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Bauckham's *The Gospels For All Christians* Revisited

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SUMMARY

Richard Bauckham's hypothesis that the canonical Gospels were written for circulation among Christians in general and not simply for isolated communities has drawn much criticism. This study presents a response to works that have criticized Bauckham's thesis including those by Philip Esler, Joel Marcus, David Sim, and Margaret Mitchell. The subsequent discussion attempts to defend the utility of Bauckham's proposal in light of these criticisms.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Hypothese Richard Bauckhams, dass die kanonischen Evangelien mit der Absicht geschrieben wurden, unter Christen im Allgemeinen zu zirkulieren und nicht einfach für isolierte Gemeinschaften, ist oft kritisiert worden. Dieses Buch präsentiert eine Erwiderung auf Werke, die Bauckham kritisiert haben, unter ihnen die Bücher von Philip Esler, Joel Marcus, David Sim und Margaret Mitchell. Die darauf folgende Diskussion versucht, die Nützlichkeit von Bauckhams Vorschlag im Lichte dieser Kritiken zu verteidigen.

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RÉSUMÉ

Selon une hypothèse avancée par Richard Bauckham, les évangiles canoniques ont été écrits pour être diffusés parmi les Chrétiens en général et non pas simplement pour des communautés isolées. De nombreuses critiques lui ont été opposées. La présente étude répond aux travaux de critiques de la thèse de Bauckham comme Philip Esler, Joel Marcus, David Sim et Margaret Mitchell, et vise à montrer l'utilité de la proposition de Bauckham.

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Introduction

Over the last hundred years New Testament scholarship has reached a near consensus that the Evangelists wrote for, and to some extent about, their own respective communities. On this view, Mark, for instance, wrote for a 'Marcan community' and Matthew for 'Matthean community' and so forth. Scholars subsequently debate where these communities were located and what internal facet of these communities is mirrored in the Gospel texts. However, this entire approach of perceiving the Gospels as windows into particular communities has been called into question by Richard Bauckham and associates in the book *The Gospel for All Christians* (1998).[1] Bauckham provocatively argues that the Gospels were not written for any single community but for all Christians or as many that might read them.

In the opening essay Bauckham begins by questioning why the community hypothesis is so widely assumed when, in fact, so little argumentation has been offered to substantiate it.[2] He proposes a wider audience for the Gospels based on several arguments. First, the Gospels are not like the Pauline epistles and they lack the particularity exhibited in Paul's correspondence with his churches. If the Gospels are analogous in genre to *bios* then a more generalized audience is implied since a *bios* was not meant for internal consumption by small communities but propagated political, philosophical and religious viewpoints further a field.[3] Sec-

ond, Bauckham asserts that the early Christian movement did not comprise isolated enclaves of believers, but made up 'a network of communities with constant, close communication among themselves'.[4] The mobility of Christians in the Roman Empire, especially among its leaders, meant that authors would have known, if not expected, their works to come into contact with several Christian groups. The wide circulation of literature and exchanges of communication between churches lends credence to this proposal, as does the fact that Matthew and Luke (perhaps also John) had copies of Mark at their disposal.[5] Bauckham concludes that 'the idea of writing a Gospel purely for the members of the writer's own church or even for a new neighboring churches is unlikely to have occurred to anyone'.[6]

Bauckham was not the first to postulate a general audience intended for the Gospels.[7] Nevertheless, Bauckham has renewed and invigorated the debate and his proposal has been welcomed in some quarters.[8] At the same time the community hypothesis is quite robust and remains firmly entrenched in Gospel scholarship. Bauckham has not convinced everyone and in fact several criticisms have been leveled against his thesis.[9] In view of that, the aim of this study is to demonstrate the viability of Bauckham's proposal in light of these criticisms.

Philip Esler

The first major response to Bauckham and *Gospel for All Christians* was from Bauckham's St Andrews colleague Philip Esler.[10] Esler's main arguments are that modern authors are culturally distant from the first century Jesus-movement. As such, modern authors (like Bauckham and company) run the risk of ethnocentrism and anachronism in projecting modern ideas of reading and publishing onto the first-century Mediterranean environment. A sociolinguistic approach recognizes the cultural horizons and group-dynamics of antiquity and avoids this error.[11] On Esler's view it is a sociolinguistic 'instinct' that the Gospels must be attached to a community of some form where the Evangelists related the Jesus tradition to their context.[12] According to Esler, the fact that Luke and Matthew re-write Mark is evidence that they repudiated his work and that they did not want their own Gospels 'savaged' as Mark's Gospel was.[13] Esler admits that although the Gospels were composed for their own communities the Evangelists may have 'contemplated the possibility that it would travel further afield ... and even supplant the unsatisfactory Gospels of others'. Such a process Esler terms 'colonisation' where 'one group thinks that it has the truth and it is important to get other Christian groups to adopt it'.[14] Esler rejects the analogy with *bios* for the Gospels' distribution since the Greco-Roman *bioi* were composed for the elite echelons of society, a situation different from the Jesus-movement.

In the same journal, Bauckham responds with a brief but penetrating riposte.[15] I shall briefly summarize his response and add a few counter-arguments of my own. Bauckham notes that a Gospel shaped in accordance with the faith of the Evangelist's community is entirely consistent with his scheme, as it does not disallow the possibility that he wrote also for Christians beyond his own community. Despite the value of sociolinguistic approaches, Bauckham asserts that Mediterranean anthropology provides no fitting analogy for the social phenomenon of early Christianity. I would add the words of Robin Lane Fox, who protests that histories of early Christianity usually tell a story of unimpeded growth and omit the complexities of its emergence, but nevertheless states: 'Christians spread and increased: no other cult in the Empire grew at anything like the same speed, and even as a minority, the Christians' success raises serious questions about the blind spots in pagan culture and society.'[16] This shows the dangers of trying to force sociolinguistic models onto a movement for which no precise analogy exists. Bauckham refuses to accept the dichotomy of choosing between either sociological views of group dynamics or modern individualism, as if these were the only options. In defence of Bauckham I would add, first, that Esler's rejection of *bios* as an analogy for the dissemination of the Gospels is premature. It is perhaps true that works like Tacitus' *Agricola* was composed for political elites, but this remains a fairly broad target audience as it could encompass any person of the upper classes who were interested in the events of Domitian's life. If one presses Esler's logic do we need to posit a 'Tacitean community'?[17] In any event, the sheer expense of writing materials in the ancient world (especially a two-volume work like Luke-Acts) and the fact that the Evangelists wrote in a prestige language like Greek as opposed to local languages (which would be more suitable for purported local traditions) suggests that the Evangelists deliberately wrote as part of the literary and cultural elite thus the analogy with the *bioi* holds. Perhaps

the Evangelists even wanted to sound elitist and promote the authority of their Jesus-stories in the wider Christian movement. Second, Elser's sociolinguistic 'instinct' about the link between Gospel and community sounds a lot like an assumption in desperate need of testing. Third, Esler cannot have it both ways about the circulation of the Gospels. He asserts that Matthew and Luke would not want their Gospels to circulate and risk being 'savaged' as Mark was, but then allows the possibility that Matthew and Luke may have wanted to distribute their works widely so as to colonize competing Christian groups. Fourth, Esler's reference to the diversity of the Gospels is always in negative terms and not, as is at least plausible, in complimentary and irenic terms.

Joel Marcus

Joel Marcus contests Bauckham's proposal for several reasons.[18] First, Marcus denies that writing is always a substitute for presence when the Gospel of Mark could have been written to preserve traditions in the face of potential death and to shape an audience through the repeated performance of the Gospel in the hope that 'its deeper secrets of structure and meaning' may be revealed.[19] Why this concern has to be restricted to a 'Marcan community' and not to all Christians in general is never stated.

Second, Marcus proposes that the diversity of the Gospels implies local support for each of Gospels since their very survival against each other was contingent upon local support.[20] Although the plurality of the Gospels posed a certain theological problem for the early church and was approached variedly (e.g. Gospel harmony by Tatian in the *Diatessaron*, formulating a truncated version of Luke by Marcion, or allegorizing the quality of 'four' by Irenaeus), we do not find evidence in the New Testament and beyond of competition between the canonical Gospels that Marcus proposes. To the contrary, it was the wide circulation of the Gospels in the churches that was instrumental in their canonization.

Third, Marcus cites several Jewish and Christian works (e.g. *Epistle of Aristeas*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and *The Teaching of Addai*) to show that writing does necessarily imply absence.[21] Yet *Aristeas* and *Joseph and Aseneth* are works that deal with contentious topics, and interest in their resolution would not be confined to Jews living in Alexandria. The question of the authority of the Septuagint (*Aristeas*) was relevant to the entire Greek-speaking Diaspora. The issue of accepting proselytes, racial intermarriage and advancing in the echelons of Roman society was likewise an issue for all Jews in the Greek-speaking cities (Joseph and Aseneth). Moreover, the primary purpose of Bauckham's contrast of the Gospels and Paul's letters is not to advocate that writing is only ever a proxy for oral communication, but to deny that the Gospels are concerned only with addressing the situation and needs of a single community in the same sense that Paul's letters were.

Fourth, Marcus appeals to local traditions in Mark, such as the reference to Rufus and Alexander (Mk. 15:21), that make it difficult to view Mark as an encyclical text.[22] Even if Rufus and Alexander were not figures widely known in the early church (hence Matthew and Luke's omission), local colouring does not necessarily imply that the document was restricted to a localized audience.

David Sim

David Sim criticizes Bauckham's hypothesis and reasserts the validity of Gospel communities.[23] Sim misrepresents Bauckham when he describes Bauckham as believing that the Gospels were written for 'each and every Christian church'[24] but elsewhere acknowledges that Bauckham's view is that the Gospels 'were designed for any and every Christian community *to which they may have circulated*'.[25] This is a subtle difference and only the latter view is true of Bauckham.

In the first part of his article Sim questions Bauckham's argument on several grounds. Sim levels that the charge that Bauckham's evidence is circumstantial and it depends on the nature of his claims about the Christian movement. He objects that Bauckham's observations about the Gospels are generalizations and not based on the internal evidence of the Gospels.[26] Unfortunately the internal evidence often cited in favour of a Gospel community is circular, depends upon allegorical readings of the text, and are grossly speculative. C.C. Black correctly notes that Mark's Gospel is less *descriptive* of its original readers than it is *prescriptive* for a certain theological stance.[27] In contrast, Bauckham's evidence is that of a literary artifact and what the phenomenon of its distribution informs us of its purpose.

Another facet of Bauckham's argument that Sim rejects is that there was no such a thing as the early Christian worldwide movement.[28] Sim pos-

its an overarching disunity within the early church between Paul and the Judaizers that negates any notion of worldwide Christian movement. Sim writes:

> In light of the diverse and polemical nature of the early Christian factions, it is extremely improbable that any follower of Jesus the Christ would have classified the world, as Bauckham implies they did, simply into Christian and non-Christian. At the very least they would have divided the Christian category between true Christians and nominal but false Christians.[29]

The ramification of this for the Evangelists in Sim's view is that they would have written only for those Christians who shared their particular traditions. But this argument can be rebutted on several grounds: (1) The status of Gentiles and the means of their entrance into the church (as indicative of Christian disunity according to Sim) was resolved by 70 CE and issues like circumcision are significantly absent from the Gospels. (2) Sim appears to assume that all forms of diversity connote rivalry, conflict and opposition, which does not follow. Despite the axiomatic assumption in New Testament research that 'diversity' has strictly negative connotations of disunity, diversity can equally mean 'different but not incompatible' or 'disagreeable but not hostile'. Perhaps Peter Bolt's suggestion of 'complexity' might be a more appropriate term to use.[30] (3) There is one text which explicitly divides the world into Christian and non-Christian groups. In 1 Cor. 1:18-24, Paul contrasts believing Jews and Greeks with unbelieving Jews and Greeks. This is evidence of the overall unity of Christians over and against the unbelieving world, and the Christians included here a unified body comprising *Jews and Gentiles*. (4) Another factor is that diverse Christian groups did share many traditions in common: the Jewish Scriptures, the Jesus tradition, and general Christian paranesis. Luke and Matthew share a common tradition in Q and Mark as sources for their Gospels. If we accept Sim's premise that the Gospels were written only for those groups who shared their tradition, one could easily imagine Luke writing for a 'Matthean Community' or Matthew for a 'Lucan community' since they share a tripartite tradition of Jewish Scripture, Q and Mark. (5) Sim overlooks that there already was a precedent for a worldwide religious movement: Judaism. Judaism was just as schismatic and fragmented as many allege the early Christian movement to have been. Several commentators go so far as to speak of Judaisms rather than Judaism.[31] Even given this diversity, the Jews still had a sense of corporate identity and their unity can be construed in a variety of ways including 'pillars of Judaism',[32] sharing a common 'story, symbol and praxis'[33] or 'web of social and religious commitments'.[34] Several Jewish authors, no doubt aware of the varieties of Jewish belief, employ the singular designation 'Judaism' (*Ioudaismos*) without hesitation (2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38; 4 Macc. 4:26; Gal. 1:13-14).[35] The Christian movement's sense of corporate identity was largely inherited from its parental religion and the distinctive ethos of the first Christians was borne out of a particular brand of messianism expressed in devotion to Jesus the Christ.

Additionally, Sim contends that rival Christian factions had little contact with each other.[36] Mark's Gospel, which arguably stems from Pauline Christianity, has come to be in the possession of Matthew who represents a form of Jewish Christianity. Whereas scholars since F.C. Baur have postulated two competing Pauline and Petrine missions in the early church, the entire notion of distinct 'Pauline churches' has recently been called into question by David Horrell's 2005 British New Testament Conference paper 'The Letters to All Christians? Were There Pauline Churches?' As the title suggests, Horrell derives the impetus for his paper from Bauckham, and he argues that despite the diversity in the early church one cannot assume that the differences were necessarily 'embodied in distinct communities, factions, or churches'.[37] I would add that Paul and Pauline sympathizers were in correspondence with churches that were either suspicious of Paul or hostile to him, most notably of all, Rome (Rom. 3:7-8; 16:1-16).[38] Paul also expresses a surprising sense of solidarity and compassion for churches that he was in opposition to. In 1 Thess. 2:14, Paul praises the Thessalonians for being imitators of the churches of Judea as the Thessalonians have experienced a comparable persecution. In Rom 15:27, Paul considers the Gentile Christians to have an obligation to meet the physical needs of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. This idea of solidarity in persecution and compassion for the needy between Jewish and Gentile churches suggests a sense of shared identity, though it certainly does not imply a uniformity of convictions.

Sim rejects the idea that Matthew and Luke intended their Gospels to circulate as widely as Mark. Sim goes on to say that Matthew and Luke believed that Mark was wrong and that they radically altered

Mark's perspective to suit their own agendas.[39] There is no question that Matthew and Luke edit, alter and smooth out Mark at times, but alteration does not necessarily mean repudiation. Luke and Matthew incorporate approximately 95% of Mark into their own narratives and in many cases follow his text word for word – hardly indicative of a renunciation. Sim suggests that Matthew and Luke did not want their Gospels to circulate widely because they did not want their work to be misinterpreted or re-written in the same manner as Mark's had been. Apart from the fact the Sim still does not explain how it was that Matthew and Luke came to possess a copy of Mark, his own premise could lead to the opposite conclusion. Precisely because Luke and Matthew disagreed with Mark they wanted their narratives to circulate just as widely to compete with what they thought was an aberrant story of Jesus (i.e. Esler's idea of 'colonisation').

The genre of a Gospel as *bios* is dismissed by Sim as evidence for an indefinite readership.[40] But a genuine analogy with Greco-Roman biography seems validated when the Gospels, like *bios*, are concerned with narrating the major events of the protagonist's life and encouraging the cultivation of the protagonist's virtues among a wide audience. Sim's reference to the *Gospel of Thomas* and other Jewish Christian Gospels as being indicative of a narrowly designed readership is unconvincing. *Thomas* is a different literary genre from the canonical Gospels, with a distinct absence of narrative and no interaction with the Jewish Scriptures.[41] If *Thomas* is dependent upon the canonical Gospels, as many believe, then *Thomas* may even constitute the earliest known evidence of use of the fourfold Gospel collection.[42] That the author of *Thomas* came into contact with all four canonical Gospels ca. 125-60 CE, is inconceivable apart from Bauckham's theory of Gospel circulation. How did *Thomas* access documents or traditions from a Marcan community, a Lucan community, a Matthean community and a Johannine community if these communities were not in contact with each other?

Little is known about the origination and dissemination of the Jewish Christian Gospels from which to infer target audiences. The Jewish-Christian Gospels were probably composed for Nazarenes or Ebionites wherever they were – a plausible hypothesis given that the Ebionites had congregations in places such as Cyprus and the Trans-Jordan.[43] The fact that most of the Jewish Christian Gospels rely on canonical Matthew (*Gospel of the Hebrews* is a possible exception) signifies their interaction with other Jewish Christian groups that were positively disposed towards Gentile Christians.[44]

In the second half of the article, Sim constructs a positive argument for assigning communities to each of the Gospel. He advocates that the existence of these communities is 'a perfectly justifiable assumption' given that productions of the Gospel required painstaking activity of composition and reflection in a communal environment.[45] Granting this assumption, which is disputable itself, there is no guarantee that a document written 'in' a community was necessarily written 'for' that community and even 'about' that community. Sim is aware of this objection and tries to substantiate his point by inferring that the theological divergences between the Gospels and their use of special traditions indicate that the Gospels were composed in independent churches that were geographically removed from each other.[46] However, I fail to see how theological divergences require geographical dislocation. Groups with radically different theological perspectives could easily co-exist in the same city (as I write this article I'm overlooking a street that contains a Church of Scotland, a Catholic church, and a Scottish Episcopalian church in the space of 100m). And why the *Sonderquellen* of 'L' and 'M' require independent localities is anybody's guess. If, as Kim Paffenroth has argued, 'L' was written by Jewish-Christians in Palestine between 40-60 CE,[47] how is it that Luke, somewhere in the wider Mediterranean, has gained access to this source and has been able to use it for a Gentile audience? If sources were limited to locations, how is it then that Matthew and Luke have gained access to *both* Mark and Q? The fact is that written traditions were not limited by location, but circulated widely just as Bauckham has suggested. Sim's contention that the Gospels were formed on the basis of 'local traditions' is therefore indefensible.[48]

Sim's final argument is that the particular theological emphases of the Gospels (e.g. Mark and suffering, Matthew's polemic against the Pharisees) are best explained by recourse to separate communities.[49] There is no denying these differences, but the default setting of explaining them by separate communities is only one possible solution.

Margaret Mitchell

From a different perspective Margaret Mitchell surveys patristic literature and identifies authors who ascribed both local and universal audiences to

the Gospels.[50] Mitchell offers a stringent critique of Bauckham's method and presuppositions as well as noting how patristic authors wrestled with a dialectic tension between the specific and indefinite readers of the Gospels. For her, this demonstrates that the earliest exegetes did not think that the Gospels were composed for all Christians.

She contends that Bauckham's decision to limit his study to the canonical narratives brackets out the diversity in early Christian literature.[51] Furthermore, several of the extra-canonical Gospels nominate specific audiences or promulgators (e.g. *Gospel of the Hebrews*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Gospel of the Nazarenes* etc).[52] Thomas Kazen argues similarly that the extra-canonical Gospels are no less sectarian than the canonical Gospels and that both were intended for liturgical use in a cluster of like-minded churches.[53] In response, however, the extra-canonical Gospels are later creations dependent on the canonical Gospels. They were written by groups largely on the fringes of the early Christian movement and were never serious contenders for the status of 'Scripture' among the wider church. The canonical Gospels won the day not due to the suppression of rival groups that composed their own literature, but because the canonical Gospels were used widely in the churches and connected the story of Jesus to the story of Israel. The gnostic Gospels like *Thomas* were composing literature for a new religion that disconnected Jesus from Israel's sacred traditions.[54] Kazen may be right that *Thomas* and Matthew are both sectarian,[55] but in radically different contexts. Matthew seeks to establish a place for the Christian movement vis-à-vis Judaism, whilst *Thomas* seeks to establish a place for Christian-gnosticism vis-à-vis other Christians. That makes *Thomas* an intra-Christian sectarian writing. Also the Jewish Christian Gospels were probably intended for all Jewish Christians. In the case of the *Gospel of Peter* we can only speculate as to its origin and reception, but it may have intended to circulate widely as the canonical Gospels as evidenced by its use in Antioch and Egypt.[56] In sum, some extra-canonical Gospels (like *Thomas*) were intended for a limited readership and that is attributable to their intra-Christian sectarian tendency. Other extra-canonical Gospels were meant for wide circulation (Jewish Christian Gospels and *Gospel of Peter*) largely out of imitation of the canonical Gospels. Bauckham is quite right then to focus on the canonical Gospels, as they alone came to be regarded as the couriers of the apostolic tradition about Jesus despite the diversity inherent within their portraits and the problems posed by their plurality.

Second, Mitchell believes that Bauckham does not adequately show how the existence of a 'world wide Christian movement' comports with the fact that there were various versions of Christianity and that the Gospels may have be tailored towards such versions.[57] It is precisely the ability to embrace unity and diversity within the Christian movement that is the genius of Bauckham's proposal. For instance, the Gospel of Mark arguably stands in relation to Pauline Christianity since Mark gives special emphasis to Christ's death, particularly its redemptive significance (Mk. 10:45; 14:22-25; Rom. 3:21-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); his view of the Law seems thoroughly Pauline (Mk. 7:19; Rom. 14:14); his use of the term eu0agge/lion is similar to Paul (Mk. 1:1, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; Rom. 1:1-4, 16-17; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:1-2); and his emphasis on Jesus feeding the children of Israel 'first' parallels Paul's emphasis on the priority of Israel (Mk. 7:27; Rom. 1:16; 15:8).[58] The Gospel of Mark was used as a template by Matthew who belongs to a form of 'Jewish Christianity', and by Luke who arguably represents a form of post-Pauline 'Hellenistic Christianity'. The question of a relationship between Mark and John is notoriously difficult to resolve, but there is a reasonable probability that the Gospel of John knows of Mark and builds upon the Marcan Gospel even if it takes the story in a new direction as a manifesto for 'Johannine Christianity'.[59] In this case the circulation and utilization of the Gospel of Mark demonstrates how, even amidst the conflicting diversity of the Christian movement (cf. Gal. 2:4, 11-14; Phil. 3:2; 1 Jn. 2:18-25; Jude 4, 8-16; Rev. 2:2, 14-16, 20-23), 'Pauline Christianity' interfaced with 'Jewish Christianity', 'Hellenistic Christianity' and 'Johannine Christianity'. This interface was mostly positive in that the Gospels posterior to Mark have not repudiated Mark's narrative christology, but have largely repeated his material, followed his outline, updated the story to suit their own interests, and expanded his account where Mark's interests met their own. This indicates that Mark's Gospel was indeed tailored for communities beyond his own immediate circle.

Third, Bauckham admits that the Evangelists had different understandings of Jesus and Mitchell complains that production of the Gospels in different localities might explain this distinctiveness.[60] This may well be the case, but locale is only one factor that can contribute to distinctiveness, and

it is almost impossible to prove that locale was hermeneutically determinative for any element of the Evangelist's individual viewpoint.

Mitchell raises several other objections against Bauckham's thesis, and since they relate to her description of how patristic authors understood the Gospel audiences I shall broadly address that facet of her argument. Mitchell raises the valid point that patristic authors did attribute to the Gospels particularistic audiences. Even so, I fail to see how this impugns Bauckham's argument that the Evangelists wrote for a broad audience. Mitchell's detailed inquiry into patristic Gospel criticism is no more than a *Wirkungsgeschicte* of how the Gospels were understood in the early centuries of the common era and provides no evidence of who the intended flesh and blood readers were. She makes this point explicitly: 'The point for our purposes ... is not to argue that this tradition is historically accurate, but to insist that it does represent what some early church readers *thought* about the origins of the gospels (in this case, Mark).'[61] The statement from Papias referring to the origins of Mark (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15) is the source most likely to convey a kernel of historical information, but that is only going to convince one side of the debate about Mark's origins since proponents of the Galilee/Syria view reject all the arguments from patristic traditions.

Mitchell labours the point that that Bauckham was wrong to assert that 'all readers without exception before the mid-twentieth century missed the (alleged) hermeneutical relevance of the Matthean community to the interpretion of Matthew'.[62] Nowhere does Bauckham deny that readers prior to the twentieth century were aware of traditions of locality, rather his point is that the particularity assigned to the Gospels did not carry the hermeneutical baggage that modern authors assign to these purported Gospel communities. Mitchell's attempt to identify particularized audiences as having hermeneutical significance for patristic interpreters (e.g. John Chrysostom)[63] confuses hermeneutics with apologetics. Associating the Evangelists with particular figures or places (e.g Mark in Rome with Peter) anchored the Gospels in apostolic testimony, and accounted for the plurality of Gospels and divergence in details. Apart from apologetic cameos, audiences were not invoked in order to provide a hermeneutical grid through which the details of the Gospel were interpreted.

A further problem is that some of the patristic authors whom Mitchell cites in favour of limited audience prove the exact opposite. If, as several patristic authors insist, Matthew wrote for Jewish Christians (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.16; Origen, *Frag. in Matt.* 1.8) and Luke for Gentile Christians (Anti-Marcionite Prologue; Origen, *Frag. Ex comm. in Matt.* 1.19-20) then we are dealing with large groups of people spread across the Roman Empire and not isolated communities in one location. If patristic notions of particularity encompass all the Gentile Christians in the Greco-Roman world, one cannot help but think that the meaning of particularity is being stretched.

Finally, a detail worth noting is that the repeated objection that the Gospels might have been written initially for an immediate group of readers like a Christian house church or a Christian benefactor and his household and only then for wider circulation is wholly compatible with Bauckham's thesis.[64] The hypothesis does not demand the particular/ universal dichotomy that many impute to Bauckham. The centre of gravity of the *Gospel for all Christians* is that the literary phenomenon of the Gospels is not conducive to the type of intra-community origination normally assigned to their origin given what is known of the circulation of Christian leaders and literature in the first-century.

Conclusion

Despite the criticisms leveled against Bauckham's *Gospel for all Christians* the hypothesis that the Gospels were written for both immediate supporters and for broad circulation is arguably sustainable. The common appeals to diversity in the early church and the non-canonical Gospels do not undermine the integrity of the notion that the Gospels were composed for audiences wider than any one specific community. What is more likely to me is that the Gospels were written to tell the story of Jesus for Christians in the Greco-Roman world.

Notes

1 Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

2 Richard Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?' in *The Gospel for All Christians*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 9-48.

3 Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?' pp. 26-30.

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

5 Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?' pp. 30-44.
6 Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?' p. 44.
7 Ralph P. Martin, *Mark – Evangelist and Theologian* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1972), p. 79; Robert M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Storeis in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 54; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), p. 83; Mary Anne Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary and Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fotress, 1989), pp. 53, 304-4; M.A. Beavis, *Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4.11-12* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 171-72; Bengst Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 199), pp. 124-25; H.F. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 102; Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 2000), pp. 106-15.
8 See reviews in: J. Duff, *Anvil* 16 (1999), pp. 134-35; Paul Ellingworth, EQ 71 (1999), pp. 273-75; B.E. Bowe, *CurThM* 27 (2000), pp. 295; Craig L. Blomberg, *Themelios* 25 (2000), pp. 78-80; T. Baxter, *Evangel* 19 (2001), pp. 55; Mark Matson, *ResQ* 43 (2001), pp. 54-56. Other positive estimations can be found in Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 28-30; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 36; Thorsten Moritz, 'Mark, Book of,' in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 480.
9 For a survey of the debate see Edward W. Klink, 'The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question,' *CBR 3* (2004), pp. 60-85 and Peter G. Bolt, 'Mark's Gospel,' in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, eds. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), pp. 395-96; H.N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (NovTSup 114; Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 17-22; Richard A. Burridge, 'Who writes, why, and for whom?' in *The Written Gospel*, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 110-12.
10 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.
11 Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', pp. 237-38.
12 Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', p. 239.
13 Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', p. 241.
14 Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', p. 242.
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17 Burridge, 'Who writes, why, and for whom?' pp. 114-15.
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24 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' pp. 4, 27.
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26 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' p. 9.
27 C. Clifton Black, 'Was Mark a Roman Gospel?' *ExpT* 105 (1993), p. 39.
28 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' pp. 9-11.
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30 Peter Bolt, 'Review: I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology*,' *ExpT* 117 (2006), p. 166.
31 Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, 'Introduction,' in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), p. 2.
32 James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), pp. 18-36.
33 N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (COQG 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 215-43.
34 J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 442.
35 Cf. E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM, 1990), pp. 255-56; Richard Bauckham, 'The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why,' ST 47 (1993), pp. 137-38; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon 1994), p. 39; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, p. 401.
36 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' pp. 11-16.
37 An abstract of the paper is available on the internet at: http://www.ntgateway.com/bnts/papers.html.
38 It is the apparent reservations that the Romans have towards Paul that provides the background of Thomas Tobin's recent monograph *Paul's Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody:

Hendrickson, 2004).

39 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' pp. 16-18.

40 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' pp. 18-19; cf. Ernest van Eck, 'A Sitz for the Gospel of Mark? A Critical Reaction to Bauckham's Theory on the Universality of the Gospels,' HTS 54 (2000), pp. 997-98; Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 19-20.

41 F.F. Bruce, 'When is a Gospel not a Gospel?' *BJRL* 45 (1963), pp. 319-39.

42 John Halsey Wood, 'The New Testament Gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas*: New Directions,' *NTS* 51 (2005), p. 595.

43 On bringing this point to my attention I am indebted to Prof. Richard Bauckham and personal correspondence dated 11-11-05.

44 Cf. Craig A. Evans, 'Jewish Versions of the Gospel of Matthew: Observations on Three Recent Publications,' *Mishkan* 38 (2003), pp. 70-79.

45 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' p. 21.

46 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' p. 23.

47 Kim Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus according to L* (JSNTSup 147; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

48 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' p. 23.

49 Sim, 'The Gospel for All Christians?' p. 26.

50 Margaret M. Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,"' *NTS* 51 (2005), pp. 36-79. Bauckham wrote a response to an earlier draft of Mitchell's paper that was read at the SBL Annual Meeting in Atlanta in November 2003. The letter is available on-line at: http://www.ntgateway.com/gospels/bauckham2.pdf.

51 Several authors such as William Wrede, ('The Task and Methods of "New Testament Theology,"' in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*, ed. Robert Morgan [SBT 25; London: SCM, 1973], pp. 68-116), Helmut Koester (*Trajectories through Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], pp. 272-73) and Heikki Räisänen (*Beyond New Testament Theology* [London: SCM, 1990], p. 100) have objected that it is arbitrary to limit a study of early Christianity to the New Testament canon and have instead urged wider approach encompassing extra-canonical literature. Alternatively, Peter Balla (*Challenges to New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], pp. 144-46) identifies in first century Christianity a process of already elevating certain writings to a high level of authority based on an analogy with the formulation of the Old Testament canon, intertestamental discussions of canonical material, and the widespread acceptance of apostolic authority.

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

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

54 D. Moody Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?' *JBL* 119 (2000), pp. 13-14.

55 Kazen, 'Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians?' pp. 566-67.

56 Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.17; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.3.2; 3.25.6-7; 6.12.2-6; POxy 2949.

57 Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', pp. 39-40. Note the similar objection of Eck ('A Sitz for the Gospel of Mark?' p. 994) who erroneously caricatures Bauckham's position as, 'the early Christian movement was one table, one shared meal, a movement practicing open commensality wider as one can imagine'.

58 Cf. Joel Marcus, 'Mark – Interpreter of Paul,' *NTS* 46 (2000), pp. 473-87.

59 Cf. D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p. 163; Richard Bauckham, 'John for Readers of Mark,' in *The Gospel for all Christians*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 147-71; Ian D. Mackay, *John's Relationship with Mark* (WUNT 2.182; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004), pp. 302-3. For an alternative perspective see Wendy E. Sproston North, 'John for Readers of Mark? A Response to Richard Bauckham's Proposal,' *JSNT* 25 (2003), pp. 449-68.

60 Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', pp. 43-44.

61 Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', p. 51.

62 Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?' p. 47; Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', p. 46.

63 Mitchell, 'Patristic Counter-Evidence', pp. 69-75.

64 Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity', p. 242; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, p. 26; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 30; Bauckham, 'Response to Philip Esler', p. 249.