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Some recent trends in Matthaean Studies

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In presenting this survey of Matthaean studies I shall confine myself, in the main, to making some observations on the major trends in redaction- or editorial-criticism of the Gospel in recent years. This is the theological method which underlies the work and exegesis of commentators on Matthew in the majority of cases at the present time.

1. The two-source theory (that Matthew is dependent on Mark and the tradition normally labelled 'Q') still dominates approaches to Matthew's composition, but we have to recognize that greater caution is required in assuming that this is the only sound basis of study. The work of W.R. Farmer /1 and Dom Bernard Orchard /2 (which revives the claim of Matthaean priority in accordance with Griesbach's hypothesis of two centuries ago): the suggestion of M.D.Goulder /3 that all that is distinctive in Matthew's Gospel is to be accounted for on the basis of its author's midrashic expansion of Mark: and the interesting thesis of J.M.Rist /4 that Matthew and Mark are independent and their similarities due to their common use of a very ancient, oral tradition: these developments must now make us less certain that we can discover what is distinctive in Matthew's work and theology by comparing his content with Mark and a reconstructed 'Q' source. Nonetheless it is my opinion that the search for and discovery of what is distinctively Matthaean in theological outlook does not depend on the two-source theory: a different method of approach, indeed different presuppositions about composition need not lead to different conclusions about Matthew's theological intention. Matthew's theology (and, for that matter, the theology of any of the evangelists) as a totality depends on his gospel as a whole and not solely on what is distinctive in his editorial arrangement, alterations, and so forth. Redaction-criticism has justly been criticized for building massive theological hypotheses on very tiny pieces of editorial evidence.

2. As far as the literary structure of Matthew is concerned, B.W.Bacon's 'five-book' hypothesis /5 has found very little support. According to this theory Matthew arranged his narrative and discourse material into five

major sections in order to make a correspondence with the Pentateuch. This procedure has been rightly criticized for overlooking the discourses in chapters 11 and 23, for making the Infancy and Passion narratives into mere appendices to the whole, and for failing to point to any convincing correspondences between the content of the Pentateuch and Matthew's Gospel. In his recent Clarendon Bible Commentary H. Benedict Green /6 thinks that the real division in the gospel comes between chapters 10 and 11. Up to chapter 10 Matthew selects and drastically redistributes Markan material in order to form a consecutive narrative which answers the question 'Who is this?'. This is done by presenting a comprehensive but essentially static picture of Jesus in five clearly defined phases- his origins (1-2), the circumstances of his first public appearance in Israel (3.1-4.16), his definitive interpretation of Torah (4.17- 7.27, the Sermon on the Mount), his messianic acts of power (7.28-9.34, the ten miracles), and his inauguration of the continuing mission of the disciples (9.35 - 10.42, the missionary discourse). Chapter 11 recapitulates this and with chapter 12- when Matthew begins to follow Mark very closely- the narrative really gathers momentum, and it is a narrative of the rejection of the Christ by his own people. Although Green thinks that there is a parallel to this kind of division in the books of Chronicles with reference to the figure of David and the subsequent history of his house, this does not seem to be a very convincing solution to the structure of Matthew's gospel.

Much more plausible is the view of J.D. Kingsbury in his important book Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom. /7 Instead of focussing on the five-fold formula "and when Jesus had finished (these sayings)"- used to stress the fact that it is Jesus Messiah who has uttered the discourse and that consequently the contents have the status of divine revelation- Kingsbury regards the formula "From that time Jesus began..(apo tote exrato)" in 4.17 and 16.21 as indicative of the major divisions of the gospel: the person of Jesus Messiah (1.1-4.16); the proclamation of Jesus Messiah (4.17- 16.20) with positive and negative responses thereto; the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah (16.20- 28.20). This is not quite the scheme with which Eduard Schweizer works in his excellent commentary /8 (though it is close to it), but, in my view, Kingsbury's division

is the best we have so far been offered.

3. Recent work has increased our awareness of the problems that Matthew had to confront in his community. Detailed analysis of the Parables chapter (13.1-52) has led Kingsbury (in his book devoted to that chapter /9) to list the following issues as matters of concern for the evangelist- materialism, secularism, spiritual slothfulness, hatred among Christians, lovelessness, apostasy and lawlessness -, while, from his intense study of chapter 18, W.G.Thompson in Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community /3 has concluded that Matthew's congregation or community was badly divided: scandal was a constant threat (18.5-9), and the need for fraternal correction was urgent (18.15-20). On the positive side Schweizer has described the church of the first gospel as the body of 'these little ones', the mikroi who are ready to follow Jesus, to remain obedient to the law of God as interpreted by Jesus' ^{deeds and words, to re-} interpret his instruction ever anew ^{to practical problems,} in answer to proclaim his word and let it speak to present situations and to revive his miraculous power in healings. /11

Most scholars continue to place Matthew and his community in Syria, Phoenicia or Palestine (though a few voices are raised in dissent, asserting that he is the spokesman for a Gentile community, possibly in Alexandria /12), but a far more important concern than localisation is Matthew's and Matthew's church's relationship to Judaism. Is Matthew writing at a time when the split between church and synagogue has taken place, that is, after about 85 AD when the "banning of heretics" clause was inserted into the Eighteen Bene ictions, thus effectively driving the Christians out of the synagogues for good? Or is he writing at a time before the decisive break occurred, possibly even before 70 AD? This is an extremely difficult question to answer, for evidence can be used to support either point of view. But, in my view, Matthew was not hostile to the faith of Israel (in which he was probably brought up) but rather to the hypocritical religion of the scribes and Pharisees (which hypocrisy he fears may be found among Christian leaders as well) which is a perversion of the true faith of Israel. When one considers Matthew's use of the term 'righteousness' and notes that he makes Jesus plead for a "righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees"(5.20), when one examines what the evangelist hands on (as tradition) about Jesus' attitude to the law, I find it difficult to say that he has severed all links with

emerging Judaism to the extent of denying that the Jews have any longer a hope of being part of the true or new Israel of God. They will not have any special place in the new people of God (as they do for Paul), but they may - and Matthew hopes that some will, as he himself has done - recognize Jesus as indeed Messiah and become incorporated into the 'true Israel'. /13

Here I digress- relevantly I hope- for a moment. We must not interpret Matthew via Paul. So significant a figure was Paul in the early decades of the Church's life that we are apt to assume that the problems he confronted and answered - about law, works, righteousness or justification - were problems that emerged in every Christian community. This need not be the case and is unlikely to have been the case. In my opinion the total thrust of Matthew's Gospel is witness to a situation in which the transition from Jewish faith to Christianity was easier than that presupposed in Paul's major letters. For Matthew salvation, to a considerable extent, is radical obedience to the law as interpreted, in its messianic intensity by Jesus. These are categories acceptable in Jewish ears, provided Jesus' messiahship is recognised- hence Matthew's repeated attempts to convince his readers of that fact, especially in the birth narratives. If Mark presents the profound picture of Christian discipleship as a being 'on the road' with Jesus to the Cross, out of which new, resurrected life emerges, Matthew is more down to earth and helps the pilgrim in via to know what 'following' means, and that mainly in terms of obedience to the law as truly interpreted and fulfilled in Jesus' words and deeds; and that obedience, that righteousness is ultimately measured by the double love-commandment, by one's attitude towards the neighbour and towards God (22. 37-40). If one examines the meanings of anomia (lawlessness) in Paul and Matthew, one sees a distinct difference: Paul understands lawlessness as an enslaving consequence of the powers of sin, law and death, whereas Matthew depends on the OT and regards lawlessness as an offence against the divinely-ordained law which Jesus came, not to annul, but to bring to its ultimate and intense fulfilment. This is not to push a wedge between Matthew and Paul: it is to recognize that each has his own way of responding to the situation he confronts and to plead that each be heard on his own terms.

4. We have already entered upon discussion of Matt-

hew's theology, which is our major concern in this paper. Several prominent scholars (following Hans Conzelmann's view of Luke's theology) argue that Matthew divides salvation-history into three segments: (i) the era of Israel, that is, the time of preparation, or the pre-history of Messiah; (ii) the era of Jesus' mission to Israel; and (iii) the era of the Church, that is, the world mission lasting until the eschaton. But all such threefold schemata for the first gospel are based on the assumption that ecclesiology is Matthew's overriding concern, whereas Kingsbury is, in all probability, right in claiming that Christology is his dominant concern. Hence he sees only two major epochs, the time of Israel and the time of Jesus: the so-called time of the Church is really only an extension of the time of Jesus. The former—the time of Israel—was inaugurated by Abraham and the latter by the ministry of John the Baptist, and the two are related in terms of promise and fulfilment.

Nearly every study of a particular passage or of Matthew's Gospel as a whole makes a contribution to the understanding of the evangelist's Christology, but the nearest thing to a comprehensive statement from a redaction-critical perspective is to be found in the central section of Kingsbury's book Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom which sets forth views first published in articles in various scholarly journals. His thesis is that the title 'Son of God' is the central term: it extends to every phase of Jesus' life, is the natural complement of the thoroughly Matthaean 'my Father', and represents the most exalted confession of Matthew's community. The words 'God with us' in 1.23 constitute Matthew's 'thumb-nail' definition of the signification of 'Son of God' and indeed the rest of the Gospel may be seen as an elaboration of the implications of the phrase (as the closing paragraph, 28: 16-20 suggests). As to the title Kyrios (Lord) Kingsbury accepts Gunther Bornkamm's thesis that for Matthew this is a divine name of majesty, but he insists that it is nonetheless an auxiliary christological title the function of which is "to attribute to Jesus divine authority in his capacity as the Messiah, Son of David, Son of God or Son of Man". /14

One of Kingsbury's more provocative suggestions is his claim that 'Son of Man' largely coincides with 'Son of God' in terms of content, but is to be distinguished from the

latter primarily on a formal basis: 'Son of Man' is a public term or title, rather than a confessional one: it is the one with which Jesus encounters the world (Jews first and then Gentiles), and particular opponents and unbelievers. Here, in my view, the evidence is being subjected to Procrustean treatment. Is it credible, for instance, that Matthew can use 'Son of Man' at 20.28 only because it is the mother of James and John (i.e. an unbeliever or opponent) whose request provokes the utterance? Again, is it credible that the scribe (8.19) is being cast in the role of opponent because he evokes the saying, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"? The scribe's relation to Jesus is no worse, probably better, than the would-be follower who is described in 8.21 as "Another of the disciples". While Kingsbury's observation that "Matthew's primary interest in the Son of Man has to do with its association with the parousia" /15 has a certain validity on the basis of statistics, it would be more accurate to say simply that Matthew shows a special interest in the parousia! Since statements about Jesus' role at the parousia are almost exclusively attributed to Jesus rather than to someone else, it ought not to surprise us that the term 'Son of Man' occurs frequently in these statements as the title by which Jesus traditionally referred to himself. That is to say: Kingsbury is right in seeking to establish a formal distinction between 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God' as a confessional term (for which Kyrios must substitute when believers address the Son of God vocatively); but the formal function of ho huios tou anthrōpou is not only public, nor does it always have opponents in view. It is simply the peculiar way of referring to himself attributed to Jesus by the tradition (whether genuine or not) and accepted without question by Matthew. A refinement or development of Kingsbury's emphasis on 'Son of God' in Matthew's gospel is to suggest that, since God's covenanted will is the Torah, so Jesus, Son of God, is Torah incarnate, the enfleshing of both the demand and the promise of the covenant, since he is 'God with us'. /16 Along similar lines M.J.Suggs has put forward a case for assuming that Matthew took over Wisdom speculation (and Wisdom and Torah are closely related, even identified, in Jewish thought) from the Q tradition, but used Wisdom themes in a unique way to identify Jesus with Wisdom. He is not Wisdom's last or

final envoy (that is a Lucan theme), but Wisdom incarnate.

/17 And as the Incarnation of Wisdom, Jesus also becomes the embodiment of the Torah.

5. No review of Matthaean scholarship can omit reference to the evangelist's use of the OT, both the allusions and, more especially, the explicit fulfilment-quotations. The present state of research on this topic would permit the following propositions:

(i) The formula-citations ("This took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet....."), having a mixed textual form, constitute a special category.

(ii) The postulate of a collection of OT testimonia, used by Christian writers, does not explain the situation. Why are there differences in the form and content of the quotations between their source and the gospel?

(iii) Krister Stendahl's theory /18 that the formula quotations reflect Christian scribal activity similar to that which produced the Qumran pescharim has not now widespread acceptance, chiefly because the OT quotations in the Qumran Habbakuk commentary function as "pegs for interpretation" whereas in Matthew they 'point' the evangelist's words, and because formulae citations are not so closely integrated with the contexts in which they appear as Stendahl assumes. Nevertheless, the idea that there lies behind the gospel of Matthew a group or school of scripture study is plausible, although the formula-citations- probably originating in a missionary preaching tradition which employed scriptural proofs against opponents- do not unambiguously point in that direction.

(iv) The citations reflect the evangelist's theology and are part of his work as redactor. But for what purpose are they employed? To undergird Matthew's opinion with another (authoritative) opinion? To 'ring bells' in his readers' minds? Probably more: to show that Jesus' life and ministry fulfil OT prophecy, or to proclaim (rather than prove) that Jesus is the Messiah. In my view, the latter is most probable. /19 The main concern of Matthew is Christological.

6. One of the problems which confronts the student of Matthew's gospel is the contrast between particularism and universalism. Only Matthew contains the instruction by Jesus to his disciples, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10.5f), words which are taken up again in his saying to the Canaanite woman

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15.24). The authenticity of these words (and one logion may lie behind both sayings) is of the highest probability. The language has a strongly Semitic character, and the Church which from pre-Pauline times had been engaged in mission (Acts 11.20ff) would not have created such a particularistic saying. "Matthew's only reason for preserving the logion", says Jeremias of 10.5-6, /20 "was that it bore the stamp of the Lord's authority"; and that would be a very good reason for Matthew's inclusion of it.

But additional reasons for the inclusion of the particularistic sayings can be adduced. The Matthaean community was concerned to know about the history out of which it came and the evangelist provides this. The story of Israel's tragic rejection of the Messiah (especially on the part of her leaders) had to be told and in the telling attitudes toward the Jews which had been emerging in the first half-century of the Church's life found expression. Moreover, the Matthaean church was intensely aware of being the heir of God's promises and purposes. This is unmistakably clear in its understanding of the law and of scripture. The refusal of Israel to receive her Messiah becomes the decisive reason for the Kingdom passing to the Church: it is the new creation built upon the foundations which the unbelieving Jews were unwilling to accept, but it is not an exclusive community. And that is where the universal mission - commanded by the risen Christ in 28.16-20 - comes in. The apostles are to make disciples of 'all nations', and the Jews are surely included in the scope of that command. Members of Israel (as distinct from the 'chosen people' as a whole) Matthew hopes - and his purpose in writing his gospel is evidence of the hope - will embrace Jesus as Messiah and form part of the new people, the true Israel of God. /21 There is no conflict between the so-called particularistic and universal missions if one does not accept a three-epoch scheme for Matthew's view of Heils-Geschichte, but sees the 'time of the Church' as an extension or continuation of the 'time of Jesus' - Messiah rejected, Son of God and Lord vindicated and triumphant, directing his Church to mission to all nations.

7. Finally, a few words on the authorship of the gospel. Early tradition is unanimous in naming the apostle Matthew as the author of the book. The key witness is Papias who declares that "Matthew compiled the logia in the

Hebrew dialect and each one translated them as he was able". Although it is possible (and some think probable) that Papias meant our present gospel, it would be extremely hard to argue that our Matthew is a translation from a Semitic tongue. As it stands, it was written in Greek by one who could, when left to himself (i.e., if not dependent on Mark or Q), compose good, grammatical Greek. Nevertheless, as C.F.D. Moule has said, "it is difficult to see how the tradition of a Semitic and apostolic original sprang up at all if there is absolutely nothing behind it." /22

The tradition can be adequately accounted for if we postulate a Semitic sayings-source, identifiable, at least in part, with the material designated by 'Q' and compiled by the apostle Matthew, the former tax-collector. Such a person would certainly have been literate and, as a provincial employee in Galilee, would have known Greek, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic, and possibly a few words in Latin (in 5.42 milion is a Latinism). Moule relates Matthew's occupation to the well-known saying in 13.52 about the scribe (grammateus) who is trained or disciplined (matheteutheis, a verb which may be a hint at Matthew's name, occurring as it does three times in Matthew's gospel and only once elsewhere in the NT) to the Kingdom and brings out of his treasure things new and old. /23

These words- often regarded as the author's signature - are usually interpreted as relating to a rabbinic scribe, but Moule suggests that grammateus should be interpreted as a secular scribe or clerk. "Is it not conceivable", he says, /24 "that the Lord really did say to that tax-collector Matthew, 'You have been a writer (as the Navy would put it). You have had plenty to do with the commercial side of just the topics alluded to in the parables - farmer's stock, fields, treasure trove, fishing, revenues. Now that you have become a disciple you can bring all this out again, but with a difference'. And is it not conceivable that this was a saying actually recorded in Aramaic by the tax collector turned disciple? It shows clearer signs of a Semitic base than some other parts of the Gospel.' However this may be - and Moule admits it is speculative (we might even say 'romantic')- there is no straining of evidence in supposing that a tax-collector like Matthew could have recorded sayings of Jesus in Aramaic. Knowledge and use of this very significant material, composed by an apostle, may well have caused the gospel which first included it to be called kata Matthaion.

It is hoped that this short review of recent studies

on the Gospel of Matthew will have demonstrated to the reader the interest and complexity of the various problems which confront the scholar who devotes his attention to the first gospel. Many questions remain unanswered; many hypotheses accepted by some and rejected by others; but what is the case with reference to the state of scholarship on Matthew's gospel is true of virtually every book in the NT and, I presume, in the OT as well.

Notes

1. W.R.Farmer, The Synoptic Problem (London-New York, 1964; 2nd ed. 1976)
2. B.Orchard, Matthew, Luke and Mark (Koinonia Press, Manchester, 1976).
3. M.D.Goulder, Midrash and Lection in Matthew (SPCK, London, 1974)
4. J.M.Rist, On the Independence of Matthew and Mark (SNTS Monograph Series 32: University Press, Cambridge, 1978)
5. B.W.Bacon, Studies in Matthew (Constable, London, 1930): this particular hypothesis was first published as "The 'Five books' of Matthew against the Jews" in The Expositor, 15(1918), 56-66.
6. H.B.Green, The Gospel according to Matthew (Clarendon Bible Series, University Press, Oxford, 1975), pp.16ff
7. J.D.Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom (SPCK, London, 1976), pp.7-37.
8. E.Schweizer, The Good News according to Matthew (Eng. trans.SPCK, London, 1976)
9. J.D.Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A study in Redaction Criticism (SPCK, London, 1969, 3rd reprinted ed. 1976).
10. W.G.Thompson, Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community: Mt. 17.22 - 18.35 (Analecta Biblica 44; Biblical Institute, Rome, 1970)
11. E.Schweizer, "Observance of Law and Charismatic Activity in Matthew", NTS, 16 (1969-70), 213-30.
12. S.van Tilborg, The Jewish Leaders in Matthew (Brill, Leiden, 1972). An intriguing case for the Transjordanian origin of Matthew, perhaps in Pella, has been presented by H.D.Slingerland in Journal for the Study of the NT, 3(April 1979), 18-28.
13. See the comments in the introduction to my commentary on Matthew's Gospel (Century Bible Series: Oliphants, London. 1972), pp.69-72; contra D.R.A.Hare, The Theme of Jewish Persecution in the Gospel according to St.

- Matthew (SNTS Monograph Series 6; University Press, Cambridge, 1967)
14. Kingsbury, Structure, p.105
 15. Kingsbury, op.cit., p.114
 16. Cf. J.M.Gibbs, "The Son of God as Torah Incarnate in Matthew, Studia Evangelica IV (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1968), 38-46.
 17. M.J.Suggs, Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970)
 18. K.Stendahl, The School of St. Matthew and its use of the OT (Uppsala, 1954; reprinted by Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1968)
 19. Cf. the section on Matthew 1-2 in Raymond Brown's most impressive book, The Birth of the Messiah (Chapman, London, 1978); it is interesting to note that Brown regards the formula-quotations in these two chapters (The Matthaean Infancy narrative) as having come to Matthew in tradition and not as insertions by the evangelist.
 20. J.Jeremias, Jesus' Promise to the Nations (SCM., London, 1959), p.27.
 21. Cf. the arguments of Kenzo Tagawa, "People and Community in the Gospel of Matthew", NTS, 16(1969-70), 149-62, especially 158ff.
 22. C.F.D.Moule, The Birth of the NT (A. and C.Black, London, 1962), p.89.
 23. This verse, Mt. 13.52 has recently been employed as a designation of the evangelist's method of working by O.Lamar Cope, Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 5: Washington, D.C., 1976). He does not think it contains a clue to the actual identity of the evangelist, but says of the writer, "The author of Matthew was a Jewish-Christian so thoroughly familiar with the OT and with Jewish traditions of its interpretation that it was natural for him to employ this knowledge as a key to the organisation of his gospel. Where he has done this, he reveals to the reader certain of his characteristic ideas and beliefs. He also reveals his understanding of the relationship between the tradition about Jesus and the OT and the relationship of both to the problems of Christians of his own day. He probably thought of himself as 'a scribe trained for Kingdom of heaven.'" (p.130)
 24. C.F.D.Moule, "Some neglected Features in Matthew's Gospel", StEv II (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1963), 91-99.