

Gerhardsson, Birger 1986 — The Gospel Tradition (Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 15)

Lund: Wallin & Dalholm. 57 pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Dr Ernest van Eck (Pretoria)

This book consists of the contribution (somewhat improved) made by Gerhardsson at a symposium (entitled *Symposium de interrelatione evangeliorum*) held in 1984 in Jerusalem. The author presents a model for the investigation of the gospel tradition (the teaching, works and fate of Jesus during his life on earth, including the signs of his resurrection), seen as part of the Early Christian tradition against the background of Judaism and Hellenism.

Gerhardsson's model to investigate the gospel tradition is simple: a basic distinction is made between 'inner' and 'outer' tradition, and, within the outer tradition four further aspects are studied: the verbal, behavioural, institutional and material traditions. More specifically, inner tradition refers to tradition that functions ideally, that is animated and 'lives', tradition which is carried and kept together by inner engagement, belief, convictions, values and views. As such, inner tradition becomes a 'message'; it generates further tradition, inspires and convinces others. It therefore becomes a kind of communication that spreads to the environment and further generations. To study inner tradition, however, is not easy, since it is as elusive and difficult to grasp as 'life' itself: it is mobile, changes, varies, some parts grow and others decline. The outer tradition, on the other hand, is much easier to study, since it expresses itself in visible and audible outward forms. As noted above, four dimensions/forms of outer traditions can be delimited:

- \* *verbal tradition* (word tradition): the verbal tradition consists of words, utterances, texts and writings that articulate the content of the inner tradition (basically, the verbal tradition is oral);
- \* *behavioural tradition* (practical tradition): the behavioural tradition concentrates on that which influential individuals pass on to others by their way of appearing and acting, that which can be called 'the force of example';
- \* *institutional tradition*: vital inner traditions (especially those of a religious nature) create engagement and fellowship. Moreover, where the latter is present, any community always organizes and institutionalizes itself, a process that includes the differentiation between insiders and outsiders, role-division, hierarchy and organization; and
- \* *material tradition* ('thing' tradition): inner tradition often needs to use inanimate objects as means, for example specific localities, special clothes, tools or outward equipment, vital for the efficient functioning of the tradition. This can be called material tradition.

Applied to ancient Judaism (200 BC to AD 200), Gerhardsson's model looks as follows: the inner tradition is what can be called 'Judaism', and in the outer tradition *verbal tradition* would refer to the Torah-tradition, *behavioural tradition* refers to 'the life in the Torah' (such as specific rites, customs,

halacha), *institutional tradition* would refer to the social structures in Judaism, and the *material tradition* would include, for example, the temple, scrolls, tassels and cloaks.

Turning to Early Christian tradition, the model separates the different aspects of this tradition as follows: the inner tradition is a Jesus Christ-centered relation to God, and in the outer tradition *verbal tradition* refers to the programmatic speaking about Jesus, *behavioural tradition* refers to 'the life in Christ' or 'following Jesus,' *institutional tradition* starts with a central group of adherents, develops into an elementary organization and ends in a division of roles, hierarchy and organization such as local churches, and the *material tradition* includes things that were taken from the mother tradition.

The last part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the verbal tradition in Early Christianity, especially the gospel tradition. Attention is *inter alia* given to such topics as oral and written traditions, the relationship and interaction between oral and written traditions, firm and flexible elements in oral and written traditions and the production of texts. Taking the Lukan prologue as example, Gerhardsson shows that all the Gospels build on a common oral tradition, but that there also must have been some kind of literary connection between individual oral traditions. 'Pure orality', according to Gerhardsson, therefore never existed in the Jesus-tradition. *Contra* Kelber (*The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 1983), Gerhardsson argues that the verbal Jesus-tradition was at no stage pure orality in the meaning folklorists (like Kelber) give the term. 'Already in the mind of Jesus the incipient parts of the gospel tradition were influenced by an older tradition which was partly oral, partly written, and the gospel tradition retained in many ways this contact the whole time until the final redaction of the synoptic Gospels, and afterwards as well' (p 33). The first written Gospel — Mark — was thus not a revolutionary phenomenon in the sense that orality became textuality, a writing in which living speech became the book.

Scholars who are interested in orality as such, the relationship between oral and written traditions, the creation and development of the Jesus-tradition, as well as the relationship between the traditions in the synoptic Gospels, will find this book worthwhile. Although already published in 1986, it must be taken into account in the 'oral-written' debate regarding the development of the Jesus-tradition.