

A Sitz for the Gospel of Mark?

A critical reaction to Bauckham's theory on the universality of the Gospels¹

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Abstract

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The aim of this paper is to evaluate the article by Richard Bauckham, in which he challenges the current consensus in New Testament scholarship that the gospels were written for and addressed to specific believing communities. The thesis that Bauckham puts forward is that the gospels were written with the intention of being circulated as widely as possible – it was written for every Christian community of the late first century where the gospels might circulate. First, a Wirkungsgeschichte of Mark's gospel in terms of the possible localities of origin and the possible theological intentions for writing the Gospel, that is, of the results of the current consensus in New Testament scholarship, is given. Bauckham's theory is then put on the table and evaluated.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the most recent article of Richard Bauckham in which he challenges the current consensus in New Testament scholarship that the gospels were written for, and addressed to, specific believing communities. Bauckham's thesis in short is that the gospels were written with the intention to be circulated as widely as possible – it was written for every Christian community of the late first century to which the gospels

¹ Dr Ernest van Eck (MA, DD) participated as research associate in the project "Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics", directed by Prof Dr A G van Aarde. This article is a revised edition of a paper read at the NTSSA, on 29 March 2000 at the Rand Afrikaans University.

might circulate. In evaluating Bauckham's thesis a *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Mark's gospel in terms of the possible localities of origin and the possible theological intentions for the writing of the Gospel are first given, that is, the results of the current consensus in New Testament scholarship (Section 2). In sections 3 and 4 Bauckham's theory is put on the table and evaluated. In the final section the question is asked if Bauckham's theory is convincing enough to depart from the current consensus in New Testament scholarship with regard to the addressees of the gospels.

2. SITZ AND REASON FOR THE GOSPEL OF MARK?

Rome, Syria and Galilee represent the most significant alternatives for a possible *setting* of Mark's gospel in past and current Markan scholarship. Since in Markan research the possible *reasons* for the writing of the Gospel are usually linked to a specific proposed setting for the Gospel, in what follows the possible settings for the Gospel will be discussed alongside possible reasons for the writing of the Gospel. First, attention will be given to Rome as a possible setting (since it represents the old consensus concerning the origin of Mark). Following the Roman proposal, the arguments for Syria and Palestine (Galilee) as possible settings for Mark will be discussed².

2.1 Rome as the setting of Mark's gospel

The earliest and most significant witness to a Roman origin of the Gospel is from the lost work of Papias, *Exegesis of the Lord's oracles* (c 140 CE), quoted by Eusebius (263-339 CE) in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.15:

And this the Presbyter used to say: Mark indeed, since he was the interpreter (*hermeneutes*) of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order, the things either said and done by the Lord, as much as he remembered. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards, as I have said, [heard and followed] Peter, who fitted his discourses to the needs [of his hearers] but not as making narrative of the Lord's sayings; consequently, Mark, writing some

² The provenances of Rome, Syria and Galilee are, of course, not the only settings that have been proposed in Markan scholarship. Schulz (1964), for example, argues for a Decapolis setting for the Gospel. Schreiber (1967) proposes a setting in Tirus, Sidon or the Decapolis, and Köster (1957) argues for a setting somewhere in Asia Minor or Greece. Since the settings of Rome, Syria and Galilee, however, are the most prominent in Markan scholarship, only these three provenances for Mark will be attended to.

things just as he remembered, erred in nothing; for he was careful of one thing
 – not to omit anything of the things he heard or to falsify anything in them.

(Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.15, in Duling & Perrin 1994:296)

The core of this tradition affirms that the author of the Gospel was a man named Mark, that he was the interpreter of Peter, and, although he was not a follower (eyewitness) of Jesus, that he wrote down accurately the remembrances of Peter.

Other (later) patristic witnesses repeat certain of Papias' statements, and make explicit what is only implied in his writing. In the so-called *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* (c 160-180 CE) Mark is named as Peter's interpreter who worked in the regions of Italy. Irenaeus (c 130 CE) asserts that Mark was Peter's disciple and interpreter who wrote in Rome after the death of Peter and Paul. Clement of Alexandria (c 215 CE) and Origin (c 250 CE) add significant amplifications to the above patristic tradition: according to Clement, Peter knew of Mark's writing, and Origin states that Peter even instructed Mark to write the Gospel (see Vander Broek 1983:9-10).

Proponents of the Roman setting attempt to support the above external evidence that Mark wrote the second Gospel in Rome with the following internal evidence: the "Mark" referred to by Papias is most likely John Mark that is referred to in Acts. In Acts it is said that the early Christians frequently gathered in Mark's mother's house in Jerusalem, that Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey to Asia Minor but left them and returned to Jerusalem, and then accompanied Barnabas on a mission to Cyprus (see Ac 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-40). Mark is also mentioned in the Pauline literature: Philemon 24 states that Paul sends greetings from Mark. He is also mentioned in the deutero-Pauline document Colossians (Col 4:10), and in 2 Timothy 1:17 and 4:11 Mark is placed with Paul in prison, most likely in Rome. Thus, in these writings a Paul-Mark-Rome connection can be inferred.

In 1 Peter 5:13, however, Mark is referred to as "my son Mark". In other words, Peter, not Paul, is associated with Mark, as in Papias. According to Duling & Perrin (1994:297), there is, however, a similarity between the 1 Peter and the Pauline tradition in that 1 Peter is sent from *Babylon*, the symbolic name for Rome in Christian apocalyptic

literature beginning in the late first century, since both Rome (70 CE) and Babylon (587 BCE) are remembered for destroying Jerusalem.

Beginning with the Papias tradition, the external and internal evidence in regard to the origin of Mark is thus clear: the second Gospel was written by Mark (as interpreter of Peter) in Rome (after the death of Peter and Paul)³.

Is there a kernel of truth in the Papias tradition? The following arguments (internal and external) can be put forward to answer this question positively (see *inter alia* Vander Broek 1983:10-12; Matera 1987:4-7; Van Eck 1990:2-4; Duling & Perrin 1994: 297-298):

- If Mark was chosen by second century Christians only to give the Gospel authority, why did they choose a follower of Paul rather than a disciple of Jesus (like Matthew)?
- The Gospel displays evidence of a Petrine eyewitness account. Peter is described as the most prominent disciple in the Gospel (e.g. Mk 1:16-18, 29-31; 8:27-9:1; 9:2-8, 14), certain phrases and descriptions in Mark are so vivid they seem to have come from an eyewitness (e.g. Mk 3:5; 5:32; 6:39), and Peter is sometimes pictured as the only disciple that accompanies Jesus (Mk 14:32-37);
- Mark contains the most Latinisms of all the Gospels (e.g. Mk 4:21; 5:9; 15), and Aramaic language terms and phrases are explained (e.g. Mk 5:41; 7:34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:34);
- Mark reckons time in Roman style (see Mk 6:48; 13:35);
- Jewish customs are explained (Mk 7:3-4; 10:12);
- Mark shows a strong interest in the Gentile mission (Mk 7:24-30); and
- the Gospel is imprecise about Palestinian geography (Mk 5:1; 6:45, 53; 7:31).

³ Aside from the evidence in the tradition that the Gospel was written after the death of Peter, the Gospel's emphasis on suffering and endurance (see Mk 8:34-38; 10:38-45; 13:9-13) is usually seen as an indication of the date for Mark. In Rome persecution of the Christians took place under Nero in 64 CE, and thus a date between 64 and 70 is commonly accepted. Also, if Rome is accepted as place of origin, the "desolating sacrilege" in Mark 13:14 might have symbolized Nero.

There are, however, also certain problems with the Papias tradition:

- Although the Gospel gives no information concerning the author, date and provenance, the Patristic witnesses purport to know all three. How trustworthy are, therefore, the Papias tradition, and, for that matter, the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* and the writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen (see Vander Broek 1983:12)?⁴
- the description of “Mark” in Papias sounds defensive, and the tradition shows an apologetic tendency (Peter wrote “accurately”, “erred in nothing”, “not to omit or falsify”; see Duling & Perrin 1994:298);
- Mark, who was not a disciple of Jesus, is connected with a disciple, Peter (Duling & Perrin 1994:298). Moreover, it seems that the connection between Mark and Peter is based primarily on 1 Peter 5:13 (Vander Broek 1983:15);
- the Latinisms, the explanation of Jewish customs, the Roman style of reckoning with time, as well as the imprecision in regard to Palestine geography could be explained as being part of the traditions used by the evangelist, or as part of the oral tradition;
- suffering and persecution did occur in several places in the Christian church in the 60’s and early 70’s, not only in Rome. Taking into account the reaction from Yavneh in the early 70’s⁵, and the emergence of formative Judaism as a result of the reorganization of Judaism taken up by Yavneh, the persecution of Christians could well have been coming from Jews;
- the Greek of the Gospel is unsophisticated, and, though it contains Latinisms, also contains Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) language influences. The document is also

⁴ A comparison of all the Patristic witnesses indicates that Papias is the basic source from which all the others drew. Yet, not all the patristic sources indicate that the Gospel was written in Rome, and a tendency to associate Peter closer and closer with the writing of the Gospel can be detected as the tradition developed (see Vander Broek 1983:12-14; Matera 1987:4-5).

⁵ Recent studies of the Judaic-Tannaitic writings, which had their origin in the post-70 CE reformed, official Judaism at Yavneh under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai and Gamaliel II, suggests that the belief in the divine birth of Jesus, as well as in his resurrection were the fundamental reasons why the Yavneh scribes regarded Jewish Christians as a heretical grouping inside Judaism. This led to the circulation of anti-Christian pronouncements, the issuing of a prohibition against reading of heretical books (*Sifre Minim*) and the promulgation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* (which implied the excommunication from the synagogue; see e.g. John 9:22; 12:42; Katz 1984:45-47; Overman 1990:38-43).

very accurate with regard to Jewish matters such as housing and taxation, as well as peasant, village and rural agricultural life in Palestine; and

- the Papias tradition does not take into account the results of historical criticism which indicate that the gospels developed in a gradual (evolutionistic) way, and that the evangelists made use of specific sources. The findings of, for example, the *Formgeschichte*, are irreconcilable with the Papias account in regard to the “remembrances of Peter”.

From the above it is clear that a Roman setting for Mark, as proposed by and derived from the Papias account, depends on both external (the Patristic witness) and internal evidence. Of these two, the Patristic witness is the more basic, and, without this foundation, the internal evidence is not convincing. If the “eyewitness” nature of Mark is disapproved, the “Gospel is not only disassociated from Peter, but also from the Roman setting in which Peter is often bound” (Vander Broek 1983:17).

Hengel (1985), Best (1983), Brandon (1967) and Standaert (1983), however, do support a Rome origin for Mark (by either using or not using the external patristic evidence as described above). These scholars argue that Mark was addressing Gentile Christians in Rome somewhere shortly before or just after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. Mark 13, Jesus’ “small apocalypse” in Mark is taken as cue, since it reveals an atmosphere in which Christian apocalypticism plays a major role and in which persecution has begun, or is about to begin (see Matera 1987:7).

Hengel (1985:47-52) argues that the Papias tradition must be seen as authoritative, and not as a literary invention by either Papias or Eusebius, since the connection between Peter and Mark is independently attested in 1 Peter 5:13, as well as by Justin Martyr, who refers to the reminiscences of Peter in *Dialogue* 106.3. Mark was a Greek speaking Christian who also understood Aramaic, and wrote at a time shortly after the community’s loss of its great leaders, Peter and Paul, through martyrdom. It was a period in which the community was in danger of being leaderless and apocalyptic expectations threatened to run out of control. Such a situation, for Hengel, is most understandable in the great year of terror, 69 CE.

The years immediately prior to 69 CE can be described as apocalyptic in character: in 64 CE Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome, Peter and Paul were martyred just before 69 CE, towards the end of the reign of Nero there was reports of famine and unrest, the Jewish war started in 66 CE, after Nero's suicide (in 68 CE) there was a civil war in which three emperors lost their lives (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), and several earthquakes were experienced in Italy round about 68 CE. All these events, Hengel argues, would have led the Christians in Rome to see their times as the end time. Although the temple in Jerusalem has not yet been destroyed, the author can see that the event is at hand. Hengel thus argues that Mark 13 does not presuppose the catastrophe of 70 CE.

Best (1983:142-145) also argues that Mark wrote before the fall of the temple in 70 CE. The reason why Mark wrote was that Mark's community "was in danger of slipping back into 'the easy and self-indulgent life which seemed to be the goal of the Greco-Roman world'" (Best 1983:144). The temptation mentioned in Mark 4:10-20 was real for the members of Mark's community, and the community also feared persecution. As a way of avoiding persecution, the community was concerned with apocalyptic hope. In these circumstances, Mark calls his community to take up the cross. Mark thus acts as a pastor to a community that has lost its original fervor in following Jesus.

Brandon (1967:240-266), on the other hand, argues that Mark was written in the aftermath of the Jewish war as an *apologia* for Roman Christians. By using external and internal evidence, Brandon argues for a date shortly after 71 CE for the writing of the Gospel. According to Brandon Roman Christians would have seen the great procession of Vespasianus and Titus in Rome celebrating Rome's victory over the Jews. In the procession, as described by Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, VII, 116-157), the Romans displayed "those ancient purple habits" (the purple hangings of the sanctuary in the temple in Jerusalem, the temple curtain mentioned in Mk 15:38).

This visual display of triumph would have affected the Christians in Rome at least in two ways. First, it reminded them that their own faith stemmed from the Jewish people that revolted against Rome, and, second, they realized that the Romans might regard them as also being infected with revolutionary ideas (Brandon, 1967:242-243).

Brandon finds the following internal evidence in the Gospel that concur with his external arguments just noted: the Gospel contains a strong polemic against Judaism and Jewish Christians: (e.g., Jesus' controversy with the Jewish leaders [Mk 2:6; 3:6, 22-27]; Jesus being rejected by his own family [Mk 6:1-6]; the shifting of the responsibility for the death of Jesus to the Jewish authorities [Mk 15:6-15]). Furthermore, Jesus' own disciples understood him as the Jewish Messiah, not as the divine Savior of humankind (Mk 8:27-33). According to Brandon, a pro-Roman apology can also be detected in Mark (e.g., the Barabbas incident [Mk 15:6-15]; the tribute to Caesar [Mk 12:13-17]; Simon the Cananean being one of Jesus' disciples [Mk 3:18]). The climax of the Gospel comes with the tearing of the temple curtain (Mk 15:38) and the confession of the Roman centurion that Jesus was truly the Son of God (Mk 15:39). Thus, by consistently denigrating the Jewish people and their leaders, the family of Jesus and his original disciples, Mark disassociates the Christians in Rome from Judaism, and appeases the Roman government.

Standaert (1983) also argues for a Roman setting for Mark. He, however, does not take his starting point from the threatening persecution either before or after the fall of Jerusalem, but from the liturgy of the Roman church. His hypothesis, in short, is that the Gospel was read as a Christian paschal Haggadah (narrative or story) on the vigil (Saturday – Sunday) after the fourteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan (Passover). The purpose of this reading was to introduce new adherents of the faith to the rite of baptism that was conferred in the morning (see Matera 1987:9-10).

Standaert's thesis is built on what he calls the baptismal and paschal imagery in the Gospel. The prologue of the Gospel (Mk 1:1-13), for example, begins with a call by John for baptism and conversion, a promise that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit, and the baptism of Jesus. That Jesus does not baptize with the Holy Spirit during the Gospel suggests to Standaert that the call to baptism are directed to the Gospel's audience. The young man that flees naked at Jesus' arrest (Mk 14:51), the young man that appears in a white robe at Jesus' grave (Mk 16:2), and Jesus' question as reaction to the request of James and John (when they ask for honorary seats in the kingdom; see Mk

10:38) if they think they are able to be baptized with the baptism by which he is to be baptized, according to Standaert, also points to the baptismal imagery of the Gospel.⁶

2.2 Syria as the setting of Mark's gospel

A location which has occasionally been suggested for the origin of Mark, mainly because scholars started to question the Roman proposal, is that of Syria (see Vander Broek 1987:30). Bartlet (1922:34-40) was the first scholar who championed Syria as a possible setting for Mark. Bartlet argues that since Peter was connected to the Antiochene church, the fact that Antioch was a great center of Roman culture (and the place where the term "Christian" was coined), and the fact that Simon of Cyrene (Mk 15:21) is referred to in the Gospel, point to a possible Syrian setting for the Gospel. Moreover, Mark's use of Aramaic words and his unexplained use of the Palestinian geography indicate that the writer of Mark could not have lived in Palestine.⁷ Following Bartlet's interpretation of the Aramaic words in Mark, Allen (1915:6) also situates Mark in Syria: Mark was written in Jerusalem in the Aramaic and later translated into Greek while the author was in Antioch.

Modern scholars who propose a Syrian setting for Mark do so on a somewhat more secure foundation, in that there is a recognition of the Hellenistic and Palestinian features in the Gospel (Vander Broek 1987:31). Fuller (1966:107), for example, is of the opinion that the language of Mark, as well as the miracle stories and Mark 13, clearly show that the Gospel has a Hellenistic background, a background that suggests an origin in Antioch.

Karnetski, in following Marxsen's (1959) *Redaktionsgeschichtliche* analysis of Mark, sees the "final" Mark as a Galilean redaction of a document that originated in Syria (in spite of the fact that he sees Galilee as the place where the community addressed in Mark is to begin their mission to the Gentiles). Kümmel (1975:98) also opts for a

⁶ Other scholars that also argues for a Roman provenance of the Gospel whose points of view are not discussed in the above section are Swete (1909), Johnson (1960), Manson (1962), Burkhill (1963), Nineham (1963), Pesch (1968), Evans (1970), Martin (1972), Lane (1974), Farmer (1974), Kealy (1977) and Myers (1988).

⁷ Vander Broek (1987:31), however, argues that Mark's use of Aramaic words and his use of unexplained geographical names (which Bartlet argues indicates an intimate knowledge of the area) actually point more to Palestine than Syria as a possible setting of the Gospel.

“Gentile community in the East”. He sees Mark as defending Jesus against the accusation of abandoning the Jewish law and against the suspicion of Jewish nationalism. In the Gospel Mark ascribes all human guilt in Jesus’ crucifixion to the Jewish leaders (e.g. Mk 2:6-8; 3:6; 7:7, 13; 12:13, 28; 14:1, 55). This apologetic of Mark is intended to make his Gentile readers aware of the riddle of Jewish unbelief and their own grace, an apologetic intent that could only have been understood by a Gentile audience such as in Syria.

Kee (1984:245-255) is most probably the scholar who has argued most comprehensively for a Syrian provenance for Mark. He understands the community of Mark as an apocalyptic community, and uses sociological models drawn from other apocalyptic communities to try to define the shape of Mark’s community. Mark’s community is an apocalyptic community after the style of the Hasidim and the Essene communities that emerged in Judaism in the time of the Maccabean revolt (167-164 BCE), a community that gained new adherents by means of itinerant preachers who went from village to village in the style of the Cynics and the Stoics, performing healings, exorcisms, and practicing open commensality. According to Kee, internal evidence in the Gospel in this regard is abundant: Jesus’ disciples went from village to village to perform healings and exorcisms (Mk 3:14-14; 6:13), a career that demanded a break with one’s natural family (Mk 3:31-35); and the Gospel’s setting aside of the ritual laws of clean and unclean (Mk 7:1-13). For Kee a community that was open across social, economic, sexual and ethnic barriers could only have come from Syria.⁸

2.3 A Galilean provenance for Mark’s gospel

In Markan scholarship a Galilean provenance for Mark has become synonymous with the work of Willi Marxsen (1959). Marxsen’s proposed Galilean setting for Mark, however, are based on the earlier work of two other Markan scholars, Lohmeyer (1936) and Lightfoot (1938).

Lohmeyer (1936) argues that early Christianity had two main centers: Galilee and Jerusalem. In Galilee a Son of Man eschatology predominated, and in Jerusalem a nationalistic messianic hope prevailed. Galilee celebrated the breaking of the bread, and

⁸ Other scholars that also argue for a Syrian provenance of the Gospel whose points of view are not discussed in the above section are Schweizer (1967), Vorster (1980), Waetjen (1989), and Duling & Perrin (1994).

Jerusalem the memorial meal. In Galilee Jesus was the Lord, and in Jerusalem he was the expected Messiah. According to Lohmeyer, Mark's gospel has taken up this historical (geographical) difference(s) between Galilee and Jerusalem in the sense that "geography becomes theology" (Lohmeyer 1936:162). In Mark, Lohmeyer argues, a direct opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem can be detected: Galilee is the center of Jesus' ministry, the sphere of divine activity, while Jerusalem is typified as the center of opposition towards Jesus' ministry, the sphere of hate and misunderstanding. Understood as such, in Mark Jerusalem (the traditional "Gottesstadt") is replaced by Galilee (the new "kommende Gotteshaus")⁹.

Lightfoot (1938:1-48, 132-159) applied Lohmeyer's thesis to the problem of understanding the conclusion of Mark's gospel. Using the *Formgeschichte* as historical-critical tool, Lightfoot argues that on the basis of form and content Mark was intended to end at Mark 16:8. The significance of this ending is, however, made most clear by the theological opposition of Galilee and Jerusalem throughout the Gospel, as indicated by Lohmeyer. The first nine chapters of the Gospel (where Jesus operates in Galilee) and the last part of the Gospel (where Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and operates in Jerusalem) show a remarkable difference: in the first nine chapters of the Gospel Jesus often calls for repentance, he calls for secrecy about his true identity, and exorcisms are at the order of the day. In contrast, in the last part of the Gospel there is no invitation to repentance, no charge to secrecy, and no exorcisms are carried out. "Galilee and Jerusalem therefore stand in opposition to each other ... Galilee is shown to have been chosen by God as the seat of the gospel and the revelation of the Son of Man, while ... Jerusalem ... has become the center of relentless hostility and sin. Galilee is the sphere of revelation, Jerusalem the sphere of rejection" (Lightfoot 1938:124-125)¹⁰.

Lohmeyer and Lightfoot's study of the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark was further developed by Marxsen (1959) in his *redaktionsgeschichtliche* study

⁹ In a later work, titled *Kultus und Evangelium*, Lohmeyer (1942) described the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in terms of the concepts *Evangelium* (Galilee) and *Kultus* (Jerusalem). Jesus' activity in Galilee (e.g. the forgiving of sins, eating with sinners, disobeying the rules of the Sabbath) was critique aimed at the cult in Jerusalem. Through these activities Jesus postulated a "neue Heiligkeit und neues Heil" (Lohmeyer 1942:106) and dismantled the cult (temple) in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ See Malbon (1982:242-255) for a more extensive and apt summary of the positions Lohmeyer and Lightfoot in regard to the possible opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark.

of Mark. Marxsen supports the main arguments of Lohmeyer and Lightfoot, but criticizes both for overlooking the importance of distinguishing between tradition and redaction in Mark. Marxsen argues that the redaction in Mark is found in the framework of the Gospel. Although most of the references to place in the Gospel are already anchored in the tradition, the evangelist inserts Galilee as the place of Jesus' activity in all his redactional remarks (see Mk 1:7, 9, 14, 15, 16, 28, 39; 3:7-8). Galilee is the center of Jesus' activity, the center of the Markan community, as well as the place for the awaiting parousia (see Mk 14:28; 16:7). Mark thus writes a "Galilean Gospel" (Marxsen 1959:92), "Galilee is Jesus' place" (Marxsen 1959:59), and Jesus' "decisive preaching always occurs in Galilee" (Marxsen 1959:62).

According to Marxsen, this theological content of the Gospel can be understood against the following historical background: the evangelist is writing some time during the Jewish War (66-70 CE). The threat of violence and war and the destruction of Jerusalem is imminent, and Christians are suspect and persecuted by both the Romans and Zealots. Also, Jewish pretenders tempt the Christians to forsake Jesus. Mark writes his Gospel to admonish those Christians still in Judea (or Jerusalem) to flee to Galilee, the place of Jesus' activity and coming parousia, to justify the existence of the community already in Galilee, and to motivate the community in Galilee to take up their cross and follow Jesus, amidst their situation of suspicion and persecution.¹¹

Kelber (1974), by concentrating on an analysis of the "kingdom passages" in Mark (cf *inter alia* Mk 1:15; 3:31-35; 4:10-34; 8:34-9:1), not only agrees with Lohmeyer, Lightfoot and Marxsen with reference to the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark, but also further darkens the negative view of Jerusalem found by these scholars (Malbon 1982:245)¹². Kelber's support for a Galilean provenance of the Gospel can be summarized as follows: the Gospel was written as a polemical work of north (Galilee) aimed at the ruined tradition of the south (Jerusalem), formed by Peter and the twelve. The religious leaders in Jerusalem, after Jesus' resurrection, betrayed Jesus' original vision. Self-styled Christian prophets of Jerusalem fell into an eschatological heresy that

¹¹ For a more extensive summary of Marxsen's view on the Markan *Sitz*, see Vander Broek (1987:33-47).

¹² Kelber, however, differs from Marxsen by situating the Gospel in the aftermath of the Jewish war and the destruction of the temple.

the parousia will occur in Jerusalem, and the family and the failed disciples of the Markan Jesus joined the Jerusalem authorities in opposing him.

Mark thus writes from the perspective of Galilean Christianity against the Jerusalem Christianity that was current in his day. For Mark the place of the parousia and the kingdom is not in Jerusalem, but in Galilee. Moreover, the time of the parousia is not in Jesus' generation, but in Mark's own time.¹³ In his Gospel Mark explains the extinction of the Jerusalem church and the abolition of Jewish legalism to vindicate the Gentile mission and to emphasize the way of the cross.

Other Markan scholars that support Marxsen's thesis,¹⁴ albeit only indirectly, are Schoep (1960:1-60), Parker (1970:60) and Trocmé (1975). Schoep (1960: 103-105) argues that, based on his analysis of Mark 13, the Markan community fled Jerusalem during the Jewish war to await the parousia in Galilee. Parker (1970:295-304), by comparing the communities in Mark and Acts, comes to the conclusion that Mark is representative of Galilean and Acts as that of Judean Christianity. Trocmé (1975:48-59), in his turn, argues that an earlier form of Mark (including chapters 1 to 13) was produced in northern Palestine by Hellenistic Jews in the early fifties. In this "earlier Mark" Trocmé finds a polemic against Jewish Christianity, based upon Mark's opposition to the temple (Mk 11; 13:1-2), the implicit criticism of Jewish Christians in Jesus' attacks on the scribes and the Pharisees, and the criticism of the leadership in Jerusalem (e.g., Peter [Mk 8:27-9:-1]; James [Mk 3:20-35]).

The most extensive study on a possible *Sitz* for Mark was done by Vander Broek (1983) in his doctoral dissertation. Vander Broek (1983:302), starting from Marxsen's main arguments, describes the Markan *Sitz* as follows: Mark was produced by a member of a Christian community in Galilee shortly after the Jewish war. Mark's community was "apocalyptically orientated, a stance which it has been forced to define in relationship to the Jewish War (ch. 13), and which influences its view of mission (13:10), miracles

¹³ The title of Kelber's book, *The kingdom of Mark: A new place and a new time*, can thus be seen as a summary of his whole argument.

¹⁴ There are, of course, scholars that criticized Marxsen's arguments for a Galilean setting of Mark. The most severe criticism came from Guthrie (1971) and Burkhil (1972). Guthrie, for example, questions the so-called opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark on grounds of the argument that Jesus also experienced hostility in Galilee (and not only in Jerusalem), that Jesus was also (as in Galilee) met with favor in Jerusalem, and that Mark 14:28 and Mark 16:7 do not illustrate any special orientation to Galilee, but simply show that Mark has no interest in Jerusalem (Guthrie 1971:82-84).

(3:20-35), and Christology and ethics (8:27-9:1)" (Vander Broek 1983:302). The community's view of Christ and understanding of discipleship excluded its participation in the Jewish war, which made pro-war Jews and the Romans hostile over against them. Mark's community also stands in tense relationship with the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem, since the latter had been pro-war (based on its royal Davidic Christology) and continued to be loyal to Judaism during the early Jamnia era. The community of Mark consisted of Gentiles and lower class Jews who were either unable or unwilling to be made part of the cultic restriction of Judaism as propagated by the Jerusalem church. Understood from this background, Mark writes his gospel for two main reasons: first, he intends his gospel to be used as a missionary document, and, secondly, he writes his gospel as an affirmation of the teaching, beliefs and practices of his community.

Finally, the point of view of Van Eck (1995), in regard to a possible Galilean setting for the Gospel, can also be mentioned. Van Eck, making use of the insights of Lohmeyer, Lightfoot, Marxsen and Kelber, and employing a narratological and social-scientific analysis to interpret the Gospel, argues that the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem in the Gospel can be scrutinized down to an opposition between the new household of Jesus on Galilean soil and the temple in Jerusalem. By, *inter alia*, performing exorcisms, healing people from their illnesses and forgiving sins on Galilean soil, Jesus created a new household that practiced open commensality, in which also women and children were welcome, which was egalitarian of character, and in which God was made present to all, especially to the so-called "sinners" of his day. This inclusivistic household stood against the exclusivistic household of the temple. For the leaders in Jerusalem, Jerusalem was the symbol of God's presence and availability. In terms of the temple's politics of holiness, however, it became the place where God's saving presence was only available to a few in society. Galilee, on the other hand, was Galilee of the Gentiles, the place where God was not perceived as being present. In terms of Jesus' politics of commensality, however, Galilee became the place where God's kingdom (the new household) was to be found. The new household became the kingdom.

As the Pharisees replicated the temple's ideology of holiness on Galilean soil, Jesus, according to Mark's story of Jesus, went to Jerusalem and, by broadening the temple, replicated his new household in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, then, and more specifically in the temple itself, two ideologies clashed: an exclusive politics of holiness and an

inclusive politics of open commensality. From this reading of Mark the following postulation of the Markan community is then made: the Markan community lived in Galilee just after the fall of the temple¹⁵, consisted of one or more house churches¹⁶, and saw themselves in continuity with the temple. The fact that the temple was there no more was experienced by them as a crisis. The evangelist, however, by describing the Markan Jesus as one who, during his Galilean ministry, and by his action in the temple in Jerusalem, replaced the temple with the new household even before the physical destruction of the temple, teaches his community that the fall of the temple should be understood as the final conclusion of what Jesus taught while he ministered his new household on Galilean soil.

Because the Markan community shaped themselves by means of an ideology of open commensality, they stood in opposition to especially a very early form of formative Judaism that originated in Jamnia along the lines of the old temple ideology of holiness. In this situation Mark calls on his community to take up their cross and to follow Jesus by living out a politics of open commensality¹⁷.

3. BAUCKHAM'S THEORY ON THE AUDIENCE OF THE GOSPELS

Bauckham's (1998:44-45) reaction to the above enterprise to situate the Markan community in Rome, Syria or Galilee (whatever the choice would be) is simple: the Gospels were not addressed to or intended to be understood solely by any specific community such as Rome, Syria or Galilee. Or, to put stronger in his own words: "the enter-

¹⁵ In Markan scholarship the discussion on a possible date for Mark normally centers on Mark 13:2, the prophecy of the destruction of the temple. It is argued that, in postulating a date for Mark, this event must be understood as about to happen or that it just happened. My choice for a post 70 date for the Gospel simply builds on my understanding of Mark 13 as a narrated speech of Jesus (see Vorster 1987:203-222). In no way can I imagine that the historical Jesus "prophesized" (in terms of telling the future) the fall of the temple. Mark, therefore, employs the words of Jesus in Mark 13:2 as "prophecy", that is, a prophecy *ex eventu*.

¹⁶ For a discussion on the house church as the dominant social institution in early Christianity, see Van Eck (1991:667-671).

¹⁷ Other scholars who argue for a Galilean setting for Mark, whose arguments are not discussed in full in the above section, are Conzelmann (1967), O'Callaghan (1972), Kealy (1977) and Mack (1995).

prise of reconstructing an evangelist's community is ... doomed to failure" (Bauckham 1998:45).

Even if one argues that the community in which a gospel was written is likely to have influenced the writing of a gospel, even though it is not addressed by the gospel, it does not follow that we have any chance of reconstructing that community. For Bauckham, therefore, trying to construct a specific community for any of the Gospels have no hermeneutical relevance. Scholars should, therefore, cease using the terms Matthean or Markan community, since they no longer have any useful meaning.

How does Bauckham come to the above conclusion? His argument runs as follows: Nearly all scholars writing about the Gospels treat it as self-evident that each evangelist addressed the specific context and concerns of his own community, and a large and increasingly sophisticated edifice of scholarly reconstruction has been erected on this basic assumption. According to Bauckham (1998:10), however, the Gospels were written for a general Christian audience, not for a specific Christian audience. Mark, therefore, was not written for a specific audience called the Markan community (or Mark's church), but for any and every Christian audience in the late first century to which the Gospel might circulate. Or, in the words of Bauckham (1998:11) himself: "[The evangelists wrote their Gospels] expected [their works] to circulate widely among the churches, had no particular Christian audience in view, but envisaged as [their] audience[s] any church (or in any church in which Greek was understood) to which [their] work[s] might find [their] way."

As point of departure, Bauckham (1998:12) assumes Markan priority. This means, for Bauckham (1998:12), that by the time Matthew and Luke wrote their respective gospels, the Gospel of Mark had already circulated quite widely around the churches and was being read in the churches to which Matthew and Luke respectively belonged. Thus, whatever Mark intended his Gospel to be, his work, as Matthew and Luke knew it, had already come to be used and valued, not as a work focused on the particular circumstances of Mark's community, but as a work generally useful to various different churches. Matthew and Luke, therefore, must have expected that their Gospels would also 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, even expecting their

respective gospels to replace that of Mark. To suppose that Matthew and Luke, after Mark's gospel received such a wide audience, addressed their own gospels to a much more restricted audience such as their own communities, therefore, seems to Bauckham *prima facie* improbable.

According to Bauckham (1998:13), the current dominating view that each evangelist wrote for his own community should be seen as a result of British scholarship starting at the end of the nineteenth century. To his knowledge, Swete (1909) was first to advance a Roman provenance for Mark, shortly followed by Plummer (who proposed that Luke was written for a specific Gentile audience) and the work of Streeter (in which he proposes that the four Gospel each originated in one of the four major centers of early Christianity, i e, Antioch, Rome, Caesarea and Ephesus). According to Bauckham (1998:15-16), the next impetus in the process by which the consensus came about that each evangelist wrote for his own specific community, came from Kilpatrick (1946; see Bauckham 1998:15), in that Kilpatrick takes it for granted that the community in which Matthew wrote was the same as the community for whom he wrote. Kilpatrick's book is also the direct ancestor of the way recent commentaries on the Gospels (e g, Davies & Allison 1988 on Matthew, see Bauckham 1998:16) and Fitzmyer (1981 on Luke; see Bauckham 1998:16) discuss the question about the context in and audience for whom these respective evangelists wrote their gospels. In these works, however, Bauckham (1998:16) finds no arguments for the view that has become consensus: that each Gospel was written for or aimed at a specific community. The same can be said about Markan scholarship: in the late 1960s and 1970s in a series of books (e g that of Conzelmann [1967], Weeden [1968], Reploh [1969], Evans [1970], Kelber [1974] and Pesch [1977]) an approach started to develop that aimed to reconstruct the distinctive features of the Markan community and to explain the Gospel as addressing specific issues within the community. Nowhere, however, Bauckham argues, arguments are put forward to substantiate this kind of working hypothesis, rather, it is treated as a self-evident fact that each Gospel addresses the specific circumstances of a particular community.

According to Bauckham (1998:19-22) all these attempts (since the late 1960s) that take seriously the claim that each Gospel addresses the specific situation of a particular community have three main characteristics in common. One is the develop-

ment of allegorical readings of the gospels in the service of reconstructing not only the character but also the history of the community behind the gospels. In other words, characters and events referred to in the gospels are taken to represent groups and events (experiences) within the community. This method, according to Bauckham (1998:20), leads to "historical fantasy". The second characteristic of scholars that claim that each gospel addresses the specific situation of a particular community is the increasing use of sophisticated social-scientific methods for reconstructing the respective communities behind each gospel. These methods, however, have taken over the same false assumption that in each gospel there indeed exists a relationship between a single context in which it was written and for which it was written.¹⁸ The third aspect of the reading strategy adopted by the current consensus is that the so-called implied relationship between text and context leads them to understand features of the text that need not to be understood so at all. A study of the social status of the characters in Mark, for example, does not automatically mean that the social status of the implied audience are the same.

In the latter part of his article, Bauckham (1998:26-44) puts forward his arguments to substantiate his thesis that the gospels were written for any and every Christian audience in the late first century to which the Gospel might circulate. The first stage of his arguments consists in contrasting the gospels with the Pauline letters. Treating the contrast between the Pauline letters and the gospels as first stage of the argument is for Bauckham important, since he is of the conviction that scholars of the consensus see the audiences of the gospels just as local and particularized as the major Pauline letters that address the specific needs and problems of each congregation that the letters are addressed to. According to Bauckham (1998:27-28), the gospels are not letters, and to appreciate the difference between the two, the following two considerations have to be taken into account: first, the crucial difference of genre, and second, the question of why someone would want to put something down in writing.

¹⁸ At this point of his argument Bauckham (1998:22-25) asks the question if one must not suppose that the assumption that each gospel was written for the evangelist's own community has not indeed been confirmed by the results of this kind of reading of the gospels. He answers this question negatively, in that he argues that current scholarship does not proceed by arguing that certain features of a gospel are explicable only if understood as addressed to a specific audience rather than to a general audience. The results of current scholarship, therefore, "are results of applying to the text a specific reading strategy, not of showing that this reading strategy does better justice to the text than another reading strategy" (Bauckham 1998:22).

In regard to the question of genre, Bauckham argues that the special quality of a letter is that it is *always* read as, for example, the letter addressed to the Corinthians. This, however, is not the case with the gospels. From the mid-second century up to the twentieth century no reader supposed that the specific situation of the Matthean community was relevant to the reading of the gospel. Moreover, since the specific genre of the gospels is what can be called the Greco-Roman *bios*, no one would expect a *bios* to address the very specific circumstances of a small community of people.

The full force of the difference in genre between the gospels and the letters of Paul, however, is only understood when we add to this difference the question: why would anyone write a letter or a gospel? In the case of the letters of Paul the answer is evident: distance required writing. On the other hand, Bauckham argues, orality sufficed for presence. Why would someone, if orality sufficed for presence, go to the considerable trouble of writing a gospel for a community to which he was regularly preaching, or go to the trouble to freeze in writing his response to a local situation? This trouble, Bauckham argues, would only have been undertaken if there was a need to communicate widely with readers unable to be present at its authors' oral teaching.

The rest of Bauckham's arguments for the likelihood that the gospels were written for general circulation are based on his understanding of the early Christian movement (see Bauckham 1998:30-44). According to Bauckham, the early Christian movement did not consist of scattered, isolated and self-sufficient communities with little or no communication between them, but rather of a network of communities with constant and close communication among themselves. "In other words, the social character of early Christianity was such that the idea of writing a Gospel purely for one's own community is unlikely to have occurred to anyone" (Bauckham 1998:30).

Moreover, evidence show that mobility and communication in the first-century Roman world were exceptionally high. Good roads and safe travel by both land and sea made the Mediterranean world a very closely interconnected area. In this kind of situation people of the early Christian churches must have traveled very regularly, and so communication was built up and kept up, and contact between churches scattered across

the empire was at the order of the day.¹⁹ Gospels written for general circulation fit this scenario.

Evidence further shows that the early Christian movement had a strong sense of itself as a worldwide movement. Christians saw themselves as brothers and sisters of all believers over the world, and if it were the case that some of the believing communities indeed experienced themselves as a small minority group experiencing alienation and opposition in its immediate social context, this solidarity with fellow-believers compensated for their own situation.

A further aspect of early Christianity that Bauckham (1998:33) sees as proof for his thesis is that most of the Christian leaders we know in the New Testament period moved around quite often. Examples of this tendency is ample: Paul and his missionary colleagues, Peter, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Apollos, Philip the evangelist and his prophet daughters, Aquila and Priscilla, Andronicus and Junia, Agabus, and the brothers of the lord.²⁰ From this evidence, Bauckham (1998:35) argues, there is no reason to suppose that such movements were untypical of all other Christian leaders of the first generation. According to Bauckham (1998:36), these traveling leaders should be seen as models for the kind of persons who might have written the gospels. Because their own experience of the Christian movement was all but parochial, the writers of the gospels did not confine their attention, when composing their respective gospels, to the local needs of a single community, but rather wrote relevantly for a wide variety of churches in which their gospels might be read (Bauckham 1998:38).

Another feature of early Christianity that Bauckham (1998:38) sees as support for his thesis is the sending of letters from one church to another (e.g. 1 Peter, 1 Clement,

¹⁹ In this regard Bauckham finds support for his thesis in the work of Thompson (1998:49-69) who argues that churches from 30 to 70 CE had the motivation and means to communicate regularly and in depth with one another. Thompson is of the opinion that many of the early congregations were less than a week's travel away from a main hub in the Christian network. If Mark's gospel, for example, was indeed written in Rome (with the endorsement of Peter's preaching), it could not have taken long for this gospel to spread right through the Mediterranean world. He also argues that Acts and the epistles of Paul preserved good evidence that the early Christian communities had strong reasons for staying in close connection with each other. Concluding from this, Thompson (1998:69) argues that it was more likely that the Gospels were written not over a period of decades (i.e., from 70 to 100 CE), but within a few years of each other.

²⁰ See Bauckham (1998:34, footnotes 41 to 51) for the places these leaders traveled to, as well as the Biblical references he quotes to support his argument.

Polycarp of Smyrna to Philippi and the six letters of Ignatius of Antioch). These letters established more than literary connections between churches. Letters imply messengers, and messengers imply personal contact, the conveying of news, sharing in worship, and taking back home news from the congregation that has been visited.

Finally, Bauckham (1998:39-40) is of the opinion that we have concrete evidence for close contacts between churches in the period around or soon after the writing of the gospels. He cites the following three examples: the famous fragment of Papias' prologue to his lost work, the letters of Ignatius and the Shepherd of Hermas. From these letters, Bauckham (1998:41-44) argues, can be deduced that there was an active communication network between the different Christian communities in early Christianity.²¹

To summarize: for Bauckham (1998:44) the early Christian movement was a "network of communities in constant communication with each other, by messengers, letters and movements of leaders and teachers – moreover, a network around which Christian literature circulated easily, quickly, and widely." The idea of writing a gospel only for local consumption does not fit this picture.

Bauckham (1998:44-48) concludes with the following hermeneutic observations: The attempt by the current consensus in gospel scholarship to give the so-called Matthean or Markan communities a key hermeneutical role in the interpretation of the gospels have no hermeneutical relevance.

In regard to the implied audience of the Gospels, what Bauckham proposes do not only implies a gospel audience broader than the current consensus allows (e.g., a range of churches over a specific geographical area), but an audience that is indefinite rather than specific. The audience of the gospels were any and every church to whom a specific gospel may circulate. The intended audience of each gospel was an open category.

²¹ Bauckham finds support for this argument in the work of Alexander (1998:71-109). Alexander, in following Gamble (1995), is of the opinion that abundant material evidence of book production among early Christians can be put forward, although it dates from the second century and beyond. The sheer volume of early Christian papyri from the second century onwards testifies to this fact. Although this evidence comes from the second century and onwards, she argues that the sheer volume of written material indicates the early popularity and widespread use of written material. From this evidence she concludes that written material must have been fairly widely used during the period of the writing and disseminating of the Gospels.

The crux of Bauckham's argument does not imply that the gospels should be seen as autonomous literary works floating free of any historical context. The gospels have a historical context, that of the early Christian movement in the late first century.

Bauckham's argument does not mean that the diversity of the gospels are underestimated. It simply denies what the consensus assumes, that is, that the diversity of the gospels require a diversity of readers.

The desire to define the historical meaning of a text as specifically as possible, by defining its historical context as closely as possible, is a hermeneutical mistake. The mistake, however, does not consist in thinking that the historical context is relevant, but lies in failing to see that texts vary in the extent to which they are context relevant. The gospels, for example, are relatively "open texts" that leave their implied readership more open and consequently leave their meaning more open to their real readers' participation in producing meaning.

4. SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON BAUCKHAM'S THEORY ON THE UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE OF THE GOSPELS

From the above it is clear that Bauckham's theory on the universality of the gospels goes hand in hand with his understanding (postulation) of the early Christian movement: a network of communities in constant communication with each other, by messengers, letters and movements of leaders and teachers, a network around which Christian literature circulated easily, quickly, and widely. In short, an irenic movement with no inner conflict, a movement (consisting of close-knitted communities) in which individual communities are open for influences from any other individual community(ies). To put it differently: the early Christian movement was one table, one shared meal, a movement practicing open commensality wider as one can imagine.

New Testament scholarship, however, has indicated that the early Christian movement was all but one close-knit family. There were many different responses to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, responses that went different ways depending on their mix of peoples, social histories, discussions about the teachings of Jesus, and how they were to be interpreted and applied (Mack 1995:6). Mack (1995:6) describes the different groups that formed around the teachings of Jesus as follows: some were called Jesus

movements, others became congregations of the Christ whose death was imagined as a martyrdom to justify a mixture of Jews and Gentiles into a new community (being “in” Christ, and therefore brothers and sisters of each other), and others developed into enclaves for the cultivation of spiritual enlightenment or the knowledge (*gnosis*) Jesus taught.²²

Mack (1988:82-97) identifies five Jesus movements that existed in southern Syria and Palestine from 30 CE to 70 CE: *itinerants in Galilee, the so-called Q-community* (based on the wisdom teachings of Jesus they adopted a social-critical way of life as alternative to the social dispensation they lived in; apocalypticism, as well as the death of Jesus, played no part in their understanding of Jesus; see Mack 1988:84-86), *the pillars in Jerusalem* (Jesus was understood as *the* authority in terms of interpreting the law, circumcision was practiced, purity rules were adhered to, and by means of table fellowship boundaries between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians were drawn; see Mack 1988:88-90), *the family of Jesus* (a *Hasidic* kind of movement, like the pillars in Jerusalem, that adhered to the purity rules and emphasized the correct interpretation of the law, but also laid claim to be in close association with the family of Jesus; see Mack 1988:90-91), *the congregation of Israel* (a group that practiced table fellowship where at the miracle stories of Jesus were interpreted in terms of the Moses-, Elijah- and Elisha traditions; see Mack 1988:91-93), and *the synagogue reform* (a group that stood in conflict with the local synagogues in the Hellenistic cities in Galilee and southern Syria, who, during table fellowship, discussed Jesus’ *chreiai*, discussion that evolved into the pronouncement stories as we now have it in Mark; see Mack 1988:94-96).

In regard to the congregations of the Christ, differences in opinion can also be detected: some cults gave no attention to the resurrection of Jesus, only reflecting on the death of Jesus and its supposed meaning for their own situation, others combined the Hellenistic myth of Jesus’ death (as being a martyr) with the Jewish myth on the resur-

²² Crossan (1999:239-574) is also of the opinion that the early Christian movement was a movement of diversity. Crossan’s (1999:xxxiv) thesis is that in earliest Christianity at least two excluding and competing traditions existed, mimetic Christianity (the Life Tradition) and exegetic Christianity (the Death Tradition). The former put emphasis on the sayings of Jesus and on living in the kingdom of God, was centered in Galilee and went out from Galilee. The latter emphasized the resurrection of Jesus and his expected return, was centered in Jerusalem and went out from Jerusalem. Both these traditions claimed exclusive continuity with the past.

rection (resurrection being the reward for a righteous life), and others gave attention to only the value of the resurrection of Jesus for one's salvation (see Mack 1988:100-113).

Is Mack (1988) correct in his description of the early Christian community (which he sees as the time between 30 and 70 CE)? If Mack is correct or not is not the point. The point is that it is clear that as early as 30 CE (just after the death of Jesus) different movements, all claiming one or another relationship to Jesus and/or his message, started to form. *Moreover, all these movements competed with one another in their claims to be the true followers of Jesus.* This claim for being the true extension of the original Jesus movement, however, was not only a matter of difference between specific Jesus movements, congregations and enclaves of spiritual enlightenment. In specific congregations different points of view on what and who Jesus was and how his message should be understood, existed. A good example here is the congregation in Corinth, since it is also referred to by Bauckham (1998:27, 29) in his article. This believing community was all but one happy family. From 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 it is clear that Paul founded at least two house churches in Corinth, and that Apollos did the same (see Breytenbach 1986:51). There are, however, some evidence that the Peter-group, that stood in direct opposition to Paul (e.g. on the question if Gentile converts should be circumcised or not) also founded a house church in Corinth (see Brown & Meier 1983:2-9).

From the above it is clear that the early Christian movement was not an universal, irenic movement with no inner conflict, a movement in which individual communities were open for influences from any other individual communities. Rather, the early Christian movement consisted of different movements, all claiming to be the true followers of Jesus. This, moreover, was not only the case in 30 CE to 70 CE. From the texts that we have, it is possible to indicate that there always were (and probably will be), widespread differences between groups that claim to be the true followers of Jesus. If one, for example, take into consideration non-canonical gospel texts like the Gospel of Thomas (*circa* 50 CE), the Dialogue of the Savior (*circa* 50-100 CE), the Gospel of the Egyptians (*circa* 150-200 CE), the Apocryphon of James (*circa* 100-150 CE), the Gospel of Peter (*circa* 50-80 CE), the Gospel of the Hebrews (*circa* 50-150 CE), the Gospel of the Nazoreans (*circa* 100-120 CE), the Gospel of the Ebionites (*circa* 150 CE), the Protevangelium of James (*circa* 150 CE) and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (*circa* 150-175 CE;

see Cameron 1982) it is clear that from as early as 30 CE up to the late second century different points of view on who Jesus was, and what fellowship with Jesus implied, existed. Bauckham's theory on the early Christian movement does not take these differences into account, and should therefore be refined.

But what about the communities that are represented by the New Testament? Were they not the large or main body of the early Christian movement that Bauckham's universal gospels were addressed to? A point can be made, in this regard, maybe for the synoptic Gospels, but what about the gospel of John with its clear gnostic background? Moreover, it must be remembered that the texts of the New Testament were collected in the interest of a particular form of Christianity²³ that emerged only by degree through the second and fourth centuries, and consists of a very small selection of texts from a large body of literature produced by various communities during the first hundred years after the death of Jesus.

If the above description of the early Christian movement is correct, the question should be asked if it is at all possible to understand the early Christian communities (all consisting of a different mix of peoples, with different social histories, and with different discussions about the teachings of Jesus and how they should be interpreted and applied) as an irenic network in constant communication with each other, a network around which Christian literature circulated easily.

A second aspect of Bauckham's thesis that needs our attention is the matter of genre. According to Bauckham (1998:28) the gospels must be seen as a special category of the Greco-Roman *bios*, and, although the implied readership of the ancient biography is a topic that still needs discussion, it seems unlikely that anyone would expect a *bios* to address the very specific circumstances of a small community of people. Bauckham's argument in this regard is clear: since the gospels are a special category of the Greco-Roman *bios*, its addressees could not have been a specific local community. Bauckham, however, does not put forward any convincing arguments for making the connection between a *bios* and a universal audience. To simply connect a specific genre to a specific

²³ Mack (1995:6) refers to the type of Christianity as represented by the New Testament as "centrist", in that it positioned itself against gnostic forms of Christianity on the one hand, and radical forms of Pauline and spiritist communities on the other.

kind of audience is not enough, since Bauckham's argument could just as well have been that, since the gospels are not of a special category of the Greco-Roman *bios*, it's implied audience must have been the specific circumstances of a small community of people²⁴.

In discussing the "full force" of the difference of genre, Bauckham (1998:28) goes even further. His argument, if I understand it correctly, is as follows: an apostolic letter and a gospel are not of the same genre. In the case of a letter, it is put down in writing (e.g., 1 Corinthians), because Paul could not visit the congregation. Writing, therefore, is needed when distance required communication. Paul, for example, would not have written 1 Corinthians if he resided permanently in Corinth. Therefore, Bauckham concludes, distance required writing, whereas orality sufficed for presence. Which brings us to Bauckham's theory in regard to the gospels: since orality sufficed for presence, the writers of the gospels taught/preached to the communities they lived in orally, thus, like Paul, would not have written a gospel to the community, for example, of Edessa if they resided in Edessa. However, since it was not possible, for example, to travel to the Christians in Sepphoris in Galilee, a gospel would be written to be passed on to them and any other local community that was interested.

From the above Bauckham's line of argument is clear: letters were written, because of distance, for a specific audience that could not be visited. The gospels (which are not letters), in turn were written, because of distance, for a universal audience (not a specific audience, since they are not letters). Or, to put it differently: if the gospels were addressed to specific communities, they would have been letters, not gospels. Thus, for Bauckham, only two possibilities exist: if someone needed to communicate over a distance with a specific identified audience, a letter was written, and if someone wanted to communicate over a distance with as many people as possible, a gospel was written.

²⁴ How difficult it is to connect the gospel genre to an earlier antecedent such as the Greco-Roman *bios* can be seen when one looks at the arguments of, for example, Bultmann and Talbert in this regard. Bultmann (in Vorster 1981:15) argued that the gospels do not fit the *bios* as genre, since a) the gospels are mythical in character while the Greco-Roman *bios* do not make use of myths and mythical language; b) the gospels can be seen as cult legends, while the *bios* is not, and c) the gospels are, because of the eschatological orientation, world negating, while the Greco-Roman *bios* has no eschatological tendencies at all. Talbert (in Vorster 1981:16), in reaction to Bultmann, uses the same arguments to prove that the gospels indeed are 'biographies'. It should also be noted that the *bios* is not the only genre that has been proposed as antecedent for the gospels. Other possibilities that have been proposed are the aretology, tragedy, and comic tragedy (i.e. Hellenistic parallels) and Exodus, the biography of a righteous man and an apocalyptic drama (i.e. Semitic parallels; see Vorster 1981:14-25).

Are there not, however, a few other possibilities also? Was it impossible, for example, that a teacher of a specific community wrote down his gospel for his community, and that his written gospel then (like the letters of Paul) started to circulate in the early Christian movement to be used by more than one believing community? Was it not also possible that someone in a specific believing community could have written down what he heard, and that what was written down (a gospel) started to circulate as widely as Bauckham has suggested? There are still more possibilities available to us in this regard: what if the leader of a specific community decided that, since his community knows the traditions he is making use of to tell his story about Jesus, decided to put in writing his version of the story in terms of traditions available, so that his community has a specific interpretation of the traditions known to them? What if the results of the *Formgeschichte* (the work of Schmidt, Bultmann and Dibelius) are taken seriously in that the gospels are *Kleinliteratur*, the creation of believing communities itself? What if the gospels indeed were written by specific authors for a universal audience, and a specific community became attached to one specific gospel since it gave expression to its own internal problems and situation? And because of this, this specific community shaped (amended or altered) the original text at specific points to fit their own needs even better? Would it not then serve the text better if the text is read or interpreted against that (or a) specific background? Also, is it not possible that some Gospels were written for individual communities, while others (e.g. Luke with its “universal” message) were indeed produced to be first and foremost read by an universal audience?

Moreover, is it not the case that, after a text has been produced by a specific writer, the writer has no control over “his” text any more? In this regard Bauckham, in my opinion, works with a modern assumption of the way texts are produced: they are written, printed and published, and then distributed for consumption. Was such a situation possible in the first century? In other words, is it not also possible that the gospels we do have differ, for a number of reasons described above (if they were indeed composed by individual authors), quite a bit from their “original” form? Or do we have to believe that what we have in the New Testament known to us as gospels are the “final” texts as produced by individual authors for a universal audience? One final example: say, for example, some followers of Jesus traveled around in a Cynic-like fashion and told

the(ir) story of Jesus to whomever wanted to listen, and their specific story/interpretation of Jesus became so popular that some leaders of congregations visited started to use the Jesus-story heard as basis for their preaching in their specific communities, either taking it over as heard, or by adapting it?

The point I want to make does not lie in the amount of possibilities that can be accumulated, but in the simple question: if any of the possibilities described above indeed are possible, would the gospels have looked different as we have them now? I do not think so. For Bauckham orality suffices where no distance is involved, but writing comes into play when distance is involved. What if orality did suffice when the gospel of Mark, for example, was first nothing but a sermon to Mark's own congregation, and, when the need arose for this specific story of Jesus (i e Mark) to be heard elsewhere, it was written down to be circulated?

In this regard, two other arguments of Bauckham (1998:32-33) need our attention. To substantiate his thesis that the gospels were written for a universal audience, Bauckham argues that the early Christian movement was a network of communities with close and constant communication between them (Bauckham 1998:30), that mobility was very high and that traveling between the different communities was easy and safe (Bauckham 1998:32), and that the leaders of the Christian movement moved around quite often (Bauckham 1998:33-34). If this indeed was the case, the question should be asked: if the leaders of the Christian communities did travel a lot (since it was so safe and easy), and was received in a quite welcome fashion in each community they visited (since the Christian movement was so close-knit), why did orality not suffice in such a situation? Was it then really necessary to put the gospel down in writing? Or are we to suppose that only four leaders of the early Christian community were not able to travel as much and where they wanted to, and therefore put down their gospels in writing?

Above all, Bauckham's theory on the mobility and the frequent moving around of Christian leaders in the early Christian movement is based on highly respectable evidence. Bauckham (1998:33-34), in substantiating his thesis that the early Christian leaders moved around quite often, quote in almost all cases texts from the Acts of the Apostles to give a base for his argument. It is, however, more or less consensus in New Testament scholarship that Acts is highly tendentious in character, in that Acts (as part of

Luke-Acts) wants to give an irenic picture of the way the gospel of Jesus the Christ spread, first from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke), and then from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts). This tendentious aspect of Acts becomes clear when, for example, a comparison is made between Acts 15 and Galatians 2. Moreover, from the letters of Paul (see 2 Cor 6:4-6; 11:23-28) a different picture of what travel in the first century entailed, can be drawn.

Another question that can be asked with regard to Bauckham's "universal thesis" is the matter of the dating of the gospels. According to Bauckham (1998:46), the gospels were written some time in the late first century. Why does Bauckham not want to be more specific? Is it not that a more specific choice will undermine his thesis? A more specific choice for a date of composition of Mark, for example, would mean that certain events (like the fall of the temple, the increasing activity of formative Judaism, the Caesar cult as practiced and advocated by, e.g. Domitianus), that can be connected with specific communities in early Christianity, would come into play in understanding the content of the gospels. This would, of course, mean that the experiences of local communities would likely have to become part of gospel interpretation, exactly what Bauckham wants to avoid. The obvious in this regard, however, cannot be denied: a date of composition for the gospels must exist, since the gospels exist. If one wants to argue that the date of composition of the gospels has no hermeneutical relevance in understanding the gospels, it is not enough to simply practice an argument of silence. If Bauckham indeed is of the opinion that the date of the composition of a gospel has no importance in interpreting that specific gospel, it must be argued why this is the case.

The diversity of the gospels also needs our attention. According to Bauckham (1998:47-48), the diversity of the gospels does not weaken his thesis in regard to the universality of the gospels' addressees. His thesis, Bauckham argues, simply denies what the consensus assumes: that the diversity of the gospels requires a diversity of readers. The distinctive nature of John, for example, does not imply that its intended readers were a highly distinctive branch of early Christianity, different from the readership of other gospels. It implies only that its author(s) wished to propagate his own distinctive theological rendering of the gospel story among whatever readers it might reach. This argument of Bauckham is, of course, based on two other arguments that form part of his thesis that have been already questioned above: that the early Christian movement was an open,

conflict free and irenic movement, and that the audiences of the gospels were indefinite rather than specific. Three observations can be made in this regard. First, the early Christian movement, as indicated above, was all but conflict free and irenic. Second, Bauckham works with a modern Western view of the way texts are produced, printed and circulated. Third, albeit that the gospels were written for indefinite audiences, audiences indeed were specific, in that if they were not, no audiences actually existed. Would, for example, an audience that was negative with regard to a gnostic interpretation of the message of Jesus, receive a gospel like John or Thomas at all?

The fact of the matter is that the gospels are diverse in terms of their content. Why this difference? Did the situation of, for example, the Markan community play no role whatsoever in the fact that Mark contains a (possible) corrective Christology (Weeden 1978), and a possible messianic secret as theological construct (Wrede 1971)? Why does Matthew make more of the correct interpretation of the law than all the other gospels, and why does John take up some elements of gnosticism in his gospel? Because, according to Bauckham, the evangelists had different understandings of Jesus and his story? Or, because certain movements soon adopted specific understandings (based on or relating to their specific circumstances, social background, mixes of people and influences from their context) of Jesus? To pretend that only the latter is possible, cannot honestly be argued. But then, to argue that only the first is possible, that is, that the circumstances of a specific community played no role whatsoever in the content of the different gospels and that the gospels are solely the product of what went on in the minds of the evangelists, can also not be accepted as unbiased.

Again it is my opinion that Bauckham does not make enough of the first century Christian movement as first and foremost oral in character. Written texts were the exception, not the rule. If this was the case in the first century, and the gospels were indeed produced by individual authors for a general and universal audience, we shall have to rethink the date of the composition of the respective gospels most seriously, since they could only then have been written much later. Bauckham will then have to amend his thesis in the sense that the gospels were written for a general Christian audience from the middle of the second century, when the writing of texts started to become more part of the order of the day (e.g., the writings of the apostolic Fathers). Is it, however, possible

to read Mark against the background of the middle second century? Also, what about the different *termini ad quem* that can be argued for the different gospels which are earlier than the middle of the second century?

5. CONCLUSION

Bauckham's thesis on the addressees of the gospels can be questioned on grounds of the following arguments:

- Bauckham's view of the early Christian movement in the latter half of the first century as being a close-knit, conflict free and irenic network of communities in constant communication with each other can be questioned on different grounds;
- his understanding of the process of writing and/or creation of the gospels is reductionistic;
- Bauckham has not proved in a convincing manner that the genre of the gospels can be categorized as a special category of the Greco-Roman *bios*;
- Bauckham's view that the different audiences/communities in early Christianity, as well as their specific circumstances, played no part in both the writing or content of the gospels, can be questioned;
- Bauckham works with a modern, Western-like model in his postulation of how the gospels were created, a model that does not take into account the full implications of the early Christian movement as an oral culture;
- the diversity of the gospels is not appreciated enough; and
- Bauckham's thesis lacks an attempt to date the different gospels, an enterprise which, if undertaken, could make his thesis vulnerable at some points.

In short, Bauckham's main thesis, and his arguments by which it is substantiated, are not convincing enough.

By this it is not meant that the "old consensus" is right and that Bauckham is wrong. What is meant is that the old consensus, which assumes that each of the gospels was written to address the specific problems, circumstances and questions of a specific believing community, still seems to be a better hermeneutical tool to understand, not only

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any given/postulated audience or gospel, but also the diversity of the early Christian movement.

By situating the audience of Mark's gospel, for example, in Galilee (or southern Syria) it becomes possible to understand why Mark, as a theological construct, depicts Galilee (Jesus' new household) as standing in opposition to Jerusalem (the temple). With the Jewish War as the immediate history of Mark's congregation, Mark's call in Mark 13:14 would make sense, as well as Mark 14:28 and 16:7 (where the disciples are called to meet Jesus, after his death, in Galilee). Also, Mark's emphasis on the following of Jesus in circumstances of suffering and resistance (i e, in the face of formative Judaism), makes sense if a Galilee provenance of the Gospel is accepted. Because Mark's community in Galilee understood themselves as the new household of God, a household created by Jesus on Galilean soil even before the fall of the temple, the fall of the temple was, for them, a crisis but not a major catastrophe. Since this was their immediate historical context, Mark taught them that they must see themselves as the final conclusion of what Jesus taught and practiced while he ministered his new household on Galilean soil. Moreover, by depicting the disciples of Jesus as fallible in the beginning of their following of Jesus, but indeed following Jesus after his death by meeting him again in Galilee and starting to minister what Jesus ministered (see Mk 13:9-11), the congregation are called to stand fast and follow Jesus, although they themselves are fallible. Only if a historical context for the Gospel is postulated, a reading like this is possible. Or, to put it differently: the postulation of a historical context makes it possible to make sense of the text.

Again, this choice does not mean that this is the one and only way Mark can be interpreted, and that all other interpretations of Mark (e g, against a postulated Roman setting) are not possible. What is argued is that the context of Galilee, as postulated above, is used as relevant hermeneutical key to understand the text. If another setting is postulated that makes the text more understandable, it must be taken note of. The context advanced by Bauckham, however, does not fall in this category.

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