

*The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John.* By Edward W. Klink III. SNTSMS 141. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

The book is a revised doctoral thesis written at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland and supervised by Richard Bauckham. The research was done in 2002–2005. Klink is assistant professor of New Testament at Talbot School of Theology. In short, Klink argues that the “community” concept in the historical depiction of the Gospel audiences should be abandoned, using John’s Gospel as “test case.” In this he is seeking to assist in “taking off the shackles” (i.e. the “Johannine community hypothesis”) that have hindered research in this area in the past. Put succinctly, the contribution of this work to the field can be assessed in this way: “Nice, but not new.”

Klink’s thesis is that John’s Gospel “was never intended for a local, geographical ‘community’ or ‘network of communities,’” in part because there is no external evidence supporting this theory (p. 248; see already Hengel). The “theory of Gospel ‘community’ reconstructions has been carried to its outer limit and has been proven inadequate” (ibid.; see already Bauckham). Klink seeks to demonstrate the validity of his thesis by pursuing four major lines of inquiry: (1) the term “community”; (2) Gospel audiences and patristic exegesis; (3) the nature and function of Gospel genre; and (4) the Gospel’s implied readers. He concludes that the Gospels were written for an “indefinite audience,” not an individual church or network of churches disconnected from the rest of the early Christian movement.

Against J. Louis Martyn, who proposed a “two-level” reading strategy of John’s Gospel (peering beneath the surface of John’s story of Jesus to an alleged “history of the Johannine community”), Klink contends that the Gospel is best read with, and was read by its first readers with, a “realistic”—i.e. “literal”—reading strategy. Against Martyn and Raymond Brown, he argues that the Gospel does not represent stages in the community’s history, and that the references to the “expulsion from the synagogue” in John’s Gospel have been overplayed. Against various sectarian readings, Klink asserts mission as a *leitmotif* [*sic*; p. 250] in the Gospel (see already Köstenberger). The Gospel assumes a varied readership, from relative novice to experienced reader, and is aimed at different “layers of faith.”

At the end of the book, Klink lists three general conclusions: (1) the “community hypothesis” (using John’s Gospel as a “test case”) does not match the data (including the external evidence) well; (2) reconstructions of a “Johannine community” result in interpretations of the Gospel that are internally inconsistent; (3) most likely, the Gospel’s audience was general; it is historically implausible that the readership moved from an isolated sect to a general audience in a short period of time. For these reasons, the “community” concept in historical reconstructions of the Gospel audiences should be abandoned.

How should Klink’s contribution be assessed? It is fitting to begin with acknowledging some of the strengths of his work (which are considerable). The monograph is clearly written and well argued, and the author’s thesis convincing. The work would make a good orientation aid for students desiring a primer in this area of Johannine studies, were it not for the price of the book (\$101.00). Klink understands the issues well, is conversant with the relevant literature (up to a certain date; see below), and is clearly an up-and-coming scholar in the field. Scholarly support for a sane assessment of the data in this (or any) area is always welcome, and for this I, for one, am very grateful. At the same time, as mentioned above, Klink’s work is “nice, but not new.” A few observations must suffice in this regard.

First, Klink's conclusion is essentially negative: the "Johannine community" hypothesis should be abandoned. He says he wants to assist in "taking off the shackles," and this is commendable, but beyond this he does not offer any major (or even not so major) new paradigms to replace the old. It takes more to dislodge an old paradigm than pointing out its weaknesses. A new, better paradigm must be proposed to take its place, and this Klink has not done (see further below).

Second, Klink's conclusion is not new. Ever since the early 1990s, critiques of the "Johannine community hypothesis" have begun to mount. Martin Hengel's *The Johannine Question* (1989) and *Die johanneische Frage* (1993), Andreas Köstenberger's *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (1993), Richard Bauckham's *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (1998), and others have raised serious concerns. Others, such as Robert Kysar, have renounced the theory they once held. As noted, the views of Martyn, Brown, and others were sufficiently critiqued by others in the past. At the risk of overstatement, Klink is here trying to drive a nail in the coffin of a patient who had already been pronounced dead and given a proper burial by some of the leading scholars in the field.

Third, what little Klink offers in terms of a way forward are citations of Moody Smith, Charles Moule, and C. H. Dodd (pp. 252–55). Are these the "fresh avenues of research" that are now possible (p. 251)? This sounds more like an advocacy of going back to the old, "pre-Johannine community reading" than a bold and daring advance into the future of Johannine studies. The only more recent contribution Klink mentions is Steven Motyer's work '*Your Father the Devil?*' (1997), and even it is 10 years old by now.

Fourth, one notes the conspicuous absence of references to the destruction of the temple as a possible occasion for writing the Fourth Gospel. This fails to consider a whole spate of recent monographs on the subject by Mary Coloe (2001), Alan Kerr (2002), Paul Hoskyns (2006), Stephen Um (2006), Andreas Köstenberger (2004, 2006), and others. To be fair, in some cases these writings were published after Klink's research was completed (though in most cases the material was available, at least in form of dissertations published or papers given). In any case, the field has moved on considerably in the past 10 years (see the 2008 volume edited by Tom Thatcher, *What We Have Heard from the Beginning*), and Klink's work is certainly not cutting-edge.

Fifth, and finally, there is one other area that is not addressed by Klink: the author of John's Gospel. What about the role of the Gospel's author in determining the Gospel audience? Is this question completely irrelevant, as the topic's conspicuous absence from Klink's work seems to suggest? This can hardly be sustained. An exclusive focus on implied readers and the Gospel genre and internal textual clues cuts off the third leg of the three-legged stool of interpretation (author, text, and reader; see, e.g., Grant Osborne's *Hermeneutical Spiral*, especially App. 1 and 2). Is interpreting a given document such as John's Gospel really all about identifying its implied readers? If there were no author, there would no text, and without text, no readers. Hermeneutically, I question whether the author is as dispensable to resolving the question of the Gospel audience as Klink seems to suggest.

In conclusion, while I agree that the "Johannine community hypothesis" in its various permutations has serious defects (in fact, I have argued this 15 years ago, as have others, such as D. A. Carson), I believe the way forward is not by positing rather nebulous general alternatives but by providing more plausible *historical* reconstructions that, while tentative and of necessity conjectural (is this not the nature of scholarship?), offer concrete alternatives to the Martyn-

Brown-style “Johannine community hypothesis.” (For my part, I have attempted to do this in an essay in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue of the *Journal*.)

The above points of critique should not detract from the fact that I find myself in sympathy, even large agreement, with Klink’s work. In fact, I am very grateful for his sound assessment of the “Johannine community hypothesis.” I also look forward to future contributions to the field by this promising scholar that move beyond what is perhaps inevitable in dissertations: a certain captivity to the constraints of such a work, which perhaps makes it unrealistic to expect a seminal contribution from someone seeking to earn a terminal degree in a given field of study.

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