



Memory, collective memory, orality and the gospels

Author:

Dennis C. Duling^{1,2}

Affiliations:

¹Department of Religious Studies and Theology Emeritus, Canisius College, United States

²Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Note:

Prof. Dr Dennis C. Duling is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Religious Studies and Theology at the Canisius College, Buffalo, United States. Professor Duling participates as research associate of Prof. Dr Andries G. van Aarde in the international research team, the 'Context Group'. Professor Van Aarde is honorary professor in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Correspondence to:

Dennis Duling

email:

dduling@roadrunner.com

Postal address:

135 Main Street,
Youngstown, NY 14174,
United States

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This article first explores individual memory as understood from the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans to modern-day neurology and psychology. The perspective is correlated with collective memory theory in the works of Halbwachs, Connerton, Gillis, Fentress and Wickham, Olick, Schwartz, Jan and Alida Assmann and Kirk and Thatcher. The relevance of 'orality' is highlighted in Kelber's works, as well as in oral poetry performance by illiterate Yugoslavian bards, as discussed in studies by Parry, Lord and Havelock. Kelber's challenge of Bultmann's theory of oral tradition in the gospels is also covered. The article concludes with observations and reflections, opting for a position of moderate-to-strong constructionism.

Introduction

'Like memory, tradition is refracted through the contemporary social realities of the communities in which it is enacted, such that it comes in important respects to reflect, even to signify those realities' (Kirk 2010:62).

'Bultmann's model is burdened with significant problems stemming from a lack of understanding of orality, gospel narrativity, and, last but not least, memory' (Kelber 2002:63–64).

'Neither of these views ['Presentist' ('Constructionist') or 'Traditionalist'] ... is particularly insightful to understand the complexities of remembering, which is always a fluid negotiation between the desires of the present and the legacies of the past' (Olick 2006:13a).

There are many kinds of memories: childhood; physical environment; multiplication tables; what one had for lunch; language; how to ride a bicycle; a traumatic past event. Memory can be affected by age, disease, gender, accident and historical events. It is related to oral traditions, social groups and power relations. Memory has been researched in the fields of neurology, neurobiology, psychology, history, literature, philosophy, political science, law, folklore and religion. Techniques of memorisation have been carefully studied and practised.

A specialised area of research is 'collective memory', which is the notion that people remember together with other people and that memory is constructed in, by and for a social group. Collective memory in relation to smaller groups is sometimes called 'social memory', whereas, in relation to whole cultures, it tends to be called 'cultural memory'. Both types of collective memory include 'memory sites' such as works of art, ritual acts, symbols, celebrations, memorials, libraries, writings and much more, all of which reinforce the collective identity of a people. There are also specialists, or 'memory men', who preserve collective memories and specialised acts of commemoration. The amount of disparate research on collective memory is rapidly increasing. A little over a decade ago, memory theorists Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins described such research as a 'nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise', which they labelled 'social memory studies' (Olick & Robbins 1998:106).

This article explores individual, social and cultural memory and their importance for the gospels, especially gospel tradition. It is dedicated to my dear friend and colleague Andries van Aarde, with whom I share many fond memories, from conversations about the Gospel of Matthew and the ancient family at context meetings in Portland, Oregon and at the Society of Biblical Literature, to viewing the mighty Niagara Falls and eating Buffalo wings in New York State, to late-night beers at an outdoor plaza in Bonn, Germany, to the experiencing of the beauties of Kruger National Park in South Africa.

Memory, mnemotechnique, cognitive psychology, neurology and the memory wars

My main interest in this study is collective memory, although some collective memory theorists have cautioned against devaluing individual memory (Assmann, J. & Assmann, A. 1988:127; Fentress & Wickham 1992:vii–viii; Kinny 1999:426; [see n. 5]) and so I take up individual memory,

as well. Cattell and Climo are illustrative: 'Individual and collective memory come together in the stories of individual lives. The process of constructing a life story is heavily mediated by social construction ...' (2002:22). I therefore begin with a little history and observation about individual memory.

Interest in memory and its functions has deep roots in the intellectual history of humankind. In the West, the ancient Greek poet Hesiod sang of the long-haired, golden-garbed Titaness *Mnēmosunē*, the goddess of memory (with the Greek *mnēmē* meaning 'memory' or 'remembrance'), who created the power of memory and storytelling, discovered the uses of reason, named every object and, thus, birthed language and made social discourse possible (*Theogony*). Her daughters, the nine Muses, were said to inspire poets, philosophers and musicians, whose oral activity was often performed with dance and music; they became the guardians of collective memory. The term 'memory' in Greek is etymologically related to 'truth' (with the Greek *lēthē* meaning 'forgetfulness' and the Greek *alētheia* meaning 'not forgetting' or 'truth'). Recall Plato's theory that education is merely remembering what one already knows, but has forgotten (*Meno*), and Socrates' comments about the close relationship between memory and knowledge (*Theaetetus*). Aristotle expanded on Plato's notion of memory as an 'image' (*eikōn*) that is stamped on the mind like a wax seal (Aristotle *On Memory and Reminiscence*; Coleman 2005; Craig 2010). These themes influenced philosopher Paul Ricoeur's reflections about memory and history (2004:7–21).

The ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians observed the human propensity to remember in relation to place or space and so developed the memory aid of associating the themes of oral discourse with various rooms, corners and statues of an imaginary 'memory palace' (Cicero *De Oratore* II.lxxxvi, 350–353). This 'mnemotechnique' persevered until the time of the Renaissance (Carruthers 1990; Rossi 2000; Yates 1966). In the 17th century, philosophers shifted from visual to linguistic – semantic and logical – memory aids. 'Knowledge henceforth resided in texts ...' and memory was considered to be a process of simply storing and retrieving information (Fentress & Wickham 1992:14).

Fascination with individual memory and memorising continued into the modern era. Semi-autobiographical novelist Marcel Proust in *Remembrance of Things Past* made the now famous observation that, when he smelled the aroma of Madeleine cookies, he always recalled his childhood experience of eating Madeleines and drinking tea on Sundays at his aunt's house (1913–1927:48–51). The early behaviourist Hermann Ebbinghaus reports in *Über das Gedächtnis* about his experiments in the laboratory with the human ability to remember nonsense syllables (1885). In *Matter and Memory*, philosopher Henri Bergson challenged the empiricists, positivists, historicists, scientists and mechanistic materialists of his day by claiming that the locus of memory is not simply 'brain matter', but the creative human spirit, the *élan vital* (life

force). He distinguished 'recollective memory', or episodes from one's autobiography, from 'habit memory' ('procedural memory'), such as that of riding a bicycle (1896). Frederick C. Bartlett in *Remembering* also challenged behaviourism's mechanistic tendencies with his view that memories are not simply recollections of the past, but are, rather, *mental reconstructions* which are informed by experience, personal habits and cultural attitudes, in short, what he called an 'effort at meaning' in and for the present (1932).

Bartlett's notion of mental reconstructions of the past as an 'effort at meaning' in and for the present is a form of constructionism, which is the view that what is normally considered to be 'objective reality' is really a construction, that, in this case, takes place in the human mind. His view opens up a debated topic in individual memory studies, namely, the fallibility of individual human memory as it attempts to 'retrieve' the past for the present. Cognitive psychologist Alan Baddeley holds the widespread opinion that:

[memory] retrieval ... is probably one of the most vulnerable points in human memory, with biased situations leading to failure to recall, or possibly to partial recall, which in turn is subject to distortion when we try to interpret our incomplete memory.

(Baddeley 1989:57)

Neurologists usually agree with the above opinion. Steven Rose (2005:161–162, see 1993), for example, describes memory retrieval as a 'biological cascade' in the brain: we do not remember the initial events themselves – *anything* – but only our previous memories of them; our memories are continually transformed over time.

Not surprisingly, the fallibility of memory in relation to traumatic events has produced a wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary, intellectual debate, called 'the memory wars' (Campbell 2003; Crews 1995; Loftus 1980, 1993, 2004; Schacter 1999, 2001). Sigmund Freud held that repressed traumatic memories can be recalled under psychotherapy (1904; Breuer & Freud 1893–1895). More recently, however, Elizabeth Loftus has performed laboratory experiments showing that autobiographical memory is 'malleable', that is, when fed misinformation, including a therapist's suggestions, it is subject to distortion (1993, 2004). She has often given testimony in childhood abuse cases and her 'misinformation effect' and 'false memory' theory is defended by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. However, representatives of recovered memory therapy (RMT) are more in line with the Freudian tradition (Papers 2010). For example, B.A. van der Kolk, a specialist on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 'dissociative amnesia'), maintains that the terror and helplessness of PTSD patients in real life cannot (and should not, for ethical reasons) be replicated in laboratory experiments. In keeping with such an approach, he says that Loftus' views do not answer the question (Van der Kolk, Hopper & Osterman 2001). Due consideration must be paid to whether, in fact, there is a middle ground. Feminist Sue Campbell warns that:

... the call for a 'middle ground', like the 'memory wars', can distract our attention from the range of alternative positions that feminists have explored and from the need for positions that challenge the current framing of these debates.

(Campbell 2003:15)

However, prominent psychologist and memory researcher Daniel Schacter writes, '... there is a middle ground in the recovered-memories debate; the problem is to identify it' (1996:277, see 2001). Neurological reporter Rita Carter summarises the debate: 'The best evidence yet suggests that both recovered and false memories are real phenomena ... False memories are not unusual. In fact, they are the norm ...' (1998:167a).

The overall conclusion of individual memory specialists appears to be that individual memories are constructed and subject to distortion. Memories transform previous memories over time, forming a 'cascade of memories'. This conclusion does not totally destroy memory's recall of *something* or *someone*, but it clearly indicates that constructionism is a major factor in individual memory and, as such, must be taken very seriously.

With this in mind, I return to the legacy of *Mnēmosunē's* daughters, the Nine Muses, that is, to *collective* memory.

Collective memory, social memory, cultural memory

The 'father of collective memory' is generally acknowledged to be Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945; cf. Coser 1992; Hutton 1993:73–89; Olick 2006:6–8; Wachtel 1986). Halbwachs renounced his allegiance to his former teacher, the individualistic, personalistic, psychologically oriented philosopher Henri Bergson (who, as noted, wrote on memory), when he fell under the spell of the influential French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Durkheim was not a memory theorist as such, but he did hold a thesis that became central to social memory studies, namely, memory in ritual helps to form and reinforce the commonly shared symbols and concepts that hold society together, which he called 'collective representations' (Misztal 2003). Influenced by Durkheim, Halbwachs in *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925) developed the view that memory is *collective and constructed within a social framework*. '... It is in society [smaller social groups] that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (1925:38). Some of Halbwach's key ideas are:

- Memory is usually related to images and places (the rhetoricians' 'memory palace' mentioned earlier).
- Memory of events and persons is selective, analogous to pools of water and rocks that remain on the coast when the tide recedes.
- Memory does not recall the real past, but only constructions of it; it 'distorts' the past in its need to show that an 'event' has a significance beyond the event itself.
- Memory and history are opposed entities: history begins where memory no longer functions.

- Memory constructs the past for the present, especially in relation to one's social group.
- The social group neither totally dispenses with, nor altogether determines, individual memory – 'it is individuals as group members who remember' (1992 [1950]:48, cf. 1925 [1990]:43, 51) – although it does limit its range of options.
- Social groups identify themselves and are identified by, their 'collective memories'.
- Different groups may have different or even competing, versions of the same persons or events (which amounts to memory 'contestation').
- The past tends to be 'constructed' as a narrative with a beginning, middle and a *satisfactory* ending.
- Dreams are an exception; they are fragmented, irrational and distorted, but they lack a social framework (1992 [1950]:39–42).
- Commemoration is also an exception; it is a *conscious* attempt to reinforce recollection, thus continuing and fixing the natural memory's focus on place and time.

Halbwachs influenced a number of academic fields. Pierre Nora, in his massive seven-volume work *Realms of Memory* (1981–1992), examines a wide range of 'memory sites' that are important for the national identity of his native France. The sites concerned include such people as Joan of Arc and René Descartes; such ideas as liberty, equality and fraternity; such symbols as the *fleur-de-lis* and the tricolour; such monuments as the Arc de Triomphe and the Tomb of Napoleon; such museums as the Louvre; and even the *Dictionnaire Larousse*. Nora also warns that memory sites can be interpreted and even manipulated, for nationalistic ends.

Collective memory has also influenced studies of ritual. In *How Societies Remember* (1989), social anthropologist Paul Connerton examines how ritual performances – for example, the Nazi festivals which were held during the time of the Third Reich – are commemorations that reinforce collective or national identity. For Connerton, such ceremonies are performative and are expressed in bodily gestures.

Similarly, political anthropologist John Gillis comments on memory construction and commemoration in relation to social and national identity:

We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena ... We are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities. Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and 'memory work' is ... embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end ... National identities are, like everything, constructed and reconstructed ...

(Gillis 1994:3, 4)

Jan Assmann is more interested in the broader view of collective memory. He states that, whereas social memory takes place in small groups and is disorganised and unspecialised, cultural memory – 'a core domain comprising religion, art, history, and morality' (2006:68) – takes place in large social entities, such as a nation state or an entire culture

and is organised and specialised (see Kirk 2005). Assmann is a constructionist: cultural memory does not deal with the 'real other', but with human constructions and projections of the other. In contrast to Halbwachs' contrast between history and memory, however, Assmann demonstrates the critical importance of cultural memory for (re)constructing history. His *Moses the Egyptian* offers an illustration: Western culture, following the Bible, 'forgets' about Moses the 'pagan', Egyptian and polytheist and 'remembers' him as a monotheistic Jew, the archetypal *opponent* of polytheism. 'Moses is a figure of memory but not of history, while [Pharaoh] Akhenaten is a figure of history but not of memory' (1997:2).

Jeffrey Olick (2006), who still prefers the expression 'collective memory', defines it broadly, allowing room for individual memory:

Collective memory is merely a broad, sensitising umbrella, and not a precise operational definition. For, upon closer examination, collective memory really refers to a wide variety of mnemonic products and practices, often quite different from one another. The former (products) include stories, rituals, books, statues, presentations, speeches, images, pictures, records, historical studies, surveys, etc.; the latter (practices) include reminiscence, recall, representation, commemoration, celebration, regret, renunciation, disavowal, denial, rationalisation, excuse, acknowledgement, and many others... To focus on collective memory as a variety of products and practices is, thus, to reframe the antagonism between individualist and collectivist approaches to memory more productively as a matter of moments in a dynamic process. This, to me, is the real message of Halbwachs' diverse insights.

(Olick 2006:8b)

In summary, Halbwachs' legacy is found in a number of different fields and is consistently constructionist. Jeffrey Olick also has a broad, inclusive view that relates individual and collective strains dynamically.

Social Memory, Orality and the Gospels

The incorporation of social memory studies into biblical study has been driven in part by the initiative and work of Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher who edited and contributed to *Memory, tradition, and text: uses of the past in Early Christianity* (2005) and who chair the section 'Mapping memory: tradition, texts, and identity' in the Society of Biblical Literature. It has also found a place in the Society's Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament (Duling 2006b). Because social memory studies have become particularly relevant for attempting to solve the complex problem of oral tradition in the gospels, in the current article, I shall focus on the work of Werner Kelber who has dedicated himself to this problem.

Social memory theorists Fentress and Wickham state, 'What defines oral history, and sets it apart from other branches of history, is ... its reliance on memory rather than texts' (1992:3). Oral history, as it relates to the gospels, was defined in the 20th century by Rudolf Bultmann (1934 [1926]), in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921; see Kelber 2007). Recall

this claim:

What the sources offer us is first of all, the message of the early Christian community, which for the most part the Church freely attributed to Jesus. ... I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life [= biography] and personality of Jesus.

(Bultmann 1934 [1926]:12)

Bultmann's view is that the gospels are characterised by multiple layers of oral tradition and that secondary accretions must be removed from these traditions to restore them to their earliest forms. Thereby the developing oral tradition – 'the history of the tradition' – is revealed.

Analysis of oral traditions as formulated by Dibelius and Bultmann (Dibelius 1935 [1919]; Bultmann 1963 [1921]) has been transformed in recent years; most important here is the fact that Bultmann virtually ignored memory (Kelber 2002; Kirk 2010:57; see also Byrskog 2000; ed. Kelber & Byrskog 2009; Mournet 2005; Vansina 1965). Harald Riesenfeld, in his *The Gospel Tradition*, sought to counter Bultmann's historical scepticism with a positive approach to memory (memorisation) derived from his view of ancient rabbinic practices, claiming that the outlines of Jesus' words and deeds were memorised by specialists, who recited them as holy word (1970:22). In *Memory and Manuscript* (1961), Birger Gerhardsson analyses in detail such rabbinic mnemonic techniques as repetition, condensation, rhythm and formulaic diction, which he then uses as a context for interpretation of the gospels. He argues that Jesus 'must have made his disciples learn certain sayings off by heart; if he taught, he must have required his disciples to memorize' (1961:328, cf. 332–333).

Gerhardsson is acknowledged as the most significant figure in relation to introducing memorisation into the study of gospel tradition. To be sure, his model has been criticised by some for drawing on rabbinic materials that are later than the New Testament (Smith 1963) and that stress memorisation, whereas Jesus' words occur in many versions in the gospel traditions (Davies 1962; cf. Perrin 1967:30–32). However, Gerhardsson's painstaking approach is more detailed and carefully nuanced than is Riesenfeld's, which has led to his contributions having recently received renewed appreciation (ed. Kelber & Byrskog 2009; Neusner 1998:xv–xvii). Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the rabbinic model is rooted in the activities of a literary elite which are not typical of the gospel writers (Kirk 2009:156–63). More important for this study, Gerhardsson preferred what Philip Esler calls 'close comparisons', that is, comparisons that are (despite Smith's criticism) close in time and place to the gospels (Gerhardsson 2001:85, n. 56; Kelber 2009:180; see Esler 1989:10–11; Mournet 2009:54–58). Following on Gerhardsson's writings, a much more 'distant comparison' model that includes collective memory became important, namely, the model of oral performance and transmission of poetry that has become known from 20th century Serbo-Croatian (Yugoslavian) bards. A brief comment about the model concerned is, therefore, in order.

In the 1930s, Milman Parry recorded the poetry of illiterate Serbo-Croatian bards, hoping that it would help him better understand and interpret the oral transmission and interpretation of Homeric poems (Elmer 2002; Parry 2010). Parry's early, untimely death meant that his colleague, Albert Lord, had to carry out Parry's programme. It is important to note that whilst the bards claimed that they sang every poem exactly the same in each new performance, as though it were exactly memorised, Parry's recordings show there are many versions of their performances. Moreover, there is no written text by which one might test their claim. Thus, together, Parry and Lord laid down what became a fundamental principle of oral poetry transmission: 'In a sense each [oral] performance is "an" original, if not "the" original' (Lord 2000 [1960]:101). Lord's student, Eric Havelock, applied Parry's analysis of Homer to gain an understanding of Greek education during the Homeric period (1963:123, cf. 1986). Then, Walter Ong, like his Toronto contemporaries McLuhan (1962, 1964) and Innis (1964), used Parry, Lord and Havelock to level critique at the 'technologising of the word', that is, he lamented the spoken word's loss of spontaneity and variety in the modern world (Ong 1982; see Mizrach 2010).

William Foxwell Albright had noted the significance of Parry's and Lord's views of oral poetry in the Europe of the 1930s for the interpretation of Ugaritic literature, as part of a critique of Herman Gunkel's form critical view of oral tradition (1950). The scholar credited with introducing this 'distant comparison' insight into New Testament gospel studies, however, is Werner Kelber (1997, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2009; ed. Horsley, Draper & Foley 2006). Kelber resisted the Bultmannian form critical approach in urging New Testament scholars to reject the search for the original forms of the oral tradition, which some scholars extended to an attempt to discover the actual words of Jesus. Such quests, said Kelber, betray ignorance of oral aesthetics. In relation to memory oral tradition should be seen as 'hot memory, propelled by active remembering and socialization'. Again, he acknowledged Gerhardsson's important contributions about memorisation (in the form of a 'didactic model'; Kelber 2009:181–182), but went on to apply the Parry/Lord/Havelock and Ong perspectives to the New Testament in relation to oral tradition ('orality') and the written gospels ('scribality') (in the form of an 'orality model'; Kelber 2009:182–185). He has continually cited, with appreciation, Parry's and Lord's principle, which resists any attempt to discover any primal original form or voice that is memorised:

The concepts of original form and variants have no validity in oral life, nor does the one of *ipsissima vox*, if by that one means the authentic version over against secondary ones. 'In a sense each performance is "an" original, if not "the" original'.

(Lord 2000:120) (Kelber 1997:30, cf. 2009:180, 183)

In addition to the above, if it is also taken into consideration that the oral gospel came from a rural and not an urban, environment, one of Kelber's (1997) central theses appears:

Mark's Gospel ... came into textual existence less by extension of an antecedent oral tradition than by resistance to oral drives, norms, and authorities ... [It is] a stunning departure from oral tradition.

(Kelber 1997:xix)

In his early work, Kelber argued that the written gospels distance the reader from Jesus, making the creative Jesus' own spontaneous oral performance 'voiceless'.

Although Kelber's innovative work on oral tradition was appreciated, it also produced strong responses. A prominent criticism of his work was that he had created an unjustified 'great divide' between oral and written cultures. David Balch countered with William Graham's study of world scriptures, showing that scriptural authority remained inescapably oral hundreds of years after the introduction of writing (1991; cf. Graham 1987; see also Goody 1987). Joanna Dewey argued that, although the Gospel of Mark was *written*, it was written to be recited *orally* (1994, cf. 2004). I note that such an idea was not new to oral performance theorists who were interested in memory. Yugoslav Krinka Vidaković Petrov integrated constructionist memory theory with orality of the gospels, stressing that human memory in oral performance is imperfect. She stated that oral performers *intentionally* alter their performances to fit their audiences or to evoke favourable responses (Petrov 1989). Finally, she argued that the four gospels have shifts that are characteristic of memory and oral communication:

namely, that a story or song has a latent existence in the memory of a performer and is actualised only when orally performed and communicated. Every performance, however, may produce a new variant or version, since it is unlikely that the text would be reproduced exactly.

(Petrov 1989:78–79)

Parry and Lord suggested that no original exists in oral performance. Petrov agrees, stating the view that the performer is not bound by any 'objective original'. However, she emphasises the performer's conscious *altering* of a story or song to fit an audience, in such a way as to actualise its potential and to produce 'variants' or 'versions' of the original, conveying the idea that *some* sort of stable content is transmitted, a content that resides in the memory. The point has been increasingly discussed, to the extent that, recently, some semblance of balance between 'fixity and flexibility', 'continuity and discontinuity', or 'stability and diversity', is sought (Mournet 2009:52, 221, n. 59).

Other oral performance theorists have lent their support to the idea that the written gospels, especially the Gospel of Mark, were memorised and performed (Shiner 2003; cf. Rhoads 2010). Thomas Boomershine (1987) suggests that written gospels orally recited do not distance the audience, as Kelber claims for the written Gospel of Mark. Boomershine admits Kelber's point that there was a shift from orality to scribality, comparing the shift to that from oral tradition to written Christ traditions, the latter of which are indebted to Hellenistic literary strategies. Yet, to his mind, Kelber collapses nineteen hundred years of gradually evolving chirography, or visual handwriting and print in human civilisation (cf. Le Goff 1992:51–99), to the first two generations of the Christ movement (1987:60). Martin Jaffee challenges both Kelber and Boomershine. He deeply appreciates Gerhardsson's work on rabbinic literature



(Kelber 2009:87–91), but observes that students of rabbinic literature have, at times, gone beyond Gerhardsson's original tendency to stress memorising, by incorporating orality and literacy studies into their work (1995). Jaffee rejects a model of tradition that posits an inevitable march from 'orality' to 'literacy', emphasising that there has been an increasing appreciation of the interpenetration of both cultural registers at all levels of the compositional and transmissional processes (1995; cf. also Carr 2005). In *Torah in the Mouth* Jaffee emphasises that, in rabbinic tradition, the primary medium of textual knowledge was *oral* communication ('scribal orality') and 'the characteristic organs of literary life were the mouth and the ears and its main textual reservoir was *the memory*' (2001:18 [Author's emphasis]; cf. Kelber 2009:178).

James Dunn also acknowledges Kelber's contribution, especially his illumination of oral tradition with studies from classicists, forklorists and social anthropologists; he reaffirms the patterns of oral tradition as 'habitual, not verbatim, memorization', emphasising the variability and stability of oral tradition. Dunn also agrees with Kelber's use of Lord's 'no original' emphasis, his correction of Bultmann's stress on the discontinuity between Jesus and the early Church (in the light of Jesus' teachings being retold during his lifetime), his focus on narrativity and his analysis of oral indices in Mark. In terms of such thinking, although the gospel is 'frozen orality', it is, nonetheless, 'frozen *orality*' (2003:199–202). Dunn, following Bailey (1991), rejects 'uncontrolled informal' oral transmission (in terms of Bultmann and rumour transmission) and 'controlled formal' (in terms of Gerhardsson and Quran memorisation) in preference for the model of 'informal controlled' oral tradition, which requires control in the recitation of some kinds of material, but flexibility in others. The key point here is that Dunn joins the critical chorus in thinking that Kelber's early work tends to overplay the shift from oral to written culture and to devalue written culture. Dunn emphasises the continuity of *memory in tradition* (for a critique of Dunn which claims that the Gospel of John is *not* in continuity in the sense of fixity, but is deeply constructionist, see Painter 2007:240–245).

Finally, John Dominic Crossan (1998:45–89) praises the 'therapeutic necessity and strategic benefit' – namely, the shock value – of Kelber's separation of oral from written culture, giving orality pre-eminence. Crossan points out that Kelber later admits that 'a novel approach requires a strong thesis' (Kelber 1994:159). Nonetheless, Crossan (1998) also rejects any sharp division between oral and written cultures, because:

while there have been oral cultures without literacy, there have been no literate cultures without orality. The divide, great or gradual, is not oral versus literate but oral alone versus oral and literate together.

(Crossan 1998:88)

Crossan cites several authorities on oral and written tradition (Goody 1987; Stock 1983; Street 1984), concluding with reference to memory theorists Fentress and Wickham (1992):

The mere fact that a society has acquired the ability to represent its knowledge in written forms does not mean that that society has ceased to be an oral culture as well. We remain an oral society, and the ways in which we pattern our social memory continue to reflect, albeit in altered forms, the same practices and thought processes of preliterate cultures. Writing may absolve us of the need to learn complex mnemotechniques; it does not absolve us of the need to speak.

(Fentress & Wickham 1992:46)

Crossan makes a related point about Kelber's tendency to prefer Parry's 'no original' in oral performance (which Crossan calls 'performatory multiformity') over a stable core structure in tradition (which Crossan calls a 'traditional matrix'). For Crossan (1998), there has to be some core of structural stability in the oral tradition:

there must be some way of recognizing versions of the same theme, plot, or story as distinct from different themes, plots, or stories. Call that structuralist stability, if you wish ...

(Crossan 1998:87)

This stability resides in memory.

There is an irony in all such critiques: the scholar most responsible for bringing 'orality' into view in Marcan studies, in contrast to the usual 'scribal' approach to Mark, is deeply appreciated, but is also challenged for overstating his case. The basic critique has been that orality and scribality overlap and that the written Marcan gospel was actually performed orally. Memory of a text is involved.

Kelber responds to his critics by clarifying and qualifying, but not denying, his position (1997:Introduction, 2005a, 2007). On the one hand, he maintains a version of his earlier position, saying that 'Jesus' oral proclamation *mutated* into the scribal medium' (2006:19a). He also speaks of a writer's 'scribally enforced *distance* from hearers, which may enhance both the desire and the ability to break with tradition, to canonize an alternate viewpoint, and thereby implement a form of forgetfulness' (2005a:229). He objects that the 'great divide' criticism misses his nuances. He has claimed only that the oral phase was '*predominantly* oral'; he has always recognised that Mark used both written and oral sources and he has never meant that writing puts an end to orality. On the other hand, he admits that the gospels might have been dictated and performed orally. He allows that there were parallels between the oral tradent and the written manuscript copyist, both of whom constructed the text for the present (Epp 2004; Parker 1997). He is sympathetic with scribalism's attempt to bring the past in line with the present (2006:21). Most importantly, he softens his tendency to separate oral culture from written culture. In a recent statement, he says:

In whatever form the oral–textual dynamics are specifically conceptualised, the premise of oral–textual interfacing enjoys the full support of current orality–literacy studies and large parts of rabbinic scholarship.

(Kelber 2009:192)

It should also be noted, with respect to the 'great divide', that Kelber's critics have missed the important point that he does not abandon the connection between the oral and written

gospel in his original groundbreaking book of 1983 (Kelber in Kelber & Thatcher 2008:29–30). In his conclusion to the work, he reaffirms the distance between the oral and written gospel, that is, Jesus' spoken parabolic Word which proclaims the Kingdom of God is not the same as the references to the Kingdom of God expressed in a written gospel about Jesus' life and death. Yet, he also claims that Jesus' spoken parable :

... furnishes linguistic and theological connection between the speaker in parables and the written gospel. Both gospel and oral parables transcend their respective narratives by pointing to the Kingdom of God. The evangelist enacts the parabolic dynamic of Jesus' language much as the Platonic dialogues represent the Socratic form of philosophical of reasoning. The gospel as written parable may thus be understood as Jesus' Word bequeathed to Mark.

(Kelber 1997 [1983]:220)

Still, such a conclusion in no way denies the possibility of a *conflictual* relationship between orality and scribality (Kelber in Kelber & Thatcher 2008:30).

Most important for the current article, Kelber's more recent restatements about oral tradition are buttressed with social memory studies (Kelber 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2009). According to Kelber, 'Bultmann's model is burdened with significant problems stemming from a lack of understanding of orality, gospel narrativity, and, *last but not least, memory*' (2002:63–64 [Author's emphasis]). In this regard, Kelber leans towards moderate constructionism: 'Memory retains not the past as such but in a sense creates a new past that speaks to the needs of the present' (2002:57). Discussing important contributions in this field (Carruthers 1990; Coleman 2005; Yates 1966), Kelber highlights especially the work of cultural memory theorists Jan and Aleida Assmann who say that tradition should be seen as '*empowered by remembering*' (2006:20–21). Thus, the Marcan author:

was plugging into a copious reservoir of memories, retrieving and reshuffling what was accessible to him memorially. In the end, I venture the suggestion that the gospel composition is unthinkable without the notion of cultural memory, which serves ultimately not the preservation of remembrances per se but the preservation of the group, its social identity and self-image ... Mark avails himself of a rich cultural memory for the purpose of securing the Christian identity for a postwar generation.

(Kelber 1997:xxiii)

I have highlighted the work of Kelber, who extends his studies of orality and scribality with the help of cultural memory and performance theory. I would be remiss not to mention, in this connection, a social memory theorist who, having become acquainted with New Testament studies under the influence of Kirk and Thatcher (2005), has expressed negative reactions to strong constructionism, whether of Bultmann or Halbwachs. Barry Schwartz argues that Halbwachs' orientation to collective memory is of no help to gospel critics. He notes that, like Bultmann, Halbwachs reduces the infancy and miracle stories to 'extreme instances of construction' and 'distortion' (2005a:49, 50, cf. 2005b), a position which he considers to be cynical:

Biblical scholarship, like social memory scholarship and the sociology of knowledge, frequently despairs over its ability to know events as they actually were and finds its triumphant moments in clever reinterpretations or the debunking of what was once believed to be true.

(Schwartz 2005a:46)

Schwartz also states: 'no assumption, in my view, has done more to undermine the foundation of social memory scholarship or hinder its application to biblical studies' (2005a:45). Schwartz wants social memory studies to be positively productive. His own approach is to focus on symbolic forms, such as words, images, institutions and behaviours, in the manner of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz's finely tuned 'thick description', which stresses the ethnologist's attempt to cipher the subtleties in cultural contexts. Geertz asks, for example, when is an eye twitch an uncontrolled physical twitch? A wink? A faked wink? A burlesque faked wink? A rehearsed burlesque fake wink? (Geertz 1973:3–30). For Schwartz, Gerhardsson 'correctly assumes that Jesus' followers were determined to get his message right' (2005a:55).

Schwartz has a very important point to make, for which he is commended by sociologist Louis Coser (1992:28, 30), but I am uncertain what he means when he says that 'Jesus' followers were determined to get his message right'. If he means that the ancient oral tradents wanted to preserve the precise wording of the Jesus' tradition, he goes too far. As Kelber and Jaffee have indicated, research on rabbinic literature has advanced into the realm of orality and memory theory and as Schwartz, one of the premier scholars in memory theory knows, *some* degree of constructionism is involved in the present's recollection of the past. In short, as I shall indicate in the conclusion, I share Schwartz's caution about what I shall call 'strong' or extreme constructionism and I accept Kelber's critique of Bultmann, but in my view terms like 'cynicism', 'fabrication' and 'debunking' (see Schwartz 2005:47–50) do not fit Bultmann, who saw Form Criticism as an analogue to a faith unable to be proved by historical research. Yet, Schwartz is right that Bultmann's construction lacks what eventually came to the fore, due consideration of memory. This point is aptly made by Kelber. Jeffrey Olick's (2006) way of putting the memory issue is softer and more nuanced:

Neither of these views ['Presentist' or 'Traditionalist'] ... is particularly insightful to understand the complexities of remembering, which is always a *fluid negotiation between the desires of the present and the legacies of the past*.

(Olick 2006:13a [Author's emphasis])

Observations and Reflections

A brief summary is in order. A number of collective memory theorists see correlations between individual memory and collective memory. That is an important observation not only because in groups it is individuals who remember, but because both individual and collective memory are to some extent constructionist, a major theme of this article.



On the individual side, modern research in neurology and psychology suggests that individuals do not recall actual persons and events, but only previous memories of them, forming a 'cascade of memories'. Such memories can be transformed over time – indeed, 'false memories' are common. This transformation is constructionism. Similarly, from Halbwach's perspective, collective memory is constructed. It is formed and perpetuated in groups; it is selective, usually related to images and places, does not recall the real past (the goal of historical reconstruction), but rather constructs the past for the present, thus 'distorting' the past. Such collective memory emerges from and perpetuates, social identity, usually in the form of a narrative with a positive ending and is reinforced by commemoration. Halbwach's perspective has influenced many academic fields, but he has also been criticised for his *destructive constructionist* stance, which is claimed to be a sort of cynical debunking of memory's positive activity. Yet, collective memory can be seen in positive vein as a broad range of mnemonic products and practices, consisting of 'a fluid negotiation between the desires of the present and the legacies of the past'.

Turning to the gospels, Bultmann's influential Form Criticism tends to see oral tradition as an evolution from smaller to larger forms, which leads some to attempt to remove later, secondary accretions in order to arrive at an approximate original form and others to search for Jesus' actual words. Werner Kelber challenges the holding of such a view in several ways. Already in 1983 he was indebted to Walter Ong's works (1997 [1983]: xv; 234–35 [bibliography]; 253 [Index]), especially Ong's contrast between oral and writing cultures and the 'chirographic bias' of Western culture, arguing that the written gospel distanced readers from the oral gospel, Jesus' living voice. Kelber's innovation had to face the objection that he had created an unwarranted 'great divide' between oral and writing cultures. In responding to such criticism, Kelber found support in the Parry and Lord theory of oral performance, that is, the principle that every performance produces an original, if not *the* original: *there is no primal original*. Bultmann had said very little about memory before then, leading Kelber to find support in social memory studies and particularly in Jan and Aleida Assmann's (1988) view of cultural memory.

The current study highlights the importance of constructionism. Bultmann's evolutionary constructionism in gospel studies may presently be dissipating, as Kelber contends, but constructionism in a more moderate form is still present in the field of memory and performance theory. I wish to consider the theory in terms of two other contexts, the social sciences and philosophy.

The first context is related to the social scientific criticism of the Bible. In the social sciences, outside observers often develop 'etic' or observers' models that are based on both distant and close comparisons, which are informed by abstract social theories that focus on social cooperation, social conflict and social interaction. Perhaps the best-known

example of general theory is that of Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's 'social construction of reality' (1966) which, in its simplest terms, says that the realities which people tend to take for granted as 'objective' are, in fact, socially constructed and maintained.

Take ethnicity as an example. The most influential ethnicity theory since the mid-20th century is found in Frederik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (1969), which I have often used to interpret ethnicity in the ancient Mediterranean world and in the New Testament (Duling 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). For Barth, the 'cultural stuff' of ethnic identity – consisting of such external features as name, archetypal ancestors, ancestry, homeland, language, myths, legends, dress and food – is important, for without such 'stuff' there would be total assimilation and no observable ethnic identity. However, such markers are neither natural, fixed and unchangeable, as people often think they are, nor do they 'produce' ethnic identity. Ethnicity is, therefore, not 'primordial', as it is commonly perceived to be by ethnic members and some theorists, but self-imposed – *socially constructed* – by groups themselves in order to describe themselves, as well as to differentiate and separate themselves from other groups in their immediate environment. Indeed, members of an ethnic group can change over time. The key is 'the social organization of cultural difference(s),' the subtitle of his book. In relation to the present study, it needs to be observed that the construction of ethnicity and of social memory go hand in hand, which Le Goff calls 'ethnic memory' (1992:55–58).

There is a second, larger context. Barth eventually claimed that his ethnic constructionism had anticipated post-modernism (1994). Barth's later opinion of his own work is not surprising. As Ian Hacking's philosophical analysis of the 'culture wars' and 'science wars' in his *The Construction of What?* (1999) indicates, many definitions and examples of constructionism exist. Such definitions and examples can be placed on a spectrum from 1–5, that is, from 'weakly' constructionist at one pole (1) to 'strongly' constructionist at the other (5). Although I myself would hesitate to place anyone within Hacking's spectrum, surely Schwartz would see the constructionism of Bultmann and Halbwach on the strong side and he himself as being positioned somewhere towards the middle. Jeffrey Olick's mediating position also seems to be closer to the middle. The attempt by some performance theorists to find a balance between 'fixity and flexibility', 'continuity and discontinuity', or 'stability and diversity' in performance theory also seems to be an attempt to locate a middle ground.

In this light, I have attempted to give constructionism a fair hearing. Indeed, I have been much influenced by Bultmann in the past and, in my book titled *Jesus Christ Through History*, viewed the quests as a series of culturally constructed images (Duling 1979). I have also incorporated Frederik Barth's theory of ethnic constructionism into my models of ethnicity. Yet, I have not gone the whole way with the sort of



constructionism which is suggested by the 'literary turn' and by post-modernism in biblical studies. Rather, I have tried to retain some room for what might be called the 'realism' of past social contexts and the 'reality' of 'ethnic features'. In this regard, I once cited Georg Iggers' *Historiography in the twentieth century: from scientific objectivity to the Postmodern challenge* (1997; Duling 1999). Iggers admires, yet also offers warnings about, certain Romantic undercurrents in 'the literary turn' and post-modernism. In Matthean studies, I have developed a similar position, based in part on the work of Warren Carter (Carter 1994, 1996, 1997), who attempts to correlate 'authorial audience' with 'real audience' (Duling 1999). Similarly, I have leaned towards constructionism in memory theory in the current article, but have restrained myself in this respect, insofar as I have occasionally referred to a memory core that gives memory some stability within fluidity. I have hinted at such a memory core in interpreting Petrov's perspective on performance, in relation to Crossan's quest for stability, in relation to Olick's middle ground and in my attempts to balance diversity with stability. Perhaps, in terms of Hacking's spectrum, then, I would be a '4' and positioned at the constructionism end of the spectrum, although not at '5', which is its strongest form.

Finally, a personal note again. A *Festschrift* such as this is a memory site. It is a memorial that honours by perpetuating and preserving. It also has a social context. I commemorate – with other commemorators – the contributions that have been made by Andries Van Aarde as a person, a friend and a scholar. Our memories are, no doubt, constructions, but they are also something more.

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