

*Der mündliche Faktor und die synoptische Frage. Analogien aus der antiken Literatur, der Experimentalpsychologie, der Oral Poetry-Forschung und dem rabbinischen Traditionswesen.* TANZ 49. Tübingen: Francke, 2008, 403-417:

## Kapitel H

### Summary

How did the similarities and the differences between the three synoptic Gospels develop? The answer to this question has to be well-founded. A description of the New Testament evidence is not enough. The synoptic data raise a number of preliminary questions, but in themselves these data do not allow a reliable answer (A.I). In order to solve the Synoptic Problem on the basis of a broader foundation it is necessary to compare the New Testament synoptic data with the relationship that exists between other parallel texts from antiquity, from experimental psychology, from oral poetry and from rabbinic tradition. Most Gospel scholars did not pay much attention to these analogies to the Synoptic Problem (A.III). But only a minority of those scholars who took these analogies into account argued for a simple literary dependence between the New Testament Gospels. Most of them integrated, to varying degrees, an oral factor into their solution to the Synoptic Problem (A.III). Nevertheless, the conclusions reached by these approaches labor under a lack of consideration of relevant analogies. That is the purpose of this book.

#### 1. The Most Important Results

Analysis of several analogies to the New Testament synoptic evidence from ancient literature (B), experimental psychology and oral poetry (C und D) as well as rabbinic tradition (E) has yielded a number of single results. Taken together they clearly point in a certain direction. While not impossible, it is improbable that the relationship of the first three Gospels to each other can be described in terms of simple literary dependence. As the different analogies have made clear, several characteristics of the New Testament synoptic evidence find no satisfactory explanation without the influence of oral tradition and human memory. The most important results of the above mentioned research that led to this main conclusion are summarized below. We begin with several observations about the content of the synoptic Gospels as such and are not yet concerned with the relationship between the Gospel parallels:

a. The synoptic tradition as a whole contains about 30.000 words. The words of Jesus amount to about 15.000 words. In the ancient Jewish world it was not regarded as an extraordinary achievement to learn such a *large number of words* by heart. The rabbis knew not only their holy scriptures (containing about 300.000 words) by heart, but in addition substantial parts of oral torah. It has been proven experimentally that some Jewish scholars had committed the Babylonian Talmud (with its nearly 2.000.000 words) to memory word by word. It is very improbable that the disciples of Jesus were able to memorize such large blocks of text. But according to the New Testament Jesus taught and trained his disciples for a period of two or three years. In this time period an average Jew would certainly have been able to commit all the synoptic words of

Jesus to memory, or at least a considerable part of them. The same disciples who did this before the crucifixion would have been able to have learned the narrative parts of the synoptic tradition by heart after Easter (C.I).

b. As children of pious Jews and as regular visitors of the synagogue the disciples of Jesus would have been accustomed to committing important learning material to memory, a skill they would have mastered as children. As ancient memory theory held and modern psychology has confirmed, human memory can be expanded and maintained on a relatively high level by *regular training*. Nevertheless, even a well-trained memory does not store any available piece of information but mainly those pieces it wants to remember because of their importance. The disciples of Jesus were strongly motivated to learn the words of their teacher by heart because of their conviction that these words were the words of God (C.II.1).

c. Two-thirds of the mk-lk parallel tradition and three-fourths of the mt-lk parallel tradition are arranged in the *same order*. Sometimes, mainly in the passion narrative, the single pericopes are connected to each other by a necessary chronological development which could easily be reproduced by heart. In synoptic sections without such a chronological connection the pericopes are often linked to each other by the principle of parallelism (*parallelismus membrorum*) or repetition which also aided memorization. The observation that the agreement in order is greater inside the passion narrative than outside of it corresponds to the fact that a necessary chronological order can be more easily memorized than an order based on parallelism and repetition (C.IV).

d. The average *length* of pericopes in the synoptic tradition is well below 100 words. The units upon which the Old Testament history books, the works of Josephus and the Alexander Romance are built are much longer. Because of the relative shortness of its pericopes the synoptic tradition could be learnt by heart and handed on by oral tradition more easily. However, even a relatively skilled memory will not be able to reproduce a comparatively short passage word by word after having heard (or read) it only once. Therefore learners have to memorize their material by regular repetition. Since Jesus did not convey his teaching in writing, he would have taught his disciples through repetition (C.II.2).

e. For instance, in contrast to the final chapters of the Book of Acts the synoptic Gospels have dropped any marginal elements of their stories and concentrated strictly on the main story lines. This *conciseness* is a typical mark of orally composed and reproduced texts (C.VI.2.a).

f. More than half of the words of Jesus are formulated according to the rules of *Semitic parallelism* in at least one of its synoptic versions. Modern cognitive psychology has demonstrated that texts regulated by rhyme (or by meter or parallelism) can be learned by heart better than texts without rhyme. The reason is that every kind of repetition aids memorization. When teaching his disciples Jesus seems to have made use of this mnemonic device (C.III), just as his »contemporaries« among the rabbis did (E.III.2.h).

g. About one third of the words of Jesus consists of pictorial parable stories. The narrative material of the synoptic tradition, which amounts to about 50 percent of the total, is also *concrete and easy to visualize*. According to empirical research from the field of cognitive psychology, human memory can store concrete imagery much better than abstract statements, because, firstly, stories are encoded not only verbally but also as images. Secondly, image encoding does not require as much work of human memory as does verbal encoding. Therefore the synoptic tradition, well above 50 percent of which consists of stories and parables, is much better suited for oral transmission than the rather abstract letters of Paul (C.V).

The results presented thus far demonstrate, *that the whole synoptic tradition could be stored by human memory, could be carried as well as preserved by oral tradition and was particularly well-suited to such a process*. What follows are further observations concerning the relationship between the parallel traditions in the synoptic Gospels.

h. The mt-mk-lk triple tradition amounts to one third of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke respectively (A.I.1.a). The mt-lk double tradition makes up one fifth of these two Gospels. Similar agreements and differences concerning the *selection of material* can be found in parallel texts

not only from ancient literature but also from oral poetry and from rabbinic tradition.

i. Both, Matthew and Mark and Mark and Luke share an average of 9 out of 10 common pericopes and 9 out of 10 common sentences in the *same order*. Only one out of 20 identical words in the mt-mk and the mk-lk parallel tradition takes a different position (A.I.2). The number of pericope, sentence and word inversions is similar in parallel texts from ancient literature, experimental psychology, oral poetry and rabbinic tradition.

*Neither the selection of material, nor its order are adequate criteria for distinguishing between literary and orally related parallel texts.* The verbal agreements and disagreements are a different matter. But it has turned out to be essential to look not only at the number of verbal agreements but also at their dispersion and at the higher figures in the poetic sections, the words of Jesus and the Old Testament quotations.

k. The *average verbal agreement* between the synoptic parallel texts amounts to only 30-50 percent. At the same time the content of the common material of the Synoptics is very similar (A.I.3.b). This combination of great content identity and rather low agreement in wording can easily be interpreted as typical of memory activity, since human memory remembers the content of an (oral or written) text much quicker, better and longer than its actual words (C.VI.1). Even Josephus, who evidently took his material from written sources, changed the wording of the Letter of Aristeas much more than its content which he closely preserved. This can be seen in the second column of the table below. However, as the example of Josephus will demonstrate, these data need interpretation.

Verbal Agreement in Ancient Parallel Texts					
Parallel Texts	Identity	Dispers. (s)	Poetry	Speech	Quotations
2 Ki / Jer	90%/84%	–	–	–	–
2 Ki / Jes	86%/89%	–	–	+9/5 Pp	–
1 Ki / 2 Chr	74%/78%	11,7/10,5	–	+8/6 Pp	[+7/3 Pp]
HAM A / β	64%/55%	12,6/13,7	–	+5/7 Pp	–
Sunjata A / B	64%/55%	–	–	–	–
mt-lk DT	48%/51%	22,4/21,1	+12/10 Pp	–	+53/42 Pp
mt-mk TT	50%/40%	15,9/15,0	+16/17 Pp	+17/19 Pp	+28/36 Pp
mt-mk DT	49%/40%	13,4/16,0	–	+11/10 Pp	+40/53 Pp
mk-lk TT	32%/40%	12,1/11,7	+8/8 Pp	+14/19 Pp	+39/30 Pp
CN / TPsj	40%/43%	10,0/10,1	+13/12 Pp	-7/10 Pp	–
ARN B / A	36%/35%	19,8/15,1	+12/16 Pp	+40/35 Pp	+49/46 Pp
Arist / Jos.	28%/30%	13,6/15,0	–	+3/4 Pp	+12/14 Pp

l. In the synoptic Gospels the *average identity of wording* is only half as high as in the Old Testament parallel texts which are definitely connected by a literary relationship (B.I.3.c). The β recension of the Alexander Romance also deviated to a lesser degree from the wording of its source than the Synoptics, although its author did not attribute a comparable religious importance to his text (B.III.4). Among the ancient authors only Josephus changed the wording of his sources to a similar degree as the Synoptics. Yet, he was motivated to do so by his stylistic ambition to imitate the classical Greek writers. The New Testament authors were free from such ambitions (B.II.3-4). They changed about 60 percent of the wording of their sources although they revised them on the same stylistic level and did so only very moderately. As a result many of the differences between the synoptic Gospels are not relevant, neither with regard to content nor with regard to style.

Texts with a similar relationship have been presented from oral poetry. Parallel texts with an oral origin regularly show an average identical wording of 20 to 70 percent. Therefore, rather high identical wording (70 percent) can not only be produced by literary dependence but also

by the activity of human memory and by oral tradition. Obviously, rather low identical wording (20 percent) is a very common result of oral tradition carried by human memory with its weakness for remembering exact words (D.II-IV). The two Targumim of the Pentateuch and the two parallel versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan that were analyzed in the course of our study also exhibit, like the synoptic Gospels, a combination of little difference in style and content and great difference in wording (E.II.3 and E.III.2.e). This observation strengthens the assumption that the rabbinic and the synoptic parallel texts have a similar origin as the parallel versions from oral poetry.

m. The identical wording in the different synoptic parallel pericopes is very *heterogeneous*. The figures for the single pericopes disperse considerably around the arithmetical mean value (A.I.4.a). Neither the Old Testament parallel texts nor the recensions of the Alexander Romance exhibit a similar dispersion. Nor are the Targumim to the Pentateuch comparable to the synoptic Gospels in this respect. Yet, Josephus revised the text of the Letter of Aristeas nearly as inhomogeneous as is the case in the mt-mk double tradition and in the mk-lk triple tradition (B.II.3.a). The two versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan do not only have a similar average verbal agreement; the single figures are just as inhomogeneous as in the synoptic parallel texts, including the mt-lk double tradition. As far as the few parallel sections of the Sunjata legend reveal, such an inhomogeneous text revision is a typical symptom of oral reproduction. The assumption that Avot de Rabbi Natan A par B is the closest ancient analogy to the Synoptic Problem of the New Testament can be further substantiated.

n. In the *poetical passages* common to the synoptic Gospels the verbal agreement is considerably higher (by up to 17 percent points) than in the remaining parallel material (A.I.4.d). Only rabbinic literature, both in the Palestinian Targumim to the Pentateuch (E.II.3) and in the two versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan (E.III.2.i), proved to be analogous to this peculiar feature of the Gospels. An explanation for this phenomenon can be deduced from cognitive psychology research. Human memory is able to store poetical texts better than prose texts because it is aided by each kind of repetition (C.III.3). Therefore also the higher identical wording in the poetical passages suggests that both the New Testament Gospels and the rabbinic parallel texts draw from an oral tradition carried by human memory.

o. In the *words of Jesus* the synoptic Gospels exhibit a much higher verbal agreement (by up to 19 percent point) than in their remaining common material (A.I.4.b). None of the parallel texts connected by literary dependence has exhibited an analogy to this aspect of the relationship between the Gospels. Only the two parallel versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan presented a real analogy. Just as the Synoptics reproduced the words of Jesus exceptionally exactly, the statements of the Rabbis are in closer agreement than the rest of the common material of Avot de Rabbi A par B (E.III.2.h). This might in both cases be the result of the particular respect the disciples of Jesus and the rabbis paid to the central teachings of their masters. They may have committed their teachers' statements more exactly to memory than the stories about them. This difference can still be seen in the written versions of the texts in question (C.II.1.b).

p. In their common *Old Testament quotations* the verbal agreement between the synoptic Gospels is twice as high as in the rest of their parallel material (A.I.4.c). They share this characteristic with only the two versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan (E.III.2.k). This is to be expected if ARN A par B originated orally since the rabbis valued their Holy Scriptures much more than the rest of their learning matter and knew it longer and better. In the case of the synoptic Gospels the higher verbal agreement in the Old Testament quotations is even more telling, since the disciples of Jesus attributed at least the same respect to the words of their teacher as to their holy books. If nevertheless they reproduced the words of Jesus less exactly than the Old Testament, this suggests that they were available in a less fixed form than the biblical texts. This was the case if the Gospel authors drew the words of Jesus from an oral tradition.

q. In two-thirds of the cases Mark's versions of the common synoptic material is *longer* than Luke's version and in three-fourths cases it is longer than Matthew's version (A.I.1.b). Psychological experiments have demonstrated that the human memory is inclined to shorten the re-

membered material (C.VI.2.a). In this respect the present research supports Markan priority, although not in the sense of literary dependence.

r. The Synoptics revised the *style* of their sources from pericope to pericope (and from sentence to sentence) very inconsistently (A.I.6), less homogeneously than Josephus and probably also the author of the  $\beta$  recension of the Alexander Romance. It would be difficult to explain such an inconsistent style revision as a result of copying. Yet, similar inconsistencies have been a common outcome of experiments of cognitive psychology. Accordingly Luke and Matthew deleted or replaced parataxis, barbarisms etc. not regularly and consistently because they drew their material from an oral source. And human memory demonstrably works selectively and, consciously or unconsciously, produces heterogeneous results (C.VI.2).

s. In the triple tradition Matthew and Luke agree more than 600 times against Mark in the *Minor Agreements* (A.I.3.c). Such agreements are a natural characteristic of oral versions of the same text. They appear regularly in rabbinic parallel traditions. Therefore, the assumption that the three synoptic Gospels are connected orally in similar fashion, represents a natural (and the most simple) explanation for the existence of the Minor Agreements (F.I-II).

## 2. The Most Efficient Model

a. The results summarized in the above section make it improbable that the synoptic relationship between the New Testament Gospels was produced by simple copying. In ancient literature, no literary dependent texts could be found that exhibited the same characteristic differences and agreements as the synoptic Gospels. The connection between the Gospels can be explained much better if human memory or oral tradition are taken into account. Therefore, *strong literary dependence including the Two-Source Hypothesis does not offer a satisfactory answer to the Synoptic Question*. Yet the assumption of Markan priority has been confirmed. Mark usually presents the triple tradition in a slightly more original form than Matthew and Luke. But to what degree did human memory or oral transmission influence the origin of the synoptic common tradition?<sup>1</sup>

b. A possible answer is that Luke (and Matthew) had a copy of Mark's Gospel before them, read each pericope from beginning to end, and subsequently wrote it down from short-term memory (H.J. Cadbury). (1) This suggestion is superior to the assumption of simple copying, since it is to a certain degree supported by the results of cognitive psychology and can better explain why the average verbal agreement between the synoptic parallels is relatively low. But this modification of the Two-Source Theory leaves a number of questions unanswered. (2) Why should Matthew and Luke have done this if they had a written copy of Mark before them? Under these conditions, why didn't they reproduce the words of their unique source as closely as the Book of Chronicles reproduced its sources? (3) Why should Matthew and Luke have changed the text of some Markan pericopes so radically and taken over the text of others almost entirely without sufficient recognizable stylistic or other reasons? (4) Could Matthew and Luke in this way succeed in reproducing the Old Testament quotations more accurately than the poetic words of Jesus, the poetic words of Jesus more accurately than his prose speeches and his prose speeches more accurately than the narrative material? Should we not expect that according to Cadbury's model the verbal agreement between shorter pericopes would be higher than between longer sections?<sup>2</sup> (5) How can the existence of the many positive (Minor) Agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark be explained, if the latter evangelists used Mark in the way assumed by Cadbury, namely directly and independently of one another?

c. A second variation of the Two-Source Theory takes into account not only human memory,

---

<sup>1</sup> Compare the theories listed above under A.III.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the relevant results from experimental psychology, mentioned under C.I.2.

but also the influence of oral tradition. It supposes that Luke and Matthew copied only the comparatively closely reproduced sections from Mark's Gospel and drew the relatively free reproduced pericopes from oral tradition (J.D.G. Dunn). This suggestion is superior to Cadbury's in several regards. (1) As experimental psychology and oral poetry research have demonstrated, the influence of oral tradition can better explain why the verbal agreement is so inconsistent and stylistic improvements are so haphazard. Still, Dunn's model has its weaknesses. (2) The question concerning what may have motivated the two later evangelists to take their material in part from oral tradition, and not from the written Gospel of Mark they had at their disposal, I mention only in passing. It has not been demonstrated that such a procedure was common in antiquity. (3) On the contrary: It is not at all necessary to assume that Matthew and Luke took only the material with a low verbal agreement from oral tradition. As experimental psychology and oral poetry research have demonstrated, parallel texts with close verbal agreement are the common product of human memory and oral tradition. (4) In Dunn's model the question as to how in a copying process different levels of verbal agreement in poetic, speech, prose and narrative material may have originated, concerns only half of the parallel pericopes. Yet, for these it remains unanswered. Is it realistic to assume that in the sections copied from Mark's Gospel, Matthew and Luke independently reproduced the Old Testament quotations more accurately than the words of Jesus, his poetic words more accurately than his prose statements, and these again more accurately than the pure narrative? (5) Dunn's model provides a convincing explanation for the existence of Minor Agreements in the parallel pericopes with a low verbal agreement, however it does not explain the origin of the many Minor Agreements in common material with high verbal agreement, if it was copied from Mark's Gospel by Matthew and Luke.

d. A third variation of the Two-Source Theory, closely related to the second one, suggests that Luke and Matthew, although they had a written copy of Mark at their disposal, reproduced many pericopes of the triple tradition in the form they had earlier stored in memory (J.C. Hawkins). (1) This hypothesis explains the higher verbal agreement in the poetic passage, in the speech material and in the Old Testament quotations better than Dunn does. These characteristics of the synoptic parallel traditions can be best accounted for if Matthew and Luke proceeded regularly in the way described by Hawkins. (2) The same is true for the Minor Agreements. Their existence can be easily explained, if Matthew and Luke wrote down their material regularly on the basis of their personal knowledge of the oral version of Mark's Gospel. Hence, a more effective solution to the Synoptic Problem would be to combine the models suggested by Cadbury, Hawkins and Dunn: Like Mark, Matthew and Luke would have drawn part of the triple tradition from an oral source and would have reproduced the remaining common material, after having read it pericope by pericope in Mark's Gospel, from short-term memory. (3) Yet, this does not answer all the above mentioned questions. Above all, this hypothetically developed procedure looks highly unnatural. Ancient analogies to such a process have not been presented.

e. Nearer at hand is a different model. Every single aspect of the Synoptic Problem may be accounted for if *Matthew and Luke drew their common Markan material from the same oral source as Mark had done before them* (P. Fiebig, A.B. Lord, B. Chilton). (1) The average verbal agreement between the synoptic Gospels is relatively low, despite the religious worth the Gospel authors attributed to their material. (2) The figures for the verbal agreement between the parallel pericopes are very inconsistent and the stylistic revisions introduced by Luke (and Matthew) are incongruent. (3) In addition, the verbal agreement is greater in the Old Testament quotations than in the words of Jesus, greater in the words of Jesus than in the narrative material and greater in the poetic passages than in the prose passages. (4) Finally, the Minor Agreements would be a normal element of the synoptic evidence, if all three Gospels drew out of a common oral tradition. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact, that all these aspects of the synoptic question have close analogies in rabbinic parallel texts, particularly in the two versions of Avot de Rabbi Natan (ARN A par B). Results from experimental psychology and oral

poetry research suggest, that both the New Testament and the rabbinic parallel traditions are connected primarily orally. In the following table the minus represents weakness and the plus strength.

Solutions to the Synoptic Problem Compared					
	<i>Streeter</i>	<i>Cadbury</i>	<i>Dunn</i>	<i>Hawkins</i>	<i>Lord</i>
Verbal Agreement Low	+ -	+	+	+	++
Agreement Inconsistent	-	-	+	+	++
Style Inhomogeneous	-	+ -	+	+	++
Higher Agr. in Poetry	--	-	+ -	+	++
Higher Agr. in Speech	-	-	+ -	+	++
Higher Agr. in Quotes	-	-	+ -	+	++
Minor Agreements	--	--	+ -	+	++

At least in passing it could be mentioned, that none of the church fathers before Augustin ever assumed a literary relationship between the synoptic Gospels. Papias, Justin, Irenaeus and their followers seem to have presupposed that Matthew, Mark and Luke made independent use of the oral Jesus tradition (going back to the eyewitnesses)<sup>3</sup>. All in all our result supports the hypothesis defended at present primarily by B. Reicke, »that the triple traditions in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as well as Mark originated in a living, acoustically preserved tradition«<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. A Hypothetical Scenario

I finish with a hypothetical scenario. It simplifies the process of the synoptic tradition and the development of the synoptic Gospels considerably, since the present research has omitted some important aspects of the Synoptic Problem; for instance, the transition from Aramaic to Greek and the absolute dates of the Gospels. Nevertheless, in this way the rather abstract results can become a little more concrete.

a. Because of their strong religious education and their regular participation in synagogue life, the later transmitters of the synoptic tradition knew central parts of their Holy Scriptures by heart word for word *from childhood*. For this reason the *Old Testament quotations* in the common synoptic material exhibit twice the degree of verbal agreement as the remaining parallel traditions which the disciples learned much later in their lives and under very different conditions.

b. In the *late twenties* of the first century the first transmitters of the synoptic tradition, among them the apostle Peter, committed the most important *statements of their teacher* to memory, all in all about 15.000 words. As members of a basically oral culture the followers of Jesus were skilled and used to doing this. And as disciples of a teacher who in their eyes was (more than) a prophet, they were highly motivated to do it.

In order to be able to learn their master's main statements by heart the apostles had to listen to them again and again over a longer period of time. They could easily remember Jesus' *parables* which made up about one third of his teaching. The reason is that concrete images can better be stored by human memory than abstract statements since image coding makes memorization easier. The sentences of Jesus formulated according to the rules of *semitic parallelism*

<sup>3</sup> Merkel, »Die Überlieferung der Alten Kirche über das Verhältnis der Evangelien« (1990), 566-590.

<sup>4</sup> »Die Entstehungsverhältnisse der synoptischen Evangelien« (1984), 1782; cf. *idem*, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (1986).

could be learned by his followers even more effectively since every poetic regulation consists of repetitions, and every repetition makes remembering a little more easy. For this reason, the verbal agreement between the synoptic parallel texts is higher in poetical sections than in prose passages.

c. *After Easter* not only the words of Jesus but also short *stories about him* were retold and transmitted. These narratives, like the teaching of Jesus, were no longer than 100 words and as short and easy to visualize as his parables. Therefore they too were well-suited for easy memorization. The stories about Jesus were subject to *less poetical regulation* and were not as highly regarded as Jesus' own statements. Therefore they were transmitted a little less carefully than the words of Jesus. For this reason the agreement in wording between the synoptic Gospels is relatively low in their narrative passages.

The single pericopes of the synoptic tradition were not transmitted separately. Already in the oral period they were connected to *collections*, related among each other by common content or form or (particularly in the passion narrative) by a close chronological link. Altogether, the post-Easter synoptic tradition contained about 30.000 words and was much shorter than, for instance, the Old Testament (with its about 300.000 words), which most scribes knew by heart entirely, or the oral tradition of the rabbis (containing more than 1.000.000 words), which at least a number of Jewish theologians had committed to memory. Not least because of its *moderate length*, it was possible for the disciples of Jesus to store the whole synoptic tradition in memory, even without the benefit of rabbinic education and training.

d. The first disciples of Jesus preserved the synoptic tradition *for decades primarily in memory*, delivered it orally and handed it over to their disciples, men of the following generation (like John Mark), as an oral tradition. Since human memory can remember the *content* of a statement much better than its exact *words*, the oral transmission of the synoptic tradition led, just as the oral poetry of other cultures, to substantial differences in wording. The repeated reproductions of Jesus' words and deeds by one disciple in spite of minor differences in content exhibited many omissions, additions, paraphrases as well as word and sentence inversions. The differences of wording between the reproductions of the synoptic tradition by different evangelical »rhapsodists« were even greater.

Moreover, *stylistic revision* took place in the course of oral transmission. Some were introduced intentionally into the synoptic material; others came about unintentionally. The revisions were moderate and, as may be expected for an oral tradition, anything but consistent.

e. *Decades later* one of the oral transmitters wrote down the main story line of the synoptic tradition that had been carried only by memory for a long time, the *first written Gospel*. The origin of Mark's Gospel did not, however, put a sudden end to the oral transmission of its content. Nor did Mark's Gospel become instantly well known in all areas of early Christianity. For quite a long period the synoptic triple tradition was *transmitted both in written and oral form*. And in this early era the Christian churches did not attribute a higher authority to the manuscripts containing Mark's Gospel than to its oral performances from memory.

f. Other transmitters of the synoptic tradition, among them *Matthew and Luke*, wrote their books *later* than Mark. In the meantime the oral triple tradition had become somewhat shorter and its wording was still flexible. Matthew and Luke did not copy the first written Gospel but drew *independently of Mark* and of each other from the same oral source as he had done. By this process hundreds of Minor Agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark emerged.

*As it were, each of our three synoptic Gospels »froze« a different memory performance of the oral triple tradition by writing it down.* To this main line of the Jesus narrative, Matthew and Luke added further statements of Jesus and stories about him, which they mainly received from oral tradition. *Therefore all the synoptic parallel texts display a number of characteristic marks of the oral synoptic tradition that would have disappeared through simple copying.*