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OMNE VERBUM SONAT:  
THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ORAL  
ENVIRONMENT OF LATE WESTERN ANTIQUITY

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One of the more salutary developments in recent research on the NT has been the recovery of the awareness that its documents were produced within the environment of late Western antiquity and that therefore knowledge of that environment will aid in their understanding. Research in this area has included both historical and socio-anthropological methods, and the results have illumined the earliest Christian community in its relationship to its immediate cultural environs.

There is one aspect of that environment, however, which has been neglected in NT research. That aspect centers on the fact that we have in the culture of late Western antiquity a culture of high residual orality<sup>1</sup> which nevertheless communicated significantly by means of literary creations. Such a predominantly oral environment presented a situation almost totally different from that within which we currently operate, even though they had written documents as do we. The apparent similarity has led modern scholars to overlook almost entirely how such an oral overlay would affect the way communication was carried on by means of written media. It is that aspect of late Western antiquity, as it impinges on our understanding of the production, dissemination, and understanding of the NT documents that I wish to address.<sup>2</sup>

The approach is dictated by the problem itself. Our first task will be to review what we know of the way in which written documents were created

<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Ong defines residual orality as "habits of thought and expression . . . deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture" (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971] 27-28).

<sup>2</sup> Hints of what I want to do show that this question is not entirely unknown (see Jacob Neusner, *Oral Tradition in Judaism: The Case of the Mishnah* [A. B. Lord Studies in Oral Tradition 1; New York: Garland, 1987] esp. 66; Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Int* 43 [1989] 32-44, esp. 33), but to my knowledge it has not been systematically asked of our evidence. We tend to assume the primacy of the written text and of its reading *as we know it*; what I am urging is that we need to keep in mind the essentially oral communication of the written texts of the NT and shape our examination of those texts, and their interpretation, accordingly.

and how they were read in the Hellenistic era. Once we are clear on those points, we will look at the NT documents within that literary environment. We will be looking for indications revealing how those documents sought to communicate their content to those to whom they were addressed. We will conclude with some observations about the impact of our discoveries on some of the ways NT literature is interpreted.

Before we can begin that investigation, however, it will be necessary to sketch out how the problem with which I am concerned is related to the many other attempts to discern and illumine the significance of the interface between written and oral communication. The oral elements within Hellenistic traditions, as well as within the traditions contained in NT documents, have of course not been neglected, and my first task will be to indicate how those investigations differ from the task I am undertaking. Only then will we be in a position to look more closely at the problems I want to investigate.

## I

The theoretical results of the transformation of culture from primarily oral to primarily written has been extensively investigated and has produced fascinating results.

Prof. Walter J. Ong has written that “more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness,”<sup>3</sup> and students of other cultures have proposed similar theorems.<sup>4</sup> The invention of printing has magnified the cultural change inherent in writing<sup>5</sup> until in modern times, we tend to think of the written word as the primal form of communication.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, there has been a tendency in some quarters to assume too sudden and dramatic a change from oral to written, and hence to draw premature conclusions about it.<sup>7</sup> There is considerable evidence that oral and

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982) 79 *et passim*. See also his *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 2, as well as his *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) *in toto*. Jack Goody notes that “the invention of writing . . . changed the whole structure of the cultural tradition” of the ancient Near East (“The Consequences of Literacy,” in J. Goody and I. Watt, *The Consequences of Literacy*, 27–68 [Cambridge: University Press, 1968] 67; see also 34, and “Introduction” [pp. 1–26] 4).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Goody, who outlines a way to test such a theory (“Introduction,” in *The Consequences of Literacy*, 4); see also John Miles Foley, “The Traditional Oral Audience,” *Balkan Studies* 18 (1977) 145–53; Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977); Eric A. Havelock, “Oral Composition in the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles,” *New Literary History* 16 (1984) 175–97; Foley, “The Oral Theory in Context,” in *Oral Traditional Literature: Festschrift Albert Bates Lord* (ed. J. M. Foley; Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1981), and the literature cited in them.

<sup>5</sup> On that problem, see the writings of W. J. Ong, e.g., *Orality and Literacy*, 130–31, 148–49, 173; *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977) 288.

<sup>6</sup> See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, chap. 1, “The Orality of language”; E. A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: University Press, 1982) 48.

<sup>7</sup> The observation that “the very genre of the written gospel may be linked with the intent

written cultures existed side by side in the ancient world, particularly since writing “tended to be used as a help to memory rather than as an autonomous and independent mode of communication.”<sup>8</sup>

While this interrelationship between oral and written communication in late Western antiquity stands at the root of the problem I want to treat, the whole area of the change wrought on human consciousness by the invention of writing and the problems experienced in classical Western antiquity in adapting from an exclusively oral to a written form of communication lie beyond the purview of my discussion.

A second area related to the oral residue of late Western antiquity which has received much discussion concerns the origin and composition of oral materials, whether as individual traditions or as more lengthy epics, which are later preserved in print.

The classical problem here relates to the origin of the Homeric epics. The disparate phenomena presented by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have long been noted<sup>9</sup> and were explained as the result of continual reworking of the narratives by “scholarly poet-interpolators.”<sup>10</sup> The discovery of repeated formulaic phrases in the epics, however, phrases which appear wherever a similar meter is required by the hexametric form of the poems, led Milman Perry to suggest that the phenomena of the Homeric epics was to be laid at the doorstep of the teller’s need to maintain meter in the course of oral recitation.<sup>11</sup> This theory was then tested on a variety of traditional literature,

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to provide a radical alternative to a preceding tradition” (Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] xvii) would fall into the category of premature conclusions; see the evidence in n. 10. Much else in Kelber’s book would in fact warn against such a conclusion.

<sup>8</sup> The language is taken from Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40; see also Finnegan: “In practice, interaction between oral and written forms is extremely common, and the idea that the use of writing *automatically* deals a death blow to oral literary forms has nothing to support it” (*Oral Poetry*, 160). Havelock cites Homer as an example of “complex compositions reflecting the beginning of a partnership between the oral and the written” (*Literate Revolution*, 9).

<sup>9</sup> Such phenomena as narrative inconsistencies, appearances of different dialects, and archaeological inaccuracies were explained as the result of a series of “Homers,” each of whom had revised the text and left textual footprints. For an excellent summary of this discussion, see Foley, “Introduction,” in *Oral Traditional Literature*; the phenomena cited above come from p. 29. Ong also contains a good summary, with literature, of this discussion (“The modern discovery of primary oral cultures,” in *Orality and Literacy*).

<sup>10</sup> The phrase is from Foley, “The Oral Theory in Context,” in *Oral Traditional Literature*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Perry suggested that the “failure to see the difference between written and oral verse was the greatest single obstacle to our understanding of Homer” (“Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I, Homer and the Homeric Style,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 [1930] 269), and in that and a second article (“Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. II, The Homeric Language as the Language of an Oral Poetry,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 43 [1932] 1–50) developed his theory that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed orally and in a traditional style much dependent on a standard stock of formulas, each adapted to a specific metrical situation (I owe these references to Foley, “The Oral Theory in Context,” in *Oral Traditional Literature*, 31). See the section of Foley’s “Introduction” entitled

principally on contemporary Yugoslavian epic singers by Albert B. Lord, who proved to the satisfaction of many that traditional oral composition draws in fact on such stocks of preformulated phrases.<sup>12</sup> While not all have been convinced of the validity of the purely oral origin of the Homeric epics<sup>13</sup> or of the validity of the Serbo-Croatian analogies,<sup>14</sup> the episodic nature of much literature does point to origins in oral composition and transmission<sup>15</sup> and has led to a clearer understanding of the origin and function of such material.<sup>16</sup>

While this area of investigation is surely of interest for an analysis of the NT materials,<sup>17</sup> it is only tangential to the problem I wish to address and will therefore not be further pursued in this investigation.

Related to that area of inquiry is the problem of the oral transmission of materials, and the relationship of that process to the written texts in which those traditions are now preserved.<sup>18</sup>

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“Oral Traditional Theory (1949–1978)” (pp. 65–79 in his *Oral Traditional Literature*) for an account of these discoveries and for the relevant literature.

<sup>12</sup> The classic study is A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); he analyzed not only Serbo-Croatian oral epics but also traditional literature ranging from ancient Greek to medieval French and English.

<sup>13</sup> William Chase Greene, for example, argues against purely oral composition in such authors as Homer and Hesiod by noting that “it is a lesser assumption to suppose that the poet used writing, as notes or outlines, in the process of composition, while planning the poems” (“The Spoken and the Written Word,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 60 [1951] 31). Finnegan stresses “the possibility of more complex interactions between many different modes of transmission and distribution” (*Oral Poetry*, 168) and hence rejects what she terms “romantic theories about the nature and purity of ‘oral transmission’” (p. 169).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Havelock, “Oral Composition,” esp. 181.

<sup>15</sup> A good case is made by Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance*, esp. 34–39.

<sup>16</sup> A basic insight derived from these studies concerns the fact that “composition” and “transmission” are in fact not two separable events, but are unified in the oral performance itself; see A. B. Lord, “The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature,” in *The Relationships among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (ed. W. O. Walker; San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1978) 33–91; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 145–46.

<sup>17</sup> As examples, see Amos Wilder (*Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* [London: SCM, 1964]), who sought to deal with “the oral speech that lies behind” NT writings (p. 10) by asking about “the special role of oral as against written discourse” (p. 11), and Kelber (*The Oral and the Written Gospel*), and more recently Dewey (“Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark”), who has raised the question with respect to the Gospel of Mark. The investigation of the possible oral origin of the Mishna is a much-debated topic and cannot be dealt with in this paper. For a careful analysis of the mnemonic structure of the Mishna, see Jacob Neusner, *Oral Tradition*. Counter to earlier views that the Mishna represents the sedimentation of various earlier stages of oral tradition (see Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* [Lund: Gleerup, 1961] III, and the literature cited in that discussion), Neusner argues that it is “unlikely . . . that the document took shape in an incremental process” (*Oral Tradition*, 3 n. 1) and concludes that since “the Mishnah was formulated pretty much all at once, in a single process” that process “may be compared not to sedimentary but to igneous rock” (p. 75).

<sup>18</sup> For a valuable summary of the earlier discussion, see W. H. Kelber, “The Pre-Canonical Synoptic Transmission,” in *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 1–43, and the literature cited.

The oral environment of late Western antiquity guaranteed that the sheer act of committing traditions to writing did not eliminate their continued transmission in non-writtten form,<sup>19</sup> and recent investigations have emphasized the mnemonic structures of nonclassical oral traditional materials.<sup>20</sup> It should not be surprising, therefore, that some at least of the mnemonic techniques of oral transmission have left their mark on the written forms of traditions once orally transmitted, and recent investigation has sought to demonstrate their presence.<sup>21</sup> Such mnemonic aids to the oral transmission of biblical materials have also been investigated, most notably those in the Gospel of Mark,<sup>22</sup> but the real difficulty attendant on reading an ancient manuscript meant that readers tended to memorize as they read,<sup>23</sup> something that would have lent continuing validity to mnemonic aids and lessened the likelihood of their being eliminated.<sup>24</sup>

While this has been a fruitful field of investigation and further work needs to be undertaken, the oral transmission of the NT materials and such mutations as they may or may not have undergone in that process, or in the process of being committed to writing, are not the problem to which I want to address myself here. Nor am I interested in finding and cataloguing the various techniques of ancient rhetoric that were used, intentionally or not, by various NT authors.

In an oral culture such as that of late Western antiquity, the study of rhetoric occupied an honored place, since it dealt with structuring thought in such a way as to be most likely to accomplish the purpose for which it was formulated.<sup>25</sup> Such rhetoric,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the preference of Papias for the oral over the written gospel traditions long after the Gospels had been written down (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4). B. Gerhardsson argued that lack of general distribution of all four Gospels until well into the second century CE also indicated the continuing oral function of gospel traditions (*Memory*, 200). On this whole problem, see Helmut Koester, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern* (Berlin: Akademie, 1957).

<sup>20</sup> Foley reports on the use of a musical instrument as a mnemonic aid ("The Traditional Oral Audience"); see also Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," 31.

<sup>21</sup> See Ong, "Some psychodynamics of Orality," in *Orality and Literacy*, esp. 34, 38; Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) 291. For a penetrating investigation of the mnemonic structure of the materials in the Mishna, see Neusner, *Oral Tradition*, although he does not think those materials owe that structure to a long pre-written period of oral transmission.

<sup>22</sup> For a convenient summary of recent discussion, see Kelber, "Mark's Oral Legacy," in *The Oral and the Written Gospel*; Dewey has sought to carry this investigation further ("Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark").

<sup>23</sup> See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 119.

<sup>24</sup> While some material may have been written first, with the express purpose of its later memorization, e.g., orations (see Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 10, discussed in George A. Kennedy, *Quintilian* [New York: Publishers, 1969] 98) or the traditions in the Mishna (Neusner, who speaks of the relationship of the "new revolutionary medium, the oral" to the "old and established medium, the written" [*Oral Tradition*, 25]), the biblical material at least seems to have been written subsequent to a period of oral traditioning. There is disagreement on whether written "notebooks" were (so Gerhardsson, *Memory*, 160–61) or were not (Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 11) used as aids in the memorization of the Mishna.

<sup>25</sup> G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 3, for this language.

whether oral or written, had a predilection for balance, symmetry, and framing,<sup>26</sup> with the whole cohering in an organic unity,<sup>27</sup> and it was to ensure the presence of those characteristics in oral or literary communication that the art of rhetoric was developed.

Analysis of such characteristics has been undertaken under the rubric “rhetorical criticism.”<sup>28</sup> This approach to ancient literature is less concerned with how the text came into existence than with the text as it now appears,<sup>29</sup> and seeks to isolate the basic rhetorical units in a given work.<sup>30</sup> By an analysis of the language of such units, rhetorical critics attempt to discern their structure and thus their intention.<sup>31</sup> Obviously, since the NT writings belong to that world as well, such as analysis of their texts is also an appropriate endeavor, and it has been undertaken by scholars who are primarily classicists as well as scholars who are primarily students of biblical literature.<sup>32</sup>

While that task concerns itself with forms developed primarily in relation to oral delivery, and while such rhetorical forms were intended to lend persuasiveness to speech—a persuasiveness enhanced if the listeners were

<sup>26</sup> So G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 14–15.

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy quotes Socrates (*Phaedrus* 264) on the organic nature of a good speech (*Classical Rhetoric*, 56).

<sup>28</sup> This term is used in two ways. For OT scholar James Muilenburg it meant the attempt to understand “the nature of Hebrew literary composition” by “exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit” and seeing how such devices as were employed were “formulated and ordered into a unified whole.” Muilenburg used “rhetoric” in the broadest possible sense and did not presuppose a given set of oral or literary conventions against which to measure a given literary unity; see “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969) 1–18, 8. As used by classicist G. Kennedy, on the other hand, the term means analyzing Greek literature in terms of “classical rhetoric” in order “to try to hear [the] words as a Greek-speaking audience would have heard them” (*New Testament*, 10).

<sup>29</sup> On this point Muilenburg and Kennedy agree. Muilenburg wanted to investigate “other literary features” (i.e., those in the present shape of the text) which were “all too frequently ignored” by the form critics (“Form Criticism and Beyond,” 4–5); Kennedy remarks that “rhetorical criticism takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing” (*New Testament*, 4).

<sup>30</sup> Again, Muilenburg and Kennedy agree. Muilenburg: “The first concern of the rhetorical critic, it goes without saying, is to define the limits or scope of the literary unit” (“Form Criticism and Beyond,” 8–9); Kennedy: “First comes a determination of the rhetorical unit to be studied” (*New Testament*, 33).

<sup>31</sup> So Kennedy, *New Testament*: rhetorical criticism seeks to determine how a given text “would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries” (p. 4). As any student of Muilenburg knew, Muilenburg felt the form critics ignored the present impact of the text in favor of determining the origin of the materials contained in it, to the detriment of understanding why the text had been shaped as it was or how it was intended to function.

<sup>32</sup> J. Dewey (*Markan Public Debate, Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1–3:6* [SBLDS 48; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980]) applied Muilenburg’s method to the Gospel of Mark (see 1, 3); H.-D. Betz applied criteria drawn from classical rhetoric to Galatians (*Galatians* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]). Kennedy looked at the NT from the same perspective (*New Testament*); for his criticism of the attempt by Betz, see his chapter “Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans,” esp. 146–47.

familiar with, and could hence anticipate, the various steps contained in such an argument—it does not address itself directly to my concern, namely, indications in written documents that would make their oral performance understandable even in the absence of any formal rhetorical training on the part of the writer or the listener.<sup>33</sup> I will therefore not concern myself in any fundamental way with an analysis of the various classical rhetorical devices contained in the NT writings.

## II

Having thus defined, if only negatively, our area of investigation, we turn now to a delineation of the oral environment of late Western antiquity within which the NT documents were produced. We shall do that by reviewing the way in which written documents in general were created and how they were read in the Hellenistic era. Of primary importance to this discussion is the realization that ancient culture remained committed to the spoken word.<sup>34</sup> For antiquity, a page, even individual letters, “spoke” or “were silent,”<sup>35</sup> a witness to the oral origins of Western, and especially Greek, literature.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, writing itself in the earliest Greek period served simply as a reminder of oral pronouncements<sup>37</sup> and even much later was still mistrusted as a

<sup>33</sup> The discipline of “literary criticism” as practiced by such scholars as N. Petersen, J. Kingsbury, M. A. Tolbert, R. Tannehill, and D. Rhoads shares with rhetorical criticism an interest in the text as it functions in its present configuration, but is not primarily concerned with the oral nature or function of the text. Another discipline, “reader-response criticism,” is similarly more concerned with how literature functions than with characteristics identifying its oral/aural nature (for a collection of essays on this discipline, see *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (ed. J. P. Tompkins; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980)). Both approaches are related only tangentially to the topic I am pursuing.

<sup>34</sup> Ong describes “the first age of writing” as characterized by “writers of more or less orally conceived discourse.” Authors addressed themselves to “imagined listeners at an imagined oral performance” (*Interfaces*, 282); see further examples in Ong, *Rhetoric*, 2–4; Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> “Pagina loquitur aut silet, littera sonat” (Josef Balogh, “Voces Paginarum, Beiträge zur Geschichte des lauten Lesens und Schreibens,” *Philologus* 82 [1927] 203 *et passim*).

<sup>36</sup> See Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 110. While orations were polished and published as works of literature (*Classical Rhetoric*, 17), and even the Greek dramas were written before they were performed or published (Havelock, “Oral Composition,” 175), nevertheless even there the material was “framed to catch the attention of the ear . . . not the eye” (Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 4–5).

<sup>37</sup> See Havelock *Literate Revolution*, 201, and the references given there. Greene speculates about Hesiod as author that “the intricate pattern of the *Theogony* and the steady march of ideas of the *Works and Days* must have required at least ὑπομνήματα in the process of composition, and must have been reduced to writing as soon as they were finished” (“The Spoken and the Written Word,” 33). Orators also used notes on occasion, but they did not customarily read speeches written ahead of time (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 98). Letters were also regarded as “one of the two sides of a dialogue” (Demetrius, quoting “Artemon”; see William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, NT Series; Philadelphia:

vehicle for the transmission of cultural tradition.<sup>38</sup> Papias's preference for oral accounts over written records<sup>39</sup> is paralleled by numerous remarks of Seneca, a master epistolary artist of the first century, expressing similar preference for the spoken over the written word.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to a cultural bias in favor of the oral over the written, the sheer physical nature of the written page in classical antiquity militated against its ease of reading and in that way also contributed to the culture's reliance on the oral mode in communication. The written page consisted entirely of lines each containing a similar number of letters, lines that ended and began irrespective of the words themselves.<sup>41</sup> Documents were written without systematic punctuation, without indications of sentence or paragraph structure,<sup>42</sup> indeed without separation of the letters into individual words.<sup>43</sup> As a result, no visible indications presented themselves to the ancient readers that would have rendered them aid in their attempt to

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Fortress, 1973) 8; Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 12.

<sup>38</sup> See Socrates in *Phaedrus* 274c–277a; esp. 275d–276d. For a discussion of this aspect of Socrates' (Plato's!) thought, see Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word," 23; Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," 51; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 58–59. A surprising comment on modern inability to appreciate the ancient perception of the orality of literature is Kennedy's complaint that ancient literary criticism "never succeeded in describing the characteristics of carefully edited, written texts" but rather literature "continued to be analyzed as though, like oral speech, it were entirely linear, each word spoken in order, with no opportunity for the audience to reread or to compare portions of the text" (*Classical Rhetoric*, 116; emphasis added). As we shall see, the sheer physical nature of ancient manuscripts made comparing portions of the text all but impossible.

<sup>39</sup> "For I did not suppose that things gained from books would profit me so much as things gained by means of a living, surviving voice" (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4).

<sup>40</sup> "Of course, however, the living voice . . . will help you more than the written word" (*Ep. Mor.* 6.5). Seneca also concedes that his letters are "carelessly written" since they should resemble "what my conversation would be if you and I were sitting in one another's company" (*Ep. Mor.* 75.1; the language is from Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 28–29; see also Demetrius 229, in idem 19; on the freer structure of language in letters, see Doty, *Letters*, 15).

<sup>41</sup> For comments on this matter, see Frederic G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932) 64–67; Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," 42. Suetonius notes as a peculiarity of the emperor Augustus that he did not divide a word at the end of a line, but wrote the remaining letters below the rest of the word and drew a loop around them (*The Deified Augustus*, 87). Since this was a noteworthy peculiarity, it is clear that the normal practice was simply to continue letters on the following line, regardless of the words to which they belonged.

<sup>42</sup> An occasional manuscript has some indications of punctuation, most often to indicate a pause in sense, but never in thorough or systematic form; see Kenyon, *Books*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> There is an indication that some Latin writers had begun to separate letters to indicate words; Seneca notes that unlike the Greeks, "we Romans, even when writing, have become accustomed to separate our words" (*Ep. Mor.* 40.11; language from R. M. Gummere, *Seneca* [LCL] 1. 271). There is no similar evidence of which I am aware that this practice was adopted in Greek manuscripts. A reader was thus faced with a manuscript devoid of "any of the aids to which we are accustomed" (Kenyon, *Books*, 66; see also Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 119).

discern the structure, and hence the meaning, of the piece of literature they confronted.<sup>44</sup>

That is, of course, not to say that writing and written documents were unknown, or even rare, in the Western world of late antiquity. Although the lack of printing technology necessarily limited the number and hence availability of written documents, there is nevertheless ample record of the existence of such written documents in a wide variety of purposes and types. While Roman laws were recorded on bronze tablets and kept in the temple of Saturn,<sup>45</sup> there was also a variety of other types of documents written on a variety of materials,<sup>46</sup> the most common of which was, of course, papyrus.<sup>47</sup> It found widely diverse uses, from personal letters, records of local merchants, and volumes of epigrams, satires, and histories,<sup>48</sup> to the accounts of the actions of the senate<sup>49</sup> and the daily gazette of events in the city of Rome.<sup>50</sup> Small wonder that Pliny the Elder was moved to the very modern observation that Roman civilization depended on the existence and use of paper! (*Nat. Hist.* 13.21.68).<sup>51</sup>

For the most part, such paper appears to have been readily available. Although it was subject to shortages—one such shortage in the latter years of the reign of Tiberius moved the Senate to assume responsibility for its allocation (*Pliny Nat. Hist.* 13.27.89)<sup>52</sup>—references to paper's broad use even after that time suggest that such shortages were temporary. Made exclusively

<sup>44</sup> Balogh remarks on the difficulty this caused for reading written documents ("Voices," 227). Suetonius reports that Caesar was the first to arrange epistles, in this instance those sent to the senate, in columns on the page(s), rather than simply across the page(s) and from top to bottom (*The Deified Julius* 6).

<sup>45</sup> It also served as the treasury (Suetonius *The Deified Julius* 28.3). That still did not ensure indestructibility; Vespasian sought to restore the three thousand tablets after they had been destroyed in the fire that swept Rome in Nero's reign (Suetonius *The Deified Vespasian* 8.5–9.1).

<sup>46</sup> Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* 13.21.69) mentions palm leaves, bark of certain trees, sheets of lead and of linen in addition to wax tablets and parchment.

<sup>47</sup> See Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," 41.

<sup>48</sup> A good idea of the variety can be gained from looking at the contents of *Select Papyri* "Non-Literary Papyri, Private Affairs" (trans. A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952) and *Select Papyri* "Official Documents" (trans. A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

<sup>49</sup> The *Acta Senatus*, mentioned, for example, by Suetonius (*Tiberius* 73.1). In addition, Augustus and then Caligula published the *Rationes Imperii*, although Tiberius did not (Suetonius *Gaius Caligula* 16.1).

<sup>50</sup> The *Diurna Populi Romani* (or *Acta Diurna*); see Tacitus *Annals* 16:22; Juvenal *Satires* 6.483. They were evidently kept as archives, since Suetonius consulted them (*Gaius Caligula* 8.2).

<sup>51</sup> Such documents were carefully preserved; Pliny the Elder also reports seeing documents from the hands of Tiberius, Gaius Gracchus, Cicero, Virgil, and Augustus; see also n. 57. Catullus's wish that his book of poems might last one hundred years thus had some substance to it (*Poem* 1.9–10).

<sup>52</sup> Pliny credits a restriction on the export of papyrus for the invention of parchment (13.21.70).

in Egypt (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 13.21.69),<sup>53</sup> it was available in a variety of qualities<sup>54</sup> and sizes.<sup>55</sup> Its uses were as varied as those of modern paper, from the publication of fine literature and communication by letters official, philosophical, commercial, familial, and friendly, to a convenient wrapping for fish.<sup>56</sup>

Paper was, of course, the favored material for the publication of books, normally in the form of scrolls.<sup>57</sup> Because each copy had to be handmade, the extent of distribution was nowhere near modern standards; the publication of one thousand copies of a book was cause for comment (Pliny *Letters* 4.7).<sup>58</sup> Yet if limited in numbers and access by modern standards, books were nevertheless available in libraries<sup>59</sup> or, for those who could afford to purchase them, from booksellers.<sup>60</sup> The wide distribution of copies of the writings of the NT gives evidence of the extent to which literature could circulate even among the less prominent members of Hellenistic culture.

The existence of such wide varieties of written material, however, should not mislead us with respect to the essential orality of that culture, an orality demonstrated both in the manner by which literature was produced and in the manner in which it was read. Both were predominantly, indeed exclusively, oral.

The normal mode of composition of any writing was to dictate it to a scribe—for the wealthy, often one of their slaves.<sup>61</sup> Because of such a

<sup>53</sup> Pliny, citing Marcus Varro, says Alexander the Great's founding of Alexandria marked the beginning of the use of papyrus. Apparently reeds for the pens used in writing also came from Egypt; see Martial *Epigrams* 14.38.

<sup>54</sup> According to Pliny, the grades in descending order of quality were Claudia Augusta, Livia, hieratic, amphitheater (upgraded by Fannius in Rome to Fanniana, a first-class paper), Saitic, Taeneotic, and emporitic; this last useful only for wrapping paper, not for writing (*Nat. Hist.* 13.23.75–80). Poorer grades tended to be spongy and to blot (Pliny *Letters* 8.15; *Nat. Hist.* 13.25.81).

<sup>55</sup> Papyrus varied in size, up to eighteen inches in width, but the largest tended to have defects (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 13.24.80). Papyrus was sold in rolls of twenty sheets (*Nat. Hist.* 13.23.77) of varying widths depending on quality (13.24.78), and as individual sheets of varying sizes (see Martial *Epigrams* 1.44). For a good discussion of the dimensions of papyrus, see Kenyon, *Books*, 47–54.

<sup>56</sup> Martial worried that his books of poems would be used to wrap fried fish (*Epigrams* 3.2.3–4; see also 6.61.6–8).

<sup>57</sup> The edges of the rolls were smoothed with pumice (Tibullus 3.1.10; Martial *Epigrams* 1.66.10; 8.72.1–2), the ends of the rods on which the papyrus was rolled carried decorations (Martial *Epigrams* 1.66.11; Catullus *Poem* 22.6–7), and the books, covered with cases (Tibullus 3.1.9; Catullus *Poem* 22.7) occasionally colored purple (Martial *Epigrams* 8.72.1), were often kept in wooden tubs (Martial *Epigrams* 14.84).

<sup>58</sup> The copies were distributed “throughout all Italy and the provinces.”

<sup>59</sup> See Kenyon, *Books*, 80; Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” 51.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Martial's books were sold in shops in Rome in Potter's Field (Martial *Epigrams* 1.3.1–2), by Atrectus opposite Caesar's Forum (1.117.10–14), and by Tryphon in an undesignated location (4.72; 13.3.3–4); Pliny to his joy learned that his books were sold as far away as Lyons (*Letters* 9.11); see also Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” 38–39.

<sup>61</sup> See Balogh, “Voces,” 232; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 95.

widespread practice, scribes were lauded as highly important<sup>62</sup> or blamed for imperfect work.<sup>63</sup> The material dictated would then be reviewed by the author, who corrected scribal mistakes.<sup>64</sup> Dictation was recommended over writing in one's own hand by Dio Chrysostom (*Discourse 18 18*),<sup>65</sup> and famous personages, we are told, were regularly accompanied by a slave prepared at any time to take dictation, whether on horseback,<sup>66</sup> in chariot or sedan chair (Pliny *Letters 3.5*),<sup>67</sup> or at leisure in the baths (*Letters 3.5*).<sup>68</sup> Julius Caesar was famous for his ability to keep multiple secretaries simultaneously occupied as he dictated successively portions of individual letters to each of them.<sup>69</sup> The disadvantage of such a process is, of course, that it slows the rate of composition since dictation demanded speech at a very slow pace (Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 40.10).<sup>70</sup> This was compensated for to some extent by the development of a type of shorthand (Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 90.25; Martial *Epigrams 5.51*),<sup>71</sup> but the evidence suggests that there were not many scribes who possessed such ability.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Havelock argues that representations of scribes in the form of dedicatory offerings show that "they commanded a craft which conferred social status on its possessors" (*Literate Revolution*, 202). See also Balogh, "Voices," 232.

<sup>63</sup> Martial blames the haste of his *librarius* for "too obscure or not quite good Latin" in his epigrams (2.8). Pseudo-Demetrius notes that letters that ought to be skillfully written are "composed indifferently by those who undertake such services for men in public office" (Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 31).

<sup>64</sup> Martial is of the opinion that such authorial corrections added to the value of his books (7.17).

<sup>65</sup> Dictation allows the composition to be closer to speech and is easier. He also has advice for those who insist on doing their own writing, however.

<sup>66</sup> Caesar was regularly accompanied by a body guard, and a slave "accustomed to write from dictation as (Caesar) traveled" (Plutarch *Caesar 17.3*).

<sup>67</sup> The scribe even had special gloves that permitted him to write in winter.

<sup>68</sup> The only time he did not dictate, or was not read to, was when he was actually in the water!

<sup>69</sup> Anywhere from four to seven (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 25.92; see also Plutarch *Caesar 17.5*).

<sup>70</sup> The complaint is that Vinicius spoke so slowly it is as if he were dictating (*tamquam dictaret, non diceret*). The technology of dictation argues against those who say that St. Paul got confused in grammar because the words tumbled out so rapidly; it is more likely that by the time he got midway into the sentence he had forgotten how he began it!

<sup>71</sup> According to Martial, shorthand teachers were well attended by pupils (*Epigrams 10.62*). The emperor Titus was famous for his ability at shorthand (Suetonius *The Deified Titus 8.3.2*). According to R. M. Gummere, Suetonius reports that shorthand was invented by a freedman of Cicero and perfected in the Augustan period by the grammarian Ennius, but he gives no references from Suetonius (*Seneca ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales LCLL II* [New York: Putnam, 1930] 414 n. b). Even then, shorthand writers were not always able to keep up with people like Julius Caesar, who spoke rapidly (Suetonius *The Deified Julius 1.55.3*); see also Kennedy, "Classical and Christian Source Criticism," in *The Relationships among the Gospels*, ed. W. O. Walker, 136.

<sup>72</sup> Kenyon notes that the early Christian community was not likely to be "able to command the services of the best professional scribes" (*Books*, 97), although some did attend the aged Origen (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.36; I owe this reference to Kennedy, "Classical and Christian Source Criticism," 136).

This is not to say that people never wrote in their own hand. The practice of taking notes, whether to have a record of a speech<sup>73</sup> or to preserve immediate impressions for later recall, was widespread.<sup>74</sup> Such notes could, of course, be dictated—Pliny the elder met his death for lingering too long near the erupting Vesuvius, dictating notes on his observations<sup>75</sup>—but they were frequently written in one’s own hand. Potential authors would also frequently make such notes, or even compose parts of a piece of literature, but even in such cases, the final composition was dictated.<sup>76</sup> Ease and speed of writing and of erasure made wax tablets the most popular medium for such notes,<sup>77</sup> and they were widely employed in a variety of situations.<sup>78</sup> Their loss was mourned in terms appropriate for the death of a friend,<sup>79</sup> and, like a popular credit card, the recommended practice seems to have been never to leave home without them.<sup>80</sup>

There is further evidence that not everyone shared normal zeal for dictation. Quintilian advised that writing in one’s own hand was better than dictation: one was not limited to the speed and intelligence of the scribe,<sup>81</sup> and it was easier for an orator to memorize things written in his own hand

<sup>73</sup> The practice could prove fatal: when Augustus, as triumvir, saw a knight taking notes on his speech, he ordered him “stabbed on the spot” on suspicion of his being a spy (*The Deified Augustus* 2.27.3).

<sup>74</sup> To such a desire on Arrian’s part we owe the discourses of Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.1.2).

<sup>75</sup> See Pliny *Letters* 6.16; his desire “ut deprehenderat oculus, dictaret enotaretque” cost him his life.

<sup>76</sup> Pliny reports his practice of composing part of a work, summoning his secretary, dictating what he had composed, returning to further composition, then dictating, and so on (*Letters* 9.36). See Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” on the use of notes (ὑπομνήματα) in recording philosophical dialogues (pp. 46–47); Wayne A. Meeks, “Hypomnemata from an Untamed Sceptic: A Response to George Kennedy,” in *The Relationships among the Gospels*, ed. W. O. Walker, 157–172, on their use in the composition of history (p. 168); Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 3, Preface, 6, on their use in lawcourts.

<sup>77</sup> Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 10.3.31. He notes that it is harder to read words written on a wax tablet than on parchment; see also Martial *Epigrams* 14.5. Writing on papyrus could be erased with a “punic sponge,” but apparently not so readily after the ink had completely dried; see Martial *Epigrams* 4.10.

<sup>78</sup> They could carry a love letter (Martial *Epigrams* 14.6; Propertius *Elegies* 3.23.10–18), notice of imperial promotion (Martial *Epigrams* 14.4), or even the ledgers of a “greedy merchant” (Propertius *Elegies* 3.23.19–20). Augustus used notes written on them for private conversations, even with his wife! (Suetonius *The Deified Augustus* 84.2; I owe this reference to G. A. Kennedy, “Classical and Christian Source Criticism,” 131). Quintilian cautions against giving a student an overly wide tablet, lest the ensuing composition, measured by numbers of lines, be excessively long! (*Inst. Or.* 10.3.32). See also Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 333; Doty, *Letters*, 17.

<sup>79</sup> Propertius *Elegies* 3.23.5–6, 9–10; their return would bring a reward, 20–24.

<sup>80</sup> Seneca reports that he and Maximus were never without dried figs or wax tablets (*Ep. Mor.* 87.3); Pliny took them when he went hunting and recommended the practice (*Letters* 1.6); Catullus and his friend Licinius used them to play games (*Poems* 50.1–6).

<sup>81</sup> He is against the “luxury of dictation” because the presence of a competent scribe leads one to dictate without taking time to think; a poor or stupid one causes one to lose one’s train of thought (*Inst. Or.* 10.3).

on his tablets (*Inst. Or.* 11.2.33).<sup>82</sup> Letters to those closest were also most appropriately written in one's own hand,<sup>83</sup> and the will of even so powerful a personage as the emperor Augustus was partly in his own hand (Suetonius *The Deified Augustus* 101.1).

The important point for our purposes, however, is the fact that the oral environment was so pervasive that *no* writing occurred that was not vocalized. That is obvious in the case of dictation, but it was also true in the case of writing in one's own hand. Even in that endeavor, the words were simultaneously spoken as they were committed to writing, whether one wrote one's own words or copied those of another.<sup>84</sup> The poet Eumolpus, in the throes of composition in his cabin on a ship, was oblivious to a passing storm; his voice, as he wrote, drowned out all other sounds in his cabin.<sup>85</sup> When Luke describes Zechariah writing the name of his son on the tablet, Luke's Greek (1:63, ἔγραψεν λέγων) demonstrates that it was the act of *writing* that proved his speech had been restored!<sup>86</sup> In the last analysis, dictation was the only means of writing; it was only a question of whether one dictated to another or to oneself.<sup>87</sup>

Equally dominated by the oral environment was the practice of reading.<sup>88</sup> It is apparent that the general—indeed, from all evidence, the exclusive—practice was to read aloud.<sup>89</sup> Martial states that he does not give his written epigrams to “vacant ears”;<sup>90</sup> a tombstone epigraph assumes that the deceased

<sup>82</sup> I owe this reference to Kennedy, *Quintilian*, 97. For the same reason the orator should write the speech in the same order he intends to give it (3.9.8–9; see also Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 64).

<sup>83</sup> So Julius Victor, 11–12; see Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 64–65.

<sup>84</sup> On writing one's own words, see Balogh, “Voces,” 212–15; on copyists reading aloud what they write, see Gerhardtsson, *Memory*, 47, and the literature cited there.

<sup>85</sup> Reported of Eumolpus in Petronius *Satyricon* 115. For comments on this scene, see Balogh, “Voces,” 213–14. “Murmur” became the stereotyped expression for both writing and reading (p. 213).

<sup>86</sup> I owe this insight to Balogh, “Voces,” 217.

<sup>87</sup> So Balogh, “Voces,” 218–19. It would appear to be a premature judgment when Kelber concludes that the written Gospel of Mark represented a “disruption of the oral lifeworld, the textually induced *eclipse of voices and sound*” (*The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 91; emphasis added). That may be true in principle, but in reality the fact that it was written had no effect on the oral nature of the way it was perceived. Not only was it read aloud, as we shall see; its actual writing must have been accompanied by an oral performance of the words *as they were being written down*, whether by Mark or by another.

<sup>88</sup> The ability to read in late antiquity depended, of course, on education, something confined to “a very limited class” (Kenyon, *Books*, 78). That is perhaps the reason, as Havelock notes, why of all “ordinary activities” reading “is historically the one which is most sparsely recorded” (*Literate Revolution*, 58).

<sup>89</sup> See Goody, “The Consequences of Literacy,” 42; Gerhardtsson, *Memory*, 163; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 119; E. Norden notes that public speaking was carried out not in normal conversational tones, but in a voice between that tone and musical performance (*Die Antike Kunstprosa* [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1958] 1. 55–57); an indication is the studied avoidance of hiatus (p. 57).

<sup>90</sup> “nec vacuis auribus ista damus” (11.3.2).

is speaking what is read;<sup>91</sup> Herodotus reports that Croesus “hears” the written oracles from Delphi;<sup>92</sup> the phrase “read and hear” became idiomatic, indicating the way reading was undertaken.<sup>93</sup> Further evidence that reading involved vocalization is the fact that reading was regarded as a healthful physical exercise, an “exercitatio” like fencing or walking.<sup>94</sup>

Obviously enough, vocalized reading characterized public presentations of literature; authors gave public performances of their works with some regularity,<sup>95</sup> and one of the characteristics of public games was poets reading aloud from their writings.<sup>96</sup> Such reading was also typical, it would seem, of early Christian gatherings.<sup>97</sup> Yet vocalized reading was not limited to a person reading to a group. A favored way of “reading” in late classical antiquity was to have someone else, for the wealthy usually a slave, read a work to one.<sup>98</sup> Such a practice allowed one to “read” even when in the company of friends at a meal or when one relaxed at the baths, or when one traveled (e.g., Pliny *Letters* 3.5); indeed, Pliny complains that the dust from such traveling had so irritated the throat of his reader Encolpius that he spat blood (*Letters* 7.1). The practice also allowed one, if necessary, to read and write at the same time.<sup>99</sup>

Most interesting from our perspective, and perhaps least generally understood, is the fact that even solitary readers, reading only to themselves, read aloud.<sup>100</sup> When Philip “heard” the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah, the Ethiopian was simply following normal ancient practice.<sup>101</sup> The fact that Bishop Ambrose reading silently provoked speculation as to why—to take advantage of the reluctance of bystanders to disturb one sitting in silence? to keep people from questioning him about what they heard him read? to

<sup>91</sup> “. . . quod legis ecce loquor . . .” (Balogh, “Voces,” 202).

<sup>92</sup> Balogh, “Voces,” 208.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 207, esp. n. 47; Balogh notes that examples of vocalized reading are “unzählig” (p. 203).

<sup>94</sup> Balogh cites Celsus and Seneca (“Voces,” 225 n. 73).

<sup>95</sup> Kennedy mentions such activity by Herodotus, Virgil, and Asinius Paulus (*Classical Rhetoric*, 111); cf. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 166.

<sup>96</sup> Dio Chrysostom speaks of “writers reading aloud their stupid works” (ἀναίσθητα συγγράμματα) (*Discourse 8, On Virtue 9*) see also *Discourse 12* or *Olympic Discourse 5*.

<sup>97</sup> Col 4:16 is an example; see Reginald H. Fuller, “Classics and the Gospels: The Seminar,” in *The Relationships among the Gospels*, ed. W. O. Walker, 188–89.

<sup>98</sup> Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 64.2; Martial *Epigrams* 2.1, 6; Dio Chrysostom *Discourse 18, On Training 6*; cf. Balogh, “Voces,” 232; Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” 47.

<sup>99</sup> So Pliny reports of J. Caesar (*Letters* 7.25.91).

<sup>100</sup> “Even the solitary reader read aloud to himself” (Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 29); see also Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 64; Doty, *Letters*, 7; Martin R. P. McGuire, “Letters and Letter Carriers in Christian Antiquity,” *The Classical World* 53 (1960) 150. There is no reason to think that the earliest mention of a person reading to himself understood reading in any other way; the Greek idiom used (ἀναγινώσκειν πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν) indeed implies it (Aristophanes *The Frogs* 52–53); see Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 204.

<sup>101</sup> Acts 8:30: ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος.

preserve his voice?—shows him unique even as late as the fourth century (Augustine *Confessions* 6.3).<sup>102</sup> Reading was therefore oral performance *whenever* it occurred and in whatever circumstances. Late antiquity knew nothing of the “silent, solitary reader.”<sup>103</sup>

Whether reading alone or to a group, however, the ancient reader found the task difficult,<sup>104</sup> so difficult that there is praise for the person who can read a book at sight (Petronius *Satyricon* 75).<sup>105</sup> The reason for such praise, clearly enough, lies in the simple fact that the visual format of the ancient manuscript—words run together, and in addition often abbreviated,<sup>106</sup> no punctuation to indicate sentences or paragraphs—conveyed virtually no information about the organization and development of the content it intended to convey.

Yet conveying such information is the whole point of a manuscript. The problem is therefore how to convey information in an organized, understandable way apart from visible indications of such organization. One way, of course, is to have someone deliver the writing who knows what it contains, and what the author intended with it, and have that person give such information. That in fact was frequently done with letters,<sup>107</sup> itself an indication of the problem ancient writers faced in conveying their thoughts in understandable form. Yet such an expedient had limited utility at best, and in fact served virtually as a substitute for conveying information via the written word.

The alternative to visual structuring of a manuscript to indicate organization of meaning is to include oral indications of structure within the material. Individual points, for example, can be stressed by repetition,<sup>108</sup> and

<sup>102</sup> Balogh identifies Ambrose as “die erste, uns ‘lesetechnisch’ verwandte lesende und schreibende Gestalt des Altertums” (“Voces,” 220).

<sup>103</sup> That is true even into the Middle Ages (Balogh, “Voces,” 210). When Havelock uses the phrase “silent, solitary reader” to describe an ancient reader, it is, intentionally or not, anachronistic (*Literate Revolution*, 203). It also renders questionable the thesis on which Kelber predicated his speculations about the Gospel of Mark, namely, the fact that the “written medium” contains “visible but silent letters” (*The Oral and the Written Gospel*, xv); “letters” in late antiquity were anything but “silent.”

<sup>104</sup> See Balogh, “Voces,” 227. Quintilian’s advice on how to teach a child to read need not presume the difficulties inherent in ancient manuscripts to be valid, but it surely does (*Inst. Or.* 1.1.32–34).

<sup>105</sup> Trimalchio praises “that excellent boy” because, among other things, “he can do division and read books at sight.”

<sup>106</sup> Balogh, “Voces,” 229.

<sup>107</sup> See Acts 15:27; Eph 6:21–22; Col 4:7–8; cf. *1 Clem.* 63:3; Paul alludes to the problem caused by the lack of such a person in Gal 4:20; that verse also gives indirect evidence of the oral nature of the communication. See also Doty, *Letters*, 2.

<sup>108</sup> See Foley, “The Oral Theory,” 102 n. 60; Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 129; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 109; Muilenburg, “Form Criticism,” 17; J. Sundwall, wrongly, I think, attributes such repetition in Mark to “der volkstümlichen Darstellungsweise” (*Die Zusammensetzung des Markusevangeliums* [Acta Academiae Aboensis: Humaniora IX.2; Abo: Abo Akedemi, 1934] 4); for a more accurate evaluation, see Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 67. His evaluation

formal parallelism of the repetition will make its importance even more evident.<sup>109</sup> A series of important ideas can be indicated by beginning the discussion of each with an identical word or phrase,<sup>110</sup> or a theme can be stated that is subsequently developed.<sup>111</sup>

That in turn raises the question about how such a statement of theme is to be recognized, since it will not visibly begin a paragraph.<sup>112</sup> One way to do that is to signal a change in topic by a change in the formal pattern of expression;<sup>113</sup> another way is to use a repeated introductory formula to indicate the beginning of new developments in a series of explanations.<sup>114</sup> One of the more common ways to indicate a unit of thought was to repeat a similar formula at the beginning and the end of that unit, that is, an *inclusio*.<sup>115</sup>

What is of greatest importance to keep in mind here, however, is that to be useful, such indications had to make themselves apparent to the ear rather than to the eye.<sup>116</sup> That is, signs of organization had to be apparent not through their visual appearance but through their sound, since without exception, as we have seen, all material in antiquity was intended to be heard. That means, of course, that listeners will have been sensitive to such oral/aural effects,<sup>117</sup> more sensitive than we are, who rely primarily on sight (even as some of you hearing this presentation are saying to yourself that you will suspend judgment on it until you have seen it in printed form!).

Therefore, methods of organization of thought intended to make that thought accessible will, in ancient writings, be based on sound rather than

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in turn of the "triads" in Mark as folkloristic (p. 66) may also be questioned: cf. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism," 11. The rhetoricians called such necessary repetition "copia" (Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 104).

<sup>109</sup> For use in classical Greek literature, see Havelock, "Oral Composition," 192; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 29; for use in ancient Near Eastern literature, see Muilenburg, "Form Criticism," 10. For its use in the NT, see below.

<sup>110</sup> It is called "anaphora"; see Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word," 31.

<sup>111</sup> See Foley, "The Oral Theory," 86; for a detailed study of the use of this figure in Hebrews, see Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1962) e.g., 44 *et passim*; for a list of other devices used to structure Hebrews, see p. 37.

<sup>112</sup> For a characteristically acute formulation of the problem, see Neusner, *Oral Tradition*, 66; although he is dealing with the Mishna, the problem, I think, relates to all literature of antiquity. See also Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> For an exemplary analysis of this method in the Mishna, see Neusner, *Oral Tradition*.

<sup>114</sup> A clear example is the *Types of Epistles* of Pseudo-Demetrius. Each description is begun with the name of the type, followed by the phrase δὲ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον, or elements from it. Thus the listener knows in each case when the discussion of a new type has begun. The text with translation may be found in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 32–41.

<sup>115</sup> It is often remarked, even when the term *inclusio* is not mentioned: see Havelock, "Oral Composition," 183, 189; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 27; Vanhoye, *La structure*, 50; it is also identified as "ring composition"; see Dewey, "Oral Methods," 38, and the literature cited there. An *inclusio* will be effective only if the hearers are able to recognize at what point it begins.

<sup>116</sup> See Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 4–5; Gerhardsson, *Memory*, 164; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 119.

<sup>117</sup> So, e.g., Kennedy, *Quintilian*, 90, an observation he does not limit to Quintilian.

sight. Similarities of sound will be more important than similarities of visual appearance, and sound patterns will provide the clues rather than visual patterns created by similar or identical phrases.<sup>118</sup> The ancient “reader” will have been more attuned to what one may call “acoustic echo”<sup>119</sup> than visual repetition in the form of sentences and paragraphs. In short, organization of written materials will depend on sound rather than sight for its effectiveness.

### III

It was from this kind of environment, then, that the NT documents emerged and within which they were intended to communicate. That means that apart from any unique characteristics they may possess in the matter of form or language, they are oral to the core, both in their creation and in their performance. It should not be a matter of surprise, therefore, that the “orality of the mindset in the Biblical text . . . is overwhelming,”<sup>120</sup> or that “the voice of the writer is the voice of the speaker to a remarkable degree.”<sup>121</sup> That in its turn means simply that to be understood, the NT must be understood as speech.<sup>122</sup>

That has as one important implication the fact that the nature of the composition, from its total organization down to the individual units of thought within it, will be determined by the need of listeners to understand what it is the speaker/author desires to communicate.<sup>123</sup> Again, that is not unique to the NT writings within the oral environment of late antiquity. It was to facilitate such understanding that the whole rhetorical apparatus was developed and refined. To the extent that rhetoric was intended to facilitate

<sup>118</sup> See Havelock, “Oral Composition,” 190; Foley, “The Oral Theory,” 78; Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 13, citing the work of B. Gerhardsson. What E. Norden identifies as rhetorically a “Monstrum” in 1 Cor 1:27–28 (the similarity in sound of ἀσθενή and ἀγενή) may in fact be just such an oral/aural clue to meaning (*Agnostos Theos* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1913] 355–56).

<sup>119</sup> I owe this particularly apposite phrase to Havelock (“Oral Composition,” 187); see also Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 35.

<sup>120</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 75.

<sup>121</sup> Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 22; in this connection, Wilder also points, rightly, to the dialogical character of the epistle (p. 39; see also p. 51).

<sup>122</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament*, 6; cf. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 21. Ong notes that ignoring that point “has interfered with our understanding of the nature of the Bible, with its massive oral underpinnings” (*Presence*, 21).

<sup>123</sup> On the kind of aural/oral expectations hearers bring to poetry, see Foley, “The Oral Theory,” 40, 70; Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” 33. Kennedy argues that similar expectation of prose rhythms are not important, since “evidence from inscriptions and papyri seems to indicate that long and short syllables were often not accurately and systematically differentiated in the pronunciation of koine Greek” (*New Testament*, 30).

comprehension, one must speak of the “rhetoric” of the NT,<sup>124</sup> yet it is not necessary to understand by that statement that the NT authors had formal training in rhetoric.<sup>125</sup> A kind of natural rhetoric occurs in all societies,<sup>126</sup> and some kind of formal pattern is necessary for communication of any kind.<sup>127</sup> Anyone who listened to public speakers, and they abounded, would have been exposed to forms of rhetoric and could be expected to have appropriated elements from them without benefit of formal rhetorical training.<sup>128</sup>

What we want to look for, then, are verbal clues that, by being heard (not seen!), would have aided the listener in understanding the organization of the kind of complex writings that are found in the NT, clues that helped the hearer determine when one unit of thought had ended and another begun. We can, of course, only scratch the surface of such an investigation, but we can at least indicate how such aural/oral clues may have functioned for those who heard the NT documents read aloud to them.<sup>129</sup>

By their nature as narrative, the Gospels have inherent in them that kind of clue. The beginning and ending of a narrative unit is readily comprehensible without any special verbal clues to indicate it is commencing or concluding.<sup>130</sup> The fact that the general outline of Jesus’ career and some at least of the individual stories contained in the Gospels will already have been familiar to many of its hearers will also have aided comprehension of the

<sup>124</sup> See the seminal work of Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, for recognition of this fact (esp. p. 43 *et passim*).

<sup>125</sup> So Kennedy, *New Testament*, 9. The fact that most Christian rhetoric is epideictic or deliberative (so Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74) probably says more about the broad purpose encompassed by that category than about any formal training in rhetoric early Christian speaker/authors may have had. Nor did formal rhetoric include all rhetorical forms used: chiasm, for example, widely used in the Hebrew Bible and in the NT, was also employed in Greek as early as Homer and was common in Latin poetry of the Augustan period, but was simply ignored by classical rhetorical theory (see Kennedy, *New Testament*, 28–29). Its use will not therefore denote formal rhetorical training, which does not diminish either its effectiveness or its widespread employment. Effective rhetoric did not depend on formal rhetorical training.

<sup>126</sup> So Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 6.

<sup>127</sup> See Wilder: “Communication of any kind is subject to the law of form” (*Early Christian Rhetoric*, 5).

<sup>128</sup> Kennedy notes that only in the Greco-Roman world did rhetoric “become a separate discipline with a fully developed theory, its own logical structure, and a corpus of pragmatic handbooks” (*Classical Rhetoric*, 7). Anyone functioning in that society would have been hard put not to have absorbed some elements of formal rhetoric even without extensive training in it.

<sup>129</sup> Kennedy observes that since it is likely that few early Christians owned copies of the Bible, or were even able to read, the Bible was more often heard in a group than read privately (*New Testament*, 5).

<sup>130</sup> See A. B. Lord: “Narrative must be distinguished from non-narrative . . . non-narrative materials are not bound by a given order, whereas narrative sequences are so bound, at least within limits” (“The Gospels as Oral,” 38). That is not to say such indications are absent from narrative units; Kennedy cites as typical of such closure Mark 5:20 (*New Testament*, 34).

Gospel narratives.<sup>131</sup> Such long-recognized elements as the repeated prediction of the passion will also have helped the hearers understand the progress of the narrative.<sup>132</sup>

Further narrative constructions, long recognized, can now be seen in light of the aid they rendered the listener in understanding the material being heard. The Marcan technique of intercalating stories is a way of allowing one story to function as an *inclusio* for a second, thus aiding the listener in determining when both stories have concluded.<sup>133</sup> Again, the anaphoric phrase *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς* or a variation on it helps the listener understand that what follows the phrase continues that particular narrative scene.<sup>134</sup>

Such signals of organization, less necessary for narrative units, do become more necessary in speeches, where the flow of the story does not help the listener understand what is being spoken. So, for example, the cluster of sayings in Mark 4:21–25 is broken by the phrase about the need to use ears in hearing (4:23),<sup>135</sup> and both sayings are introduced by the anaphoric *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς*. In this way, the listener is told to expect the two separate sayings.

Far more extended, of course, is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. We cannot analyze the entire speech in detail, but one or two suggestions will show how such a complex of sayings was organized to give the listener clues about what to expect.<sup>136</sup> To an audience accustomed to verbal clues, the list of beatitudes beginning in 5:3 would cause them to assume that the first element would contain the signal of the *inclusio*, something which then occurs with 5:10b, and the repeated *ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*. The final beatitude (5:11–12), now in the second rather than third person, confirms that for the hearer.

A second example must suffice: the antitheses in 5:21–48, which comprise a unit within the larger unity of the Sermon, and which display a variety of clues to enable the listener to anticipate their organization. (1) The content

<sup>131</sup> What Greene notes about Greek or Elizabethan drama is also true, I think, of the materials in the Gospels: “an eager anticipation by the audience of a familiar theme, whether it is handled in a new fashion . . . or whether it is the very same . . . story . . . that is presented again” (“The Spoken and the Written Word,” 29; see also p. 37).

<sup>132</sup> A discussion of “backward and forward echoes that constitute the narrative of Mark” can be found in Dewey, “Oral Methods.”

<sup>133</sup> Kelber also notes that such intercalation is more likely to belong to the oral nature of the material than to anything like manipulation of the written text in the form of “interpolations” (*The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 67).

<sup>134</sup> On such an organizational structure, the account of stilling the storm (4:35–41) belongs with the preceding parabolic materials; perhaps Mark intended 4:41 rather than 4:33–34 to be the climax of parabolic speech.

<sup>135</sup> The fact that the phrase about the necessity of hearing had concluded the parable of the sower (4:9) would alert the listeners to that as its function in 4:23.

<sup>136</sup> There is, of course, the *inclusio* formed by Matt 5:2 and 7:28, as noted, e.g., by Kennedy, *New Testament*, 39.

is divided into six elements by the anaphoric introductory phrase ἡκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, in each case alerting the listener that a new antithesis is about to begin. (2) The introductory phrases to the first and the fourth antithesis have an added phrase: τοῖς ἀρχαίοις, thus setting them apart. (3) The slightly altered introduction to the third antithesis of the first series (5:31: ἐρρέθη δέ) alerts the listener that this antithesis has structural significance for the series. (4) The appearance of πάλιν at the beginning of the fourth antithesis (5:33), which then repeats the longer phrase also found in the introduction to the first, confirms the clue and alerts the listener to anticipate a second series of three antitheses. (5) Thus, anticipating a second series of three antitheses (5:43–48), the listener will be prepared, with the third antithesis, for a further segment of the speech to begin, an anticipation confirmed with the new material introduced in 6:1.

That such organizational clues are by no means unique to the Gospels will be confirmed by a look at some material in the epistles, to which we must now turn our attention. Once again, this can by no means be exhaustive; we shall give some illustrations of constructions that would aid those listening to the material to know when one unit of discussion ended and another began.

Such clues are all the more necessary in letters, as noted above, since they have no flow of narrative to aid the listener. It is even more necessary for NT letters, which tend to be longer than the other letters of late Western antiquity. While the average length of a letter of Cicero was 295 words, and that of Seneca 955, the average length of a Pauline letter is 2,500 words.<sup>137</sup> Thus, what is necessary for letters in general would be the more necessary for Paul: clues to organization so the listener would not simply be lost in a forest of verbiage.

Our primary concern here is not with rhetorical conventions, although Paul for one was no stranger to them,<sup>138</sup> and they can serve to structure an argument. Nor is our primary concern with the impact of the sound of the prose. One finds, of course, such figures as alliteration (e.g., 1 Pet 1:4: ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον; or 1:19: ἀμνοῦ ἀμώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου Χριστοῦ) even alternating alliteration (e.g., Rom 13:7: τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν). One also finds plays on words, where two meanings of a word follow one another in succeeding sentences, e.g., 1 Pet 4:7: πάντων τὸ τέλος (“the end of all things”); v. 8: πρὸ πάντων (“above all”; but also “prior to [the end] of all things”); Rom 12:13: τὴν φιλοξενίαν διώκοντες (“pursue hospitality”); v. 14: εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας (“bless those who persecute”). It is probably not

<sup>137</sup> Cicero's letters range from 22 to 2,530 words; Seneca's from 149 to 4,134; Paul's from 355 to 7,101; so McGuire, “Letters and Letter Carriers,” 148.

<sup>138</sup> So Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 130.

accidental that Paul, to describe the character of life in this age, chose the homophonic βρώσις καὶ πόσις (Rom 14:17).<sup>139</sup>

Such use of language made listening interesting, and to that extent aided comprehension, but there are other ways I want to look at which provided hints to the listener on when one unit of thought ended and another began. Again, let it be stated that such clues needed to be built into the language of the argument in a way that is not necessary when the organization of an argument can be portrayed visibly, as it is in modern print.

One way to keep the listener abreast of the argument is repetition.<sup>140</sup> Such repetition can take a number of forms: anaphora, which links a series of thoughts;<sup>141</sup> parallelism, which drives home an idea;<sup>142</sup> *inclusio*, which echoes an idea to round out an argument;<sup>143</sup> to mention but three. Yet each of these figures can also be used to structure the thought of a letter, and we want now to turn our attention to some of those ways.<sup>144</sup>

Structuring a letter by means of anaphora, so that the listener can keep abreast of the argument, can be very simple and straightforward. 1 Corinthians is a good example, where reference is made to items contained in a letter from that community to Paul (περὶ δὲ + topic: 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 15:1; 16:1) along with two references to oral reports from Chloe's people (1:11; 5:1). This repeated calling attention to items already known by both parties helps the listener follow the discussion as it progresses.

Anaphora can also be used in more subtle ways, however. When Paul wants to attribute sinful activity to God's withdrawal of control, he repeats the phrase παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς in Rom 1:24, 26, and 28. The last one is least emphatic in its position, indicating to the listeners that that series has now come to an end and preparing them for a new stage in the argument, namely, a list of vices. Again, Paul structures his argument about the unbelief of Israel in Romans 10–11 with a series of rhetorical questions introduced by the basic phrase λέγω μὴ (ἀλλὰ λέγω μὴ in 10:18, 19; λέγω οὖν μὴ in 11:1, 11), a phrase that occurs in increasing intervals, as though he wanted first to establish the pattern in adjacent verses, and then could rely on his hearer's recognizing that structuring element. Again, Paul signals his continuing discussion of the three nouns announced in Rom 5:20 (νόμος, ἁμαρτία, and

<sup>139</sup> This combination of βρώσις καὶ πόσις was not created by Paul; it was used both as a pair and in combination with other nouns in a number of other writings.

<sup>140</sup> So Kennedy, *New Testament*, 22; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40. Such redundancy is characteristic of Acts, e.g., 10:1–11:18; 9:3–9; 22:6–16; 26:12–18.

<sup>141</sup> Kennedy mentions the repetitive function of anaphora (*New Testament*, 27).

<sup>142</sup> On the use of parallelism in oral literature, see Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 128; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 35; Ong, *Rhetoric*, 44.

<sup>143</sup> See Havelock, "Oral Composition," 189.

<sup>144</sup> The fact that examples will be drawn primarily from the major Pauline letters and 1 Peter is due more to the present author's limitations than to the absence of such figures in other NT letters.

χάρις) in their various combinations in the subsequent discussion with the phrase τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν in 6:1 (ἁμαρτία and χάρις); τί οὖν in 6:15 (νόμος and χάρις) and a concluding τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν in 7:7 (νόμος and ἁμαρτία). The repetition of the form in introducing the third segment which introduced the first (τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν) signals to the listener that this development is concluded, since now the three nouns have been discussed in all possible combinations.

A further way to keep the listener abreast of the argument is by means of parallelism. It can be used to drive home an important point, as one can see in the case of 2 Cor 5:18–19. There, v. 19 restates the point of v. 18 so that the listener knows where the emphasis is to lie in this important theologoumenon of Paul. In addition, parallelism can also be used to provide the listener with clues about when one unit of thought ends and another begins. In 1 Cor 1:27–28, for example, a point is hammered home by means of the repeated formula: (noun) τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς ἵνα. The third repetition, however, adds a second noun after τοῦ κόσμου and omits the ἵνα, thus signaling that that particular thought has been concluded.

Another example of this use of parallelism is found in Romans 5, where Paul emphasizes his conclusion to his discussion of Adam and Christ with the doublet in vv. 18–19. In addition to the emphasis thus achieved, the fact that each member of that doublet is formulated in perfect parallelism, a notable change from the imperfect parallelism of his previous formulations in that argument, provides the listener with the further clue that that particular discussion is now concluding.<sup>145</sup>

There are yet other ways to signal to the listener the conclusion of a particular argument, or of one part of a letter, and the beginning of another; many of them have been widely recognized. The use of the benediction in 1 Pet 4:11, for example, clearly marks the conclusion of one part of the argument of that letter. Paul's hymnic formulation celebrating the mystery of the divine actions in Rom 11:33–36 is also a clear indication to the listener that that part of the letter's argument has now concluded. The use of various forms and compounds of φρονεῖν in Rom 12:3, repeated in 15:5, also marks out for the listener that that material is a unit, which concludes with the second member of the *inclusio*.

A further way to signal to the listeners the structure of an argument is the use of an *inclusio*.<sup>146</sup> It can be used, for example, to signal to the listeners the end of a list of virtues or vices, so that they can be prepared for the further development of the argument. In Rom 12:9–13, the list of virtues takes the

<sup>145</sup> Kennedy identifies epigrammatic climaxes to paragraphs as “much sought in the first century A.D.” (*Quintilian*, 83); carefully constructed parallels seem to function the same way in Rom 5:18–19.

<sup>146</sup> This form, like the others mentioned, is, of course, familiar to ancient rhetoric. Yet all are also useful to the listener, whether used by those educated in formal rhetoric or not. My focus here is on what makes listening more productive, not on identifying formal rhetorical forms in the NT.

form of a nominative plural participle and a noun.<sup>147</sup> All of the nouns are dative, save the noun in the first phrase, and in the last, a clear indication to the listener that when the initial form is repeated, the list has come to its conclusion. The same phenomenon can be observed in the list of virtues in 1 Pet 3:8, where the phoneme φρονες begins (ὁμόφρονες) and ends (ταπεινόφρονες) the list, and in the list of vices in 4:3b, where the list begins with three plural feminine nouns in the dative, moves to three plural masculine nouns in the dative, and concludes with a plural feminine noun in the dative, signaling the conclusion. An *inclusio* also signals the end of the short list of imperative phrases in 1 Pet 2:17 (τιμήσατε, τιμᾶτε).

Paul uses another way to signal to the listener the end of such a list in Rom 1:29–31; here, after a list of vices which display no discernible pattern, the listener is suddenly confronted with four alliterative adjectives (ἄσυνέτους, ἄσυνθέτους, ἀστόργους, ἀνελεήμονας), a verbal signal, I suspect, that with such a clear pattern, the list is coming to an end.

Such, I would urge, are a few examples of some of the ways aural clues were built into the prose of the letters addressed to groups of Christians, clues that would aid the listener in following the course of some long and complex arguments contained in those letters, but which would also aid the reader in giving a coherent and meaningful presentation of the content. Such clues were the only kind available, given the uninformative visual format presented by a first-century Greek letter.

We may now turn to our final task, which is to look at one or two implications of our discussion for the way we go about understanding the nature of the material in the NT.

#### IV

Thinking about NT writings as both produced and used orally is something scholars are not accustomed to doing. That is not to say, of course, that the oral background of such materials has not been taken into consideration. What has not been considered, I would urge, is the fact that both the writing and the reading of this material involved the oral performance of the words,<sup>148</sup> and that therefore clues to the structure which the author provided were intended for the ear, not the eye. That is so different from the way we write and read that we need to reflect carefully about it. The oral nature of writing and reading in late antiquity may be a small item, but it is, as has been

<sup>147</sup> I see no reason to regard the initial phrase of 12:9 (ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος) as imperative; I take it to be a statement of fact, with the following phrases spelling out the implications of that fact for Christian conduct.

<sup>148</sup> The point here is, of course, not the level of literacy; my reflections do not depend for their validity on the fact that few Christians could read. The point is rather: How did people who were literate, as well as those who were not, understand what was contained in a written document?

noted, one with potentially wide-ranging effects.<sup>149</sup>

One implication of this orality of the NT documents concerns the problem of the identification of sources. One wonders if it can so quickly be assumed that where there are discrepancies or inconsistencies in a Gospel or a letter, it is the result of the combination of divergent written sources.<sup>150</sup> It may well be the case that such inconsistencies are the result of the need to provide oral/aural clues to the one who listens to the document. Of course the NT documents were written down, but they were written, and would be read, as we have seen, in a way far different from that to which we are accustomed, and much closer to an oral than to a print environment. It may well be the case that the inconsistencies one can find, say, in the Gospel of Mark are more likely to be due to the orality of that document, and hence the need to provide oral clues for its understanding, than to its author's combination of various written sources.<sup>151</sup>

One could argue the same for the letter of Paul to the Philippians. Here again, what in a text shaped for the eye, with its structural changes indicated by paragraphing, could be taken as indications of composite sources, in a text shaped for the ear may well have been intended as oral/aural signs of structure. Instead of a series of written sources combined to produce the letter, with its resulting wide variation of topics, what we may have is a wide-ranging letter, intended to cover such a variety of topics, with the changes of topic indicated for those who were to hear it. It is noteworthy that conclusions of discussions in that letter are clearly signaled: a doxological form in 1:11; 4:9, 19; words expressing closure in 3:1 (τὸ λοιπὸν) and in 4:1 (ὥστε), with the whole letter concluding with a doxology. Each of those closures would have alerted the listener that one topic had ended and another was about to begin.

The shape of written texts in late Western antiquity, with their absence of all visible indications of organization of thought, also must be taken into account in our consideration of references in one text to another. In such written texts, the location of a given passage would be extraordinarily difficult: aside from the need to roll and re-roll, there would be no visible indication of where various parts of the composition began or ended.<sup>152</sup> Nor

<sup>149</sup> See Balogh: "Das laute Lesen gehört . . . zu jenen anscheinend geringfügigen Problemen der Wissenschaft, die überraschend weite Sichten eröffnen . . ." ("Voces," 220).

<sup>150</sup> See Finnegan, who notes that inconsistencies mark oral literature, although she argues the point can be "over-stressed" in some contexts (*Oral Poetry*, 127).

<sup>151</sup> One example: Jesus and the boat in Mark 4; he gets in it (v. 2); the boat is ignored (v. 10); he is assumed still to be in it (v. 35). In this case, v. 35 may well be intended to form the inclusion with v. 2 to indicate the conclusion of Jesus' speech on parables, a need that overrides a need for narrative consistency.

<sup>152</sup> See Kenyon, *Books*, 113. The codex made such location physically easier to the extent that one can more easily page than roll (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 111). Important passages, of course, could be marked, and thus found more easily, but unless a passage were so marked, its location would be very difficult. One would have to recognize at each point in the search where one was in relation to the desired passage in order to find it. The intimate knowledge of a writing

would there be a way, once the passage was located, of referring to it by paragraph or page so that others could also find it.<sup>153</sup> A reference meant the words itself. All of that simply means, I would urge, that authors did not “check references” in the way modern scholars do (or ought to do!). In light of the pervasive orality of the environment, and the physical nature of written documents, references were therefore much more likely to be quoted from memory than to be copied from a source.<sup>154</sup>

That in its turn carries with it a double implication. The first is that questioning whether Paul, for example, is quoting from the LXX as we know it or from a text that varies from the ones we have, or was making his own translation from the Hebrew or a Targum, will tend to be an exercise in futility, since the assumption that Paul is laboriously quoting a source he has in front of him is overwhelmingly likely to be false. The second implication concerns the assumption of possible deceit, if the quotation happens to have been changed in such a way as to lend more support to the argument than the quotation in its “original” form. Such alteration was common practice in late antiquity. Dio Chrysostom, for example, often “altered” the material he “quoted,” as did other authors as well.<sup>155</sup> Given the oral environment of late Western antiquity, the expectation is gratuitous at best that authors who quoted others would function as we function in a period of print, and that therefore the same standards will have applied then that apply now in the matter of the quotation of others. The whole nature of our assumptions about the use of sources needs seriously to be reexamined.

In these and other matters, one suspects, scholarly suppositions have prevailed that are simply anachronistic when applied to the actual environment within which documents were written and read. Many such suppositions need to be questioned, and much work remains to be done—and redone!—if we are to form a clear and probable picture of the way the NT documents were produced and the way they functioned, within the oral environment of late Western antiquity.<sup>156</sup>

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that was required to make location of a specific passage possible would thus virtually obviate the need to do so.

<sup>153</sup> Kenyon makes this point (*Books*, 67–68).

<sup>154</sup> See Fuller, “Classics and the Gospels,” 187.

<sup>155</sup> For example, he alters a quotation from Euripides to make it more appropriate for his argument (*Discourse 17 29*); Seneca misrepresents Virgil to make a point (*Natural Questions 1.11.2*; cf. also *Natural Questions 7.20.2*). In addition, Dio condenses a quotation from the *Iliad* (*Discourse 40 29*), alters one from the *Odyssey* (*Encomium on Hair*), and confuses a father with his son (*Discourse 74 16*); H. Lamar Crosby thinks in this instance it is because Dio is quoting from memory [LCL 5. 225 n. 4]. On the familiarity of classical authors with one another, see Greene, “The Spoken and the Written Word,” 34.

<sup>156</sup> One ought also avoid a too-hasty application of the change from the oral medium to the written medium to the time the NT was written. The oral environment means that when Mark, for example, wrote his Gospel, he in fact did not make a “crucial (shift) from sound to silence” (Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 95), nor did the NT writings make words “visible and knowable apart from sound and hearing” (p. 92). Such judgments are anachronistic in the period here under discussion. At this time, there were no “silent words”: *omne verbum sonat!*