

Chapter 1

GOSPEL AUDIENCE AND ORIGIN: THE CURRENT DEBATE

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Introduction

From the classroom to the church no reading of the Gospels is able to ignore the questions related to audience and origin. It is just assumed that the context of the Gospels, the people and issues involved in the situation behind the Gospels, necessarily controls how the Gospels are to be read and interpreted. The modern commentary almost always begins by discussing the introductory material before discussing the text proper. This approach is simply assumed. The end result is certainly affected in principle by the starting point. This is not to say that any understanding of the text is predetermined a priori and that the text itself is left helpless to the scholar's dissecting and analyzing tools; on the contrary, the text is often used as the very tool itself by which one draws theories by which it need be analyzed. Thus, any attempt to understand the Gospels and their meaning must consider the means by which an understanding of what they are and how they came to be directly affects how one discovers what they mean.

While the study of the audience and origin of the Gospels has existed almost as long as the Gospels themselves, an attempted rethinking has taken place, primarily in English-speaking scholarship, regarding the contemporary understanding of the situation behind the Gospels, and the reading that such an understanding presupposes. The purpose of this volume is to provide a needed point of engagement with what has now become a burgeoning dialogue and debate, from *Festschrift* to footnote, for a decade. With a topic that is both historical and hermeneutical, there is a growing need for clarity and refocus. Even more, this volume hopes to provide needed definition to the concepts initially presented, as well as contributing a more developed dialogue over the most debated issues, related to the study of the early Christian movement. It is hoped that this volume will further the quest for understanding the origin and function of

the Gospels in early Christianity. Before we move any further, it is necessary to survey the decade-long rethinking of the audience of the Gospels.

A Reconsideration of the Quest of the Gospel Community

Ever since the Gospel narratives were removed from their created environments, the situations in which they were created have been *prima facie* evidence regarding their meaning and intent. The Church Fathers, for example, provide elaborate details of the circumstances surrounding origin of the Gospels. The earliest exegetes sensibly assumed that the Gospels were written for a specific reason and within a particular context. Those 'traditions' remained for centuries as grounding the Gospels in the origin of earliest Christianity. Over the last century those traditions have been developed so as to take on a life of their own. Gospels research has now considered it axiomatic that the four evangelists wrote for their own particular Christian communities.¹ In the last few decades elaborate reconstructions of the four Gospel communities have been proposed using technical reading techniques that attempt to get 'behind the text' of each Gospel. The quest for the historical Jesus that occupied much of the nineteenth century largely gave way to the quest for the early church in the twentieth century.² Yet this critical consensus has not gone without criticism, being courageously presented in an important volume a decade ago, leading to the contemporary dialogue and debate. A summary of this volume is now in order.

The Gospels for All Christians?

These reading techniques that attempt to get 'behind the text' of each Gospel, along with their elaborate reconstructions, were called into question by several British scholars in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (GAC) in 1998.³ The most crucial essay in GAC is the initial chapter by Richard Bauckham entitled 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', which presents the main argument for

a paradigm shift in reading the Gospels.⁴ In his critique of GAC, David Sim admits: 'Without a doubt the most important chapter in this volume is the first essay ... by Richard Bauckham. It is this offering that presents the most sustained attack on the consensus position and the most detailed account of the alternative hypothesis.'⁵

Bauckham's thesis challenges the current consensus in Gospels scholarship which assumes that the Gospels were written for a specific church or group of churches, and proposes that it is more probable that the Gospels were written for general circulation around the churches with a general Christian audience in view. 'Their implied readership is not specific but indefinite: any and every Christian community in the late-first-century Roman empire.'⁶ Bauckham's thesis has four primary and cumulative parts, each of which we should not summarize.

First, the assumption that a more specific audience is intended is simply taken for granted. In fact, as Bauckham argues, whereas the Christian background of the audience is often given extensive support and argumentation, the question of the specific or general nature of the audience is remarkable for having never been discussed in print.⁷ This assumption is an old view in British scholarship, going back to at least the end of the nineteenth century. But it was made commonplace by B. H. Streeter's *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* in 1924.⁸ Central for Streeter was the view that each of the four Gospels must have originated in a major center of Christianity; only this accounts for the prestige of all four and their eventual canonization. According to Streeter, 'Thus we are led on to the view that the Gospels were written in and for different churches, and that each of the Gospels must have attained local recognition as a religious classic, if not yet an inspired scripture, before the four were combined into a collection recognized by the whole church.'⁹

Around the same time Streeter was developing his major source-critical work, German scholarship was formulating an understanding of the Gospels creation that would carry even further the concept of the Gospel 'community'. According to the form critics, the Gospels

4. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?' in GAC, pp. 9-48.
5. David C. Sim, 'The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham', *JNTS* 84 (2001), pp. 3-27 (5). Bauckham first presented this thesis at the British New Testament Conference in 1997. The positive responses to his paper are what led to GAC (personal conversation with Richard Bauckham, fall 2002).
6. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?' pp. 1-2.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
8. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

1. The following is adapted from an earlier article by this author, Edward W. Klink III, 'The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question', *CBR* 3 (2004), pp. 60-85, with all unchanged parts reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.
2. See, for example, Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (SNTSMS 141; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 42-47.
3. Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

were created in and for their own *Sitz im Leben*, which can and must be defined if the Gospels are to be read correctly. Martin Debelius, one of the early and most influential form critics, defined *Sitz im Leben* as 'the historical and social stratum in which precisely these literary forms were developed'.¹⁰ Later with redaction criticism, the Gospels' *Sitz im Leben* received even more attention. Willi Marxsen was the first to introduce three *Sitze im Leben*. According to Marxsen, the first life-setting is the unique situation of Jesus' activity (i.e. the historical Jesus); the second life-setting is the situation of the primitive church (i.e. form criticism); finally, the third life-setting is the unique situation of the evangelist's creation of the Gospel (i.e. redaction criticism).¹¹ Following in the work of these early and foundational redaction critics, the late 1960s and 1970s saw the production of works on the Gospels that were specifically concerned with the unique community and situation of each of the Gospels, and eventually the increasingly sophisticated use of social-scientific methods for reconstructing the community behind each Gospel.

Second, the ramifications of building upon a false assumption inevitably led to the acceptance of unproven hypotheses. Bauckham questions whether the assumption being practiced in current Gospels research is in any way confirmed by the fact that multiple conclusions and results have been built upon it. For Bauckham, the derived results are simply the consequences of applying a particular reading strategy to the text, not of showing that this particular reading strategy does 'better justice to the text than another reading strategy'.¹²

Third, it seems more appropriate to assume, based upon historical evidence, that someone writing a Gospel in the late first century would have envisaged a more general audience.¹³ This seems to be an appropriate counter-assumption to the community reconstructions simply by contrasting the Gospels with the Pauline epistles. The Pauline epistles were addressed to identifiable Christian communities with specific problems. In this way, the epistles could be better understood by the historical context of the addressees. The Gospels, unlike epistles, have no particular addressees assumed within the document. The difference in literary genre between epistles and the Gospels implies a different type of reading, hence a different or less specific readership. This does not imply

10. Martin Debelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. B. L. Woolf; London: Ivor Nicholson, 1934), p. 7.

11. Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redactional History of the Gospel* (trans. J. Boyce, D. Juel, and W. Poehlmann; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 23.

12. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?' p. 22.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

a Gospel's audience would be completely indefinite, for the Gospels were limited by their historical time and first-century geographical context. Nor does it imply that early Christian traditions concerning Gospel authorship and provenance were in error, for as Bauckham explains, 'whereas letters (though not invariably) stopped at their first recipients, anyone in the first century who wrote a book such as a bios expected it to circulate to readers unknown to its author'.¹⁴ 'The careful literary crafting of each ... and the small size of the individual congregations in the first century make it unlikely that any of the Gospels were composed for the strictly local and intramural use of a single community. Broader dissemination in Christian circles, if not beyond, must have been intended from the outset'.¹⁵

Fourth, the consensus that views an early Christian community as a segregated, self-sufficient, introverted group, having little contact with other Christian groups, and little sense of a broad Christian movement is an unrealistic depiction. The general character of the early Christian movement should not be pictured as 'a scattering of isolated, self-sufficient communities with little to no communication between them, but quite the opposite: a network of communities with constant, close communication among themselves'.¹⁶ This aspect of the early church, though itself a reconstruction, is supported by the historical evidence we have concerning the late first and early second centuries of Christianity.¹⁷ But physical communication was not the only definable aspect of early Christian interconnectedness. 'The local groups of early Christians not only enjoyed a high level of cohesion and group identity, they were also made aware that they belonged to a larger movement, "with all who invoke the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place" (1 Cor. 1.2)'.¹⁸

Preparatory Warnings

It seems as though the ground was ripe for the broader audience concept promoted by GAC. As early as 1979, Luke Timothy Johnson criticizes

14. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

15. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 102.

16. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?' p. 30.

17. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 64–68; Michael B. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation', in GAC, pp. 49–70.

18. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 107.

the community reconstructions in the Gospel of Luke.¹⁹ For Johnson, reconstructing Pauline communities is difficult; reconstructing Gospel communities is disastrous. Even if we assumed that a community existed behind the Gospel, we would not be certain how to apply the information from the text to the specific community. He uses the example of the discussion of prayer in Luke: Are we to suppose that Luke stresses praying because his community does not pray (or that some in his community do not pray)? Or are we to assume his community is correcting an inappropriate view on prayer; one that requires a theological lesson?²⁰ For Johnson, anything but a general description of Luke's readers does an injustice to the text; it destroys the text's intended literary meaning.

Following Johnson, several other interpreters, some who continued to use community reconstructions, also saw methodological problems. In 1988, Dale Allison argued that even the term 'Lukan community' should not be used in application to the Gospel.²¹ In a volume dealing with the approaches to the community reconstructions for the Gospel of Matthew in 1991,²² Jack Dean Kingsbury gives a surprising warning to such a methodological practice. Kingsbury admits that 'the text itself is not regarded as the primary concern but as a vehicle for getting at something else, namely, the social situation of the community of Matthew'.²³ Kingsbury argues that such a method is not inappropriate per se, but it may be also appropriate for the historian to ask herself if more thought should be given to the question of how one moves from text to a particular social situation.

We even find a similar warning discussed by Graham Stanton in 1992.²⁴ Stanton discusses the ability to find the Matthean community from within the text of Matthew. He admits, 'A reconstruction on these lines must inevitably draw heavily on the disciplined imagination of the historian. One's overall map of the "parting of the ways" between Christians and Jews in the latter half of the first century and in the early decades of the second will be as important as the text of the gospel itself.'²⁵ In a later

19. Luke Timothy Johnson, 'On Finding Lukan Community: A Cautious Cautionary Essay', *SBLASP* (1979), pp. 87-100.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

21. Dale Allison, 'Was There a "Lukan Community"?', *IRB* 10 (1988), pp. 62-70.

22. David L. Balch, ed., *The Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

23. Jack Dean Kingsbury, 'Conclusion: Analysis of a Conversation,' in Balch (ed.), *The Social History of the Matthean Community*, pp. 259-69 (262).

24. Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for A New People* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

article he revisits his previous warning.²⁶ In this article Stanton's thesis is to show 'that some of the more recent work on other early Christian writings ... is a further reminder of the value of setting Matthew in the broadest possible context within early Judaism and early Christianity'.²⁷ The methodological key, for Stanton, is that a Gospel is not a letter. Since a letter does not give a clear window onto the social situation of the recipients, a Gospel must then be treated with even more caution. Stanton even states, 'Matthew's gospel should not be expected to provide us with detailed information about the social setting of the first recipients. I am convinced that Matthew's choice of literary genre and the evidence of the text of the gospel itself both point in this direction.'²⁸

In 1992, Frederick Wisse argued that the hypotheses used to determine the historical circumstances of the Gospel of John's composition through indirect data are highly problematic.²⁹ According to Wisse, 'Such information is able to provide only a few faint and idiosyncratic hints of individuals but not something that clearly applies to whole communities'.³⁰ To solve major historical uncertainties in the history of early Christianity, Gospel scholars made the startling assumption that the early Christian writings are virtually unique among literary texts in that they bear the transparent imprint of the historical situation of a community. The practice of this hypothesis reveals, according to Wisse, that biblical scholars 'have great difficulty facing up to the disappointment that the historical conclusions warranted by the evidence are very limited'.³¹ A similar critique of Johannine community reconstructions was presented by Thomas Brodie from a source-oriented approach in 1993.³²

Even within the field of social scientists and social historians, warnings of the illegitimacy of explicit communities drawn from the text of the Gospels were being given. In 1980, Edwin Judge raises the following concern:

This objection rests upon the assumption that the contents of the gospels will have been shaped by the interests of the communities for which they were composed.

26. Graham N. Stanton, 'Revisiting Matthew's Communities', *SBLASP* (1994), pp. 9-23.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

29. Frederick Wisse, 'Historical Method and the Johannine Community', *Arc* 20 (1992), pp. 35-42.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

32. Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Source-Oriented Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Therefore if the gospels condemn wealth, this implies a community which does not enjoy it. But one only needs to recall Seneca to recognize the capacity of the well-to-do and cultivated to admire the strictures of philosophy while safely insulated against their consequences. Should one not also allow the possibility of a gospel compiler sharply critical of the use of wealth amongst those for whom he wrote (cf. the epistle of James)?³³

A similar critique is given a decade later by Bengt Holmberg.³⁴ Dealing with an appraisal of the same debate and other sociological approaches used to derive the social context behind the Gospels texts, Holmberg states: 'The postulate of complete and positive correlation between a text and the social group that carries and receives it is implausible. To read the gospel narratives as if they were uniformly allegories of early church life is, if nothing else, somewhat unimaginative.'³⁵

Finally, Stephen Barton surveys the current community research in his 1992 article, 'The Communal Dimension of Earliest Christianity'. In this article Barton describes how current study of the New Testament has had an 'explosion of interest' in the early Christian communities.³⁶ Barton argues that both the critical developments in New Testament research, as well as the theological emphases on church and community in recent years, have led to this trend. Barton gives a warning that a pure allegorical reading of the Gospels used to derive a supposed community behind them may be inappropriate. Barton states, 'For the way in which the Gospels are read often as virtual allegories of communities or groups, whose needs, interests and history they are supposed to reflect in a quite transparent way, is open to serious doubt.'³⁷ Barton was not attempting to disallow Gospels research from looking at the communal dimension, but simply be forced to comply with 'a much greater methodological accountability'.³⁸ Thus, we have seen that there were hints of a coming warning prior to the arrival of GAC.

Gospels for All Christians: The Initial Aftermath (1998–2001)

When GAC arrived its thesis brought forth various responses in various

33. Edwin Judge, 'The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History', *JRH* 11 (1980), pp. 201–17 (208).

34. Bengt Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–25.

36. Stephen Barton, 'The Communal Dimension of Earliest Christianity: A Critical Survey of the Field', *JTS* 43 (1992), pp. 399–427.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 425.

38. *Ibid.*

degrees. Some responses were positive and perceived the new paradigm to be in general agreement with other areas of New Testament research. An example of this can be seen in a monograph by Graham Twelftree.³⁹ Twelftree builds upon Bauckham's argument of a broader audience in order to explain his theory of the silence of exorcisms in the Gospel of John.⁴⁰ But as we will discuss below, others were not as convinced. Since a full discussion of responses and related interaction to GAC is beyond the scope of this chapter, we will detail the highlights in a chronological fashion to show how the Gospel community debate has developed and the hermeneutical areas around which it has centered.

One of the first scholars of Bauckham's thesis was his own colleague, Philip Esler, in 1998.⁴¹ Although Esler presented criticisms of several contributors in the volume and at several areas of the new paradigm, his primary critique was that Bauckham et al. had failed to consider the cultural distance between the modern interpreter and the first-century readers. Discourse, he argued, can only be understood within particular social contexts and can only be retrieved by the scholars who use the resources available to them from the social sciences.⁴² Esler argued, 'The detailed familiarity with the ancient data, which is an admirable characteristic particular of Bauckham but also of the other contributors, will normally not be enough if the data is still viewed within interpretive frameworks derived from North Atlantic ways of understanding the world.'⁴³ In the same journal volume, Bauckham gives a specific response to the criticisms presented by Esler.⁴⁴ Already we have the old and new paradigms clashing against one another.

A second major critique came from within the pages of a commentary on Mark by Joel Marcus in 2000.⁴⁵ In a section of his introduction called 'Setting: The Markan Community', Marcus summarizes Bauckham's thesis and argues that the Gospels should still be seen as having been directed 'in the first instance' to individual communities.⁴⁶ Marcus' arguments against this thesis are based upon what he considers to be Bauckham's contradictory understanding of the nature of writing and the use of documents in antiquity. Marcus claims that the very fact the

39. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999).

40. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

41. Philip F. Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*', *SJT* 51 (1998), pp. 235–48.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 237–38.

44. Richard Bauckham, 'Response to Philip Esler', *SJT* 51 (1998), pp. 249–53.

45. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000).

46. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

church kept and used four different Gospels supports the community hypothesis. In the end, according to Marcus, the text of the Gospel of Mark does not support Bauckham's thesis.⁴⁷ Marcus concludes: 'Bauckham may well be correct in speculating that Mark hoped his Gospel would eventually reach a wider readership, and this desire may explain its fairly quick appropriation by the Matthean and Lukan groups. But it was also probably still intended in the first instance as a teaching tool for Mark's local church.'⁴⁸

In the same year *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate*, the revised doctoral dissertation of Dwight Peterson, entered the Gospel community debate with a helpful response to these hermeneutical issues.⁴⁹ Interestingly, although Peterson mentions Bauckham and GAC, it appears that the dissertation on which the monograph is based was written before GAC was published. Peterson approaches the Gospel community debate by studying the hermeneutical principles used by proponents of such an interpretive method. He argues that the common practice of reconstructing communities behind the Gospels are means of attaining 'interpretive control' and using a particular 'interpretive strategy' in order to achieve desired results.⁵⁰ The nature of such a method, whereby the text is used as a window to see the originating aspects of an early Christian community so that the text can be understood, is a circular and illegitimate practice.⁵¹

Peterson presents his critique of the Markan community reconstructions by looking specifically at three major Markan proponents: Werner Kelber,⁵² Howard Clark Kee,⁵³ and Ched Myers.⁵⁴ After giving an introduction and survey of the development of the Markan community, and a chapter to each of these scholars and their interpretive methods, Peterson concludes with his most important chapter: a hermeneutical critique of the Markan community construction. Peterson lists and explains four problematic and 'unjustified assumptions which are entailed within the drive to construct communities behind documents'.⁵⁵

47. Ibid., pp. 26–28.

48. Ibid., p. 28.

49. Dwight N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate* (BIS 48; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

50. Ibid., pp. 156–61.

51. Ibid., p. 3. See also pp. 52–55.

52. Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); idem, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

53. Howard Clark Kee, *The Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

54. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

55. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark*, p. 158.

First, Markan community constructors assume it is possible to easily get into the mind of the author of Mark in a way which will enable us to determine the author's intended meaning. According to Peterson, we should be cautious in our attempts to define authorial intent in Mark when we are not even certain who the author actually was. All the more then, it is just as dangerous to write 'as if one can reconstruct the intention of an author when one has no information about who the author was, or why that author wrote, other than that abstracted from the document one is reading, and then use that reconstructed "intention" as a measuring stick against which to judge appropriate and inappropriate readings of Mark.'⁵⁶ Peterson argues that intentionality of a document is not the basis of interpretation, but the result.

Second, Markan community constructions assume they know about the condition of the original audience, and that this original audience is somehow constitutive of the meaning of the text. Peterson states plainly that 'This assumption is central if the hermeneutical maneuver of referring to the historical Markan community for explanatory power is going to work.'⁵⁷ For Peterson the work of Dan O. Via is helpful here: the employers of community reconstructions claim to be moving from 'context to text' when in reality they are moving 'in the opposite direction'.⁵⁸ Since the community behind Mark cannot be known from sources other than Mark, but must rather be constructed from the text of Mark, the historical certainty of such a construction is weak at best.⁵⁹

Third, Markan community constructions assume the apparent belief that influence is a one-way street, namely, that the community behind Mark existed in time and space. This understanding places the social context as primary; the social and historical context of the community 'controls' and 'influences' what it is the text is allowed to do and say.⁶⁰ Thus, as Peterson states:

In this understanding of influence . . . the socio-historical setting must first be sketched out from the narrative before it can be held to *influence* the meaning of the narrative. Influence thus *appears* to be unidirectional, but in these cases is *actually* (although not admittedly) at least two directional. This idea of 'influence', in which the Gospel of Mark is understood to 'reflect' prior socio-historical circumstances, also does insufficient justice to the ways in which a narrative such as Mark may have

56. Ibid., p. 159.

57. Ibid., p. 161.

58. Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 74.

59. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark*, p. 163.

60. Ibid., p. 169.

been embedded in its social-historical situation, simultaneously exerting influence and being influenced in (at least) dialogical fashion.⁶¹

Thus, even the supposed historical reality behind which the text of the Gospel (of Mark) was produced is unrealistic, hence, unhistorical. Fourth, the use of Markan communities as the basis for one's reading of Mark is a procedure that only hides the real interests of the interpreter: 'It tends to obscure the interests of the reader of Mark behind a screen of alleged historical "objectivity".'⁶² The so-called objectivity of the interpreter, who uses a reconstructed socio-historical community, in most cases, only frees that same interpreter to apply to the text their desired methodological devices. Such an approach is not only anti-historical, but results in an unnecessary constraint being placed on the text.

Finally, also in 2000, Martin Hengel's *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* promoted an independent version of the broad audience hypothesis.⁶³ Hengel states:

Contrary to a widespread view, none of the four Gospels was written for one particular community; far less do they simply reproduce the views of one individual community. They give primarily the views of their authors. We cannot even say with certainty whether they ever came into being in one community, for the missionaries of the early church traveled a great deal and could be authoritative teachers at different places. So we should stop talking automatically about 'the community of Mark', 'of Luke', 'of Matthew', 'of John' as the one really responsible for the composition of a Gospel writing and its theology.⁶⁴

Although Hengel's primary focus is on the origin and use of the term 'gospel' in the early church and its unified meaning, he deals briefly here with the concept of the canonical Gospels and their message of salvation for the 'whole' church.⁶⁵ It is interesting that despite a note concerning one of the GAC essays dealing with the interconnectedness of the early church,⁶⁶ he neglects to mention a book with a similarly radical thesis published two years earlier.

The most detailed critique of Bauckham's thesis came from David C. Sim in a 2001 article directly responding to GAC.⁶⁷ Sim's critique of Bauckham's thesis is that it is circumstantial in nature and does not give

61. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

63. Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 2000).

64. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–15.

66. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet'.

67. David C. Sim, 'The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham', *JSNT* 84 (2001), pp. 3–27.

legitimate evidence for the hypothesis which it supports.⁶⁸ Sim claims that Bauckham's concept of the early church, its travel and communicative nature, and its self-conscious existence, is in no way represented by the picture provided by Bauckham. Sim spends time laying out his critiques of not only Bauckham but of all the contributors of this broad audience thesis. Overall, Sim lays a heavy-laden critique at Bauckham which labels all his arguments as both unsupported by the texts themselves and unsupported by our knowledge of the early church. It seems as if Sim's critique is intended to do more than respond to GAC since, as he admits, he published a detailed study of the Matthean Community the same year GAC was published (1998).⁶⁹ Sim notes concerning the reception of his book on the Matthean community, 'In the subsequent reviews of this book, no less than three reviewers (thus far) independently referred to the Bauckham volume, and each of them made the point that my work had been compromised to some extent by the arguments presented in this particular book.'⁷⁰

From Printed Page to Public Debate: Conferences and Congresses (2002–2003)

The new paradigm proposed in GAC was not limited to technical articles and monographs on the Gospels. The discussion that was initially between individuals has recently moved to a more public stage. The scholarly community at large had begun to participate in the debate because this new paradigm touches upon a whole range of issues; issues important to several sub-disciplines within biblical studies. As the survey above has shown, GAC was not the lone voice promoting this new paradigm, or at least warning of the current paradigm's potential dangers. Many voices were a part of this shift. Thus, what we have called the Gospel community debate had officially arrived. The effect can be seen most clearly in three major conferences in 2002–2003 that dealt with various aspects of the Gospel community debate. A summary of each is given below.

Society of Biblical Literature 2002

The first public venue for discussing an aspect of the Gospel community debate was the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in

68. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

69. David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

70. Sim, 'The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham', p. 4.

November 2002. A session was held in the Johannine Literature Section with the theme: Current Issues in the Gospel of John. The main paper was given by Robert Kysar with prepared responses given by D. Moody Smith and Gail O'Day, as well as an invited brief remark by J. Louis Martyn at the close. A discussion of the issues of that session and its relation to the Gospel community debate now follows.

Robert Kysar is well known for his chronicling the history of interpretation in the Gospel of John.⁷¹ Kysar's paper, 'The Expulsion from the Synagogue: A Tale of a Theory',⁷² sketches a tale of the past thirty-five years of Johannine scholarship around the questions of the origins and dating of the Fourth Gospel and its community. Specifically, the tale tells the 'state of the question' of the scholarly work that links the origins of the Johannine community with an expulsion from the synagogue. This theory is deeply embedded in the groundbreaking book first published in 1968 by J. Louis Martyn,⁷³ although others, particular Raymond Brown,⁷⁴ played a significant role. Before discussing the other papers a brief look at Martyn's important work is in order.

It was in the 1960s, at the high point of redactional activity in all four of the Gospels, that Johannine scholarship was drastically affected by Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. John Ashton states that this book, 'for all its brevity is probably the most important single work on the Gospel since Bultmann's commentary'.⁷⁵ D. Moody Smith concurs: 'Martyn's thesis has become a paradigm, to borrow from Thomas Kuhn. It is a part of what students imbibe from standard works, such as commentaries and textbooks, as knowledge generally received and held to be valid.'⁷⁶ Martyn stated his purpose in his introduction:

Our first task ... is to say something as specific as possible about the actual circumstances in which John wrote his Gospel. How are we to picture daily life

71. Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975).

72. Robert Kysar, 'The Expulsion from the Synagogue: A Tale of a Theory' (unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Toronto, 23-26 November 2002).

73. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 3rd edn, 2003).

74. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29, 29a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970); *idem*, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

75. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 107.

76. D. Moody Smith, 'The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John', in R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa (eds.), *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 175-94 (193).

in John's church? Have elements of its peculiar daily experiences left their stamp on the Gospel penned by one of its members? May one sense even in its exalted cadences the voice of a Christian theologian who writes *in response to contemporary events and issues* which concern, or should concern, all members of the Christian community in which he lives?⁷⁷

To achieve this, according to Martyn, the text of John needs to be read on two levels: one that saw the tradition of the church and the other that was involved in the contemporary issues of the particular community.⁷⁸ By assuming that all the Gospels drew from a similar cistern of tradition, Martyn uses a redaction critical method to see how the Gospel of John applied this tradition (the constant) to the unique social and religious circumstance in which the evangelist lived and ministered (the variable). Martyn explains: 'Consequently, when we read the Fourth Gospel, we are listening both to tradition and to a new and unique interpretation of that tradition.'⁷⁹ With the results of form criticism and the community concept already in play, Martyn simply applied redaction criticism to help define more clearly the community standing behind the Fourth Gospel.

All of this, according to Martyn, allows us to read John through the historical era in which it lived; an era with increasing conflict between Jews and Christians. This is where the theory of the expulsion from the synagogue becomes important. Therefore, the Johannine literature section, and Robert Kysar's paper, are not merely looking at Christian expulsion from the synagogue in a historical sense, but the entire hermeneutical matrix in which such a theory has grown to encompass, specifically the ability to reconstruct a 'community' behind the Gospel of John.

For Kysar, the tale of this theory is related to him personally as it tells the direction of his thought in recent years. Almost thirty years ago Kysar stated the following concerning the theory of the Johannine community:

Contemporary Johannine scholarship has confirmed that the gospel is a community's document ... The gospel cannot be read meaningfully apart from some understanding of the community out of which and to which it was written. Certainly no significant level of understanding of the text can be achieved without a prerequisite historical knowledge ... It is incumbent upon the reader to know as much about that occasion as possible.⁸⁰

77. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 29.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

80. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel*, pp. 269-70.

But concerning the importance of knowing 'as much as possible about the [historical] situation', Kysar now concludes: 'An investigation of the past usually tells us more about the investigator than the past.'⁸¹ He continues: 'Maybe we are just learning that the testing of any hypothesis is an ongoing necessity and that working hypotheses do not always "work" without flaw.'⁸² 'As I am grateful for the work of scholars like Brown and Martyn, I suppose I have simply tired of playing the game of abstract speculative constructions.'⁸³

The responses to Kysar's paper by D. Moody Smith⁸⁴ and Gail R. O'Day⁸⁵ tell a different tale. Smith admits that the title of his response should have been 'Getting at the Root of a Tale'.⁸⁶ Smith spends time discussing the development of the expulsion theory by looking at Martyn's own progression beginning with his Ph.D. dissertation.⁸⁷ According to Smith, Martyn's original purpose was to investigate Rudolf Bultmann's claim that the salvation-history perspective is missing from the Fourth Gospel. He attempted this by 'seeking to discern the conceptual background, intended readers, and purpose in writing of the Fourth Evangelist in order to understand the Gospel's meaning back then'.⁸⁸ Eventually Martyn, contra Bultmann, places the Gospel of John in a Jewish conceptual background, not Gnostic, and comes to find that the fourth evangelist 'writes for readers who are now excluded from synagogues whose experience includes this traumatic rupture. Church and synagogue are now separate.'⁸⁹ While such specific reconstructions concerning the background of the Gospel of John can go astray, Smith is not convinced it is useless. 'I do not ... think that the investigation of the Gospel's Christian setting need be entirely abandoned, or that Martyn

81. Kysar, 'The Expulsion from the Synagogue', p. 12.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 14. Kysar's fatigue in 2002 regarding 'speculative constructions' has now become even more pronounced. See, for example, his 'What's the Meaning of This? - Reflections Upon a Life and Career', in Tom Thatcher (ed.), *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), pp. 163-78.

84. D. Moody Smith, 'Response to Robert Kysar, "The Expulsion from the Synagogue: The Tale of the Theory"' (unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Toronto, 23-26 November 2002).

85. Gail R. O'Day, 'Response: "The Expulsion from the Synagogue: A Tale of a Theory"' (unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Toronto, 23-26 November 2002).

86. Smith, 'Response to Robert Kysar', p. 10.

87. J. Louis Martyn, 'The Salvation-History Perspective in the Fourth Gospel', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1957).

88. Smith, 'Response to Robert Kysar', p. 3.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

would want exegesis to abandon it.'⁹⁰ He continues: 'As biblical exegetes we have to deal with questions of what happened ... proof beyond a reasonable doubt may be a chimera, but one we shall inevitably pursue. Absolute certainty? Almost never, especially in historical research. But probable results remain worth seeking.'⁹¹

The tale presented by O'Day is also different. Going further back than Martyn's dissertation, O'Day looks at the how the classical introduction questions of provenance and date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the real impetus for the eventual theory proposed by Martyn. By the time of Martyn, although the older questions of provenance and date were no longer asked, origins were still front and center.⁹² The strength in Martyn's theory was how well he incorporated all aspects of critical study in his reading of John. The weakness, related to its strength, was that Martyn's theory 'became totalizing, not because his claims or even intents and methods were totalizing, but because he read [John] so well and so easily that we forgot it was a construction of the data'.⁹³ Thus, for O'Day, the tale of Martyn's theory should not lead us to reject all hypotheses based on data as an act of 'abstract speculative construction', for that never really happens. Public scholarly conversation keeps theories grounded in reality. Rather, our scholarly conversations need to ask questions about history and even the construction of hypotheses, while 'keeping our work public and therefore available for scrutiny'.⁹⁴

At the end of the session the moderator invited J. Louis Martyn to make a brief remark. Martyn claimed that his motive was and still is to allow John to be read in its own setting, as far as we are able to do that; this is essential if we really want to hear its own voice, as a voice quite distinct from our own voices! Unfortunately, the strength in Martyn's motivation became its weakness: the only voice interpreters heard were his. In the end, the seminar revealed unknowingly the crisis facing the entire debate surrounding Gospel audience and origin, even though its focus was much narrower. It too, in seeking to find the most appropriate historical context in which to place the Gospel of John, was forced to deal with the nature of hypothetical constructions and their interpretive influence.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

92. O'Day, 'Response', p. 3.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Life in Abundance:

An International Conference on the Gospel of John (2003)

The second conference related to the debate regarding Gospel audience and origin was an international conference on the Gospel of John paying tribute to the life of Raymond E. Brown in October 2003.⁹⁵ One of the sessions was entitled, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community', the same as the main paper given by Robert Kysar,⁹⁶ with a prepared response given by Hans-Josef Klauck.⁹⁷ In his second paper related to the debate, Kysar explores further the origin of the Johannine community reconstructions by looking not only at Martyn, but several of the key scholars and movements in the creation of Gospel communities. According to Kysar, there are four originating events that fostered the origin of the community concept now common in Johannine research. The first was the work of Raymond E. Brown, who first published his view of the Johannine community in the introduction to his commentary on John (1966). His later works⁹⁸ all contributed in some way to establishing the concept of a Johannine community as a key hermeneutical tool. The second was the work of J. Louis Martyn (1968), whose work is discussed above. The third was the work of Wayne Meeks (1972),⁹⁹ whose use of the methods of sociology of knowledge did much to fashion a view of the 'sectarian' Johannine community for years to come. Furthermore, Meeks' use of sociology was the spark that ignited a wide range of social-scientific investigations of the reconstructed Johannine community.¹⁰⁰ Finally, the fourth was the discoveries at Qumran, which linked the model of a Johannine 'sect' to another known sect in the first century. 'These four pivotal events ... formed a magnetic

95. All the papers from this conference are now published in John R. Donahue (ed.), *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005). In order to follow the chronological development of the discussion, all references are to the original papers.

96. Robert Kysar, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community' (unpublished paper delivered at Life in Abundance: An International Conference on the Gospel of John: A Tribute to Raymond E. Brown, Baltimore, Maryland, 16–18 October 2003).

97. Hans-Josef Klauck, 'Community, History, and Text(s) – a Response' (unpublished paper delivered at Life in Abundance: An International Conference on the Gospel of John: A Tribute to Raymond E. Brown, Baltimore, Maryland, 16–18 October 2003).

98. Raymond E. Brown, 'Johannine Ecclesiology – The Community's Origins', *Int Epistles of John* (AB 30; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979); idem, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984).

99. Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 44–72.

100. Kysar, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community', p. 4.

force in Johannine scholarship. The six years between 1966 and 1972 were to set in motion a deluge of studies that took the community as their focus';¹⁰¹ hence the 'Whence' of the community.

But as Kysar goes on to explain, the 'Whither' was not far behind. There are two problems that now confront the concept of a Johannine community and two future challenges that need to be addressed. The first problem has to do with the evidence for such a hypothetical construction as the Johannine community.¹⁰² There are more questions than there are answers concerning the method to determine the type and make-up of a Johannine community. Kysar admits: 'If the effort to determine what constitutes evidence for the Johannine community becomes widely questioned, I fear the methodology on which it is based will prove in and of itself enough to weaken fatally the community interpretation.'¹⁰³ A second problem, related to the first, is that we have no way to go about testing the veracity of the proposed Johannine community. '[I]f it the case that a supposition that seems to give meaning to specific passages is necessarily true? Is it not possible that a faulty supposition might do the same? Simply because a hypothesis illumines the possible meaning of a passage does not necessarily prove that the hypothesis is true.'¹⁰⁴ The first challenge to the future of the Johannine community hypothesis is the entire postmodern movement, which has weakened the historical critical method and has increased the popularity of other interpretive methods. 'Obviously, if postmodernism prevails, it will mean the death of the historical critical method of biblical interpretation and all the historical reconstructions which were results of the method, including those involving the Johannine community.'¹⁰⁵ The second challenge, related to the first, is the rise of these new interpretive methods. A flood of studies within the new literary criticism have come onto the scene, some of which are totally incompatible with historical criticism, especially relating to the question of the locus of meaning.

The distinction between the text as a window and as a mirror is now well known (and perhaps over used), but it entails the issue that I think is vital. Of course, the meaning of a text for the historical critic lies in the occasion behind the text, so that they are required to pick up clues in the text and its larger literary context reading the events that shaped the text itself. Some literary critics, however, argue that the meaning of

101. Ibid., pp. 4–5.

102. Ibid., p. 5.

103. Ibid., p. 6.

104. Ibid., p. 7.

105. Ibid., p. 8.

any text is found and discernible in the text itself without reference to the history behind it.¹⁰⁶

These problems and challenges that do or will confront the Johannine community hypotheses are centered on interpretive method and how one approaches the text. Kysar's forecast is that with the oncoming change in method, the current community results will be forced to change as well. For Kysar, the fact that the reconstruction of the Johannine community is based upon historical and interpretive methods now under siege and being dismantled piece by piece gives it a dim future, if not a total demise.¹⁰⁷

The response to Kysar's paper by Hans-Josef Klauck was entitled 'Community, History, and Text(s) – a Response'. Klauck agreed with the historical development of the Johannine community that Kysar presented, as well as doubts concerning its future. Thus, rather than repeat what Kysar and he have in agreement, Klauck took up one of the related issues in the Gospel community debate: the referentiality of texts. How are we to reconcile the new text-centered methodologies and postmodern theories with the salvageable aspects of historical criticism?¹⁰⁸

To answer this question of referentiality in texts Klauck turns to the issue of genre. In reference to the Johannine community, the genre of the Gospel of John is an important issue as well as the assumed connection between the Johannine epistles. For Klauck, the epistles and Gospel may be seen as related, thus giving a 'partial' picture of what stands behind them.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the theoretical discussions going on in modern historiography are important to the Gospel community debate. Klauck explains the importance of this issue:

If I understand them correctly, historians no longer pretend that they can reconstruct the past. What they do is construct history. The past can never be repeated or revived, but textual and material remains of the past may be used to construct meaningful narratives that help us to a better understanding of the situation we find ourselves in ... This is exactly what we are doing just now, in discussing the rise and potential fall of an influential and respectable model in our field, i.e. the construction of the history of the Johannine community.¹¹⁰

In the end, both Kysar and Klauck agree: the reconstruction of the Johannine community, as well as the other Gospel communities, has become a precarious enterprise.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

108. Klauck, 'Community, History, and Text(s) – a Response', p. 1.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Society of Biblical Literature 2003

The debate regarding Gospel audience and origin resurfaced again at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2003, this time hosted by the Synoptic Gospels Section in a session with the theme: 'Gospels for All Christians? Rethinking Gospel Audiences'. Unlike the previous conferences that did not even mention GAC, this session was specifically designed to discuss the new paradigm presented by Bauckham et al. Since Bauckham was unable to be in attendance, Richard Burridge, one of the contributors to GAC, restated the thesis of the volume, followed by prepared responses by Mark Matson and Margaret Mitchell. Since the thesis of Bauckham has already been discussed above, we shall only deal with the responses given by Matson and Mitchell.

Matson's response¹¹¹ was a rhetorical exploration in the Gospel of Matthew which asks a different question of the text than is usually asked by redaction critics. Instead of assuming the first evangelist was aware of Mark but was writing to an audience that was ignorant of the Mark, Matson asks the question: How might we read Matthew if the author was addressing an audience already competent with the narrative of Jesus – the Gospel of Mark? How might that influence the way one understands Matthew's rhetorical force?¹¹² After asking these questions of several texts in Matthew, Matson concludes: 'The idea that Matthew's audience had, or Matthew imagined that they had, Mark is certainly not proven.'¹¹³ Unfortunately, according to Matson, this exploration neither proved nor disproved the thesis of GAC.

The most important part of the session was the prepared response by Margaret M. Mitchell (2003).¹¹⁴ Mitchell's paper, entitled 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians"', presented a powerful critique to the new paradigm promoted by Bauckham. Although Mitchell agrees with Bauckham 'that redaction critical readings can dissolve into excessive "allegorical" readings of the gospels', she thinks the general paradigm that Bauckham proposes has both logical and methodological difficulties and does

111. Mark A. Matson, 'Interactive Rhetoric in Matthew: An Exploration of Audience Knowledge Competency' (unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, 22–25 November 2003).

112. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

114. Margaret M. Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians"' (unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, 22–25 November 2003).

not fit with the patristic evidence.¹¹⁵ Concerning the former, Mitchell accuses Bauckham of making overtly generalized statements concerning the Gospel literature, the nature of the Christian movement, authors, audiences and rhetorical appropriateness, and the overall logical expression of the thesis.¹¹⁶ Concerning the latter, Mitchell attempts to show that far from being unconcerned with a local audience, the patristic writers were very concerned with the local origins of each of the Gospels. An extended explanation by Mitchell is important here:

My conclusion is that, in a rush to present patristic exegetes ... as uniformly opposed to anything like 'redaction criticism', Bauckham has overlooked the extent to which patristic interpretation of the gospels was very self-consciously and complexly working at the fulcrum between the universality and particularity of the gospels (including at times an insistence upon their original local audiences) ... The gospels ultimately were read as addressing "all Christians" in that they were regarded as having communicated a universal divine truth. That they could so effectively be read in this way was in fact their genius and was ... a major factor in the rise and missionary success of the Christian cult. But that universal readership did not concomitantly require later Christian readers (as Bauckham insists is necessary) to disregard circumstances of origin, local origin. Patristic authors found many creative ways to hold in tension their historical particularity and theological universality.¹¹⁷

From this Mitchell deals with several examples of patristic texts that she claims contradict the paradigm presented by Bauckham in GAC. Mitchell has provided valuable insight into the patristic issues of the Gospel community debate.¹¹⁸

The Consensual Chaos of Gospel Audience and Origin (2004–Present)

Once the rethinking of Gospel audience and origin presented by GAC was given a forum in print and public, the debate settled into its various corners of New Testament studies. The result can be described as a mild form of chaos. What began as a challenge to the current consensus has yielded a consensual chaos. But clearly this is not unexpected. The challenge of a century-old paradigm brings out both the presumptive victors and the staunch opponents, with a majority of onlookers feeling

115. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–11.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

118. Mitchell's paper is now published in only a slightly revised form in NTS 51 (2005), pp. 36–79. In order to follow the chronological development of the discussion, all references are to the original paper; but the more recent article will be discussed throughout the remainder of this volume. Because of the importance of Mitchell's contribution to the Gospel audience and origin debate, it will be given an entire chapter in this volume.

bewildered and confused. While we are unable to survey every area affected, a brief summary of the primary arenas of the discussion is now in order.

First, the debate over Gospel audience and origin has most directly affected the study of the canonical Gospels. Since 1998, nearly every new work on the four canonical Gospels feels compelled to allude to or directly address the Gospel community debate, even if only in a footnote. Even more, the debate has moved from a general discussion of 'the Gospels' to detailed analyses of specific Gospels. Taking a life of its own, the current discussion already begins with the need to rethink the traditional consensus, either positively or negatively, and then applies new readings or presuppositions to the individual Gospel narratives. The result has been that discussions become focused on particular sub-disciplines (e.g. Matthean studies, Johannine studies),¹¹⁹ or even between the Gospels, their interrelationship, within the broader study of the Gospels corpus. These more focused studies bring needed attention on the detailed effects of the debate regarding Gospel origin and audience.

Second, the current debate has also extended to the non-canonical Gospels. The early critique to Bauckham by David Sim argued that the non-canonical evidence is in sharp contrast to the thesis of GAC.¹²⁰ A similar accusation was leveled against GAC by Margaret Mitchell, who criticized Bauckham for restricting his analysis to the canonical Gospels, especially when many are designated by their audience.¹²¹ But the most extensive analysis of non-canonical evidence, or what he refers to as extra-canonical, was provided by Thoman Kazen.¹²² Kazen argues that by comparing canonical with non-canonical Gospels the thesis of Bauckham et al. is only weakened, for not only do the non-canonical gospels originate in a specific group, but, like the canonical Gospels, had a distribution (or lack thereof) based entirely on power structures, not intention. Kazen and others provided needed analyses of the evidence surrounding the canonical Gospels, reflecting the authorial issues of diverse Christians in the early Christian movement.

Third, from its inception much of the debate has centered upon hermeneutical theory and the nature of the Gospel genre and referentiality.

119. See, for example, on Matthew: Daniel W. Ulrich, 'The Mission Audience of the Gospel of Matthew', CBQ 69 (2007), pp. 64–83; on Mark: Michael F. Bird, 'The Markan Community, Myth or Maze? Bauckham's *The Gospels for All Christians* Revisited', JTS 37 (2006), pp. 474–86; on John: Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John*.

120. Sim, 'The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham', p. 19.

121. Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', p. 39.

122. Thomas Kazen, 'Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-Canonical Texts', NTS 51 (2005), pp. 561–78.

The interaction between Kysar and Klauck above only amplified the need for further examination. One recent attempt has been an examination of the two-level reading made famous in the community reading of John by J. Louis Martyn. According to Tobias Hägerland, no other biographical work, even those comparable to the Gospels, reflects any intention to be read on two levels of distinct ostensive reference.¹²³ While Hägerland's research provided a helpful comparison between ancient biographies, Justin Smith has provided helpful new categories for understanding the nature and function of Greco-Roman Biography.¹²⁴

Fourth, the debate has necessitated a reevaluation of basic 'introductory' questions of the Gospels and early Christianity. The entire foundation of the debate regarding the audience and origin of the Gospels is intimately tied not only to the classic issues of introduction regarding the Gospels, as in date, authorship, provenance, and purpose, but also to the entire early Christian movement. Two recent works on the purpose of Mark's Gospel, for example, interact at length with GAC and the issues involved in developing Gospel community debate.¹²⁵ In this way the debate is not an isolated entity, a mere discussion among specialists, but is central to any study of the Gospels.

Fifth, the influence of the debate has extended, surprisingly, into corpora beyond the Gospels – specifically Pauline studies! In a paper at the 2005 British New Testament Conference, David Horrell applies the arguments Bauckham proposes in relation to the Gospels in a comparable way to the Pauline letters.¹²⁶ Horrell admits that the issue he considers is not the same as is central to Bauckham. While Bauckham is mainly concerned whether the Gospels were written for a specific or wider Christian audiences, Horrell's concern 'is to ask whether the local communities to which the letters were undoubtedly sent can in any sense be meaningful labeled "Pauline"'. In other words, the issue is not one of geographic isolation but of theological or ideological distinctiveness.¹²⁷

123. Tobias Hägerland, 'John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?' *JSNT* 25 (2003), pp. 309–22.

124. Justin M. Smith, 'Genre, Sub-Genre and Questions of Audience: A Proposed Typology for Greco-Roman Biography', *JGRChJ* 4 (2007), pp. 184–216.

125. See Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (BIS 65; Leiden: Brill, 2003); and Hendrika N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (NovTsup 114; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

126. David G. Horrell, 'The Letters to all Christians? Were there Pauline Churches?' (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the British New Testament Conference at Liverpool Hope University, 1–3 September 2005); soon to be published in a revised form in 'Pauline Churches or Early Christian Churches? Unity, Disagreement, and the Eucharist', in A. Alexeev, C. Karakolis, U. Luz, and K.-W. Niebuhr (eds.), *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

127. Horrell, 'The Letters to all Christians? Were there Pauline Churches?' pp. 4–5.

Use by Pauline scholarship of the reconsidered questions being asked of the Gospels reflects the larger impact of the debate in New Testament studies, at both historical and theological levels.

The Purpose of this Volume

In the midst of the chaos regarding Gospel audience and origin, this volume intends to bring some fresh insight and needed clarity to the contemporary debate ten years after GAC. In response to the contemporary chaos involved in the debate of Gospel audience and origin we have assembled an international group of scholars to address the primary arenas of discussion above, with the intention of bringing needed clarification and definition, and if possible, fresh insight. The following is a brief introduction to the contributions.

In chapter 2 Michael F. Bird addresses directly the issue of the non-canonical Gospels. In an essay entitled 'Sectarian Gospels for Sectarian Christians? The Non-Canonical Gospels and Bauckham's *The Gospels for All Christians*', Bird attends to the important issue raised by several in the Gospel community debate: Does the evidence from the non-canonical Gospels help us determine the expected audience of the Gospels? Several scholars contend that in GAC Bauckham ignores evidence contrary to his thesis by bracketing out the extra-canonical Gospels that are specifically designated by their audience. If the Gospels written in the second century and beyond were created for restricted and localized Christian readership, should we not assume something similar was intended for the canonical Gospels? Does a comparison with the extra-canonical Gospels undermine the thesis of GAC?

In chapter 3 Justin Marc Smith presses further the research into the nature of the Gospel genre and referentiality by examining the author-subject relationships in contemporary Greco-Roman biographies and the corresponding relationship between the genre of the Gospels and the implied reader. In an essay entitled 'About Friends, by Friends, for Others: Author-Subject Relationships in Contemporary Greco-Roman Biographies', Smith argues that the long-standing discussion about the genre of the Gospels can move beyond the generic impasse to a more detailed description of author-audience relations. In order to do this Smith provides a new classification for Greco-Roman biography: a 'relationally-oriented typology' for classifying Greco-Roman biographies. Does this new typology provide more insight into the intended audience of the Gospels?

In chapter 4 Richard Bauckham provides a response to the important argument presented by Margaret Mitchell regarding the patristic evidence.

Michael F. Bird's initial essay in GAC: 'For Whom Were

Gospels Written?', has been widely regarded as a major threat to the 'All Christians' position. In an essay entitled 'Is there Patristic Counter-Evidence? A Response to Margaret Mitchell', Bauckham provides a thorough and substantial response to Mitchell by responding not only to Mitchell's argument, but also to the evidence from the patristic period and its relation to the Gospel audience debate. Is Mitchell correct when she claims that Bauckham has overlooked the extent to which patristic interpretation of the Gospels was very self-consciously and complexly working at the fulcrum between the universality and particularity of the Gospels, including at times an insistence upon their original local audiences? Can some form of the view that the Gospels were written for specific, localized audiences be found in patristic statements about the origins of the Gospels? What do the traditions about the audience and origin of the Gospels really reveal?

In chapter 5 Craig L. Blomberg explores the possibility of an intermediary position between Gospels for specific communities and Gospels for all Christians. In an essay entitled 'The Gospels for Specific Communities and All Christians', Blomberg explores the two positions and attempts to determine if the two sides are mutually contradictory. Is there a *via media* between the proposal set forth by GAC and the traditional consensus of redaction criticism? Is it possible that both positions, taken to an extreme, are unable to account for the actual evidence regarding origin of the Gospels? Is it possible to have a both/and approach to the audience and origin of the Gospels?

In chapter 6 Adele Reinhartz provides a different evaluation of the Gospel audience debate. In an essay entitled 'Gospel Audiences: Variations on a Theme', Reinhartz avoids altogether the argument for or against one position by addressing a more fundamental issue: the logic of the argument and the nature of its reception in the New Testament guild. Reinhartz is concerned not merely with the nature of history, but with the nature of the historian. What is the logical consequence of the hypothesis proposed by GAC? What other concerns motivated the 'All Christians' proposal? And more foundationally, does what GAC proposes inevitably lead to a paradigm shift?

The volume concludes with a summarizing essay that analyzes the findings of each of the contributors and provides an evaluation of their overall contribution to the debate regarding the audience and origin of the Gospels. The goal of this final chapter is to provide a launching pad for continued discussion and research. This chapter is not intended to present a further argument, but to provide an overall synthesis and evaluation in the form of a dialogical conclusion.

Chapter 2

SECTARIAN GOSPELS FOR SECTARIAN CHRISTIANS? THE NON-CANONICAL GOSPELS AND BAUCKHAM'S THE GOSPELS FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Michael F. Bird

Modern Gospel scholarship has for some time tried to locate the Gospels against the backdrop of certain communities which exerted a formative influence upon their contents and concerns.¹ On this perspective, Luke, for instance, wrote for a 'Lucan community' and John for a 'Johannine community' and so forth. However, this entire approach of regarding the Gospels as windows into particular communities has been called into question by Richard Bauckham and associates in the book *The Gospels for All Christians* (1998).² Bauckham provocatively argues that the Gospels were not written for any single community but for all Christians or as many that might read them. The Gospels probably had

1. This approach is somewhat indebted to patristic authors who identified the Gospels in relation to specific audiences or particular localities. Matthew was often thought to have been composed for a Jewish readership, Luke for Gentiles or the region of Achaia, Mark as Peter's interpreter purportedly wrote for Italy or the Roman church, and John for Asia Minor (e.g. Anti-Marcionite Prologues for Mark, Luke and John; Muratorian Canon; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1; Origen's fragments cited in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.4-6; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carm.* 1.12.6-9; see Margaret M. Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,"' NTS 51 [2005], pp. 36-79). These patristic accounts of the Gospels' origins seem driven by a need to defend the fourfold Gospel collection, specifically, their plurality and diversity. The reports themselves probably contain a mixture of early church tradition and later aetiological embellishment. Modern scholarship in contrast attributes to these hypothetical communities hermeneutical significance in illuminating the meaning of the Gospel, i.e. the Gospels are to some extent about their respective communities.

2. Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). For a recent survey of the debate see Edward W. Klink, 'The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question', CBR 3 (2004), pp. 60-85.