# CHRISTIAN ORIGINS: HISTORICAL TRUTH AND SOCIAL MEMORY

*Barry Schwartz*

Christianity begins miraculously—the angel Gabriel appears in Nazareth and announces to Mary that she will bear a son. He will assume David's throne and reign over Israel forever. This astonishing event is the subject of a Jewish joke. Mary asks Gabriel how a virgin can possibly have a child; when God's angel assures her that it will be so, she requests a favor: "If God can do such a thing, would you please ask Him to give me a little girl?" To this Gabriel replies, "Mashele, t'siz nicht ba'shert" (Mary, It's not meant to be). The joke falls flat today, but it was hilarious a century ago. Gabriel, after all, is speaking in Yiddish, not Aramaic or Hebrew. And by saying "It's not meant to be" he is affirming the fate of the Jewish people. "If only God had given Mary the little girl she always wanted! Then our centuries would have been filled with sweetness instead of suffering." And there is a distinct undertone of irreverence and incredulity: irreverence because the joke refers to the Mother of God in the diminutive, "Mashele; sweet little Mary"; incredulity because it affirms that virgins do not have children—period, which makes the issue of Mary's preference irrelevant. The pivotal point, however, is that the joke would not work if the joke-teller and his listener believed in the Annunciation. Many twenty-first century scholars, like the Jewish joke-teller, doubt the Annunciation story; but can such skeptics, however empathetic, grasp the social memory of first-century believers?

Social memory scholarship might help answer this question, but we cannot invoke it rashly; we need to recognize its merits and avoid its pathologies, especially those it shares with biblical studies, lest it certify the very distortions we want to correct. These distortions result from a cynical "constructionist" project rooted in the valuable idea of memory being assembled from parts (Hacking: 49–50), but fixated on the circular

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assumption that constructed products are not what they seem precisely because they are constructed. No assumption, in my view, has done more to undermine the foundation of social memory scholarship or hinder its application to biblical studies.

## Social Memory

Two models orient social memory scholarship. Neither model describes reality; each is a fictional template in terms of which different relations between social experience and memory can be compared and understood. In the first—presentist—model, social memory is context-dependent and constructed differently as it is invoked in different communities. Whether focusing on the politics of memory (Hobsbawm 1983; Alonso; Tuchman and Fortin; Bodnar 1992; J. Boyarin; Gillis 1994b) or memory over the *longue durée* (Halbwachs 1992; Pelikan; Kammen 1991; M. Peterson; Ben Yehuda), constructionist scholarship endeavors to show how beliefs about the past become hostage to the circumstances of the present, and how different elements of the past become more or less relevant as these circumstances change. Memory thus becomes a social fact as it is made and remade to serve new power distributions, institutional structures, values, interests, and needs.

In the second—culture system—model, society changes constantly, but social memory endures because new beliefs are superimposed upon—rather than replace—old ones (see Durkheim 1965:414–33). "No generation, even in this present time of unprecedented dissolution of tradition," observed Edward Shils, "creates its own beliefs." Generations acquire from the past most of what constitutes them (38). As individuals acquire traditional understandings through forebears (either through oral culture, commemoration, or historiography), common memories endow them with a common heritage, strengthen society's "temporal integration," create links between the living and the dead, and promote consensus over time (Shils: 13–14, 31–32, 38, 327; see also Freud; Bellah et al.; Schwartz 1991; Schudson 1992:205–21). Every society, even the most fragmented, requires a sense of sameness and continuity with what went before.

The presentist model of social memory has become so robust—the culture system model, so feeble—that we have lost sight of the dynamics that sustain the sameness and continuity that make society possible. Stable images of the past are often, but not always, demonstrably true images. Sometimes false ideas are transferred across generations and accepted as if they were true; sometimes true ideas are rejected as if they were false. Truth value and its resistance to revision is one, but not the only, source of the past's stability. The inertia of history (oral and written), commemora-

tive symbolism (icons, monuments, shrines, placenames, rituals), cultural and institutional structures reinforce the continuities of memory. That we should even consider these continuities problematic rather than given is, however, ironic. The pioneers of collective memory research (including Cooley; Czarnowski; Halbwachs 1992; G.H. Mead) surprised the world by demonstrating that a supposedly immutable past is readily and constantly transformed. So abundant has been the evidence of transformation, and so convincing the presentist explanations, that the continuity of memory is now treated as the greatest puzzle of all. Before social memory scholarship can be applied to Christian origins, or to any other problem in biblical studies, that puzzle must be solved, and to do so we must bring the foundational flaws of social memory scholarship into the open.

## The Cynical Discipline

"Social memory" refers to the distribution throughout society of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, and moral judgments about the past. Only individuals possess the capacity to contemplate the past, but this does not mean that beliefs originate in the individual alone or can be explained on the basis of his or her unique experience. Individuals do not know the past singly; they know it with and against other individuals situated in diverse communities, and in the context of beliefs that predecessors and contemporaries have transferred to them.

As a branch of the sociology of knowledge, social memory scholarship first assumed pertinence "under a definite complex of social and cultural conditions in which shared orientations diminish and are overshadowed by incompatible differences, where one universe of discourse challenges all others and statements and truth claims are assessed in terms of the social interests of those who produced them" (Merton: 457–60). This new culture of suspicion arose during the post–World War I era of disillusionment, and among its several embodiments, form criticism—a method for analyzing and deconstructing generic oral forms affecting the content of written texts—occupies a prominent place. While Maurice Halbwachs conducted his pioneering work on collective memory, Karl Mannheim (1952; 1936) produced his classic essays on the sociology of knowledge, Carl Becker relativized history in "Every Man His Own Historian," George Herbert Mead defined conceptions of the past uniquely as a way of managing present problems, and Rudolph Bultmann, the most influential form critic, searched for the social roots of the Gospels (1968). The conditions underlying this convergence, however, present us with our greatest obstacle. Social memory scholarship, like the sociology of knowledge and form criticism, has an affinity for cynicism and casual dismissal of conventional belief. It flourishes in societies where

cultural values no longer unify, where people have already become alienated from common values, and separate communities regard one another distrustfully. The sociology of memory, like the sociology of knowledge, "systematizes the lack of faith in reigning symbols" (Merton: 459). Biblical scholarship, like social memory scholarship and the sociology of knowledge, frequently despairs over its ability to know events as they actually were and finds its triumphant moments in clever reinterpretations or the debunking of what was once believed to be true. The sociology of memory appeals to the reflexive and hesitant, to those who preface even their own assertions with the disclaimer: "I might be rationalizing, *but*...."

## History, Commemoration, and Memory

Social memory functions differently in traditional and modern societies. The people of traditional societies, whether patriarchal, patrimonial, or feudal, orient themselves to the past and are encompassed by their memories and customs (Weber 1947:341–58; Shils: 9–10). The meaning of everyday practices is based on their conviction that forebears performed them; historical beliefs, on their conviction that forebears embraced them. Modern societies, in contrast, tend toward a traditionless state where practices are assessed according to legal principle and scientific reason; historical beliefs are dissected rather than embraced (Weber 1947: 329–40). Therefore, modern people's breadth of historical knowledge is unprecedented while their identification and continuity with the past steadily declines. Traditional peoples knew much less about the past than we, but they felt a greater sense of identity and continuity with it (see Meyerhoff).

History is absent in traditional society, but social memory flourishes there through oral discourse and ritual observance. Traditional society is a mnemonic garden of Eden in which heroes and miraculous deeds are authoritative, unquestioned, and spontaneously recalled (see Nora). Against this paradise of remembrance stands modern society, the seat of analytic history and self-critical memory.

No pure cases of tradition or modernity exist. Inhabitants of first-century Palestine, largely illiterate, learned from their elites what they needed to know about the sacred past. Historical writing had its roots in the equating of history and theophany, but the result, according to Yosef Yerushalmi, "was not theology, but history on an unprecedented scale" (13). Jesus and his generation saw themselves as part of this history and understood it as a true narrative embodying wisdom, faith, and a law containing the seeds of Western rationality (Weber 1952).

The relevance of social memory scholarship depends on its ability to bring us into contact with first-century Christianity. In our time, a New

History is concerned with ordinary people more than religious and political elites (see Foner). Ironically, biblical scholarship, on the whole, affords the peasants of Jesus' time less emphasis than they deserve, reflects inadequately on the political and economic interests they pursued, and pays too little attention to the traditional worldview, including the social memories, in which they were immersed. For this lapse there are at least two reasons. First, social memory studies—concerned largely with popular memory—did not take root until the early 1980s and only now are beginning to reach a mass critical enough to warrant advance into unfamiliar topical areas. The second answer is prompted by a vaguely felt but definite foreboding that biblical topics are qualitatively different from more recent topics on which social memory scholars feed, in that biblical data are so sparse as to doom a project before it begins. The question of social memory and Christian origins nevertheless remains. Let us explore it.

## The Gospel Tradition

In the literature on the first-century Christian world many themes recur: cultural values, status, kinship, politics, governance, city and rural life, church formation, ritual. Social memory is not among these themes. Yet, memory and commemoration are central to religious life. Georg Simmel's definition of religion includes "the response of souls full of piety to traditions and objects which the past has transmitted to us" (1903:326). In Clifford Geertz's more comprehensive view, religion "is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of facticity that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1973:90–91). Applied to Christianity, this symbol system consists exclusively of the history and commemoration of Jesus. No Christianity exists apart from the distribution of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, and moral judgments that define social memory.

The problem is to get from the social memory of Jesus to the establishment of Christianity. Since this problem involves the transition from orality to literacy, we collide with Rudolph Bultmann's presentist approach to memory and Christianity. Seeking to bridge the gap between individual memories and New Testament accounts authenticating specific sayings, Bultmann assumed that oral tradition, the recollection of Jesus' spoken words, could not be trusted to represent Jesus' life. The interests of the early church, not its longing for the truth, shaped its conception of Jesus' life. Bultmann's comment on Mark pertains to all four Gospels: its author is "steeped in the theology of the

early church, and he ordered and arranged the traditional material that he received in light of the faith of the early church" (1968:1). Only as it served the needs of the church did elementary forms like parables or sayings become part of moral exhortation, preaching, worship, social control, polemics, apologetics and the other instruments of social memory. The memory of Jesus, thus, becomes little more than a repercussion of the church's search for legitimacy. Many of Jesus' own words may have survived these conditions and this search, but, alas, they remain inert and concealed by fabrication.

Locating decisive sources of memory in social situations, Bultmann reduces the Gospels to an elaborate thematic apperception test: confessional elements, doctrines, values, and practices attain legitimacy in the present as they are projected back to the past. But the problem goes beyond fabrication. Bultmann's theory of memory, if we may so define form criticism, is an instance of what Karl Mannheim (1952) called unmasking, which not only refutes ideas but also undermines them simply by showing what functions they perform. Bultmann was certainly seeking to establish falsehoods in order to peel them away to find the truth, but, notwithstanding his own motive, he could not help but challenge the authority of the past, for once one sees the "extra-theoretical function" of an idea, it loses its efficacy (Mannheim, 1952:140). Claiming that our ideas about the past are construed by elites intent on enlarging the authority of their own institutions, Bultmann's statement above causes the most ardent "politics of memory" scholars to blush.

Form criticism resonates with the constructionist worldview that has been in the air for the past quarter-century (see Hacking), and at its edge dangle the very questions that bedevil constructionism. The first question concerns the relationship between political interests and religious ideas: whether institutional power is the generative matrix for ideas or vice versa. Second, there is the thorny issue of generalization: do the form critics apply to their own work the principles they apply to the Gospels? (To which *Sitz im Leben* are their own insights attributable?) Third, Bultmann and his successors wish to identify fabrications, peel them away, and reveal the core of historical truth. To do so with certainty, however, they must already know or have a way of knowing the difference between the fabricated and the authentic Jesus. Bultmann's method assumes, or, at least, presumes, the very knowledge it seeks to affirm. The fourth problem with form criticism, even in its most diluted and widely accepted forms, is that it asserts what it must demonstrate. "In seeking to bring unity and order to the heterogeneity of the first thirty years," Robert Wilken asserts, Luke "interpreted the material he had inherited to fit into his scheme" (33). Perhaps so, but since no one knows who wrote Luke, Wilken can present no evidence on the author's motives, let alone refute

an alternate hypothesis: that the material Luke's author inherited *changed* his scheme. A fifth question concerns continuity and stems from cliché: "Each age has its own responsibility to forge its own distinctive meaning of Christian faith" (Semler, cited in Wilken: 131). Christian origins, it is true, are not fixed but seen differently by successive "period eyes" (Baxandall: 32). Yet, if each generation creates Jesus in terms of its own character and finds in him its own ideals, then why are early accounts recognizable in later generations that see the world through the lens of dissimilar perspectives and ideals?

Perceptions of the past are materialized in monuments, shrines, pla- cenames, and other sites of memory (see Nora). In these sites Bultmann and Halbwachs share great interest, but where Bultmann regards them as one source of information about Christian origins, Halbwachs takes them as the primary source and is determined to demonstrate their capacity to distort. As we consider the question of whether Gospel content reflects or determines popular beliefs about Jesus, therefore, we quickly realize that Maurice Halbwachs, founder of the field of collective memory, provides no help. He says little about the life of Jesus, confining himself instead to the landmarks symbolizing it. He applies to physical sites the same reductionist principles that Bultmann and his followers apply to texts. Halbwachs is a master at demonstrating how events occurring at one site are represented at another and how such "localizations," as he calls them, support the narrative they make concrete. Since Jesus' birth in Bethlehem conveniently connects him to the line of David, Halbwachs dismisses the Nativity as a legend (1992). The logical problem is patent. John F. Kennedy's birthplace, Boston, connects him to the beginning of the American Revolution, but this hardly means that he was not born in Boston. Halbwachs's greatest failure is his inability to see commemora- tion as anything more than an elaborate delusion. It is not just that localizations distort history; the more they distort the better they work.

Halbwachs advances a pejorative conception of collective memory, one that distrusts and works to undermine established beliefs. He assumes that memory, as opposed to history, is inauthentic, manipula- tive, shady, something to be overcome rather than accepted in its own right. That commemoration is a selective celebration rather than an infe- rior version of history escapes Halbwachs. He cannot fully grasp what sacred sites accomplish, how they transmute reality to mobilize and sus- tain religious sentiment and, above all, elevate Jesus and sustain faith in what he did and represented.

Bultmann's and Halbwachs's common failure is their refusal even to ask how pericopae, texts, and physical sites reflected what ordinary people of the first century believed. Their tactic of invoking extreme instances of construction, including miracle stories, reminds us of

modern investigators invoking the most extreme instances of distortion—the story of Paul Revere alone alerting thousands of Middlesex County farmers of the British advance; Betsy Ross making a flag at General Washington's request; Kentucky farmers defeating the British at New Orleans—as archetypes of social memory. Although we have little direct evidence on what or how the people of first-century Palestine thought about Jesus, we have plenty of indirect evidence, including the Gospels themselves (see de Jonge). That historical documents reflected and/or determined what ordinary people believed is an assumption beset with pitfalls, but it is reasonable and defensible. If we search these documents for the many ways in which the Gospels could have misrepresented belief about Jesus, we will surely find them, but we will have failed to meet what the task at hand—what the Gospels reveal of early Christianity's social memory—requires.

Gospel writers inscribed not the raw experience of Jesus' life but what informants led them to understand. As Clifford Geertz has remarked, however, not everyone is a liar and one need not know everything in order to know something (1973:3–30). The job of social memory scholarship is to assess what we know: assembling documents like the Gospels, estimating their meanings and relation to the culture of which their authors were a part, and drawing conclusions. From the social memory standpoint, then, our object of study is not the authenticity of the Gospels; it is rather the Gospels as sources of information about the popular beliefs of early Christianity. The Gospels are critical to us because they put us in touch with the way early Christians conceived Jesus' place in their world, and because without them our understanding of the social memory of this world would be more shallow. At question, then, is what popular meanings were conveyed, aspirations satisfied, fears quieted, by Jesus' invocation. To this end, neither Bultmann's analysis of isolated verbal forms nor Halbwachs's analysis of physical sites take us very far.

## New Theories

Many past instances can be interpreted in ways to satisfy present interests. But the problem that Bultmann and Halbwachs fail to address is whether the interest theory of social memory applies to one set of historical situations or generalizes to all. The distinction is critical. If interest theory captures the general mindset of elites, then everything known about the past, not just Jesus, becomes subject to presentist reinterpretation. The stories of Noah, Moses, David, the Exile, etcetera come into view as projections of religious needs. Form criticism is evidently grounded in this more general theory. Crossan, for example, declares that

all historical understanding is a "reconstruction" that is "interactive of past and present," and on the question of whether past or present dominates this interaction he leaves little to the imagination. "Positivism or historicism is the delusion that we can see the water without our face being mirrored in it" (1998:3). But can we see any faces besides our own? On the other hand, if the mirror metaphor refers only to early Christianity, what conditions immunize other historical periods from its relevance? That one cannot know the past without interference from one's personal and social situation is certain, but does the past's content have anything at all to do with the way it is apprehended?

Form criticism's inability to answer these questions results from grave doubts about the Gospels' authenticity, which its practitioners have developed ingeniously. Crossan devised a sophisticated stage theory beginning with (1) individuals retaining their original memories of what Jesus said and did; (2) then modifying these contents as they transmit them; and (3) recipients concocting the received episodes as they please (1998). Since the contents of the Gospels are largely derived from the last two phases, they must represent the social conditions in which recipients reside more accurately than the original events they purport to describe. Norman Perrin sharpens this point in his two-step model of information flow: from Jesus to the evangelist; from the evangelist to the church. In the process, almost everything original gets lost (Perrin 1967). Bruce Malina reiterates the idea in terms of levels: "we have an author, such as 'Luke,' (final level of the tradition, level 3), telling us what somebody else said (intermediate level of tradition, level 2) that Jesus said and did (the career of Jesus, level 1)" (2001:198). The movement between levels, according to Malina, is an editing process similar to American newspapers which purport to transmit valid information but actually serve special interests, including pro-Israel lobbies, with "continued material support of Israel." It has been thus since "the Catastrophe, the founding of the Zionist state"(2001:199). Malina's torturous logic would not be worth mentioning were it not so typically distracting. Since Zionist influence has never been strong enough to reduce, let alone deter, anti-Zionist expression, Malina's parallel exemplifies the perils of ransacking the past for far-fetched ideological leverage. Constructionism's pathologies, it is true, must not be mistaken for its paradigm, but the content of these pathologies, dramatized by the failure of peers and editors to challenge Malina, reveal an intellectual climate that gives constructionist assertions more deference than they deserve.

The indirect information flow that Crossan, Perrin, and Malina describe is often compared with the rumor game in which one child whispers a message to a second, the second to a third, and so on until the last child receives a final version totally different from the original. The

danger of such a loose analogy is evident in William Herndon's Abraham Lincoln papers (1889), which are based on the same kind of oral tradition from which the Gospel writers drew their accounts of Jesus. After President Lincoln's 1865 assassination, Herndon, his former law partner, began an intense series of correspondences and interviews with people who had known Lincoln between 1831–1837 in New Salem, Illinois—a commercial village which emerged and disappeared in the process of westward population movement. Herndon captured 30 years of Lincoln oral tradition, just as Mark captured approximately the same number of years of Jesus oral tradition. Among the many things Herndon wished to learn about Lincoln's young adulthood was his relation to Ann Rutledge, a New Salem girl who died while young Lincoln was presumably courting her (1889:1.128–42). The question is important not only for its romantic interest but also because, if true, it would demonstrate the contingency of history: Lincoln would have probably not become president if he had married this simple country girl rather than Mary Todd, the well-connected aristocrat. James G. Randall, arguably the greatest Lincoln scholar, prefigured Malina's model when he dismissed one key document suggesting a romantic link: "Here is one person [Level 3] reporting what another person had written him [Level 2] concerning what that person recollected he had inferred from something that Ann [Rutledge] had casually said to him [Level 1] more than thirty-one years before!" (2.328; inserts added). Since the Herndon papers are rife with errors and inconsistencies on other matters, the romance between Ann Rutledge and Abraham Lincoln must be dismissed as legend. Such was Randall's reasonable conclusion.

Weak data, however, trump strong theories. When Douglas Wilson, a contemporary Lincoln scholar, analyzed Herndon's original documents he found all respondents agreeing that Lincoln courted and planned to marry Ann and grieved with unusual intensity after her death (1990). Such testimony, presented by individuals who could have had minimal if any influence on one another, can still be challenged on the grounds that shared beliefs are not necessarily true. But of the infinity of false beliefs that might be held about Lincoln, why was this one held with such tenacity by everyone? Since many, if not, most Lincoln scholars now believe that Lincoln had a romantic understanding with Ann Rutledge, the case is relevant to the social memory of Jesus because it illustrates the cost of setting the bar of admissibility so high that it becomes impossible to accept less than perfect evidence. To assume that evidence is wrong until proven right beyond reasonable doubt would render Lincoln's young adulthood and childhood blank. Instead of a distorted version of those periods of his life we would have no version at all. Indeed, if one applies Bultmann's method of distinctiveness (with due allowance for context) to

Abraham Lincoln's statements, many would have to be discarded because they fail the test.

Presuming that a statement is wrong until proven right beyond a reasonable doubt cuts off most knowledge of Jesus and of what his contemporaries believed about him. It puts the burden of proof on partially documented assertions while allowing skeptics to make undocumented claims about religious writings being weapons in the struggle for dominance. That the church placed on Jesus' lips a decree about forgiveness because it wished to monopolize authority in matters of punishment and pardon is unproven, but its ring of truth is enough to convince any skeptic. Theories that dismiss the Gospels as screens on which church leaders projected their agendas are instances of intellectual dandyism—exercises in creating the impression of efforts to discern meaning without seriously trying—but since they resonate with the taste of a cynical age, their burden of proof is light.
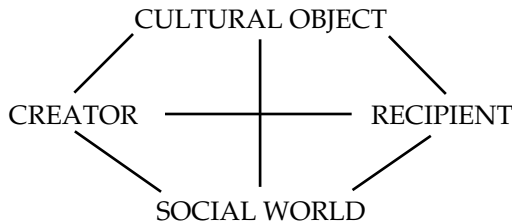
To conceive of Jesus as a mere mirror of reality is to conceive a fiction, for if our changing understanding of his life *uniquely* parallels changes in our society, then the only relevant reality would be the present, and the very concept of social memory would be meaningless. To conceive the meaning of Jesus as fixed is likewise false, since any event must appear differently as perceptual standpoints change. The problem is how to disentangle truth and fiction, and to determine whether historical facts and commemorative symbols affect the way ordinary individuals think about the past. Answering these questions in the case of Jesus, where the best evidence is vague, requires the recognition of different kinds of errors and the estimation of their costs. Those seeking to protect themselves against what statisticians call a Type I error fear to assert that something is true when it may prove to be false. As Norman Perrin would put it, "When in doubt, exclude." In contrast, those seeking to protect themselves against Type II error fear to reject an assertion as false when it may be true. "When in doubt," they would say, "include." Every assertion about Jesus carries the risk of both types of error, and different mentalities have a different tolerance for different risks. The compulsively venturesome cannot bear the thought of ignoring a single truth about the life of Jesus; they set their standards low—so low, sometimes, as to allow the imagination more freedom than it should have. Scholars disdainful of even informed speculation, on the other hand, cannot tolerate the thought of asserting something is true when it may not be; they set their standards high—so high, sometimes, as to paralyze the imagination. They are inclined against even informed speculation on first-century Christian belief. Such is the problem of Bultmann's fatally rigid criterion of dissimilarity.

Since we can arrive at no more than an approximate idea of how Jesus' followers remembered him, we must learn to manage our fear of

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being wrong. Numerous uncertainties attend answers to the question of how information about Jesus found its way to Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. We cannot say for sure where or when the Gospels were written, or even who wrote them. Everything is so vague that we would be justified in dropping the whole project; but doing so would substitute total ignorance for partial knowledge, and when we contemplate that choice we realize how precious partial knowledge can be. If we had discovered the Gospels only yesterday, buried in some cave, they would be the objects of great excitement and we would be grateful to possess at last a rich source of evidence putting us into contact with Jesus' contemporaries, if not Jesus himself. I do not propose that first-century written documents be subjected to lower standards of evidence than those applied to data-rich topics. I propose instead that we be aware of the cost of rejecting evidence of which we cannot be totally certain, that uncertain conclusions may bring more net benefit than a studied determination not to reach any conclusion at all—or a determination to believe, aside from cynical claims about the invention of the past, that there is no conclusion to be reached.

## Social Memory as an Act of Creation and Reception

Authors and artists who preserve social memory do their work with an audience in mind, and since creators and audiences are members of the same social world, the former know what their work will mean to the latter. Since culture producers, including authors of the Gospels, live under the same roof as their consumers, their relations can be represented in the form of a cultural diamond, as in the figure below.



This figure, with its four points (creator, recipient, social world, cultural object) and six connecting links, is no theory because it neither specifies nor explains causal direction. It is simply a model, an accounting scheme, that allows us to keep track of different kinds of data, order their interconnections, and locate gaps in our knowledge (Griswold 1994). Clearly, there exists little evidence about the Gospel *creators'* identities

and motives, while evidence on their *recipients'* presuppositions is even weaker. About the first-century Christian *social world* and its *cultural objects,* including the Gospels and Scriptures, much more is known, and since their creators' motives and recipients' reactions are affected by common social experience, recipient beliefs are inferable from an era's texts, symbols, and other cultural objects. The cultural diamond's connecting links furnish the warrant for drawing inferences about memory from knowledge of social worlds and cultural objects, and for embedding changes in the memory of individuals in social change. Such must be our methodological tenet. We cannot imagine ourselves in the shoes of an early Christian listening to an elder reading about Jesus, then try to guess what such a person would think about what she is hearing. We can understand the scene, however, by identifying it, "by searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another" (Geertz 1983:58). The cultural diamond's logic is identical: we see the world from the "native's point of view" by making contact with the thoughtworld of his community, by reconstructing the context in which its members wrote, spoke, and listened.

## Conclusion: In the Grip of Memory

Witnesses usually get something wrong, but we depend on them to give us a general idea of what happened in situations where we are absent. Social memory is preserved by witnesses, and the content of the tradition they convey is more than a mere reflection of their needs and troubles. Without the stabilizing force of tradition, Jesus' image would become blurred as new generations replace one another and would eventually cease to be recognizable.

Tradition, strictly defined, is a *traditum,* a thing handed down or transferred across generations. The thing transmitted is nothing concrete; it is a guiding pattern, an abstract conception of an event, object, practice, or person. *Traditum* inevitably changes as it is transmitted, but the receiver gets most of it from what she is given. Thus, successive generations do not create Jesus anew but inherit most of their knowledge, which is why the image of Jesus remains identifiable across generations—and centuries. Whatever the merit of Birger Gerhardsson's comparison of the way rabbis traditionally taught their disciples with the way Jesus taught his, he correctly assumes that Jesus' followers were determined to get his message right (2001). Nothing would have been easier for the early church than to accommodate Gentiles by having Jesus renounce circumcision or to make a statement about the practice of speaking in tongues,

the uniting of Jews and Gentiles, whether believers could divorce non-Christian spouses, what role women might play in the ministry (Blomberg: 31–32), but this never happens. Since the past possesses its own authority, it is not always serviceable as a screen for the projection of present issues.

Gerhardsson's analysis of Jesus reminds us of an even less reconstructable man—Confucius. Because the ancient Chinese lacked a transcendental ideal that distanced them from the world, their morality was completely secularized, devoid of prophetic zeal (see Zhang and Schwartz). They were dedicated in their adjustment to the world and relentless in their exaltation of tradition. Reverence for Confucius and the inconceivability of reconstructing him was the very keystone of this tradition, and while his place in China's collective imagination could be officially suspended, as during the Cultural Revolution, it was too deeply installed, too sacred, to be altered fundamentally. This does not mean that Confucius was "the same today and tomorrow as he was yesterday." If his assumed character and teachings had not resonated with China's changing conditions, he could have never been idolized for so long. Progressive intellectuals always criticized Confucius because his doctrines of self-restraint and conformity stand in opposition to ideologies of change (Louie: 1–16); on the other hand, establishments found Confucius necessary to legitimate themselves. The tension has always been resolved by what the Chinese call "critical inheritance"—a form of social memory with no Western counterpart. "Critical inheritance" is a deliberative process whereby positive aspects of historical figures are embraced; negative ones recognized but rejected. Thus, Confucius can be revered—must be revered—by the very institutions and individuals that find his political convictions inconvenient. Might the malleability of Jesus have been similarly, if not identically, limited?

There is no community, past or present, whose true history is a matter of indifference. When Newburyport, Massachusetts celebrated the Tricentennial of its founding, the festival's organizers consulted historians in order to ensure the authenticity of the forty events depicted on floats and in other historical displays (see Warner). Their efforts were part of a secular ritual of consecration that promoted the trust needed to identify with the city and its past. Christians, on the other hand, took most of what they knew about Jesus at face value and felt no need to validate it; for they believed in their Scriptures, despite gaps and contradictions, more strongly than we believe in ours. Our skeptical generation must somehow identify with these strong beliefs—this social memory. I, like a streetsweeper, have tried to clear away some of the intellectual debris that prevents us from doing so.

# PROMINENT PATTERNS IN THE SOCIAL MEMORY OF JESUS AND FRIENDS

*Richard A. Horsley*

> All beginnings contain an element of recollection. This is particularly so
> when a social group makes a concerted effort to begin with a wholly
> new start. There is a measure of complete arbitrariness in the very
> nature of any such attempted beginning.... But the absolutely new is
> inconceivable.... In all modes of experience we always base our partic-
> ular experiences on a prior context in order to ensure that they are
> intelligible at all; prior to any single experience, our mind is already pre-
> disposed with a framework of outlines.... (Connerton: 6)

Jesus had little or no memory. At least that is the impression one
receives from presentations of prominent members of the Jesus Seminar.
More conservative interpreters leave Jesus' memory seemingly intact.
There appears to be an irony in the way Jesus scholarship has developed
in the last decade or so. Some of the liberal leaders of the Jesus Seminar
who further honed the critical methods developed earlier in the twentieth
century produce a Jesus who is seemingly detached from his culture.
Israelite tradition does not play a prominent role in their construction of
Jesus. More conservative interpreters, on the other hand, who give less
attention to critical methods, view Jesus as still connected (negatively
and/or positively) with Jewish tradition, at least as constructed by Chris-
tian theological scholarship. Both, of course, are under pressures,
whether those of Christian doctrine or those of marketing a Jesus com-
pelling to contemporary readers, to come up with a distinctively different
if not an utterly unique figure.

Research into various concerns of biblical studies and related fields,
meanwhile, has problematized a number of the basic assumptions and
concepts of standard scholarship on Jesus and the Gospels. Recent explo-
ration of new approaches to and previously unrecognized aspects of the
(canonical and noncanonical) Gospels and other texts that provide the
principal sources for interpretation of Jesus, moreover, bring new light to
old problems and solutions. Scholars in other fields have called attention
to "social memory" or "cultural memory" as a historical force that has far

more influence on peoples' lives than the ideas and literature of cultural elites. Werner Kelber has pioneered exploration of cultural memory as an important factor in the development of Gospel materials in connection with the interface of orality and literacy. In this volume the younger Gospel scholars Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher are calling the wider field of New Testament studies to attend critically to the importance of social memory. Recent studies of social memory happen to overlap compellingly with, and to deepen the insights of, other new approaches to Jesus and the Gospels. Critical attention to social memory and how we can get at it might well enable us to discern that Jesus indeed had a memory. Interspersed with discussions of the implications of new research and approaches, I will examine how the highly sophisticated method developed by leaders of the Jesus Seminar, particularly John Dominic Crossan, tends to detach Jesus from Israelite cultural tradition, and then explore how recent studies of social memory can enable us to see Jesus and the early Jesus movement as firmly rooted in Israelite social memory.

## New Research and Fresh Approaches

During the last three or four decades a combination of new questions, fresh perspectives, borrowed methods, and expanding research has dramatically changed the way we approach and interpret biblical texts. The standard assumptions, concepts, and approaches of the New Testament field in general and of Gospel and Jesus studies in particular have been challenged and undermined and, to a considerable degree, replaced. The landscape of the historical context of the Gospels has undergone the most extensive change. The way we read texts has also broadened. Most recently extensive new research is undermining standard old assumptions about the cultural context of New Testament texts. Now the introduction of the approach and comparative materials of studies in social memory (or cultural memory—see the introductory essay of this volume) will strongly reinforce some of the most significant challenges to older assumptions and approaches, confirm some of the new approaches, and induce distinctive new insights.

An early and elementary historical opening came with the recognition of the considerable social and cultural diversity in ancient Judea. This recognition gradually cut through the theologically constructed scheme of Christianity developing from and succeeding Judaism that had previously effectively blocked the recognition of that diversity. Standard essentialist concepts such as "Judaism," "normative Judaism," and "Christianity," turn out to have no historical referents. What could be called Judaism or Christianity had not yet emerged in late Second Temple times. The Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes together comprised only a

tiny fraction of the "Jewish" people. From soon after his crucifixion, followers of Jesus formed differing groups. While some scholars resist acknowledging the diversity, still projecting a monolithic Judaism (see Sanders), and many still write of "(early) Judaism" and "(early) Christianity," others at least take such halfway measures as speaking about "Judaisms" or "formative Judaism."

Such timid scholarly moves, however, still operate on the anachronistic assumption that religion was separate from political-economic structures and institutions. When we deal with the Jerusalem temple and high priesthood, for example, we are dealing unavoidably also with the political-economic institution(s) that headed the temple-state maintained in Judea by imperial regimes as an instrument of their political domination and economic extraction. The high priestly aristocracy was responsible for collection of the tribute to Caesar as well as sacrifices on behalf of Rome and the emperor. The Passover festival celebrated the people's political-economic, as well as religious, deliverance from bondage to Pharaoh, under the watchful eyes of the soldiers that the Roman governor had posted on the porticoes of the temple.

The dominant reality in the political-economic-religious structure was the fundamentally conflictual divide between the imperial rulers and their Herodian and high priestly clients whose wealth and power derived from the tribute, taxes, and tithes they extracted, on the one hand, and the village producers they ruled and taxed, on the other. Nearly all the sources portray this clearly (see Sirach, 1–2 Maccabees, *1 Enoch,* Josephus's histories, Mark). Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the fundamental political-economic-religious conflict is that the period of the mission and movement(s) of Jesus was framed historically by five major widespread popular revolts against the imperial and Jerusalem rulers: the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s B.C.E., the prolonged resistance to Herod's takeover from 40–37 B.C.E., the revolts in Galilee, Judea, and Perea after Herod's death in 4 B.C.E., the great revolt of 66–70 C.E., and the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 132–35 C.E. The sources also feature division and conflicts between scribal groups and the Jerusalem high priestly rulers and their imperial sponsors (*Psalms of Solomon,* DSS, Josephus).

Compounding the conflictual divide between rulers and ruled were the historical regional differences between Galilee (and Samaria) and Judea/Jerusalem (Horsley, 1995). Galileans, many of whom were presumably descendants and heirs of earlier Israelite peoples, were not brought under Jerusalem rule until a hundred years before Jesus. Interpreters of Jesus, Jesus movements, and the Gospels have barely begun to deal with the implications of these differences.

Simultaneous with these changes in the landscape of the historical context of Jesus, Jesus movements, and the development of the Gospels,

some interpreters were learning how to read New Testament literature (Gospels, Acts, Epistles, etc. ) as more than the text fragments of isolated sayings and decontextualized pericopae. Especially significant was the recognition that Mark and other Gospels are complexly narrated stories, with plot, subplots, multiple conflicts, and their own narrative styles and agenda (e.g., Kelber 1979; Horsley 2001). More recently some also recognized, for example, that while the *Gospel of Thomas* presents a collection of sayings and parables, the hypothesized document Q is evidently a sequence of speeches rather than a mere collection of sayings (see Kirk's essay in this volume; Horsley and Draper).

Recent research has also decisively undermined some major standard assumptions about the culture of ancient Judea and Galilee, particularly assumptions about literacy and the Hebrew Scriptures. Not only are some scholars now suggesting that the composition of the Torah and Prophetic books should be dated relatively later than previously thought (perhaps in Hellenistic times), those who have closely examined the multiple scrolls of books of the Torah found at Qumran are also concluding that the text of the books of the Torah was not yet uniform or stable. Different textual traditions still existed in the same scribal community (and presumably in Jerusalem as well), each of which was still undergoing development. The Dead Sea Scrolls also supply further examples of alternative Torah (4QMMT; the *Temple Scroll*) and alternative versions of Israelite history and tradition (not rewritten Bible; *Jubilees*, Pseudo–Philo, Biblical Antiquities) that coexisted and competed, at least among scribal circles.

Compounding the implications of such research is the mounting evidence and recognition that literacy was at least as limited in Judea and Galilee as in the rest of the Roman empire (see Harris; Hezser). Oral communication dominated. Indeed, even scribal circles such as the Qumranites apparently recited their texts aloud (see Jaffee). Besides being extremely expensive and therefore rare, scrolls were cumbersome and virtually unreadable to anyone who did not already have the text memorized.

The recent research in these areas thus gives powerful confirmation to hypotheses that only a few interpreters were previously ready to entertain and willing to argue. First, Israelite culture was as diverse as were the groups and communities that comprised Judean, Galilean, and Samaritan society. Different versions of Israelite tradition coexisted and competed. The well-known differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees can be multiplied.

Second, since they were expensive as well as cumbersome, and few could read them, scrolls of different textual traditions of the Torah and alternative Torah would have existed even in Jerusalem, much less in the

villages of Judea and Galilee. That most people were nonliterate, however, does not mean that they did not know and cultivate Israelite tradition. It simply gives powerful reinforcement of the hypothesis that, as in other agrarian societies, popular Israelite traditions paralleled and competed with versions of Israelite tradition maintained in scribal circles and in the temple—for which anthropologists use the terminology "little tradition" and "great tradition" (Horsley and Draper; Horsley 2001; Herzog). It may well be that the Hasmonean insistence that the Galileans accept "the laws of the Judeans" when they took over the area (Josephus, *Ant.* 13. 318–19) meant that they assigned the Pharisees and other scribal retainers to press their own "traditions of the elders" and other officially recognized "(temple-) state law" on the populace. But "the laws of the Judeans" would hardly have replaced the local customs, covenantal teachings, Elijah-Elisha stories, and other Israelite traditions cultivated in Galilean village communities.

Third, whether written copies existed, texts were recited or performed aloud to groups of people, not read silently by individuals. From Judean texts themselves (e.g., 1QS 6:6–8) it is clear that texts were recited in/to groups, almost certainly from the text that existed in memory, not (more than) from a written copy (see Jaffee). Thus even in scribal circles, texts existed more in the memory than written on scrolls, and were learned as well as heard communally by recitation. How much more therefore in village communities that lacked both scrolls and literacy were traditional Israelite materials such as stories of heroes, covenantal laws and teachings, victory songs, etcetera, performed and cultivated orally.

Fourth, in a social-cultural context dominated by oral communication, where even when written scrolls existed, the texts were recited from memory, composition was usually carried out not only for but also in performance. Greek and Latin writers describe how they composed texts in their heads, relying on memory for certain materials, and only later dictated their composed text to a scribe who wrote it down (see Small). The same seems the likely procedure among Judean scribal circles (e.g., for the *Psalms of Solomon, 1 Enoch*, Daniel). If it was the rule among literate circles, then composition in performance is all the more likely for popular literature such as the Gospel of Mark and Q, in communities where literacy would have been even more limited than among the elite.

Recognition that Gospel texts, even if they existed in written form, were performed in groups of people changes dramatically the way they must be understood to have "worked" and therefore the way they should be approached. In standard older biblical studies, the theological interpreter was trying to reconstruct the meaning of a text fragment such as an individual saying or pericope. The text fragment, abstracted from

its fuller literary and historical context, was assumed to possess meaning-in-itself.

If the text is rather taken as a complete unit of communication performed (regularly) to groups of people in a particular historical situation, then interpreters must try to understand how the story or speech did its work in resonating with the group to whom it was performed. Standard New Testament studies has left us ill-equipped to carry out such a challenging task.

Yet help is now available from other fields that are also just discovering oral-derived texts that can, to a degree, be understood in performance. Recent work in social linguistics, ethnography of performance, ethnopoetics, and recent theory of verbal art that draws upon the insights of the others, all draw attention to the special importance of two aspects in particular: the group context in which an oral-derived text was performed, and the cultural tradition that the text referenced metonymically in order to resonate with the community of hearers (Foley 1995; 2002; Horsley and Draper; Horsley 2001). As Werner Kelber has recognized, studies of social memory promise to be especially helpful in approaching the relationship of oral-derived texts and the tradition they reference, the cultural "biosphere" in which they do their work (1994).

## Social Memory versus Assumptions of Jesus-Questers

There are already some fundamental reasons why the standard procedure used by the Jesus Seminar and before it by form criticism (in which many of us were trained) to identify "data" for reconstruction of the teaching of Jesus is seriously problematic as a method of historical investigation. The Gospels are assumed to be mere containers of data. The data, however, must be removed from the containers for critical evaluation. Modern rational ("scientific") criteria determine what is potentially good data. While tending to dismiss narratives as too mythic and corrupted by miraculous elements, liberal Jesus-questers in particular tend to focus heavily on sayings. The determinative criteria derive from the dominant modern western literate definition of real knowledge as stated in propositional terms. In contrast to subjective feelings and values, only the sayings material from the Gospels sufficiently resembles this propositional knowledge that it can be relied upon as historical data for Jesus. Accordingly rigorously critical Jesus scholars carefully isolate sayings from their literary contexts that are flawed by faith perspectives in order to evaluate their potential as data.

This procedure is seriously problematic. It is difficult, in the first place, to imagine that anyone anywhere ever communicated effectively by uttering isolated individual sayings. Purposely isolating sayings from

their contexts in the ancient texts, moreover, effectively discards the primary guide we might have as historians to determine both how a given saying functioned as a component in a genuine unit of communication (a speech or a narrative) and its possible meaning context(s) for ancient speakers and hearers. With no ancient guide for its meaning-context, then, interpretation is determined only, and almost completely, by the modern scholar, who constructs a new meaning-context on the basis of other such radically decontextualized sayings.

Recent studies of social memory not only confirm those observations, but explain further why and how the standard procedure of form criticism and (some members of) the Jesus Seminar is fundamentally flawed as historical method. A major problem is that these Jesus scholars, along with many others in the New Testament field, are working with a modern (mis-) understanding of memory rooted in the modern western understanding of knowledge. Studies of social memory can help us identify several interrelated aspects of this fundamental misunderstanding. Much of the following discussion engages the work of John Dominic Crossan because his *Historical Jesus,* as the most intensively marketed and most widely read analysis of Jesus sayings, has been highly influential, and because, recognizing memory as a problem, he has seriously grappled with understanding how it works in another methodologically sophisticated and magisterial treatise (1998). But the discussion is also an attempt to grapple critically with what have been standard assumptions and operating procedures in the field of Gospel and Jesus studies that now seem problematic.

*The "textual model" of memory:* Form critics and their more recent heirs assume that the route that Jesus sayings took from Jesus himself to the literary containers in which they can now be found was oral tradition, that is, the memories of Jesus' followers. As Werner Kelber pointed out over twenty years ago, form criticism depends on the assumptions of modern print culture (1983). The model for how the followers' memory handled Jesus' sayings was how Matthew and Luke handled what they found in Mark and the reconstructed (hypothetical) Q, that is, texts that the modern scholars understood in terms of print culture. That is, not only were the sayings understood as texts, for which Jesus scholars strove to establish the original wording (*ipsissima verba,* or at least *ipsissima structura*), but they worked with a "textual model" of memory.

Students of social memory, however, have explained that this textual model of memory is also an expression of a modern literate definition of knowledge, propositional knowledge that can be separated out as "objective" from the "subjective" aspect of memory (Fentress and Wickham: 2–5). Not only is each piece of knowledge like a text, but the part of memory that carries those pieces is like a text. Thus for the form

critics and their successors in the Jesus Seminar, the memory of the Jesus-followers was a container for Jesus-sayings, just like the Gospels into which they fed the sayings. The textual model of memory, however, rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of memory. The reason propositional knowledge in memory seems "objective" is merely that "we can communicate it in words more easily" than we can the memory of "subjective" feelings. "But that has nothing to do with the structure of memory. It is a social fact. What emerges at the point of articulation is not the objective part of memory but its social aspect" (Fentress and Wickham: 6–7). Drawing on Durkheim's insight about the social character of collectively held ideas, Halbwachs recognized that memory is social, the result of social and historical forces. With regard to the Gospels and Gospel tradition as sources for the historical Jesus, the memory involved in oral tradition was not a text–like container but a social process. Moreover, insofar as the Gospels themselves as written texts were almost certainly transcripts of particular performances of the texts, they also were products of social memory. Use of the Gospels as historical sources requires the understanding of social memory.

*The "copy-and-save" concept of memory:* Closely related to their textual model of memory/ies, form critics and many Jesus scholars also have a "copy-and-save" conception of memory. In the traditioning process, some disciples were able to remember and repeat Jesus sayings. As indicated by the voting by members of the Jesus Seminar, in some cases the copy-and-save mechanism of memory worked well (red and pink), whereas other sayings involved a considerable degree of creativity by the tradents. While assuming the operation of this mechanism, Crossan is skeptical about how accurately it works. He concludes that in many cases the copying reproduces the "gist" of sayings, but not the precise wording of the "text." This modern intellectual (mis)understanding of memory ("copy and save") is illustrated both by Frederic Bartlett's well-known experiments among his Cambridge colleagues and friends in the 1930s and by Crossan's selective use of the results to show how undependable memory is for reliable "reproductions." As Fentress and Wickham see, Bartlett set up the experiment to prove what he suspected about memory in modern intellectual society. Bartlett had his friends read (twice) a story from the Chinook people recorded by the anthropologist Franz Boas and then repeat it soon thereafter and again years later, with mixed and unimpressive results. Crossan takes some of the results of the experiment as applicable to ancient Mediterranean peoples.

Both, however, turn out to be comparing apples and oranges, or rather an apple tree and an orange. As Fentress and Wickham note, Bartlett presented to his friends a story taken completely out of its own cultural context and quite unintelligible to his friends and utterly alien to

their own culture. If he had presented them a clever new limerick similar to those commonly shared in Oxbridge culture, the results would have been dramatically different. An appropriate use of the Chinook tale for testing memory, which is social, would have been within Chinook culture. An appropriate illustration of how memory worked among early Jesus-communities would have to come from the culture of those communities. It is Crossan's (very appropriate) distrust of "copy-and-save" memory that leads him to depend so heavily on written-textual containers of sayings as sources for Jesus sayings. But as Fentress and Wickham point out, "The ability of society to transmit its social memory in logical and articulate form is not dependent on the possession of writing" (45).

*Memory as individual:* Like Bartlett, Crossan (like many and perhaps most interpreters) apparently assumes that memory is an individual operation. Given the orientation of modern western culture, particularly in the United States, to the individual, many and perhaps most of us conceive of Jesus' sayings as teachings to individuals remembered and transmitted by individuals. It is true that memory operates through individual consciousness. But the main point that Halbwachs and his successors have been explaining is that memory is thoroughly social, the product of social forces operating through communities, movements, and societies (Fentress and Wickham: 25). Leading historians such as Marc Bloch and Peter Burke have been clear in recognizing this fundamental reality (Burke: 98).

*Jesus-sayings as cultural artifacts with meaning in themselves:* In accordance with the modern theory of knowledge on which they are operating, Jesus scholars and others assume that the Jesus-sayings transmitted by individual memory have meaning in themselves. That they were operating on this assumption may explain why Crossan and others in the Jesus Seminar were concerned merely to date the documents they took as containers of Jesus sayings. They did not give careful attention to the different meaning contexts and implicit hermeneutics of those different sources. Students of social memory point out that this assumption that a statement has meaning in itself is quite unwarranted. In social memory and social knowledge, a particular statement or tale operates in a larger meaning context. When the context changes, the same statement or tale takes on a more or less altered meaning appropriate to the new context (Fentress and Wickham: 68).

*Jesus sayings as "unconventional" or "countercultural":* The assumption that Jesus' sayings were text-like propositional statements carried in container-like memory underlies another prominent aspect of Jesus research. Under the old theological imperative to find Jesus distinctively different from "Judaism," an earlier generation of Jesus-questers established the criterion of dissimilarity (from his Jewish cultural context as

well as from the early church) as one of the principal measures for the "authentic" sayings of Jesus. While the Jesus Seminar and other scholars have seriously qualified that criterion in the direction of some continuity, some leading members of the Jesus Seminar perpetuate the notion in finding Jesus' sayings to be "unconventional" or "countercultural" (see Crossan; Mack).

As historians, of course, we could immediately ask how Jesus could have become a significant historical player if he had been uttering sayings that were so dissimilar to anything in his cultural context, how anything he said would have been remembered if it had not resonated with followers embedded in a particular culture. Recent theory of performance places great emphasis on how speech works by referencing the hearers' cultural tradition, that is, memory. Studies of social memory strongly reinforce such reactions to the "dissimilarity" criterion and the "unconventional" interpretation. Especially in a new movement, as Connerton emphasizes in the first paragraph of his analysis of social memory, "the absolutely new is inconceivable." The followers of Jesus who remembered his teaching and action were responding from "an organized body of expectations based on recollection" (6). Their experience of Jesus would have been embedded in past experience. Memory represents the past and the present as connected to each other (Fentress and Wickham: 24). This approach closely parallels the recognition of oral performance analysis: tradition is key to the communication taking place (see Foley). More particularly, the images held in social memory are a mixture of pictorial images, slogans, quips, and snatches of discourse. A figure such as Jesus could not have communicated without tapping into those images in ancient Galileans, and others' social memory. Further, the images he used would have communicated effectively only by being "conventionalized and simplified: conventionalized, because the image has to be meaningful for an entire group; simplified, because in order to be generally meaningful and capable of transmission, the complexity of the image must be reduced as far as possible" (Fentress and Wickham: 47). Of course, while Jesus' teaching had to be conventionalized for effective communication with his followers, who were embedded in the Israelite "little tradition" of the peasantry (including fishers and marginalized), it was indeed most likely "counter" to the culture of the elite in Jerusalem and Tiberias. That Jesus' teaching may well have been counter to the elite culture of Jerusalem and scribal circles, who produced the Judean literature that constitutes many of our written sources for late second temple times, should not be mistaken for Jesus' teaching having been counter to Israelite culture generally. It is necessary to be more critically attentive to the differences between the elite and the popular versions of Israelite culture (see below).

The fundamental insight of Halbwachs and his successors that memory is social is simple but profound in its implications for academic endeavors such as studies of Jesus and the Gospels. In order to use the Gospels appropriately as historical sources for Jesus and early Jesus movements, therefore, we have to abandon several interrelated aspects of the modern western misunderstanding of memory, that is, the "textual model," the "copy-and-save" conception, individualization, the notion that Jesus sayings have meaning in themselves, and the presumption that Jesus sayings could have been somehow distinctively different from his cultural context.

## Why and How (Study of) Social Memory Is Useful for Approach to Jesus and Jesus-Movements

The prominent historian Peter Burke noted some time ago that historians have two principal interests in memory. "In the first place, they need to study memory as a historical *source,* to produce a critique of the reliability of reminiscence on the lines of the traditional critique of historical documents" (99). Against the stiff resistance of their more traditional colleagues, some younger historians of the recent past moved to include "oral history" in their research. Yet historians of earlier periods also need to understand social memory in order to deal with "the oral testimonies and traditions embedded in many written records." Secondly, historians should be concerned with "memory as a historical phenomenon," including the principles of selection, variations by location, and changes over time (100). Given the character of the orally derived texts that they study, biblical historians also have a keen interest in social memory in both of these respects.

It is curious, however, that a social historian of Burke's stature did not mention a third reason for understanding the workings of social memory—for which the two interests he identified would be ancillary. Historians, especially social historians, would presumably have an interest in social movements, particularly popular movements, and, more broadly, peoples' history in general. Social memory is often the most important source for such movements. Indeed, for those popular movements that did not become prominent and gain wide notice, social memory may be virtually the only historical source. More significantly, for movements of mainly nonliterate people, their social memory would have been one of the principal forces driving their collective actions. Burke makes the passing comment that unofficial memories may differ sharply from official memories and "are sometimes historical forces in their own right," offering the examples of the German Peasant War of 1525 and the "Norman Yoke" in the English Revolution (107). Although

he does not pursue the implications himself, his passing comment that "unofficial memories" become historical forces themselves leads us to consider how popular Israelite social memory may have played a creative and formative role in the movement resulting from the interaction of Jesus and his followers.

In the academic division of labor, the subject matter that we New Testament scholars deal with provides prime examples of popular leaders and movements that became historical forces that local and imperial "officials" had to reckon with. As suggested above, moreover, given the oral derivation of the Gospels and Gospel materials, the literature we interpret was apparently the product of those movements' social memory. Gospel materials, moreover, mediated both through literature (the Scriptures) and through continuing orally cultivated social memory, comprised an important component of the social memory that motivated both the German Peasant War, the English Revolution, as well as the earlier Hussites and Lollards and many other popular movements. Interpreters of Jesus and the Gospels have compelling reasons to understand social memory.

One of the most important possibilities that social memory studies helps open up for an appropriate approach to Jesus and the Gospels is its critical focus on the diversity and conflict of memories. Students of social memory have long since moved beyond the limitations of Halbwachs's teacher Durkheim, with his emphasis on societal cohesion, to the avoidance of social dissent and conflict (Burke: 106–107). They are as aware as any that the role of professional scholars, like that of schoolteaching and the media, is to reinforce official or established memory more than critically to investigate dissenting memories (Fentress and Wickham: 127). They are aware that the struggle of peoples against hegemonic memory is often the struggle of their memory against enforced forgetting, against the elimination of alternative memory (Connerton: 15).

Study of Jesus, Jesus movements, and the Gospels can learn from these students of social memory. Interpreters of Jesus and the Gospels focus on literature and movements that express opposition to the local and imperial rulers. The latter attempted to suppress those movements and their memory, through the crucifixion of Jesus and subsequent repressive action against his followers. In some cases they apparently succeeded, except that their memory survived in the oral-derived texts they left behind. Ironically, established biblical studies has sometimes effectively suppressed the subversive memory carried in the Gospels that the Roman rulers could not stamp out. This has been done by treating the texts as merely religious and by reducing the focus to Jesus as a teacher and/or to individual discipleship, while virtually ignoring the collective activity and solidarity of a popular movement. Recent studies of social

memory can help interpreters of Jesus and the Gospels to appreciate how the adversarial Gospel tradition and literature are rooted not only in the subversive popular memory of Jesus and his movement, but also in the memory of earlier Israelite leaders and movements. Such studies of social memory can help New Testament scholars rediscover the memory of social movements whose voices have been silenced by established scholarship. Like the Gospel literature itself, study of social memory in Jesus movements will be subversive of long-established scholarship, challenging standard assumptions, concepts, and approaches in order to discern oppositional memories and the conflicts they engage.

Crossan declares confidently that what has been discovered about how Balkan bards (their texts and their audiences) are rooted in centuries-old tradition "has nothing whatsoever to do with the memories of illiterate peasants operating within the Jesus tradition," because of the latter's "total newness" (1998:78–79). Indeed, judging from the "data-base" listed in the "Overture" of his Jesus book (1991), the Cynic-like sage he presents is almost completely memory-less. Only one name (Adam) from Israelite tradition remains in the aphorisms and parables that Crossan has declared admissible as evidence. When he comes to presentation and analysis, he does admit to a few other allusions. But we are left wondering what the basis is for concluding that Jesus was a *Jewish* and not just a generic Mediterranean peasant.

Suspicious of the authenticity of most of Jesus' prophetic sayings, he thus eliminates from his data base references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Solomon and the Queen of the South, and Jonah, as well as the traditional Israelite prophetic forms of some of those sayings. Following standard critical criteria in extracting sayings from narrative context, he ignores the prominent references and allusions in Mark and elsewhere to Moses, Elijah, the exodus, the twelve tribes of Israel, and the covenant meal. Because, in standard procedure, he focuses on individual sayings, he does not even notice Jesus' use of traditional Israelite forms and patterns, such as components of Mosaic covenantal patterns and allusions to covenantal teaching.

Although Crossan's procedure tends to eliminate references to Israelite tradition, the "data-base" of the Jesus tradition in which he finds "total newness," if we examine it more closely with "ears to hear," does indeed make numerous references or allusions to Israelite tradition. "Finger of God" refers to the exodus. The issues of adultery and of giving tribute to Caesar are rooted in the Mosaic covenant. "Blessings" and "woes" are components of the Mosaic covenant and "woes" crop up prominently in the prophets. The clever saying about giving one's shift as well as one's cloak refers to Mosaic covenantal law. "Go bury my father" alludes to the story of Elijah's commissioning of Elisha. The parable of the

tenants in the vineyard resonates deeply with the song of the vineyard in Isaiah's prophecies. The image of a division of families was used by the prophet Micah. The prophetic action and prophecies against the temple are reminiscent of Jeremiah's prophecies and prophetic actions, etcetera. Moreover, other images (swearing by Jerusalem) and figures (the Samaritan, the Levite and the priest) in Jesus' teaching refer directly to more recent Israelite institutions and history. The "newness" of Crossan's Jesus tradition is in fact not "total." His followers' memory, even when its "copy and save" mechanism is judged dysfunctional, cannot help but carry (Jesus' own?) memory of and allusion to Israelite tradition, including many references to central aspects of that tradition, such as exodus and covenant, Moses and Elijah, prophetic oracle and covenantal teaching.

If we broadened our purview beyond Crossan's critically restricted "data-base" to include the prophetic materials in Q and the narrative in Mark, then the Jesus tradition (however it be judged for "authenticity") is simply permeated with social memory of Israelite tradition. The obvious implication: the Jesus tradition is far from "totally new." It cannot possibly be understood except as rooted in Israelite social memory. That holds even if Mark were "located" in its composition and performance in Syria or even in Rome. Even if the (precanonical) Gospel of Mark belonged to communities of "Gentiles," they apparently identify with and understand the text in terms of its resonance with Israelite tradition. In seeking help from studies of social memory to understand Jesus and the Gospels, therefore, we must focus not only on the Jesus tradition itself but also on its grounding in and continuity with Israelite tradition. That is, we are dealing not only with social memory in the development toward and formation of the oral-derived texts of Gospels themselves but also with the social memory of Israelite tradition that those texts referenced in order to resonate with their hearers (see Foley; Horsley and Draper).

### How Do We Gain Access to the Social Memory of Jesus People?

The obvious next question then is how we can gain access to the social memory of the earliest and subsequent "followers" of Jesus, the bearers of the social memory of Jesus' mission and message who were also embedded in Israelite social memory. Students of social memory seek access to it through various kinds of sources, including oral traditions, memoirs and written records (memory transformed through writing), public monuments and other sources of images, places and landscape images, and rituals and other actions. Students of social memory of Jesus tradition and Israelite tradition have only some of these available as sources. How we might be able to use those sources,

moreover, requires some critical analysis, given recent research on late Second Temple Israelite society and culture.

For social memory of Jesus tradition itself, we largely lack monuments and landscape images and have minimal access to rituals (Lord's supper, baptism). Recent recognition of the predominantly oral communication environment and the likelihood that texts were orally composed and performed prior to and subsequent to being written down has problematized the use of the Gospels as sources. We must still figure out, and almost certainly will be debating among ourselves for some time, the degree to which the Gospels represent transcripts of oral-derived (performed) texts or written records, that is, memory transformed by written composition.

For social memory of Israelite tradition it can no longer be a matter of consulting the "Old Testament"/Hebrew Bible passages listed in the apparatus of our copy of the Greek New Testament. As recent research has shown, few chirographs existed in ancient Judea (and Galilee), and those few were mainly in scribal circles, where texts were nevertheless recited from memory (see Jaffee). As noted above, moreover, different versions of the Torah and Prophets coexisted even in literate elite circles. The people who responded to Jesus, who participated in Jesus movements, were largely ordinary people who would have had little or no direct contact with written texts, perhaps not even indirect contact. They would have known Israelite tradition through oral communication mainly in their village communities, with perhaps some indirect influence of scribal retainers (e.g., Pharisees) who represented Jerusalem interests in occasional interaction with villagers. We therefore cannot use biblical and other Judean literature as direct sources for the Judean and Galilean "little tradition." Because it was apparently parallel to and in some regular interaction with the "great tradition" represented by the developing texts of the Torah, Prophets, and other versions of Jerusalem-based tradition, however, we can use written biblical and other Judean texts as indirect sources for the Israelite popular tradition, particularly where we have reason to believe there was overlap. We also have other indirect sources. Often we can discern from Josephus's portrayal of popular movements and protests that such actions are informed by Israelite tradition. This seems fairly clear, for example, from his accounts of the popular movements led by "prophets" and popularly acclaimed "kings" and by protests in the temple at Passover. Finally, the Gospels themselves, insofar as they are products of popular circles, provide evidence for Israelite social memory among Galilean (and Judean) popular tradition, both of traditional figures and traditional cultural forms.

The net effect of these critical complications regarding our sources only serves to indicate the historical importance of Israelite social

memory for understanding Jesus, Jesus movements, and their literature. Another effect, of course, is to make all the more important and exciting (in anticipation) the help that studies of social memory can provide us, particularly as it appears to dovetail with and supplement the results of recent research that has undermined standard older assumptions, concepts, and approaches in the field of Gospel studies.

## The Social Memory of Jesus Built on Israelite Social Memory

Finally, the way social memory analysis might contribute to a more defensible approach to the historical Jesus can be illustrated in focusing briefly on two particular complexes of material in the Gospel of Mark that resonate with those same complexes in Israelite social memory: renewal of the Mosaic covenant and renewal of Israel by a new Moses and Elijah. Given the usual orientation in New Testament studies to culture divorced from concrete historical political-economic life, it is important to emphasize that Mark (and Q) were rooted in and reflect the violent domination of the Roman imperial rulers and their client rulers over subject peoples and the continuing struggle of the latter to resist. That struggle, moreover, had intensified in the time of Jesus and his mission, which are so vividly framed by the widespread revolts of Judeans and Galileans in 4–2 B.C.E. and 66–70 C.E. Many recent treatments of social memory may be all the more helpful for investigation of Jesus and the Gospels because they give special attention to subordinate groups and peoples.

In this connection we can perhaps work analogously from Connerton's critique of the approach followed by some oral historians when we focus on Gospel materials and Jesus-followers. In both cases the aim is to open channels for the hearing of voices that are otherwise silenced by scholarly concepts and procedures. Like recent Jesus-interpreters (note the subtitle "The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant"), however, oral historians approached their sources with the concept of a life history, as if their subjects thought like educated modern people of affairs. This approach, however, may actually impede the aim of the historians.

> The oral history of subordinate groups will produce another type of history: one in which not only will most of the details be different, but in which the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home.... In [the] culture of subordinate groups ... the life histories of its members have a different rhythm ... not patterned by the individual's intervention in the working of dominant institutions". (Connerton: 19)

Analogously, seeking for what Jesus actually said or did, much less his individual "life," will only block access to a Jesus who was historically significant as catalyst of movements who remembered him. Not only was their memory social, but Jesus became significant for his interaction with them in action and speech taken in his and their fundamentally conflictual historical situation. As suggested by this analogy from Connerton, as by all the above discussion, an approach to the historical Jesus and the Gospels must be relational and contextual.

In a complex, multifaceted approach I have recently attempted to understand how we can appreciate certain broad (Israelite) cultural patterns that are discernible in the speeches of Q and in the story of Mark (Horsley and Draper; Horsley 2001). By focusing on individual sayings and narrative episodes extracted from the speeches and overall narrative that formed the units of communication we render them unintelligible, because we decontextualize them. In their own historical communication context, however, what our standard scholarly analytical practices render into unintelligible text fragments were held together intelligibly by cultural patterns or "scripts" derived from Israelite tradition, which constitute/provide the tacit infrastructure as well as the cultural meaning context of the speeches or the broader narrative of which they were integral components. Ancient Judean and other texts may well provide our only sources for and access to these patterns and scripts. Yet their operation in Mark and Q was probably not derived from written texts, but rather from their continuing presence in popular Judean and Galilean tradition. Central among these were the social memory of Mosaic covenant and of popular prophetic and messianic movements. Combined with the recent research and new approaches outlined at the outset above, recent studies of social memory can help open the way to discerning how such popular Israelite social memory was operating in the interaction of Jesus and his followers as represented in Mark and Q.

In the introduction to this volume, Alan Kirk (drawing on several studies of social memory) explains that

> the past, itself constellated by the work of social memory, provides the *framework* for cognition, organization, and interpretation of the experiences of the present. The salient past, immanent in the narrative patterns in which it has become engrained in social memory, provides the very cognitive and linguistic habits by which a group perceives, orients itself, has its "being in the world." … It is precisely because of the orienting, stabilizing effect of memory that free, innovative action in the present becomes possible. (15–16; emphasis mine; see also Schwartz 2000:225–30; Casey 2000:150–53)

One of the *frameworks* for cognition, organization, and interpretation of political-economic-religious life in ancient Israel, perhaps the principal framework, was the Mosaic covenant. The six-component structure discerned by comparison with second-millennium B.C.E. Hittite suzerainty treaties by Mendenhall and others can be discerned in Exod 20 and Josh 24. From fragments of prophetic oracles such as Mic 6:1–7 and Isa 1:2–3; 3:13–15, it is clear that this deeply rooted framework (that still included the appeal to witnesses) continued to inform prophetic protests (literally in the name of God) against the rulers' oppression of the people. Readers of the Community Rule and Damascus Rule from Qumran can recognize that the framework—in the somewhat simplified three-part form of God's deliverance, commandments to the people, and pronouncement of blessings and curses as sanction on those commandments—continued to inform the organization of dissident movements into late Second Temple times (see Baltzer). Those Qumran texts also demonstrate that the form could be transformed so that the blessings and curses became the new declaration of divine deliverance, with other devices marshaled to serve as sanctions.

This same covenant framework turns out to be prominent in the earliest Gospel texts. As I have argued in larger treatments of the speech in Q/Luke 6:20–49, all those sayings that have been classified into the essentialist category of "sapiental" can be more intelligibly understood as components of a performative speech of covenant renewal (see Horsley and Draper). After declaring God's current/imminent action of deliverance and judgment in the blessings and woes, Q's Jesus pronounces renewed covenantal teachings which make numerous allusions to traditional covenantal principles and exhortations, followed by the double parable of houses built on rock and sand, which serve as sanction on "keeping his word." Similarly, argued in a larger treatment of Mark as a complete story (Horsley 2001), the series of dialogues in Mark 10 which explicitly recite the covenantal commandments, can also be discerned to be a coherent renewal of Mosaic covenant at a crucial point in the narrative sequence, following the announcement and demonstration that the kingdom of God is now at hand. As is particularly clear in Q/Luke 6:20–49, moreover, the covenantal pattern is not simply the framework for organization of sayings and dialogues in the texts of Q and Mark, but the framework of organization of the communities of the movement among whom the speeches and Gospel story were being performed. The traditional covenantal pattern thus becomes the framework of orientation, aiding discernment of what was wrong (people were divided among themselves, not observing the fundamental covenantal principles), and the framework of stabilizing innovation (creatively "updating" the covenantal form and teaching to effect renewal of mutual cooperation, sharing, and solidarity).

In Mark especially, however, the Mosaic covenant pattern extends beyond the covenant renewal dialogues into other episodes (Horsley, 2001). Most prominently, Jesus insists on the basis of the covenantal commandments of God that local economic needs ("honor your father and mother") must take priority, rejecting the pressure on the people to "devote" resources to the temple, as advocated by the Pharisaic representatives of the temple in their "the traditions of the elders" (Mark 7:1–13). And Jesus' final Passover meal with the twelve, and presumably the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper among the Markan communities, was a meal of covenant renewal, as indicated in the allusion that the blood of the covenant makes to Israel's covenantal meal with God on Sinai (Mark 14:17–25; Exodus 24). Less explicitly Jesus' prophetic demonstration against the temple, in reciting part of Jeremiah's oracle against the temple, alludes also to the covenantal basis on which God is condemning it. Studies of social memory thus confirm and further illuminate how the traditional Israelite cultural pattern of the Mosaic covenant, alive and well in the social memory of Jesus' contemporaries, provided a fundamental framework of organization and interpretation in Mark and Q and the movements they addressed.

In the same section of the introductory essay to this volume, Kirk adds: "Social memory makes available the moral and symbolic resources for making sense of the present through 'keying' present experiences and predicaments to archetypal images and narrative representations of the commemorated past" (16). As Fentress and Wickham explain, in popular culture, "stories do more than represent particular events: they connect, clarify, and interpret events in a general fashion. Stories provide us with a set of stock explanations which underlie our predispositions to interpret reality in the ways that we do" (51). The same process happens in the assimilation and interpretation of historical events. What Barry Schwartz calls "frame images" work as "pictorial counterparts of 'emplotment,'" defining the meaning of events by depicting them "as episodes in a narrative that precedes and transcends them" (Schwartz 1998a:8).

Another broad cultural pattern that operates in Mark's story of Jesus is the double sequence of miracle stories (sea crossing, exorcism, healing, healing, wilderness feeding), which in turn appears in Mark's overall story as the "script" of a popular prophet-and-movement, also discernible in the many prophets and their movements that Josephus mentions. The sequence of miracle stories in Mark, of course, may have been semiseparable from the broader "script" of a popular prophetic movement. It is difficult to tell whether the similar sequence of "signs" in the Gospel of John is part of such a larger script that can be clearly identified in the rest of the story. In the main plot of the renewal of Israel in Mark's overall story the double sequence of miracle stories has been

interwoven and overlaid with subplots of Jesus' conflict with the disciples and of the women's role in the renewal of Israel. The underlying pattern of "miracle chain," however, remains unmistakable in the duplicated sequence of episodes (see Mack).

Analysis of these episodes in terms of social memory readily confirms and deepens the sense that they are shaped in terms of numerous allusions to the formative events of Israel led by Moses and the renewal of Israel led by Elijah (clinched, in Mark, by the ensuing episode of the appearance of Jesus with both on the mountain before the three disciples). The crossings of the stormy sea are reminiscent of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea led by Moses. Jesus' feedings of the thousands in the wilderness allude to Moses' feeding of the people in the wilderness. By implication, in resonance with the audience's Israelite social memory, Jesus is thus leading a new exodus, a new or re-formed Israel. Jesus' exorcisms and healings in the middle of the sequence of episodes (including a raising of the [almost] dead, and perhaps also the multiplication of food) are reminiscent of Elijah's (and Elisha's) healings in renewal of a disintegrating Israel under the despotic foreign rule of Ahab and Jezebel. The stories to which these episodes in Mark are alluding were basic elements of Israelite popular tradition long before they were taken up into the Judean great tradition, some textual traditions of which developed into the Septuagint and the Masoretic text.

While the allusions these stories make to "scriptural" events have long been recognized, however, standard New Testament scholarship tended not to look for broader patterns of culture. Yet sequences of several incidents in the formative Israelite exodus-wilderness story, such as the sea crossing and the wilderness feeding, appear in any number of Psalms and other passages in Judean literature. The wondrous deeds of Elijah and his disciple Elisha, moreover, were recited in sequences in texts as divergent as the popular stories taken up into the Deuteronomic history (1 Kgs 17–21; 2 Kgs 1–9) and a section of Ben Sira's hymnic "Praise of Famous Men." These sequences appearing in written texts are sufficiently different to suggest not common prototypes but general patterns in Israelite culture, versions of which could be deployed as appropriate in given circumstances. Werner Kelber demonstrated how individual healing or exorcism stories could be understood as orally composed and performed from a standard repertoire of motifs according to a basic three-part narrative pattern (1983). Given evidence of broader patterns of Mosaic or Elijah-Elisha stories, we might build on Kelber's insight to hypothesize that Israelite social memory included a broader repertoire of distinctively Israelite stories and story motifs. Included in that repertoire were several stories organized in sequences. Precisely such resources from Israelite social memory

provided the *frameworks* and *frame images* used in emplotting and defining the meaning of Jesus' exorcisms, healings, feedings, etcetera, "depicting them as episodes in a narrative that precede[d] and transcende[d] them" (Schwartz 1998a:8).

It was long since recognized, according to Enlightenment criteria of reliable historical accounts, that there is no point asking whether and how individual miracle stories adequately or authentically represent an incident of healing or exorcism. Studies of social memory confirm that social memory of events is not stable as accurate historical information. Social memory, however, "is stable at the level of shared meanings and remembered images" (Fentress and Wickham: 59). If we focus not on individual stories but on the two parallel sequences of stories, then it is clear that in Mark's story (and prior to and/or independently of Mark) Jesus' followers understand his exorcisms, healings, etcetera, as a renewal of Israel, drawing on and resonating with a deeply rooted pattern of the social memory of Moses and Elijah.

Discerning how Mark and Q are informed by, draw upon, and adapt broader cultural patterns of Israelite social memory, of course, does not constitute direct evidence for Jesus-in-mission. Since we are just beginning to explore the implications of the important insight that memory is social, it would be premature to attempt to draw conclusions about how Israelite social memory functioned in the interaction between Jesus and his immediate followers. Combined with the recent research and its implications sketched at the outset above, however, studies of social memory enable us to begin constructing a far more defensible set of assumptions and approaches than those of form criticism and the Jesus Seminar. Crossan, critical leader of the Jesus Seminar, presents a Jesus whose teaching exhibits little or no Israelite memory that is acknowledged in discussion. In effect we are asked to believe that, historically, Jesus did not operate in Israelite culture in Galilee. (Crossan 1991, of course, suggests that Galilee was "cosmopolitan," including influence from Cynic philosophy. )

The Gospel of Mark, whether written in Syria or even as far away as Rome no later than the 70s, has a rich knowledge of Israelite culture into which Jesus' action and teaching are woven, as is evident in nearly every episode. Similarly the speeches of Q exhibit multiple Israelite figures, motifs, and cultural forms. This may not be a problem for standard New Testament studies: on the assumptions of academic print culture, Mark can be pictured as "composed at a desk in a scholar's study lined with texts" (Mack: 322–23). Recent research, however, has simply pulled the rug out from under such anachronistic assumptions and the resulting procedures. The combination of the recent research cited above and studies of social memory lead rather to the conclusion that there was a far

greater continuity between Jesus in interaction with his immediate fol-
lowers and emergent texts such the Q speeches and Mark's Gospel. That
continuity is provided by the social memory of Jesus-in-mission, which is
a continuation in key ways of Israelite social memory, including broad
cultural patterns such as those of Mosaic covenant and Moses- and Elijah-
led renewal of Israel. The social memory of Jesus-in-mission accessible in
Q speeches and Markan story does not give us access to exactly what
Jesus said or did, but it does enable us to discern the "shared meanings"
of his typical preaching and practice in the broader cultural patterns
operative in the historical situation in which he worked.