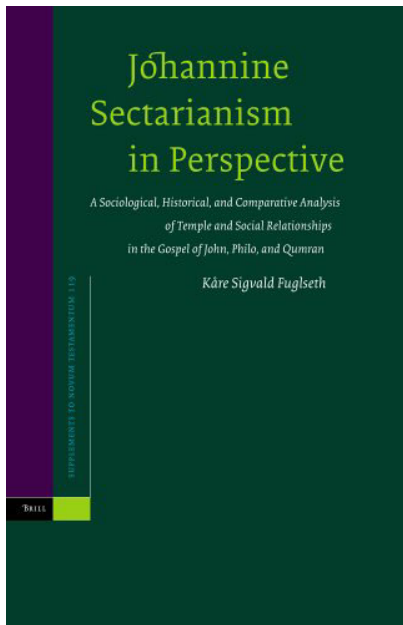


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Fuglseth, Kåre Sigvald

Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of the Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran

Supplements to Novum Testamentum 119

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As the title suggests, this book uses sociological models to examine different descriptive categories that have been applied to the Fourth Gospel, namely, sect, school, conventicle, “circle.” It is a revision of Fuglseth’s doctoral thesis presented at the University of Trondheim in 2002, under the supervision of Peder Borgen and Jarl Ulrichsen.

The book is particularly helpful in that it offers sound definitions of terms and criteria for evaluating the category most appropriate for the Fourth Gospel. The study of other first-century Jewish communities of Philo and Qumran provides useful comparative material to situate John within a spectrum of social organizations with respect to Judaism, to mainstream Christianity, and to the Greco-Roman milieu. The three communities are examined in the light of two main sociological models: sects and cults. Only two aspects of each community are considered in this comparison: the relations of the community to the Jerusalem temple, and the community’s attitude to others, that is, whether it was inclusive or exclusive.

Fuglseth offers the following distinctions: (1) a sect is a splinter group broken from the parent body to regenerate the old order; it claims to represent the authentic, purged, and refurbished tradition; (2) a cult, on the other hand, is the beginning of a new religion

claiming to have a new revelation that changes the traditional order. Using these distinctions, Fuglseth claims that Qumran is a sect within Judaism, that Philo, for all his critique of the temple, is still within the tradition of the parent body, while the Fourth Gospel is cultic. He does not say that the community *is* a cult, for want of sufficient evidence about the community, but that it is cult-like (cultic). Tensions with the parent body, Judaism, are resolved by innovation rather than by refurbishing the past. While there is innovation, seen particularly in the high christological claims, a cultic community will retain cultural continuity with and similarity to the parent body. Using the “cult” model, Fuglseth describes the relationship with Judaism as “a conflict within the family” and describes the core of the conflict arising from innovations, which caused reactions, which caused exclusivism. “The novelties of the Johannine community and early Christianity are in this way emphasized without blaming the ‘Jews’, an important factor in today’s Christian hermeneutics” (371).

The first two chapters situate this work in the history of studies of the Johannine community and the development of sociological models for examining groups. In these chapters Fuglseth establishes precise definitions of terms that in the past have been used quite loosely. The third chapter asks the question “Was there a distinctive Johannine community within the early Christian movement?” Similarly, “Was there a Philo community?” and “Was there a Qumran community?” While noting the different connotations of the word “community” in each case, Fuglseth posits that there was a particular group in a dynamic relationship with particular texts. The works of Philo, the Gospel of John, and the Qumran scrolls were not written for a general audience.

The following three chapters focus on the temple in John, Philo, and Qumran; then two chapters examine the social relationships in the three communities. A concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the major findings.

In discussing the temple in John, Fuglseth makes the distinction between fulfillment and replacement/rejection, arguing that “alternative worship seen in a transference that does not establish a physical alternative cannot necessarily be taken as a complete replacement,” which argues against notions that the Johannine community totally rejected the temple. Looking at the temple scene in John 2:13–17 and the statements about true worship in 4:20–24, Fuglseth does not conclude that the community operated out of a replacement model.

I was not entirely convinced by his arguments in this section. I read the temple action of Jesus as far more than a critique of trade, as a definitive sign of the abrogation of temple sacrifices. In my work, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Liturgical Press, 2001), I refer to articles by Jacob Neusner, who also interprets this

activity as the ending of temple sacrifice. Neusner's work, Peter Walker's book, *Jesus and the Holy City*, and my own study would have been valuable in this discussion. I do not believe that Fuglseth gives enough weight to the antithetic parallelism in the Prologue to John that establishes a marked contrast between the Mosaic law and the true gift of Jesus. Where Fuglseth reads acceptance of the temple in the many occasions in the Gospel where Jesus goes to the temple, I read Johannine irony as Jesus appropriates the symbols and meaning of the temple worship. These differences do not undermine the fine quality and insights Fuglseth offers, particularly in his care to clarify terms and attitudes, which are often used without specifying the meaning.

When looking to the attitudes of the Qumran community and Philo in relation to the temple, Fuglseth concludes that Philo rejected the temple "in a much more categorical way than John" (245), even though he continued temple practice, thus revealing a similar ambiguity toward the temple that Fuglseth sees in the Gospel. The Qumran documents also display some ambiguity regarding attitudes to the temple. The Jerusalem temple was rejected because it was seen to be defiled, but the community did not institute alternative sacrifices as a replacement. There was a transference of the meaning of the temple to the community, suggesting the community was a protest group but not yet entirely separated from the parent body. In the light of these comparisons, Fuglseth suggests that, had the temple not been destroyed, the Jewish members of the Johannine community would not have neglected temple worship and celebration. In other words, the community would have had a "both-and" relationship about faith in Jesus, involving a critique of temple practice without total rejection of temple worship.

In his analysis of the temple scenes Fuglseth looks to see if there is explicit replacement language in terms of "a replaced object," a "replacer," and a "relationship" between these two elements. Only when all three elements are present would he support a replacement model. The only text that provides evidence of this is John 4:21–23, but since he finds even more radical antitemple attitudes in Philo he concludes that it was possible to reject the temple in principle and accept it at the same time. The Gospel reinterprets the temple, festivals, and Jewish institutions in a way that "may have *prepared for* a replacement at a later stage" (283). Fuglseth's analysis places this community in transition from but still within Judaism. He speaks of them following "a common early Christian matrix of critical temple loyalty" (283). The "both-and" or "conjunction" model argues against this community being a sect.

The examination of social relationships leads to a similar conclusion. Philo and John exhibit a more inclusive attitude to outsiders than the Qumran writings. The mainly hostile relationship to "the Jews" he explains in terms of the Martyn-Brown hypothesis of conflict with a local synagogue.

Fuglseth's work is a very helpful contribution to Johannine studies and the complex relationship between this community and post-70 Judaism. The application of sociological models offers precision and clarity to his analysis, and he paves a way out of supersessionist interpretations of John.