

**CHAPTER 5****COMPARING AND ASSESSING THE JOURNEYS****5.1 M Borg**

Although I haven't dedicated a full chapter to his views on the subject, Borg has been a conversation partner for so big a part of all the previous chapters that I feel justified in including a summary of his work here.

Borg, at the end of his journey, discovers a multi-faceted pre-Easter Jesus; he is a Spirit person<sup>53</sup>, teacher of wisdom, movement founder, exorcist and healer, and last but not least, social prophet (Borg & Wright 1999:60).

These facets combine to give us a complete picture of a Jewish mystic. He describes Jesus in the various facets of his ministry as follows:

**5.1.1 Jesus the Spirit person:**

Borg uses this term as interchangeable with that of "Jewish mystic", yet it also forms part of the five-part spectrum comprising the picture of Jewish mystic and indeed is prerequisite for the other four. For Jesus, God was a known, experienced reality, One to whom he had direct access as opposed to hearsay evidence. There is an intimacy in his knowing of God which reminds one of the same quality in the two archetypal prophets of the Old Testament, namely Moses and Elijah and is shown in the uncommon way he addresses God as *Abba*. Borg (1998:242) cites part of Matthew 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22, saying: "...[a] Q text reports that Jesus spoke of the intimate knowing that occurs between father and son and uses this analogy to speak of Jesus' own experience of God: 'No one knows the son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the son.'" Like Dunn, Borg (1998:242) believes that, as Q material, its credentials are excellent, that in

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 6.

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language and content it belongs within a pre-Easter Palestinian milieu, and that it can therefore very likely be attributed to Jesus.

Borg (1998:243) adds that Jesus understood the nature of God to be one of cosmic generosity and compassion, as being gracious, nourishing and all-encompassing, in line with the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition which was his own tradition. Furthermore he had insight into God's vision of what He wanted his people to be and therefore his "...basic 'program' for the internal reform of Israel – 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate' – flowed out of knowledge of God which he, as a Spirit person, was given in his own internal experience" (Borg 1998:243).

### **5.1.2 Jesus the sage**

The authority of a teacher of wisdom depended largely upon the clarity of expression in his teachings. In terms of perspicacity, Jesus' parables and aphoristic sayings know no equal. Usually a sage is a person of advanced years who, through observation and rumination have reached a level of sagacity which allows them to share their keen reflections with students or an audience. In the case of Jesus, however, his youth is counterbalanced by his spiritual experience and the subsequent mystical perception of himself and the world.

His wisdom was subversive and alternative in nature leading beyond convention, his aphorisms and parables inviting his audience into a different way of viewing the world, God and themselves, an alternative way of living and centering - in short - into a life in the Spirit.

### **5.1.3 Jesus as healer and exorcist**

As a "doer of mighty deeds" (Josephus in Borg & Wright 1999:66) he performed "paranormal healings and exorcisms as history remembered" (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:66). The fact that more healing stories are told about Jesus than about any other figure in Jewish tradition, bears

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testimony to his exceptional healing abilities. His healings and exorcisms symbolised the coming of the kingdom of God and a time of salvation and formed a central part of his ministry program and, together with sharing a meal, formed part of what he commissioned his followers to do when they were sent out on their mission. “The two practices involved a sharing of spiritual and material resources, even as they challenged the established religious and social world of Jesus’ day. In particular, healing as practiced by Jesus and his itinerant followers pointed to an unbrokered relationship to God, apart from institutional mediation” (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:67, 68). In this he is in agreement with John Dominic Crossan who writes about “...Jesus’ invocation of the kingdom of God not as an apocalyptic event in the imminent future but as a mode of life in the immediate present....My wager is that *magic and meal* or *miracle and table* ...is the heart of Jesus’ program” (Crossan 1991:304) and adds:

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, of this place *over* other places, symbolically destroys the radical egalitarianism it announces. Radical egalitarianism denies the processes of patronage, brokerage, and clientage, and demands itinerancy as its programmatic symbolization....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 any established brokers or fixed locations.

(Crossan 1994: 101)

#### **5.1.4 Jesus as prophet**

Being in essence a Spirit person cultivated within Jesus a sense of mission which led him to assume the role of prophet. Following in the footsteps of the gospel-writers who imply that he was thought of as a prophet and may have seen himself as one (Borg, in Borg & Wright 1999:72), Borg

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compares him with the social prophets of ancient Israel who incisively delivered stringent critique upon the social-political order of their day as a result of their direct communion with the “*mysterium tremendum*”.

Jesus’ actions were subversive; he ignored table-fellowship taboos and Sabbath conventions, targeted Jerusalem and the Temple in his indictment of the corporate direction of his people and radically rewrote their future expectations. Through his own table-fellowship with its open invitation to all and sundry, he included those pronounced anathema, enacting a breakdown of holiness as separation. Jesus opposed the gathering momentum of a potentially militant resistance to Rome, advocating instead the way of peace which meant for him not some abstract notion but a practical reality encompassing political peace. It would be incorrect to label him non-political because regarding his society and people whom he loved passionately. He was intensely political in his concern about their institutions and historical dynamic, but his political attitude towards Rome was based “...on the conviction that in the political affairs of the world the judging activity of God was at work” (Borg 1998:246).

As a prophet Jesus was summoning his people to once again reshape as a nation their attitudes and institutions to conform to the “inclusive compassion of God” (Borg 1998:246) and to dare to meet an uncertain future in which all that was certain was God’s ultimate vindication of his people. His summons entailed risks, but he sought to steer his people from a course which could only end in catastrophe. Apparently anticipating his own death as a result of his prophetic actions and ministry, he went to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover in order to deliver a climactic appeal to his people at the centre of their corporate life.

Borg (in Borg & Wright 1999:73) concludes: “I am convinced,...that it was Jesus’ activity as a social prophet that accounted for his execution. According to the synoptic gospels, his prophetic act of overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the temple court was the trigger for his arrest. His prophetic vocation was that important to him.”

### 5.1.5 Jesus as movement initiator

All of the above combined to gain Jesus a following and a movement that germinated, grew and gathered momentum around him because of his miracles, his wisdom, his prophecy and his trademark inclusive meal practice, but the movement he initiated was only institutionalised some time after his death.

## 5.2 NT Wright

### 5.2.1 A summary of Wright's route

We know about Jesus in two ways: through history and faith. The elimination of either or the separation of both from each other would be wrong and impoverishing to the understanding of the whole.

Just as the historian examines every scrap of evidence as a source, so he too uses all available material. Wright finds the theory that in New Testament research the problem of the literary relationship between the gospels has to be solved before attempting to find the way back from the sources to Jesus "notoriously complex" (Wright, in Borg & Wright 1999:20). Questions of relationships between sources, the sources they might have used, a three-stage development in source material, including oral traditions and their shaping, their solidifying into literary sources and the collection and editing of these last pose, to his mind, questions which would be wonderful if answered or even answerable, but seeing that they're not, they aren't.

Wright (in Borg & Wright 1999:22) views all these questions in the wider context of the beginning of Christianity; why it began and why it assumed the shape it did. His three criteria are: Does it make sense of the data as they stand, "Does it have an appropriate level of simplicity, or even elegance? Does it shed light on areas of research other than the one it was designed to cover?"

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Along a road mapped by this method he discovers a first-century Jewish monotheism subscribed to by people who believed their god to be the only one, the one who elected them to be his chosen people. Wright (in Borg & Wright 1999:32) likewise discovers a first-century Jewish eschatology (“the belief that history is going somewhere, that something will happen to put it right” [Wright, in Borg & Wright 1999:32]) claiming that the one god of his chosen people would soon act within history and vindicate his elect and establish peace and justice once and for all. Although God’s people had returned from exile as God’s punishment for their sins, foreigners were still their overlords and this meant that the punishment was continuing. The great promises of forgiveness given by the great prophets of old had not yet come to fruition. They anticipated their future liberation in language reminiscent of the return from exile, seeing this hope as the new exodus.

In steps Jesus, the first-century Palestinian Jew, announcing in the manner, language and demeanour of a prophet, that YHWH, the God of Israel, was now, at last, becoming king, for the arrival of his kingdom in this world was imminent. This kingdom would be a place distinguished by the fact that God ruled, or would soon rule. In a world where theology and politics, piety and revolution went hand in hand, the hope for God’s kingdom was not merely political. Therefore this new kingdom would bring a new kind of religion, a new spiritual experience, a new code of mores. For it was about the story of Israel having reached its climax and moving towards its decisive moment in time.

The kingdom Jesus announced looked somewhat different from the one expected and the enemy was not Rome, but the one behind Rome. The final battle before the kingdom would break in upon the world, had already been inaugurated in and through the person and work of Jesus with all his emphasis on prophetic symbolism. It challenged the power and policies of Herod, Caiaphas and Rome itself, it challenged the militant aspirations of the revolutionaries within the ranks of Israel, it challenged all the injustices and oppression endemic within its own society, a society resting on the

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laurels of its own purity and isolating outsiders in sharp distinction, perpetuating the injustice.

Jesus invited his audience to become kingdom people, God's people who had truly returned from exile by repentance and faith in his gospel. They must relinquish all revolutionary ideas and buy into Jesus' counter-agenda, turning the other cheek and going the extra mile, losing their lives to gain it, and all of this in a newly constituted community where debts would be written off and sins forgiven. He welcomed sinners into fellowship with himself as members of the kingdom he was announcing, offering forgiveness of sins out on the street, without sacrifice or temple. He challenged people to live as the new covenant people in forgiveness and prayer, to abolish barriers against those on the outside and oppression to those on the inside so that God, through them, may fulfil his long-cherished intentions for his world.

In announcing all of this Jesus was misunderstood by his followers and attacked from all sides. But this Jesus - the prophet - had a strong sense of vocation, a profound awareness of drawing strength and guidance from the one he called "Abba", a deep consciousness of the role that was his to perform. However, his vocation was a dangerous one and being the light of the world meant for those following him political danger, even death. In spite of this, they received the reassurance that their faith in the God they worshipped would carry them through present tribulations and into the new day that would dawn.

For those unwilling to follow him, dire consequences await: for the nation, Jerusalem, the temple.

Jesus' agendas culminated in a clash of his own positive kingdom-symbols with those embracing the symbols of Torah, Temple, Jerusalem, Sabbath, et cetera. In these skirmishes he saw his kingdom-program, inaugurated by him, moving towards fulfilment.

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If Jesus' inevitable death accomplished the kingdom of God in some obscure way, then his message widened in impact to embrace the whole world.

### **5.2.2 Assessment: Wright's journey in retrospect**

Wright works with a grand narrative, a large hypothesis in which judgment on smaller-scale issues must be made according to how they fit into the large picture. But what constitutes the controlling story can be problematic, as pointed out by Dunn (2003:473). He identifies this as exile and restoration which is contentious in a number of ways (cf. Dunn 2003:473-477 who concludes that one "should heed postmodernism's warning against uncritical dependence on grand narratives, against the superimposition of a unitary meta-narrative on much more complex data."

My own concerns with his work is that he too readily dismisses the possibility of achieving any results from looking critically at the sources, their ancestry and their interdependence, and especially at and behind the Gospel of Mark. The work of Horsley has shown that it is indeed possible, plausible and scientific to do so and the results of such a study inspire much more confidence that, what is learnt from the investigation, brings one close to the actual intention of Jesus. When travelling with Wright in search of a clear view of Jesus, one can't help feeling that Jesus, instead of being found at the destination of the journey, has been a fellow-passenger all along, nor can one help wondering at times what the whole point of the journey was.

## **5.3 R A Horsley**

### **5.3.1 A summary of Horsley's route**

In our investigation into the work of Horsley, we have concentrated especially on his theories as expounded in his examination of Q, not as



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consisting of isolated sayings, but as a sequence of discourses united by a common theme, and understood within its Jewish matrix.

The main gist of Horsley's argument is that Q has to be understood as oral-derived literature. He refers to previous analyses of Q, all of which have condensed composition and writing into one action which would then supposedly have required "literary (that is, scribal) technology, knowledge confined in antiquity to an elite of perhaps five percent of the population" (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:294). Q would, according to these analyses, be seen as the result of the kind of scribal activity endemic to Near Eastern scribal schools, a collection of material shuffled into a relatively well-organized form, complete with "clearly constructed arguments and with a degree of topical organization that places it among the best organized ancient sayings collections....Q, then, is far from unreflective, unsystematic oral tradition" (referring to Kloppenborg, in Horsley & Draper 1999:294).

Horsley (in Horsley & Draper 1999:293-295) distances himself from these conclusions, voicing his opinion that, even when acknowledging the complexity and organization in this source (as he indeed does with appreciation), no scribal activity had been employed in the formation of Q. He reminds scholars that even before the recent revival of interest in oral performance and transmission, it had been shown that oral tradition is anything but unreflective or unsystematic and that, on the contrary, it can be complex and highly sophisticated. Horsley's (in Horsley & Draper 1999:294) conclusion is therefore that the composition of Q is an oral one, with scribal technology only employed for the conversion of the composition into writing.

An assumption integral to his proposal is that it is essential for an oral text to resonate with its audience in order to ensure its continued performance. In Horsley's opinion this implies that the content of Q would deliver upon inspection, clues as to the context of the hearers and performers. "The key to determining the situation of the people who heard and resonated to the

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text recited or performed is its register, analysed according to its key features in the communication context: its field (what is happening), its tenor (between whom), as well as its mode” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:295).

If one heeds the cues of the registers within the Q discourses, one should be able to attune to the general communication contexts such as covenant renewal and prayer. So, for instance, does he find clear Mosaic covenantal register in Q 6:20-49 in which the performer conveys Jesus’ enactment of covenant renewal between God and the people, newly appropriating blessings and curses to communicate God’s deliverance, while reformulating and reinforcing the traditional socio-economic covenantal relationships.

Horsley deems it necessary to employ a realistic historical sociology when striving for a clear view of Jesus in Q, avoiding the pitfalls of depoliticising Jesus and his mission. In the teaching of Jesus, as in that of the political prophets Elijah and Elisha, religion and politics should not be treated as two disjunct fields of interest, and as proof should be regarded the fact that he was executed as political agitator or criminal, charges of which Horsley believes him not to have been entirely innocent.

The Q discourses are not exclusively addressed to the poor, but also address typical local village interactions and the “rather mundane exchanges” (1999:297) of village community life, realigning them to Mosaic covenantal principles. Involved referencing to covenantal principles suggest an audience familiar with, indeed well-versed in, Israelite tradition, their circumstances claiming immediacy with them, and therefore most probably villagers.

There is, moreover, according to Horsley, an enactment of the renewal of Israel, carrying distinct socio-economic overtones aimed at community life, to be found in the covenant renewal discourse. Part and parcel of this renewal is guidance directed at the ordinary people, mainly villagers, in

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their stance over against the very powerful and rich Jerusalem rulers and their scribal-Pharisaic representatives, their “retainers”. The renewal of Israel through its people, and the Q-people in particular, was underway and targeted as opponents these Jerusalem rulers and their representatives who stand under the wrath and condemnation of God for their exploitation of his people and the violence against his prophets. For latent to overt conflict on historical political and social planes, compounded in Galilee by regional differences, was part and parcel of the cultural heritage of Jesus’ audience. Horsley’s comment on the conclusion of the discourse found in Q 7:18-35 reveals an important part of his understanding of Jesus’ role as portrayed in Q: “[T]his generation,’ caricatured as contentious and pretentious children, stands in opposition to the amazing fulfilment of the people’s longings for deliverance in the new age, the kingdom of God. In spite of these attacks on John and Jesus, the prophets of the fulfilment now underway, (God’s) wisdom will be vindicated by its children” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:299).

Applying the principle mentioned above, namely that only what resonates with and is essential to the community will survive in oral transmission, to the exhortation of Jesus to fearless confession before those who have the jurisdiction to have them executed, Horsley states that, had the threat of execution not been an actual one, the tradition of this saying would not have survived.

He also focuses attention on the Q performers as speaking for Jesus (or John) and about Jesus, bringing to life once more what he had taught. They have lately come to be understood as coming from a Jesus movement parallel to but dissimilar to the Pauline mission and the movement or community connected with Mark. Performing regularly before the same communities, they encouraged their audience to boldly seek the kingdom of God while envisioning relief from their economic pressures and the basic necessities for life: “seek the kingdom of God and these things will be given you.” They were, repeatedly, in every performance, cast in a prophetic role, serving in a prophetic office.

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The Jesus he finds in Q is not the exalted Lord. He finds no indication of interest in Jesus' death or resurrection. Neither is he influenced by the wisdom tradition or to be found, as some in the past have claimed to find him, within the context of Gentile Cynic popular philosophy. Instead he finds a Jesus declaring himself to be the prophet fulfilling the longings of the people previously articulated by the prophets, enacting the role of a prophet like Moses (who had communicated with God, led his people to deliverance and founded the covenantal people of Israel), with the renewal of the covenant as his focus. In his mission discourse, commissioning envoys to ensure the continuation of his renewal program, he assumes the mantle of Elijah, the most prominent and revered prophet from the northern Israelite tribes, whose focus had similarly been the renewal of Israel.

The kingdom announced by Jesus was not the end of the world or a cosmic cataclysm as anticipated in the older apocalyptic eschatology, but a political metaphor, a symbol of the restoration of society according to covenantal principles.

As oracular prophet Jesus was the receiver and deliverer or pronouncer of a revelation from the Lord, but there was also another type of prophet; one with a much broader range of office. These prophets not only delivered revelatory oracles of the will and action of God, but founded and led movements of renewal as well. Moses, as leader of the exodus and covenant mediator had been the great prototype, setting the example for a series of later liberators (*sophetim*) and prophets (*nabi'im*), beginning with Joshua. Probably the pinnacle functionary in this prophetic archetype was Elijah who, with his successor Elisha, led a renewal movement against oppressive domestic rule.

Jesus and the Q performers reciting his speeches not only pronounce condemnation of rulers and their representatives for their oppression of the people but also deliver encouragement and admonition to the people to work in cooperation and solidarity, trusting the renewal process that

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God is initiating in the kingdom and maintaining their commitment and solidarity in the movement even under threat of persecution and death.

(Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:307, 308)

Horsley (1999:309) understands the Q Jesus to have the distinguishing traits of all leadership functions mentioned by Paul (1 Cor 12:27-28): “Q’s Jesus was an ‘apostle’ of God, a ‘prophet’ receiving and declaring the will of God, a ‘teacher’ of the people in the movement, and a healer and performer of deeds of power (exorcisms), as well as an organizer of a movement.” In Q, as in the *Didache* and Acts 13:12, Jesus’ role of prophet and teacher fit together seamlessly.

### 5.3.2 Assessment: Horsley’s journey in retrospect

Horsley, forging his way along the Wredestrasse to sources behind the Markan gospel, does so with commendable scholarly thoroughness and objectivity. He offers a refreshing view of Jesus behind the Gospel of Mark. His insights into the oral traditioning process and his treatment of Q as a series of discourses rather than isolated sayings offer various fresh slants to the view and one senses in his work a genuine commitment to listening to the voice of Q. His warning that Jesus’ teaching should be seen within the religious-social-economic context of his day should be heeded and when he finds a prophetic rather than sapiential Jesus in Q, one has the satisfaction of knowing that the route he travelled to discover this view is a legitimate one.

However, although he pleads for emphasis on both political and religious aspects of the teaching of Jesus, he seems at times to do to a certain extent the opposite of what he accuses previous generations of scholarship to have done – approach Jesus with theological presuppositions – when the socio-political aspects of his own theories seem to encroach slightly on his understanding of Q’s Jesus. This could lead to an impoverished

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understanding of his mission and the kingdom he announced, although this “criticism” holds much less water for his work on Q than for his previous studies on a wider range of sources, which may indicate that this had indeed been the slant in Q.

Although he offers a much more detailed comparison with and examination of the offices of the various notable prophets of tradition than Wright, he would similarly benefit from a detailed study into the prophetic phenomenon. One wonders, for instance, given the nature of the prophetic office in which the prophet is completely at God’s disposal, whether it is necessary to distinguish between oracular prophets and the leaders of movements, for if God deemed it necessary, the oracular prophet would lead a movement as part of the oracle he delivered.

Which brings us to an important part of our understanding of prophecy and of Jesus as prophet in particular. Is a prophet, while claiming God’s calling and authority and indeed maybe under the illusion that he is in direct communication with God, in actual fact on his own mission? But more on this topic later in Chapter 6.

## **5.4 J D G Dunn**

### **5.4.1 A summary of Dunn’s route**

I suspect that many a scholar will henceforth be following the Dunn-meander en route to a clear view of Jesus, finding it, like me, well worth the effort. It has been mapped out well by him, is easily navigated, and when it reaches its destination the beholder feels himself on much firmer ground while admiring the view.

His major contribution is the insight that the synoptic evangelists have not falsified, but on the contrary preserved, the memory of Jesus, presenting even the reader of the twenty-first century with the possibility of an encounter with Jesus. There is solid attestation for the importance attached

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to remembering Jesus and learning about him from responsible teachers. He dismisses as misleading the suppositions that prophecy within the earliest churches would have expanded significantly the original Jesus tradition, saying that, on the contrary, the first churches would have been on red alert to stamp out any trace of false prophecy or any prophetic utterance out of harmony with the Jesus tradition.

He emphasises orality, with its mixture of stable and flexible elements, as one of the major keys to understanding the traditioning process which has handed down to us the tradition regarding Jesus. He refers to the statement made by RF Person (in Dunn 2003:254), namely that scribes understood their task to be the re-presentation of the dynamic tradition of their communities, before presenting his show-stopping comment that, rather than assuming the literary co-dependence of the synoptic gospels, as in the two-source hypothesis, one should look into an at least partial oral explanation for the variations and similarities between them:

[T]he degree of variation between clearly parallel traditions and the inconsequential character of so much of the variations have hardly encouraged an explanation in terms of literary dependence (on Mark or Q) or of literary editing. Rather, the combination of stability and flexibility positively cried out to be recognized as typically oral in character. That probably implies in at least some cases that the variation was due to knowledge and use of the same tradition in oral mode, as part of the community tradition familiar to Matthew and Luke. And even if a pericope was derived from Mark or Q, the retelling by Matthew or Luke is itself better described as in oral mode, maintaining the character of an oral retelling more than of a literary editing.

(Dunn 2003:254)

This implies that Matthew and Luke would have known many of these oral traditions independently of their knowledge of written traditions, including

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Mark and Q. In the stabilities within the tradition he discovers its identity and in the dissimilarities its vitality.

He finds evidence of a concern among the disciples and within the churches, relating to both narratives and teaching, for the words and deeds of Jesus to be remembered as their central identity-defining component. This concern is focused in particular themes, words and phrases, usually uttered by Jesus himself, which show no evidence of linear or cumulative variations and developments, but are clearly the variations characteristic of oral performance. He reports finding neither penchant for detailed literalistic historicity nor flooding of tradition with Jewish wisdom material or prophetic utterances or embellishments in the material he examined.

He pleads for an adaptation of the default settings inherent in the age-old literary mindset of the modern reader to allow for a paradigm better suited in its flexibility to accommodate the complexities of the Jesus tradition.

He sees the oral traditioning process as starting almost from the very beginning, definitely before the first Easter, and maintained through to and even beyond the writing down of the tradition in the form of the synoptic gospels. Jesus' initial impact, or indeed series of impacts, ignited the formation of the tradition, which was in its turn the formative and constitutive factor in the establishment of the community / church. This tradition was preserved and celebrated through repeated community or liturgical performances and probably reviewed for apologetic or catechetical purposes. From this basis he comes to the conclusion that the gospels present us with the living tradition of Christian celebration which transports the reader with surprising immediacy to the very heart of the first memories of Jesus.

Dunn acknowledges that, given the nature of the synoptic traditions, he can offer as little in the way of positive proof for his theories as the proponents of the Markan priority, "...but my conviction remains that the shape and verbal variations of most of the Synoptic traditions are better explained by



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such an oral hypothesis than exclusively in terms of literary dependence” (Dunn 2003:336).

Following the trail laid by oral transmission of the Jesus tradition, he discovers the view of a Jesus uninterested in laying claim to any title as such, rejecting at least one title awarded him by others, someone clearly without the intention of making any claims as to his own status in the execution of his mission. His use of the “non-title” “son of man” seems to merely express his hope for vindication. But when he alludes to his own role within his mission, it is a mere by-product of the single central element in his teaching: the Kingdom of God. “[H]is role was a role in relation to that, rather than an assertion of his own status as such. Evidently, it was his proclamation of the kingdom which was important; the identity of the proclaimer was a secondary matter” (2003:761, 762).

As to the question of who the receivers of God’s Kingdom would be, it seems that Jesus did not envision a mission to the Gentiles, but if his program of unreserved neighbourly love to all and sundry which he required his disciples to follow was anything to go by, he seemingly took it for granted that they would be included in the kingdom. Jesus called as many as would hear him and seemed in particular “to include those whom most others, or the main opinion-formers in particular, regarded and treated as outside the realm of covenant grace. Not just the poor, in line with the deeply rooted priorities of Torah and prophet, but also, surprisingly, ‘sinners’, who ought to be disapproved of by the faithful...” (Dunn 2003:540). Here he differed from his prophetic predecessors, but he did expect the renewal of Israel in the near future and anticipated it in the circle of discipleship which he assembled around him.

Dunn (2003:610, 611) speaks of circles of discipleship, such as those of the innermost twelve and a wider circle including the women who followed him, which overlap and intertwine, preventing any hard and fast distinction between disciples and followers. Jesus expected these disciples of his to live in the light of the coming kingdom, not as living an *Interimsethik*, but

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...rather as the character of kingdom life, lived already here and now in anticipation of God's ordering of society when his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Not as living in a spiritual world...but as living in a sacramental universe, where the signs of God's providential care are everywhere to be recognized, learned from, and received with thankfulness. Not as a closed society, determined by rules and excluding boundaries, but as a community which seeks above all else God's priorities, in which forgiveness is experienced, which is often surprised by grace, and which knows well how to celebrate God's goodness in the openness of table-fellowship and love of neighbour.

(Dunn 2003:610, 611)

He believes that the tradition proves impractical any clear boundaries between disciples and followers, all of whom had to meet with a series of other requirements as well, some of which are:

- They were subjects of the king and had to acknowledge Him as such.
- They were children of the Father and should trust in Him and his generosity for their very existence with child-like faith. God is trustworthy and they should know that He will sustain them in the face of crises and be willing to return to a position of dependence.
- The implicit trust expected from the disciples is conveyed through prayer to the King who is simultaneously Father.
- Jesus chose an immediate group of followers so that they may assist and share in his mission. They were disciples of Jesus, following him in reaction to his calling, just as Elijah had called Elisha. This implied that they were to learn what the teacher, Jesus taught, that they were to be sent out by him to be fishers of men (Mk 1:17), to preach the exact same message that was characteristic of his own preaching, namely that God's kingdom had drawn nigh, and to exorcise demons with authority.

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- Jesus depicted his role as that of servant and expected his close circle of disciples to join him in this servitude.
- They should be prepared to follow him through the suffering which surely lies ahead for him and them.
- They hunger for what is right.
- Love for one's neighbour and forgiveness sums up the motivational force for relations with others in Jesus' teaching.
- But the characteristic of discipleship that was most distinctive of his mission and most prominent in the social self-understanding he encouraged in his disciples, was those of open table-fellowship and the absence of boundaries. These were characteristic of the good news of the kingdom he was promoting, which was noted for its concern for others in their various disabilities

Therefore the conduct required from Jesus' disciples is not their guaranteed entry-ticket into the Kingdom, nor *Interimsethik*, but a quality of life appropriate for those who anticipate with gladness its manifestation and strive to live already in its light. The teaching of Jesus does not yield a systematic ethical program, nor does one find in it, according to Dunn, economic policies to reconstruct society in the local community and make it more just as we have seen Horsley do. But while saying that it offers no blueprint for a complete social order, it does clearly reflect the social divisions and economic hardship of the time. The rich are admonished in no uncertain terms to open their eyes to the danger their wealth holds and to give amply to the poor.

Jesus was seen to fit the role of prophet. There are indications that he drew on Isaiah 61:1-3 as agenda for his mission and that he deliberately shaped his mission to coincide with that of the classical prophets of old. He did so particularly in championing the cause of the poor and sinner in the face of the lack of importance on the scale of priorities and the unconcern and lack of empathy on the part of establishment. He clearly is under the impression of a prophetic commissioning from God. There is clear memory of

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prophetic insight and foresight in the tradition and his actions were clearly reminiscent of, not the sign prophets, but the great prophets. Scholarship (referred to in Dunn 2003:664) has drawn attention to some of these actions such as his choice of twelve followers, his eating with toll-collectors and sinners, his healings and exorcisms, his entry into Jerusalem, the symbolic Temple-action and the last supper.

There are, moreover, indications that Jesus understood his own mission to transcend that of prophet. Dunn (2003:666) sums up: “[T]here need be little doubt that Jesus was regarded as a prophet by many, that he saw himself in the tradition of the prophets, and probably also that he claimed a(n eschatological) significance for his mission (and thus himself) which transcends the older prophetic categories.”

As sage or teacher he is remembered as speaking regularly with a confident assertion of personal authority, placing great emphasis on both his teaching and his expectation that his disciples place similar emphasis on it. Jesus claims direct authority from God, maybe coinciding with his proclamation of God’s rule, so that his authority emanated from his proclamation of its imminence as well as from his enactment of God’s reign in the here and now. Dunn (2003:703) refers to Dodd’s observation that Jesus’ formulaic “I say to you”, “I came”, “Amen, I say to you” and “I command” transcends the usual prophetic formulae of “Thus saith the Lord”, “I was sent” and “I adjure you by”.

Jesus expressed a profound sense of and confidence in his relationship with God as his Father and so we can safely deduce that this was a crucial element in his self-understanding and the immediacy of authority with which he proclaimed the kingdom of his Father, “in both its eschatological immanence and imminence” (Dunn 2003:724). He did not make this belief of his a subject of explicit instruction, nor did he expect his disciples to entertain this belief in regards to him. Indications are that he tried to instil a similar sense of kinship in the disciples to God as their Father and so

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praying as he did and living, as they indeed seemed to do, with the sense of a shared sonship before God.

The righteous would suffer, indeed anyone placing God's will before all else could anticipate suffering or death. Jesus expected to share in the fate of the prophets; their rejection and even martyrdom in Jerusalem. He anticipated the rejection of "his message in Jerusalem, 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). John the Baptist had already lost his life, therefore the mounting hostility against him and his mission could hardly have come as a surprise. But there is a strong indication that Jesus saw the climax to his mission as the climax to God's eschatological purpose:

Jesus (and his disciples) would suffer the final tribulation through which God's kingly purpose would achieve its goal; the kingdom would come. His death would introduce that final climactic period, to be followed shortly ("after three days"?) by the general resurrection, the implementation of the new covenant, and the coming of the kingdom.

(Dunn 2003:824)

#### **5.4.2 Horsley and Dunn: Comparing notes on the journey**

Horsley and Dunn are in agreement in deeming orality to be a vital, very real and prominent part of the traditioning process. For Horsley this is true especially with regards to Q, as a source by nature nebulous and elusive, but emerging in a new and useful way when examined through the lens of orality. The possibility of an orally performed Q led Horsley to the main thrust of his argumentation namely that Q was community tradition repeatedly performed before a community in conflict, with whom the material resonated in their social and historical contexts.

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With this, Dunn is in agreement, similarly stressing the importance of the concept of the performance of tradition. According to him, what scholars should be looking for in the Jesus tradition is the Jesus who was remembered for a number of features, which were all illustrated by narratives and teaching, performed in the circles of disciples and church gatherings. Dunn (2003:334) compares it to the continuous run of the performances of some classic where the performers and interpretation may change, but it is the same classic being performed throughout in what he terms “continuity through performance”. This continuity throughout the performance of the words and deeds of Jesus and the impact they made on the audience from the first is for him still audible and gives the remembered Jesus historical substance (Dunn 2002:334). The performed narratives and teaching had not yet been properly documented into the literary paradigm and the living character of this process of performance, remembering and passing on of Jesus tradition had to substitute thinking in terms of literary relationships between static entities. Paying careful attention to the principal resonating contexts for the mission of Jesus and understanding the socio-political-economic context for it is likewise imperative for Dunn in research.<sup>54</sup>

Both authors agree that because the subject matter of the sayings would have superponated constructively with the community it would therefore have immediately acquired a social and historical context. It is precisely because of the immediacy of these contexts that it is of such importance to take contexts into serious considerations. Dunn gives recognition to and approves of the views of Horsley and Draper on the subject of metonymic referencing context reception; they had applied the theory of JM Foley (referring to metonymy and metonymic reference which means that a part,

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<sup>54</sup> It is of considerable interest to note that the troubadours, purported to have originated in the 11<sup>th</sup> century as the equivalent of mere wandering minstrels. Their origins are, however much earlier, and their covert function of travelling from land to land, from one castle and court to another, linking together the adherents of a secret society of mystic teaching, hidden by their overt function of entertainment through song. The words of their songs were symbolical, understood only by the initiated and the songs continued even though discovery meant death. The continuing value and power of oral performances up until as late as the twelfth century has been greatly underestimated.

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by reference, evokes the whole) and concluded that phraseology well-known from tradition as well as standard narrative patterns provide ways for a poet to convey meaning by tapping into a “traditional reservoir” (see Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:160-166).

They contributed that oral texts imply an audience who presides over the background knowledge which enables them to respond as the source or performer of the text expects them to do, to signals encoded in the text, thereby bridging any gaps of indeterminacy there might exist in the text and so contributing to the creation of a consistency in the traditioning process. Horsley coined the phrase: “Performance is the enabling event, tradition the enabling referent” (Horsley, in Horsley & Draper 1999:8). Dunn finds it apt and refers furthermore to the results of Horsley’s application of the work of Foley to Q, so that Q, as seen through this lens, seems to be the transcript of one performance among many of an oral text, of a libretto that was performed regularly in the early Jesus-movement and with the metonymic context of reception being Israelite (and not Judean) cultural tradition.

Oral traditioning likewise lends impetus to the mainstay of Dunn’s work, namely the remembered Jesus whose words and deeds impacted deeply on his followers, imprinting themselves on the memories of his followers and continuing to echo in their gatherings. Their collective memories served the passing on of tradition which had from the beginning been part of church founding and the bearing of witness which was part and parcel of being a follower of Jesus for expansion of the movement and the “sending out” of emissaries were matters of the gravest importance. Once again he is in agreement with Horsley who emphasized in his study of Q the importance of the “sending out” motif and the repeated underlining of its fervent urgency as well as the urge to expand the movement. When Dunn speaks of the necessity of memorising a solid base of Jesus-tradition, Horsley’s theory of repeated performances to facilitate retention springs to mind. Neither doubted that the material, though emerging from community life, was carefully structured and rigidly controlled.

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On an important matter, however, they seem to diverge from one another. Part of the main thrust of Horsley's work is that Jesus through his words and actions performed covenant renewal and that each repeated performance was a renewal of the covenant in itself. Dunn says Jesus was observant of the law and far from setting himself over against it, to do the will of God had still been the primary goal in his teachings and actions and he had dug deep into it to discern the divine rationale or justice in its particular *miswot*. It seems to Dunn that Jesus, rather than renewing the covenant, refused to go down the road of speaking out on issues of the law and halakhah which had become test cases of obedience and loyalty to the covenant and that his standing before God did not depend on particular interpretations or applications of the Torah. So where the renewal of the covenant constitutes almost the heartbeat of Horsley's contribution, Dunn seems to think that, although Jesus subscribed to both, he appeared to sit loosely towards issues of law and covenant in what he taught about standing before God. However, when Dunn speaks of Jesus' death, he interprets it as a covenantal sacrifice rather than as a sin offering, saying that if God was planning to renew his covenant with Israel, he would take it upon himself to be the sacrifice needed therefore. He refers to the metaphor of the baptism by fire used first by John the Baptist but given a new twist in meaning by Jesus when he said that he would have to suffer this baptism, not dispensing judgment, but enduring it.

Horsley, however, assumes this same metaphor as used in Q to mean that Jesus, who was more than merely an oracular prophet, would, as John had depicted him from the beginning of his ministry, baptise with the fire of judgment and the Spirit of renewal, burning chaff and gathering grain in a sweeping renewal of the covenant as the new Moses.

On issues of the Kingdom of God their views are similar, but with each tingeing his views with slight differences in nuancing. Dunn says Jesus does not lay out a pattern of conduct necessary to gain one entry into the Kingdom, an Interimsethik (Schweitzer) required only in the meantime before God's kingdom arrives, but instead a quality of kingdom life with a



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character of living appropriate for those who are looking for the coming of the Kingdom and who seek to live already in its light.

In Horsley's work he speaks of making the Kingdom a social reality in the dire traits in which the people of the community are trapped and adds that the performances include prayers for the realization of the Kingdom. Jesus commissions prophetic envoys to expand his program of announcing the kingdom and healing to the village communities to bring about renewal. His exorcisms are portrayed as the new exodus and a manifestation of the kingdom. He, as well as the Q-performers enacting his words, pass judgment on the rulers and their agents for their oppressive and unjust treatment of the people, but their audiences are encouraged to hold on to the hope of the renewal and reversal of fortunes that the kingdom would bring and to work together in peace and solidarity in the meantime, remaining committed to the movement even in the face of persecution or death.

#### **5.4.3 Assessment: Dunn's work in retrospect**

It is difficult to attempt an assessment bordering remotely on anything critical when one has been as willing and appreciative a passenger of Dunn's on his meander as I have been. I have great appreciation for his thoroughness and sound reasoning and for once I have felt myself to be searching for a view of Jesus without the fear of being sucked down by the bog of the treacherous marshland of uncertain and unreliable tradition in the sources available.

Maybe it is this absence of uncertainty which causes one to doubt the relief his theories bring, and suspect them of offering solutions too simple and facile to be true. Can it really be possible to pay so little attention to sifting through layers of tradition to try and discern *ipsissima verba* from later interpretation and embellishment? Is it really unnecessary to ask, for instance in the Gospel of Mark, which material has to be attributed to the evangelist's own later theologising? My suspicion is that, although I

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completely endorse Dunn's argumentation in this regard, the editorial work of the evangelists might have to be taken more seriously. Having said that, I can envision how his theories have opened up a much wider scope of vision against which to attempt a sighting of Jesus than has previously been imagined in critical scholarship.

Once again I harbour the suspicion that too little has been made of the office of prophet and what it entails in the light of the huge corpus of Israelite tradition on the lives of the great prophets of old. If Jesus had indeed, as Dunn suggests, seen himself as prophet in the tradition of these prophets, their lives and offices could offer much more in lieu of indicators as to the meaning attached by Jesus to his mission.

Dunn refers to the tradition of the words of Jesus in Mark 9:37/Luke 9:48 and Matthew 10:40 stating that whoever receives or rejects him, receives or rejects the one by whom he was sent. He subsequently remarks: "The thought is the familiar one of the prophet as speaking for God" (Dunn 2003:663).

This brings me to the question I posed earlier in my assessment of the work of Horsley, namely whether the prophet is really an emissary of God or whether he merely perceives and believes himself to be one. Was Jesus deluding himself in thinking that he was fulfilling a God-given task? One supposes this question to be a difficult one to answer if one is to remain objective and critical, but at the same time essential to one's understanding of the role of the prophet, and of Jesus in particular. Scholarship seems to sidestep the issue or deny it outright, but I think it is essential to the understanding of the message of the prophets to decide whether they were merely following their own rudder or whether there were divine hands at the tiller. Can God indeed call people to deliver his message and did He do so in the lives of the prophets and of Jesus? Was Jesus sent by God, and not necessarily as his son, Christ or Messiah, but as prophetic messenger in the sense in which it is explained in the following chapter - a life completely in service of, guided by and absorbed into the will of God that he was

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called to execute. For the starting point of true prophecy is God and his will and message and not the program or convictions of the prophet. And the union between them is not mysticism, but a reality in the Father-child relationship between God and his people, the livewire of all the words and actions of the prophet, such as is obvious in the life, prayer and death of Jesus in all its prophetic symbolism and obedience.