Part One

The Twofold Beginnings of a History of Early Christian Literature

A. The Charismatic Beginnings of Gospel Literature in Jesus

One may only speak of literature in the strict sense when a text (1) exists in written form and (2) is addressed to a general audience. In this regard the two basic forms of the New Testament moved in different directions. The Jesus tradition existed in oral form at first, but it was addressed to the whole people of Israel. It was used in the mission to Israel and thus was not initially directed to all people. It became literature when it was written down and extended to all peoples in the 60s/70s C.E. Paul's letters, by contrast, existed in written form from the beginning. They were addressed to individual Gentile communities. It is true that the letter to the Romans came close to being a public document, but it was only the posthumous collection of all Paul's letters that gave them a common addressee, as private letters often become public literature when they are collected for publication. This also took place in the 60s/70s. Those years saw the universalizing of the audience for the traditions of Paul and Jesus, and in the case of Jesus the writing down of the traditions as well. Thereby these texts became literature for the first time. Our question is now: were comparable factors at work in the gospels as in the letters that caused them to become literature? Can the prehistory of the gospels and the letters of Paul properly be assigned to one and the same phase? Further: why were the letters fifteen years earlier (with the letter to the Romans) in becoming written literature than the gospels? Why, within the same literary-historical phase, was there a temporal delay for the gospels?

1 The Oral Prehistory of Early Christian Literature with the Historical Jesus

The Beginning of the History of Early Christian Literature

Jesus is said once to have written something—but he wrote in sand, in which the traces vanish (John 8:8). We have retained not a single line from him. He taught in synagogues and undertook the reading of Scripture in worship (Luke 4:16-21). Such traditions would not have arisen if he had not been able to read and write. Nevertheless, he did not commit his message to writing. The reason is that he lived in a culture of oral communication. We must first ask: how did this differ from written communication? Can we detect anything at all of the oral prehistory of the tradition behind the written texts before us, to say nothing of reconstructing it? One relevant conclusion of form criticism is that in the case of oral tradition what is primarily visible is its formal language.[1] We may be uncertain whether Jesus spoke certain *words*, but that he used particular forms is undisputed: he taught as a prophet, a wisdom teacher, a teacher of the law, and a storyteller. The storyteller is known especially from his similitudes; his are the first such to be attested in Jewish literature. The stories about him must be strictly distinguished from his words, for these are texts that were not shaped by Jesus. They include the apophthegms that appear in Jewish tradition for the first time in the Jesus traditions: short, polished statements with narrative frames; in addition, there are the miracle stories, which have many parallels in Jewish and non-Jewish antiquity; and finally, there is also the passion story.

Jesus was not the only person who left no writings. His "teacher," John the Baptizer, did not write any books either. Jesus used the oral culture

of communication much more deliberately for his purposes than did the Baptizer; the latter let people come to him, but Jesus went out as a wandering teacher to the people and brought his message into their world. He strengthened his effectiveness by sending disciples out into the villages with his message. They asserted a public claim within Israel, but the groups they addressed remained limited to Jews.[2] His disciples do not appear to have left any writings, either, although secondarily a number of writings were attributed to them; however, the Gospel of Matthew was certainly not written by the apostle Matthew, the Gospel of John is not by the apostle John, and the letters of Peter are not by Peter. What is true of all these figures is that they lived in an oral culture. Oral communication was the sole means of mass communication among ordinary people. Other "media" were controlled by the powerful. They made coins that passed through many hands; these were used by the rulers to spread political messages. Public inscriptions were also erected by those who had money and power, and these were read by many people. They were not the people's medium. The only medium everyone could use was oral report, the news spread from mouth to mouth. There is much in favor of the supposition that Jesus organized and used this medium of communication in a new and effective form.

About twenty to thirty years of oral communication elapsed before his tradition was written down—first in the Sayings Source (between 40 and 65 c.e.), then in the Gospel of Mark shortly after 70 c.e. Even after it was written, the oral transmission of his words continued alongside it. The writings in turn affected the oral tradition, for in antiquity writings were primarily read out loud. Often the primary and secondary oral traditions merged.

It is true that skeptics ask: was there ever really such an oral tradition before the gospels? Can we be sure that it was not some gifted writer who composed the Jesus tradition, as Walter Schmithals thinks?[3] We cannot, of course, look behind the written texts. We can only draw conclusions. "Constructive conclusions" permit us to make a few direct statements about the oral tradition: Jesus directed his disciples to proclaim his message orally. He did not say: "Whoever reads you, reads me!" but "Whoever listens to you listens to me!" (Luke 10:16). The commission in Matthew 28:19-20 makes oral preaching by itinerant teachers an obligation. The Acts of the Apostles depicts the oral dissemination of this preaching but makes no mention of a written medium—with the exception of the letter containing the apostolic decree (Acts 15:23-29). The Lukan prologue speaks clearly of eyewitnesses whose tradition was only secondarily written down. Even Papias, at the beginning of the second century c.e., gives preference to the "living and enduring voice," that is, oral tradition, over what is written (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4). Added to these constructive conclusions based on direct

statements about oral tradition are "analytical conclusions" based on the form of these texts: the memorable form of the tradition points to an oral origin. It consists of brief pericopes shaped mnemnotically for oral tradition by parallelisms, alliteration, and antitheses. The factual variability of the tradition can be better explained by oral variants than by conscious scribal activity. Even the words of Jesus handed on in the apostolic fathers do not always indicate written sources. Here, too, the oral tradition has not died out.[4] Finally, we can make some comparisons. Charismatic movements also prefer oral traditions: this was true for John the Baptizer, and also for the Montanist prophecy![5]

But we must also ask: during the years of oral tradition, was the Jesus tradition changed so much as to become unrecognizable, so that the memory of Jesus was overlain by other factors? In fact, the degree to which the Jesus traditions had pre-Easter origins, or whether they were radically reshaped by the post-Easter faith, as well as whether they were subject to some control or were able to develop freely and without restraint are matters of dispute among scholars. This question is mainly discussed within the framework of Jesus research, but it is also important for a literary history of the New Testament: the issue here is whether the formative phase of the gospel tradition began with Jesus or only after his death.

Beginnings of Oral Tradition with the Historical Jesus?

Classic form criticism regarded faith in the cross and resurrection as the crucial formative factor in the Jesus tradition: in particular instances it is traceable to the historical Jesus, but it has been so thoroughly reworked through the faith of the first Christians and their needs that the burden of proof of a historically accurate memory of Jesus rests with the advocates of the historicity of the Jesus traditions. The tradition is said not to have been subject to any formal controls (for example, by appointed "teachers"). Recurring situations in which the tradition was used, the "Sitz im Leben," are supposed to have given it a certain stability, but since this Sitz im Leben was radically changed in the transition from Palestinian to "Hellenistic" early Christianity, there was not much continuity! To summarize, one can formulate the form-critical view as follows: Post-Easter shaping and little social control of the Jesus tradition are reasons for a broad historical skepticism. Early post-Easter Christianity is the formative phase of the gospel traditions.

The Scandinavian view of tradition (Birger Gerhardsson), in contrast, was oriented to contemporary analogies in Judaism: as a rabbi, it says, Jesus taught his disciples, his "pupils," to learn and memorize his words. Thus

the tradition was shaped by its pre-Easter origins and was "tended" after Easter as normative tradition. It is much more reliable than form criticism supposed. Samuel Byrskog[6] expanded this concept: according to him, in antiquity it was the eyewitnesses and their oral history that were conclusive. They were sought out so that one might appeal to them. To summarize this in a formula: here we assume a pre-Easter shaping and strict control of the Jesus tradition. The result is a high degree of trust in the historicity of the tradition. Jesus' teaching activity is the crucial formative phase of the gospel tradition.

The new concept of tradition (James G. Dunn)[7] begins with the study of oral literature in antiquity. Homer's epics are interpreted in light of Serbo-Croatian heroic hymns.[8] Observations on oral tradition in the contemporary Mediterranean world show that oral tradition is independent of any "original version"; its handing on is not the reproduction of a model, but a new creation based on a wealth of existing formulae, themes, and structures. Every version is an original.[9] The handing on is not arbitrary, but is influenced by the hearers, whose social control of the tradition is all the more rigorous the more important it is for the identity of the society. It is more strict with regard to brief, pointed sayings than for stories with narrative development.[10] The beginnings of the tradition are seen to lie with Jesus before Easter: the group of disciples was the first Sitz im Leben for the tradition (Heinz Schürmann).[11] In my opinion this new view of tradition is only a refinement of classic form criticism. If we reduce it to a formula, it says that the pre-Easter beginnings and informal social control by listeners make it likely that we can critically evaluate the tradition for knowledge of the historical Jesus. Both the historical Jesus *and* post-Easter early Christianity are parts of the formative phase of the gospel tradition.

In my view, the "new" understanding of tradition comes closest to the truth. Negatively, we can say that at certain points the tradition was not, as one might expect, shaped by the needs of the post-Easter communities. What we know of the social needs of the early Christian communities has often left little trace in the synoptic traditions. For example, every social group has to define who belongs to it and who does not belong. There was a quarrel over this in the early Christianity of the 40s: was male circumcision a necessary criterion for acceptance, or not (Gal 2:1-21; Acts 15:1-29)? This dispute left no traces in the synoptic tradition. Nowhere do we find any saying of Jesus for or against circumcision. Only the Gospel of Thomas contains a corresponding saying of Jesus (GThom 53). The legitimation of authority structures is just as important. In the first generation we already hear about "presbyters" (Acts 11:30 and elsewhere), or "*episkopoi* and *diakonoi*" (Phil 1:1). But nowhere do we find any saying of Jesus to back this

up. Can the influence of the "Sitz im Leben" really have been so thorough, if elementary social needs did not shape the tradition?

However, we can also trace the beginnings of the tradition back to the historical Jesus in a positive sense. During his life there naturally arose situations that caused Jesus' disciples to learn the basic features of his preaching and be able to hand them on independently.

a. Jesus was an itinerant teacher, traveling with his disciples from place to place. He offered the same message everywhere. There was no need to say something different each time. Rather, he would have repeated his words often, with the variations typical of oral tradition. So there is no need to suppose some kind of orderly schooling to explain the repetitions. The existence of an itinerant teacher outside the routine of daily life created quite enough opportunity for repetitions!

b. Jesus lived with his disciples in close community. Their common itinerant existence had to draw them together. Communities develop rules and rituals. So he would have taught his disciples the "Our Father" as a community prayer. Now and again a new disciple would have been added to the group. Each time the newcomer was instructed in what was expected of a disciple.

c. Jesus sent his disciples on itinerant missions. They had to repeat his message in a lot of different places! They must have brought a few orally composed texts with them, and committed them to memory through repetition. Three or four villages would have sufficed. One might object: doesn't the mission discourse and the peace greeting by the disciples point to a time when the shadow of war lay across the land—that is, a time after Jesus (Paul Hoffmann)?[12] Favoring the historicity of the mission is that the disciples did not preach the parousia of the returning *Kyrios*, but *metanoia* (Mark 6:12). They promised the coming of the reign of God (Luke 10:9). They did not baptize, but preached and healed. They didn't even demand "belief"! All that points to the time before Easter. The Jesus tradition was probably shaped not so much in an orderly schooling process as in a "mission campaign" organized by Jesus himself.

Jesus may have had a model for his itinerant existence: Judas Galilaios.[13] Josephus calls him a "Sophist" (*Bell.* 2.118,[14] 433). He came from Gamala in Gaulanitis, and while teaching in Galilee he was called "the Golanite" (*Ant.*

18.4); later, when he was agitating against the taxation census in Judea after 6 B.C.E., he was called "the Galilean."[15] These two appellations suggest mobility. If he called on the people to refuse the tax, he had to carry his message to the villages. An analogy makes this likely: Shortly before the outbreak of the Jewish War, the Jewish aristocracy tried to save the peace by a final effort: "the members of the council dispersed to the various villages and levied the tribute" (*Bell.* 2.405). Wouldn't the opponents of the tribute likewise have gone into the villages? How else were they to influence the people?

Jesus, too, wanted to reach the whole people with his message. If a previous generation had already engaged in an oral campaign against taxation, he had to distinguish himself from them, since the call to refuse taxation was a call for rebellion. It is therefore no accident that in the mission discourse Jesus seems twice to distance himself from other itinerant preachers:

Q: Q is ually cited nply as Q, d on the order sayings in ke; is that isfactory re, instead of "?]

First, he orders his messengers to enter houses with a peace greeting (Q 10:5). The magical power of this greeting is supposed to spread and rest on the household or, if the messengers are rejected, be withdrawn. In the Lukan version the peace depends on whether a "peaceful person" is in the house (Luke 10:6). In the Matthean version the disciples are supposed to find out who is worthy before they enter a house (Matt 10:11). By means of their peace greeting, Jesus' disciples distinguish themselves from Judas Galilaios's campaign. Refusal of taxation was a declaration of war. The pericope on the tribute (Mark 12:13-17) attests that Jesus really did have to separate himself from Judas Galilaios. Thus a comparable distinction in the mission discourse is also possible.

We may mention a second move: Jesus' messengers are not to go around, like Cynic itinerant philosophers, with staff and bag. That only makes sense if itinerant preachers who called themselves Cynics were a familiar sight. We ought to consider that a man could walk around with a beard, bag, and walking staff without being a Cynic. All that was really necessary was bringing an unconventional message. Judas Galilaios and his adherents brought such a message. Josephus presents them as a fourth Jewish philosophy (*Ant.* 18.23). He equates the Essenes with the Pythagoreans (*Ant.* 15.371), the Pharisees with the Stoics (*Vita* 12), the Sadducees indirectly with the Epicureans.[16] As a fourth philosophy there remained only the Cynics,[17] since Cynicism was nothing but a radicalized Stoic philosophy.[18] It is therefore quite possible that Judas Galilaios might have pretended outwardly that his "philosophy" was Cynicism. He came from a city that was not too distant from Gadara, where Cynic traditions are attested over a number of centuries.[19] But the Cynic shell would have been superficial. The formal language of Hellenistic culture would only have served, here as so often in the Middle East, to give additional lustre to native content.

Three Tradents of the Jesus Tradition after Easter

The origins of the Jesus tradition can thus be seen in Jesus' teaching and itinerant existence. Their transmission was relatively secure, inasmuch as the disciples continued their itinerant life after Easter and—inspired by the Easter experience—persevered in the mission. Itinerant charismatics retained important parts of the tradition of Jesus' words. They were able to represent Jesus' radical ethos in believable fashion, that ethos of homelessness, distance from family, critique of possessions, and nonviolence, for all of which I coined the concept of "itinerant radicalism." Q emphasizes their homelessness: "but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Critical of family are the words: "whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). One should let the dead bury one's father (Luke 9:60-61); war within families is regarded as unavoidable (Luke 12:51-53). In such circles one could criticize the rich and live like the birds of heaven (Luke 6:20-49; 12:22-34). Since Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher, the early Christian itinerant charismatics constitute a certain guarantee that his words were retained for us in his spirit. They were the real agents of the new movement, and we can demonstrate their presence in Syria-Palestine for a considerable time.

Besides the itinerant charismatics, there were locally settled groups of sympathizers, including the most important, the local community of Jerusalem—existing as "home harbors" for many itinerant charismatics, but also as the place of Jesus' last days. Probably memories of Jesus' passion were handed on in that community. As a rule the Jesus tradition consisted of small, complete units, but in the passion story we have a coherent narrative made up of many units, either a short account of arrest, trial, condemnation, and crucifixion like the one beginning in Mark 14:43, or a longer account beginning in Mark 14:1 with the decision of the Sanhedrin to arrest Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels, in any case, agree remarkably well with the Gospel of John in the passion story. All the gospels may be dependent on a common passion narrative, retained in its oldest form in the Gospel of Mark. Favoring the great age of this passion story are the "indicators of familiarity" in Mark—that is, references in the text that presume familiarity with persons and places mentioned there. Two examples: during the arrest, two persons remain anonymous. A follower of Jesus wounds a member of the arresting group with his sword (Mark 14:47), while another escapes naked after being seized (Mark 14:51-52). In both cases the anonymity may be for protection: as long as members of the arresting body were alive it was not opportune to reveal the names of the two followers of Jesus who defended themselves

during the arrest. We can thus assume that the passion story was shaped in Jerusalem in the 40s/50s.

A second tradition that is not made up simply of short pericopes points to southern Palestine: the "synoptic apocalypse" in Mark 13, which revises an older tradition. In the middle of this text, people in Judea are addressed directly: "but when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains!" (Mark 13:14). Mark probably adopted here a proverb from the Caligula crisis in the years 39/40. At that time a statue of the emperor was made in Phoenicia; it was intended to be brought by Roman soldiers and set up in the Temple by force. That was the "desolating sacrilege." As soon as it was installed in the Temple, where it should not stand, the final eschatological crisis and the end of the world would occur. This proverb stems from the years 39/40. It was probably handed down in Jerusalem, which was most affected by the Caligula crisis.

In any case, itinerant charismatics were not the only bearers of the Jesus traditions. His localized followers also talked about him. In addition, there were traditions about Jesus that were generally current among the people: the miracle stories. It is often said in the gospels that word about Jesus' miracles had spread throughout the whole country (e.g., Mark 1:28). These notes about the spread of the news presume that at a very early time people told about Jesus' healings and exorcisms, even where people had little interest in the rest of his teaching. We have at least one attestation of this: in the *Testimonium Flavianum* Jesus is called a "wonder-worker" (*paradoxōn ergōn poiētēs*) (*Ant*. 18.63-64). Josephus had heard about his miraculous deeds. He would have valued Jesus just as he did the exorcist Eleazar, whose exorcisms in the presence of Vespasian and his officers he recounts, filled with pride at the power of the Jewish king Solomon:

> The manner of the cure was this:—He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon. (*Ant*. 8.46-48)

Thus after Jesus' death his traditions were handed down in three social contexts: among disciples, in communities, and by the general public. We should not imagine these disciples', community, and popular traditions as separate. What was handed down among the people was also told among Jesus' followers. What was told among Jesus' localized followers was also known to the itinerant charismatics. These last handed on the core of his

teaching. Their tradition was set down in the Sayings Source, while the community and popular traditions were recorded a generation later in the Gospel of Mark. But what forms and genres made up this Jesus tradition with its threefold Sitz im Leben?

The Formal Language of Jesus' Proclamation

Genres are institutionalized forms of communication. They link the production and reception of texts by means of preprogrammed models and motifs and thus create the formal conditions for understanding, that is, the general expectations and pre-understandings that make comprehension possible. The use of existing genres is part of a general social exchange. In speaking as in other things we are confronted with pre-programmed role expectations. They determine what speech utterances are expected of us and how they are interpreted. The same was true for Jesus. He was experienced by his contemporaries in two, perhaps three roles:

a. He was a *prophet*. It is true that he is nowhere addressed as "prophet," but his appearance created the presumption that he was a prophet (Mark 6:15; 8:26; Matt 21:11; Luke 7:16; 24:19).
b. He was a *teacher*. There is ample attestation of his being addressed as "teacher." Matthew suppresses it because in his eyes it was too trivial for Jesus' role. In Matthew's gospel it is only Judas who addresses Jesus as "teacher." But here, too, he is "the teacher" pure and simple (Matt 23:8-10).
c. As prophet and teacher, he entered into discussion with *scribes*. He took positions on Torah and interpreted it. He made an impression because he taught, differently from the scribes, "with authority." But that did not mean he was perceived in the role of a scribe.

The genres in which Jesus' words were transmitted correspond exactly to these roles. These are primarily prophetic and wisdom forms. Rules and legal prescriptions, such as are characteristic of rabbis learned in the law, are only weakly attested. Jesus did not formulate any *halakah*, any binding interpretations of the law—except for his teaching about divorce (Mark 10:11-12 *parr.*). His interpretation of the law in the antitheses has wisdom features: he formulates commandments regarding anger and sexuality that are not subject to legal regulation through sanctions. He offers ethical

principles instead of legal norms. Hence the roles of prophet and teacher are generally adequate to describe his activity. Very seldom does he appear in the role of a scribal Torah teacher, a role that, after all, was not fundamentally different from that of a sage.

Both as prophet and as teacher, Jesus was a gifted teller of similitudes. To the extent that similitudes speak of the reign of God, they are part of the prophetic role. To the extent they are obvious, they are aspects of wisdom. And yet Jesus' similitudes have no models in the prophetic and wisdom literature of Judaism. Jesus differs from later rabbinic tellers of similitudes also in the fact that his similitudes did not interpret Torah. They rest within themselves.

Jesus' double role as wisdom teacher and prophet is directly addressed in one saying—the twofold word about the queen of the South and Jonah: "The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!" (Q 11:31-32). This double role constitutes a unity: as teacher, Jesus fascinated his audience and taught them with authority. As prophet, he was rejected—not only in his hometown, but also in Jerusalem and among his people. His teaching was the basis of his charisma, his prophetic role was his stigma. Charisma and stigma go together. Attempts to separate the role of the sage, who spoke paradoxical wisdom sayings like a Cynic itinerant teacher, from the role of the prophet who proclaimed the inbreaking of the reign of God are inappropriate.[20]

In every genre we find three forms in the tradition as we now have it:

1. Forms primarily containing an appeal (in the second person singular or plural),
2. Forms consisting of statements in the third person, and
3. Forms containing a statement of Jesus about himself (often in the first person singular).

Jesus probably used most of the forms listed below. They are part of his formal language, even if not every example of a form handed down to us need be genuine. Most disputed are the "self-statements." It is most often suspected, in their case, that they have been colored or shaped by a post-Easter view of the person of Jesus, since they make fundamental statements

about his significance and mission: the words about Jesus' having come are often seen as post-Easter retrospective views of his mission, the *sophia* sayings as expressions of an early christology according to which Jesus was a messenger of Wisdom. The allegories in which there may be a self-reference are usually regarded, because of the very fact that they are allegories, as early Christian creations. Only the antitheses formulated in the first person are nearly always recognized as authentic forms of speech used by Jesus (see Table 3).

Table 3: The Formal Language of Jesus' Sayings

	Appellative statements (often 2d person)	**Objective statements (2d and 3d person)**	**Self-statements (1st person)**
Prophet	Macarisms and judgment sayings: preaching of salvation and judgment	*Basileia* sayings and crisis sayings: preaching of salvation and judgment	Mission sayings: Jesus' having come for salvation and judgment
Wisdom teacher	Warnings (2d person) (a) singular (b) plural	Proverbs (3d person) (a) general statements (b) statements about roles (c) images	*Sophia* sayings: Jesus as messenger and speaker of wisdom
Teacher of the Law	Rules for disciples: Discipleship sayings, rules for mission	Legal sayings	Antitheses: Jesus as critical interpreter of the Law
Teller of similitudes and parables	Parables: advocacy for unusual behavior	Similitudes: argumentation by means of typical events	Allegories: coded self-statements

We will select, by way of example, some forms from this language: similitudes, sayings (word traditions), and miracle stories (narrative tradition).

Similitudes cannot be understood as a continuation of Jewish literature. The few Old Testament precursors contain anthropomorphically portrayed plants or animals.[21] They are more fables than similitudes. But with Jesus there is no trace of anthropomorphic stylizing! It is deliberately omitted. So in the similitude of the fig tree Jesus works with traditional fable material in which a fig tree itself spoke. But he retains a human spokesperson who

speaks as the fig tree's representative (Luke 13:6-9).[22] We can see a similar development in the similitude of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12): Isaiah's song of the vineyard (Isa 5:1-7) underlies it; there the vineyard is addressed directly, like a human partner. In Jesus' similitude, in contrast, it is not the vineyard, but its tenants who are God's conversation partners. Where we find animals and plants in Jesus' similitudes they are not anthropomorphized. They do not speak and they have no feelings—even when they clearly represent human beings, as in the case of the lost sheep or the seed on the fourfold field. For us, Jesus is the first to introduce the similitude form in Judaism. But he was probably not the first person who told similitudes, since the rabbis also told them and represent a narrative tradition that probably goes back to New Testament times. Most nearly comparable is the fable literature of antiquity, to the extent that it does without anthropomorphized plants and animals. If we ask, then, about the movement from the few Old Testament fables to the development of New Testament and rabbinic similitudes, we will (with David Flusser) have to take into account the long influence of Hellenism in Palestine.[23]

Jesus' sayings belong partly to the wisdom, partly to the prophetic tradition. They often appear in the tradition with a narrative frame attributing them to a situation and a particular author. Thus we encounter for the first time in Jewish literature (not with Jesus himself, but in the Jesus tradition) apophthegms, that is, sayings attributed to a particular person in a particular situation. The only models for these were in pagan literature.[24] Here, then, we are dealing with the (narrative) embedding of the form of the saying, coming from Judaism, in the communication form of the apophthegm, something new to Judaism.

This borrowing from general, including non-Jewish forms of communication is clearest in the miracle stories. The topics of the New Testament miracle narratives cannot be found in non-Jewish texts. The miracle stories themselves contain indications of their "intercultural" character. A Gentile woman from Syrophoenicia has heard about Jesus' miracles and therefore comes to Jesus to beg healing for her sick child. It is simply assumed as a matter of course that even in Jesus' lifetime Gentiles were talking about his miracles (Mark 7:24-30). When the tongue of a deaf-mute is loosed, Jesus does forbid him to tell of it, but the more he forbids it, the more people talk about it (Mark 7:36), as if the real miracle did not consist in the freeing of the tongue of a deaf-mute, but rather in the fact that the tongues of the eyewitnesses to the miracle were loosed and they became proclaimers who spread everywhere the story of what they had seen.

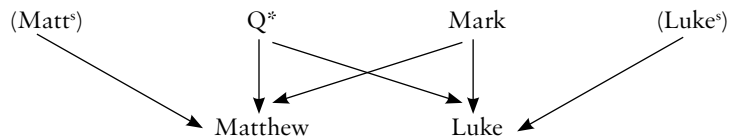
In the first generation after Jesus, then, Jesus traditions were circulating among three groups: as the traditions of the disciples, the communities, and the people in general. There Jesus appeared in the role of a prophet and sage. The prophetic and wisdom formal language he used also shaped the continuing history of the tradition of Jesus' words. This we can see in the Sayings Source.

2 The Sayings Source Q

The First Written Form of the Jesus Tradition

The Sayings Source is the first written form of the Jesus tradition. It was discovered in the process of work on the "synoptic question" (i.e., the question of the relationships among Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the three Synoptic Gospels). In the nineteenth century the opinion that the kinship of the Synoptic Gospels was explained by mutual use became accepted. Until today, the "two-source theory" is accepted: that is, the proposition that Matthew and Luke used two sources, Mark and the Sayings Source, plus special material (Matthew^{s} and Luke^{s}), in oral or written form. This source theory is, as a rule, represented thus:

Figure 1: The Two-Source Theory



The "double tradition" in Matthew and Luke can best be explained if they have a common source ("Q"). Since most of the material transmitted twice is made up of Jesus' words, the source is called the "Sayings Source." A statistical argument favors its existence: where Matthew and Luke reproduce the source we have retained, the Gospel of Mark, their word agreement is 56 percent. Where they reproduce the no-longer-extant source Q, it is 71 percent. If with 56 percent agreement we have to conclude to an undoubtedly existing source (Mark), how much more can we postulate, on the basis of a 71 percent agreement, the no-longer-extant source Q! Its existence is

confirmed by occasional overlaps between Mark and Q material. Sometimes the gospels contain doublets, that is, the same tradition twice—once according to Mark, another time according to Q. So, for example, Luke's gospel tells of the sending of twelve disciples, according to Mark, in Luke 9:1-6, and a second sending of seventy disciples, according to Q, in Luke 10:1-12; there is a first eschatological discourse by Jesus from Q in Luke 17:22-37, and a second from Mark in Luke 21:5-36.[1]

It is possible that the early Christian witness of Bishop Papias of Hierapolis (either ca. 115 or 140 C.E.) attests to both of these ancient sources. Eusebius, writing his church history in the fourth century C.E., quotes from Papias's work:

> "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, a follower of Peter. Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord's sayings, so that Mark did not err in writing down some things just as he recalled them. For he had one overriding purpose: to omit nothing that he had heard and to make no false statements in his account." (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.14-15)

> "Matthew compiled the sayings in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could." (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16)[2]

What Papias recorded here was a tradition he had already received. That would explain why Eusebius found notes from him on only two gospels, even though Papias may have been familiar with the Gospel of John as well, something that, however, is uncertain. If one reads the two notes objectively one must think of the Gospel of Mark as a depiction of Jesus' words and deeds (as is the case with Mark), and of the writing attributed to Matthew as a collection of sayings. It is possible that Papias had in mind the two oldest gospel sources: he attributed the collection of sayings to Matthew either because he confused it with the Gospel of Matthew or because the sayings collection he possessed was thought to be the work of the apostle Matthew. What Papias describes could be a variant of the Sayings Source. Of course, one must ask whether it could have been known in Asia Minor around the turn of the century. That is possible. In 1 Tim 5:18 a proverbial saying is cited as "scripture" (together with Deut 25:4): "The laborer deserves to be paid." This corresponds to the logion in Q 10:7. The Pastorals certainly belong to Asia Minor—probably to Ephesus, which was not

far from Hierapolis, where Papias was bishop. The author of the Gospel of Matthew used this sayings collection as a source. Possibly for that reason his gospel was attributed to a "Matthew" and the toll collector "Levi" in the Gospel of Mark became "Matthew" in the Gospel of Matthew (Mark 2:14; Matt 9:9): a toll collector was the most likely of the otherwise uneducated disciples (Acts 4:13) to be able to write down Jesus' words. This also makes it understandable that the Sayings Source has not survived: if two writings were in circulation, both attributed to a "Matthew," and one of them (the Gospel of Matthew) contained the whole of the other (Q), the more complete writing would always prevail. What is important for us is that we find an indication of a "collection of sayings" very early in Christianity. The reconstruction of that source is not easy. We can never be certain whether there was more in it than what Matthew and Luke have in common (against Mark). It is also always difficult to assert that something was *not* in Q. It is easier to say positively what *was* in it. It seems that Luke has preserved the sequence of the sayings in Q better than Matthew, which is why Q is quoted according to Luke.

The Structure of Q

The Sayings Source Q begins in chronological order with the preaching of John the Baptizer (Q 3:2-4) and (probably) Jesus' baptism, with his "appointment" as Son of God, since in the temptation of Jesus that follows (Q 4:1-13) he is addressed as "Son of God" when he refuses to kneel before the Satan in order to obtain sovereignty over the world. He shows himself to be a model Jew who knows that no one is to be worshiped but God alone. Jesus refuses other miracles for show that would demonstrate his majesty, for no one may test God by demanding miracles. Because Jesus passes the test, he can teach persuasively.

1. This introduction to the Sayings Source is followed by a programmatic discourse (Q 6:20-49) that Matthew shaped into the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with beatitudes for the poor, the hungry, and the sorrowing. Its central demands are love of enemies (Q 6:27-28) and the prohibition against judging one another (Q 6:37, 38). At the end it is emphasized that only someone who acts according to these words has built on rock (Q 6:47-49).
2. After this, Jesus' effect on various contemporaries is depicted: the Gentile centurion from Capernaum acknowledges him

(Q 7:1-10). His appearance after the programmatic discourse underscores the power of Jesus' words. The Baptizer takes a wait-and-see attitude toward him (Q 7:18-23), but "this generation" rejects Jesus and the Baptizer, even though both are messengers of Wisdom (Q 7:31-35).

3. In a third section Jesus calls his disciples to follow him (Q 9:57-62), sends them on mission (Q 10:1-16), and offers them a special relationship to God (Q 10:21-24): God's revelation of his "Son" is for them, and they in turn may address God as Father (Q 11:2-4). In the discipleship sayings and the mission discourse the itinerant charismatics are visible as the tradents of the material collected in Q.
4. The expulsion of a demon (Q 11:14-15) introduces a section in which Jesus argues with opponents. He rejects the accusation that he is in league with Satan (Q 11:17-26) and attacks the Pharisees and those learned in the Law in a series of "woes" (Q 11:39-52). Punishment will fall on "this generation" because they have rejected Wisdom and her messengers.
5. The fifth section is about "the life of disciples in light of the end" (Q 12:2-59). It begins with sayings against fear of human beings and of public confession of Jesus (Q 12:8-9). An admonition not to worry shows that the bearers of this tradition worried no more about the source of their livelihood than the birds (Q 12:22-31). Their eccentric way of life was only possible because the end of the world was near. A series of further traditions in Q deals with this last age. This fifth section has very little unity of theme—a typical sign of a collection of pericopes. The redactor at first had a lot of material to choose from and was therefore able to shape the beginning very carefully, but at the end he had only a number of scraps that had to be incorporated. (In the Sermon on the Mount also, the third major section beginning with Matt 6:19 is less systematically composed than the first two parts.)

The conclusion is a little "apocalypse" on the end of the world (Q 17:22-35). It warns against false expectations of a Messiah and announces the appearance of the "Son of Man," who will break unexpectedly into a time of peace. It may be that Q ended with the saying about the twelve tribes of Israel: in the new world the disciples will rule the renewed people of God (Q 22:28-30).

The Time of Q's Origins

In my view, the Jewish War is a *terminus ad quem*: since the Son of Man—differently from Mark 13—is supposed to enter a peaceful world (Q 17:23-37), Q must have been created before the Jewish War. The destruction of the Temple is not yet presumed. This, of course, is not undisputed, because in Q 13:34-35 God announces that he will abandon the Temple:

> "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house will be left in ruins (NRSV: is left to you). And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Tacitus (*Hist*. V.13.1) and Josephus (*Bell*. 6.299-30) report, from the time before the destruction, that there was a voice announcing the departure of the deity. Probably the comparable prophecy in Q also came from before the beginning of the war. The question is only: how long before? The fear that the divine presence would withdraw from the Temple was always acute when the Temple was criticized and its destruction was expected—thus since Jesus' prophecy about the Temple, but at the latest since the woe invoked over the city and the Temple by the prophet of doom Jesus, son of Ananias (62 c.e.). The prediction that the divine presence would come again corresponds to Rom 11:26: the redeemer will come from Zion. Unbelieving Israel will have another chance, in direct confrontation with the Exalted One!

A *terminus a quo* is the attempt by the emperor Gaius Caligula in the year 39/40 to transform the Temple into a sanctuary of the imperial cult, since the Caligula crisis is worked into the temptation story.[3] Three motifs favor this: (1) Gaius wanted to have himself worshiped in the Jerusalem Temple, as does the devil in the temptation story. (2) In Rome he demanded that he be worshiped with *proskynesis*, just as the devil demands that Jesus bow down to him. (3) Gaius had the power to bestow lands—as, for example, he gave Galilee and Judea to his friend Agrippa I. The temptation story rejects miracles for show that were supposed to authenticate Jesus. We know that after 35 c.e. there appeared increasing numbers of "signs prophets" who led their followers to the place of a promised miracle. They tried to authenticate themselves through showy miracles. Theudas (after 44 c.e.) promised that the waters of the Jordan would part, as at the occupation of the Land (*Ant*. 20.97-99; Acts 5:36). Under Felix (52–59 c.e.) there appeared an Egyptian

who promised to repeat the miracle at Jericho on the walls of Jerusalem (*Ant.* 20.169-72; Acts 21:38). At the same time pseudo-prophets led their followers into the desert and promised miracles there (*Ant.* 20.167-68). Is it an accident that the two miracles for show in the temptation story were supposed to take place in Jerusalem and in the desert—where the signs prophets also expected miracles? This would also fit well with the rejection of any sign other than the sign of Jonah (Q 11:16-30). In that case, experiences from the 40s and 50s would have been reworked in the temptation story.

In my opinion, Q originated between 40 and 65 C.E.—probably in Palestine or Syria, but not far from Palestine. Individual traditions indicate a Galilean perspective; these mention little places like Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Q 10:13-15). But that need not be the perspective of the entire writing. Its localization in Galilee is not impossible, but much less certain than many think. If the words of itinerant preachers were recorded in Q, we could locate it anywhere throughout the area in which the itinerant preachers were working.

The Tradition-Critical and Theological Location of Q

The Sayings Source contains traditions from itinerant radicalism, thus representing an early Jewish Christianity. Within Jewish Christianity it was close to the moderate wing of the mission to Israel, which did not conduct a mission to the Gentiles but accepted it at the Apostolic Council. Paul's letters are a document of the Gentile mission, Q a document of the mission to Israel.

Q collects traditions from itinerant charismatics (and translates them into Greek). These itinerant preachers could plausibly represent Jesus' radical ethos of homelessness (Q 9:58), distance from family (Q 9:60-61; 12:51-53; 14:26), critique of possessions and nonviolence (Q 6:20-42; 12:22-34). The Sayings Source itself need not have been written by an itinerant charismatic. It is more probable that a Christian in a local community wrote down the traditions of itinerant charismatics and translated them into Greek in order to retain them for the Christian communities and secure their dissemination independently of the itinerant charismatics—much as Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century, collected Jesus traditions from itinerant preachers. He writes:

> "Unlike most, I did not delight in those who say much but in those who teach the truth; not in those who recite the commandments of others but in those who repeated the commandments given by the

> Lord. And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the elders, I asked about their words: what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I did not think that information from books would help me as much as the word of a living, surviving voice." (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.3-4)[4]

This is the model by which we should understand the origins of Q: a locally resident Christian writes down traditions about Jesus because he treasures them above all else. The stream of oral tradition continued, of course, even after it was thus first committed to writing. Perhaps Q was meant to serve as a little handbook for missionaries, perhaps even as a document intended to win Christians to the role of itinerant charismatics, since the mission discourse begins with a petition to God to send workers into his harvest: "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Q 10:2). The call to discipleship is not onlyheard before the mission discourse (Q 9:57-62), but is encountered again in discipleship sayings toward the end (Q 14:26-27, 33). The similitude of the talents at the conclusion is an appeal to risk something in this life (Q 19:11-27)!

Q is deeply rooted in Judaism. It is a document of Jewish Christianity. There are no statements critical of the law (sabbath conflicts, fundamental abrogations of the category of external purity, direct critique of the Temple). Even the Israelites who rejected Jesus' message still have a chance. Jesus appeals to the Jerusalemites who have killed the prophets and stoned the messengers sent to them in the name of Wisdom: "you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Q 13:35; this interpretation is disputed, however). Paul is aware of the comparable hope that at the Lord's return all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26). This ties these two witnesses to the first generation.

In Q, Jesus is the messenger of Wisdom. He was the latest of a sequence of prophets and messengers of Wisdom to die a martyr's death for his cause (Q 11:49-51). But he is nevertheless more than a prophet and teacher of wisdom. How does the Sayings Source express that "more"?

a. Jesus is the Son of Man. He does not merely teach what God demands. He himself, as judge, will demand an accounting (as the parable of the talents at the end of Q shows).
b. Jesus is above all the Son of God. The title of messiah is absent (just as in the Gospel of Thomas). But the titles "Son of God"

> and "the Son" stem from messianic tradition. Already in Q, Jesus as the Son stands alongside God and is the exclusive revealer: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Q 10:22).

Is this a repudiation of monotheism? No! For Jews at that time it was imaginable that there were divine figures besides God, such as Wisdom (Proverbs 8), the Logos (Philo), or the Son of Man (Daniel 7). What was, however, unthinkable was that a human being could lay claim independently to being such a divine figure. This the Sayings Source excludes. It tells, in the temptation story, how Jesus had rejected any worship of another being besides God. Only after Jesus has withstood the test of his monotheism are statements made about him that set him alongside God.

Ultimately, the Sayings Source is a document of the mission to Israel. It courts Israel intensely. The saying about the Twelve who will judge Israel is not aimed at Israel's condemnation, for the assembly of the twelve tribes it presupposes is a saving event. The judgment by the Twelve corresponds to the Messiah's "judging" in *PsSol* 17:26—and that, too, is a ruling that saves.[5] But the proclamation of the messenger Jesus brings Israel to a crisis that began with the Baptizer. Jesus' message is no harsher than his preaching. It is an appeal to Israel, despite its rejection. Often, it is true, the polemic against "this generation" has been seen as a radical criticism of Israel, interpreted as a reaction to the failure of the preaching in Israel. Israel, it is said, has no further chance. But many traditions in Q speak against this: within this "capricious" generation there are children of Wisdom who accept Jesus and the Baptizer (Q 7:31-35). Not all are lost. Q announces judgment on individual cities in Israel, which only makes sense if other cities have a chance at the judgment (Q 10:13-15). Judgment is to pass right through individual houses and families. Thus individuals may be saved (Q 17:34-35). In addition, the message of judgment is no more severe than that of John the Baptizer. The latter was a given for Jesus and is not a secondary reflection on failure. Had the Sayings Source left no chance at all for the people Israel, the Jesus of the Sayings Source would be one of those scribes who close the door of the reign of God against people, but precisely those scribes are harshly criticized (Q 11:52). The Gentile mission is not actively pursued in Q, but Gentiles are set up as positive models: the centurion at Capernaum (Q 7:1-10), the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon (Q 10:13-14), and the queen of the South as well as the Ninevites in the North (Q 11:31-32). All these are supposed to "irritate" Israel into believing. We find a comparable idea, as far as the subject is

concerned, in Romans 11. According to Paul the converted Gentiles ought to "irritate" the unconverted Jews into belief. This attitude to the Gentiles allows us to conclude that here we have a moderate Jewish Christianity that accepts the Gentile mission. Thus we have in Q a witness to that Jewish Christian branch of early Christianity that accepted the Gentile mission at the Apostolic Council, while feeling itself obligated to the mission to Israel. Their primary representative is Peter. One could of course object that his name is not found in the Sayings Source. But no disciple is mentioned by name there. Only at the end do we encounter the "Twelve," but the Twelve are clearly related to the twelve tribes of Israel. And there can be no doubt that Peter was the leading disciple among the group of the Twelve.

The Genre of Q: A Prophetic Book and More?

A crucial question for any literary-historical critique is: what kind of genre is revealed in Q? Two proposals have been made in the course of research: Q is either regarded as a wisdom writing (James Robinson) or a prophetic work (Migaku Sato). Sometimes it is seen as a *corpus permixtum* made up of various genres (Marco Frenschkowski).[6] The overall frame undoubtedly resembles that of a prophetic book. Only in the prophetic books does the prophet appear as clearly in his individuality as does Jesus in Q. In the wisdom books the sage is often concealed behind the great wise man Solomon or remains a bland figure like Jesus Sirach.

The individual profile of the prophet appears in narratives. The narrative portions of Q are the temptation story, that of the centurion of Capernaum, and the exorcism at the beginning of the Beelzebub discourse. There is no narrative of the death of Jesus. These narrative sections are indicative: we know of no wisdom books with narrative introduction (cf. Proverbs, Sirach, Pseudo-Phocylides), but we do have prophetic books with narrative texts such as the call of Isaiah (Isa 6:1-8) or Amos's conflict in Bethel (Amos 7:10-17). And yet, in the prophetic books as in Q, there is no account of the death of the prophet. In prophetic books the narratives legitimate the prophet through his calling and describe his conflicts.

The prophetic character of Q is further evident in Jesus' words: these can be contextualized much better as common wisdom sayings. They are addressed to the generation before the end and speak of places like Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Jerusalem. They specify the opponents as Pharisees and teachers of the law. The contrast with the Baptizer lends Jesus a distinctive profile: unlike the Baptizer, he is a glutton and a drunkard.

Wisdom traditions, unlike these, have a tendency to decontextualization! They name no individual persons and names. The *framing texts* of Q are also prophetic: the Sayings Source begins with the Baptizer's preaching of judgment and the promise of the one who is to come (Q 3:7-12). It ends with sayings about the coming of the Son of Man, the similitude of the talents about judgment, and the saying about the Twelve judging Israel (Q 22:28, 30). Within this frame we find a great many wisdom sayings. The programmatic discourse (Q 6:20-49) contains, for example, the saying about love of enemies, the golden rule, the warning not to judge, the sayings about the blind leading the blind, the speck and the log, the tree and its fruits. Q is therefore a prophetic writing containing wisdom sayings. That is: the authentic formal language of Jesus' sayings has led here to an initial written genre. For Jesus' formal language was that of a prophet and wisdom teacher. Almost all the forms of his preaching are found also in Q, with the exception of the antitheses. From a form-critical point of view we can observe a surprising degree of continuity between Jesus' formal language and that of the Sayings Source (Table 4):

Table 4: Jesus' Formal Language in the Sayings Source

	Appellative Sayings	**Material Sayings**	**Personal Sayings**
Prophet	Macarisms (6:20-23) and woes (11:39-52) as sayings about salvation and judgment	*Basileia* and crisis sayings (17:23ff.) as sayings about salvation and judgment	Mission sayings about having come for judgment (12:51-53) and salvation (7:34)
Wisdom Teacher	Warnings in the second person: (a) singular (17:3-4) (b) plural (12:4-5)	Proverbs in the third person (many examples)	*Sophia* sayings: Jesus as the messenger of Wisdom
Teacher of the Law	Rules for disciples: discipleship sayings, rules for mission	Legal sayings: divorce (16:18)	No antitheses, but a statement about divine law: "Everyone who acknowledges *me* . . . (12:8-9)
Teller of Similitudes	Parables: the banquet, the talents	Similitudes: building a house, children, servant, mustard seed, leaven, lost sheep (drachma)	Allegorical equation: in the last supper similitude, in the lost sheep

There are two objections to classifying Q as a prophetic book: that there is no call narrative, and that Jesus in Q is more than a prophet.

On the first point we should say that if there is a narrative of the baptism of Jesus, that would be a kind of call narrative. In any case, the temptation story, which follows immediately, has a legitimizing function. It is a qualifying test. Jesus proves himself to be a model monotheist. He is legitimized much more emphatically than all the prophets, namely in a threefold fashion: through another prophet, through the voice of God at his baptism, in case the Baptizer story was part of Q, and through the overcoming of Satan. If the temptation on the mountain represents a contrast-story comparing Jesus to Caligula, Jesus' claim would be a concealed statement of opposition to political power.

To the second objection we may say that Jesus, in Q, is in fact much more than a prophet, but according to Q the Baptizer was also more than a prophet (Q 7:26). In Q, Jesus even calls blessed all the eyewitnesses who see what prophets and kings desired to see and did not see. Even they are superior to the prophets (Q 10:23). But above all, Jesus must be more than a prophet. This "more" explains all the features that go beyond a prophetic book. No prophet announced his own coming at the end of the ages, but Jesus speaks of the coming of the Son of Man and means himself. No prophet said that the fate of humanity rested with him. Q ends with a little apocalypse, with apocalyptic sayings about the coming of the Son of Man. But Q is not an apocalypse, for no previous (pseudonymous) authority testifies to the truth of the prophecy, but rather Jesus himself. He appears as a prophet, but he is more than that, for he is the fulfillment of all prophecy.

It is likewise impossible to separate wisdom and prophetic layers in Q.[7] The two forms are linked. In the double saying about Jonah and the Queen of the South, Jesus is seen as both a prophet and a wisdom teacher (Q 11:31-32). The *Sophia* sayings combine the idea of Jesus as messenger of Wisdom with the deuteronomistic tradition according to which the prophets were rejected and killed. This combination of wisdom and prophetic traditions is not attested before the *Sophia* sayings (and before Q).

Thus the first written version of Jesus' preaching relied on a familiar genre from the OT, but developed it further. Just as Jesus was more than a prophet, Q is more than a prophetic book. And yet, Q could have been placed at the end of the Old Testament canon as an additional prophetic book. Its form expresses the claim to be a continuation and conclusion of the Old Testament revelation! But it was *this* very writing, its formal shape resting on the Old Testament, that did not survive as an independent document. What in Q points beyond a prophetic writing could, in fact, be better shaped within a different framing genre.[8]

3 The Gospel of Mark

The Second Written Form of the Jesus Tradition

The Gospel of Mark is the second written form of the oral Jesus tradition. While the Sayings Source was based on the formal language of Jesus' words, in the Gospel of Mark the formal language of narrative tradition furnishes the shape: Mark's gospel relates two cycles of apophthegms, a Galilean cycle at the beginning (2:1–3:6) and a Jerusalem cycle at the end (12:13-44), while miracle stories run throughout the whole gospel. But primarily, this is a passion narrative with an extended introduction. It projects a more exciting image of Jesus than does Q, demanding a much greater power of literary and theological integration, for the image of Jesus in various genres shaped from the perspective of a third party was necessarily more heterogeneous than in the sayings tradition whose formal language goes back to Jesus himself. In the traditions reworked by Mark, Jesus appears as a miracle worker, a teacher who made gripping points, and simultaneously a failed royal pretender. While Q put into writing the traditions of the disciples as itinerant charismatics, Mark includes congregational and popular traditions alongside some of those of the disciples. Here we see much more of the perspective of the local communities and the people as a whole. But there are overlaps between the two streams of tradition, as is evident from the more than twenty logia common to Q and Mark.

The Structure of Mark's Gospel

The Gospel of Mark is artfully structured. It consists of individual pericopes, each of which makes its own point. Through their arrangement into a gospel they acquire a "surplus of meaning": in the framework of the story of Jesus they point to the mystery of Jesus' person, which is only revealed in

the entirety of the story. The individual narratives are therefore, on the one hand, superficially structured into a plausible chronological and geographical order, but at the same time they are interpreted by a christologically-motivated ordering. A geographical and a christological outline overlie one another:

Geographical order: The first part of Mark's gospel centers on Galilee, the second part on Jerusalem. Jesus travels from Galilee to Jerusalem in 10:1-52. But fundamentally he has been on the way to Jerusalem since the first passion prediction in Mark 8:31.

1.	1–4	Jesus' activity in Galilee
2.	4–8:30	Jesus' activity beyond Galilee. His journey to the Gentiles
		Peter's messianic confession: 8:29
1.	8:31–10	Jesus' journey to Jerusalem
2.	11–13	Jesus' activity in Jerusalem
3.	14–16	Jesus' suffering in Jerusalem.

Christological order: The heavens are opened three times in Mark's gospel. God's voice and messenger speak to the human world and reveal successively who Jesus is. They always link to human expectations, surpassing and correcting them. Human beings suspect who Jesus is, but his true nature is only known through a self-revelation of God—perhaps in a deliberate three-step process from adoption at his baptism (1:11) to presentation at the transfiguration (9:7) and his reception into the world of God through his resurrection, proclaimed by an angel (16:6). These three "epiphanies" structure Mark's gospel. At the center are Peter's confession (8:29) and the transfiguration. Previously Jesus works in Galilee and its neighborhood; afterward he begins his journey to Jerusalem and suffering. Previously his disciples do not understand his majesty; afterward they do not comprehend the humiliation of his suffering. Previously the mystery of the reign of God has been given only to the disciples in parables. But at the end his opponents understand that the parable of the wicked tenants is aimed at them (12:1-12). Peter's confession of Jesus as messiah is the turning point.

Before we present the subtle fabric of the Gospel of Mark through a brief summary of its content, we need to illustrate these mutually dependent and overlapping divisions in a table. The three epiphany-scenes will be particularly emphasized as the fundamental structure of Mark's gospel (Table 5):

Table 5: The Structure of Mark's Gospel

1:1-13: Beginning of the gospel: the Baptizer announces the *Stronger One*	His affirmation by the voice from heaven as "*Son of God*" at his baptism (1:9-11)
1:14–4:34: Jesus' activity in Galilee	His personal secret: only demons recognize Jesus' dignity (1:24, 34; 3:11; 5:7) The disciples' understanding: the disciples, despite the miracles, do not understand Jesus' majesty (4:39ff.; 6:52; 8:14ff.)
4:35–8:26: Jesus' journey to the Gentiles	The secret of the miracles: despite Jesus' forbidding it, the miracles are told (1:44-45; 5:18ff.; 7:36-37) Jesus' secret teachings: he instructs the disciples in the open (4:10-20) and "in the house" (7:17ff.)
8:27–9:10: Center of the gospel: Peter's confession of Jesus *Messiah* and the call to discipleship in suffering	Confirmation of Jesus as "*Son of God*" by the voice from heaven (9:7)
9:11–10:52: Jesus' journey to Jerusalem	The personal secret: people also recognize Jesus' dignity (Peter, 8:29; centurion, 15:39)
11:1–13:37: Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem	The disciples' understanding: the disciples do not understand Jesus' humility (8:32; 9:32; 14:39ff.)
14:1–15:47: Jesus' suffering in Jerusalem	Jesus' secret teachings: Jesus teaches in the house (9:28-29, 33ff.; 10:10ff.) and in the open (13:3ff.)
15:38–16:8: Conclusion of the gospel: the centurion's confession of the dead *Son of God* (15:39)	The angel's message about his *resurrection* (16:6)

The introduction to Mark's gospel: Jesus is legitimized through words of scripture (Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1-3 + Isa 40:3), the Baptizer's prophecy, and the voice from heaven. The voice from heaven and the bestowal of the Spirit are depicted as subjective experiences of Jesus. The reader is privileged; he or she knows that Jesus is the Son of God not through birth but through adoption. Yet it will be a long time before the people in Mark's gospel understand that. For a long period only demons recognize who Jesus is (Mark 1:24; 1:34;

3:11), while the disciples do not understand him (4:41; 6:52; 8:21-28). Therefore Jesus forbids the demons to talk about him, but tries to get his disciples to understand him—for a long time without success. The beginning of the Gospel of Mark has parallels to the beginning of Q; both start with the Baptizer, and not with Jesus' birth.

Jesus' activities in Galilee (1:14–4:34): At the beginning we hear of Jesus' success (1:14-45) in calling disciples and in healing. The flood of sick people forces Jesus to shift to other places. This is followed by a counterpoint: the description of a growing enmity (2:1–3:6) in a cycle of confrontational dialogues with increasing accusations of blasphemy (2:1ff.) culminating in the decision to kill Jesus (3:6). The result is a separation between followers and outsiders (3:7–4:34): the followers are gathered through the attraction of the crowds and the calling of the Twelve. But opponents come from Jerusalem and accuse him of alliance with the devil. In contrast to these, his group of followers, as *familia dei*, desire to do the will of God. Only the disciples, as insiders, receive an explanation of the similitudes.

Jesus' journey to the Gentiles (4:35–8:26): Jesus' travels beyond Galilee are a symbol of the journey to the Gentiles, and are full of obstacles. This is signified by the three crossings of the sea that organize this section: stilling of the storm, walking on the sea, and crossing while discussing the leaven. When crossing the sea, Jesus is alone with his disciples. The theme is their lack of understanding, which steadily intensifies, as shown by three sayings about their failure to understand: In 4:40, after the stilling of the storm, Jesus asks: "Have you still no faith?" After his walking on the sea the narrator asserts in 6:52: ". . . they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." In the discourse about the leaven in 8:14-21 Jesus reproaches them for their blindness in face of *both* bread miracles!

The sections between these crossings of the sea are shaped by two contrasts: of *King Herod* with Jesus (5:21–6:44)—his banquet with dancing, intrigue, and the murder of the Baptizer has its opposite image in Jesus' feeding miracle. Jesus, in contrast to Herod, is the good shepherd who has compassion on the people. Afterward the *Pharisees* are contrasted with him (7:1–8:13): they insist on excluding the Gentiles by means of purity laws. By alleviating these, Jesus opens the way to the Gentiles: he heals the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman and (in Gentile territory?) heals a deaf-mute and performs a second bread miracle.

After a symbolic healing of a blind person, hinting that the eyes of the disciples have to be opened by a miracle, Peter recognizes Jesus as messiah but rejects his path to suffering (8:27-33). Jesus calls him, together with the disciples and the people, to follow the cross. On the mountain Peter and the sons of Zebedee see the transfiguration of Jesus in glory, with Moses and

Elijah. Peter, who is the only one of the three who wants to build a booth and thus deal directly with the matter, still does not understand his unique dignity: Jesus is the only Son of God to whom they are to listen as their authority and beside whom Moses and Elijah fade into obscurity (9:7). The vision on the mountain is not to be made known until the resurrection of the Son of Man (9:9)—an indication that aspects of an Easter vision have been reworked in this episode. Jesus' exaltation on the mountain is deliberately contrasted with the powerlessness of the disciples at the mountain's foot: they cannot heal the epileptic boy.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (8:31-32; 9:11–10:52): From the time of his first passion prediction, Jesus has been on the way to Jerusalem. This path is organized by prophecies of suffering:

1. The first passion prediction (8:31) teaches the necessity of suffering.
2. The second passion prediction (9:11-12) parallels the fate of Elijah (= the Baptizer) with that of Jesus. Both will be killed. But this corresponds to Scripture.
3. The third passion prediction (9:31) emphasizes the paradox: The Son of Man will be given into the hands of human beings, but he will rise again.
4. The fourth passion prediction (10:32-33) makes Jesus' suffering concrete in terms of Jewish and Gentile examples. The "people" of 9:31 are distinguished socially.
5. The fifth passion prediction (10:45) gives the passion, "as a ransom for many," a soteriological meaning. This interpretation will be repeated anew at the Last Supper.

The sections between the passion predictions take community problems as their theme: in the transfiguration, Jesus is legitimized as teacher: "Listen to him!" (9:7). Since the transfiguration is an anticipation of Easter, the teaching that follows is aimed at the post-Easter community and deals with its problems, beginning and ending with the problem of cooperation in the community and in the middle that of the family in the household. Cooperation is a problem in every community: the disciples' dispute over rank is criticized, and the demand to overcome oneself (by abandonment of hand, foot, and eye) is emphasized in harsh sayings. Everything is to be at the service of peace in the community! (9:33-50). Problems in the household include marriage, children, property, and the renunciation of possessions. Besides locally resident Christians, who are married, we glimpse here

a different manner of life: disciples leave their wives, reject children, give up their possessions (10:1-31). Finally, cooperation in the community is thematized again in closing. Martyrdom is the only place of honor Jesus has to bestow. The rule of service in the community is that the first should be prepared to become last (10:35-45).

Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem (11:1–13:37): Jesus provokes his opponents by two symbolic actions. His entry into Jerusalem provokes the political, his cleansing of the Temple the priestly power-brokers. He justifies his actions with his discourse on authority and his parable of the vinedressers. Jesus teaches openly in the Temple and out of public sight on the Mount of Olives. In the Temple he engages in controversy dialogues with his opponents (about authority, taxes, and the resurrection). With regard to the twofold love commandment he even achieves agreement with a sympathetic scribe. At the end is his teaching for the people who are sympathetic to him: on the son of David and the Messiah, the woe against the scribes, the example of the poor widow (12:35-44). On the Mount of Olives he teaches the "synoptic apocalypse"exclusively for his disciples and prepares them for the time after his death. It will be a time of suffering for them, too (13:1-37).

Jesus' suffering in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8): The passion narrative is divided into a farewell portion in which Jesus is alone with his followers and a judicial section in which he is arrested and executed. His isolation increases: first Jesus is betrayed by a disciple, then three of his disciples fall asleep in Gethsemane, and finally they all flee. Stories about women bring some light into this darkness: a woman anoints Jesus and others follow him to the cross. Beneath the cross a Gentile centurion acknowledges him: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39). An angel corrects this statement by proclaiming the Easter message at the tomb: the one who died *was* not God's Son. "He *is* risen" (16:6). God is victorious over death. Only after Easter can the disciples publicly proclaim Jesus as the Son of God.

Time and Place of Mark's Gospel

Mark's gospel was written shortly after 70 C.E. Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple in Mark 13:1-2 just as it had occurred: only the "buildings" of the Temple (*hieron* in 13:1) will be destroyed; the Temple platform still remained. The Temple building would not be rebuilt. Before the Sanhedrin, in contrast, Jesus is accused of a quite different version of this prediction as "false witness": that he would destroy the Temple (*naos* in the singular!) and rebuild it in three days (14:58). In Mark's gospel *naos* always means the inner sanctuary in contrast to the whole Temple complex (*hieron*).[1] Thus

this prediction applies only to the central sanctuary. It is, in fact, false: not Jesus, but the Romans destroyed the Temple, and not only the sanctuary itself but all the buildings on the Temple platform. A new Temple would never be built. The reader still has 13:1-2 in his or her ears. There Jesus has correctly predicted that all the "great buildings" (in the plural!), but not the whole sanctuary with its platform, would be destroyed. The formulation in the passive leaves open who will destroy the Temple, so that it could also be the Romans. Nothing is said about a rebuilding. Jesus' words in 13:2 thus correspond precisely to the reality, while the supposed false statement in 14:58 contradicts it. If we (like the Markan evangelist) regard 13:1-2 as a correction of 14:58, it would be a correction that adapts Jesus' saying to the actual events. In that case, however, the Temple has already been destroyed. Some exegetes believe nevertheless, with good arguments, that Mark wrote shortly before 70 C.E., because in Mark 13:1-2 Jesus does predict the destruction of the Temple, but in answering the disciples' question about when that would happen he nowhere refers clearly to the destruction of the Temple (13:3-37).

The Markan evangelist wrote in Syria. It is true that ancient church tradition says that he wrote in Rome and identifies the author with the "John Mark" from Jerusalem who in 1 Peter 5:13 is associated with Rome (= Babylon). But the information about Palestine is too erroneous on one point to have come from a Jerusalemite. Gerasa, according to Mark 5:1-20, lies on the lake of Genesareth, while in fact it was about fifty-five kilometers south of it. However, the author could not have been living too far from Palestine, for he is still familiar with oral Jesus traditions such as were more likely to be circulating in the neighborhood of Palestine than in distant Rome. He anchors Jesus in a rural world that is also his own, for the lake of Genesareth, for him, is a "sea," not a "lake" as it is for the more worldly-wise Luke. A Jerusalemite who had reached Rome would not have spoken in Rome of a Galilean "sea." Also against a Roman location is that he equates the smallest coin of the Roman empire, the quadrans, with two still smaller coins (Mark 12:42). This was true only of the Herodian coinage in the East, while in Rome the quadrans itself was considered the smallest coin (Plutarch, *Cicero* 99.5). The evangelist is thus familiar with the Herodian coinage, which circulated only in the East, but does not orient himself to Roman usage. Since in Syria also the quadrans was known as the smallest coin (Matt 5:26), it could very well have served to explain the Herodian coinage to a Syrian readership. He promises the disciples persecution by governors and kings (Mark 13:9). But those existed only in the provinces, with Roman client kings located primarily in the East. He also shares traditions of Syrian Christianity before and during the time of Paul: the concept of the "gospel"

(*euangelion*), the Last Supper tradition, and the genre of the vice list (Mark 7:21-23), all of them traditions and forms that are also found in Paul as existing tradition and that Paul would have adopted from his Syrian home communities (for example, in Damascus and Antioch).

Ancient church tradition saw Mark as the interpreter of Peter, writing down from memory his traditions about Jesus. It refers to Papias (beginning of the second century C.E.), who supposedly received this information in turn (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). Those who choose to believe this tradition[2] can point out that in Mark's gospel Peter does in fact play a central role. He is the first disciple mentioned, and the last (Mark 1:16; 16:7), and he appears at crucial points: his confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the transfiguration, and the passion narrative. But this is a fragmented Peter tradition: Peter's mother-in-law is healed, but where is Peter's wife, who after Easter traveled through the world with him (1 Cor 9:5)? The transfiguration on the mountain could be the vestige of Peter's Easter vision (Mark 9:2-13). But it has become a preliminary revelation during the life of Jesus in which Peter lacks a correct understanding. Nowhere is the first Easter appearance credited to Peter, not even in Mark 16:7, where all the disciples (together with the women?) are promised an encounter with the Risen One in Galilee. The kernel of truth in the Papias tradition could consist in the fact that the Gospel of Mark belongs to a stream of tradition that goes back to Peter. Some things may recall attitudes in Peter's circle: the mission to Israel is primary, but the Gentile mission is recognized (Mark 7:27; cf. Gal 2:1-10). The food regulations are invalid, but that is to be taught (and practiced?) only in secret (Mark 7:14-23; cf. Gal 2:11-14). The message of salvation is called "gospel": in Galatians 2:7 the "gospel" for the uncircumcised is also assigned to Peter and in 1 Corinthians 15:1, 11 the "gospel" is a message common to Paul and the other apostles, including Peter. At the center of this gospel, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-11, is the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah. That is the goal to which the whole of Mark's gospel is also directed. Now, there were Peter traditions in many places. He was certainly much better known in Syria than in the West. It is demonstrable that he had followers in Antioch and Corinth (1 Cor 1:12). The fact that the Markan evangelist has been made his interpreter could be a conclusion drawn from the Gospel of Mark itself: this evangelist often uses Aramaic words and expressions and sometimes explains them (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22; 15:34). This conclusion was perhaps supported by the fact that Mark's gospel circulated very early as a "gospel *according to* Mark," for that unusual superscription is attested in antiquity only for translations. According to the Papias tradition, the Gospel of Matthew must have had a different superscription, because it was indeed considered a translation, but Matthew was

the author who was translated and *not* the translator. Papias writes that others translated it as each was able. Hence there may be a kernel of truth in the Papias tradition. Even the name "Mark" could be accurate. If the name had been invented later, the Gospel of Mark would have been attributed to an apostle. When Papias says critically that Mark did not present the traditions in their correct order, that conclusion could have been drawn from Mark's gospel itself: for example, Mark presumes the arrest of the Baptizer already in Mark 1:14, but only tells of it in retrospect in Mark 6:14-29. There is no Easter appearance, but instead he presents, by way of anticipation, such an appearance (in the transfiguration) in the midst of Jesus' life (Mark 9:2-10). He says nothing at the beginning of his gospel about Jesus' birth and hometown, but in Mark 6:1-5 he simply presumes a hometown for Jesus without explicitly identifying it with Nazareth. Finally, the Gospel of Mark reports a mission of the disciples (Mark 6:7-13) before they have recognized Jesus as the Messiah. A Christian reader might have regarded that as "illogical." Thus the Papias tradition need not necessarily have had our Gospel of Matthew or Gospel of John in view for comparison when it attributes a bad ordering of the traditions to the Gospel of Mark. On the whole, one cannot take the Papias tradition literally in all respects. Too much is uncertain. Thus the superscription "*according to* Mark" could also have originated secondarily on the basis of the tradition that the Gospel of Mark was a representation of Peter's recollections produced by a translator.

In terms of its theological-historical location, the Gospel of Mark may be located within Gentile Christianity. This gospel culminates in the recognition of Jesus as "Son of God" by a Gentile centurion (15:39). The evangelist now and then explains Jewish customs for Gentile readers (7:3-4). But his gospel also reveals considerable affinity to Judaism, a monotheistic sensibility that was lost on Gentile Christians. Mark knows that the worship of a human being as Son of God is a problem. A comparison between Jesus in Mark's gospel and Agrippa I in Acts is revealing. Agrippa accepts being reverenced as God and is punished by death (Acts 12:19-23). Jesus, in contrast, refuses to be divinized by human beings. He suppresses the demonic voices that call him "Son of God" (Mark 3:11-12). His exaltation and revelation belong to God alone. Mark also expresses this positively. In 12:29 Jesus utters Israel's monotheistic confession of God as Lord alone. A scribe agrees: "'he is one, and besides him there is no other'" (12:32). But in Mark's own time Christians were already worshiping Jesus as "Lord" together with God. Therefore Mark immediately quotes Psalm 110:1: "The Lord (= God) said to my Lord (= Jesus), 'Sit at my right hand . . .'" (12:36). Beside the one God the only one who can be "Lord" is the one whom God has exalted, and that is what happens in the raising of the Crucified One. The traditional

interpretation of the "messianic secret" is thus correct: in Mark's gospel the worship of Jesus as Son of God, which was originally tied to his resurrection, was projected back into the life of Jesus. Jesus was the Son of God, but during his lifetime he was so only secretly.[3] Jesus and his followers had to wait for God's decisive action in order to be able to acknowledge him as Son of God. They thus averted the suspicion that Jesus attributed divine status to himself of his own accord. That would have been blasphemy (2:6-7; 14:64).

Just as in terms of the history of theology the Gospel of Mark stood on the boundary between Jews and Gentiles, so in terms of social history it stands on the border between itinerant charismatics and local congregations. It primarily collects the traditions that had always penetrated as far as the local communities and the people, but at the same time it works with the traditions of the itinerant charismatics in such a way that it makes them more easily accessible to all Christians.

Narrative traditions extended quite soon beyond Jesus' followers: narratively-framed apophthegms, passion narrative, miracle stories. The external perspectives they contain were more heterogeneous than the image yielded by the Sayings Source. It was the service of the Gospel of Mark to have combined these heterogeneous traditions. Miracle stories and the passion narrative are here tied together by the motif of the secret. The picture in the miracle stories is, for this gospel, not the whole of the revelation about Jesus. The whole picture only emerges when one follows Jesus on the way to the cross and Easter. The apophthegms are integrated as Mark uses them to depict conflicts between Jesus and his opponents and so creates an arc of tension that points toward the passion. After the first cycle of controversy dialogues, his opponents plan his execution (Mark 3:6). After the second, he is crucified.

But Mark also integrates the traditions of the itinerant charismatic group into his gospel and makes them accessible to his communities. He expands the concept of "discipleship" in such a way that it applies also to local communities. The toll collector Levi is a disciple (2:13-17). He invites Jesus into his house and holds a banquet there. Levi is not in the list of the twelve disciples who are always to be with Jesus (3:13-19). Mark thus indicates that Levi remained in his house. He is to be a figure of identification for members of the local communities who did not share Jesus' itinerant existence. When, at his banquet, many "follow" his invitation, "followership/discipleship" becomes participation in dinners that were part of the life of every local community. A further expansion of the concept of discipleship is found at the center and at the end of the gospel: here discipleship is defined as readiness to suffer (8:34-35) and care for others (15:41). This was true both of itinerant charismatics and of local communities.

Jesus' disciples are joined by suffering: after the first passion prediction he challenges the disciples: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34). Mark addresses Christians who are being persecuted (13:9-13). Their identity will at some point be unavoidably recognized, just as Jesus' identity was recognized. At some point they will stand before judges and have to confess themselves Christians, just as Jesus confessed his messianic status before his judges (14:61-62). When at the beginning the Son of God wants to remain in secret he gives his followers a good conscience if they do not unnecessarily push themselves into the public sphere and provoke conflicts.

It may be that the Gospel of Mark also contains a critique of other concepts of what it means to be Christian: the disciples, in following Jesus, reveal themselves as blind and lacking understanding. They understand neither Jesus' majesty (6:52) nor his humility (8:32-33; 10:32); they comprehend neither the miracle stories nor the passion story—that is, both groups of texts that are suppressed or absent in the Sayings Source. It could be that in the incomprehending disciples there is a critique of the type of itinerant charismatics who are behind Q.[4] That is not certain. In any case, the uncomprehending disciples provide a foil for the true understanding of Jesus to which Mark wants to lead the readers.

Genre: A Biography with a Public Claim

The model for the gospel was the ancient biography.[5] But we also recognize that it was written by and for people who were familiar with prophetic books. Its content is a prophetic message: the "gospel," whose story the Gospel of Mark intends to trace back to its "beginning." This message is prophetic: it announces the coming of the reign of God (Mark 1:14-15). The message is more important than the prophet; hence his biography begins with his call. However, that this follows the pattern of an ancient biography is evident from the fact that the traditions are organized in a plausible chronological and geographical framework, and that his death is interpreted in terms of the conflicts in his life. All that is lacking in the prophetic books. The "life story" of a prophet is here told in the form of a biography. Two objections may be raised against this thesis of a prophetic tradition restructured in terms of ancient biography: (1) there is no birth story, as would be proper to a biography, and (2) the Gospel of Mark consists entirely of individual pericopes.

The beginning, with the appearance of the Baptizer and the baptism of the protagonist, is in fact unusual for a biography. But this is a special

biography about the life and activity of the Son of God. For Mark, Jesus first became Son of God when he was baptized. Since Mark has information about Jesus' origins and family (6:1-6) and could easily have begun with them, his beginning with the appearance of the Baptizer and Jesus' baptism resulted from a deliberate decision. He is writing for Christians, for whom their own real lives only began at baptism. Therefore, with this audience, he can count on a sympathetic reception of his "incomplete" biography. Just as their true lives had begun at baptism, so they let Jesus' life begin with his baptism. If they knew the Old Testament prophetic books they would have taken no offense at this abbreviated portrayal. Mark 1:1 begins with the expression: "beginning of the gospel (*archē tou euangeliou*) of Jesus Christ [the Son of God]." At the beginning of the book of the prophet Hosea, with which in the LXX the prophetic books began, the sayings were introduced with a related formula: "beginning of the words of the Lord (*archē logou kyriou*) to Hosea" (Hos 1:2). Then follows a commission from God containing a narrative: Hosea is to marry a prostitute. The readers and hearers of Mark's gospel were familiar with such prophetic writings, which began with the word of God coming to a human being, nothing being said about the prophet's previous history. In addition, in the biographies of pagan antiquity the accent was always on the public actions of the person, not his or her beginnings and youthful development.

The second objection to regarding Mark's gospel as a biography is founded on the character of this gospel as a collection. It seems like an awkward assemblage of individual traditions. Such collections of sayings, mixed with a few narratives, are certainly familiar to us from the prophetic books. But Mark's gospel is more: it is a little work of art that skillfully arranges traditional stories one after another and, by means of motifs in the individual stories, creates an overarching tension for the whole narrative. Pericopes having their own point become parts of a coherent narrative. In this way all the pericopes acquire an underlying surplus of meaning. They are all about the Son of God, even when people do not notice it. In principle, it is possible to think of pericope literature as biography. This is evident from Lucian of Samosata's *Demonax*. But here the mysterious double structure through which smaller and larger genres are overlaid is unique. The Gospel of Mark, unlike the Sayings Source, is not a prophetic book whose form is exploded by the message of a unique prophet. It is the tradition of one who is more than a prophet, and that tradition has been reshaped into the form of biography.

Therefore it has rightly become a consensus among scholars that the Gospel of Mark is a variant of the flexible ancient genre of biography.[6] This genre does not emerge from the Jewish world, where there were only two

biographical texts: Philo's *vita* of Moses, written to make Moses known to non-Jews,[7] and Josephus's *vita*, which is not a real autobiography and was written by Josephus to defend himself against the accusation that he compromised himself in the war against the Romans. Neither of these writings is addressed solely to Jews.

Precisely the same is true of the gospels. Although the historical Jesus addressed himself only to Jews, all the gospels extend his proclamation to Gentile audiences. In Mark the Gentile mission begins already in Jesus' lifetime. There a healed man begins to preach in the Decapolis about Jesus' deeds (Mark 5:19-20).[8] Matthew's gospel programmatically restricts Jesus' earthly activity to Israel (Matt 10:6; 15:24), but ends with a universal command to mission in which it is deliberately emphasized that everything Jesus taught applies to all peoples.[9] The Gospel of Luke shows in its continuation, the Acts of the Apostles, how the universal command to mission is carried out. While Paul's letters from the start are addressed to Gentile communities (but only to individual congregations), Jesus' proclamation was addressed to all Jews, yet in the gospels was expanded secondarily to all Gentiles (i.e., all people). Only in the redactional layer of the gospels was this universalizing of Jesus' message fully developed. The addressing of the gospels to all "Gentiles" and the appropriation of the literary form of the biography that was familiar in "Gentile culture" are necessarily related.

This universalizing of Jesus' message is associated in the oldest gospel with the concept of "evangelium/good news" (*euangelion*). Mark introduced it into the Jesus tradition. In two of the passages he created, he emphasizes its universality: one says that the "good news" is to be preached "to all nations" (Mark 13:10); the other that it is to be proclaimed "in the whole world" (Mark 14:9). At the time when Mark's gospel originated, when someone spoke of "good news" (*euangelia*) for the whole world the thought evoked was that of a new emperor. According to Josephus, the ascent of Vespasian as emperor, which again brought stability to the empire shaken by war, was celebrated in the year 69—that is, precisely at the time when the Gospel of Mark (ca. 70 C.E.) was created—as *euangelia*.[10] Probably the Gospel of Mark was an anti-gospel to this political gospel.[11] It says that it is not the Flavians who have saved the world, but the crucified King of the Jews, whom God has raised from the dead. Even before Mark, the concept of "gospel" designated the preaching *about* Jesus as a ruler from the line of David (Rom 1:1-6) and as the crucified Messiah (1 Cor 15:1-11).[12]

But the concept has a second meaning also. Mark probably introduced it everywhere into the Jesus tradition[13] and extended it to the proclamation made *by* Jesus (1:14). Jesus' preaching of the reign of God is "gospel" (*euangelion*). Thus for him what Jesus did and taught is just as much "gospel"

as what God did in him in the cross and resurrection. This second meaning of "gospel" as Jesus' message about the coming of the reign of God links to the second root of the concept of "gospel/good news" in the Old Testament:[14] Jesus appears in the role of a prophet like the "messenger of good news" in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 52:7; 61:1-11; cf. Rom 10:15-16, where Isa 52:7 is quoted). We should not set up an opposition between this second source and the derivation from imperial propaganda or the conscious opposition of the gospel to the political "gospels" of its time, since even Isaiah's messenger of good news brought a political message about the end of the exile and the liberation of Israel.

In both variants the concept of "gospel" acquires an additional significance through its opposition to the Flavians. The noun "gospel" is attested primarily in the imperial ideology. Even with Paul we find it once in opposition to the imperial cult. In Romans 1:3-4 he describes the proclamation of Jesus, son of David, Son of God, and ruler of the world as gospel—perhaps in ironic derivation from the apotheosis of Claudius in October 54. Jesus was "really" ruler of the world, not merely through a state-supportive fiction.[15] Was not the point of Mark's "anti-gospel" against the rise of the Flavians also that Christians should not bow down before the Roman emperor, but rather the centurion, as representative of the Roman superpower, bows before the crucified Jesus?

Thus the Gospel of Mark adopts the form of biography from the pagan world and fills it with the content of the proclamation of a ruler as good news (*euangelion*). Jesus is the royal messiah whose entry into power is proclaimed as "gospel," as joyful news. The other Synoptic Gospels follow: Matthew's shows at the beginning, by means of a genealogy, that Jesus is a Jewish royal son, and it proclaims him at the end as ruler of the world to whom all power in heaven and on earth is given (Matt 1:1-18; 28:18). The Gospel of Luke sees the son of David from Bethlehem as the opposite counterpart of the emperor. Here he, like an emperor, ascends after his death and is received into the divine world (Luke 2:1-21; 24:50-53).

The twofold character of the concept of gospel fits well with our literary-historical classification of the Gospel of Mark. The early Christians first attempted to collect traditions about Jesus in the form of a prophetic book, something familiar to them. The oldest of these attempts is the Sayings Source. Even there the Jesus tradition exploded the form of a prophetic book. But in Mark's gospel the tradition of the prophet Jesus is shaped even more firmly according to pagan models: the evangelist writes a biography. The image of a prophet is still influential: he does without a birth story, beginning with Jesus' commissioning; he summarizes the essentials as a message of good news brought by Jesus as a prophet—but he himself is its

essential content, as crucified king and Son of God. This last does not fit any prophet's life.

In the gospels, then, a group stemming from Judaism makes use of literary forms adopted from non-Jews in order to address non-Jews. A tradition that people had attempted without much success to edit in analogy to a prophetic book was transformed into an ancient biography. To that extent we are dealing with an intercultural literature, one that crosses boundaries between peoples. Even in its creative first phase, then, this is not "primitive literature" in the sense of having arisen on the soil of early Christianity before it had any contact with the world, as Franz Overbeck thought. Instead, it is part of Jewish-Hellenistic literature arising out of the soil of the Septuagint.

We can distinguish two currents within Jewish-Hellenistic literature.[16] One adheres closely to the Septuagint in style and form: it includes novellas like Tobit and Esther or 1 Maccabees.[17] Another stream of tradition sought to follow the forms of elevated pagan literature; this included the tragedian Ezekiel, the poet Pseudo-Phocylides, but above all the religious philosopher Philo and the historian Josephus.[18]

Based on its language and style, early Christian literature belongs to the first line of tradition; based on its adaptation of pagan forms, however, it belongs to the second. Even in Philo and Josephus we found the beginnings of a biographical form—but with an important difference: what for these Jewish aristocrats was a form of expression of a literary upper class we encounter in early Christianity as a literature for ordinary people. In adopting biography, the first Christians took over a form of expression proper to the upper class. They even took hold of a form of communication belonging to the imperial upper class when they called its content a "gospel." In doing so, they crossed boundaries both upward and downward: by placing a crucified man at the center they offered an identification to all those lower on the social scale.[19] The same is true of the general tendencies of early Christianity: to a downward transfer of the values of the upper class, which are now adopted by ordinary people—for example, when the first Christians made their own the humane ideal of the ruler as one who brings peace (Matt 5:9).[20] When, in addition, they emphatically turned with their "gospel" to all nations (or all Gentiles), their literature became "intercultural." This fits with the opening of an originally Jewish group to non-Jews, an opening associated with Paul and with the second beginning of early Christian literature.

However, the first beginning of early Christian literature clearly lies with Jesus: his preaching and his work. The preaching was first written down in the Sayings Source—according to the model of a prophetic book, although

the prophet depicted in this prophetic book was far more than a prophet. Jesus' work and suffering were first recorded in the Gospel of Mark, on the model of a biography (something well known in the non-Jewish world). We do not know who did it. Papias traces both these beginnings to an apostle, Matthew, and an apostle's disciple, Mark. He also sees clearly that the tradition of the words had a much closer affinity to the Jewish world than the Gospel of Mark. The words had to be translated. The Gospel of Mark is itself based on a process of translation. It is not impossible that Papias accurately retained for us the historic names of the two oldest Christian writers—even though we have to reckon with subsequent concretizations that grew up around these traditions.