choice of criterion by saying that it is preferable to base any portrayal of Jesus on clusters and themes within the Jesus-tradition rather than on individual sayings even though heeding the warning of C W Hedrick (1988:1-8) of “the tyranny of the synoptic Jesus.” To my mind this seems to be the logical thing to do, given the nature of oral traditioning and “performances” which had to lock memory and therefore would have refrained from the utterance of individual sayings.

4.3.4.6 Other Gospels

Although Dunn's judgment of the diminished value of the remaining gospels as cited by Crossan (1985) and Koester (1990) seems to be met with overall consensus, there still seems to be some points of argumentation worthy of mention:

Dunn's point of view on the Dialogue Gospel,³⁶ which he labels as clearly Gnostic, and even more so on the Apocryphon of James is that, similar to the Gospels of Thomas and John, they provide evidence of the different ways in which the sayings tradition developed. He qualifies, however:

But even more than in the case of *Thomas* it is doubtful whether the distinctive features of the *Dialogue Gospel* provide earlier or more original versions of Synoptic traditions. And much less than in the case of the Gospel of John does it provide evidence of rootedness in the earliest forms of the Jesus tradition.

(Dunn 2003:168)

And on the Apocryphon: "The document is clearly Gnostic in character and the parallels could very well be explained as echoes of tradition known from the canonical Gospels" (Dunn 2003:168, 169).

On the subject of the synoptic gospels' precedence of the Dialogue Gospels, Dunn (2003:168) sets out to prove that this Gospel had access to the finished version of Matthew and most probably also of Luke. He finds in this Gospel parallels to the Gospel of John, both in content and in the mirroring of the development of reflection on earlier tradition of the sayings of Jesus, but in an alternative way.

³⁶ The "*Dialogue Gospel*" is Gnostic in content and contains material known to us only through the Gospel of Thomas. It contains parallels to the Gospel of John in both content and the implication that it had contributes to developing reflection on the earlier tradition of the sayings of Jesus (Dunn 2003:168).

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Koester (1990:180), however, pleads the case of exactly the opposite scenario, namely that John betrays knowledge of this "...more traditional Gnostic dialogue, which the *Dialogue of the Savior* has preserved in its more original form", with John 14:2-12 apparently being a deliberate christological reinterpretation thereof. Dunn is convinced that the Dialogue Gospel, which had been sourced to create the Nag Hammadi Dialogue of the Saviour, already bears testimony to advanced development of reflection on earlier tradition to such an extent that the earlier form is visible only occasionally (Dunn 2003:168).

Likewise Koester's (1990:191-96, 200) so-called "Tendenz" is in evidence when he argues regarding the Apocryphon of James that it presupposes an earlier stage of the sayings tradition attested in both the synoptic tradition and the Gospel of John. He finds support for this theory from Cameron (1984), but not from Crossan (1991:432), who includes this source only in his fourth stratum since the earlier tradition cannot be abstracted as a unified first-century source.

The source known as "The Secret Gospel of Mark" seems to have sparked an equal amount of controversy. Clement of Alexandria (Crossan 1985:98-100) called it a "more spiritual" elaboration of the canonical Gospel of Mark, which in its turn had been further amplified by a second-century Gnostic sect called "The Carpocratians". Crossan (1991:328-332,411-416) and Koester (1990:295-303) both suggest that this source precedes the canonical Gospel of Mark. They argue the diversity of pre-canonical tradition using two extracts from this gospel which resemble Mark 10:34 and 10:46a as part of a store of pre-canonical gospel tradition. Crossan considers it likely that "...canonical Mark scattered the dismembered elements of those units throughout his gospel" (1985:108), but Dunn considers this to be highly unlikely, opting for the probability that this gospel is a composition "...drawing on remembered phrases from other stories in canonical Mark" being much more plausible (Dunn 2003:169).

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Koester (1990:295-303), having examined the parallels between this gospel and John 11, concludes that it is “impossible” that this gospel sourced John 11. Dunn says: “With such logic, the recognition of any allusion to earlier documents would be equally ‘impossible’” concluding and providing us with important insight into his view on the traditioning process: “The fallacy here, as elsewhere, is to assume that what is in view must be some kind of literary editing process, whereas many traditions even when already written down would still have been remembered orally” (Dunn 2003:169, 170).

He further mentions that the “Gospel of Peter” may “...bear witness to accounts of Jesus’ Passion which circulated orally apart from the canonical Gospels and on which both the canonical Gospels and Peter were able to draw, each to retell in his own way and with his own variation and elaboration” (Dunn 2003:170).

4.3.5 Where the sources led us

4.3.5.1 In silhouette

These sources have led us to reasonably firm ground for sketching an outline of the life and mission of Jesus. Dunn (2003:312) sketches this outline as follows: The gospels refer to Herod the Great (37-4 BCE), Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) and Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea (26-37 CE), and so provide a fairly accurate backdrop for locating Jesus and his mission. A date for his birth may be fixed at between 6 BCE and 4 BCE and for his crucifixion on the 14th of Nisan 30/33 CE with the former date being the one most favoured by research. His mission may have lasted for two or three years although the Gospel of John mentions three Passovers. One is forced to generalize about his upbringing and education in the lack of firm evidence. He hailed from Nazareth, a small, relatively poor village in lower Galilee, the son of a *tehton*, part of a large family of four brothers and some sisters, at a time of relative quiet. He and his family, though not poverty-stricken, must have been fairly familiar with the face of poverty. In

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

this regard Meier (1991:278-85) states that there is no evidence of poverty with regards to Jesus:

On this rough scale, Jesus the woodworker in Nazareth would have ranked somewhere at the lower end of the vague middle,....He was indeed in one sense poor,But Jesus was probably no poorer or less respectable than almost anyone else in Nazareth, or for that matter in most of Galilee. His was not the grinding, degrading poverty of the day laborer or the rural slave.

(Meier 1991:282)

Hengel (1989:17) says that Jesus as "...a building craftsman belonged to the middle-class", but Meier (1987:312) warns that this statement could be misleading. Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:179) says: "...[T]he Gospels give clear indications that Jesus and his followers were members of the underclass: peasant cultivators, laborers, and fishermen."

Surprisingly Buchanan (1984:240) speculates that he might have come from a wealthy family. Even more suprising is Chilton's theory that Jesus was never found once he was separated from his parents in Jerusalem, that he joined "the legions of poor who sought alms around the Temple and begged among the merchants in the Lower City..." (Chilton 2000:35), that he

probably considered seeking shelter from Miriam and Martha back in Bethany, but they would have insisted that he return to Nazareth. Breaking with the family brought dishonor, and those who left the community, by divorce or flight, brought shame on both themselves and those who harboured them. He was forced to take his chances on the street.

(Chilton 2000:35, 36)

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

All of these circumstances caused in Jesus feelings of anger, estrangement and resentment against his own people in Nazareth, so that when his turn came to be baptized by John, he could do so after repenting, just like all the other people. The water cleansed him and he was able to release the grudges he felt (Chilton 2000:48, 49).

On one point, namely that of honour, does Malina (1993:25-50) agree with him. By forsaking his clearly defined role in society, namely that of Nazarene carpenter to assume the new and ambiguous role of teacher and miracle-worker, Jesus was also giving up an assured position of honour, albeit modest, in order to become a person of great honour in the eyes of the believers, but great shame in the eyes of his opponents.

Meier argues in similar vein when he says that Jesus marginalized himself to a certain degree by abandoning his socially respectable livelihood and hometown, opting for a homeless, itinerant lifestyle to undertake a prophetic ministry. As a poor rural Galilean he would never have attended a scribal school or studied under any teacher of note, yet he marginalized himself by daring to challenge the teachings and practices of his day, proclaiming "...his own teachings with a sovereign authority whose basis was by no means clear to his opponents" (Meier 1991:8). No wonder then that he was meted out rejection, disbelief and shame in this honour/shame-driven society. His style of living and teaching offended many a Jew and marginalized him from within Palestinian Judaism to such an extent that, at the time of his death,

...he had managed to make himself appear obnoxious, dangerous, or suspicious to everyone from pious Pharisees through political high priests to an ever vigilant Pilate. One reason Jesus met a swift and brutal end is simple:

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

he alienated so many individuals and groups in Palestine that, when the final clash came in Jerusalem in AD 30, he had very few people, especially people of influence, on his side.

(Meier 1991:9)

4.3.5.2 Literate/illiterate?

At this point Dunn (2003:313,314) enters into the literacy/illiteracy debate for a brief spell, remarking on the strong presumption of widespread illiteracy among the lower social groupings in the Roman Empire. Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:125-127), after having asked what literacy would have entailed in ancient times, estimates that working with even the minimum of what constitutes literacy, the percentage of illiterates in the Roman Empire is almost certain to have been as high as ninety percent. He is aware that recent studies of Jesus and early Christianity acknowledge this fact, but “trust generalizations about high rates of Judean or diaspora Jewish literacy that preceded recent critical studies of literacy in antiquity” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:127). Josephus wrote that it was a duty, indeed a religious commandment, that within first-century Judaism children be taught to read and that rabbinic sources convincingly suggest strongly a strong interest in basic literacy so that even small communities had access to elementary schools. According to Horsley, however, what was meant by Josephus was:

...not that children were taught to read but that the teaching and learning of scripture / the laws were carried out by public oral recitation (at Sabbath assemblies), suggesting both that the general populace was illiterate and that communication of the most important matters was oral. Indeed, the concept of writing in these contexts is magical-religious: by hearing the sacred laws taught aloud, the latter would become “engraved on [the people’s] souls...and guarded in their memory”....The rabbinic sources cited for the ubiquity of schools not only are

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

late but also clearly refer to a limited segment of the Israelite population, mainly rabbinic circles themselves. Rabbinic texts that have previously been claimed as evidence for people *reading*...in fact refer to them *reciting* from memory, and with different abilities, certain psalms and prayers”

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:127)

Chilton (2000:12) applies the term “*mamzer*” to Jesus, and distinguishes between the meaning of this term and that of “bastard” or “mongrel”. For the term “*mamzer*” is a taunt used for a child born out of “prohibited sexual union, such as incest”: “An unmarried woman impregnated by a man outside her own community was in an invidious position, suspected of illicit intercourse” (Chilton 2000:13). Because Mary had been living in Nazareth and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ conception, it would have been virtually impossible for her to have proven that he was the father and Jesus’ suspect paternity would be exposed to all and sundry through the label of “*mamzer*” which he would have acquired at birth. The stigma attached to this label made the person carrying it an undesirable in the community and would later have excluded him from the privilege of speaking in “...the public congregations that regulated the social, political, and religious life of Israel (Dt 32:2)”. Chilton believes that Jesus “...belonged to the caste of the *mamzer* or ‘silenced one.’ From the beginning of his life Jesus negotiated the treacherous terrain between belonging to the people of God and ostracism in his own community” (2000:13). From this conviction it is only one step further to postulate his illiteracy as the very product of this ostracism (Chilton 2000:99).

Meier’s (1991:271-278) opinion regarding the literacy of Jesus differs from those of the above-mentioned scholars, although he admits that some of his arguments, such as reverence for the Torah and respect for literacy, do not prove that Jesus was among the Jews that could read and study the Scripture, they simply indicate a likelihood. “It is sobering to realize, though, how here, as so often in Jesus research, we reach our conclusions not by

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

direct, clearcut, indisputable texts, but rather by indirect arguments, inference, and converging lines of probability” (Meier 1991:278). There exists the danger, as he correctly points out, of making sweeping statements regarding the state of Jewish education at the turn of the era and producing a “homogenized” picture which would accommodate the majority of Jewish children (Meier 1991:271).

Another problem is that the source generally used to cast light on the state of Jewish education at the time of Jesus, the Mishna, dates from approximately two hundred years after the childhood of Jesus. Meier (1991:273) refers to the work of Shaye Cohen who has argued against the existence of “public schools” in the Jewish community of both Palestine and the Diaspora. Cohen points out that neither Philo nor Josephus makes any mention of a formal or institutionalised system of education for children at that time and that the rudimentary education received by Jewish children came to them in the form of instruction by the father in a craft, a familial “craftsman’s literacy” which would enable them to write up bills or sign agreements, but that “any sort of ‘higher education’ was the prerogative of the rich and leisured class” (Meier 1991:273).

But “counterinfluences that would have favored literacy” existed especially among pious Jews:

By the 1st century A.D., the Jewish people had created a unique body of sacred literature, at the heart of which stood the “five books of Moses,” the so-called Pentateuch....So central was this literature that it had generated literature about itself,While we must not think anachronistically of a closed canon of Scripture during Jesus’ lifetime, the Pentateuch, along with the continuation of its sagas in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, created the national consciousness of all religiously aware Jews, whatever their particular theological bent. In addition, the prophetic books both directed the ongoing interpretation of the Torah in new situations and held out to an oppressed nation the hope of future glory. For all the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

differences among the various groups of Jews, the narratives, laws, and prophecies of their sacred texts gave them a corporate memory and a common ethos.

(Meier 1991:274, 275)

Given the importance attached to these Scriptures, it is small wonder, says Meier, that religious Jews attached great importance to the ability to read and expound them. He reminds the reader that Ben Sira, in the second century BC had written in praise of the professional scribe and said that his sentiment held true in the first century CE. From there he takes an unmapped slipway to the conclusion that literacy held special importance for the Jewish community. He refers to the archaeological evidence produced by Riesner (in Meier 1991:275) for the existence of “a wide diffusion of literacy among Palestinian Jews in the first centuries B.C. and A.D.”³⁷

He admits that some groups, such as the intellectuals from the Jerusalem society, professional scribes and Pharisees, were in a better position financially as well as being desirous to spread reading literacy among their comrades and children which would enable them to read the Scriptures. By the same token peasants in the villages in the hills would not have had the luxury of time and resources on their hands to enable them to emulate the intellectuals and aristocracy. He also acknowledges that the existence of Aramaic Targums argues the case that numerous ordinary Jews did not understand Hebrew.

There are, however, several considerations which enable him to do away with generalisation and speculation and make “some reasonable extrapolations about the boyhood that produced such an adult” one of

³⁷ These include inscriptions on ordinary vessels and instruments such as pitchers and arrows, as well as exercises, at least one of which shows the hand of a beginner. Once again jumping to a rather precarious conclusion, Meier (1991:275) writes on the strength of this: “...plainly there were special factors in Jewish life that fostered respect for and pursuit of literacy, and archaeology provides at least some relics of this pursuit.”

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

which is that his religious formation within his family had been intense and profound and included being taught how to read biblical Hebrew (1991:276):

- He “became fiercely focused on the Jewish religion”.
- Almost all the gospels contain reports of him engaging in learned disputes with students of the Law over Scripture and halaka.
- He was given the title of rabbi with all the respect it entails.
- “[M]ore than one Gospel tradition presents him preaching or teaching in the synagogues (presumably after and on the scripture readings).”
- And most importantly, his teaching carried the indisputable stamp of the outlook and language of the sacred texts of Israel.

Meier sees in Joseph the mentor of his firstborn son upon whom he lavished special attention and to whom he passed on knowledge of his trade as well as the religious traditions and texts of Judaism. He admits that a great deal of this would have been done by word-of-mouth, but that Jesus’ skilful debate on interpretations of Scripture and halaka when confronted by Pharisees, scribes and Jerusalem authorities in temple and synagogue indicate a reading knowledge of the sacred texts, by Joseph or some learned Jew, with maybe education at the Nazareth synagogue added to that.³⁸ According to Riesner (in Meier 1991:277) the education or lack of it of a boy from the lower strata of Palestine would depend upon the piety of the father and the existence of a local synagogue.

Dunn (2003:312-315) also opts for Jesus having been literate on the grounds of his challenge: “Have you not read...?”³⁹ which is reasonably well attested and probably presupposes that Jesus himself could read. He mentions, however, the opposing view of Harris (in Dunn 2003:314) that Jesus asks Pharisees, chief priests and scribes this question and that they

³⁸ Meier says that Mark 6:1-6a acquires a new depth of meaning if one accepts that Jesus did indeed receive instruction in the Nazareth synagogue (see Meier 1991:227).

³⁹ Mark 2:25/Matthew 12:1-8/Luke 6:1-5; Mark 12:10/Matthew 21:42/Luke 20:17; Mark 12:26/Matthew 22:31/Luke 20:37; Matthew 12:5; 19:4; 21:16; Luke 10:26.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

could presumably read. The parable in Luke 16:6-7 assumes a probably basic but nonetheless widespread ability to write and Dunn believes the picture painted in Luke 4:16-17 to be quite a realistic portrayal. Given the degree of the Greek language into first-century Palestine, he views as probable that Jesus knew some Greek at the very least and may occasionally have spoken it.

A number of problems present themselves in this debate:

- One wonders at Meier's acceptance that Jesus' father was actively involved in his upbringing and that he would have enjoyed the privileged position of first-born son. Add the ominous silence in the gospel accounts regarding Joseph to what AG van Aarde (2001, but especially 115,116) has written about him and the picture painted by Meier of a doting father lavishing education and trade secrets upon a favourite first-born son disappears like mist before the sun. Even if there had been a consistent father figure, would he himself have received sufficient education to qualify him for teaching his sons? And if his father hadn't taught him, who would have been interested in teaching a "*mamzer*"?
- Horsley is correct in pointing out the importance of orality in education which is still not taken into account to any serious degree. If modern day Jewish children still has to learn by heart chunks of their tradition for their Bar Mitzvah, in keeping with generations of adherence to their traditions, how much more would first-century Jews expect memorisation from their children in a culture that had it down to a fine art (to the extent that they are described as "walking encyclopaediae"). We who have access to the written and printed word which opens up into meaning before our literate eyes, can have no idea of the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the oral process of traditioning and how for centuries it had kept traditioning alive.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

- We have learnt about the wide gap that existed between peasants in Galilean society and the elite in Jerusalem. Social studies show time and again a conservativeness in the religious and general value system of rural areas, little villages where traditional beliefs were held onto long after change had occurred in Jerusalem, for instance. Lucretia Yaghjian (in Craffert & Botha 2005:27) says that the terms “literacy” / “illiteracy” are in their application often “freighted with an ethnocentric twentieth-century stigma inappropriate to first-century Mediterranean readers.” What we understand under illiterate, may actually have been either oraliterate or auraliterate, ἀγραμματος not having been a desultory word, but a technical, socially descriptive term.

The reverse of the stigma attached to illiteracy today, may have been felt among peasants, for literacy in the sense in which we understand it was the privilege of the indolent elite. The traditional art of memorisation might have been upheld in villages over against the reading and scribal abilities of the learned, elite, modern uppercrust. In this case literacy would have carried the stigma as the usurper of ancient ways of education and traditioning, an art that had been handed down for centuries, from generation to generation, and the vehicle for safeguarding their sacred traditions, replacing it with new, modern ways which threatened to render the old art obsolete, much as computer literacy today is replacing the art of writing and the ability to spell, and the way it is frowned upon for this reason. Memorisation would have been upheld as the art that requires more skill and loyalty to tradition and especially in villages education is likely to have taken place in oral mode with reading and scribal literacy regarded as the inferior qualification. Meier (1991:277) admits:

The Judaism of Galilean peasants, while fiercely loyal to basics like the Mosaic Torah, circumcision, and the Jerusalem Temple, had a strong conservative streak

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)
 that would not be attracted to what they considered the novelties of the Pharisees, especially if the latter were viewed by the former as refined townspeople.

Craffert and Botha (2005:22, 23) propose:

...that literacy was of little concern to most Galileans (and most Judeans as well) in the first-century world. No doubt schooling was practised, and various teachers were active but first-century education, teachers and teaching served purposes relative to Jewish peasant communities to whom modern concerns were unknown and irrelevant. Consequently, when one comes across a reference to reading (or writing), appropriate, cultural-historical scenarios with which to conceptualise “literacy” in the world of Jesus is crucial.

- It is not really the question of whether Jesus was literate or not that matters, but what knowledge and skill the learning process, be it memorisation or literacy, had enriched Jesus with. And a learning process of memorisation puts knowledge, references and quotes at one’s disposal for use in an impromptu oral situation, such as reasoning with Pharisees and scribes, in a way that reading cannot.

4.3.6. Geography and biography

4.3.6.1 Galilee in general

Reconstructing an historical context from the sources available, Dunn emphasizes the need to appreciate the geographical context of Galilee and Judea in the first century of the common era:

Although the northwest quadrant of the lake seems to have been the hub of Jesus’ mission, the impression has remained that he travelled extensively

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

through Galilee. Gerd Theissen (1978:9), in viewing the texts from a sociological perspective, happens on a picture of wandering charismatics, homeless and itinerant, but Dunn warns against an exaggeration of the amount of itinerancy, given the proximity of both upper and lower Galilee to Capernaum. Arnal (in Dunn 2003:322) suggests: “Not itinerancy but short day trips to the villages and towns of the region”. This seems to be more plausible seeing that most of Upper and Lower Galilee were within two days journey from Capernaum and that, apart from Jesus enjoying village hospitality, “a number of women acted as a support team, following him (Mk 15:40-41) and providing for him from their own means” (Dunn 2003:322).⁴⁰

“...Jesus is remembered as a Galilean⁴¹, and no one disputes that most of his mission was centred in Galilee” (Dunn 2003:293). The question is, however, whether Galileans were part of Judaism and whether it is legitimate to call Jesus a Jew?

Being part of the northern kingdom of Israel, Galilee had been separated from Judea since the division of the Davidic kingdom after the death of Solomon in approximately 922 BCE. Under Assyrians rule the inhabitants had been exiled (2 Ki 17:6) and only in the internecine warfare of 152 BCE were they reincorporated with Judea. Fifty years later (104-103 BCE) saw the Hasmoneans under Aristobulus I take control of the region. According to Ant 13:318, the inhabitants were given the option of being circumcised and living in obedience to the laws of the Jews/Judaism or leaving the territory. Less than a hundred years later, at the death of Herod the Great, Herod's kingdom was divided and Galilee given to Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) while Judea soon came under direct imperial rule. Dunn (2003:293) poses the question of whether Jesus was brought up in a merely superficially “judaized” Galilee.

⁴⁰ The question springs to mind how the hosts extending hospitality and this female support-group viewed Jesus and his mission. In what capacity had his impact upon them been sufficient to evoke this amount of assistance?

⁴¹ Mark 1:9; Matthew 2:22, 21:11, 26:69, 27:55; Luke 2:39, 23:6; John 7:41,52.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Meier (1991:207-208) paints a picture of a Galilee in which Judaism had been forced to live alongside a strong pagan influence for centuries. Only after the victory of the Maccabees had a “vigorous Jewish presence” once again made itself felt in the “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Meier 1991:208). He writes about James, “the brother of the Lord” that he might have been associated with conservative Christian Jews intent on upholding circumcision and food laws (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 15:13-29) and that he hadn’t “suddenly become an urban Pharisee; he had rather remained very much a Galilean peasant” (Meier 1991:277).

Vermes (2003:10,11) paints a vivid picture of Galilee as background to Jesus, the Galilean Hasid who, as typical Galilean, made xenophobic statements, describing it as a rich agricultural region, especially in the lower-lying areas around the Lake of Gennesaret. The inhabitants of the region were courageous and resilient, but inherently militant, rebels and fighters who were regarded as dangerous and volatile enemies. In Jerusalem and Judean circles they were looked down upon as uncouth and ignorant, shunned from the Temple and so religiously ostracised. The conflict between Jesus the Galilean and the Pharisees was echoed in the nationalist explosiveness of the eschatological and politico-religious cauldron of the time so that the region always teetered on the brink of an eruption of some kind.

An unresolved issue between Richard Horsley and Sean Freyne is whether the Galileans were Jewish in their identity, with Freyne (1980:33-36,392-393; 2000:248) arguing that they had retained a firmly Jewish identity.

Freyne has done thorough research on Galilee, keeping abreast of current topical archaeological findings. His findings are that Galilee retained a definite Jewish identity throughout. He argues that both Judea and Galilee had been incorporated in the administrative region of Samaria under the Ptolomees and Seleucids and that Josephus (Ant 12:142) reports a decree of the Seleucid king Antiochus III that all members of the *Ioudaioi* shall be ruled in accordance with their ancestral laws. Therefore there would have

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

been no need for the “judaisation” of Galilee under the Hasmoneans. Furthermore, the area taken over by Aristobulus is called Iturea and Freyne has his doubts whether any of lower Galilee was included in that (1980:43-44). On the contrary “Galilean Judaism was now politically reunited with what had always been its cultural and religious center” and “the Jerusalem temple continued to exercise a powerful attraction for them” (Freyne 1980:392-3).

Horsley (1995:46-52), however, believes that Galilee had not been incorporated into a culturally unified common “Judaism” and that it is important to distinguish between Galilean peasants and imported aristocrats, who were first the “Judeans” as decreed by the Hasmoneans and later the Hellenized appointees of the Herods. He believes that the ancient Israelite traditions of the time of the northern kingdom was the only prevailing factor which lent continuity throughout these drawn-out periods of political upheaval and change. The theory of Horsley is that political-economic-religious subordination to the Hasmonean high priesthood in Jerusalem was required for a life in accordance with the laws of the Judeans just as (re-)circumcision signified entry in to their body-politic. This did not mean, however, that Galileans had thereby been “integrated into the Judean ethnos”.

Dunn (2003:294) says in critique on Freyne that “‘Judaism’ had at that point in time been less of an inclusive term than Freyne seemed to think.” He identifies the underlying problem in this argument as one of a difference in opinion regarding the translation of “Ioudaioi” as used by Josephus, with Freyne opting for “Jews” and Horsley for “Judeans”.

The argument has, however, been settled to Dunn’s satisfaction, by recent archaeological findings which correspond with the literary data and he finds much of value in the research of Jonathan Reed (2000:23-61) on the subject. Evidence found through study of the settlement patterns of Galilean sites points to two surprising conclusions: Firstly, the Assyrian campaigns of 733-732 BCE had been totally devastating, leaving a Galilee

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

almost completely abandoned in its wake. Following the Hasmonean conquest however, a sudden windfall of data in the nature of architecture, pottery and Hasmonean coins leads one to conclude that new settlements had rapidly been forming, a phenomenon which, in its turn, indicated economic and political ties between Galilee and Jerusalem. This contradicts persuasively Horsley's theory "...of a Hasmonean aristocracy imposing themselves over a continuing Israelite population and point clearly to a wave of Judean settlements spreading over a depopulated territory" (Dunn 2003:295).

Fascinating are what Reed (2000:39-43) calls the "four indicators of Jewish religious identity"; found exclusively in Galilee and the Golan, which do not occur outside of it;

- stone vessels, impervious to ritual impurity according to the Mishnah and indicating that ritual purity was a concern,
- Jewish ritual baths (miqwa'oth) which are plastered stepped pools,
- evidence of the observance of burial practices reflecting Jewish views on afterlife - "Placing ossuaries inside so-called kokhim or loculi, horizontally shafted underground family tombs, was a distinctly Jewish phenomenon at the end of the Second Temple period" (Reed 2000:47),
- as well as bone types with bones from pork noted by their absence, once again betraying adherence to Jewish dietary laws.

"In the light of such finds we can hardly do other than speak of the characteristically Jewish population of Galilee in the late Second Temple period" (Dunn 2003:295).

Questions as to the Hellenization of Galilee have had responses covering the full spectrum, the most radical of those being that of Walter Grundmann (1941:166-175): "Galilee was Gentile", "Jesus was no Jew". The main causes for disrupting the certainty pertaining to the Jewishness of Galilee and Jesus, are the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, re-established as

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

administrative centres by Herod Antipas in the lifetime of Jesus. Horsley (1995:214-5) has, however, pointed out that the historical evidence concerning lower Galilee shows that neither of these cities were anything like the Hellenistic cities of the Decapolis. Unlike independent Hellenistic poleis they had no territorial jurisdiction over surrounding districts and were not major Hellenistic cities, but minor provincial centres. Besides which the four strands of archaeological evidence noted above were excavated from Sepphoris just as clearly as from anywhere else in Galilee. “The conclusion that Sepphoris contained a predominantly Jewish and devout Jewish population is hard to avoid” (Dunn 2003:300).

And Meyers (1992:325) writes that the discoveries made during archaeological excavations “...point to a Torah-true population, judging by the number of ritual baths (*miqva’ot*) in houses and by the strict practice of burial outside the city precincts.”

Dunn (2003:296) lists attestations which prove the regard felt in Galilee for the Jerusalem Temple and as proof that it was matched by their regard for the Torah, he reminds his readers of Jesus’ knowledge and use of the Torah, which implied that Galileans were schooled in matters of the Torah. “Some of the issues confronting Jesus were matters of Torah and Torah interpretation (including Sabbath, purity laws, Temple offerings, and fasting) and imply a similar breadth of concern for the law” (Dunn 2003:296). On the grounds of this evidence and more he concludes (2003:296): “The pillars of Temple, monotheism, and Torah (the second of the ten commandments) were evidently as deeply embedded in Galilean as in Judean soil.”

The scholar should therefore have no reserve in calling Galileans, and in particular Jesus of Nazareth, “Jews”, even to the extent of understanding the implications to be that they practised “common Judaism”.

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:46-60) remarks on the ambivalent relationship between the Galileans and the temple-state, saying that,

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment of origin for this tension, the hundred years in which Galilee was under direct Jerusalem rule seems to be the obvious breeding ground. A careful consideration of ancient Galilean history, its social forms and its political-economic-religious relations reveals neither an overly parochial Jewish religion transcended by the Q people nor a Hellenized Gentile culture moving towards universalism, but a majority of villagers adhering to their Israelite heritage, their lives embedded in the traditional social forms of family and village community. The increased economic pressures under Antipas would have evoked deeper attachment to their traditional Israelite heritage among Galileans. Moreover:

Those who would interpret Q sayings as calling for voluntary poverty and abandonment of home and family must explain the absurdity of addressing such a call primarily to people who were already marginal and under increasing economic pressure – that is, already mired in poverty and struggling to keep their households and village communities from disintegrating any further. It is difficult, finally, to discern how the abstract individualism of the itinerant radicalism thesis fits in any way the circumstances of first-century CE Galilee.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:60)

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:101, 102) remarks on the diametrically opposed interests of the different classes:

In patterns of income, consumption, and residence, the high-priestly and Herodian elite were building ever more sumptuous mansions and palaces in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Tiberias in Roman-controlled Palestine, funded by the revenues they derived from the peasantry, while the Judean and Galilean villagers labored under multiple layers of economic dues, tithes, offerings, Herodian taxes, and Roman tribute.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

This chasm was widened by those of social religious status; concentric circles of priestly aristocracy, priests and Levites. These scribal guardians and cultivators set up the great scriptural tradition as interpreted by them as the great divide between them and the mass of Israelites on the far side of the chasm. The top layer of Jerusalemites would have ranked Galileans below Judeans and this, compounded with differences in language and education further widened the gap between the urban elite and the hoi polloi, or villagers in this instance. Biblical Hebrew was the language used by the scribal elite for the cultivation of the official tradition, Herodian administrations in Jerusalem, Sepphoris and Tiberias employed Greek, while most of the ordinary people spoke some dialect of Aramaic. “The scribal circles that cultivated the great tradition presided over education of subsequent generations precisely for purposes of continued cultivation of the tradition, whereas the popular tradition(s) would have been learned informally from household and community practices and interactions” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:101-102).

That there had been diversity in contemporary Judea and Galilee cannot be ignored, nor the fact that this diversity had as bedrock the fundamental political-economic divide between rulers and ruled.

If the scholar were to take into account the historical regional differences as well as the political-economic-religious structural divide between Jerusalem and Galilee, it would hardly surprise him/her that the majority of Israelites, including the Galilean tribes, had been in latent but sometimes overt rebellion against Jerusalem rule since King Solomon’s death, that there had been a general dissatisfaction with the high-priestly aristocracy and that “several passages and at least one clearly delineated discourse in Q are directed ostensibly against Jerusalem rulers or their scribal representatives.” Horsley (in Horsley and Draper 1999:277) believes Galilee to have been the point of origin for the Q material with its prophetic ambience and that one can be more attuned to the prophetic overtones of the denunciations against the ruling house, the scribes/lawyers and the Pharisees in Jerusalem, bearing all of this in mind. In this way he sees Q

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

13:34-35 as a condemnation of Jerusalem for the killing of the prophets and Q 11:49-51 of “this generation” for shedding their blood in the past and of the Pharisees for all they extorted from and the burdens they placed upon the people.

Similarly, Matthew takes Q 11:30, the reference to the “sign of Jonah” and builds upon it to construct an allegory referring to the death and resurrection of “the Son of Man”. The prophet Jonah had originally come from lower Galilee where local tradition locates his tomb, and popular tradition seems to attest to the heroic status this prophet enjoyed in Galilee especially where a village only a few miles from Nazareth is traditionally linked with his name.

Freyne (2000:243) puts the issue of the connection between messianic expectation and realisation and Galilee under the magnifying glass and, in doing so, touches on some very important aspects for this study which Dunn have overlooked. He says that almost all messianic material originated in groups which may be describes as scribal elite, such as the Essenes or the Pharisees who had amongst them a history of rivalry and dissidence in terms of the Hasmonean and Herodean ruling classes. Essene material shows the expectation of a teacher/prophet messiah which was never absorbed into the expectation of a royal messiah, just as the various sign and oracular prophets documented by Josephus appear to have enjoyed popular appeal and to have been a response to the social conditions of the time.

Freyne asks whether any indigenous characters may have had special resonance for Galileans in formulating their hopes for the future. After the Assyrian conquest, Isaiah 8:23 (echoed in Mt 4:13-16) delivers an oracle of salvation for the north, including “Galilee of the Gentiles (Megiddo)” (2000:254) and is linked, in its present context, with the Davidic promise of Isaiah 9:1-6 in which darkness and gloom will be replaced by light and rejoicing and slavery and war with justice and peace. The catalyst for this

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

will be the birth of the child named “Wondrous Counsellor”, “Mighty God”, and “Prince of Peace”.

“...Galilee can provide an alternative location for divine revelation. In a place that would have been deemed pagan from a Jerusalem perspective, judgement was passed on the Jerusalem priesthood. It also suggested that its patriarch, Levi, had received his commissioning there” (Freyne 2000:255). The prophets Elijah and Elisha operated within the northern kingdom (see Freyne 2000:256). He quotes Richard Horsley on the important implications he reads into this fact, namely that in the memory of Galilean Israelites, Yahweh’s victory over the prophets of Baal through his prophet Elijah, with king Ahab as mere witness of Yahweh’s victory and the people’s choice, projected “an ideal that could become a rallying symbol for more active resistance to oppressive rule” (2000:256). Freyne (2000:257), however, believes Elijah’s rapture into heaven and his anticipated return to be more prominent in Jewish imagination than his role as social agitator and reasons: “Subsequently, his role as restorer is embellished in various ways, and it is in this setting that his miraculous deeds are recalled and expected (Mk 15,33-36).”

Of all of this Freyne finds echoes in the gospels, with both John the Baptist and Jesus being identified with Elijah.⁴² In John’s gospel it is emphasized that Jesus’ messiahship may not be understood in nationalistic terms but rather that he be identified with Elijah or the coming prophet as well as in royal terms. In the spectrum of messianic repertoire, that of militant nationalist is rarely now ascribed to Jesus, the prevailing one being that of teacher/prophet, a prophet like Moses, sometimes combined with the returning Elijah. Freyne (2000:266) writes: “[I]n both Mark and John the figure of the prophet appears side by side with that of the messiah. Mark warns against false prophets as well as false messiahs and John suggests that because Jesus had been perceived as the prophet he might have been forcibly made king, thereby implying a link between the two roles”. He

⁴² See Mark 15:33-36, 6:15, 8:28, Mk 9:12; Matthew 11:14; Luke 4:23-25; John 1:21.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

adds: “[T]here were several aspects of the prophet’s career...which might be expected to resonate in a particular way in Galilee, not least his projected role as end-time restorer of all Israel” (Freyne 2000:257, 258).

The refurbishing in Antipas’ time of Sepphoris and Tiberias had disrupted Galilean social life through the introduction of a politically controlled economy into a situation of free land-owning peasants with the inevitable results being debt, penury and homelessness. “These are the conditions that best explain the particular thrust of Jesus’ teaching ministry – the blessings for the poor and the woes on the rich, the call for total trust in God’s provident care, the injunction to share with the needy and the refusal to endorse retaliation....In all of this we are hearing the voice of a prophet with a passion for justice” (Freyne 2000:267). Considering all the evidence, Freyne concludes it to be sufficient to cast Jesus in the role of end-time prophet whose concerns with justice for the oppressed struck a deep messianic chord.

It is highly probable that tension existed between the city of Sepphoris and the villages, Nazareth for example, the normal kind of friction that exists between “local bureaucrats and administrators on the one hand and the producers of agricultural and other material goods on the other” (Dunn 2003:301). “That such tension did indeed exist between Sepphoris and inter alia Nazareth is strongly suggested by the social situations reflected in many of Jesus’ parables – wealthy estate owners, resentment against absentee landlords, exploitative stewards of estates, family feuds over inheritance, debt, day labourers (forced to sell off family patrimony because of debt?), and so on” (Dunn 2003:302).⁴³

⁴³ See also Freyne (2000:195-196, 205-206).

4.3.6.2 Sepphoris and Tiberias

Given the proximity of these two cities it seems strange that the Jesus tradition seems to maintain virtual silence on both of them. Dunn (2003:321) finds in this silence a parallel and shared motive, perhaps political, to the silence regarding Jesus' attitude towards Herod Antipas, rendering it deliberate and therefore an indication of deliberate avoidance by Jesus of these seats of Herodian power in Galilee.

4.3.6.3 Capernaum

A number of towns had significance in the ministry of Jesus, one of these being Capernaum. "That Jesus had made Capernaum the hub of his mission is also clearly indicated by the records" according to Dunn (2003:317), citing for example Matthew 4:13 - "*katokysen eis Kapharnaoum*", Matthew 9:1 - "*tyn idian polin*" and Mark 2:1 - "*en oiko*" and Mark 3:20 - "*eis oikon*" as well as the references that "he used to teach" in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mark 1:21/Luke 4:31. Crossan and Reed (2001:94-96) argue, in spite of passages such as these, that the mission of Jesus had been constantly itinerant and therefore that the covenantal kingdom he brought "...could not have a dominant place to which all must come, but only a moving center that went out alike to all." Although this certainly sounds in keeping with the big picture of Jesus' mission, the evidence in this case seems to be made subject to the theory and in my opinion Dunn (2003:317) is justified in labelling this argumentation "tendentious".

Interesting to note are also the vehement renunciations in Q of Capernaum (Mt 11:23/Lk 10:15), and of Chorazin and Bethsaida (Mt 11:21/Lk 10:13), the latter two being the towns closest in proximity to Capernaum, as well as the apparent relocation of Peter and Andrew from their home town Bethsaida (Jn 1:44) to settle in Capernaum (Mk 1:29).

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

This town had significance as the main fishing village in the area which supplied the surrounding area, but greater significance as the last village in Herod Antipas' territory on the road running northeast, across the Jordan and through Herod Philip's territory to Damascus, explaining its status as customs-post. Dunn (2003:319) understands the presence of the military officer and his staff in Matthew 8:9/Luke 7:8 to be an indication of Capernaum's strategic importance, and that "[t]oll-collector and royal officer require only a small revision of the picture emerging from the archaeological evidence to include a thin line of provincial bureaucracy." Reed (2000:165) speculates that Capernaum was conveniently close to the edge of Herod Antipas' territory as well as the lake, allowing Jesus to slip in and out of his territory when the need arose and this makes sense to Dunn (2003:319) who recalls vividly the "short shrift given to Jesus' mentor John the Baptist by Antipas (Mark 6.14-29 pars.)." However, any real answer as to why Jesus singled out this town eludes us.

4.3.6.4 Jerusalem

There is total consensus among the synoptics on the implication that Jesus, prior to the final week of his life and crucifixion, never visited Jerusalem. The Gospel of John paints an altogether different topographical picture of Jesus' mission, when he narrates the cleansing of the Temple (Jn 2:13-22) and activities of Jesus in the south in a period of apparent overlap with the mission of John the Baptist (Jn 3:22-26). Although Dunn (2003:323) concedes that some of this may readily be discounted, there are considerations which may suggest that the fourth evangelist might have drawn upon sound tradition, such as;

- that the missions of John and Jesus may, in all probability, have overlapped,
- that a mission aimed at the restoration of Israel would hardly have omitted the people of Judea and Jerusalem,

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

- that the synoptics report followers from Jerusalem and Judea and that John 11:1 specifies the “*komyn*” of Luke 10:38-41 where Mary and Martha resided, to be Bethany,
- that the arrangements for the entry into Jerusalem suggest secret disciples there.

He does not make an effort to motivate these considerations as the synoptic tradition seemingly attaches little value to the chronology or the geography of Jesus’ mission and he himself, following their example, bases no arguments on either.

4.3.6.5 Caesarea-Philippi

From topical information or the lack thereof in the gospels, he deduces that the synoptics attached no great value to the citing of specific traditions at specific times. There are, however, a few exceptions, one of these being that there had been some kind of turning point in the area of Caesarea-Philippi around which the evangelists had structured their gospels. Dunn touches on the question of whether this turning point in Mark 8:27-9:50, which may have been the source for the accounts in the other two synoptic gospels, is data remembered or building blocks in the structure by which Mark wished to encase his message.

In the light of Kenneth Bailey’s observation on Middle Eastern tradition, the scholar learns that total flexibility in the traditioning process would be allowed in what is considered to be unimportant detail. Topographical detail, considered by Dunn to be of lesser importance in the Synoptics Gospels, would therefore qualify as material trivial enough to be subjected to total flexibility in the transmission.

But Caesarea-Philippi seems to have been anything but unimportant, indeed, it apparently played a pivotal role in the Gospel of Mark, and Dunn (2003:644) accedes that, in Mark’s plot, there is a definite “before-and-

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

after-Caesarea-Philippi” structure to be found. Wrede (1971) with his reference to the Markan secret (Mk 8:30) has influenced many and the episode in question has subsequently been regarded as the product of early Christian, and more specifically Markan, theology. Bultmann (1963:258, 259) sees this narrative as an Easter story, carried back into the ministry of Jesus, perhaps for the first time in Mark.

Dunn finds several indications that Mark had been able to draw upon well-rooted memory and explains the variations among the synoptic accounts to be the result of performance flexibility. Firstly Mark’s gospel recounts the locality of the confession and states that it happened “on the way”, both rare features. Secondly, John’s gospel (Jn 6:69) recalls a similar turning point in Galilee which drew a confession from Peter, and in the absence of literary interdependence, these two accounts probably attest to different versions of a memory of such an event transmitted in different streams of oral performances. Thirdly the question as to the messiahship of Jesus was sure to have arisen at the end and posed by his close disciples who had, after all, sacrificed their lives and families to follow Jesus.

After considering the sources of importance and the history of research on this subject, Dunn (2003:330) asks how the researcher participating in the quest should proceed. His critiques are that Liberal questers have been approaching the text with too many cultural and intellectual predispositions and that form criticism has isolated individual Jesus-sayings in their focus for field of study.

4.4 The birth and application of the sources

4.4.1 The gospel-genre

Dunn (2003:184) disagrees with Bultmann (1963:372) when he says that there is nothing of historical-biographical interest to be found in the gospels “...and that is why they have nothing to say about Jesus’ human

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

personality, his appearance and character, his origin, education and development....” He acknowledges, however, that what Bultmann meant was that the gospels aren’t the equivalent of modern biographies. A study of the gospel-genre will show that they are very similar in appearance to the ancient biographies where character was set, unchangeable, and the task of the biographer was to portray his subject by reporting his words and deeds – characteristic of all canonical gospels but not of non-canonical gospels. The aim of these biographies of antiquity was to “...provide examples for readers to emulate, to give information about their subject, to preserve his memory, and to defend and promote his reputation” (Dunn 2003:185). This likewise holds true for all the canonical gospels.

Of course, it remains true that the Gospels were never simply biographical; they were propaganda; they were kerygma. But then neither were ancient biographies wholly dispassionate and objective (any more than modern biographies). In other words, the overlap between Gospel and ancient biography remains substantial and significant.

(Dunn 2003:185)⁴⁴

Therefore, although the gospels fit into the category of ancient biography, they are so much more than mere biography and a great deal of historical interest contributed to the formulation, repeated performance and collection of the material in the synoptic gospels. Burrige (1995:80-81) makes a contribution towards the understanding of this genre by writing:

[B]iography is a type of writing which occurs naturally among groups of people who have formed around a certain charismatic teacher or leader, seeking to follow after him. If it was true of Socrates, Cato and St Francis that their followers sought to keep their memory alive by writing *bioi* and *vitae* of them, then *bios* literature is a sensible place to begin a search

⁴⁴ See also Aune (1987:28-58).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

for the genre of the gospels, written about Jesus by his followers.

He adds (Burridge 1995:80-81) that a major purpose and function of these *bioi* was to be found within a context of didactic or philosophical polemic and conflict and that:

Bios is a genre capable of flexibility, adaptation and growth, and we should avoid facile and simplistic definitions. Furthermore, bios nestles among neighbouring genres such as historiography, rhetoric, encomium, moral philosophy, polemic and the novel or story, with some examples tending towards overlap with one or more neighbouring borders and yet still remaining recognizably within the genre of bios.

Burridge agrees with Momigliano's comment that not all biography had been intended for great debate and quotes him (in Burridge 1995:150,151) as saying that the "...educated man of the Hellenistic world was curious about the lives of famous people. He wanted to know what a king or a poet or a philosopher was like and how he behaved in his off-duty moments."

So the Gospels attest to a lively interest among first Christians in knowing about Jesus, in preserving, promoting and defending the memory of his mission, and in learning from his example. This makes them very useful indeed as sources in the search for the clearest, most authentic picture of Jesus and of the way in which he was perceived.

4.4.2 The traditioning process

Of particular interest is Dunn's focus on the oral tradition of Jesus' mission and the suggestion that the pattern and technique of oral transmission ensured greater stability and continuity of the Jesus-tradition than had previously been imagined. He also investigates claims that there had been

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

diverse and alternative forms of Christianity as early as those attested to in the New Testament.

The passing on of tradition had from the first been part of church founding, as the reader of the New Testament is reminded on numerous occasions (1 Cor 11:2; 15:3; Phlp 4:9; Col 2:6-7; 1 Th 4:1; 2 Th 2:15, 3:6)⁴⁵ and as is seen from the prominent role played by teachers who appear to have been present in even the earliest Christian churches (Ac 13:1; Rm 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; Heb 5:12; Ja 3:1; Did 15:1-2). The tradition passed on by them could have included community tradition, teaching on how new converts should live, as well as teachings of Jesus according to which their lives should be conducted. Teachers were apparently even paid for services rendered. More importantly, in the absence of encyclopaediae and books for research, people became human reference libraries (cf Vansina 1985:37).

The relationship between Jesus and his disciples was that of teacher⁴⁶ and students reaping the benefit of the teaching.⁴⁷ Van Aarde believes that a

⁴⁵ Although Dunn makes no distinction between Pauline and deuterio-Pauline authorship at this point, critical science regards Colossians and 2 Thessalonians among the above-mentioned texts as deuterio-Pauline, which could then indicate later dates of origin. See in this regard Horrell (2000:113-122).

⁴⁶ See Dunn (2003:177) for Scriptural passages confirming this. In an interesting footnote he adds that Matthew and Luke seem mostly to have avoided the term “*didaskalos*”, presumably because they deemed it lacking in sufficient overtones of exaltation.

⁴⁷ There exists a line of thinking in scholarly research that assumptions such as these concerning the disciples and in particular the group of twelve, are too readily made and uncritical. Andries van Aarde (2004:711-738) states that the earliest Jesus group in Jerusalem had used the term “the Twelve” as an inclusive reference to themselves and all of Israel. This stemmed from their belief that they were the “apostles” and “prophets” of the “new Israel” and that by applying this term to themselves, they were symbolically referencing the twelve patriarchs of Israel. Meier (in Van Aarde 2004:732) points out that the Twelve had rapidly disappeared and were subsequently completely absent for the rest of the New Testament. By way of an explanation he offers that maybe, after the death of some of their number, or the possible mission of some to Diaspora Jews in the East or West, it hardly made sense to still refer to them in this way, or that some strong individual leaders came to the fore eclipsing the Twelve as a unit. Schmithals (in Van Aarde 2004:732, 733) had been the first to pose the idea that the Twelve had been a retrojection by the post-Easter group into the public ministry of Jesus. He links this to his understanding of Mark’s view namely that Jesus acted within a Greco-Roman environment, outside the boundaries of Judean exclusivity so that the transformation of their self-designation from “the Twelve” to “apostles” was intended to free the Jerusalem group from their exclusivist attitude. Van Aarde (2004:733) is in perfect agreement with him on this score, basing his conviction in this regard on the paucity of reference to the Twelve in the earliest Jesus traditions such as miracles, chreias, apothegms and

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

calling of disciples, more specifically “the Twelve” should not be too readily regarded as historically accurate. He believes the twelve to have been a post-Easter concept that came into being as a result of the traditions concerning the risen Jesus, and that the number twelve designates the “apocalyptic ‘true Israel’” (Van Aarde 2004:724).

However, a number of scholars, including Dunn believes this exact symbolism had been the motivation for Jesus the prophet to have chosen this number of followers to allude to the new Israel and that this deduction is supported by the fact that it is strongly confirmed by the only Q passage which speaks of the twelve (Dunn 2003:510). Moreover he believes the tradition concerning the twelve to be firmly rooted and widespread with enough variation to suggest oral transmission. Paul recalls the summary of the gospel he had been given at his conversion (2-3 years after the crucifixion) which contains a resurrection appearance to the twelve which was unlikely to have been established only as a result of these appearances. Variations in the lists of their names, as well as some obscurities, not only underline the orality of the material, but also indicated a less prominent role played by the members of the twelve in the earliest groups and churches, so that their identity as Jesus’ inner circle “became somewhat confused in corporate memory” (Dunn 2003:509).

As such the disciples would have been committed to remembering the teaching of the teacher. In Acts the role of the first disciples, or the apostles in particular, was that of witnesses (*martyres*) bearing testimony of especially the crucifixion and resurrection. Acts 1:22 and 10:37-39 show that witnessing was meant to start right at the very beginning from the baptism of John. Paul calls himself a “witness of Jesus” (Ac 22:15,18; 23:11; 26:16) and it is not only in Acts that witnessing is deemed an important part of being a follower of Jesus. The Gospel of John heavily emphasizes witnessing as well; John the Baptist was himself a model

controversy reports. “The primary evidence for this statement, from a tradition critical perspective, is that both Paul and Mark related their knowledge of the idea of ‘the Twelve’ to their receipt of the kerygmatic tradition (gospel about the salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus)” (Van Aarde 2004:733).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

witness (Jn 4:39; 12:17), the inner circle of disciples bear witness, helped by the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27) and they bear Spirit-assisted witness through the Gospel of John.

This theme permeates the Johannine epistles and is strengthened therein by two complimentary motifs, namely an *ap' arches* theme and a theme stressing the importance of continuity of “hearing” from the first disciples to converts, the latter retaining what they had heard and living accordingly. This motif is found not only in the Johannine epistles, but also in Hebrews 2:1,3 and later Pauline epistles. But more striking still is the motif of “remembering” which was of importance also for identity-forming. What is meant here by “remembering” is definitely much more than merely a cognitive act of recollection. It implies that more or less from the very first those who established new churches would take care to provide and build a foundation of Jesus-tradition. This must have been of particular importance for gentiles adopting a wholly new lifestyle and social identity as this would provide them with guidelines and models for the conduct now expected from them. A solid basis of Jesus-tradition was thus what they were expected to remember, that is to take in and live out.

This leads him to believe that we are presented in the gospels, not with last editions or the top of ever more impenetrable layers, but “...the living tradition of Christian celebration which takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus” (Dunn 2003:254).

Dunn (2003:180) speaks aptly of “apostolic custodians” who had already been regarded as the foundation of the church or the “new Jerusalem” in Ephesians 2:20 and Revelations 21:14. There is clear emphasis on this office in the early chapters of Acts, their role being to ensure a continuity between what Jesus had taught and the expanding mission of movement reinvigorated at Pentecost. The opening words of Acts (Acts 1:1) therefore imply continuity with all Jesus had begun to do and teach as recorded in part 1 of this work, namely the Gospel of Luke, and in Acts 1:2 it continues with instruction to the apostles. The first trademark a new apostle had to

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

acquire was therefore continuity with and firm adherence (*proskartereo*) to the teaching of the apostles. The earliest churches would have wanted to remember and refer to the Jesus-tradition which was passed on to them as foundational tradition by their founding apostle and in actual fact succeeded in doing so.

The oral character of the traditioning (transmission) process means that in and through the performative variations of the tradition still evident in the Synoptic tradition we are even now able to hear the stories first told about Jesus and his teachings which initially drew the tridents into discipleship and sustained the churches in the early years of their common life of discipleship. Therefore:

Where we find consistent features across the range of performed tradition...we may conclude that they derive from the most formative influence on tradition – that is, most likely, not from any one of the many performers of the tradition but from the creative impact of Jesus, as embodied in the tradition shared by and definitive for the communities which celebrated the tradition.

(Dunn 2003:329)

He adds that the rule in evaluating these slants should be to question whether they were consistent with the originating impulse. Dunn (2003:329) comments further on the unlikelihood of “jarring inconsistencies” having been introduced by or accepted from a prophet or teacher and believes that a synopsis of all this would serve to bring home the full impact that Jesus had on his followers.

Rudolf Bultmann (1962:1) had said: “The purpose of Form Criticism is to study the history of the oral tradition behind the gospels”, furthermore concerning the agreements between the gospels:

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

[M]ay not the agreements go back to some lost primitive gospel which the three synoptists used? Or if not to a complete gospel, at least to single fragments or written sketches of the works and words of Jesus? Or may not the oral tradition of the Christian church have arrived at a sufficiently fixed form so that the evangelists needed only to draw from this source?

(Bultmann 1962:12)

And, voicing an insight essential to Dunn's own understanding, "Whenever narratives pass from mouth to mouth the central point of the narrative and general structure are well preserved; but in the incidental details change takes place...". However, he obscured this insight, according to Dunn, by maintaining that certain "laws of style" found in studies of folklore and applied to the transmission of forms in the gospels, determined the course of this process of transmission. His assumption of a literary model which had the capacity to explain this transmission process led him to the concept of layers in the Jesus-tradition and raised his hopes of being able to strip down later Hellenistic layers in order to expose earlier Palestinian layers.

Voices have been raised in criticism but that of Sanders (1969:272) will suffice when he writes: "There are no hard and fast laws of the development of the Synoptic tradition. On all accounts the tradition developed in opposite directions. It became both longer and shorter, both more and less detailed, and both more and less Semitic..."

C F D Moule (1959:100-114) and his pupil Eugene Lemcio (1991:8-18,109-114) have contributed the insight that the Gospels distinguish between pre- and post-Easter perceptions of Jesus within the content of the related Jesus-tradition. So, even if it is self-evident that they retell the story within the context of a post-Easter perspective, this rarely intrudes or is interjected into the content thereof. And if this is indeed the case where the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

often retold and developed material constituting the synoptic gospels is concerned, to what larger extent would it not be true of the retelling in the case of the traditions which had been sourced by the evangelists.

Although Helmut Koester does not develop a model or study the dynamics of the whole traditioning process, he is quoted (in Dunn 2003:196) as contributing that Jesus-tradition existed in “oral streams” (free tradition) well into the second century. Harald Riesenfeld (1970:16, 24, 26) brought to the attention that the technical terms used for the transmission of the rabbinic tradition, underlie the Greek terms used in the New Testament for the same process (*paralambein* and *paradidonaí*) and deduces from this that, similar to the rabbinic traditioning process, the early Christian one was “a rigidly controlled” transmission of the words and deeds of Jesus memorized as holy word. He was of the opinion that the idea of a community-shaped tradition derived directly from Jesus and had been transmitted by authorized teachers in a far more rigid and fixed form. His student, Birger Gerhardsson (1961:130-36), who made a minute study of rabbinic tradition and transmission, as well as several techniques of oral transmission, found that the operative word in all of this was “memorization” and that this was achieved via repetition. The memorization was not some haphazard, random act of hit-or-miss recollection, rather the pupil had to memorize the “exact words” of the teacher as a basis for any commentary of his own. Dunn points out that Luke and Paul both use the same phrase “the words of the Lord” and that Jesus as teacher would require his disciples to learn by heart and memorize his words. This meant that the evangelists could work on a fixed tradition form, but an oral one. The theories of the latter two were rejected, however, as being too rigid and fixed to explain the divergences of the different gospels.

Of great importance to the work of Dunn are the conclusions reached by Werner Kelber (1983:26, 27):

Orality and social world cooperate through the vehicle of a formulaic mode of communication. Both the effectiveness and

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

the memorability of spoken words is (sic) enhanced in direct proportion to their conformity with rhythmical, acoustic demands. If a saying is to enjoy social survival, it is to be articulated in accordance with mnemonic formalities.

He refers to scholars whose work has demonstrated the exceptional degree to which the sayings of Jesus have retained the heavily patterned speech forms saturated with alliteration, paranomasia, appositional equivalence, tautologic parallelism, et cetera. Similarly, the predictable traits of the synoptic miracle stories have been highlighted by Bultmann, Dibelius and Theissen (in Kelber 1983:27), so that may be seen to comply with the requirements for oral utility, encoding the miracle stories in the manner of habitual, not verbatim, memorization.

[O]ral life is not merely embellished by rhetorical conventionalities, but it lives from them. Thoughts in orality are not merely clothed in patterned forms, and formalized language is not merely a matter of added skill, but oral thinking consists in formal patterns from the start. So much does information depend on form, and spirit on style, that in orality one could almost say that the form is the soul of the message.

Furthermore, he comments on the datedness of thinking that verbatim memorization is a key factor in oral transmission, substituting “the inevitability of change, flexibility, and degrees of improvisation” (1983:27).

The miracle stories, according to Kelber, have conventionally been seen in New Testament scholarship, as the fruition of Hellenistic culture, with Bultmann as one of the most prominent advocates of this view. However, Howard C Kee (in Kelber 1983:50) has shown miracles as a sign of eschatological deliverance to have become “a central ingredient in Jewish apocalyptic literature” and Eugene Trocme (in Kelber 1983:50), deliberately leaving behind the terminology of the *Religionsgeschichtliche* terminology, posed the question whether the miracle stories in Mark may

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

have been, not Jewish, nor Hellenistic, but animistic. Trocme's theory is that the miracle stories can be traced back to the popular memory of Galilean storytellers, rather than the memory of an organized Christian community in Jerusalem.

In a study of the distinctive character of oral tradition from classicists to folklorists to social anthropologists, Kelber (1983:141, 199) discovered that the distinguishing factor was mnemonic patterns shaped for oral recurrence, such as heavy rhythmically balanced patterns in repetitions, antitheses, alliteration, et cetera. He furthermore comments on the huge difference between oral performance and literary transmission which, according to him, lies in the ability of the oral to claim an immediacy and direct, personal engagement between speaker and auditor. This Dunn readily agrees to, saying that it coincides with what he meant by the "impact" made by Jesus on his disciples.

Kelber (1983:29) reminds us that documents of the ancient world were written to be heard, to be read out loud and that the letters were effective substitutes for personal absence and that every reading of a text is therefore like a fresh performance of the text in terms of reader-response criticism. He admonishes against idealising the original form and feverishly hunting for it to the exclusion of all else, for each oral performance is unique and a new creation. Moreover, he thinks that the retelling started taking place during the life of Jesus and not only post-Easter (as Bultmann has already pointed out in the past) and so narratives or retold stories about Jesus have again become prominent.

An interesting and important observation by Kelber (1983:65-68, 91, 94) is that the Gospel of Mark still shows many traits characteristic of the oral, such as activist syntax, colloquial Greek, the use of storyteller's redundancies and repetitions, and that this gospel takes an oral story and adapts it "for the eye more than for the ear". He adds that Mark's gospel may be *frozen* orality, but that it is without doubt frozen *orality*.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Dunn's critique on Kelber is that he overextends his thesis on Mark as having indicated a major transition from oral to written, thereby seriously compromising its overall value. Quoting Kelber (1983:95,98,131), he comments:

The first step in his thesis development is that the written Gospel disrupts the "oral synthesis"; it "arises not from orality *per se*, but out of the debris of deconstructed orality"; it indicates "alienation from the oral apparatus"; it "accomplishes the death of living words for the purpose of inaugurating the life of textuality". The transition is overdramatized: it is widely recognized that in a predominantly oral culture, oral versions of a tradition would continue after it had been transcribed and that knowledge of the written version would usually be in an oral medium.

(Dunn 2003:202)

G N Stanton (in Dunn 2003:202) gives a more tempered-down opinion of the matter: "There is no reason to doubt that it was not the writing of Mark's gospel, but the later slow acceptance of Mark as a fixed and authoritative text which led to the death of oral traditions about Jesus".

Kelber himself (1995:195) later seems more cautious about, as he calls it, "the great divide thesis, which pits oral tradition vis-à-vis gospel text."

The work of Horsley and Draper on this subject is also highly regarded. The benefit they reaped from the work of J.M. Foley (1991,1995) must be acknowledged, while Foley in his turn relies upon the "receptionalist" (Dunn 2003:204) theories of W Iser and HR Jauss, as proponents of contemporary literary criticism. The main thrust of their work is that it is imperative for a text to be heard within the correct "horizons of expectation" (Jauss) and furthermore for the scholar to realize that any text has gaps of indeterminacy (Iser) which may be filled only from a prior understanding on

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

the part of the receiver of the text, author or tradition. Traditional phraseology and narrative patterns provide ways for a poet to convey meaning or tap into a traditional reservoir.

Foley (1991:6-13, 40-48) points out that oral traditional texts imply an audience with a background which enables them to respond faithfully to signals encoded in the text, to bridge gaps of indeterminacy and so to formulate an implied consistency. “It is the responsibility of the “reader” of an oral traditional text to attempt to become as far as possible the audience implied by that text” (1991:54, 55). “Performance is the enabling event, tradition the enabling referent” (1995:28). Foley adds (1995:35):

The tale must be well known to the public if the performance is to be a success for the audience must not be overly preoccupied with the task of trying to follow painstakingly what is being told in order to enjoy the tale. They must already know the tale so that they can enjoy the rendering of its various episodes, appreciate the innovations, and anticipate the thrills still to come. So every performance is new, but every performance presupposes something old: the tale itself.

For Foley (1991:5), the key lies in the “question of referentiality. Instead of asking ‘what’ is meant by a work of art and its constituting parts, we should begin by asking ‘how’ that work or part conveys whatever meaning can be or is communicated.” This process is metonymic, “a mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole”.

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:160-174) applies Foley’s contribution to Q and concludes: “...in order to understand Q as a libretto that was regularly performed in an early Jesus movement, we must engage in a number of interrelated analytical or investigative exercises” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:174). These include the establishment of the “texts” or “words” of Q that were being performed not as a collection of sayings, but a series of short speeches or discourses on subjects which were of

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

concern to the movement. The context for these performances would have been the regular meetings of the community within a renewal movement “...and/or the particular situations of mission or trial in which members frequently found themselves” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:174).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:174) adds:

The speech-*registers* appropriate to those situations included the general register of the founding prophet addressing the movement for Q as a whole and the particular registers of prophetic proclamation of new deliverance (the kingdom of God / renewal of Israel), Mosaic covenant renewal, mission to expand the renewal movement, encouragement-and-instruction for trial before the authorities, consolation and encouragement in difficult circumstances of poverty, and warning sanctions on discipline and solidarity.

He recommends an exploration of the Judean biblical tradition and any other road marks we may have as to how a popular renewal movement would have understood its tradition in order to reach an understanding of sorts on how the verbal signs and symbols in all of the Q discourses would have resonated metonymically with popular Israelite tradition (1999:174).

Draper (in Horsley & Draper 1999:182, 184) contributed that metonymic referencing is a culturally determined matter, enabling for example a word or phrase to telescope a whole aspect of tradition and culture. He discovered that, despite difficulties and uncertainties, patterns and features of oral performance which have withstood the incarceration of living tradition within text, clearly emerge when segmenting Q into measured verse. Couplets and triplets reveal themselves and stanzas seem to divide into sets of three to five to reflect, with a regularity which excludes any possibility of coincidence, an oral mnemonic patterning aimed at easing both the performance and the reception of the material. “This analysis of

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

the oral patterns discernible in the Q discourses serves to confirm the impression of a coherent sequence of discourses as the overall structure of Q” (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:188).

Draper (in Horsley & Draper 1999:175-194) examines Q 12:49-59 in this way, immediately discovering within the measured text a residue of oral performance. It consists of three stanzas, each composed of three parallel couplets (with only two exceptions to this rule), constructed on the basis of parataxis and linkage, popular oral devices. He then attempts to reconstruct the register for this text stating his rule of thumb: “We have already argued that in oral culture, the use of the restrictive code means that the reference is metonymic, *pars pro toto*, to the culture as mediated through a particular social class” (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:191). Thus, in the mention of “*pur elthon balein epi ten gen*”, one hears reverberations of the consequences of covenantal disobedience as spelt out in the prophecies of Jeremiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel (Draper states that the reference to fire being unleashed mainly against Israel occurs sixty times). “In this way, the prophet is an agent in God’s unleashing of the fire of judgment” (Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:192). Contrarily, in the “*eirene*” or state of blessedness which follows upon covenantal obedience, he hears echoes of Jeremiah 17:58 and in: “[*opsias genomenes*] *legete [eudia purrazei gar ho ouranos kai proisemeron cheimon purrazeigar stugnazzon ho ouranos.] to prosopon tou ouranou [oida] te [diakrin]ein ton kairon de ou [dynasthe]?*” echoes of references to the weather in prophetic oracles such as Amos 8:11, 12; Micah 7:1; Isaiah 45:8; Joel 1:4,11-12; 2:2, 30-32. He remarks on similar metonymic referencing to divine wrath, fire covenant and fruitfulness which can be found in John’s teaching in Q 3:7-9, where those failing to bear fruit will be like a tree cut down and thrown into the fire, where the coming one will baptize with Holy Spirit and fire and will sift the wheat and burn the chaff with fire.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

He announces without reserve that he considers Q 12:49-59 to be metonymic reference, not of apocalyptic, but of *prophetic-covenantal* nature (1999:193) and comes to the following illuminating conclusion:

Jesus feels compelled, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to pronounce the fire of God's wrath in judgment because of disobedience to the provisions of the covenant. He makes a reference to a tradition we find also in Mic. 7:6....Jesus sees himself called instead to pronounce judgment with a spirit of power which brings the prophecy to pass (Hos. 12:10; Mic. 3:8). The breach of the covenant declared by Micah concerns oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful. For them the judgment brings confusion and division....Jesus, in his turn, pronounces that the injustice and oppression visited on the poor by their rulers (in Jerusalem? In Sepphoris and Tiberias?) will bring confusion and disaster and understands his word to effect that judgment. He stands squarely within the tradition of covenantal prophecy in Israel.

(Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:193)

Kenneth Bailey (in Dunn 2003:206) reflects on the topic of the oral culture of Middle-Eastern village life, saying that this is as close as we'll get to the oral tradition of the village culture of first-century Galilee. He lists the types of material typically preserved in oral traditioning; pithy proverbs or wisdom-sayings, story riddles, poetry of both the classical and popular type, parables or stories, and lastly and most importantly, well-told accounts of important figures in the history of the village or communities, which prove the rule that central figures will have their stories told. Of further importance is that Bailey explains the capability of the community to control tradition as well as the different levels of control – in poems and proverbs no flexibility is allowed, in parables and recollections of people and events important for the community, some flexibility is permitted; the core can't be changed, but flexibility may exist with regards to detail. And in the case of unimportant material which isn't of any relevance for the

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

community, that is does not contain wisdom or valuable information, such as jokes or casual news, total flexibility is allowed.

Taking these rules and observations into consideration, Dunn (2003:209-210) has no doubt in his own mind that the oral transmission of the Jesus-tradition was controlled within the mixture of stability and flexibility, fixedness and variability in the elements constituting oral traditioning. Up until the first Jewish revolt (66-73 CE) it was possible for informal oral tradition to function in Palestine and everyone twenty years old and older could have been an “authentic reciter of that tradition.” (Bailey in Dunn 2003:209). Literary editing is absent, for each telling is in itself a complete performance of tradition and not an edition. This means that the transmission of Jesus-tradition consists of a sequence of retellings, each emerging from a common fount of events and teaching and each “...weaving common stock together in different patterns for different contexts” (Dunn 2003:209).

Dunn considered the following to be valuable contributions made by Bailey to the understanding of the Jesus-tradition:

- That oral tradition is flexible with a stable core and constant themes in variations of the same story;
- That communities are concerned with preserving traditions they hold dear and deem valuable for the identity of the community;
- That this control varies according to the value attached to the tradition for the identity of the community;
- That the most fixed and stable element of a story would always be the central core.

Examples of the Jesus-tradition that were examined by Dunn (see 203:210-238) showed the combination of elements of stability and flexibility that “simply cried out to be recognized as typically oral in character” (Dunn

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

2003:254). Examples of both narrative tradition and teaching seemingly confirm implications drawn from the oral character of its formulation:

- The teaching of Jesus made such an impact on his first hearers that it was recalled, with its key emphases crystallized in the overall theme and/or in particular words and phrases to remain constant in the process of rehearsing and passing on of this teaching in disciple gatherings and churches.
- The variations in the reteaching indicate a readiness to group material differently, to adapt or develop it, and to draw further lessons from it, consistent with the tradition of initial impact made by Jesus himself in the light of the developing circumstances of the churches which treasured the teaching. Once again the point is that the tradition was *living tradition*, celebrated in the communal gatherings of the earliest churches. There was no concern to recall all the exact words of Jesus; in many cases the precise circumstances in which the teaching was given were irrelevant to its continuing value. But neither is there any indication in the material reviewed that these were sayings interjected into the tradition by prophets or free (literary) creation, or that the development of particular teachings subverted their original impact.

The first of these finds support from Crossan (1983:40, 67) "...the basic unit of transmission is never the *ipsissima verba* of an aphoristic saying but, at best and at most, the *ipsissima structura* of an aphoristic core." "In oral sensibility one speaks or writes an aphoristic saying, but one remembers and recalls an aphoristic core." And B B Scott (1989:18-19) adds:

It is futile to seek the original words of a parable. The efforts of those who preserved the parables should not be viewed as the efforts of librarians, archivists, or scribes preserving the past,

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

but of storytellers performing a parable's structure. We must distinguish between performance, which exists at the level of *parole*, actual spoken or written language, and structure, which exists at the level of *langue*, an abstract theoretical construction.

On the topic of the second of these, Draper states in support that the idea that some of Jesus' sayings were created in entirely innovative fashion, is not in keeping with the process of oral transmission:

Such entirely innovative 'words of the Risen Jesus' are inherently unlikely. On the other hand, the words of Jesus would have been repeated by himself and his followers on innumerable occasions, always in varying forms, and so it is inappropriate to speak of an original form of a saying (since it would have had no original form but only an original shape' or of *ipsissima verba* (since the words would have changed in each performance even on the lips of Jesus himself).

(Draper, in Horsley & Draper 1999:183)

4.4.3 Oral transmission

Dunn now expounds his own views and conclusions on this subject. Only in a literary text is there the possibility of an editing process. The dynamics of the repeated oral performances which precede the written text, are entirely different. Whereas Gerhardsson (1961:168) had opted for the "*tantum scimus, quantum memoria tenemus*"-principle, Dunn (2003:203) believes that the operative words are rather "theme and variations" which may make the search for sources, appropriate in researching the origin of a written text, obsolete in the perusal of oral tradition. He adds: "...even talk of 'oral transmission' can mislead such discussions, since it envisages oral performance as intended primarily to transmit (transfer) rather than, say, to celebrate tradition."

At the onset he makes three crucial observations:

- Immediately, upon impact, an initiating word or action of Jesus would have begun the traditioning process. A delayed reaction of years, months, even days, was not an option. Within the word or deed which caused the impact lay the awakenings of the formation of the very same tradition which had created that impact. The reaction of excitement, wonder or surprise would be captured in the initial shared reaction,

...the structure, the identifying elements and the key words (core or climax) would be articulated in oral form in the immediate recognition of the significance of what had been said or happened. Thus established more or less immediately, these features would then be the constants, the stable themes which successive retellings could elaborate and round which different performances could build their variations, as judged appropriate in the different circumstances.

(Dunn 2003:240)

- One should heed against the misconception that the above-mentioned impact resulted in various disparate reactions of independent individuals. Tradition forming was the concern of the community and could certainly have contributed to their adhesion as community. In this way the pre-Easter circle of disciples had already formed a "*Bekennnisgemeinschaft*" "...of committed disciples...who confessed Jesus as the final revealer and interpreter of the word of God" (Dunn 2003:241). In this vein Strecker (in Dunn 2003:241) remarks that the 'Sitz im Leben' of a text is usually to be sought in the life of the community, and in its worship and catechetical instruction in particular. In distinction to the literary tradition (*Tradition*), the oral tradition (*Überlieferung*)

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

is mainly prescribed for performance in the Christian community and is therefore structured accordingly.

This said, Dunn (2003:243) remarks that, “in focusing particular attention on the communal character of the early traditioning process we should not discount the more traditional emphasis on the individual figure of authority respected for his or her own association with Jesus during the days of his mission. “

Contrary to Theissen’s (1978:1) suggestion of the passing on of tradition by “wandering charismatics”, the survival of these traditions have not had to depend upon single evangelistic or missionary proclamations but the communities in question would regularly, at their gatherings, have referred to the tradition which had called them into existence and which was to instruct and guide them. It is owing to its regular and repeated use in preaching that these traditions have been handed down to us.

The implication of this second of his observations is that often, what is yielded by the Jesus tradition, is not necessarily the objective words and deeds of Jesus as much as it is the “consistent and coherent features of the shared impact “ which they had made. What has been handed down to us are examples of the oral retelling of that shared tradition which show to their best advantage the flexibility and elaboration of oral performances. There had surely been a man called Jesus who had left the original impression, the remembered Jesus, but that original impact comes to us not as a pure form or single impact on which the historian can lay his hands. If Jesus told at least some of his parables on more than one occasion, then it only makes sense that there had never been a single original context for these teachings. Kloppenborg (1996:334) aptly speaks of performative diversity existing at the earliest stages of the Jesus tradition. “The remembered Jesus may be a synthesis of the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

several impacts made on and disciple responses made by Jesus' earliest witnesses, but the synthesis was already firm in the first flowering of the tradition" (Dunn 2003:242).

- Another implication is that from the very first moment of impact the traditioning process was taken seriously as formative tradition of the evolving community. So important does Dunn consider it to be that he writes: "To the extent that the shared impact of Jesus, the shared disciple-response, bonded into groups of disciples or adherents those thus responsive to Jesus' mission, to that extent the dynamics of group formation would be operative" (Dunn 2003:242). It seems obvious that the shared memories of the words and deeds of Jesus – already Jesus tradition – would have played an essential part in defining group identity internally and demarcating boundaries over against their fellow Jews.

Kloppenborg (1987:98) speaks of the traditioning process as "...the juxtaposition of originally independent units", a point of view strongly refuted by Dunn (2003:246), who believes there is enough reputable evidence to prove the grouping of sayings very early in the transmission process and adds: "To group similar teachings and episodes would be an obvious mnemonic and didactic device for both teachers and taught, storytellers and regular hearers, more or less from the beginning."

From Mark and Q, texts with a definite oral character, Dunn (2003:210-252) studies numerous examples of first narrative and subsequently teaching tradition and notes three elements in the narratives and teachings he examined (Dunn 2003:254), all of which are on par with his original theories which preceded the study of the texts:

- Meticulous attention was given to the preservation of what Jesus had done and said as the new disciples and seedling

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

communities celebrated the core tradition which constituted their identity. For it was the impact of these – the life and message of Jesus – that had formed and shaped their faith and communities.

- Stories and teachings were remembered which derived from and were identified by the focal points in particular words or phrases usually originating from Jesus himself.
- Any variations and developments were characteristic of the variations within oral performance and were not linear or cumulative in character. No attempt was made to preserve any literalistic historicity of detail, nor was there a flooding of the tradition with Jewish wisdom sayings or prophetic utterances. No knowledge we have of prophetic activity in the early church can substantiate the assumption that prophecy within the earliest churches would have added substantial material to the Jesus-tradition. On the contrary, the first churches would have been on the look-out to stamp any sign of prophecy out of character with the Jesus-tradition already in their possession.

This leads him to conclude that what we are dealing with here is not merely the top layer or last edition in a series of inscrutable layers, but “...the living tradition of Christian celebration which takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus” (Dunn 2003:254). *This means that it is possible to encounter a remembered Jesus in the impact that his words and deeds had made on the first disciples as that was “translated” into oral tradition and passed on by the enactment in oral performances within the earliest circles of disciples and churches, “...to be enshrined in due course in the written Synoptic tradition”* (Dunn 2003:254). After the initial impact, when we read in Mark 3:14 that the twelve were chosen as emissaries to go and preach and to be an extension of himself in his mission, the self-evident answer to the question of what they would have

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

preached would be the teaching given them by Jesus as well as instruction by Jesus in what to say.

4.5 Historical context: A backdrop

Dunn gives recognition to the Liberal Quest for its attempt to portray Jesus against the backdrop of his historical context. At the beginning of the twentieth century the *religionsgeschichtliche* school superponated constructively with this idea. The sociological quest takes us a step further in understanding Jesus against his backdrop and through the social attitudes and behaviour of his time. The interaction of the Jesus-movement with Jewish society in Palestine was studied by Gerd Theissen (1992:33-59) and Dunn gives him the credit for having made the first attempt to study the texts of the New Testament from a sociological perspective.

Investigations of this kind have increased our chances of seeing a clearer reflection of Jesus and have provided us with much essential information of which the preceding and following are but a few.

The bulk of Jesus' teaching had been in Aramaic but due to extensive penetration of Greek into first-century Palestine, he is likely to have known at least some Greek and may even on some occasions have spoken it. Piously brought up by his parents and educated in the Torah at the local village (Nazarene) assembly or synagogue, he was first and foremost a Jew. Whether he could read or not does not influence the plausibility of his knowledge of and familiarity with Scripture even as the son of an artisan. One can assume that pilgrimages were made at least to Jerusalem for the great feasts or the preparation for his transition to manhood. As a Jew he would have been familiar with the Temple and its functionaries, as well as with the priests who served locally as teachers and magistrates. He would have known the requirements for tithing and purity, probably said Shema as a daily obligation, prayed two or three times a day and as an adult would have observed the Sabbath, attended the synagogue and given every seventh day over to the study of the laws and customs. He would have known Pharisees and been familiar with their fervour to interpret the Torah

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

for their time, would have known of the Essenes and would have been aware of their history of tension with the Samaritans.

The context of Jesus, the artisan from a Galilean village, whose land was under foreign – Roman – dominion, as well as the context of his mission, has to be taken into account on historical, social, political, geographical, and especially national and religious level within Judaism if a full understanding is to be reached. All of these have as starting point the acknowledgement that Jesus was a Jew. Dunn examines what this implies, starting with his milieu and primary context, Judaism, the unity and diversity of second Temple Judaism, the factionalism and political realities which all point to a multiplex context, as well as what was meant by the terms “Jew” and “Judaism”.

4.5.1 Judaism

An earlier generation of scholarship, Jewish as well as Christian, had envisioned a “normative Judaism” such as that represented in the rabbinic tradition of, for example, the Mishnah and the Talmuds as early as the first century. Although scholars were aware of the Jewish pseudepigrapha which date back as early as and even earlier than the second century BCE, as well as of Philo who died, according to general consensus, in about 50 CE, it was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-twentieth century which truly challenged their assumptions. For among them were Jewish documents which predate and were as such untouched by Christianity. Their content, according to scholars such as Stegemann (1998:104-118), carry definite sectarian overtones in a type of Judaism which flourished in the heart of Israel. This find has had some notable consequences in the study of Judaism; there followed a resurgence of interest in the pseudepigrapha as similarly representative of different forms of Judaism, the extent of Pharisaic influence in first century Israel has been challenged by Neusner (1973, 1971) and Sanders (1992), and “...the sharpness of any distinction between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Hellenistic Judaism’

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

has been considerably blurred. Kraft and Nickelsburg (1986:2) write:

“Whereas rabbinic Judaism is dominated by an identifiable perspective that holds together many otherwise diverse elements, early Judaism appears to encompass almost unlimited diversity and variety – indeed, it might be more appropriate to speak of early Judaisms”. The pluriformity of Judaism in the first century seems established, but Dunn (2003:257) points out the need for studying the self- and inter-perspective of these different forms.

Dunn (2003:258, 259) similarly warns against superimposing temporal connotations upon Judaism because of the manifold risks involved and concludes: “All this potential perplexity points up the need to proceed cautiously if we are to avoid the danger of imposing categories and grids which might distort the evidence more than display it. “

Summarily defining Judaism in its earliest form, Dunn ventures (2003:262):

...the term “Judaism” describes the system of religion and way of life within which diaspora Jews lived so as to maintain their distinctive identity, and also the national and religious identity which was given its more definitive character by vigorous resistance to the assimilating and syncretistic influences of wider Hellenism.

He reiterates his warning to the scholar about treading lightly when using the term “Judaism”:

The very term itself makes it difficult for us to gain an insider’s view of Judaism at the time of Jesus. And if we want to see Jesus and earliest Christianity in context, that is, in some sense “within Judaism” or emerging from “within Judaism”, we will have to be conscious of the strong nationalist overtones in the term’s early use, and of the degree to which national and religious identity were fused in one word – including not only

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

differentiation from but also a certain hostility to the other nations and their religious practices.

(Dunn 2003:264, 265)

4.5.2 “Jew”, “Israel”

People originating from Judea (*Ioudaia*) would have, early on, been referred to as “Judeans” (*Ioudaioi*) and later as “Jews”. However, because Judea was a temple state, religious and ethnic identity became interdependent and worshippers of the God of the Jerusalem temple were referred to as “Jews”. Kuhn (in Dunn 2003:261, 263) clarifies any confusion by saying that “Israel” was used in self-designation, while “Jews” was the term preferred by outsiders. Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 26, 32 illustrate the veracity of his analysis in the “king of the Jews” used by Pilate, in contrast with the “king of Israel” used by the high priests. Similarly Paul, when depicting the whole of humanity in texts such as Romans 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28, speaks of “Jews and Greeks”, while referring to himself as an “Israelite” (Rm 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22). It is interesting to note that, in Acts 21:39 and 22:3, according to Luke, the gentile evangelist, Paul says: “I am a Jew” in addressing both the Jerusalem crowd and the Roman tribune.

It seems advisable to speak of second-Temple Judaism as the Judaism spanning the more or less 600 years since the reconstruction of the Temple, that is from the 6th century BCE to the year 70 CE when it was once again destroyed, a Judaism centred around and focused on the Jerusalem Temple. It is imperative for the researcher to grasp the comprehensiveness of Judaism, firstly as a religion, but also as a national ideology, integrated to mark out a people distinctive among other nations and religions and encompassing the totality of life – family life, education, the law of the land, social relationships, economics and politics. A sense of the definitive character it obtained by vehement resistance to the assimilating and syncretistic influences of wider Hellenism, and of the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

implied differentiation and even hostility towards other nations and to their religious practices, further completes the picture.

In an investigation into the diversity of Judaism and its constituting groups and elements, Dunn chooses as starting point the writings of Josephus, who is as close a witness as is available. When Josephus speaks of “four philosophies” or “sects”, he implies that these were the only groupings among the Jews worthy of his attention:⁴⁸

- **Pharisees**

Because of Christian bias as well as uncritical use by Jewish and Christian scholars alike of later rabbinic traditions which were retrojected as evidence of the practices and belief-systems of first-century Pharisees, certain assumptions had been made which were later found to have been untrue. This meant that less is known about these, “...the principal forerunners of subsequently prevailing Judaism” (Dunn 2003:266) than had previously been assumed.

Christian bias led to their having been perceived as the chief proclaimers of a rigid legalism which stood in sharp contrast to the gracious character of the Christian message. Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism sien Dunn 267) put paid to this misconception, whereas Neusner (Rabbinic Traditions) addressed the fallacy of retrojections by removing layer after layer to finally expose the layers which may be traced back to the first century “with the greatest confidence” (Dunn 2003:267).

⁴⁸ Saldarini (1988:127) warns, however that the question of the exact nature of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes as historical groups, is a far more complicated matter than Josephus’ characterization gives credit to. He adds the grouping of “Scribe” to the list (see Saldarini 1988:273-276), saying they were found in great numbers among the bureaucracy, but also among the Pharisees and in villages, that they played a role in the preservation of prophecy, wisdom writing and the Pentateuch and that: “[I]n the Talmudic period the roles of wise man and scribe... were assimilated to the title of rabbi...”.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

From the statement by Josephus that the Pharisees had handed down various traditions “to the people” he deduces that an exclusivism existed as the result of concerns for the holiness of the people. What, according to Dunn, is definitely and characteristically known about them, is their concern with meticulous, scrupulous, exact observance of the law of their fathers and the development of a distinctive halakhic Torah interpretation, the traditions of their fathers – the so-called oral law.

That the Pharisees had wielded substantial political and social influence is maintained by Dunn, but disputed by Saldarini (see below) and Sanders (1992:395-412). He concedes that they had exercised some political influence at the time of Jesus, but concludes from the evidence that the political power they enjoyed during the reign of Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE) had waned but not disappeared, leaving them “a moderate but usually ineffective opposition”. Having said this, some of them had been involved in the uprisings prior to the death of Herod the Great, that of Judas the Galilean in 6 BCE and the outbreak of the revolt of 66CE (Sanders 1992:380-95).

Anthony Saldarini (1988:274) has drawn the attention to the wide chasm which existed between the two major classes in agrarian societies, in contrast to modern industrial societies where a middle class bridges the gap. There was a large peasant class which produced food and a small elite governing class protecting the peasants from outside aggression and living off the agricultural surplus provided by them. The “retainers” were “people who had left the peasantry but did not have an independent place and power in society, townspeople serving the needs of the elite as soldiers, educators, religious functionaries, entertainers, skilled artisans, et cetera. These functionaries ensured a well-functioning society. Saldarini finds the Pharisees and scribes in their midst and has gained the support of scholars such as Borg and Horsley in his

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

argument that the Pharisees as part of this “retainer” class in Jewish society, had served the needs of the ruler and the governing classes and were consequently to some degree dependent upon the rich and powerful (Saldarini 1988:36, 38-48, 295-97).

The communities in both the villages and the “upper reaches of society” (Saldarini 1988:73) were held together by intricate webs of familial and political relationships which controlled religion, economics, education, culture, ethical norms and all other aspects of society. Leaders in the community were the elders and heads of prominent, land-owning families. “They were representatives to the government, patrons of those in need, intercessors (brokers) for the weak with the powerful, judges in disputes and leaders in religious affairs” (Saldarini 1988:73, 74).

There existed between those of unequal status at all levels of society a patron-client relationship based on the exchange of favours in informal, implicitly accepted understandings. Both classes formed corporate societies which could simply be social clubs, or complex movements to reform society. Among these, political interest groups, attempting to control or influence the direction and leadership of society religiously, socially and politically, were prominent. The Pharisees seem to have been such a group, their efforts meeting with various degrees of success according to political circumstances and at times had a partly independent power base through their influence on the people. Some Pharisees and Sadducees were part of the governing classes, they were interested in religious and political power and were always a factor in society at large, but they were a minor factor, one of a large number of groups and forces within the complex network of Judaist society in Judea. (Although Josephus places the Pharisees with the leadership in Jerusalem, Mark locates them in Galilee on all occasions except one.)

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

In Mark, for instance, they stand for a certain kind of community while Jesus throws down the gauntlet by attacking this community with its purity regulations concerning washing, food and Sabbath practice. He seeks to widen the borders of the community and loosen its requirements for membership. In doing so Jesus effectively created a new community over which they exercised no control, which could not but provoke their outrage and animosity. Jesus, coming from a lower-class family of artisans without the social standing, honour and influence to command respect as a teacher (Mk 6:2-3) engages in battle with the Pharisees, recognized leaders in the Galilean community, with high standing and influence, if not power, with the people and other community leaders. Their dispute is not religious by nature, but rather a vying for control over the community and Mark (6:4) explains that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country, among his own kin, in his own house.

- **Sadducees**

They can be distinguished from the Pharisees by their rejection of the oral law and purity. There existed a substantial overlap between members of this grouping and the aristocratic families from which the high-priests came and who exercised control over the Temple and because Judea was a temple-state, this also meant exercising control over the political, religious, economic and social spheres of their day inasmuch as they were permitted to by Rome and the Herods. From this Dunn deduces that the Judaism of Jesus' time was fraught with socio-political-religious complexities, that the high-priestly faction was the only one which could realistically have been involved in Jesus' crucifixion, that their prominence and power before 70 CE bear indisputable evidence to the importance of the Temple in first-century Judaism.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Saldarini (1988:304, 305) reminds us that the sources are unanimous in testifying that the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, afterlife and judgment. These ideas entered Judaism only in the second century BCE and in time came to dominate in religious thought over the next four centuries. The Sadducees upheld the traditional Biblical view and if, as indeed it seems, they were predominantly from the governing class, by reputation strictly conservative in a traditional society, they would not look kindly upon change and innovation. Though they believed in God's covenant and his care for Israel, they did not believe in his apocalyptic intervention. Over against the Pharisees and the new customs they were developing, the Sadducees wanted to uphold the status quo and "...keep the focus on the nation (and potential kingdom) of Israel in this world, not in the next" (1988:304).

- **Essenes**

Josephus bore witness to the fact that the occupants of Qumran had been one of many groupings of this "sect" and that they occupied a wide terrain, moreover, that only some of the scrolls are representative of Qumran's own beliefs. Saldarini (1988: 98,109, 124-125) remarks on them that they are consistently presented by sources as an ascetic, atypical and eremitic grouping. He considers the Essenes to be the closest to the modern idea of a sect because they (and especially the Qumran group) withdrew from society in protest and had an active conflict with the religious authorities of society. They were introversionist, and often revolutionist, withdrawing into a purified community and awaiting divine intervention which would destroy the evil social order.

- **The “Fourth Philosophy”**

A distinctive grouping with Pinehas and the Maccabees as figures to emulate, striving for zealous and committed piety and with a self-understanding of their identity as the elect people of God having been singled out among the nations as their fundamental and defining characteristic.

4.6 From backdrop to view: How to proceed?

Funk (1996:165) would use parables as starting blocks: “In the beginning was the parable”, “[t]he parables and aphorisms form the bedrock of the tradition. They represent the point of view of Jesus himself”. He calls them : “...a significant speech form characteristic of Jesus” and says: “The parable as Jesus used it is virtually unknown to the Old Testament, and it was rarely successfully imitated in Christian lore” (Funk 1996:136). He has equal appreciation for the aphorisms – subversive adages or epigrams which contradict or undermine folk wisdom as economically as possible - as road marks to navigating the route to the historical Jesus. The fact that Jesus made use of these speech forms shows that his wisdom ran contrary to proverbial folklore and sensibilities and that he strove to replace old perceptions with new ones. The Jesus Seminar used the parables as base and sorted through the aphorisms in search of the techniques used by Jesus in the creation of the parables, for example hyperbole and paradox.

Benedict Viviano (in Dunn 2003:331) builds upon the thirty-one sayings in Mark and Q which overlap to reach what Dunn calls a “surprisingly complete picture”.

Crossan’s (1995:xi) chosen starting point is where three independent vectors cross, “like three giant searchlights coming together on a single object in the night sky”.

These vectors are:

- A (“rather broadly conceived” - Dunn 2003:331) cross-cultural anthropology,
- Greco-Roman and especially Jewish history,
- and literary or textual analysis (“...plus his idiosyncratic stratification of the totality of Jesus tradition” - Dunn 2003:331).

Wright (1996:79) reads elements of the Jesus-tradition against his meta-narrative of Israel in exile and restoration. He works with the concept of a “large hypothesis” or serious historical hypothesis within which all the details of the Jesus tradition may find their place, a whole which influences the parts most satisfactorily.

Lee Keck (1971:33) observes: “Instead of the *distinctive* Jesus we ought rather to seek the *characteristic* Jesus.” Dunn (2003:332) believes these to be words of wisdom, also preferring to look first at the broad picture or the “characteristic Jesus” rather than the dissimilar Jesus to prevent becoming bogged down and lost at the outset in a quagmire of details over individual disputed sayings (see also Telford 1994:50, 52, 57). The oral traditions holds more of the same obstacles for him: “[W]hat we are looking at in the Jesus tradition, and what we are looking for through the Jesus tradition, is one whose mission was remembered for a number of features, each illustrated by stories and teaching and performed in the disciple circles and church gatherings, though not yet (properly speaking) ‘documented’ (the literary paradigm)” (Dunn 2003:332). He reasons that any feature which is characteristic within the Jesus-tradition and relatively distinctive of it, is likely to go back to it and reflect the original impact made by the teaching and actions of Jesus on at least many of his first followers which drew them into and formed their community with other disciples and was celebrated (with kerygmatic traditions of the cross and resurrection) in the gathering of the first generation of Christianity.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

There was, however, development within the tradition, although there is a different process to this development, with flexibility as well as stability forming part of the oral paradigm. How important Dunn considers this aspect to be, is reflected in his statement: "...the Synoptic tradition demands no less by way of explanation of its lasting shape" (Dunn 2003:333). It is essential for scholars to recognize the living character of the process and he issues a warning not to think in terms of literary relationships between static entities (Dunn 2003:334). He adapts Schweitzer's (1906:299) well-known metaphor, saying that the task of tracing the history of the Jesus-tradition is not best conceptualised as an endless journey through countless stations at which one has to stop and change (the different layers of tradition), but rather as a continuous run of performances of some classic where performers and interpretation change even though it is the same classic being performed, thus lending continuity throughout the performances. That still audible impact of word and act is what gives the remembered Jesus historical substance (Dunn 2003:334). If one accedes to this, then a remarkably full portrayal begins to take shape in a remarkably short time.

4.6.1 Can a picture truly emerge?

One of the strongholds of his argumentation is that it is imperative for the researcher to bear in mind that what is offered the reader in the synoptic tradition is the *remembered* Jesus – not merely as people chose to remember him, but the very impact of his words and deeds as it shaped their memories and continued to reverberate in their gatherings. *Therein lies his contribution; that he does not envision retrieving Jesus, the historical person, behind the gospels, but is optimistic about detecting the earliest impact made by Jesus upon the people he called to discipleship.* This impact, in his opinion, had from the very first translated itself into the community tradition thus bearing evidence not only of the impact made by Jesus, but of the effect he had had on his followers.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Willi Marxsen's (1992:92) succinct "Christian faith began with the event of being moved by Jesus" expresses how powerful this initial impact had probably been while Stephen Patterson (1998:56) reminds his readers that different people experiencing first hand the impact of Jesus had different reactions to it: "[H]ow did some people find such ultimate goodness in Jesus, while others experienced him quite differently?" John Dominic Crossan (1994:199-200) remarks on the diverse nature of this impact and the response it evoked, saying that any plausible historical reconstruction of Jesus has to take into account that these vary from "Let's worship him" to "Let's execute him". The fact remains however that a response, no matter what the nature thereof, was always evoked.

Patterson (1998:9, 10) expresses profound thoughts on this matter:

Jesus was...an "event" for many people. They experienced him as meaningful for their lives....I want to ask what we can know about the historical Jesus, what he did and said, the stories he told, the people he gathered around him, that really meant something to people. ...Who was Jesus? Who is God? For the earliest Christians, these questions became the same question. They were linked, not through abstract speculation about Jesus' inner nature or because of prodigious displays of the miraculous. They were linked simply in the experiences people had of Jesus that moved them to a clearer idea of who God is – so clear that they could give themselves over to this theological vision and allow it to determine who they would become if they chose to live faithfully to it....I wish... to clarify why it was that early Christians made their claims about Jesus in the first place.

Patterson urges the scholar to bear in mind that when the followers of Jesus confessed their faith, or cried "Behold, the Son of God," it was a direct response to his words and deeds which they experienced in their lives and which moved them deeply. Their responses of faith did not replace his words or acts and substitute something new in their place,

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

“Rather, they elevated what they had experienced in Jesus to a new kind of status: a claim about who God is, a *theological* claim” (Patterson 1998:47, 53). “An existential approach to Christology takes this basic experience as the foundation of Christian faith” (Patterson 1998:54).

Jesus was, moreover, firmly embedded in the cultural, political, sociological and economic world of the times in which he lived and Dunn warns against questing for a Jesus who was not a Jew nor the founder of Christianity. Of early Christianity we glean some information from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 24:5 speaks of the first followers of Jesus as “Nazarenes”. Only later did they come to be known as Christians. Sociological and socio-anthropological studies have shown that groups such as these would almost certainly have had foundation stories to announce to others and reiterate internally why they came into existence and what their name (whether “Nazarenes” or “Christians”) means (Dunn 2003:175).

Dunn (2003:132, 133) points out that hermeneutical tension exists between faith and history when talking historically about Jesus. In researching the “historical Jesus” the idea is encountered that behind the texts there exists an historical man, the real Jesus, who differs from the Christ of dogma and the Jesus of the Gospels and who can be discovered by historical research, which will simultaneously enable us to criticize the latter two. He, however, maintains that the Jesus who had inspired the faith event in the gospels, who had inspired the disciples to paint pictures of him, is also the Jesus in these pictures and that apart from the picture of him as perceived through the eyes of faith, there exists no other “neutral” picture, no perception untouched by faith, as though evangelists had traced stories of Jesus through folk songs and tales. The truth, according to him, is that we have *no historical Jesus, only an historical Christ*. Patterson (1998:56) writes: “...for some, this experience of him was redemptive, liberating, empowering. And for some, this experience of Jesus gave meaning to their lives in a way that only something ultimately real and authentic can do, and they gave themselves over to it. These were the first Christians.” He explains:

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

One should remember...that all of these early followers were Jewish, as was Jesus himself. None of them had any notion of starting a new religion that would one day stand over against Judaism. Such thinking would not enter into the followership of Jesus until many generations after his death. In using the term "Christian" to describe these early followers of Jesus, I intend to designate persons for whom Jesus became an experience of God. I also intend to suggest that these earliest followers of Jesus were indeed the first "Christians....it did not take a resurrection to call forth such faith in Jesus. For some, it would have happened the day they met Jesus; for others, never at all, in spite of the resurrection proclamation.

(Patterson 1998:56)

A gross oversight in Dunn's opinion is that scholars have been asking how faith sculpted final forms while neglecting to ask how it inspired the beginning, thinking that tradition came into existence post-Easter, as though his words impacted upon people only after his death, causing them to become disciples only on Easter Sunday, and that it was the product of an already developed faith. The traditions underlying the gospels already started with the encounters between Jesus and those who became his disciples through these very encounters. The hearing and witnessing of the first disciples was already an hermeneutical act, they were already caught in the hermeneutical circle and the exegetes of the 21st century merely continue this dialogue.

What we have in the texts is the impact Jesus made, what he was remembered as doing or saying and not Jesus himself (Dunn 2003:131). "We do not escape the fact that we know Jesus only as the disciples remembered him." And the words of Keck (2000:20): "...the perception of Jesus that he catalysed is part of who Jesus was" are reassuring. The impulse behind the records is the sayings of Jesus as they were heard and received, the actions of Jesus as they were witnessed and retained in memory and all of these as reflected on thereafter – the faith-creating word

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

or event-shaping faith – as retained and rehearsed by the faith and thus creating and being created. This means that tradition began with the initial impact of Jesus' words and deeds and continued to influence intermediate retellers of tradition till it crystallized in the gospel accounts. What we have, therefore, is not so much what Jesus did or said, but what was remembered. Other than in the case of Paul the narratives begin, not with Jesus, but with the remembered Jesus of the disciples. For Dunn this provides the solution to the gulf that exists between history and faith. In the historical moment of the creation of the Jesus-tradition, we have historical faith.

The synoptic tradition bears witness to the continuity between pre-Easter memory and post-Easter proclamation – a continuity of faith. And because Jesus impacted differently on different individuals, there existed a diversity of faith from the very first. The synoptics, however, also tell of an overall homogeneity of impression made by Jesus on those who first created and then transmitted tradition. Dodd (1971:21-22) confirms this, writing that the first three gospels offer a body of sayings that show on the whole so great a consistency, coherence, and withal a manner, style and content so distinctive, that no reasonable critic should doubt, whatever reservations he may have about individual sayings, that what we have here, reflects the thought of a single, unique teacher.

And Schillebeeckx (1979:51) adds: "...this pluralism which at rock bottom is 'held together' by Jesus as he lived on earth and was apprehended by other people".

The consistency of the disciple-response lends consistency to the tradition. But the circle of discipleship was not homogenous from the very beginning and within the homogeneity of the overall response there also exists a diversity of faith-responses which have been united through Jesus and the faith of the disciples in him. Other responses exist that fell short of discipleship or that understood discipleship differently or that stopped short of Good Friday. These he also takes into account as sources to be

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

examined although the emphasis for him should always fall upon the gospels.

To summarize then: Just as Wright and Borg he marries faith and history in researching the remembered Jesus. Faith is of the utmost importance for understanding the life and mission of Jesus. Equally important is history, *but for informing and not proving faith*. Omitting the element of faith from this process is to proceed unhistorically. The challenge would thus be to attempt historically to reveal the character of the impact that Jesus had made, the effect he had had on those who were responsible for the first formulations that were passed down to us. The faith of these people has to be taken into account and the faith-dimension has to be acknowledged and reckoned with as being integral to the Jesus-tradition if a responsible account of Jesus' life and mission is to be constructed.

4.7 Jesus: His image revealed

Any legitimate image of Jesus would have to include aspects of, among other themes, the Kingdom of God, his disciples, the nature of discipleship and the ones for whom he intended his message.

4.7.1 The Kingdom of God

That the kingdom of God is a central theme in the preaching of Jesus, is one of the least disputed, or indeed disputable, facts in the study of Jesus. The numerous occurrences of the phrase "*basileia tou theou*" in the evangelist's renditions of the words of Jesus – thirteen times in Mark, nine times in q/Q, twenty-eight times in Matthean Sondergut, twelve times in Lukan Sondergut – tell a story in itself. Despite probable retellings and redaction, "...we may be ...confident that such retelling and redaction reflected an awareness, on the part of both the tridents and their audiences, that the kingdom had been a prominent theme of Jesus' preaching" (Dunn 2003:385).

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

After a thorough investigation of all the passages making mention of the kingdom, Dunn (2003:393-396) concludes that the range of usages imply a larger picture which he believes to be a threefold vision of Israel's most fundamental convictions:

- God is one and the sole ruler of all creation - Israel's monotheistic faith and creation theology.
- God is our/my King – the affirmation that out of all the peoples Israel was God's elect.
- God's royal rule will be manifested to all – a diverse and diffuse expectation, the following aspects of which may have been rife in Israel within Second Temple Judaism:
 - The scattered Israelites would be returned to the promised land and the twelve tribes reunited as God's people.
 - Renewed and abundant prosperity, the removal of defects or disabilities, a restoration of paradise.
 - A messianic figure or divine agent in a messianic age, sometimes coupled with a messianic banquet.
 - A renewed covenant.
 - The building of a new temple.
 - The return of Yahweh to Zion, brought to renewed attention by Wright.
 - Israel's vindication among the nations.
 - A climactic period of tribulation.
 - Cosmic disturbances.
 - The defeat of Satan.
 - Final judgment.
 - Resurrection, explicitly in evidence only in the latter half of the Second Temple period.
 - Sheol/Hades, the abode of the dead, now a place of retribution for the wicked.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Dunn considers the answers to three questions to penetrate to the heart of the hermeneutical problem of perceiving how these texts were heard in the first century and are heard today and therefore to be essential for a true understanding of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. These questions are whether one should think in terms of a *single* larger story, what is meant by “eschatological”, and whether we should understand the kingdom to be a literal concept, a symbol, a metaphor or none of these.

Looking briefly at two of many images drawn by other scholars on the theme of the kingdom, much can be learnt and many pitfalls avoided when striving to reveal the truest image possible:

J D Crossan’s grand narrative, abstracted from cross-cultural anthropology, is one of a peasant society exploited and oppressed by and exhibiting resistance to the ruling classes. Within this framework Jesus preached the kingdom, a kingdom which may once, in the time of Jesus have been understood in apocalyptic terms, but which achieves the best fit in sapiential terms: The sapiential kingdom looks to the present rather than the future....One enters that Kingdom by wisdom or goodness, by virtue, justice, or freedom. It is a style of life for now rather than a hope of life for the future” (Crossan 1991:292). He speaks of a “Brokerless Kingdom” of egalitarianism on behalf of the totality of Mediterranean peasantry, which stood in stark contrast to the highly brokered Roman empire. This kingdom with its theology of unbrokered access was symbolized most clearly in Jesus’ practice of welcoming at his table and eating with all and sundry. He bases his conviction that at “...the heart of the original Jesus movement a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material resources” existed and that “open commensality” was practised, upon passages such as Luke 10:7, the Gospel of Thomas 14:2; Mark 6:10 and at the heart of the matter the parable in Luke 14:16b-24. The open commensality has nothing sentimental about it. Crossan says; “Generous almsgiving may even be the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

conscience's last great refuge against the terror of open commensality” (Crossan 1991:341; see also pp 225,226,261-264, 341-344)⁴⁹.

Freyne (1997:64) writes: “If one were to follow Crossan’s methodology to its logical conclusion...it would be difficult to locate Jesus anywhere, certainly not in Galilee”. The main gist of Dunn’s own critique is that Crossan’s treatment of Judaism is very limited and his analysis of the conditions in lower Galilee very restricted. Dunn (2003:471) points out that there were national and religious factors and not merely social and economic factors operative in Jewish society. Of these factors it was mainly and arguably the national and religious factors which provided the dominant narrative by which even Jewish peasants made sense of their lives.

Dunn (2003:472).further comments:

...during the ministry of Jesus, there is little indication of escalating unrest – injustice, oppression, and complaint no doubt, but the impression of a moving escalator of heightening protest again owes more to a larger generalisation read into the particularities of Jesus’ historical situation with too little care for the particularities themselves.

He also questions the wisdom of using diaspora Greek and Jewish literature to the exclusion of all other literature for the illustration and documentation of his sapiential kingdom theory, considering that a kingdom theme in these sources is noted by its absence, which leads to the conclusion that Crossan is promoting his Tendenz of a non-apocalyptic kingdom.

Wright places great emphasis on the necessity of a grand narrative in pursuit of the quest, criticizing his predecessors for “pseudo-atomistic work on apparently isolated fragments” and identifying “the real task, still

⁴⁹ See 4.7.2 below.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

awaiting all students of Jesus” as “that of major hypothesis and serious verification” (Wright 1996:33). He adds: “All the current New Questers point, despite themselves, to the correct solution: the scholar must work with a large hypothesis, and must appeal, ultimately, to the large picture of how everything fits together as the justification for smaller-scale decisions. That is the real criterion that operates the system whereby, in dealing with gospel pericopae, many are called but few are chosen” (Wright 1996:79). Wright is convinced that Jesus’ contemporaries still believed Israel to have been in exile to which Jesus’ answer was that “the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel”, thereby summoning up “the entire narrative of Israel’s new exodus, her final return from exile” (Wright 1996:244).

Dunn (2003:473, 474) identifies the problems associated with Wright’s confident choice of “exile and restoration” (2003:245) as grand narrative or “controlling story” as, firstly, an exaggeration of the importance of the theme of the return from exile in Palestinian Judaism, saying that no real evidence suggested that those actually living in the land considered themselves to be exiles.

Such a hypothesis hardly squares with the amazing hymn of praise to Simon the High Priest in ben Sira 50 (422) or with the confidence that the purification of altar and temple attested the restoration of Israel’s heritage (2 Macc 2:17). And the Sadducean priests responsible for the twice daily *Tamid* offering on the Temple presumably did not think of themselves as still in exile.

(Dunn 2003:473)

Secondly there was no single comprehensive grand narrative controlling the consciousness of Jesus’ contemporaries, but rather a number of motifs, such as the removal of defects and disabilities, the imagery of the great feast, an eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, the meek inheriting the

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

land, suffering, the defeat of Satan and the final judgment in the spectrum of Jewish expectation addressed in the teachings of Jesus (Dunn 2003:475).

And thirdly “the most serious weakness of Wright’s grand hypothesis is his inability to demonstrate that the narrative of return from exile was a controlling factor in Jesus’ own teaching” (Dunn 2003:475).

4.7.2 Jesus’ banquet: An open invitation

Much has been made in scholarship of Jesus’ open table-fellowship. Crossan (1994:66-74) uses the term “commensality”, referring to the Latin “*mensa*” for “table”, and says that in the “anthropology of eating” (see 1994:68) the rules of the table and eating were like maps in the miniature for rules regarding whom to associate and socialize with. Jesus, on the other hand, insisted upon an open commensality at the table supplanting the discrimination, hierarchy and exclusivity with its radical symbolic egalitarianism and absolute equality. “The Kingdom of God as a process of open commensality, of a nondiscriminating table depicting in miniature a nondiscriminating society, clashes fundamentally with honor and shame, those basic values of ancient Mediterranean culture and society” (Crossan 1994:70).

Jesus vehemently opposed a supposed righteousness that called for division. Jesus demonstrated this with his open fellowship at his table, welcoming those who, as a rule, were thought to be unsuitable table companions. He did not call for segregation or turn his back on Israel in spite of rejection, but envisioned his people living as Israel should before their God, envisioned them to be Israel in the way God wanted them to be - in short, “...a community bonded by ‘brotherly love’, distinguished by its openness to the marginalized, characterized by members putting themselves out for one another as one would for a beloved sister or brother and not by hierarchy, priestly craft, or power-play” (Dunn 2003:610).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Crossan (1994:99-101) has developed a theory which starts with Jesus' relationship with his family. He does not believe that they doubted his power and importance, his message or his mission, but that they were critical of the way in which he was wielding and implementing it. Any normal Mediterranean family would know that in a case such as this Jesus should have settled down at home to start a healing cult right there in Nazareth. He would then be the patron, his family the brokers and clients would be attracted via word-of-mouth to come for healing.

Instead Jesus took to the road, healing whoever needed it along the way, and generally not behaving as he should have or was expected to by people cherishing hopes of a family brokerage.

Citing Mark 1:16-38, Crossan (1994:100) refers to the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Peter's house whereto the whole city and its sick flocked. He says that, once again, one would expect Peter's house to become a place of brokerage and Peter the broker, with all those who sought healing at his door. But Jesus spoke to Peter and said: "*Agomen allaxou eis tas exomenas komopoleis hina kai exei kyrukso eis touto gar ekselthon.*"

Matthew omits the incident from his gospel and Luke changes the answer of Jesus. In Crossan's opinion the "entire day is a Markan creation opposing Jesus to Peter and showing their, from Mark's point of view, incompatible visions of mission. I take from it only its opposition of itinerancy and brokerage and its usefulness for seeing what is radical about itinerancy" (1994:100-101).

He explains his theory further (1994:101):

The equal sharing of spiritual and material gifts, of miracle and table, cannot be centered in one place because that very hierarchy of place, of here over there...symbolically destroys the radical egalitarianism it announces, Radical egalitarianism denies the processes of patronage, brokerage, and clientage, and demands itinerancy as its programmatic symbolization.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Neither Jesus nor his followers are supposed to settle down in one place and establish there a brokered presence....But, for Jesus, the Kingdom of God is a community of radical or unbrokered equality in which individuals are in direct contact with one another and with God, unmediated by established brokers or fixed locations.

4.7.3 Discipleship

Jesus left a lasting impression on his disciples with regards to what discipleship entailed for him – that God, the beneficent provider, the One who forgives unpayable debts, should be to his followers the essence of their lives, their king and their Father. “Life was to be lived out of reverence for, fear before, trust in, and whole-hearted love for God” (Dunn 2003:608).

To give God first priority in this way would mean sacrificing any ambitions for social promotion or affluence, enduring rejection, suffering and the disruption or even renunciation of family life. In all of this the coming kingdom is a ubiquitous presupposition and they should live in its light. His message was directed to Israel, and in the light of the coming kingdom, urged a return to their God, just as had the message of the prophets of old. The values laid down in the Torah and emphasized by the prophets were the values he called for, with strong emphasis on the prominence given by God to the poor.

This prominence given by God to the poor is the clear message of Isaiah 61:1. Dunn writes elsewhere (2003:516): “Of all the prophecies which may have influenced Jesus, Isa. 61.1 stands out.” It reverberates in the remembered words of Jesus in reply to the question of John the Baptist (Mt 11:5/Lk 7:22), in the opening sequence of the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-6/Lk 6:20b-21), in Luke’s portrayal of Jesus reading the passage – for even while “explicitly claiming its fulfilment (Lk 4.16-21)...we can still be confident that his elaboration was based on a strong remembrance of Jesus making clear allusion to the passage on more than one occasion”

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

(Dunn 2003:517) – and its parallel in Mark 6:1-6a upon which it elaborated, and climaxing in the good news being proclaimed to the poor in Matthew 11:5/Luke 7:22. “At or near the top of any list which Jesus himself might have drawn up were clearly ‘the poor’” (Dunn 2003:517).

But who did this man calling people to discipleship think he was? And was he, as has so often been believed “...conscious of divine identity and personal pre-existence...” (Dunn 2003:616)? In most of the twentieth century scholars were to deny the possibility of having any real idea as to the self-consciousness of any historical person and his theory that the only Jesus available to us is the remembered Jesus, apparently supports their denial. He does, however, concede that his theory is not necessarily a *cul de sac* for finding Jesus’ self-understanding. “For the clearer the impression made, the clearer the object making the impression” (Dunn 2003:616).

This issue had been “...the concern of the nineteenth-century Liberals, as characterized by Schleiermacher’s conception of Jesus’ ‘God-consciousness’ and by the preoccupation with Jesus’ ‘messianic consciousness’” (Dunn 2003:616). And when scholars characterize Jesus as “charismatic vagrant” (Theissen), or “Mediterranean Jewish peasant” (Crossan 1991) or Rabbi Jesus” (Chilton 2000), the question of what these characterizations imply of Jesus’ self-understanding has to be asked.

Wright (1996:639) boldly states:

He saw his journey to Jerusalem as the symbol and embodiment of YHWH’s return to Zion. It was a new encoding, in an acted narrative, of the widespread and well-known biblical prophecies....The action was prophetic; it was messianic; and it was something more, consonant with both of those but going beyond, into an area where there is no obviously suitable adjective. Jesus was hinting, for those with ears to hear, that he was riding over the Mount of Olives, celebrating the coming kingdom, and warning Jerusalem that it

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

would mean judgment for those who rejected him and his way of peace, so YHWH was returning to his people, his city and his Temple.

Wright sees a young Jewish prophet narrating a story about YHWH's return to Zion in the dual role of Judge and Redeemer, symbolically acting out his narration of the Temple's final destruction and the celebration of the final exodus by riding into the city while weeping. Like the symbolic actions of prophets of the past, this was meant to convey the message of his vocation, namely that just so God would return and redeem his people as he had promised in Israel's scriptures.

Dunn (2003:616) says that characterisations such as these cannot fail to imply hints of the self-awareness of Jesus pertaining to what he was about. He thinks it probable that Jesus deliberately moulded his mission to resemble those of the classic prophets and highly likely that Jesus often acted in a way resembling not the sign-prophets to which Josephus referred, but the great prophets. The various "prophetic actions" attributed to him, such as the choice of the twelve, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, his entry into Jerusalem, his symbolic Temple action and the last supper all contribute to this impression.

Even if only a few sayings of Jesus were handed down as they were originally received, some of these may still resonate something of his self-awareness or self-understanding. But to start off with, the question would be how he was perceived by others. And "...here too we can claim to be tracing and filling in the contours of the impact made by Jesus. Not least will it be of importance to ask how Jesus himself reacted to these possible role models and to any attempts to identify him with them" (Dunn 2003:615).

4.8 The Image - Stirring Memories of...

4.8.1 Messiah

The title of “Messiah” or “Messias” or “Christos” was bestowed on him within a space of more or less twenty years after his death and was attached to his name so often that in the end it functioned as a personal name. It was not a priestly type of messiahship that would have been attached to him, for sufficient evidence regarding his descent would have made it obvious that no priestly lines could be traced therein and no subsequent writers saw fit to create such a lineage in order to make the title fit. Royal Messiahship seems to be a far more acceptable title in the understanding of Jesus but the questions to ask would be whether the issue of messiahship was raised in the lifetime of Jesus and if it was, to what extent? And can we deduce from the tradition how he reacted to it? Dunn believes and motivates his belief that there is a high historical probability that the issue of Jesus’ messiahship was the legal and decisive factor or excuse for Jesus’ execution, that he was crucified as messianic pretender. Several incidents in the mission and life of Jesus that are firmly grounded in the earliest memories and that raise the question of whether Jesus was the expected Royal Messiah and Dunn believes all of this cannot merely be relegated to the file of post-Easter belief.

Did Jesus see himself as royal Messiah? Dunn says that, at least in the region of Lake Galilee, a popular conception was that of the royal messiah who would come and echo in his deeds the great events of Israel’s first liberation from slavery and their entry into Canaan, so fulfilling their prophetic hope of a new and prosperous age under a king from the lineage of David. It stands to reason that Pilate would be anxious to crucify such a king for reasons political and military. Van Aarde (2003:453) finds in the Gospel of Matthew a Jesus sent by God from Egypt - reminiscent of Moses - a saviour in the mould of Joshua, the successor to Moses, to save Israel. He came in the guise of a Joshua-like figure combining in his office and

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

mission “the new/second Moses” and royal, Davidic Messiah sent to “heal”, that is, liberate God’s people from political stress.

But there is a clear implication to be found in the words of Jesus that he reacted against this role being used to typify his mission probably seeing it as false and misleading. Dunn looks at his response to Peter’s confession in Mark 8:30. The command to silence is followed by the expressed conviction that his mission would meet with rejection and suffering in the end. Indeed, the expectation of suffering features strongly in Jesus’ teaching in its entirety. The messiah Peter confesses is the royal messiah in accordance with the popular understanding of the Davidic Messiah as a mighty warrior, but Jesus quells this expectation because his own understanding of his role differed radically from this. He tries to redirect Peter into seeing his role more as he saw it himself. This is all an indication, not of a *messianic secret*, but a *messianic misunderstanding*.

Another point which he raises in his discussion of this issue and which has pertinence here is the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple. Neither of these events were of course intended as a military coup to seize the throne of Herod the Great but were meant as a prophetic protest in which the Temple is recognized as the hub of God’s involvement with his people, as well as an enactment of the necessity for the Temple to fulfil its eschatological role, with Jesus the self-conscious actor in the enfolding eschatological drama.

He concludes that Jesus never used this title for himself and never welcomed its application to himself by others. He rejected the dominant understanding of the time that the Royal Messiah was a military power in the mode of Herod the Great and when the disciples wanted to claim their share in this type of power and privilege, he points out that that is the incorrect model for discipleship. But was this understanding the only way of interpreting the prophetic texts of Israel? “The fact that the first Christians took over the title ‘Messiah’ so speedily and completely, suggests that there were other strands of Israel’s expectation which had ‘messianic

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006) potential” (Dunn 2003:653). The disciples saw him as Messiah, son of David during his mission, but their concept of messiahship is radically transformed by the Easter-events, thus substituting the traditional content of the title with a new one provided by the law, the prophets and the psalms. They built upon pointers in the teachings of Jesus about eschatological reversal and suffering but that does not mean that Jesus believed and taught his role to be that of suffering Royal Messiah. “Much the more interesting possibility was that Jesus might be considered a prophet. For in terms of eschatological expectation, the role of prophet was almost as prominent as that of royal Messiah and more widespread than the hope of an anointed priest” (Dunn 2003:655).

4.8.2 Prophet

Three prophetic figures feature in Jewish eschatological expectation, namely:

- The “returning Elijah” stemming from Malachi 4:5-6 and mirrored in Sirach 48:9-10. This expectation shines through several formulations in the gospels, such as Luke 1:17, Mark 9:11-12/Matthew 17:10-11, Matthew 11:14 and John 1:21. Of considerable interest also is the association of Elijah with Enoch, both of whom did not die, but were transported to heaven.
- A prophet like Moses with Deuteronomy 18:15,18 as basis. It is surprising that this prophecy does not feature at all prominently in Jewish expectation. An allusion to it in one of Qumran’s testimony collections was picked up and made to bear on Jesus in earliest Christianity (Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).
- Thirdly there was a somewhat vague and maybe even overlapping expectation regarding an “eschatological prophet” with as basis Isaiah 61:1-3.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

But the different strands of expectation often merged and the eschatological hopes for an anointed one were on the whole relatively anomalous.

Dunn has no doubts that Jesus had been regarded as a prophet during his mission, pronouncing the testimony bearing witness to this both widespread and consistent. Passages such as Mark 6:15 and 8:28, 29 bear witness to the widespread range of rumours regarding Jesus which were most likely circulated within Palestine and not to some evasive messianic secret.

There are numerous attestations to be found that the question of whether Jesus was a, or even “the” prophet (e.g. Jn 6:14; 7:40, 52) arose among those whose interest was aroused by the reports of Jesus’ mission. His miracles seem to have echoed those of Elijah and Elisha and significance may even be attached to the negative attestation of his being taunted as a failed prophet in Mark 14:65 and Matthew 26:68.

John the Baptist is commonly assumed to have been perceived as a prophet and therefore speculation about whether Jesus could also be seen in this way, would quite naturally abound, especially since the prophetic office still seems to have been in evidence at the time of Jesus. Proof of this is seen in the prophetic examples cited by Josephus from the two decades leading up to the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem, namely Theudas and “the Egyptian”.

Dunn (2003:658) furthermore cites the examples within “firm if confusing tradition that Jesus was asked for a ‘sign,’” applying to the tradition his method of sifting out elaborations and editorial work and retaining the stable core. The tradition he refers to is Matthew 12:38-42; Matthew 16:1-2, 4; Mark 8:11-12 and Luke 11:16, 29-32. But over and above the clear memory that Jesus was asked for a sign, “...a less clear, or elaborated, memory of his response has also been preserved: that he resisted the implication that he was that sort of prophet and may have referred

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

enigmatically to Jonah and (probably) Jonah's success in his preaching to the notoriously wicked city of Nineveh" (Dunn 2003:660).

The logical sequitur to the question of how others perceived Jesus, would be to ask how he perceived himself. In answer Dunn cites Mark 6:4 and Matthew 13:57, as well as Luke 4:24, The Gospel of Thomas 31 and John 4:44 – all versions of the same proverb depicting the welcome received by the prophet in his home village. The ample attestation suggests that the memory of his response to the lack of welcome he himself had received in Nazareth had been firmly rooted within early-Christian tradition and that Jesus indeed saw the nature of this reception to have been in line with the nature of similar receptions, equally cold, received by the prophets of the past. However, the references are to "a prophet" not "the prophet". Dunn adds that because the post-Easter believers had regarded Jesus as more than a prophet, there is no cause to doubt the veracity of this relatively lowly self-estimate. Similar considerations make a probability of even the solely attested Luke 13:33 where Jesus answers in reply to a Pharisee that no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

Schweitzer believed that eschatology was the key to the public ministry of Jesus in its entirety and not merely in his teaching, that Jesus had been a man obsessed with eschatology who fanatically foresaw that the end was at hand and the kingdom of God on the brink of manifestation, that he increasingly saw himself as end-time agent whose death would trigger the final intervention of God (Schweitzer 1906:348-349). Dunn argued that the dogmatic tone set by the use of the word *dei* echoes Jesus' own sense of the divine necessity determining his course and once again one has the sense of an undetermined prophet standing in a line of prophets rejected.

Jesus' use of "the programmatic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 to inform his own mission" (Dunn 2002:662) is noteworthy and it is probable that these passages provided him with both instruction and inspiration.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Dunn looks at several other passages which, he believes, paint a broader picture although the evidence they provide may not be as explicit. These are the texts in which Jesus is remembered as having said that he came or was sent, the implication seemingly being that he was sent by God. Dunn poses the question whether they may be seen as expressions of a prophetic commissioning on the part of Jesus. The texts to which he refers are Mark 2:17, Luke 19:10; Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:49; Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28; Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48; Matthew 10:40, Matthew 15:24, John 13:20 and Matthew 18:20.

Dunn (2003:663, 664) observes:

Finally we should note the possibility that Jesus may have shaped his mission self-consciously in terms of classic prophetic priorities, particularly championing the cause of the poor and sinner in the face of establishment priorities and unconcern.... Several recent studies have drawn fresh attention to the various “prophetic actions” attributed to Jesus: particularly the choice of twelve, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, the entry into Jerusalem, the symbolic action in the Temple, and the last supper. That Jesus every so often acted, not like the sign-prophets of whom Josephus speaks, but in the mode of the great prophets must be judged very likely. And there are various suggestions in the Jesus tradition that Jesus was remembered as exercising both prophetic insight (notably Luke 7.39) and prophetic foresight. No doubt much of all this was elaborated in the many retellings of such episodes, and much that was remembered began in the eye of the beholder. But that there were some such memories remains likely, and that in itself is significant.

Dunn believes the evangelists to have regarded the category of prophet as insufficient for describing Jesus so that climaxing opinion of him regarded him as more than a prophet. However, he points out the possibility that in

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

doing so they may have been building on covert suggestions within the tradition itself, as is evident in texts such as Luke 24:19-27 and John 6:30-33, 49-51.

Thus the reference to Isaiah 61:1-3 may stake a claim for more than merely another prophet, implying instead the (eschatological) prophet. Underlying Mark 12:1-9, the parable of the vineyard tenants, is the rejection of the prophets. The parable culminates in the mission of the son of the owner, suggesting a category more intimately linked with the owner.

Similarly, when Jesus uses the phrase “I was sent” but also “I came” it suggests a surpassing of normal prophetic commissioning, just as his usage of “I say to you” transcends the normal prophetic formula of “thus says the Lord”. Referring to Matthew 11:6/Luke 7:23 he writes:

This chimes in with the sense of eschatological newness which comes through in several of Jesus’ sayings: something greater was happening than the repetition of prophetic hope; something greater than the prophet Jonah, whom Jesus may have ...offered as a sign....Which in turn strengthens the implication...that Jesus saw himself, at least as proclaimer of the kingdom, to be part of the eschatological newness which he proclaimed and its offensiveness.

(Dunn 2003:665)

There are, of course also the reports of Jesus’ transfiguration and Dunn remarks on the significance of both the men appearing in Jesus’ company and discoursing with him, being prophets and not royal figures. He points out that an echo of Deuteronomy 18:15 is “generally detected” (Dunn 2002:665) in the command of the heavenly voice. For him it clearly implies that Jesus was a prophet in the mould of Moses, but that his glory overreaches even that of the two most illustrious prophets in the history of Israel. This is evident in the luminosity of his appearance (exceeding that of Moses in Ex 34:29-30) and the interpretative voice speaking in his

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

transcendental experience as opposed to the “gentle whisper” heard by Elijah in 1Kings 19:12.

Dunn (2003:666) has no hesitation in stating that the theme itself originated in very early perceptions of Jesus’ mission, including comments that Jesus was recalled as himself making. However, he explains that if anything, it was more likely these perceptions which gave rise to the story than vice-versa. In summary Dunn believes there need be little doubt that Jesus was regarded as a prophet by many, that he saw himself in the tradition of the prophets, and that he probably also that he claimed an eschatological significance for his mission (and therefore also for himself) which transcended the older prophetic categories.

He agrees with Sanders (1993:238) who writes:

He regarded himself as having full authority to speak and act on behalf of God. Sinners who followed him, but who may or may not have returned to the Mosaic law, would have a place in God’s kingdom. From the point of view of those who were not persuaded, he was arrogant and attributed to himself a degree of authority that was most inappropriate. From the point of view of his followers and sympathizers he offered an immediate and direct route to God’s mercy, establishing a relationship that would culminate when the kingdom fully came. Jesus was a charismatic and autonomous prophet; that is, his authority (in his own view and that of his followers) was not mediated by any human organization, not even by scripture....He said, in effect, “Give up everything you have and follow me, because I am God’s agent.”

Jesus’ reputation as exorcist and healer forms such an integral part of tradition concerning him that it cannot but be taken seriously. In the Gospel of Mark alone thirteen accounts of healing miracles, of which exorcisms

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

form the largest part by far, are to be found and in Acts 10:38 the essence of who Jesus was and what he stood for is summed up as follows: "...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Dunn 2003:670).

Dunn's criterion that different accounts may vary in the more trivial details thereof but will have a stable core where the essentials are concerned, leads him to deduce from the evidence that these stories of miracle and healing had been told as miracles from the first which is the only satisfactory explanation of how Jesus' reputation as exorcist and healer became so firmly fixed and so widespread so quickly. He reminds us once again of the stronghold of his theory as it applies here, namely that in history there are no objective facts, only interpreted data, no objective Jesus who, like an artefact, waits to be uncovered by clearing away the layers of tradition. All we have is the remembered Jesus. In this case we have what witnesses saw, namely miracles understood as having been brought about by divine power flowing through Jesus - not ordinary events which were later interpreted as miracles. This would imply, Dunn (2003:673) writes, that "[t]he first 'historical fact' was a miracle – because that was how the event was experienced, as a miracle, by the followers of Jesus who witnessed it" and then transformed it into oral accounts which were circulated among Jesus' followers (and more widely).

The impact and scope of the reputation that Jesus attained as healer and exorcist would be well nigh impossible to explain. He agrees with Strauss (1972:40) that removing the element of miracle would eliminate the very reason why the story was told in the first place. He points out, however, that Jesus definitely seems to have come across as a doer of extraordinary deeds and not a *Magos* who would, for example, name a power source initiating exorcism (I adjure you by ...).

Vermes (2003:8) writes in this regard that Jesus' contemporaries had not ascribed physical and mental disease to natural causes as much as to

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

divine punishment for sin instigated by the devil in the case of physical disorders and to direct demonic possession in the case of mental disorders. When an exorcist therefore expurgates a victim of these evil spirits, he “was believed to be acting as God’s agent in the work of liberation, healing and pardon”. With direct reference to Jesus he explains his views: “Jesus was an exorcist, but not a professional one: he did not use incantations...or foul-smelling substances....Instead, Jesus confronted with great authority and dignity the demoniacs...and commanded the devil to depart”.

He calls Jesus a Galilean Hasid and reminds his reader that “[b]esides healing the flesh and exorcizing the mind, the holy man had one other task to perform: the forgiveness of sin” (Vermes 2003:9) and that:

[i]n the somewhat elastic, but extraordinarily perceptive religious terminology of Jesus and the spiritual men of his age, ‘to heal’, ‘to expel demons’ and ‘to forgive sins’ were interchangeable synonyms. Indeed, the language and behaviour of Jesus is reminiscent of holy men of ages even earlier than his own, and it need cause little surprise to read in Matthew that he was known as ‘the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee’ (Matt. 21.11), and that Galilean admirers believed he might be one of the biblical prophets, or Jeremiah, or Elijah *redivivus* (Matt 16.14). In fact, it could be advanced that, if he modelled himself on anyone at all, it was precisely on Elijah and Elisha....

(Vermes 2003:10)

But for Dunn the whole *raison d’être* of these “extraordinary deeds” is the eschatological significance Jesus seems to have attached to them, the exorcisms in particular seeming to signify the defeat of Satan. Passages such as Matthew 12:27-28 and Luke 11:19-20 seem to signify that he “laid claim to a plenitude of power which, by implication, other exorcists did not experience” (Dunn 2003:694).

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Jesus laying claim to a special anointing by the Spirit (Isa 61:1) is therefore confident that his exorcistic ministry is manifestly of God. And as his mission is so manifestly of God, he can condemn Galilean villages (“this generation”) as all the more culpable because he is of God. Matthew 11:5-6, an eschatological blessing, reinforces that thought (Dunn 2003:695).

It would appear that Jesus saw his mission as embodying eschatological blessings and himself as the decisive agent in the realisation of eschatological hopes. “We are unlikely to appreciate Jesus’ kingdom teaching and mission as a whole unless we are willing to recognize that Jesus claimed (was remembered as claiming) a distinctive eschatological empowering for his mission as evidenced particularly in his healings and exorcisms” (Dunn 2003:696).

Dunn once again refers to the claim of unmediated authority implicit in the mission of Jesus proclaiming God’s rule as imminent and already being enacted in the present. Other typical prophets would use the formula: “Thus says the Lord...” whereas Jesus would use “I say to you...”. Other typical prophets would use “I was sent...” whereas Jesus would use “I came...”. Similarly his formula of “Amen, I say to you...” transcends all that was typically prophetic just as in exorcism his “I command...” conveys unquestionable authority which puts the usual “I adjure you by...” in the pale.

“Tradition enshrines the possibility” that Jesus explicitly claimed to be the *salaam* of God, his eschatological emissary and representative (see Dunn 2003:703). Dunn believes that, in spite of the thoroughly Jewish character of his mission, Jesus claimed for it a degree of distinctiveness and that his audience and disciples struggled to find words with which best to describe what they were seeing and hearing.

4.8.2.1 Apocalyptic and / or / nor eschatology: Confusion at the crossroads

Stephen J Patterson (1998:164) writes that New Testament scholarship has, for almost a century, presented a unified front on at least one theory, namely that the beginnings of New Testament theology are firmly rooted in eschatological thinking. He ascribes this to the emphasis on “last” things and the end of the world in the teachings of Jesus as presented in synoptic gospels:

Eschatology comes from the Greek words *eschatos*, which means “last,” and *logia*, which means “speech.” Eschatology is literally “talk about last things.” In theology, eschatology has come to be associated with the doctrine of the end times, when, according to traditional church doctrine, God will bring history and the world as we know it to an end. *But it can also have a more general meaning. Eschatology can also refer to any decisive moment when former ways and older ideas give way to something new.* When New Testament scholars use it to speak of Christian origins they are usually using it in the first sense: beliefs about the impending end of the world, the eschaton.

(Patterson 1998:164; emphasis mine)

Van Aarde (2001:1166) expresses the opinion that theologians writing on the topic of eschatology often fail to take into account the difference in time frame between the Mediterranean and the modern Western world and refers to the work of Malina (in Vann Aarde 2001:1166) in this regard. One needs to take into account that the first-century Mediterranean world was focused on the present, while our world, according to him, is future oriented.

The term “eschatology” is interpreted by Van Aarde (2001:1168) as theological rumination on the end of heaven and earth as God’s creation

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

when this order would be replaced by God's transcendental world, and the corrupt present would be replaced by the perfect, divine utopia (see Crossan in Van Aarde 2001:1168).

The way in which these last things, according to these evangelists, were expected to happen, was through imminent violent, cataclysmic catastrophe. These expectations had manifested in eschatological strands in the gospels, but when they were not fulfilled, the eschatological strands became an embarrassment.

Building upon a solid foundation of scholarship, Van Aarde writes that apocalyptic is no longer seen as solely a literary genre, but that it is currently also recognized as a socio-religious and cultural phenomenon. He adds that a knowledge of the dynamics of the altered state of consciousness⁵⁰ facilitates an understanding of apocalyptic thought processes.

A certain perspective on apocalyptic would define it as the imminent end to all, pre-empted by catastrophe of cosmic proportions. This catastrophe is expressed in symbolic language employing references to portentous events such as earthquakes, meteorites, eclipses during broad daylight. In this way researchers are of the opinion that Jesus expected the heavenly kingdom to become a reality in the near future, supplanting the mundane order.

Van Aarde (2001:1169) expresses the meaning that "Kingdom of God" is embedded in ethical eschatology, sometimes also referred to as social apocalyptic. He reminds the reader, however, that ethics in Biblical times cannot be viewed as disjunct from religious persuasions.

He sums up Jesus' use of "ethical apocalyptic by saying that Jesus had encoded his Kingdom message in parables and miraculous healings and

⁵⁰ See Van Aarde (2001:1166) for a quotation of the definition of altered states of consciousness by E Bourguignon .

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

by means of words, deeds and his very existence. Within the context of “ethical apocalyptic” Jesus undermined systemic violence perpetrated by those wielding (demonic) power in Rome, Sepphoris, Tiberias and Jerusalem as imperial strongholds of emperor, Herodian family and the Saddukite elite and against marginalized peasants.

The relationship between “apocalyptic” on the one hand and “eschatology” on the other, is clarified by Van Aarde’s (2001:1169) explanation that, just like ascetism, apocalyptic can be seen as one of the various eschatologies of the first-century Mediterranean world.

When we combine these terms into “apocalyptic eschatology” social-scientific and cultural-anthropological perspectives yield fruits as to the understanding of the conglomerated term. Studies of this nature undertaken by researchers take seriously the challenge to acknowledge and respect in their work the distance which exists between ancient and modern contexts. Van Aarde quotes the definition of Hanson (in Van Aarde 2001:1167): “Apocalyptic eschatology, therefore, is neither a genre (apocalypse) nor a social-religious movement (apocalypticism) but a religious *perspective* which views divine plans in relation to historical realities in a particular way.”

Patterson traces the steps of scholarship on eschatology and apocalypticism back to its starting line and finds its first advocate in Johannes Weiss “who argued that the new empire of which the historical Jesus actually spoke was to be an apocalyptic event, that is, one which God would usher in through the agency of an emissary, the Son of Man, whose return, flying in on clouds of glory, would be marked by great violence, tribulation, struggle, and ultimately judgment for all” (in Patterson 1998:165, 166).

Through the work of Schweitzer and others, Weiss’ apocalyptic theory and variations on it have become major themes in New Testament scholarship, to the extent that Patterson speaks of a consensus among scholars on

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Jesus as apocalyptic prophet. Patterson points out that those in support of it have found their motivation in Mark, considered to be the oldest of the canonical gospels, who paints a picture of Jesus “as thoroughly steeped in and motivated by Jewish apocalyptic” (Patterson 1998:171), as well as in Q “the earliest identifiable document in the Gospel tradition.”

These seemed to be solid sources on which to base such a consensus, but under the onslaught of new developments in this field, the said consensus has started to crumble. Patterson sees as a major part of the onslaught the “widely accepted” (1998:172) work of Kloppenborg which diverted the intention of Q from apocalyptic to wisdom. Opposition has also come from the Jesus Seminar which has credited no apocalyptic sayings with red print, as well as from the views of scholars such as Marcus Borg, who pleaded the case for a non-eschatological Jesus (in Patterson 1998:170). And John Dominic Crossan (in Patterson 1998:170) substituted the apocalyptic Jesus for “a radically countercultural social critic, who proclaimed immediate access to an unbrokered reign of God for persons marginalized from the conventional means to humane living”.

Answering his own question of what the collapse of the apocalyptic hypothesis would mean for Christian theology, Patterson envisions an abandonment of “the temporal-theological dualism which claims the present for the imperfect, inevitably flawed realm of human activity, while relegating the future to the transcendent realm of God’s absolute sovereignty” (1998:179). Two quotations sum up Patterson’s (1998:181) views on the outlook of a theology without apocalyptic:

Jesus saw clearly the pain and brutality of the world in which he lived and dared to construct in word and deed a new world coming into being. In this sense Jesus’ preaching may be said to have an eschatological dimension, even though it was not apocalyptic. This is not mere special pleading or a vain attempt to rescue the visionary aspects of eschatology without the offense of apocalyptic. Apocalyptic was but one form of

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)
 eschatology in the ancient world. In the violent and catastrophic days of the Jewish war it was this form of eschatology that Mark deemed most appropriate to giving expression to Christian hope. But before Mark, before Q, or even Paul, there was Jesus and his eschatological vision of the Empire of God.

Over against the Roman Empire Jesus offered this Empire of God, not fully present as yet, nor a future apocalyptic reality upon which one must wait. Rather is this Empire in its essence a potentiality, and best described in the parables of Jesus. Its potential is realized there where an active decision is made to live out of its “audaciously presumed reality.” This Empire of God differs vastly from the options open to the scholar at the end of the nineteenth century. When Jesus spoke of the future, he did not envision an apocalyptic one in which God would violently overthrow God’s enemies or ours.

...Jesus preached an Empire of God whose presence was not guaranteed, and perhaps could not ever be. It depends on one’s decision to live out of its reality in an act of faithfulness. But in precisely this sense Christian theology must be thought of as fundamentally eschatological. It is indeed about bringing something to an end and beginning something new....The Empire as “eschaton,” as “end,” means the end of life lived out of the realities of sin, injustice, violence, shame and pain. But it also has an “end” – that is, a goal. It is not a distant goal....The Empire of God is reached day in and day out, in the everyday decisions one makes to live faithfully to God.

(Patterson 1998:183, 184)

Dunn (2003:401, 478-484) has indicated the confusion present and past in terms of “apocalyptic” on the one hand and “eschatology” on the other. He briefly defines “apocalyptic” as follows: “[I]t can be used to indicate insight given by revelation and visions of heavenly realities now as well as in the

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

(near) future” (2003:478). He adds that the “cosmic convulsions” which are usually imagined when thinking about the term and Jesus’ use of it, occurs only once, in Mark 13:24-25, and that the idea of “divine intervention” is more implicit than explicit. He refers to Goppelt (in Dunn 2003:478) who distances Jesus from “apocalypticism” but is certain that Jesus announced the imminent end of the world and asks: “[D]oes the Jesus tradition not attribute to Jesus also a future and final eschatological expectation, including God’s kingdom to come in a way not experienced hitherto, God’s final triumph over evil, final judgment of the nations, a state of affairs imagined as a great feast, and resurrection from the dead to angelic existence?” (2003:478).

In terms of “eschatology” Dunn believes the Spirit to be a common denominator between Christian eschatology and that of Jesus. For Paul the experience of the Spirit had to be understood as the “first instalment” (Dunn 2003:479) of the kingdom, the full inheritance of which was still outstanding. Jesus’ own anointing and the empowering of his ministry by the Spirit may have “convinced him that God’s longed-for (final) manifestation of his royal rule was already in evidence and that its full manifestation could therefore not long be delayed” (Dunn 2003:479). Jesus had expressed hopes that this eschatological hope would be realised imminently, with or without apocalyptic elements, but his hope was not fulfilled and the course of events proved him wrong, revealing, according to some, the humanness of Jesus.

Dunn believes that in all of this too little attention has been paid to the character of Jewish prophetic hope, which “learned to live with the failure of prophecy without denigrating the prophecies themselves” (Dunn 2003:480). On the same page he refers to the interesting statement of Robert Carroll that the dissonance resulting from failed promises gave rise to hermeneutics, including even the transition from prophecy to apocalypse. Dunn adds that it similarly gave rise to renewed prophecies: “The point is this: within Jewish prophetic/apocalyptic tradition there was some sort of recognition that the partial fulfilment of a hope did not nullify or falsify that

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

hope. Instead the earlier hope became the basis and springboard for a fresh articulation of the same hope” (Dunn 2003:481). Moreover, one should not interpret the understanding of time which informs eschatology to be a linear one⁵¹.

H L Ellison ([1952] 1977:19) remarks that, in terms of prophecy and its seeming non-fulfilment, it is better to speak of “suspended” rather than “unfulfilled” ([1952] 1977:14). Of interest here are also his further remarks:

While the foretelling of the true prophet may normally be expected to come to pass (Deut. 18:21f), that does not necessarily establish his credentials (Deut. 13:1ff). Ultimately it is the spiritual quality of his message which shows whether a man is a prophet or not. In any case the foretelling of the future is never merely to show that God knows the future, or to satisfy man’s idle curiosity; there is normally a revelation of God attached to it. We can know the character of God better now, if we know what He will do in the future. And as the future becomes present we can interpret God’s activity the better for its having been foretold.

He concludes that Jesus saw himself not just as a prophet, but as the eschatological prophet referred to in Isaiah 61:1-3; not just as a healer or exorcist, but as emissary of God, who, when witnessed in action, leaves the onlooker with a sense of plenitude of eschatological power evidenced in both exorcisms and healings that is still perceptible in their memories as captured in the sources available. His disciples remember an exclusiveness in his claim to eschatological anointing by the Spirit of God which, in his own words, marked him off from other healers and exorcists including John the Baptist, whom Dunn names as his mentor); not just a teacher but as one who could claim an immediacy of apprehension of God’s will and an unequalled authority for teaching it. He understands

⁵¹ See Dunn (2003:483) on the flexibility in the use of “end” in this regard.

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Jesus' offices of prophet, healer and teacher to be bound together by and subsidiary to his main kingdom-objective.

When, later on, we discuss prophecy in depth and at length, we are reminded of the uniquely intimate bond there has always existed between God and his prophets, the sense of their entering into another plane of reality in which the presence and voice of God is experienced and heard more clearly than the mundane. That in Jesus this bond was experienced with a heretofore and hence unknown level of intensity, is expressed by Dunn in his remarks regarding the sonship of Jesus. He writes that there exists sufficient evidence that Jesus' *Abba* prayer was so cherished among the first believers because it was remembered as having been his own trademark form of prayer, used consistently and unvaryingly in his address to God (for his motivation of this conclusion see Dunn 2002:710-718). His use of *Abba* in this characteristic and distinctive way indicates that his prayer was heard as expressing a

...profound sense of and confidence in his relationship with God as his Father, and ...that Jesus was also recalled as alluding to this relationship on a few occasions during his mission. We can deduce further, without any strain, that this sense of sonship must have been ...crucial, even central, to Jesus' own self-understanding and...the source of the immediacy of authority with which he proclaimed the kingdom of God, in both its eschatological immanence and imminence.

(Dunn 2002:724)

Jesus seems never to have made the immediacy of his relationship with God the subject of overt instruction nor to have expected the disciples to acquiesce that he was the son of God. Neither was it a covert part of the instruction to be revealed at an advanced stage of initiation. It does appear however, that his aim was to guide them to a similar sense of sonship with

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

God, as is seen mainly when he encourages them to pray as he did and to live out this relationship as he did.

At the end of his chapter on the self-understanding of Jesus, Dunn summarizes in a nutshell:

...we can begin to speak more firmly of the man who was remembered as one who above all took on the role of eschatological spokesman for God. And from that we can deduce, without strain, something of Jesus' own self-understanding regarding that role – his conviction of being God's eschatological agent at the climax of God's purposes for Israel, his sense of intimate sonship before God and of the dependence of his disciples on him, and his probably strong hope for final acknowledgment as the man who was playing the decisive role in bringing the kingdom to fulfilment and consummation.

(Dunn 2003:762)

4.8.3 Sage

Funk (1996:143) writes: “[T]he earliest sources portray Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, a sage” and Keck (2000:83) agrees: “[H]e was not a healer who found he had something to say but a teacher who found it necessary to heal.”

Marcus Borg (1994:69-95) classifies Jesus as sage in no uncertain terms:

Wisdom is one of the most important concepts for an understanding of what the New Testament says about Jesus. It is central for two reasons. On the one hand, Jesus was a teacher of wisdom. This is the strongest consensus among today's Jesus scholars. Whatever else can be said about the pre-Easter Jesus, he was a teacher of wisdom – a sage, as

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)
 teachers of wisdom are called.⁵² On the other hand, the New
 Testament also presents Jesus as the embodiment or
 incarnation of divine wisdom, and in the next we shall look at
 him as “the wisdom of God”

(Borg 1994:69)

He distinguishes between two types of wisdom and two types of sages. The first of these is conventional wisdom, the most common type with conventional sages as its teachers, a mainstream wisdom voicing what people already know inherently, such as what the truth is and how to live according to this wisdom. The second is a subversive and alternative type of wisdom which questions and undermines the first and shows its initiates an alternative path. “Its teachers are subversive sages, and they include some of the most famous figures of religious history” (Borg 1994:70). On this path he finds Jesus: “The transformation from secondhand religion to firsthand religion, from living in accord with what one has heard to life centered in the Spirit, is central to the alternative wisdom of Jesus and also to the Jewish tradition in which he stood” (Borg 1994:88) and he concludes in a paragraph essential to his understanding of who Jesus was:

The gospel of Jesus – the good news of Jesus’ own message – is that there is a way of being that moves beyond both secular and religious conventional wisdom. The path of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up (whether to culture or to God) to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-pre-occupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God.

(Borg 1994:88)

⁵² He bases his argument on two streams of scholarship which converge to show consensus on this topic, namely one on the oral forms of Jesus’ teaching which has argued for an early tradition layer in Q which is “dominated by wisdom forms” (Borg 1994:88) and the other on the Gospel of Thomas which has also been classified as a wisdom document. He states that scholars don’t disagree on whether Jesus was a teacher of wisdom, but on which other strokes of the paintbrush should be added to complete the picture of Jesus.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Wright (1996:311) welcomes the emphasis which, in recent years, has been placed on Jesus as sage or teacher of conventional wisdom, such as has been chronicled by Borg. He agrees with Borg that Jesus offered his contemporaries an alternative route to the one offered by conventional wisdom, one on which he himself walked, setting an example for others to follow:

[T]o recognize that Jesus stood within the ‘wisdom’ traditions of Israel (and her neighbours) in no way means abandoning the view that he used this broad stream of thought and style to drive home his message about YHWH’s call to Israel at the critical moment in her history. Wisdom and prophecy, and wisdom and apocalyptic, do not cancel each other out, but rather belong together. Prophet and apocalypticist share the agenda of the Jewish wisdom tradition: to break open the worldly perspectives of readers and hearers, so that the truth of YHWH can be seen and his call heard.

Dunn considers the labels of “subversive sage” or “transformative sage” not inappropriate for Jesus, nor can be denied that his teachings had a distinct political edge to them. He had no fixed ethical system, but allowed his ethics to flow from his instinctual detection of the human element in each situation.

4.9 Jesus’ last days

When discussing the crucifixion, Dunn (2003:765-824) feels himself to be on firm ground as all sources dealing with the subject agree that the climax to Jesus’ mission had been a final visit to Jerusalem where he had been executed. Dunn (2003:765, 766) regards the reports of the events leading up to and surrounding the crucifixion as a prime and extended example of the stable essential core of the oral traditioning pattern as formulated initially by eyewitness participants, leaving little room for doubting the historicity thereof.

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Dunn (2003:769) believes the Synoptics to be clearly implying that if a single incident can be identified as having directly led to the arrest of Jesus, it would have to be his “prophetic sign” in the Temple. All three are in agreement that the authority claimed by Jesus had to be directly challenged as a symptomatic response in the ever-widening chasm between Jesus and the scribes.

The questions of why Jesus went to Jerusalem and whether he anticipated his own death are asked more readily than answered. The reader is reminded of Dunn’s argumentation leading to the conclusion that Jesus in all likelihood had seen himself as standing in the tradition of the prophets of Israel and maybe even at the climax thereof. The fate of Israel’s prophets and their suffering had become proverbial and Jesus, in donning the mantle of prophetic emissary of God, must have been fully aware that a prophet’s rejection, suffering and martyrdom was at the very least a probability. Add to that the expectation that the righteous could expect to suffer and even die for putting God’s will before everything else and that Jesus had most certainly been aware of the fate that John the Baptist had suffered at the hands of Antipas, and the second question seems to have been answered.

Two acts of prophetic symbolism enacted by Jesus, namely the Temple action in which he must have been deliberately throwing down the gauntlet to the Temple authorities (and especially if he had provoked those in charge of the Temple by predicting its destruction and replacement), as well as the bread broken and shared as a symbol of himself and the wine poured into a communal cup, clearly denote “...that Jesus did anticipate rejection for his message in Jerusalem, to share the fate of the prophets, to suffer as a man in the hands of men, to drink the cup of suffering and be fully caught up in the final tribulation” (Dunn 2003:805).

In another answer to this question Jesus echoes the metaphor used by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” It was John who applied the metaphor of the

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

baptism to the great tribulation which he anticipated and which would envelop his hearers. Jesus is remembered as taking up and applying this metaphor deliberately and in the same way. However, he adds a transformative interpretation to it when he applies it to himself, suggesting that he himself would not be dispensing the judgment, but would have to endure it.

Jesus is remembered in the earliest formulated memories of his mission as giving his anticipated (and increasingly feared) death a certain meaning as a planned and integral part of this mission; it was God's will that he should suffer just as the other faithful and righteous before him had suffered and maybe he hoped that his suffering would end Israel's suffering. Suffering would be part of the reconstitution of Israel called for in the escalating eschatological crisis and he as the chosen one was called upon to take it upon himself. And if God was planning on renewing the covenant with his people, presumably a covenant sacrifice would be needed. Exodus 24:8 reads "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" Jesus possibly saw those around him (the "for you" in Lk 22:20 is presumed by Dunn to have had in mind the twelve as representatives of the eschatological Israel) as constituting the renewal of God's covenant with Israel and maybe he foresaw the promise of a renewed covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 being finally fulfilled. Dunn opts for the possibility that Jesus saw his death less as a sin offering than as the required covenantal sacrifice and that he may have met his death more willingly because he saw it as the sacrifice necessary for bringing into effect the long-promised covenant.

4.10 In conclusion

"*Prophet* was a category which Jesus seems to have fitted well, and found congenial to characterize much of his mission which is clearly remembered as fully alive to the traditional fate of the prophet to be rejected..." (Dunn 2003:889). He was also remembered as a healer and exorcist – many

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

experienced miraculous healings and happenings in his company - and often hailed as a teacher – he launched scathing attacks on the contemporary system of religious and social values through his parables and aphorisms.

The Jesus of memory aimed to bring the good news to the poor and to call sinners in a reaffirmation of Israel's constitutional priorities, to encourage and bring to realisation a society in which any unnecessary and hurtful boundaries between its members are eradicated. He lived on in memory as one who frequently pronounced that many age-old prophetic hopes are on the point of fulfilment:

The Baptist's onesided emphasis on imminent and purgative judgment Jesus supplemented (not entirely replaced) with the complimentary emphasis, drawn largely from the same prophet Isaiah), of divine grace to the physically, socially, and religiously disabled. In the *liberation* he saw his exorcistic ministry bringing to demoniacs and in the *healing* (and forgiveness) he saw his ministry bringing (through the trust exercised) to those who were ill...clear signs that God was exercising his rule in the here and now. It was presumably such repeated experiences which confirmed for Jesus that his hope for the fuller (final) coming of God's kingdom could not be long delayed. God's royal rule had drawn near.

(Dunn 2003:887)

In closing he once again emphasizes that there is no other Jesus to be found than the *remembered* Jesus. The Jesus tradition of the Gospels confirms that remembering Jesus had been a matter of concern within earliest Christianity and the process of engraving within the collective memory occurred by reuse and regular repetition in the oral mode of the original and immediate impact made by Jesus. The initial formative impact had not been Easter faith, nor was the impulse to formulate tradition only experienced in the post-Easter period. The original impression of what

[University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H \(2006\)](#)

Jesus had said and done in the pre-Easter call to faith, and which had drawn his first disciples into discipleship, had been translated into the words of the eyewitnesses. “In that key sense, the Jesus tradition *is* Jesus remembered” (Dunn 2003:882).

Many scholars from far and wide using different maps, reading different signposts and taking different directions at the crossroads, speeding along congested Autobahnen or meandering roads less trodden, have arrived at the same view: The clear view of a prophet. But in this view they have been guided less by an accurate mental picture of what the prophetic office with its age-old history as recorded in the Israelite tradition entailed and whether the words, actions and fate of Jesus matched up to it, than by an intuitive recognition and classification.

It is reminiscent of a family travelling to the seaside with great anticipation who suddenly, rounding a corner, shout in unison: “The Sea!” Maybe a similar expectation, a prior conditioning, leads one to expect in anticipation the image of a typical prophet or maybe even of The Prophet when rounding the corner on whichever Strasse or alley one chose in one’s research. Or maybe, just as there is something about the ocean that leaves no doubt in the mind of the traveller that he has reached his destination, so similarly, may there be something in the very being of the man Jesus, even in repose, which embodies the essence of being God’s prophet.

If it is the latter, it is good, because an in-depth look at the prophetic phenomenon almost reads like a blueprint of the mission of Jesus. One knows, however, that a prophet was steered, not by some pre-conceived notion of what was expected of them if they wanted to meet the job-description, but by the internal rudder of God’s will and I think that, if one were to meet a true prophet, one would know. If it is the former, it is also good, for having travelled for some way on the Dunn-meander, one comes to realise that the memories transmitted by word of mouth and captured, though sometimes fleetingly, in the sources available to us, leaves little doubt in a variety of scholarly minds that a major part of the initial impact of

University of Pretoria etd – Dannhauser, E H (2006)

Jesus as remembered by his followers and opponents alike, was that of prophet.

However, an in-depth look at what we know about the prophets and prophetic modus operandi from tradition, can only enrich our understanding of Jesus as prophet, his actions, the ways he chose to encode his message, as well as what drove him, and make the view clearer and more detailed.