

RICHARD BAUCKHAM

The Christian World  
Around the New Testament

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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zum Neuen Testament

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Richard Bauckham

The Christian World  
Around the New Testament

Collected Essays II

Mohr Siebeck

RICHARD BAUCKHAM, born 1946; 1973 PhD, University of Cambridge; 1992–2007 Professor of New Testament Studies, St Andrews University, Scotland; 1998 elected Fellow of the British Academy; 2002 elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; since 2007 Emeritus Professor, St Andrews University, and Senior Scholar, Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

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## List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Ed. by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
Aev	<i>Aevum: Rassegna de science, storiche, linguistiche, et filologiche</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGLB	Vetus Latina: Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
AnBoll	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
ANQ	<i>Andover Newton Quarterly</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Ed. by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1972 ff.
Aug	<i>Augustinianum</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAC	Biblioteca de autores cristianos
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BG 8502	Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus 8502
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCSA	Corpus Christianorum. Series Apocryphorum
CG	Cairensis Gnosticus (= Nag Hammadi Library)
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CIL	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i>
CNS	<i>Cristianesimo nella storia</i>



ConBNT	Coniectanea neutestamentica/Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . Ed. by Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks. 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957–64
CQR	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DACL	<i>Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie</i> . Ed. by Fernand Cabrol. 15 vols. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1953
DBSup	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i> 1 ff. Ed. by Louis Pirot and André Robert. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928 ff.
EBib	Études bibliques
EuroJTh	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
FGH	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Ed. by Felix Jacoby. Leiden: Brill, 1954–64
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte
FoiVie	<i>Foi et Vie</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FS	Festschrift
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten (drei) Jahrhunderte
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HeyJ	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HvTSt	<i>Hervormde theologiese studies</i>
IBS	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> . Editio minor. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1924 ff.
IGRR	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i> . Ed. by René Cagnac. 4 vols. Paris: Leroux, 1903–27
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JAC.E	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i> . Ergänzungsband
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> . Supplement Series

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSPSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th edition with revised Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
MM	Moulton, J. H., and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i> , London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930 (reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997)
<i>MTSR</i>	<i>Method and Theory in the Study of Religion</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to <i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OLA	Orientalia analecta Lovaniensia
<i>OrSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i> . Ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–86
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina</i> . Ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–64
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBén</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RechBibl	Recherches bibliques
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version

SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLECL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Christianity and Its Literature
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources Chr�tiennes
SD	Studies and Documents
<i>SE�</i>	<i>Svensk Exegetisk �rsbok</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SPAW.PH	Sitzungsberichte der Preu�ischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum/Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity
StPB	Studia Post-Biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVTP	Studia in veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993
TNCT	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TPINTC	TPI New Testament Commentaries
TRSR	Testi e Ricerchi di Scienze Religiose
TS	Texts and Studies
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum/Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>VD</i>	<i>Verbum domini</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift f�r die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift f�r Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZRGG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift f�r Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>ZWT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift f�r wissenschaftliche Theologie</i>

## Introduction

This volume is a companion to my earlier collection of essays, *The Jewish World around the New Testament* (WUNT 233). The essays assembled here were written over the course of forty years (the earliest was first published in 1974) but, whereas in the earlier collection I arranged the essays in chronological order, in this volume I have been able to group the thirty-one essays in seven broad topics.

The title's reference to the 'world around the New Testament' is intended to indicate that these essays on early Christianity are by no means limited to the canonical texts of the New Testament. Very few are concerned with exegesis of the New Testament texts in the ordinary sense. Many of them probe 'behind' those texts in ways that are standard in modern biblical scholarship, attempting to trace the traditions and to reconstruct the history that produced the texts we have. Others are historical studies that draw on New Testament evidence along with the evidence of non-canonical Christian literature. There are many studies of so-called apocryphal Christian literature and a few that relate to early patristic texts. These other early Christian texts 'around' the New Testament have attracted my interest for as long as I have also studied the New Testament itself, and I have long maintained that the study of Christian origins must take full account of them. Whatever conclusions we reach as to the relative chronology and literary relationships of the various canonical and non-canonical texts from the first two centuries of Christian history, it should be obvious that they are all relevant to the study of early Christianity, and study of the New Testament texts themselves cannot but be enhanced by seeing them in a wider context.

Special thanks are due to Matthias Müller, who compiled the indices.



## Gospel Audiences



## Introduction

The two essays in this section are my two major contributions to the debate about Gospel audiences that was initiated in 1998 by the volume of essays I edited: *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*. I wrote the lead essay of this volume (reprinted below), which set out the thesis that I and the other authors (Michael B. Thompson, Loveday Alexander, Richard Burridge, Stephen Barton and Francis Watson) were arguing. We proposed a paradigm change in Gospels scholarship, in which for most of the twentieth century the overwhelmingly dominant view had been that each Gospel was written for its author's own Christian community – the so-called Matthean community, Markan community, Lukan community and Johannine community. We proposed instead that the Gospels were intended from the start to circulate around the churches (as, very soon, they certainly did). The “Gospel community hypothesis” was a consensus for which hardly anyone had ever actually argued. It was widely taken for granted as though there were no credible alternative. By arguing that “the Gospels for all Christians” is at the very least a plausible alternative view of the audiences for whom the Gospels were written, we hoped to start a debate that had never taken place. The bibliography below shows that debate has taken place and has been fairly extensive, even if it has also been rather haphazard. (There are helpful overviews of the debate by Klink<sup>1</sup> and Cirafesi.<sup>2</sup>) The second essay in this section is my response to one scholar, Margaret Mitchell, who argued against “the Gospels for all Christians” thesis on the basis of patristic evidence.

While Wally Cirafesi in 2014 called *The Gospels for All Christians* “a paradigm shifting moment for Gospel scholarship,” and suggested that, at least in Johannine scholarship, “it appears to represent the direction that a

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Klink, “The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question,” *CurBR* 3 (2004) 60–85; Edward W. Klink, “Gospel Audience and Origin: The Current Debate,” in *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, ed. Edward W. Klink (LNTS 353; London: T. & T. Clark International [Continuum], 2010) 1–26.

<sup>2</sup> Wally V. Cirafesi, “The Johannine Community Hypothesis (1968–Present): Past and Present Approaches and a New Way Forward,” *CurBR* 12 (2014) 173–193; Wally V. Cirafesi, “The ‘Johannine Community’ in (More) Current Research: A Critical Appraisal of Recent Methods and Models,” *Neot* 48 (2014) 341–364. In these articles Cirafesi is concerned only with the Gospel of John.



good deal of English-speaking scholarship is currently heading,”<sup>3</sup> the “community hypothesis” is still alive and well in much current Gospels scholarship. A well entrenched consensus is not easily or rapidly shifted. In a very positive view of Edward Klink’s book *The Sheep of the Fold* (which develops “the Gospels for all Christians” approach in the case of the Gospel of John) veteran Johannine scholar Robert Kysar wrote:

One of the shocking revelations of the work of these scholars who want to reestablish the Gospels as originally documents intended to be circulated widely among Christians is how deeply embedded the notion of “community” has become in contemporary biblical scholarship. It seems that the longer an assumption is taken to be true, the more resistance there is to reevaluating it. After you and I have devoted so much of our lives to the study of documents supposed to have been related to some geographical cluster of Christians in the first and second centuries, we are tempted to turn deaf ears to any who challenge the assumption. The group of scholars for whom Klink speaks seeks to do us a favor by nudging us in another direction, and we repudiate our scholarship if we resist that creative prodding.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cirafesi, “The Johannine Community Hypothesis,” 186, 185.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Kysar, review of Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold*, in *Bib* 90 (2009) 133–135, here 135.

<sup>5</sup> This bibliography is doubtless not exhaustive, but it is more comprehensive than any I have seen.

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# 1. For Whom Were Gospels Written?

## I.

The title of this essay could be analyzed into two distinct questions, only one of which it will attempt to answer. One of these questions is: Were Gospels written for Christians or for non-Christians? This question has sometimes been discussed, particularly in the case of the Gospels of Luke and John, since a minority of scholars have argued that those Gospels, or all four Gospels, were written as apologetic or evangelistic works, not for Christians but for outsiders.<sup>1</sup> On this question the present chapter takes for granted, without arguing the point, the answer given by the scholarly consensus: that all Gospels were intended to reach, in the first place, a Christian audience. For the purposes of the argument of this chapter, it needs only to be observed that, if any of the evangelists did envisage reaching non-Christian readers, they would surely have had to envisage reaching them via Christian readers, who could pass on copies of Gospels to interested outsiders through personal contact.<sup>2</sup> So the Christian audience would in any case remain primary.

The second question, which this chapter does address, is: Were the Gospels written for a specific Christian audience or for a general Christian audience? Was, for example, Matthew written for Matthew's own church, the so-called Matthean community, or was it written for wide circulation among the Christian churches of the late first century? Are a Gospel's implied readers a speci-

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<sup>1</sup> For this argument with reference to all four Gospels, see C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*, SBT 2/1 (London: SCM Press, 1967), 101–14 (113: “all four Gospels alike are to be interpreted as more than anything else evangelistic and apologetic in purpose”); and cf. H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 103 (“missionary and propagandist aspects” as well as “important functions within Christian communities”). For Luke, see C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 104–11. For John, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 87–95. M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 304, takes the view that Mark was written for two categories of individuals (not groups): Christians experiencing persecution and interested outsiders.

<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with the second-century evidence that the Gospels did find some non-Christian readers: Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 103.

fic Christian community (consisting of one or more specific local churches), or are they the members of any and every Christian community of the late first century to which that Gospel might circulate? Whereas the first of our two questions has sometimes been discussed, with some substantial arguments deployed in its discussion, this second question is remarkable for having never, so far as I can tell, been discussed in print.

The point is not, of course, that this question is not relevant to the concerns of current or recent Gospels scholarship. Quite the opposite. One of the two possible answers to this question – the option that each Gospel was written for a specific Christian community – has been taken entirely for granted in most Gospels scholarship for some decades now.<sup>3</sup> As an assumption on which arguments about the Gospels are based, it has come to play a more and more dominant role in Gospels scholarship, which since the late 1960s has become increasingly interested in reconstructing the circumstances and character of the community for which, it is assumed, each Gospel was written. Almost all contemporary writing about the Gospels shares the unargued assumption that each evangelist, himself<sup>4</sup> no doubt a teacher in a particular church, wrote his Gospel for that particular church, with its particular situation, character, and needs at the forefront of his mind. The so-called Matthean, Markan, Lukan, or Johannine (or for that matter, Thomasine<sup>5</sup>) community may be understood as, not just one church, but a small group of churches, but in that case it is treated as axiomatic that this group of churches was homogeneous in composition and circumstances. The unargued assumption in every case is that each Gospel addresses a localized community in its own, quite specific context and character.

Nearly all the literature of the last few decades that makes this assumption and increasingly builds large and highly sophisticated arguments upon it seems to regard this assumption as completely self-evident, as though no alternative could ever have occurred to anyone. There is, of course, a perfectly obvious alternative possibility: that an evangelist writing a Gospel expected his work to circulate widely among the churches, had no particular Christian audience in view, but envisaged as his audience any church (or any church in

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, some important works on the Gospels that show no interest at all in the question of their audience also continue to be published, e.g., H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> I refer to evangelists as male, not because the possibility of a female author of a Gospel can be excluded, but because what we know about authorship in the ancient world makes it relatively improbable.

<sup>5</sup> For various reconstructions of the Thomasine community, see B. Lincoln, "Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text," *NovT* 19 (1977): 65–76; K. King, "Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas," *Foundations and Facets Forum* 3, no. 1 (1987): 48–97; S. J. Patterson *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1993), especially chapters 5–7.

which Greek was understood) to which his work might find its way. This is the possibility that the present chapter argues deserves to be given very serious consideration. The purpose of the chapter is not simply to challenge the established consensus but to open up a discussion that has never so far taken place. Not only has no one apparently ever, so far as I have been able to discover, argued for the alternative view, which I shall propose as more plausible. There has never been any debate.

To challenge a scholarly consensus is inevitably and understandably to encounter resistance from readers immersed in the consensus. Such readers are naturally disposed to think that a consensus that is not only so universally accepted but that also has proved so fruitful in generating exciting and interesting work on the Gospels must be right. Any argument against this kind of consensus has an uphill struggle merely to gain an unprejudiced hearing, if there were such a thing. Therefore I begin with a preliminary argument whose function is merely to sow an initial seed of possibility that there might perhaps be something to be said for the view I shall propose.

I put this argument in a form that presupposes the most widely accepted view of Synoptic relationships, but it could easily be restated to accommodate any theory of Synoptic relationships. (None of the argument of this essay depends on any particular theory of Synoptic relationships.) Since the present argument has to be stated in one form or another, I assume Markan priority. On the assumption of Markan priority, how is it that Matthew and Luke both had Mark's Gospel available to them? No one imagines all three evangelists belonged to the same local Christian community. So the view that is generally taken for granted is that by the time Matthew and Luke wrote, Mark's Gospel had already circulated quite widely around the churches and was being read in the churches to which Matthew and Luke respectively belonged. This is a very reasonable view, since we know quite certainly that at a slightly later date Mark's Gospel was known in churches other than Mark's own, wherever that was. Matthew and Luke, in other words, knew Mark as a Gospel that had in fact circulated quite widely among the churches and was proving to be useful and valued in many Christian communities. Whatever Mark had meant his Gospel to be, his work, when Matthew and Luke knew it, had already in fact come to be used and valued, not as a work focused on highly particular circumstances in Mark's own community, but as a work generally useful to various different churches. Matthew's and Luke's model for what a Gospel was must have been Mark as it was actually circulated and used in the churches. They must surely have expected their Gospels to circulate at least as widely as Mark's had already done. They must have envisaged an audience at least as broad as Mark's Gospel had already achieved. Most likely Matthew and Luke each expected his own Gospel to replace Mark's. To suppose that Matthew and Luke, knowing that Mark's Gospel had in fact circulated to many churches, nevertheless each addressed his own Gospel to the much

more restricted audience of his own community seems *prima facie* very improbable. Such a view would require rather careful argument and certainly should not be treated as a self-evident axiom.

## II.

The way the current consensus on this issue has come about, without anyone ever having seriously argued the case for it, would make a significant topic for study in the history of New Testament scholarship. It could also provoke reflections, perhaps rather disturbing reflections, about the sociology and psychology of New Testament studies as a discipline. In this section of the present essay, I can only indicate some broad features of the history of scholarship that provide background for engagement with the current consensus.

The view that each evangelist wrote for his own community is an old view in British scholarship. The earliest example of it I know is in Henry Barclay Swete's commentary on Mark (first edition, 1888), a major commentary in its time. Swete claims, in fact, that it was "the prevalent belief of the ancient Church" that "St. Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome and for the Roman Church."<sup>6</sup> The idea here rests on patristic evidence, which Swete, like most of his contemporaries, accepts with little discussion. That Mark was written not only in Rome but also for the Roman church seems in fact to be based only on the account in Clement of Alexandria (*ap.* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.6–7), which need not strictly require this conclusion.<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to notice that for Swete Mark's intended readership is merely an aspect of the usual introductory questions about the Gospel; it has no significant consequences for exegesis. It does not occur to him that Mark adapted his thoroughly historical record of Jesus to address specific needs or issues in the Roman church. We are dealing with an idea that has at this date a very limited function in Gospels scholarship but which would come into its own when Mark was read as something other than a straightforwardly historical record.

At the same time as Swete, Alfred Plummer in his *International Critical Commentary on Luke* (first edition, 1898) takes a different view – at least of Luke's audience. Dismissing the idea that Luke wrote only for Theophilus, he

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<sup>6</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1909), xxxix; cf. xl.

<sup>7</sup> According to Clement, Mark wrote his Gospel, a record of Peter's preaching, at the request of those who heard Peter's preaching in Rome and distributed copies of it to those who had asked him. This is quite consistent with the view that Mark would have expected further copies to be passed on to other churches, in the normal way in which literature circulated in the early Christian movement. It is very doubtful whether Clement had any source for his account other than Papias's account of the origin of Mark's Gospel, but nevertheless the way in which he envisaged a Gospel beginning to circulate is of interest.

claims: "It is evident that he writes for the instruction and encouragement of all Gentile converts."<sup>8</sup> That Luke might have written for a specific church does not occur to him. But the view that each Gospel had a specific community in view must have been given considerable impetus in British scholarship by B. H. Streeter's book *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (1924), which was a landmark in English-speaking Gospels scholarship, establishing the dominance of the four-document hypothesis for a long time to come. Integral to Streeter's argument was the view that each of the four Gospels must have originated in a major center of Christianity (in fact, respectively Antioch, Rome, Caesarea, and Ephesus). Only this, in his view, accounts for the prestige of all four and their eventual canonization. They acquired this prestige not simply by having originated from these important churches but from having been originally used in these churches: "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."<sup>9</sup> Mark in particular survived the competition from Matthew and Luke because of the prestige it had acquired locally as the Roman church's Gospel. In my view there are serious flaws in this argument,<sup>10</sup> which need not detain us because the argument is rarely found today, but we should note that, if it is true that the idea of the Gospels as local Gospels (Streeter's term) became popular as a result of Streeter's work, then it did so on the basis of a single argument that has long since been forgotten by most who exploit the idea for purposes unknown to Streeter. In any case, Streeter would seem to be one of the first scholars to stress the local origins of all four Gospels in such a way as to fuse the two questions of the local context *in which* a Gospel was written and the audience *for which* it was written.<sup>11</sup> As he puts it, "The Gospels were written in and for different churches"<sup>12</sup> – a statement that encapsulates the axiom of the current consensus that I wish to question.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), xxxiv.

<sup>9</sup> B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Even if the four Gospels originally had the prestige of being the local Gospels of particular major churches, there is no evidence at all that this factor was operative in the second century, when the survival of all four to form the four-Gospel canon was at stake. The association of Mark's Gospel with Peter is far more likely to have been a major factor in the survival of Mark alongside Matthew and Luke.

<sup>11</sup> B. W. Bacon, *Is Mark a Roman Gospel?*, HTS 7 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919) also fuses these questions, in relation to Mark. Though his argument is almost entirely concerned with the location in which Mark was written, occasionally he reveals that for him this is the same question as that about the implied readership of Mark (66, 85).

<sup>12</sup> Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 12.



A most interesting representative (still within British scholarship) of the process by which the consensus has come about is G. D. Kilpatrick's *The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1946). Some readers may be surprised to find at this date so strong an emphasis on the specific *Sitz im Leben* in which the Gospel was written and its formative influence on the making of the Gospel. Kilpatrick is already discussing the major issues that those who write about the kind of context in which Matthew originated still discuss. A chapter on "The Gospel and Judaism" covers the now very familiar ground of relating Matthew to late-first-century developments in Judaism and in Jewish-Christian relations. In a chapter on "The Community of the Gospel" he speaks of "the Matthean church" and uses the clues provided by the Gospel to argue that the church in which Matthew wrote was well-to-do, had a ministry of prophets and teachers, was suffering persecution, was imperiled by false teaching, and so on. Crucially, he takes it for granted – without argument – that the church in which Matthew wrote was the church for which Matthew wrote.<sup>13</sup> His reconstruction of the Matthean community and its context in fact depends on this assumption, since it presupposes that everything Matthew implies about his readers is specifically true of his own church.

Kilpatrick's book is the direct ancestor of the way recent major commentaries on the Gospels – for example, Davies and Allison on Matthew,<sup>14</sup> Fitzmyer on Luke<sup>15</sup> – discuss the introductory questions about the Gospels, simply assuming that the question about the context in which a Gospel was written and the question about the audience for which a Gospel was written are the same question. Such discussions therefore regularly and systematically confuse the evidence for these two different questions. Precisely in the context where one might expect to find *arguments* for the view that has become the consensus – in discussions of the conventional set of introductory questions about Gospels – one finds only the assumption of precisely what needs to be proved and a consequent confusion of issues.

Latent in Kilpatrick's method of reconstructing the Matthean community's character and situation from the Gospel was the potential for reading the Gospel as addressing the particular needs and concerns of the community. Though this potential is mostly undeveloped in Kilpatrick's book, the book does show how well the ground was already prepared, in English-speaking

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<sup>13</sup> G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 130.

<sup>14</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. I, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 138–47.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, AB 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 57–59. Other recent examples are D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), lxxv–lxxi; U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, trans. W. C. Linss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 82–90.

scholarship, for the approach that developed within redaction-critical studies, especially of Mark, in the 1960s and 70s. Not all redaction critics were especially concerned with the evangelist's community; some used redaction criticism primarily as a means of highlighting the particular theology of each evangelist, without relating this theology to a specific community and its situation. But in the late 1960s and 70s a series of books developed an approach that aimed to reconstruct the distinctive features of the Markan community and to explain the Gospel as addressing specific issues within the community. Best known of the pioneering books along these lines is Theodore Weeden's *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (1968), which also marks the rise of American Gospels scholarship to leadership in this field, but the approach is also found, for example, in the German work of K. G. Reploh, *Markus, Lehrer der Gemeinde* (1969). It is characteristic of these works that they take it entirely for granted that a Gospel was written for a particular church. They do not even treat this as a working hypothesis that their work may show to be plausible. They treat it as self-evident fact, on which their work can build. This is the point, crucial in the history of Gospels scholarship, at which an unargued assumption, previously confined to discussions of introductory questions, became the basis for interpretative strategies that found the specific circumstances and needs of a particular community addressed in a Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

The redaction critics often complained that form criticism, despite its professed emphasis on the Christian community as the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel traditions, always considered the community in highly general terms. The only distinctions between communities that mattered to form criticism were the much-used categories of Palestinian Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, and Gentile Christianity. Moreover, when the great form critics, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, did discuss the written Gospels as the end products of the oral tradition, the community dimension seemed to

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<sup>16</sup> An illustration of the axiomatic status so widely attributed to this assumption can be found in J. R. Donahue, "The Quest for the Community of Mark's Gospel," in *The Four Gospels 1992*, ed. F. van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. van Belle, and J. Verheyden, Festschrift for F. Neirynck; 3 vols.; BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 2:817–38. He surveys attempts to locate the origin of Mark's Gospel and to identify the "Markan community" as the Gospel's implied readership (treating, as usual, the two issues as the same), refers to the "interesting questions about the whole enterprise of the quest for the communities behind the gospels" raised by M. A. Tolbert (835), who argues that Mark was not written for a specific local community but for a wide readership, and continues: "Even if this total skepticism may be unwarranted . . ." (836). While this sounds as though some scepticism might be warranted, Donahue proceeds merely to throw doubt on the use of some kinds of evidence for reconstructing Mark's community (836–37). That Mark's implied readership was his own community, which improved methods will be able to reconstruct, he never for a moment doubts. That the "interesting questions" raised by Tolbert require this unargued assumption to be examined seems to be a thought Donahue is so incapable of taking seriously that he fails to recognize it even while stating it.

disappear entirely. The redaction critics were intent on much more specificity. For example, Howard Kee in his *Community of the New Age* writes:

What was the *Sitz im Leben* from which and for which Mark's gospel was written? To answer that question responsibly it is not sufficient to attach a general label to Mark – such as Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian, or Palestinian-Jewish-Christian. By analysis of the text itself, but with the aid of paradigms for the study of eschatological communities as well as historical analogies with apocalyptic communities close in space and time to primitive Christianity in the first century, it should be possible to trace the contours of the Markan community.<sup>17</sup>

Study of Mark along these lines led the way; study of Matthew and Luke for the most part followed rather belatedly. But it is important to notice that developments in Johannine scholarship kept close pace with Markan scholarship. Since form criticism and redaction criticism as applied to the Synoptics were not usually thought appropriate to the special case of the Gospel of John, Johannine scholarship pursued its own peculiar path, increasingly a highly introverted field of scholarship. Books on the Gospel of John rarely refer to Synoptic scholarship, or books on the Synoptic Gospels to Johannine scholarship. But the appearance of the first edition of J. Louis Martyn's vastly influential *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* in 1968 can hardly be unrelated to the work of Weeden and others on Mark at precisely that time (and also in America), though Martyn makes no reference to them. Martyn's book does for John what Weeden and others did for Mark. John Ashton calls it, "for all its brevity ... probably the most important single work on the Gospel since Bultmann's commentary,"<sup>18</sup> since it was the source of that obsession with the Johannine community that has dominated most subsequent Johannine scholarship.<sup>19</sup> That the Johannine community is the implied audience of the Gospel of John and that this community can therefore be reconstructed from the Gospel are assumptions that began to affect Johannine scholarship largely from the publication of Martyn's book onwards. No more than the Synoptic scholars does Martyn offer any argument for the assumption that John addresses his own community.

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<sup>17</sup> H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 77.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 107. Cf. D. Moody Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John*, ed. R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa, J. L. Martyn Festschrift (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 293 n. 30: "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."

<sup>19</sup> The "Johannine community" as the implied readership of the Gospel of John first enters – unobtrusively but momentarily – Ashton's survey of the history of Johannine scholarship at the point where he discusses Martyn's work (Ashton, *Understanding*, 108).

The sustained attempt since the late 1960s to take seriously the claim that each Gospel addresses the specific situation of a particular Christian community has had two main characteristics. One is the development of more or less allegorical readings of the Gospels in the service of reconstructing not only the character but the history of the community behind the Gospel. Characters and events in the Gospel story are taken to represent groups within the community and experiences of the community. The disciples in Mark stand for proponents of a *theios-aner* Christology that Mark is fighting within his community, the relatives of Jesus represent the Jerusalem Jewish Christian leaders, Nicodemus stands for Christians whose inadequate Christology prevents them from making a complete break with the synagogue, and so on. The successful mission of Jesus and the disciples to Samaritans in John 4 is supposed to reflect a stage in the history of the Johannine community when it engaged in successful mission to Samaritans. Weeden pioneered this way of reading Mark, and Martyn this way of reading John. There have been many subsequent reconstructions of the history of the Markan and Johannine communities. The many different reconstructions throw some doubt on the method, which to a sceptic looks like a kind of historical fantasy.<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to avoid supposing that those who no longer think it possible to use the Gospels to reconstruct the historical Jesus compensate for this loss by using them to reconstruct the communities that produced the Gospels. All the historical specificity for which historical critics long is transferred from the historical Jesus to the evangelist's community. The principle (inherited from form criticism) that the Gospels inform us not about Jesus but about the church is taken so literally that the narrative, ostensibly about Jesus, has to be understood as an allegory in which the community actually tells its own story.

The second characteristic of work in this tradition is the increasingly sophisticated use of social-scientific methods for reconstructing the community behind each Gospel. For Mark this began with Kee's *Community of the New Age* and for John probably with Wayne Meeks's enormously influential 1972 article on Johannine sectarianism.<sup>21</sup> Philip Esler pioneered such work on Luke (1987),<sup>22</sup> while Matthew has recently become a major focus, with Andrew

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<sup>20</sup> For a survey of the very varied attempts to reconstruct the Johannine community and its history, drawing an appropriately skeptical conclusion, see T. L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15–21.

<sup>21</sup> W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72; reprinted in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. J. Ashton (London: SPCK, 1986), 141–73.

<sup>22</sup> P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, SNTSMS 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Esler is a rare case of a writer who sees some need to argue for the view that a Gospel, in this case Luke, was addressed to a specific Christian community or at least group of communities. But his argument (24–25) is premised on the validity of the common view that each of the other three canonical Gospels was addressed

Overman's *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism* (1990),<sup>23</sup> and several essays in the multi-authored volume *Social History of the Matthean Community* (1991).<sup>24</sup> Once again it has to be said that virtually all this work takes the usual unargued assumption for granted. Unexceptionable arguments for the use of social-scientific methods to study the relation between a literary work and its social context are simply applied to the unexamined premise that this relation means, in the case of a Gospel, its dual relationship to a single context in which it was written and for which it was written. It is this assumption, built into the use of the social-scientific methods from the start, that produces reconstructions of communities each apparently unrelated to the rest of the Christian movement, each apparently treating itself self-sufficiently as *the* Christian social world. In this respect recent social-scientific studies of the Gospels are directly continuous with redaction criticism. Though asking different questions about the relationship between a Gospel and its original audience, they have taken over without question the same unargued assumption about the definition of the implied audience.

### III.

At this point I need to address this question: Even if I am right that the assumption that each Gospel was written for the evangelist's own community has come to be widely accepted largely without having been argued, might one not suppose that this assumption has been *confirmed by the results* that Gospels scholarship has built upon it? A large body of literature has been devoted to reconstructing each Gospel's own community and illuminating

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to its own community and is merely concerned to rebut the views of those who see Luke-Acts as an exception to this otherwise general rule. Thereby he gives the impression that little argument is actually needed. The evidence he offers is the use of the image of the flock for Jesus' disciples in the Gospel (Luke 12:32) and for the church at Ephesus in Acts (20:17-35). The way this image is used, he says, evokes the circumstances of "a small Christian community beset by difficulties from within and without" (25). The implication is that, since the whole church was not such a community, Luke-Acts does not address the whole church, but one such community. However, if Luke wrote for a general Christian audience, this means he wrote for any and every specific community to which he could expect his work to circulate. At the end of the first century, any such community would be a small community beset by difficulties from within and without. Luke could easily expect any Christian community to find such imagery appropriate to itself. What is actually striking about Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is how generalized the language is. The reference to false teaching could refer to any kind of false teaching.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> D. L. Balch, ed., *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

each Gospel by reading it as addressed to that reconstructed community, with its particular theological views and debates (the main concern of earlier redaction criticism), its particular social composition and social context (the concern of more recent study with social-scientific ingredients), even its own history (elaborately reconstructed in Johannine scholarship especially). A properly argued case for the view I am disputing would certainly have to draw on this work, but the work itself does not constitute such a case. With only occasional exceptions in detail, this body of scholarship does not proceed by arguing that certain features of a Gospel text are explicable only if it is understood as addressed to a specific Christian audience rather than to a general Christian audience. Its results are the results of applying to the text a particular reading strategy, not of showing that this reading strategy does better justice to the text than another reading strategy.

The point can be illustrated by observing what goes on in typical instances of this reading strategy. One form of it consists in applying to a specific Christian community textual implications that would readily apply to a very large number of Christian communities. Take, for example, J. Louis Martyn's classic argument that chapter 9 of the Fourth Gospel should be read, on one level, as a narrative of the Johannine community's expulsion from its local synagogue.<sup>25</sup> Does this constitute evidence that the Gospel addresses the specific situation of the evangelist's own community? Not at all, not even if one wholly accepts Martyn's account of when and how the expulsion of Jewish Christians from synagogues occurred. Precisely Martyn's own argument, that the introduction of the *Birkat ha-Minim* into synagogue liturgy late in the first century had the effect of forcing Jewish Christians out of synagogues,<sup>26</sup> is an argument for a general process that, if he is correct, must have been going on in many diaspora cities where Jewish Christians had previously

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<sup>25</sup> J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), part I.

<sup>26</sup> I accept Martyn's case here for the sake of argument, but it needs radical reassessment in the light of more recent discussion of the *Birkat ha-Minim*: see P. Schäfer, "Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne: Zur Trennung von Juden und Christen im ersten/zweiten Jh. n. Chr.," *Judaica* 31 (1975): 54–64; R. Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders and A. I. Baumgarten, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 226–44; W. Horbury, "The Benediction of the Minim and the Early Jewish-Christian Controversy," *JTS* 33 (1982): 19–61; S. T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76; R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, StPB 37 (Jerusalem: Magnes; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 102–7; P. S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn, WUNT 66 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1993), 1–25; R. Bauckham, "The *Apocalypse of Peter*: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba," *Apocrypha* 5 (1994): 87–90.