

“The Point Of Matthew’s Gospel”

Survey of Matthew

March 3, 2024

INTRO:

Why am I preaching this sermon today?
Why are you listening to a/this sermon today?

What’s the point?

These are questions I go over with all young preachers...
and they are questions whose answers I pray will bless you.

PRAYER

CONTEXT:

- The Gospel of Matthew: miracle Messiah mission
- The genealogy of Christ
- The coming of Christ
 - His DEITY
 - His HUMANITY
 - His MYSTERY
 - His FAMILY
- Today: *The ultimate point of Matthew’s Gospel*

BIG IDEA: The point of Matthew’s Gospel
IS the point of Matthew’s Gospel...

PREVIEW:

- A. Scripture
- B. Survey
- C. Structure
- D. Secrets
- E. Sent-ones

TEXT:

[Matthew \(A-Z\)](#)

“Biblos genesis... Immanuel (2X)... to the end!”

I. The Gospel’s **SCRIPTURE**

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says it all...
- Jesus trusted & treated Scripture as divine...
- If you have a biblical worldview, you will see and treat Matthew’s Gospel as God’s divine Word
- See where & how it fits into the New Testament...

VIDEO: *N.T. Overview*
(Bible Project)

II. The Gospel’s **SURVEY**

- As students of God's Word, we have learned that context is critical & key to proper interpretation...
- While there are numerous aspects to context (ie. genre, historical setting, immediate surrounding, cultural norms, grammatical distinctives, etc.), one of the most important can be a relationship between the macro and micro dynamics within a passage or larger body of text (i.e. how Matthew's Gospel divinely fits into the New Testament).

VIDEO: *Gospel of Matthew Overview (A)*
(Bible Project)

Can you see how & why this kind of overarching understanding could have a profound impact on your biblical interpretation, inspection, and inspiration?

VIDEO: *Gospel of Matthew Overview (B)*
(Bible Project)

- I pray you are sensing your blessing...
- I pray you are getting what you're looking for...
- I pray you are looking for what you are getting!
- Again: **Why are you listening to a sermon?**
- I'm preaching for God's glory & our refinement!

T/S: If you're listening for God-honoring reasons with God-honoring desires... you're about to be blessed even more!

I say that because as insightful as the survey is, the structure is even more revealing, at least when it comes to ***"The Point Of Matthew's Gospel."***

III. The Gospel's **STRUCTURE**

- Watch this! Most of us are about to be shocked.
- Many of us are about to be incredibly blessed!
- Some of us could have a miraculous moment.
- All of us will get the point of Matthew's Gospel!

VIDEO: *Literary Genius of Matthew's Gospel*

- Did you just feel that...
- Was God's truth in love washing over you?
- But wait, there's more... but wait, there's more...

God's Word is like a treasure chest that has no bottom!

T/S: Think about what many of us just learned...

*Think about how powerfully God's truth
in love could impact your life and the
lives of those that you impact!*

- JDP

IV. The Gospel's **SECRETS**

- Did you hear & heed the secret of Matthew 13...
- Did you hear what Jesus said about **hiding**...
- Did you hear what Jesus said about **showing**...
- *Do you realize how blessed you are to have heard?*

The secret of The Gospel of Matthew is the secret of Matthew's Gospel. Or, to say it another way, let's go back to today's big idea:

The point of Matthew's Gospel is the point **(of the chiastic arch)** of Matthew's Gospel **(ch.13)**.

T/S: To press into the secret(s) even further, come back next week when we'll do exactly that... but for now, notice the secret message & mission Jesus shows us & commands us to share in.... GO! Show & tell. HE will take care of the hiding & revealing... **(Matthew 28:18-20)**.

V. The Gospel's **SENT-ONES**

Remember our survey text of Matthew's Gospel...

Now, hear Matthew's last recorded words of Christ:

Matthew 28:18-20

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

REVIEW:

The point of Matthew's Gospel **IS** the point of Matthew's Gospel...

Scripture

Survey

Structure

Secrets

Sent-ones

CLOSE:

Live SENT with the secret of Matthew's Gospel...

...SENT seeking to Find the Lost & Grow the Found!

...SENT with a mission & message from our Messiah:

SEEK first the King

&

His kingdom!

(or else...)

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *"Looking For You" & "Turn This Thing Around"*

STUDY NOTES:

ESV Study Bible Notes:

Matthew

Author and Title

Since none of the four Gospels includes the names of their authors in the original manuscripts, they are all technically anonymous. This is not surprising, since the authors likely compiled their Gospel accounts for members of their own churches, to whom they were already well known. However, historical documents from early church history provide significant insight into the Gospels' authorship. The earliest traditions of the church are unanimous in attributing the first Gospel to Matthew, the former tax collector who followed Jesus and became one of his 12 disciples. The earliest and most important of these traditions comes from the second century in the writings of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (c. a.d. 135), and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (c. 175). Because these early church leaders had either direct or indirect contact with the apostolic community, they would have been very familiar with the Gospels' origins. Moreover, no competing traditions now exist (if they ever did) attributing Matthew's Gospel to any other author. If Matthew did not write the book, it is hard to see why the false ascription would bear the name of a relatively obscure apostle when more well-known and popular figures could have been chosen (e.g., Philip, Thomas, or James).

Matthean authorship is denied by some modern scholars, especially on the view that the author of Matthew borrowed much of his material from Mark's Gospel. Given that Matthew was an apostle while Mark was not, it is assumed that Matthew would not have needed (or chosen) to depend on Mark's material. But even if Matthew did borrow from Mark's Gospel, it would only have added to Matthew's apostolic credibility since the evidence suggests that Mark himself relied extensively on the testimony of the apostle Peter.

When Jesus called him, Matthew was sitting in the tax collector's booth (9:9), collecting taxes for Herod Antipas, and this may have been along a commercial trading route about 4 miles (6.4 km) from Capernaum. However, since the narrative surrounding Matthew's call is set in Capernaum (9:1, 7, 10; cf. 4:13), the tax booth may have been on the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum, since Herod also taxed fishermen. At his calling in the first Gospel he is referred to as "Matthew" (9:9), while Mark's and Luke's Gospels describe him as "Levi the son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14) and "Levi" (Luke 5:27). The reason for the variation in names has elicited much discussion, but most scholars believe that the tax collector had two names, Matthew Levi, which he either possessed from birth or took on following his conversion. His occupation as a tax collector implies that he had training in scribal techniques and was thus able to write, while his identity as a Galilean Jewish Christian suggests his ability to interpret the words and actions of Jesus in light of OT messianic expectations.

Date

The precise date of the writing of Matthew's Gospel is not known. Some scholars argue for a date later than the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, since Jesus alludes to this event in 24:1–28. Of course, such a conclusion is warranted only if one denies Jesus' ability to predict the future. In light of Irenaeus's assertion (c. a.d. 175) that Matthew composed his Gospel while Peter and Paul were still living (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1), it is traditionally dated to the late 50s or early 60s.

Theme

This is the story of Jesus of Nazareth, recorded by the apostle Matthew as a compelling witness that Jesus is the long-anticipated Messiah, who brought the kingdom of God to earth and is the prophesied fulfillment of God's promise of true peace and deliverance for both Jew and Gentile.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Matthew crafted his account to demonstrate Jesus' messianic identity, his inheritance of the Davidic kingship over Israel, and his fulfillment of the

promise made to his ancestor Abraham (**Matt. 1:1**) to be a blessing to all the nations (**Gen. 12:1–3**). Thus in large part Matthew's Gospel is an evangelistic tool aimed at his fellow Jews, persuading them to recognize Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. At the same time, the Gospel reveals clearly to Gentiles that salvation through Jesus the Messiah is available to all nations. For Jewish Christians, Matthew's Gospel provides encouragement to stand steadfast amid opposition from their own countrymen, as well as Gentile pagans, secure in the knowledge of their citizenship in God's kingdom.

Against the backdrop of such opposition to Jesus' message, Matthew establishes the identity of Christ's church as the true people of God, who now find their unity in service to Jesus despite previous racial, class, and religious barriers. His Gospel provides necessary instruction for all future disciples, Jew and Gentile, who form a new community centered upon devotion and obedience to Jesus the Messiah amid significant opposition.

Many scholars have suggested that the prominent church in Antioch of Syria, whose members included both Jewish and Gentile Christians (cf. **Acts 11:19–26; 13:1–3**), was the intended audience of Matthew's Gospel. They point to the Gospel's influence on Ignatius, an early bishop of Antioch. At the same time, Matthew's message spoke to all of the fledgling churches of his day, and the Gospel appears to have circulated rapidly and widely.

History of Salvation Summary

Jesus comes as the messianic King in the line of David to fulfill the OT, especially its promises of everlasting salvation. The ultimate fulfillment comes with his crucifixion and resurrection. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the Overview of the Bible.)

Literary Features

The primary genre of Matthew is the Gospel, and the organizing framework of all four Gospels is narrative or story. However, with the narrative framework of Matthew's Gospel, a major amount of space is

devoted to Jesus’ discourses. Beyond that, the usual array of subtypes are found: birth stories, calling or vocation stories, miracle stories, parables, pronouncement stories, encounter stories, passion stories, and resurrection stories.

The most notable literary feature of the book’s format is the alternating pattern around which the book is organized. The material in Matthew’s Gospel is based on a rhythmic, back-and-forth movement between blocks of narrative material and blocks of discourse material. There are five passages of discourse, which can be viewed as corresponding to the five digits on the human hand and can be easily remembered if one lists the questions that Jesus in effect answers in each unit: (1) How are citizens of the kingdom to live (chs. 5–7)? (2) How are traveling disciples to conduct themselves on their evangelistic journeys (ch. 10)? (3) What parables did Jesus tell (ch. 13)? (4) What warning did Jesus give about not hindering entrance into the kingdom and on forgiveness (chs. 18–20)? (5) How will human history end (chs. 24–25)? Matthew even used a set formula to signal these units, ending them with the statement “when Jesus had finished [these sayings]” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

Matthew’s distinguishing stylistic features include recurrent quotation and citation from the OT and an emphasis on Jesus as being kingly or royal (even the opening genealogy places Jesus’ father Joseph in the Davidic line). Additionally, Matthew is fond of the term “Son of David” as a title for Christ, statements to the effect that “this was done that it might be fulfilled as the prophets had said,” and the formula “the kingdom of heaven is like ...”

Key Themes

<p>1. <i>Portrait of Jesus.</i> Jesus is the true Messiah, Immanuel (God incarnate with his people), Son of God, King of Israel, and Lord of the church.</p>	<p>1:1, 23; 2:2; 14:33; 16:16; 18:20; 21:5–9</p>
<p>2. <i>The bridge between Old and New Testaments.</i> Jesus fulfills the hopes and promises of the OT through his</p>	<p>1:1–17, 22–23; 2:4–5, 15, 17, 23; 5:17–20</p>

<p>messianic genealogy, fulfillment of OT prophecies, and fulfillment of the OT law. These bridging qualities may have been one reason Matthew was chosen to begin the NT canon. Another possible reason is that many in the early church thought that Matthew was the first Gospel written, and another is that it was personally written by an apostle, in contrast to Mark and Luke.</p>	
<p>3. <i>Salvation-historical “particularism” and “universalism.”</i> Matthew’s Gospel traces God’s continuing work of salvation within Israel (“particularism”) and extends this saving work to all the peoples of the earth (“universalism”), through the person and work of Christ.</p>	<p>10:5–6; 28:19</p>
<p>4. <i>The new community of faith.</i> The early church included both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Matthew’s Gospel would have encouraged them to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers to find unity in service to Jesus the Messiah as members of his universal church.</p>	<p>11:28; 16:18–19; 28:19</p>
<p>5. <i>The church is built and maintained by Jesus’ continuing presence.</i> God’s saving work in the present age is carried out chiefly by and through the church, which Jesus continues to build and inhabit. Anyone who responds to Jesus’ call—whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, slave or free—is brought into the fellowship of his church to enjoy him and participate in the community of his kingdom.</p>	<p>16:18; 18:15–20; 22:10; 28:20</p>

<p>6. A “<i>great commission</i>” for evangelism and mission. Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations” is found only in Matthew and has motivated countless believers to reach out to the lost with the good news of the gospel. As Jesus made disciples in his earthly ministry, he commissions his church to follow his example.</p>	<p>28:19</p>
<p>7. Jesus’ five discourses recorded in Matthew can be viewed as a manual on discipleship. The presentation of five of Jesus’ major discourses, addressed at least in part to his disciples, forms the most comprehensive collection of Jesus’ instructional ministry found anywhere in Scripture. They paint a holistic picture of life lived in obedience to Christ, and the church has used them to instruct disciples through the ages.</p>	<p>chs. 5–7; 10; 13; 18–20; 24–25</p>

The Setting of Matthew

The events in the book of Matthew take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe events surrounding Jesus’ birth in Judea, where Herod had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip.

Outline

1. The Arrival in History of Jesus the Messiah (1:1–2:23)
 1. The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (1:1–17)

2. The angelic announcement of the conception of Jesus the Messiah (1:18–25)
3. Magi report the star-sign of the birth of “the King of the Jews” (2:1–12)
4. OT prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah (2:13–23)
2. John the Baptist Prepares for the Appearance of the Messianic Kingdom (3:1–17)
3. Jesus the Messiah Begins to Advance the Messianic Kingdom (4:1–25)
 1. Temptations of the Messiah (4:1–11)
 2. Jesus the Messiah begins his Galilean ministry (4:12–25)
4. The Authoritative Message of the Messiah: Kingdom Life for His Disciples (5:1–7:29) (First Discourse)
 1. Setting, Beatitudes, and witness of the kingdom of heaven (5:1–16)
 2. The messianic kingdom in relation to the law (5:17–48)
 3. The development of kingdom life in the real world (6:1–7:12)
 4. Warning! With Jesus or against him? (7:13–29)
5. The Authoritative Power of the Messiah: Kingdom Power Demonstrated (8:1–9:38)
 1. Healings, discipleship, and overpowering Satan’s strongholds (8:1–9:8)
 2. Unexpected discipleship, miracles, and workers (9:9–38)
6. The Authoritative Mission of the Messiah’s Messengers (10:1–42) (Second Discourse)
 1. Commissioning and instructions for the short-term mission to Israel (10:1–15)
 2. Instructions for the long-term mission to the world (10:16–23)
 3. Characteristics of missionary disciples (10:24–42)
7. Opposition to the Messiah Emerges (11:1–12:50)
 1. Jesus, John the Baptist, and ministry in Galilee (11:1–30)
 2. Confrontations with the Pharisees (12:1–45)

3. Jesus' disciples are his true family (12:46–50)
8. Mysteries of the Messianic Kingdom Revealed in Parables (13:1–53) (Third Discourse)
 1. The opening of the Parabolic Discourse (13:1–23)
 2. Further parables told to the crowds (13:24–35)
 3. Explanations and parables told to the disciples (13:36–53)
9. The Identity of the Messiah Revealed (13:54–16:20)
 1. Prophet(s) without honor (13:54–14:12)
 2. Compassionate healer and supplier for Israel (14:13–21)
 3. The Son of God worshiped (14:22–36)
 4. Teacher of the Word of God and compassionate healer (15:1–39)
 5. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (16:1–20)
10. The Suffering of the Messiah Revealed (16:21–17:27)
 1. The suffering sacrifice (16:21–28)
 2. The beloved, transfigured Son (17:1–13)
 3. Sons of the kingdom (17:14–27)
11. The Community of the Messiah Revealed (18:1–20:34) (Fourth Discourse)
 1. Characteristics of life in the kingdom community (18:1–35)
 2. Valuing the kingdom community (19:1–20:34)
12. The Messiah Asserts His Authority over Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)
 1. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem: Jesus' authority as Messiah (21:1–11)
 2. The temple actions: Jesus' pronouncement on the temple establishment (21:12–17)
 3. Cursing the fig tree: Jesus' judgment of the nation (21:18–22)
 4. Controversies in the temple court over Jesus' authority (21:23–22:46)
 5. Warnings against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (23:1–12)
 6. Woes of judgment against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (23:13–36)

7. Lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39)
13. The Delay, Return, and Judgment of Messiah (24:1–25:46)
(Fifth [Olivet] Discourse)
 1. The beginning of birth pains (24:1–14)
 2. “Great tribulation” and the coming of the Son of Man (24:15–31)
 3. The nearness and time of Jesus’ coming (24:32–41)
 4. Parabolic exhortations to watch and be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man (24:42–25:30)
 5. Judgment at the end (25:31–46)
14. The Crucified Messiah (26:1–27:66)
 1. Plot, anointing, and betrayal to the religious leaders (26:1–16)
 2. The Passover and the Lord’s Supper (26:17–35)
 3. Gethsemane: Jesus’ agonizing prayers (26:36–46)
 4. Jesus arrested (26:47–56)
 5. The Jewish trial of Jesus (26:57–27:10)
 6. The Roman trial of Jesus (27:11–26)
 7. Jesus the Messiah crucified (27:27–44)
 8. The death of Jesus the Messiah (27:45–50)
 9. Testimonies, women followers, and burial (27:51–66)
15. The Resurrection and Commission of the Messiah (28:1–20)
 1. An empty tomb and the risen Jesus (28:1–10)
 2. The conspiracy to deny the truth of Jesus’ resurrection (28:11–15)
 3. The risen Jesus’ Great Commission (28:16–20)

MATTHEW

D. A. Carson

Introduction to Matthew

1. The Criticism of Matthew

The earliest church fathers to mention this Gospel concur that the author was the apostle Matthew. Papias's famous statement (cf. section 3) was interpreted to mean "Matthew composed the *Logia* [Gospel?] in the Hebrew [Aramaic?] dialect and every one interpreted them as he was able." In other words the apostle first wrote his Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, and it was subsequently translated into Greek. Matthean priority was almost universally upheld; Mark was considered an abbreviation and therefore somewhat inferior. These factors—apostolic authorship (unlike Mark and Luke) and Matthean priority—along with the fact that Matthew preserves much of Jesus' teaching not found elsewhere, combined to give this first Gospel enormous influence and prestige in the church. With few exceptions these perspectives dominated Gospel study till after the Reformation.

The consensus could not last. An indication of its intrinsic frailty came in 1776 and 1778 when, in two posthumously published essays, A.E. Lessing insisted that the only way to account for the parallels and seeming discrepancies among the synoptic Gospels was to assume that they all derived independently from an Aramaic *Gospel of the Nazarenes*. Others (J.A. Eichorn, J.G. Herder) developed this idea; and the supposition of a Primal Gospel, whether oral or literary, began to gain influence. Meanwhile J.J. Griesbach (1745–1812) laid the foundations of the modern debate over the "synoptic problem" (cf. section 3) by arguing with some care for the priority of both Matthew and Luke over Mark, which was taken to be a condensation of the other two. In the middle of the nineteenth century, many in the Tübingen school adopted this view. As a result Matthew as an historical and theological source was elevated above the other Synoptics.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new tide was running. Owing largely to the meticulous work of H.J. Holtzmann (1834–1910), the "two-source hypothesis" gained substantial acceptance (see EBC, 1:445–47, 510–14). By the beginning of the twentieth century, this theory was almost universally adopted; and subsequent developments were in reality mere modifications of this theory. B.H. Streeter, advocating a "four-source hypothesis" that was essentially a detailed refinement of the two-source theory, argued that Luke's Gospel is made-up of a "Proto-Luke" that was filled out with Mark and Q. This raised the historical reliability of Proto-Luke to the same level as Mark. Streeter's hypothesis still has some followers, and today most scholars adopt some form of the two-source theory or the four-source theory. This consensus has recently been challenged (cf. section 3).

These predominantly literary questions combined with the substantial antisupernaturalism of some critics at the turn of the century to produce various reconstructions of Jesus' life and teaching (see EBC, 1:519–21). During the 1920s and 1930s, the source criticism implicit in these efforts was largely passed by in favor of form criticism (see EBC, 1:447–48). Philologists first applied this method to the "folk literature" of primitive civilizations, especially the Maoris. H. Gunkel and H. Gressmann then used it to classify OT materials according to their "form." New Testament scholars, especially K.L. Schmidt, M. Dibelius, and R. Bultmann (*Synoptic Tradition*), applied the method to the Gospels in an effort to explore the so-called tunnel period between Jesus and the earliest written sources. They began by isolating small sections of the Gospels that they took to be units of oral tradition, classifying them according to form (see EBC, 1:447). Only the passion narrative was taken as a connected account from the beginning. Oral

transmission was thought to effect regular modifications common to all such literature (EBC, 1:444–45)—e.g., repetition engenders brevity in pronouncement stories and provides names in legends, rhythm and balance in didactic sayings, and multiple details in miracle stories. The form critics then assigned these forms to various *Sitze im Leben* (“life settings”) in the church (see EBC, 1:511–13).

The historical value of any pericope was then assessed against a number of criteria. For instance, the “criterion of dissimilarity” was used to weed out statements attributed to Jesus that were similar to what Palestinian Judaism or early Christianity might have said. Only if a statement was “dissimilar” could it be ascribed with reasonable confidence to Jesus. The net result was a stifling historical skepticism with respect to the canonical Gospels. Many scholars used the same literary methods in a more conservative fashion (e.g., V. Taylor’s great commentary on Mark); but the effect of form criticism was to increase the distance between our canonical Gospels and the historical Jesus, a distance increased yet further in Matthew’s case because of the continued dominance of the two-source hypothesis. Few any longer believed that Matthew the apostle was the first evangelist.

Following World War II a major change took place. Anticipated by Kilpatrick’s study, which focused on the distinctives in Matthew’s theology the age of redaction criticism as applied to Matthew began with a 1948 essay by G. Bornkamm (printed in English as “The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew,” *Tradition*, pp. 52–57). He presupposed Mark’s priority and then in one pericope sought to explain every change between the two Gospels as a reflection of Matthew’s theological interests and biases. Redaction criticism offered one great advantage over form criticism: it saw the evangelists, not as mere compilers of the church’s oral traditions and organizers of stories preserved or created in various forms, but as theologians in their own right, shaping and adapting the material in order to make their own points. It became important to distinguish between “traditional” material and “redactional” material, i.e., between what came to the evangelist already formed and the changes and additions he made. In other words, while tradition may preserve authentic historical material, redactional material does not do so. It rather serves as the best way of discerning an evangelist’s distinctive ideas. In his meticulous study of one pericope, Bornkamm sought to demonstrate a better method of understanding Matthew’s theology—a method that could best be discerned by trying to understand how and why Matthew changed his sources (esp. Mark and Q).

Countless studies have poured forth in Bornkamm’s wake, applying the same methods to virtually every pericope in Matthew. The translation of redaction-critical studies by G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H.J. Held (*Tradition*) has exercised profound influence in the world of New Testament scholarship; and in 1963 the first full-scale redaction-critical commentary on Matthew appeared (Bonnard). Bonnard handles his tools fairly conservatively. He frequently refuses to comment on historical questions and focuses on Matthew’s theology and the reasons (based on reconstructed “life settings”) for it. His work, which is immensely valuable, became the forerunner of several later English commentaries (notably Hill’s).

Nevertheless a rather naive optimism regarding historical reconstruction has developed. Virtually all recent writers on Matthew think they can read off from Matthew’s redaction the theological beliefs either of Matthew’s community or of the evangelist himself as he sought to correct or defend some part of his community. Kilpatrick argues that the book is catechetical, designed for the church of Matthew’s time. Stendahl (*School of Matthew*) thinks the handling of

the OT quotations reflects a “school” that stands behind the writing of this Gospel, a disciplined milieu of instruction. The major redaction-critical studies all attempt to define the historical context in which the evangelist writes, the community circumstances that call this Gospel into being (it is thought) between A.D. 80 and A.D. 100, and pay little useful attention to the historical context of Jesus. One need only think of such works as those of Trilling, Strecker (*Weg*), Cope (*Matthew*), Hare, Frankemolle, and the recent books by Thysman and Künzel, to name a few.

Not all redaction critics interpret Matthew’s reconstructed community the same way; indeed, the differences among them are often great. Moreover, several recent critics have argued that much more material in the Gospels (including Matthew’s) is authentic than was recognized ten years ago. Yet the wide diversity of opinion suggests at least some methodological and presuppositional disarray.

A modern commentary that aims primarily to explain the text must to some extent respond to current questions and the more so if it adopts a fairly independent stance. For many of these questions greatly affect our understanding of what the text says.

2. History and Theology

Few problems are philosophically and theologically more complex than the possible relationships between history and theology. The broader issues in the tension between these two cannot be discussed here: e.g., How does a transcendent God manifest himself in space-time history? Can the study of history allow, in its reconstructions of the past, for authority and influence outside the space-time continuum? To what extent is the supernatural an essential part of Christianity, and what does it mean to approach such matters “historically”? What are the epistemological bases for a system professing to be revealed religion? Even the titles of recent books about Jesus show the chasm that separates scholar from scholar on these points.⁷

This section will therefore ask some preliminary methodological questions. How appropriate and reliable are the various methods of studying the Gospels if we are to determine not only the theological distinctives of each evangelist but also something of the teaching and life of the historical Jesus? We must begin by avoiding many of the historical and theological disjunctions⁹ notoriously common among NT scholars. An example is the recent essay by K. Tagama, who arrives at his conclusion that the central theme of Matthew is “people and community” by insisting that all other important themes are mutually contradictory and therefore cancel one another out. But contradiction is a slippery category. As most commonly used in NT scholarship, it does not refer to logical contradiction but to situations, ideas, beliefs that on the basis of the modern scholar’s reconstruction of early church history are judged to be mutually incompatible.¹¹

Such judgments are only as convincing as the historical and theological reconstructions undergirding them; and too often historical reconstructions that in many cases have no other sources than the NT documents depend on illicit disjunctions. Did Jesus preach the nearness of the end of history and of the consummated kingdom? Then he could not have preached that the kingdom had already been inaugurated, and elements apparently denying this conclusion obviously spring from the church. Or did Jesus preach that the kingdom had already dawned? Then the apocalyptic element in the Gospels must be largely assigned to the later church. (On

this particular problem, see comments at 3:2; 10:23; and ch. 24.) Was Jesus a proto-rabbi, steeped in OT law and Jewish tradition? Then Paul's emphasis on grace is entirely innovative. Or did Jesus break Jewish Halakah (rules of conduct based on traditional interpretations of the law)? Then clearly Matthew's emphasis on the law (e.g., 5:17–20; 23:1–26) reflects the stance of Matthew's church, or suggests that Matthew wishes to legislate for his church, without helping us come to grips with the historical Jesus. Better yet Matthew's Gospel may even be considered a Jewish-Christian reaction against "Paulinism."

All such disjunctive reconstructions are suspect. Historical "contradictions," as Fischer has shown, too often reside in the eye of the historian. Strange combinations of ideas may coexist side by side in one generation, even though a later generation cannot tolerate them and therefore breaks them up. So we need to be cautious about pronouncing what ideas can be "historically" compatible. Acts and the early Pauline Epistles show us considerable diversity in the fast-growing infant church, as a number of NT studies attempt to explain.

Reconstruction is a necessary part of historical inquiry; sometimes meticulous reconstruction from a number of reliable documents shows that some further document is not what it purports to be. But as far as the Gospel of Matthew (or any of the canonical Gospels) is concerned, we must frankly confess we have no access to the alleged "Matthean [or Markan, Lukan, etc.] community" apart from the individual Gospel itself. The numerous studies describing and analyzing Matthew's theology against the background of Christianity and Judaism contemporary with Matthew's "community" in A.D. 80–100 (cf. Stanton, "Origin and Purpose," ch. 3) beg a host of methodological questions. This is not to deny that Matthew's Gospel may have been written within a community about A.D. 80, or may have addressed some such community; rather is it to argue the following points.

1. What Matthew aims to write is a Gospel telling us about Jesus, not a church circular addressing an independently known problem.

2. There is substantial evidence that the early church was interested in the historical Jesus and wanted to know what he taught and why. Equally there is strong evidence that the Gospels constitute, at least in part, an essential element of the church's kerygmatic ministry, its evangelistic proclamation (Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth*), each Gospel having been shaped for particular audiences.

3. It is therefore methodologically wrong to read off some theme attributed by the evangelist to Jesus and conclude that what is actually being discussed is not the teaching of Jesus but an issue of A.D. 80, unless the theme or saying can be shown to be anachronistic.

4. Matthew's reasons for including or excluding this or that tradition, or for shaping his sources, must owe something to the circumstances he found himself in and the concerns of his own theology. But it is notoriously difficult to reconstruct such circumstances and commitments from a Gospel about Jesus of Nazareth.

5. Moreover, virtually all the themes isolated as reflections of A.D. 80 could in fact reflect interests of any decade from A.D. 30 to 100. In the early thirties, for instance, Stephen was martyred because he spoke against the law and the temple. Similar concerns dominated the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49) and demanded thought both before and after the Jewish War (A.D. 66–70). The truth is that such themes as law and temple, and even many christological formulations (see section 11), offer very little help in identifying a "life-setting" for the church in Matthew's day. Although Matthean scholarship may advance by trying out new theories, no

advance that forces a Procrustean synthesis based on methodologically dubious deductions constitutes genuine progress.

Today we are in a position to consider the proper if limited place of redaction criticism. Since this method of study has been scrutinized elsewhere (cf. Carson, "Redaction Criticism," and the literature cited there), only a few points need be made here.

1. The "criteria of authenticity," as has often been pointed out, are hopelessly inadequate. For instance, the "criterion of dissimilarity," viz., that only if a statement was "dissimilar" from what Palestinian Judaism or early Christianity might have said could it be ascribed with reasonable confidence to Jesus, can only cull out the distinctive or the eccentric, while leaving the characteristic untouched—unless one is prepared to argue that Jesus' teaching characteristically never resembled contemporary Judaism and was never adopted by the church.

2. The analysis of the descent of the tradition, though useful in itself, is marred by four major flaws. First, comparative studies in oral transmission have largely dealt with periods of hundreds of years, not decades. On any dating of the Gospels, some eyewitnesses were still alive when the evangelists published their books. Second, the work of several Scandinavian scholars has drawn attention to the role of memory in Jewish education. Their work has been seriously criticized; but even their most perceptive critics¹⁵ recognize that too little attention has been paid to the power of human memory before Guttenberg—a phenomenon attested in many third-world students today. More impressive yet, the detailed attack on form criticism by Güttgemanns is so compelling that one wonders whether form criticism is of any value as a historical (as opposed to literary) tool. Oral traditions, especially religious oral traditions, are not conducive to tampering and falsification but are remarkably stable. Third, convincing reasons have been advanced for concluding that some written notes were taken even during Jesus' public ministry.¹⁷ *Written* material, of course, necessarily fits into various "forms" or "genres"; but such genres must be considered quite separately from the "forms" of oral transmission and the shaping that takes place by this means. If traditions of Jesus' words and deeds were passed on by both oral and written forms, many of the historical conclusions of the form-critical model collapse. Fourth, classic form criticism is intrinsically incapable of dealing historically with several similar sayings of Jesus, since they all tend toward the same form.

3. More broadly, the fact that Jesus was an itinerant preacher (cf. comments at 4:23–25; 9:35–38; 11:21) is passed over too lightly. To attempt a tradition history of somewhat similar sayings, which the evangelists place in quite different contexts, overlooks the repetitive nature of itinerant ministry. Of course each case must be examined on its own merits and depends in some instances on source-critical considerations; but we shall observe how frequently this basic observation is ignored. See especially the introductory discussion on parables at 13:3a.

4. To deduce that all changes in Mark and Q (however Q be defined), including omissions and additions, are the result of exclusively theological motives fails to reckon with the extreme likelihood of a multiplicity both of reasons for introducing changes and of sources, oral and written, within the first few decades (cf. Luke 1:1–4) and with the possibility that the author was an apostle (cf. section 5). While apostolic authorship would not give the text more authority than nonapostolic authorship, it must affect our judgment of the role of oral and written sources in the making of this Gospel. These factors—multiplicity of sources and possible

apostolic authorship—suggest that in most instances there is no compelling reason for thinking that material judged redactional is for that reason unhistorical.

5. Modern redaction criticism also suffers from dependency on a particular solution to the synoptic problem (cf. section 3).

6. Also, it fails to consider how many changes from Mark to Matthew (assuming Mark's priority) might owe something to stylistic predilections rather than theology. For example, F. Neiryck has clearly shown that Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand, often said to reflect more clearly than Mark the institution of the Eucharist, in reality turns out to be entirely consistent with the stylistic changes he introduces elsewhere.

7. Too many redaction-critical studies develop an understanding of the theology of Matthew's Gospel solely on the basis of the changes, instead of giving adequate thought to the document as a whole. Surely what Matthew retains is as important to him as what he modifies. The possibility of distortion becomes acute when on the basis of changes Matthew's distinctive theology is outlined and then anything conflicting with this model is reckoned to be "unassimilated tradition" or the like. It is far wiser to check the "changes" again and determine whether they have been rightly understood and, avoiding a priori disjunctions, to seek to integrate them into all Matthew writes down.

Such considerations do not eliminate the need for redaction criticism. In God's providence we are able to compare the synoptic Gospels with one another, and such study helps us better understand each of them. Matthew's topical treatment of miracles (Matt 8–9), his chiasmic arrangement of parables (Matt 13), the differences he exhibits when closely compared with Mark—these all help us identify his distinctives more precisely than would otherwise be possible. Thus no responsible modern commentary on the synoptic Gospels can avoid using redaction criticism. But redaction criticism, trimmed of its excesses and weaned from its radical heritage, throws only a little light on historical questions; and one must always guard against its dethroning what is essential by focusing on what is distinctive and idiosyncratic.

It is possible to approach the question of how much history is found in Matthew by examining the genre of literature—either of the Gospel as a whole or of some section of it. Perhaps a "Gospel" is not meant to convey historical information; perhaps certain stories in Matthew are "midrash" and, like parables, make theological points without pretending to be historical. Anticipating later discussion (section 12), we conclude that the evangelists, including Matthew, intended that their Gospels convey "historical" information. This does not mean they intended to write dispassionate, modern biographies. But advocacy does not necessarily affect truth telling: a Jewish writer on the Holocaust is not necessarily either more or less accurate because his family perished at Auschwitz. Nor is it proper in the study of any document professedly dealing with history to approach it with a neutral stance that demands proof of authenticity as well as proof of inauthenticity. Goetz and Blomberg, in an adaptation of a Kantian argument, write:

If the assumption was that no one ever wrote history for the sake of accuracy, then no fraudulent history could ever be written with the expectation that it would be believed. The process of deception is parasitic on the assumption that people normally write history with the intent of historical accuracy. People must (a) acknowledge the a priori truth that truth-telling is the logical backdrop to lying, and (b) *actually* assume that people tell the truth in order for a lie to be told with the expectation that it will be believed.

So with any particular historian, including Matthew, the writer of history must be assumed reliable until shown to be otherwise. “The reader must make this a priori commitment if the practice of writing history is to be viable.” In other words, other things being equal, the burden of proof rests with the skeptic.

From this perspective harmonization, which currently has a very bad name in NT scholarship, retains a twofold importance: negatively, it is nothing more than one way of applying the coherence test for authenticity; and, positively, once we no longer insist that every Gospel distinctive is the result of theological commitment or that the only possible sources are Mark, Q, and a little undefined oral tradition, harmonization carefully handled may permit the illumination of one source by another, provided legitimate redaction critical distinctions are not thereby obliterated.

This commentary endeavors to apply these observations and assessments to the Gospel of Matthew. Rigorous application would have trebled the length. Therefore certain sections and pericopes were singled out for more extensive treatment (cf. for instance, at 5:1; 6:9–13; 8:16–17; 13:3; 26:6, 17), in the hope that the positions outlined in this introduction could be grounded in the hard realities of the text. The aim must be to understand as closely as possible the Gospel of Matthew.

3. The Synoptic Problem

The recent return of the synoptic problem to center stage as the focus of much debate (see section 1) necessitates some assessment of the developments that impinge on questions of authorship, date, and interpretation of Matthew. One contributing factor to the debate is the quotation from Papias (c. A.D. 135) recorded by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16). Several of Papias’s expressions are ambiguous: “Matthew *synetaxeto* [composed? compiled? arranged?] the *logia* [sayings? Gospel?] in *hebraïdi dialektō* [in the Hebrew (Aramaic?) language? in the Hebrew (Aramaic?) style?]; and everyone *hērmēneusen* [interpreted? translated? transmitted?] them as he was able [contextually, who is ‘interpreting’ what?].” The early church understood the sentence to mean that the apostle Matthew first wrote his Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic and then it was translated. But few today accept this. Although Matthew has Semitisms, much evidence suggests that it was first composed in Greek.

The most important attempts to understand this sentence from Papias include the following.

1. Manson (*Sayings*, pp. 18ff.) has made popular the view that identifies the *logia* with sayings of Jesus found in Q. That would make Matthew the author of Q (a source or sources including approximately 250 verses common to Matthew and Luke), but not of this Gospel. Papias confused the two. This view falters on two facts. First, it cannot explain how an important apostolic source like the Q this theory requires could have so completely disappeared that there is no other mention of it, let alone a copy. Indeed, the entire Q hypothesis, however reasonable, is still only hypothesis. Second, Papias’s two other instances of *logia* (recorded by Eusebius) suggest the word refers to both sayings and deeds of Jesus, while Q is made up almost exclusively of the former. From this perspective *logia* better fits the Gospel of Matthew than a source like Q.

2. This last criticism can also be leveled against the view that *logia* refers to OT “testimonia,” a book of OT “proof-texts” compiled by Matthew from the Hebrew canon and now incorporated into the Gospel. Furthermore, it is not certain that such “testimonia” ever existed as separate books; and in any case it would have been unnecessary to compile them in Hebrew and then translate them, since the LXX was already well established. Matthew demonstrably follows the LXX in passages where Mark has parallels (see section 11).

3. If by *logia* Papias meant our canonical Matthew, then in the opinion of many scholars convinced that canonical Matthew was set down in Greek (erg., Hill), Papias was plainly wrong. Either his testimony must be ignored as valueless or we must suppose that Papias was right as to the language but confused the Gospel with some other Semitic work, perhaps the apocryphal Gospel According to the Hebrews.

4. Kurzinger offers a possible way out of the dilemma. He thinks *logia* refers to canonical Matthew but that *hebraïdi dialektō* refers, not to Hebrew or Aramaic language, but to Semitic style or literary form: Matthew arranged his Gospel in Semitic (i.e., Jewish-Christian) literary form dominated by Semitic themes and devices. In this view the last clause of Papias’s statement cannot refer to translation, since language is no longer in view. Kurzinger points out that immediately before Papias’s sentence about Matthew, he describes how Mark composed his Gospel by putting down Peter’s testimony; and there Mark is called the *hērmēneutēs* of Peter. This cannot mean Mark was Peter’s translator. It means he “interpreted” or “transmitted” (neither English word is ideal) what Peter said. If the same meaning is applied to the cognate verb in Papias’s statement about Matthew, then it could be that everyone “passed on” or “interpreted” Matthew’s Gospel to the world, as he was able.

It is difficult to decide which interpretation is correct. A few still argue that Matthew’s entire Gospel was first written in Aramaic. That view best explains the language of Papias, but it is not easy to reconcile with Matthew’s Greek. Why, for instance, does he sometimes use a Greek source like the LXX? It cannot be argued that the alleged translator decided to use the LXX for all OT quotations in order to save himself some work, for only some of them are from the LXX. If this interpretation of Papias’s statement does not stand, then Papias offers no support for Matthean priority.

The other two plausible interpretations of Papias are problematic. The view that Papias was referring to Q or some part of it offers the easiest rendering of *hebraïdi dialektō* (“in the Hebrew [Aramaic] language”) but provides an implausible rendering for *logia*. Kurzinger’s solution provides the most believable rendering of *logia* (viz., canonical Matthew) but a less likely interpretation of *hebraïdi dialektō* (“in the Semitic literary form”). Yet this rendering is possible (cf. LSJ, 1:401) and makes sense of the whole, even though Kurzinger’s view has not been well received. The important point is that either of these last two views fits easily with a theory of Markan priority, which may also be hinted at in the fact that, as Eusebius preserves him, Papias discusses Mark at length before turning rather briefly to Matthew.

Quite apart from the testimony of Papias, the NT evidence itself demands some decisions, however tentative, regarding the synoptic problem. Its boundaries are well known. About 90 percent of Mark is found in Matthew, and very frequently Matthew agrees with Mark’s ordering of pericopes as well as his wording (see esp. Matt 3–4; 12–28). Matthew’s pericopes are often more condensed than Mark’s but have a great deal of other material, much of it discourses. Of this material about 250 verses are common to Luke, and again the order is frequently (though

by no means always) the same. In both instances the wording is often so similar throughout such lengthy passages that it is impossible to see oral fixation of the tradition as an adequate explanation. Some literary dependence is self-evident. It seems easiest to support the view that Matthew and Luke both depend on Mark rather than vice versa, largely because Matthew and Mark frequently agree against Luke, and Mark and Luke frequently agree against Matthew, but Matthew and Luke seldom agree against Mark. It is not the argument from order itself that is convincing, for all that proves is that Mark stands in the middle between the other two. What is more impressive is that close study finds it easier to explain changes from Mark to Matthew and Luke than the other way around. The two-source hypothesis, despite its weaknesses—what, for instance, is the best explanation for the so-called minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark if both Matthew and Luke depend on Mark?—is still more defensible than any of its competitors.

Before pointing out a few of the historical and interpretive implications of this view, notice must be taken of the main alternatives.

1. By far the most common alternative is some form of the Griesbach hypothesis. This argues for Matthean priority, dependence of Luke on Matthew (according to some), and Mark as an abbreviation of Matthew and Luke. Despite increasingly sophisticated defenses of this position, it remains implausible. It appears highly unlikely that any writer, let alone a first-century writer like Mark, would take two documents (in this case Matthew and Luke) and analyze them so carefully as to write a condensation virtually every word of which is in the sources—a condensation that is graphic, forceful, and not artificial (so Hill, *Matthew*, p. 28, citing E.A. Abbott's work in EBr 1879). The impressive list of literary analogies compiled by Frye,³¹ who argues that Mark must be secondary because it is much shorter than Matthew and Luke and that literary parallels confirm that writers deeply dependent on written sources condense their sources, actually confounds his conclusion; for where he follows Mark, Matthew's account is almost always shorter. His greater total length—and even the occasional longer Matthean pericope—always comes from new material added to that from the Markan source. Frye therefore inadvertently supports the two-source hypothesis. Moreover the Griesbach hypothesis flies in the face of other evidence from Papias, who insists that Mark wrote his Gospel on the basis of material from Peter, not by condensing Matthew and Luke (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15).

2. Gaboury and Leon-Dufour argue that the pericopes preserving the same order in the triple tradition (i.e., in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) constitute a primary source on which all three synoptic Gospels have been built. But it is demonstrable that sometimes the evangelists chose topical arrangements quite different from their parallels (e.g., see at chs. 8–9); so why should it be assumed that all three synoptists conveniently chose to take over this alleged source without any change in topical arrangements?

3. Several British scholars adopt Markan priority but deny the existence of Q.³³ Parallels between Matthew and Luke are explained by saying that Luke read Matthew before composing his own Gospel. That is possible; but if so, he has hidden the fact extraordinarily well. Compare, for instance, Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. Gundry (*Matthew*) holds to the existence of a somewhat expanded Q but argues as well that Luke used Matthew—and this explains the “minor agreements” between Matthew and Luke. But this view, though possible, is linked in

Gundry's mind with his theory that sources shared by Matthew and Luke include even such matters as the Nativity story; and that is very doubtful.³⁴

4. Rist rejects both the two-source hypothesis and the Griesbach hypothesis and argues for the independence of Matthew and Mark. As many others have done, Rist focuses attention on 4:12–13:58, where there are numerous divergences in order between Matthew and Mark. He examines a short list of passages in the triple tradition where there is not only close verbal similarity but identical order and argues that in each case the order either logical or the result of memory, not literary dependence. But Rist does not adequately weigh the impressive list of instances where Matthew agrees with Mark's order without close verbal similarity. Such order argues strongly for some kind of literary dependence, however the verbal dissimilarities be explained.

5. Others, in the hope of keeping Matthean priority alive, argue that his Gospel was first written in Aramaic; and this became a source for Mark, which in turn influenced the Greek rendering of Matthew. This is possible, but we have already seen that Papias's testimony may not support a Semitic Matthew at all. And it remains linguistically improbable that the whole of Matthew was originally in Aramaic.

There are other proposed solutions to the synoptic problem, generally of much greater complexity. But not only do they suffer from the improbability of some of their details, the theories as a whole are so complex as to be unprovable.

The two-source hypothesis remains the most attractive general solution. This does not mean that it can be proved with mathematical certainty or that all arguments advanced in its favor are convincing. But some small details are very weighty. Gundry (*Use of OT*) has shown that the OT quotations and allusions Matthew and Mark have in common are consistently from the LXX, whereas those found in Matthew alone are drawn from a variety of versions and textual traditions. It is singularly unlikely that Mark was condensing Matthew, for so consistent a collection of Matthew's OT quotations—only those from the LXX—seems too coincidental to be believed. The pattern is easy enough to understand if Matthew depended on Mark.

Yet in itself the two-source hypothesis is almost certainly too simple. Source-critical questions are enormously complex; many facets of the question demand tighter controls.⁴¹ Moreover close study has convinced some careful scholars that the evidence does not warrant the degree of certainty with which many hold the two-source hypothesis. Such uncertainty is unpopular; but it is scarcely more scientific to go beyond the evidence than to admit uncertainty where the evidence does not provide an adequate basis for anything more. Such hesitations are especially anathema to radical redaction critics, for every major redaction-critical study of Matthew rests on the two-source hypothesis. Their aim is to find out how Matthew changed Mark.

In view of the weaknesses inherent in a radical use of redaction criticism and the uncertainties surrounding the two-source hypothesis, this commentary adopts a cautious stance. The two-source hypothesis is sufficiently credible that we do not hesitate to speak of Matthew's changes of, additions to, and omissions from Mark. But such statements say little about historicity or about the relative antiquity of competing traditions (cf. B.F. Meyer, pp. 71–72). In some instances it is apparent that Matthew used not only Mark but Q (however Q is conceived), probably other sources, and perhaps his own memory as well. In some instances an excellent case can be made for Matthew's use of a source earlier than Mark. Any theory of

literary dependence must also face subsidiary problems, such as the perplexing features of Luke's "central section" (see comments at Matt 19:1–2). Changes Matthew has introduced may sometimes be motivated by other than theological concerns; but in any case the total content of any pericope in Matthew's Gospel as a whole is a more reliable guide to determine distinct theological bent than the isolated change. As for dramatic diversity (see comments at 16:13–20; 19:16–30), the detailed differences must be treated and plausible reasons for the changes suggested. Rarely, however, are the solutions offered so dependent on the two-source hypothesis that a shift in scholarly opinion on the synoptic problem would irreparably damage them. The aim throughout has been to let Matthew speak as a theologian and historian independent of Mark, even if Mark has been one of his most important sources.

4. Unity

The question of the unity of Matthew's Gospel has little to do with source-critical questions. Instead it deals with how well the evangelist has integrated his material to form cohesive pericopes and a coherent whole. In sections very difficult to interpret (e.g., Matt 24), it is sometimes argued that the evangelist has sewn together diverse traditions that by nature are incapable of genuine coherence. Failing to understand the material, he simply passed it on without recognizing that some of his sources were mutually incompatible.

There are so many signs of high literary craftsmanship in this Gospel that such skepticism is unjustified. It is more likely, not to say more humble, to suppose that in some instances we may not understand enough of the first-century setting to be able to grasp exactly what the text says.

5. Authorship

Nowhere does the first Gospel name its author. The universal testimony of the early church is that the apostle Matthew wrote it, and our earliest textual witnesses attribute it to him (*KATA MATTHAION*). How much of that testimony depends on Papias is uncertain. We have already noted that many today think Papias is referring to some source of canonical Matthew rather than to the finished work or, alternatively, that Papias was wrong (cf. section 3). If Papias is right, the theory of Matthew's authorship may receive gentle support from passages like 10:3, where on this theory the apostle refers to himself in a self-deprecating way not found in Mark or Luke.

Modern literary criticism offers many reasons for rejecting Matthew's authorship. If the two-source hypothesis is correct, then (it is argued) it is unlikely that the eyewitness and apostle Matthew would depend so heavily on a document written by Mark, who was neither an apostle nor (for most events) an eyewitness. Moreover the reconstructions of canonical Matthew's life-setting, fostered by redaction criticism, converge on A.D. 80–100 in some kind of savage Jewish-Christian conflict. This is probably a trifle late to assume Matthew's authorship (though cf. traditions that say the apostle John composed his Gospel c. A.D. 90); and the details of the reconstructed settings discourage the notion. Kümmel (*Introduction*, p. 121) argues further than "the systematic and therefore nonbiographical form of the structure of Mt, the

late-apostolic theological position and the Greek language of Mt make this proposal completely impossible.” He concludes that the identity of the first evangelist is unknown to us but that he must have been a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian with some rabbinic knowledge, who depended on “a form of the Jesus tradition which potently accommodated the sayings of Jesus to Jewish viewpoints” (ibid.).

These reasons for rejecting Matthew’s authorship are widely accepted today. So alternate proposals have sprung up. Kilpatrick (pp. 138–39) suggests that the early patristic tradition connecting the first Gospel with Matthew arose as a conscious community pseudonym by the church that wrote the Gospel, in order to gain acceptance and authority for it. Abel argues that Matthew’s extra material is so confused and contradictory that we must assume it represents the efforts of two separate individuals working independently of each other. Several redaction-critical studies have denied that the author was a Jew, feeling that the antipathy exhibited toward Jesus in this Gospel and the ignorance of Jewish life are so deep that the writer must have been a Gentile Christian.⁴⁴ Those who think Papias was referring to Q or to some other source used by Matthew are often prepared to say that the apostle composed the source if not the Gospel (e.g., Hill, *Matthew*). There are several other theories.

The objections are not so weighty as they at first seem. If what the modern world calls “plagiarism” (the wholesale takeover, without acknowledgment, of another document) was an acceptable literary practice in the ancient world, it is difficult to see why an apostle might not find it congenial. If Matthew thought Mark’s account reliable and generally suited to his purposes (and he may also have known that Peter stood behind it), there can be no objection to the view that an apostle depended on a nonapostolic document. Kümmel’s rejection of Matthew’s authorship (*Introduction*, p. 121) on the grounds that this Gospel is “systematic and therefore nonbiographical” is a non sequitur because (1) a topically ordered account can yield biographical facts as easily as a strictly chronological account, and (2) Kümmel wrongly supposes that apostolicity is for some reason incapable of choosing anything other than a chronological form. The alleged lateness of the theological position may be disputed at every point (see section 6 and this commentary).

Those who argue that the author could not have been a Jew, let alone an apostle, allege serious ignorance of Jewish life, including inability to distinguish between the doctrines of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (16:12) or, worse, thinking that the Sadducees were still an active force after A.D. 70 (22:23). But the second of these two passages has synoptic parallels (Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; here Matthew has interpreted Mark’s verb as a historical present); and neither Matthean passage denies that there are differences separating Pharisees and Sadducees—differences Matthew elsewhere highlights (22:23–33)—but merely insists that on some things the Pharisees and Sadducees could cooperate. This is scarcely surprising: after all, both groups sat in the same Sanhedrin. Politics and theology make strange bedfellows (see section 11.f). Other “glaring errors” (so Meier, *Vision*, pp. 17–23) prove equally ephemeral (e.g., Matthew’s use of Zech 9:9; see comments at 21:4–5). Also Kilpatrick’s suggestion of a conscious community pseudonym cannot offer any parallel.

The charge that the Greek of the first Gospel is too good to have come from a Galilean Jew overlooks the trilingual character of Galilee, the possibility that Matthew greatly improved his Greek as the church reached out to more and more Greek speakers (both Jews and Gentiles), and the discussion of Gundry (*Use of OT* pp. 178–85), who argues that Matthew’s training and

vocation as a tax gatherer (9:9–13; 10:3) would have uniquely equipped him not only with the languages of Galilee but with an orderly mind and the habit of jotting down notes, which may have played a large part in the transmission of the apostolic gospel tradition. Moule wonders whether 13:52, which many take as an oblique self-reference by the evangelist, hides a use of *grammateus* that does not mean “teacher of the law” (NIV) but “clerk, secular scribe.” “Is it not conceivable that the Lord really did say to that tax-collector Matthew: ‘You have been a “writer” ...; 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.’ ”⁴⁷

Moule proposes an apostle who was a secular scribe and note-taker and who wrote primarily in a Semitic language, leaving behind material that was arranged by an other scribe, a Greek writer unknown to us. One may wonder if *grammateus*, used so often in the Jewish sense of “teacher of the law,” can so easily be assigned a secular sense. But whatever its other merits or demerits, Moule’s argument suggests that the link between this first Gospel and the apostle Matthew cannot be dismissed as easily as some have thought.

None of the arguments for Matthew’s authorship is conclusive. Thus we cannot be entirely certain who the author of the first Gospel is. But there are solid reasons in support of the early church’s unanimous ascription of this book to the apostle Matthew, and on close inspection the objections do not appear substantial. Though Matthew’s authorship remains the most defensible position, very little in this commentary depends on it. Where it may have a bearing on the discussion, a cautionary notice is inserted.

6. Date

During the first three centuries of the church, Matthew was the most highly revered and frequently quoted canonical Gospel. The earliest extant documents referring to Matthew are the epistles of Ignatius (esp. To the Smyrneans 1.1 [cf. Matt 3:15], c. A.D. 110–15). So the end of the first century or thereabouts is the latest date for the Gospel of Matthew to have been written.

The earliest possible date is much more difficult to nail down because it depends on so many other disputed points. If Luke depends on Matthew (which seems unlikely), then the date of Luke would establish a new *terminus ad quem* for Matthew; and the date of Luke is bound up with the date of Acts. If the Griesbach hypothesis (cf. sections 1 and 3) is correct, then Matthew would have to be earlier than Mark. Conversely, if the two-source hypothesis is adopted, Matthew is later than Mark; and a *terminus a quo* is theoretically established. Even so there are two difficulties. First, we do not know when Mark was written, but most estimates fall between A.D. 50 and 65. Second, on this basis most critics think Matthew could not have been written till 75 or 80. But even if Mark is as late as 65, there is no reason based on literary dependence why Matthew could not be dated A.D. 66. As soon as a written source is circulated, it is available for copying.

Two other arguments are commonly advanced to support the view now in the ascendancy that Matthew was written between 80 and 100 (between which dates there is great diversity of opinion). First, many scholars detect numerous anachronistic details. Though many of these are discussed in the commentary, one frequently cited instance will serve as an example. It is often

argued that Matthew transforms the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15–24) into the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–14); and the process of transformation includes an explicit reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (22:7). Therefore this Gospel must have been written after that. But the conclusion is much too hasty. Those who deny that Jesus could foretell the future concede that Mark predicts the Fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:14; Matt 24:15), arguing that if Mark wrote about A.D. 65, he was so close to the events that he could see how political circumstances were shaping up. But on this reasoning Matthew could have done the same thing in 66.

More fundamentally it is at least doubtful that Matthew's parable (22:1–10) is a mere rewriting of Luke 14:15–24; more likely they are separate parables (cf. Stonehouse, *Origins*, pp. 35–42). And on what ground must we insist that Jesus could not foretell the future? That conclusion derives, not from the evidence, but from an antisupernatural presuppositionalism. Moreover the language of 22:7 derives from OT categories of judgment (cf. Reicke, "Synoptic Prophecies," p. 123), not from the description of an observer. One could almost say that the lack of more detailed description of the events of A.D. 70 argues for an earlier date. In any event, if it is legitimate to deduce from 22:7 a post-70 date, it must surely be no less legitimate to deduce from 5:23–24, 12:5–7; 23:16–22; and 26:60–61 a pre-70 date, when the temple was still standing. The absurdity of this contradictory conclusion must warn us against the dangers of basing the date of composition on passages that permit other interpretations.

Second, recent studies have tended to argue that the life-setting presupposed by the theological stance of the Gospel best fits the conditions of A.D. 80–100. It is more difficult to reconstruct a life-setting than is commonly recognized (cf. section 2). Many of the criteria for doing so are doubtful. Explicit references to "church" (16:18; 18:17–18) are taken to reflect an interest in later church order. But the authenticity of 16:18 has been ably defended by B.F. Meyer (see comments at 16:17–20). Moreover 18:17–18 says nothing about the details of order (e.g., elders or deacons are not mentioned) but only of broad principles appropriate to the earliest stages of Christianity. Persecution (24:9) and false prophets (24:11) are often taken to reflect circumstances of 80–100. Yet these circumstances appear as prophecies in Matthew and did not need to wait for 80, as Acts and the early Pauline Epistles make clear.

Though Matthew's Gospel seems to presuppose uneasy relations between church and synagogue, the Gospel is less anti-Jewish than anti-Jewish leaders and their position on Jesus (see section 11.f); and such a stance stretches all the way back to the days of Jesus' ministry. Significantly Matthew records more warnings against the Sadducees than all other NT writers combined; and after A.D. 70 the Sadducees no longer existed as a center of authority. Other small touches seem to show a definite break with Judaism had not yet occurred; and these agree with Reicke ("Synoptic Prophecies," p. 133), who says, "The situation presupposed by Matthew corresponds to what is known about Christianity in Palestine between A.D. 50 and ca. 64."

We must face the awkward fact that criteria such as Matthew's christology are not very reliable indices of Matthew's date (cf. section 11.a). They might easily allow a range from 40–100. Gundry (*Matthew*, pp. 599ff.) has an excellent discussion; because he believes Luke depends on Matthew and Luke-Acts was completed not later than 63, he argues that Matthew must be still earlier. Clearly this conclusion is only as valid as the hypothesis of Luke's dependence on Matthew, a hypothesis that does not seem well grounded. While surprisingly

little in the Gospel conclusively points to a firm date, perhaps the sixties are the most likely decade for its composition.

7. Place of Composition and Destination

Most scholars take Antioch as the place of composition. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city with a substantial Jewish population; and the first clear evidence of anyone using the Gospel of Matthew comes from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century. This is as good a guess as any. Yet we must remember that Ignatius depends more on John's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles than on Matthew. But this does not mean they were all written in Antioch.

Other centers proposed in recent years include Alexandria (van Tilborg, p. 172), Edessa, the province of Syria,⁵³ and perhaps Tyre (Kilpatrick, pp. 130ff.) or Caesarea Maratima. In each instance the grounds are inadequate (Stanton, "Origin and Purpose," ch. 5; Hill, *Matthew*). More plausible is Slingerland's proposal that Matthew 4:15; 19:1 show that the Gospel was written somewhere east of the Jordan (he specifies Pella, but this is an unnecessary and unprovable refinement); see commentary in loc. If he is right, then Antioch is ruled out.

Actually we cannot be sure of the first Gospel's place of composition. Still more uncertain is its destination. The usual assumption is that the evangelist wrote it to meet the needs of his own center—a not implausible view. But the evangelist may have been more itinerant than usually assumed; and out of such a ministry he may have written his Gospel to strengthen and inform a large number of followers and given them an evangelistic and apologetic tool. We do not know. The only reasonably certain conclusion is that the Gospel was written somewhere in the Roman province of Syria (so Bonnard, Filson, Hill, Kümmel [*Introduction*, pp. 119–20], and many others; for the area covered by the designation "Syria," see comment at 4:25).

8. Occasion and Purpose

Unlike many of Paul's epistles or even John's Gospel (20:30–31), Matthew tells his readers nothing about his purpose in writing or its occasion. To some extent the Gospel shows Matthew's purpose in the way it presents certain information about Jesus. But to go much beyond this and specify the kind of group(s) Matthew was addressing, the kind of problems they faced, and his own deep psychological and theological motivations, may verge on speculation. Three restraints are necessary.

1. It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for supposition.
2. It is unwise to specify only one purpose; reductionism cannot do justice to the diversity of Matthew's themes.
3. Great caution is needed in reconstructing the situation in the church of Matthew's time from material that speaks of the historical Jesus (see sections 1–3). In one sense this may be legitimate, for in all probability Matthew did not compose his Gospel simply out of a dispassionate curiosity about history. He intended to address his contemporaries. But it does

not necessarily follow that what he alleges occurred in Jesus' day is immediately transferable to his own day.

Nowhere are these restraints more important than in weighing recent discussion about the diverse emphases on evangelism in this Gospel. On the one hand, the disciples are forbidden to preach to others than Jews (10:5–6); on the other, they are commanded to preach to all nations (28:18–20). Because of this bifurcation, some scholars have suggested that Matthew is preserving the traditions of two distinct communities—one that remained narrowly Jewish and the other that was more outward looking. Others think Matthew had to walk a tightrope between conflicting perspectives within his own community and therefore preserves both viewpoints—a sort of committee report that satisfied neither side. Still others erect a more specific “occasion” for this tension, a conflict between the church and the synagogue over the place of Gentile mission, Matthew taking a mediating (not to say compromised) position whose aim was to avoid cleavage between the two groups. Though such reconstructions cannot be ruled out, they suffer from a serious flaw. They fail to recognize that Matthew himself makes distinctions between what Jesus expects and demands during his earthly ministry and what he expects and demands after his resurrection.

Matthew 10:5–6 tells us what Jesus required of his disciples in their first-recorded major assignment; it does not necessarily tell us anything about what was going on in Matthew's day. The reason Matthew includes 10:6 as well as 28:18–20, and all the texts akin to one passage or the other, may be to explain how Jesus began with his own people and moved outward from there. One might argue that Jesus' own example is the foundation of Paul's “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom 1:14–17). This change develops not merely on pragmatic grounds but as the outworking of a particular understanding of the OT (see comments at 1:1; 4:12–17; 8:5–13; 12:21; 13:11–17) and of the distinctive role of Jesus the Messiah in salvation history (see comments at 2:1–12; 3:2; 4:12–17; 5:17–20; 8:16–17; 10:16–20; 11:7–15, 20–24, 12:41–42; 13:36–43; 15:21–39; 21:1–11, 42–44; 24:14; 26:26–29, 64; 28:18–20). Matthew thus shows how from the nascent community during Jesus' ministry the present commission of the church developed.

If this is a responsible approach to the evidence, then we are not justified in postulating conflicting strands of tradition within the Matthean community. It may be that by this retelling of the changed perspective effected by Jesus' resurrection Matthew is encouraging Jewish Christians to evangelize beyond their own race. Or it may be that he is justifying before non-Christian Jews what he and his fellow Christian Jews are doing. Or it may be that he is explaining the origins of Christian mission to zealous Jewish-Christian personal evangelists who after the warmth of their initial experience want to learn about the historical developments and teaching of Jesus that made the Jewish remnant of his day the church of their own day. Or it may be that, though such questions have not yet arisen, Matthew foresees that they cannot be long delayed and, like a good pastor, decides to forestall the problem by clear teaching. Or it may be that Matthew has Gentile readers in mind. Or it may be that all these factors were at work because Matthew envisages an extensive and varied readership. Several other possibilities come to mind. But such precise reconstructions outstrip the evidence, fail to consider what other purposes Matthew may have had in mind, and frequently ignore the fact that he purports to talk about Jesus, not a Christian community in the sixth, eighth, or tenth decade of the first century.

Particularly unfortunate are several recent works that define the purpose of this Gospel in categories, both reductionistic and improbable. Walker argues that this Gospel does not reflect specific church problems but that it was written as a piece of theological combat, designed to show that Israel has been totally rejected in the history of salvation and had been displaced by the church so completely that the Great Commission must be understood as a command to evangelize Gentiles only (see discussion at 28:18–20). The Jewish leaders are nothing but representative figures, and the Gospel as a whole has no interest in and little accurate information about the historical Jesus. Only rarely is Walker exegetically convincing; nowhere does he adequately struggle with the fact that all the disciples and early converts are Jews.

Frankemolle in his final chapter argues that Matthew's work is so different from Mark's—long discourses, careful structure, prologue, epilogue—that it is meaning less to say it is a "Gospel" in the same sense as Mark (see section 12). Instead, Matthew belongs to the literary *Gattung* (form or genre) to which Deuteronomy and Chronicles belong. Frankemolle (pp. 394ff.) cites several phrases (e.g., cf. Deut 31:1, 24; 32:44–45) used by Matthew to round off his own discourses; and from such evidence he concludes that Matthew's "Gospel" is in reality a "book of history," not of "salvation history" as normally understood, but of the community as it summarized its beliefs. Matthew, Frankemolle maintains, does not distinguish between the life and teaching of the historical Jesus and the present exalted Lord. In his "literary fiction" (p. 351), Matthew fuses the two. Thus Jesus becomes the idealized authority behind Matthew the theologian who here addresses his community. But Frankemolle overemphasizes formal differences between Mark and Matthew and neglects the substantial differences between Matthew and Deuteronomy or Chronicles. His investigation is far from even-handed.

Frankemolle's insistence that Matthew is a unified book is surely right. Yet a book may be theologically unified by appealing to prophecy-fulfillment and other salvation-historical categories. Theological unity does not entail ignoring historical data. Moreover neither Walker nor Frankemolle adequately recognizes that for most of his Gospel Matthew depends heavily on Mark and Q (however Q he understood). Matthew was creative, but not so creative as Walker and Frankemolle think.

Goulder offers a lectionary theory. Arguing somewhat along the lines of Carrington and Kilpatrick, Goulder maintains that Matthew's purpose was to provide a liturgical book. He argues that the evangelist has taken the pattern of lections of the Jewish festal year as his base and developed a series of readings to be used in liturgical worship week by week. Mark, a lectionary book for a half-year cycle, has been expanded by Matthew (not the apostle) to a year-long lectionary; and Mark is Matthew's only source. Luke, dependent on Matthew, has also written a lectionary for a full year but has displaced the festal cycle followed by Matthew with the annual Sabbath cycle of readings. Q does not exist.

Despite Goulder's immense erudition, there is little to commend his thesis. We know very little of the patterns of worship in first-century Judaism. At the end of the second century A.D., triennial cycles were used in some Jewish worship. But the annual cycles Goulder discerns behind Luke are almost certainly later than their triennial counterparts. As for Matthew, we have no evidence of a fixed "festal lectionary" in the first century; and even if it existed, it would have been connected with temple worship, with no evidence that it was ever connected with the synagogue worship Goulder's thesis requires (cf. Stanton, "Origin and Purpose," ch. 4). Not only is our knowledge of first-century *Jewish* liturgical custom very slender, our knowledge

of *Christian* worship in the first century is even more slender. Thus we do not know whether Christian lectionary cycles—if they existed—developed out of Jewish lectionary cycles—if those cycles existed! Certainly by the time of Justin Martyr, the churches of which he had knowledge read the “memoirs of the apostles” (i.e., the Gospels) for “as long as time allowed” (*First Apology* 1.67), not according to some lectionary specification. Moreover, to make his pattern fit, Goulder must postulate lections in Matthew that vary enormously in length. Goulder’s thesis is unlikely to convince many.

Numerous studies characterized by more sober judgment have recently contributed to our understanding of Matthew’s purposes. Many of these are referred to in the commentary. At the broadest level we may say that Matthew’s purpose is to demonstrate (1) that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Son of Man, Immanuel; (2) that many Jews, and especially the leaders, sinfully failed to perceive this during his ministry; (3) that the messianic kingdom has already dawned, inaugurated by the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus; (4) that this messianic reign, characterized by obedience to Jesus and consummated by his return, is the fulfillment of OT prophetic hopes, (5) that the church, the community of those, both Jew and Gentile, who bow unqualifiedly to Jesus’ authority, constitutes the true locus of the people of God and the witness to the world of the “gospel of the kingdom”; (6) that throughout this age Jesus’ true disciples must overcome temptation, endure persecution from a hostile world, witness to the truth of the gospel, and live in deeply rooted submission to Jesus’ ethical demands, even as they enjoy the new covenant, which is simultaneously the fulfillment of old covenant anticipation and the experience of forgiveness bestowed by the Messiah who came to save his people from their sins and who came to give his life a ransom for many.

Such a complex array of themes was doubtless designed to meet many needs: (1) to instruct and perhaps catechize (something facilitated by the careful arrangement of some topical sections; cf. Moule, *Birth*, p. 91); (2) to provide apologetic and evangelistic material, especially in winning Jews; (3) to encourage believers in their witness before a hostile world; and (4) to inspire deeper faith in Jesus the Messiah, along with a maturing understanding of his person, work, and unique place in the unfolding history of redemption.

9. Canonicity

As far as our sources go, the Gospel of Matthew was promptly and universally received as soon as it was published. It never suffered the debates that divided the Eastern church and the Western church over, for example, the Epistle to the Hebrews but was everywhere regarded as Scripture, at least from Ignatius (died 110) onward.

10. Text

Compared with that of Acts, the text of Matthew is fairly stable. Important variants do occur, however, and some of these are discussed. The most difficult textual questions in Matthew arise because it is a synoptic Gospel. This provides many opportunities for harmonization or disharmonization in the textual tradition (e.g., see comments at 12:47; 16:2–

3; 18:10–11). Although harmonization is a secondary feature, this does not necessarily mean that every instance of possible harmonization must be understood as being secondary (e.g., see comments at 12:4, 47; 13:35). Certainly harmonization is more common in the sayings of Jesus than elsewhere. But much work remains to be done in this area, especially in examining the phenomenon of harmonization in conjunction with the synoptic problem (cf. section 3).

11. Themes and Special Problems

We may consider Matthew's principal themes along with the special problems of this Gospel, because so many of Matthew's themes have turned into foci for strenuous debate. To avoid needless repetition, the following paragraphs do not so much summarize the nine themes selected as sketch in the debate and then provide references to the places in the commentary where these things are discussed.

a. *Christology*

Approaches to the distinctive elements of Matthew's christology usually run along one of three lines, and these are not mutually exclusive.

The first compares Matthew with Mark to detect what differences lie between the two wherever they run parallel. Perhaps the first important study along these lines was an essay by Styler. He argues that Matthew's christology is frequently more explicit than Mark's (he compares, for instance, the two accounts of the Triumphal Entry, 21:1–11). This is surely right, at least in some instances. But it is much less certain that Matthew focuses more attention than Mark on ontology (see comments at 9:1–8; 19:16–17; cf. Hill, *Matthew*, pp. 64–66), at least in those pericopes treated by both evangelists.

The second approach examines the christological titles used in Matthew's Gospel. These are rich and diverse. "Son of David" appears in the first verse, identifying Jesus as the promised Davidic Messiah; and then the title recurs, often on the lips of the needy and the ill, who anticipate relief from him who will bring in the Messianic Age (see comment at 9:27). Matthew uses *kyrios* (Lord) more often than Mark, and some have taken this to indicate anachronistic ascription of divinity to Jesus. But *kyrios* is a word with a broad semantic range. It often means no more than "sir" (e.g., 13:27). It seems fairer to say that Matthew frequently uses the word because it is vague. During Jesus' ministry before the Cross, it is very doubtful whether it was used as an unqualified confession of Deity. But because it is the most common LXX term for referring to God, the greater insight into Jesus' person and work afforded by the postresurrection perspective made the disciples see a deeper significance to their own use of *kyrios* than they could have intended at first. A somewhat similar but more complex ambiguity surrounds "Son of Man," which is discussed in the Excursus at 8:20. Other titles receive comment where they are used by the evangelist.

The third approach to Matthew's christology is the examination of broad themes, either in exclusively Matthean material (e.g., Nolan's study on Matt 1–2, which focuses on a christology shaped by the Davidic covenant), or throughout the Gospel (e.g., various studies linking messiahship to the Suffering Servant motif). Some reference is made to these throughout the commentary. Doubtless it is best for these christological titles and themes to emerge from an

inductive study of the text, for narrower approaches often issue in substantial distortion. For example, though Kingsbury (*Matthew*) ably demonstrates how important “Son of God” is in Matthew (see comments at 2:15; 3:17; 4:3; 8:29; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63), his insistence that it is the christological category under which, for Matthew’s community all the others are subsumed cannot be sustained. Matthew offers his readers vignettes linked together in diverse ways; the resulting colorful mosaic is reduced to dull gray when we elevate one theme (a christological title or something else) to a preeminent place that suppresses others.

b. *Prophecy and fulfillment*

Untutored Christians are prone to think of prophecy and fulfillment as something not very different from straightforward propositional prediction and fulfillment. A close reading of the NT reveals that prophecy is more complex than that. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, understands the Levitical sacrificial system to be prophetic of Christ’s sacrifice, Melchizedek to point to Jesus as High Priest, and so on. In Matthew we are told that Jesus’ return from Egypt fulfills the OT text that refers to the Exodus (2:15); the weeping of the mothers of Bethlehem fulfills Jeremiah’s reference to Rachel weeping for her children in Rama; the priests’ purchase of a field for thirty pieces of silver fulfills Scriptures describing actions performed by Jeremiah and Zechariah (27:9); and, in one remarkable instance, Jesus’ move to Nazareth fulfills “what was said through the prophets” even though no specific text appears to be in mind (2:23). Add to this one other major peculiarity. A number (variously estimated between ten and fourteen) of Matthew’s OT quotations are introduced by a fulfillment formula characterized by a passive form of *plēroō* (“to fulfill”) and a text form rather more removed from the LXX than other OT quotations. These “formula quotations” are all asides of the evangelist, his own reflections (hence the widely used German word for them, *Reflexionszitate*). What explains these phenomena?

Such problems have been extensively studied with very little agreement. When Matthew cites the OT, this commentary deals with many of these issues. In anticipation of these discussions, four observations may be helpful.

1. From very different perspectives, Gundry and Soares Prabhu argue that Matthew is responsible for the formula quotations (the difference between them is that Gundry thinks the evangelist was the apostle Matthew, Soares Prabhu does not). Wherever he follows Mark, Matthew uses the LXX; but he in no case clearly demonstrates a personal preference for the LXX by introducing closer assimilation. There is therefore no good a priori reason for denying that Matthew selected and sometimes translated the non-LXX formula quotations. Doubtless both Hebrew and Greek OT textual traditions were somewhat fluid during the first century (as the DSS attest); and so it is not always possible to tell where the evangelist is using a text form known in his day and where he is providing his own rendering. What does seem certain, however, is that there is no good reason to support the view that the fulfillment quotations arose from a Matthean “school” (Stendahl) or were taken over by the evangelist from a collection of testimonia (Strecker).

2. Though often affirmed, it does not seem very likely that the evangelists, Matthew included, invented their “history” in order to have stories corresponding to their favorite OT proof-texts. The question is most acute in Matthew 1–2 and 27:9 and is raised there. Several

points, however, argue against a wholesale creation of traditions. The NT writers do not exploit much of the rich OT potential for messianic prediction. The very difficulty of the links between story and OT text argues against the creation of the stories, because created stories would have eliminated the most embarrassing strains. The parallel of the DSS cannot be overlooked. Even when they treat the OT most tortuously, the Qumran covenanters do not invent “history” (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, pp. 193–204).

3. The ways the events surrounding Jesus are said to fulfill the OT varies enormously and cannot be reduced to a single label. Even the Jewish categories commonly applied need certain qualification (on “Midrash,” cf. section 12).

Some of Matthew’s fulfillment quotations are said to be examples of *peshet* exegesis (e.g., Stendahl, *School of Matthew*, p. 203; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 143). Such rabbinical exegesis stresses revelation and authoritatively declares, “This event is the fulfillment of that prophecy” (e.g., Acts 2:16). But even here we must be careful. The clearest examples of *peshet* exegesis are found in 1QpHab. What is striking about its authoritative pronouncements is that the OT prophecy it refers to, Habakkuk, is interpreted exclusively in terms of the “fulfillments” it is related to, making its original context meaningless.⁶⁵ Even the most difficult passages in Matthew, such as Mt 2:15, do not hint that the original OT meaning is void—in this case that the people of Israel were not called by God out of Egypt at the Exodus.

4. What must now be faced is a very difficult question: Even if Matthew does not deny the OT setting of the texts he insists are being fulfilled in Jesus, on what basis does he detect any relationship of prophecy to fulfillment? The verb *plēroō* (“to fulfill”) is discussed in the commentary (see comments at 2:15 and esp. 5:17); but when it refers to fulfilling Scripture, it does not lose all teleological force except in rare and well-defined situations. But opinion varies as to exactly how these OT Scriptures point forward. Sometimes the OT passages cited are plainly or at least plausibly messianic. Often the relation between prophecy and fulfillment is typological: Jesus, it is understood, must in some ways recapitulate the experience of Israel or of David. Jesus must undergo wilderness testing and call out twelve sons of Israel as apostles. Even the kind of typology varies considerably. Yet the perception remains constant that the OT was preparing the way for Christ, anticipating him, pointing to him, leading up to him. When we ask how much of this forward-looking or “prophetic” aspect in what they wrote the OT writers themselves recognized, the answer must vary with the particular text. But tentative, nuanced judgments are possible even in the most difficult cases (e.g., see comments at 1:23; 2:15, 17–18, 23; 4:15–16; 5:17; 8:16–17; 11:10–11; 12:18–21; 13:13–15; 21:4–5, 16, 42; 22:44; 26:31; 27:9). Care in such formulations will help us perceive the deep ties that bind together the Old and New Testaments.

c. *Law*

Few topics in the study of Matthew’s Gospel are more difficult than his attitude to the law. The major studies are discussed elsewhere (cf. esp. Stanton, “Origin and Purpose,” ch. 4.4, and this commentary, esp. at 5:17–48); but we may summarize some aspects of the problem here.

The difficulties stem from several factors. First, several passages can be understood as staunch defenses of the law (e.g., 5:18–19; 8:4; 19:17–18) and even of the authority of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in interpreting it (23:2–3). Jesus’ disciples are expected to

fast, give alms (6:2–4), and pay the temple tax (17:24–27). Second, some passages can be seen as a softening of Mark’s dismissal of certain parts of the law. The addition of the “except” clause in 19:9 and the omission of Mark 7:19b (“In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean.’”) in Matthew’s corresponding pericope (Mt 15:1–20) have convinced many that Matthew does not abrogate any OT command. Third, there are some passages where, formally at least, the letter of OT law is superseded (e.g., 5:33–37) or a revered OT institution appears to be depreciated and potentially superseded (e.g., 12:6). Fourth, there is one passage, 5:17–20, that is widely recognized to be programmatic of Matthew’s view of the law. However, it embraces interpretive problems of extraordinary difficulty.

In light of these things, various theories have been proposed. Bacon (*Studies in Matthew*), followed by Kilpatrick (pp. 107–9), argues that the Gospel of Matthew presents a “new law” that is to the church what the Torah is to Judaism. The five discourses of Matthew (cf. section 14) became the new Pentateuch. Today few follow this theory; its thematic and formal links are just too tenuous. Some suggest that this Gospel reflects a Matthean church that has not yet broken away from Judaism, while others argue that the church has just broken free and now finds it necessary to define itself over against Judaism (cf. expressions such as “their teachers of the law,” “their synagogues,” or “your synagogues,” when addressing certain Jews [e.g., 7:29; 9:35; 23:34])

But such arguments are rather finespun. Does “their synagogue” imply a break with Judaism or distinctions within Judaism? The Qumran covenanters used the pronoun “their” of the Pharisees and mainline Judaism. Therefore could not Jesus himself have used such language to distinguish his position from that of his Jewish opponents without implying he was not a Jew? A liberal or high churchman in the Church of England may refer to their colleges, referring to Church of England training colleges reflecting evangelical tradition, without suggesting that any of the three principal groups does not belong to the Anglican communion. And if Jesus spoke in such terms and if Matthew reports this, then Matthew may also be consciously reflecting the circumstances of his own church. But if so, it still remains unclear whether his church (if it is in his mind at all) has actually broken free from Judaism (see further comments at 4:23; 7:29; 9:35; 10:17; 11:1; 12:9–10; 13:35 et al.).

Another example (8:4) is commonly taken to mean that the writer believes Jesus upholds even the ceremonial details of OT law, and that this reflects a conservative view of the continuing validity of the law in Matthew’s community. This interpretation, though hard to prove, is logically possible. Alternatively one might also argue that 8:4 reflects a pre-A.D. 70 community since after that offering temple sacrifices was impossible. Again, if Jesus said something like this, then Matthew’s including it may not have been because of his community’s conservatism but because it shows how Jesus used even ceremonial law to point to himself (see comment at 8:4).

It is very difficult to narrow down these various possibilities. Clearly they are also related to how one uses redaction criticism (cf. sections 1–3, 5, 7–8). Too frequently these methodological questions are not so much as raised, even when the most astounding conclusions are confidently put forward as established fact. Some argue that Matthew’s church had so conservative a view of the OT law that the “evildoers” (lit., “workers of lawlessness”) denounced in 7:23 are Pauline Christians (e.g., Bornkamm, *Tradition*, pp. 74–75). Quite apart from the authenticity of Jesus’ saying and the danger of anachronism, this view misunderstands

both Matthew and Paul. Matthew's attacks are primarily directed against Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees, whose legal maneuvers blunt the power of the law and who fail to see the true direction in which the law pointed. They are, as the Qumran covenanters bitterly said, "expounders of smooth things" (CD 1:18). As for Paul, doubtless many saw him as being antinomian. But he too spoke strongly about the kind of behavior necessary to enter the kingdom (Rom 8:14; 13:10; Gal 5:14).

Yet if Matthew attacks Pharisees, does this mean the Pharisees of Jesus' day, of Matthew's day, or of both? The least we can say is that Matthew chose to write a Gospel, not a letter. Since he chose to write about Jesus as the Messiah, the presumption must be that he intended to say something about Jesus' life and relationships. This leads us to ask whether some differences between Matthew and Paul are to be explained by the distinctive places in salvation history of their subject matter. Though he writes after Paul wrote Romans, Matthew writes about an earlier period. Undoubtedly he had certain readers and their needs in mind. Yet it is no help in understanding Matthew's treatment of the law to view the needs of his first readers from the viewpoint of his modern readers without first weighing the historical background of his book—viz., the life and teaching of Jesus.

Jesus' teaching about the law, whether gathered from Matthew or from all four Gospels, is not easy to define precisely. Sigal ("Halakah") has recently set forth an iconoclastic theory. He argues that the Pharisees of Jesus' day are not to be linked with the rabbis of the Mishnah (see section 11.f) but were a group of extremists wiped out by the events of A.D. 70. These extremists were opposed both by Jesus and by other teachers who occupied roles similar to his own. After all, ordination was unknown in Jesus' day, so there was no distinction between Jesus and other teachers. Jesus was himself a "proto-rabbi"—Sigal's term for the group that gave rise to the ordained rabbis of the post-Jamnian period (A.D. 85 on). All Jesus' legal decisions, Sigal says, fall within the range of what other proto-rabbis might say. Sigal tests this theory in Matthew's reports of Jesus' handling of the Sabbath (12:1–14) and divorce (19:1–12).

Sigal makes many telling points. His exegesis (cf. the fuller discussion in the commentary) of 5:17–20 and other test passages is not convincing, however, because he eliminates all christological claims (e.g., 12:8) as the church's interpolations into the narrative. He nowhere discusses, on literary or historical grounds, the authenticity of Jesus' christological claims but writes them off merely by referring to similar dismissals by other scholars. Yet the issue is crucial: if Jesus offered judgments concerning the law by making claims, implicit or explicit, concerning his messiahship, the function of the law in Jesus' teaching will certainly be presented differently from the way it would be if Jesus saw himself as no more than a "proto-rabbi." The commentary deals at length with this question (see on 5:17–20; 8:1–4, 16–17; 11:2–13; 12:1–14; 21; 13:35, 52; 15:1–20; 17:5–8; 19:3–12; 22:34–40; 27:51).

Doubtless we may link Matthew's treatment of the law with his handling of the OT (section 11.b). Matthew holds that Jesus taught that the law had a prophetic function pointing to himself. Its valid continuity lies in Jesus' own ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection. The unifying factor is Jesus himself, whose ministry and teaching stand with respect to the OT (including law) as fulfillment does to prophecy. To approach the problem of continuity and discontinuity—what remains unchanged from the Mosaic code—in any other terms is to import categories alien to Matthew's thought and his distinctive witness to Jesus (see esp. comments at 5:17–20; 11:7–15). Within this unifying framework, the problem passages mentioned at the

beginning of this discussion can be most fairly explained; by it we may avoid the thesis that makes the double love commandment the sole hermeneutical key to Jesus' understanding of the OT (see comments at 22:34–40).

d. *Church*

The word *ekklēsia* (“church”) occurs twice in Matthew (16:18; 18:17). Partly because it appears in no other Gospel, the “ecclesiasticism” of Matthew has often been overstressed.

Certain things stand out. First, Matthew insists that Jesus predicted the continuation of his small group of disciples in a distinct community, a holy and messianic people, a “church” (see comment at 16:18). This motif rests on numerous passages, not just one or two texts of disputed authenticity. Second, Jesus insists that obeying the ethical demands of the kingdom, far from being optional to those who make up the church, must characterize their lives. Their allegiance proves false wherever they do not do what Jesus teaches (e.g., 7:21–23). Third, a certain discipline must be imposed on the community (see comments at 16:18–19; 18:15–18). But Matthew describes this discipline in principles rather than in details (there is no mention of deacons, elders, presbyteries, or the like), and therefore this discipline is not anachronistic provided we can accept the fact that Jesus foresaw the continuation of his community.

This third theme is much stronger in Matthew than in Mark or Luke. One might speculate on the pressures that prompted Matthew to include this material—apathy in the church, return to a kind of casuistical righteousness, infiltration by those not wholly committed to Jesus Messiah, the failure to discipline lax members. But this is speculation. The essential factor is that Matthew insists that the demand for a disciplined church goes back to Jesus himself.

e. **Eschatology**

Matthew consistently distinguishes among four time periods: (1) the period of revelation and history previous to Jesus; (2) the inauguration of something new in his coming and ministry; (3) the period beginning with his exaltation, from which point on all of God's sovereignty is mediated through him, and his followers proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all nations; (4) the consummation and beyond.

Many features of Matthew's eschatology are still being studied. The seven most important of these (the number may be eschatologically significant!) and the places where they are principally discussed in this commentary are (1) the meaning of peculiarly difficult verses (e.g., 10:23; 16:28); (2) the distinctive flavor of Matthew's dominant “kingdom of heaven” over against “kingdom of God” preferred by the rest of the NT writers (cf. comment at 3:2); (3) the extent to which the kingdom has already been inaugurated and the extent to which it is wholly future, awaiting the consummation (a recurring theme; cf. esp. ch. 13); (4) the bearing of the parables on eschatology (ch. 13, 25); (5) the relation between the kingdom and the church (another recurring theme; cf. esp. 13:37–39); (6) the sense in which Jesus saw the kingdom as imminent (see comments at ch. 24); (7) the Olivet Discourse (chs. 24–25).

f. *The Jewish leaders*

Two areas need clarification for understanding Matthew's treatment of the Jewish leaders. The first is the identification of the "Pharisees" at the time of Jesus. We may distinguish four viewpoints, each represented by able Jewish scholars.

1. The traditional approach is well defended by Guttman, who argues that the Pharisees were more effective leaders than the OT prophets. The prophets were uncompromising idealists; the Pharisees, whose views are largely reflected by their successors, the rabbis behind the Mishnah, were adaptable, adjusting the demands of Torah by a finely tuned exegetical procedure issuing in legal enactments designed to make life easier and clarify right conduct.

2. By contrast Neusner insists that a chasm yawns between the rabbinic views reflected in Mishnah and pre-A.D. 70 Pharisaism. The Pharisees shaped the life of pre-70 Judaism by extending the purity rituals of the temple to the daily experience of every Jew.

3. Rivkin argues that the Pharisees—a post-Maccabean and theologically revolutionary group were men of considerable learning and persuasiveness. They developed the oral law, now largely codified in the Mishnah, and unwittingly departed radically from their OT roots. Rivkin denies that they had separatistic or ritualistic tendencies; their influence was broad and pervasive.

4. Sigal argues for a complete disjunction between the Pharisees, whom he identifies as the *perushim* ("separatists"), and the rabbis behind Mishnah. In Jesus' day the rabbis were not officially ordained: ordination had not yet been invented. That is why Jesus himself is addressed as "rabbi" in the Gospels (e.g., 26:49; Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; John 1:38, 49; 3:2). He belonged to a class of "proto-rabbis," the forerunners of the ordained rabbis of the Mishnaic period. His opponents, the Pharisees, were extremists who died out after A.D. 70 and left virtually no literary trace.

The tentative assessment adopted in this commentary is that these competing interpretations of the evidence are largely right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. Sigal is almost certainly right in arguing that ordination was unknown in Jesus' day (cf. Westerholm, pp. 26–39), though there may have been informal procedures for recognizing a teacher of Scripture. There can be no simple equation of "Pharisee" and Mishnaic rabbi. But against Sigal, it is unlikely that the Pharisees were so separatistic that they did not embrace most if not all "proto rabbis." The Gospels refer to every other major religious grouping—Sadducees, priests, scribes—and it is almost inconceivable that the evangelists should say almost nothing about the "proto-rabbis," the dominant group after A.D. 70, and vent so much criticism on a group (the Pharisees) so insignificant in Jesus' day that they disappeared from view after A.D. 70. The fairly rapid disappearance of the Sadducees after A.D. 70 is no parallel because much of their life and influence depended on the temple destroyed by the Romans; and in any case the evangelists do give us some description of their theological position.

As for Jesus, he cannot be reduced to a "proto-rabbi," training his followers to repeat his legal decisions. His messianic claims cannot so easily be dismissed. To onlookers he appeared as a prophet (21:11, 46) Guttman (n. 68) is right in saying that the Pharisees adapted the laws to the times and were effective leaders. The problem is that their minute regulations made ritual distinctions too difficult and morality too easy. The radical holiness demanded by the OT prophets became domesticated, preparing the way for Jesus' preaching that demanded a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees (5:20). Though Neusner (n. 69) correctly detects the Pharisees' concern with ceremonial purity (cf. 15:1–12), his skepticism concerning

the fixity of many oral traditions and the possibility of knowing more about the Pharisees is unwarranted. The evidence from Josephus cannot be so easily dismissed as Neusner would have us think. Even allowing for Josephus's own bias toward the Pharisees, his evidence so consistently demonstrates their wide influence in the nation, not to say their centrality during the Jewish War, that it is very difficult to think of them as a minor separatistic group (Sigal) or as exclusively concerned with ritual purity.

The Mishnah (c. A.D. 200) cannot be read back into A.D. 30 as if Judaism had not faced the growth of Christianity and the shattering destruction of temple and cultus. Nevertheless it preserves more traditional material than is sometimes thought. One suspects that the Pharisees of Jesus' day include the proto-rabbis, ideological forbears of the Mishnaic Tannaim (lit., "repeaters," i.e., the "rabbis" from roughly A.D. 70 to 200). In this view they included men every bit as learned and creative as the second-century rabbis. But they also included many lesser men, morally and intellectually, who were largely purged by the twin effects of the growth of Christianity and the devastation of A.D. 70. These events called forth a "counterreformation," whose legacy is Mishnah. Rivkin (n. 70) is undoubtedly right in seeing the Pharisees as learned scholars whose meticulous application and development of OT law massively influenced Judaism though his identification of Pharisees with scribes and his handling of the development of oral law are simplistic.

We hold that the Pharisees were a nonpriestly group of uncertain origin, generally learned, committed to the oral law, and concerned with developing Halakah (rules of conduct based on deductions from the law). Most teachers of the law were Pharisees; and the Sanhedrin included men from their number as well (see comment at 21:23), though the leadership of the Sanhedrin belonged to the priestly Sadducees.

The second area needing clarification is the way Matthew refers to Jewish leaders. It is universally agreed that Matthew is quite strongly anti-Pharisaic. Recently however, more and more scholars have argued that Matthew's picture of the Pharisees reflects the rabbis of the period A.D. 80–100, not the situation around A.D. 30. His grasp of the other Jewish parties, which largely fell away after A.D. 70, is shallow and sometimes wrong. Gaston thinks the depth of Matthew's ignorance, especially of the Sadducees, is "astonishing."

The question is complex. Certain observations, however, will qualify the charge of Matthew's ignorance.

1. If Matthew's sole target had been the rabbis of A.D. 80–100, designated "Pharisees," it is astonishing that they are virtually unmentioned during the Passion Week and the passion narrative when feeling against Jesus reached its height. What we discover is that the chief opponents are priests, elders, members of the Sanhedrin, which is just what we would expect in the vicinity of Jerusalem before A.D. 70. This demonstrates that Matthew is not entirely ignorant of historical distinctions regarding Jewish leaders; it calls in question the thesis that his opponents are exclusively Pharisees and urges caution in making similar judgments.

2. Matthew mentions the Sadducees more often than all the other evangelists combined. If Matthew was so ignorant of them, and if they were irrelevant to his alleged circumstances in A.D. 80–100, why did he multiply references to them?

3. Matthew demonstrates that he was aware of some of the Sadducees' doctrinal distinctives (see comment at 22:23–33). This should make us very cautious in evaluating the most difficult point—viz., that in five places Matthew uses the phrase "Pharisees and

Sadducees” in a way that links them closely (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 11–12). This linking is peculiar to Matthew. The known antipathy between the two groups was sufficiently robust that many modern commentators have concluded this Gospel was written late enough and by someone far enough removed from the setting of A.D. 30 for this incongruity to slip into the text. But in addition to Matthew’s historical awareness, two complementary explanations largely remove the difficulty.

First, the linking of Pharisees and Sadducees under one article in Matthew 3:7 may reflect, not their theological agreement, but their common mission. Just as the Sanhedrin raised questions about Jesus’ authority, it is intrinsically likely they sent delegates to sound out John the Baptist. The Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6); and their mutual distrust makes it likely that the delegation was made up of representatives from both parties. The fourth Gospel suggests this. The “Jews of Jerusalem” (who else but the Sanhedrin?) sent “priests and Levites” (John 1:19)—certainly Sadducees—to ask John who he was; but Pharisees were also sent (John 1:24). Matthew’s language may therefore preserve accurate historical reminiscence. Something similar may be presupposed in 16:1. We must always remember that though the Pharisees and Sadducees could fight each other fiercely on certain issues, their political circumstances required that they work together at many levels.

Second, though the linking of the Pharisees and Sadducees in the remaining references (16:6, 11–12) appears to make their teaching common, the context demands restraint. In certain circumstances, a Baptist may warn against the “teaching of the Presbyterians and Anglicans,” not because he is unaware of fundamental differences between them (or even among them!), but because he wishes to set their pedobaptism against his own views. Quite clearly in 16:5–12 Jesus cannot be denouncing everything the Pharisees and Sadducees teach, for some of what they teach he holds in common with them. The particular point of teaching in this context is their attitude toward Jesus and their desire to domesticate revelation and authenticate it—an attitude so blind it cannot recognize true revelation when it appears (see comment at 16:1–4). It is against this “yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” that Jesus warns his disciples; in his view both parties were guilty of the same error.

4. Categories for the Jewish leaders overlap in the Gospels, Matthew included. As far as we know, the Sanhedrin, for instance, was made up of Sadducees, Pharisees, and elders. The Sadducees were mostly priests. The elders were mostly lay nobility and probably primarily Pharisees. Thus “Pharisees” in the Sanhedrin were “laymen” in the sense that they were not priests; but many of them were scribes (“teachers of the law”) and thus different from the elders. When 21:23 speaks of the chief priests and elders of the people coming to Jesus, it is probably referring to members of the Sanhedrin described in terms of their clerical status rather than their theological position. The ambiguities are considerable, but we must avoid indefensible disjunctions.

5. Our own ignorance of who the Pharisees were and of the distinctive beliefs of the Sadducees (we know them almost entirely through the writings of their opponents—“almost” because some scholars think that Sirach, for instance, is a proto-Sadducean document) should make us hesitate before ascribing “astonishing” ignorance to the evangelist. The astonishing ignorance may be our own. One suspects that in some instances Matthew’s treatment of Jewish leaders is being pressed into a mold to suit a date of A.D. 80–100. The truth is that our knowledge of both Judaism and Christianity during that period has formidable gaps. Though

Matthew may have been written then—though in my view this is unlikely—his treatment of Jewish leaders cannot be used to defend the late date view.

But is Matthew's polemic so harsh that he must be considered anti-Semitic (cf. the commentary at 23:1–36; 26:57–59)? The judgment of Legasse is sound. Matthew's sternest denunciations are not racially motivated; they are prompted by the response of people to Jesus. These denunciations extend to professing believers whose lives betray the falseness of their profession (7:21–23; 22:11–14) as well as to Jews; the governing motives are concern for the perseverance of the Christian community and for the authoritative proclamation of the "gospel of the kingdom" to "all nations," Jew and Gentile alike (see comments at 28:18–20), to bring all to submission to Jesus Messiah.

g. *Mission*

It has long been recognized that the closing pericope (28:16–20) is fully intended to be the climax toward which the entire Gospel moves. By tying together some of Matthew's most dominant themes, these verses give them a new depth that reaches back and sheds light on the entire Gospel. For instance, the Great Commission is perceived to be the result of God's providential ordering of history (1:1–17) to bring to a fallen world a Messiah who would save his people from their sins (1:21); but the universal significance of Jesus' birth, hinted at in 1:1 and repeatedly raised in the flow of the narrative (e.g., see comments at 2:1–12; 4:14–16, 25; 8:5–13; 10:18; 13:36–52; 15:21–28; 24:9, 14) is now confirmed by the concluding lines.

We have already observed that the extent of the Great Commission has been limited by some—though on inadequate grounds—to Gentiles only (section 8, see comments at 28:18–20). Matthew does not trace the context of the people of God from a Jewish one to an exclusively Gentile one but from a Jewish context to a racially inclusive one. Unlike Luke (Luke 21:24) and Paul (Rom 11:25–27), Matthew raises no questions about Israel's future as a distinct people.

h. *Miracles*

The biblical writers do not see miracles as divine interventions in an ordered and closed universe. Rather, God as Lord of the universe and of history sustains every thing that takes place under his sovereignty. Sometimes, however, he does extraordinary things; and then we in the modern world call them "miracles." Biblical writers preferred terms like "sign," "wonder," or "power." Parallels between Jesus and Hellenistic miracle workers are not so close as some form critics have thought (cf. Albright and Mann, pp. cxxiv–cxxxi). On the other hand, the value of miracles as proof of Jesus' deity is not so conclusive as some conservative expositors have thought.

Miracles in Matthew share certain characteristics with those in the other Synoptics, and these characteristics must be understood before Matthew's distinctives can be explored. Jesus' miracles are bound up with the inbreaking of the promised kingdom (8:16–17; 12:22–30; cf. Luke 11:14–23). They are part of his messianic work (Mt 4:23; 11:4–6) and therefore the dual evidence of the dawning of the kingdom and of the status of Jesus the King Messiah. This does not mean that Jesus did miracles on demand as a kind of spectacular attestation (see comments

at Mt 12:38–42; cf. John 4:48). Faith and obedience are not guaranteed by great miracles, though faith and God’s mighty power working through Jesus are linked in several ways. Lack of faith may be an impediment to this power (e.g., Mt 17:19–20), not because God’s power is curtailed, but because real trust in him submits to his powerful reign and expects mercies from him (e.g., 15:28; cf. Mark 9:24).

“Nature miracles” (the stilling of the storm or the multiplication of loaves and fish) attest, not only the universal sweep of God’s power, but may in some cases (calming the storm) provide the creation rebelling against God with a foretaste of restored order—an order to be climaxed by the consummation of the kingdom. In some cases (the multiplication of loaves and fish, the withered fig tree) miracles constitute a “prophetic symbolism” that promises unqualified fruition (the messianic banquets the certainty of judgment) at the End.

Matthew’s miracles are distinctive for the brevity with which they are reported. He condenses introductions and conclusions, omits secondary characters and the like (see comments at 8:14). Nevertheless it is too much to say, as Held does, “The miracles are not important for their own sakes, but by reason of the message they contain” (Bornkamm, *Tradition*, p. 210). This might almost suggest that the tacticity of the miracles is of no consequence to Matthew provided their message is preserved. Matthew himself specifically disallows this (11:3–6). All the evangelists hold that miracles point beyond the mere factuality of wonderful events: in this Matthew is no different from the others. He simply shifts the balance of event and implication a little in order to stress the latter.

The particular themes most flavored by Matthew in connection with Jesus’ miracles are worked out in the commentary.

i. *The disciples’ understanding and faith*

Ever since the work of G. Barth (in Bornkamm et al., *Tradition*, pp. 105ff.), many scholars have held that whereas in Mark the disciples do not understand what Jesus says till he explains it to them in secret, Matthew attributes large and instant understanding to the disciples. Indeed, this is what sets them apart from the crowd: the disciples understand, the outsiders do not. Where the disciples falter and must improve is not in their understanding but in their faith.

The thesis can be defended by a careful selection of the data, but it will not withstand close scrutiny. Apart from depending too much on the so-called messianic secret in Mark (see comments in this vol. at Mark 9:9), it does not adequately treat the disciples’ request for private instruction (Mt 13:36), their failure to understand Jesus’ teaching about his passion even after his explanations (e.g., 16:21–26; 17:23; 26:51–56), and the passages that deal with “stumbling” or “falling away.” These are not peripheral matters; they are integral to what Jesus and Matthew say about discipleship.

The thesis also errs, not only for the two reasons mentioned above, but also for a third. Adopting a doctrinaire form of redaction criticism, it so stresses what the relevant passages reveal about Matthew’s church that it blunts their real thrust. In particular the failure of the disciples to understand the significance of Jesus’ passion and resurrection predictions is largely a function of the disciples’ unique place in salvation history. They were unprepared before the events to accept the notion of a crucified and resurrected Messiah; not a few of Jesus’ christological claims are sufficiently vague (cf. Carson, “Christological Ambiguities”) that their

full import could be grasped by those with a traditional Jewish mind-set only after Calvary and the empty tomb. To this extent the disciples' experience of coming to deeper understanding and faith was unique because it was locked into a phase of salvation history rendered forever obsolete by the triumph of Jesus' resurrection.

Matthew's readers, whether in the first century or today, may profit from studying the disciples' experience as he records it. But to try subjectively to imitate the disciples' coming to full faith and understanding following Jesus' resurrection is futile. Rather we should look back on this witness to the divine self-disclosure, observing God's wisdom and care as through his Son he progressively revealed himself and his purposes to redeem a fallen and rebellious race. Feeding our faith and understanding on the combined testimony of the earliest witnesses who tell how they arrived by a unique historical sequence at their faith and understanding, we shall learn to focus our attention, not on the disciples, but on their Lord. This is not to say that the disciples have nothing to teach us about personal growth; rather, it is to insist that we shall basically misunderstand this Gospel if we do not see that it deals with a unique coming to faith and understanding. This topic is so important that the commentary refers to it repeatedly (cf. 13:10–13, 23, 36, 43, 51–52; 14:15–17; 15:15–16; 16:21–28; 17:13, 23; 20:17–19, 22; 23:13–36; 24:1; 28:17). Elsewhere it has been comprehensively treated by Trotter.

12. Literary genre

The interpretation of any piece of literature is affected by an understanding of its genre. A sonnet, novel, parable, history, fable, free verse, or an aphorism must be read according to its literary form.

a. *Gospel*

What, then, is a Gospel? Many theories have been proposed and affinities discovered in other writings (e.g., apocalyptic literature, OT books, Graeco-Roman biographies, etc.). Recently Talbert has argued that the Gospel belongs to the genre of Graeco-Roman biography. In a convincing rejoinder, Aune⁷⁷ has shown that Talbert has misunderstood not a few ancient sources and has arrived at his conclusions by adopting ambiguous categories that hide essential differences. Aune rightly insists that the Gospels belong in a class of their own. This does not mean that the Gospels have no relation to other genres. The truth is that “‘new’ genres were constantly emerging during the Graeco-Roman period, if by ‘new’ we mean a recombination of earlier forms and genres into novel configurations.”

Thus our Gospels are made up of many pericopes, some belonging to recognized genres, others with close affinities to recognized genres. Each must be weighed, but the result is a flexible form that aims to give a selective account of Jesus, including his teaching and miracles and culminating in his death by crucifixion and his burial and resurrection. The selection includes certain key points in his career (his baptism, ministry, passion, and resurrection) and aims at a credible account of these historical events. At the same time the material is organized so as to stress certain subjects and motifs. The writing is not dispassionate but confessional—something the evangelists considered an advantage. Some of the material is organized along thematic lines, some according to a loose chronology; still other pericopes are linked by some

combination of catchwords, themes, OT attestation, genre, and logical coherence. The result is not exactly a history, biography, theology, confession, catechism, tract, homage, or letter—though it is in some respects all these. It is a “Gospel,” a presentation of the “good news” of Jesus the Messiah.

b. *Midrash*

Scholars have increasingly recognized the Jewishness of the NT and have therefore cultivated Jewish literary categories for understanding these documents. Among the most important of these categories is midrash. One application of this work, the lectionary theory of Goulder, has already been discussed (section 8). But the most recent development is the commentary by Gundry. He argues that Q is larger than is customarily recognized, embracing material normally designated “M” (cf. section 3), including the birth narratives in Matthew 1–2. What Matthew does according to Gundry, is apply “midrashic techniques” to the tradition he takes over, adding nonhistorical touches to historical material, sometimes creating stories, designated “midrashim,” to make theological points, even though the stories, like parables, have no historical referent.

Everything depends on definition. Etymologically “midrash” simply means “interpretation.” But in this sense, every comment on another text is midrash—including this commentary. Such a definition provides no basis for saying that because Matthew relates midrashic stories in Matthew 1–2 they are not historically true. Most other definitions, however accurate, are not sufficient to yield Gundry’s conclusion. Derrett (*NT Studies*, 2:205ff.), for instance, defines midrashic method in terms of its allusiveness to many sources, not in terms of historicity at all. Snodgrass defines midrash, not as a genre, but “as a process in which forms of tradition develop and enrich or intensify later adaptation of Old Testament texts.” Many other definitions have been offered.⁸⁰

To compound the difficulty, the term seems to undergo a semantic shift within Jewish literature. By the time of the Babylonian Talmud (fourth century A.D.), midrash had developed a more specialized meaning akin to what Gundry clearly wants. Other Jewish commentaries, mainly the Qumran Pesharim, were characterized by three things: (1) they attempted to deal systematically with every point in the text; (2) they limited themselves almost exclusively to the text; (3) they adopted a revelatory stance toward the text that identified virtually every point in the text with a point of fulfillment in the interpreter’s day or later, without any sense of historical context. By contrast the midrashim worked through the text of Scripture more haphazardly, using Scripture as a sort of peg on which to hang discourse, stories, and other pieces to illuminate the theological meaning of the text. This was in conscious distinction from “peshat,” the more “literal” meaning of the text. But in the first two centuries, it is very doubtful whether midrash had a meaning even this specialized. It referred rather to “an interpretive exposition however derived and irrespective of the type of material under consideration” (Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 32).

In a wide-ranging chapter, Moo (“Use of OT,” pp. 8ff.) discusses the various ways in which literature that treats the OT text may be analyzed. He distinguishes literary genre (form and general content), citation procedures (e.g., explicit quotation, allusion, conceptual influence, and the like), appropriation technique (the ways the OT text is applied to the contemporary

setting), and the hermeneutical axioms implicitly adopted by the interpreter (e.g., that the Scripture was a closed entity needing to be ingeniously interpreted to elicit answers to questions about conduct not specifically treated in the text).

Now if “midrash” refers to genre, in the first century it is too wide a term to bear the weight Gundry places on it and is inadequate on other grounds (*Matthew*, pp. 63ff.). Attempts to define “midrash” in terms of appropriation techniques have not proved successful, because none of the techniques is restricted to midrash. Moo tentatively suggests that “midrash” be characterized “in terms of the hermeneutical axioms which guide the approach” (“Use of OT,” p. 66). There is considerable merit in this; but of course this results in largely limiting midrash to rabbinic Judaism, since the operative hermeneutical axioms include a largely noneschatological perception of itself and a deep preoccupation with enunciating its identity and directing its conduct (corresponding roughly to the two forms haggadic midrash and Halakic midrash). By contrast the stories of Matthew 1–2 are fundamentally eschatological: they are said to fulfill Scripture in the context of a book in which messianic fulfillment and the dawning of the eschatological kingdom constitute fundamental themes. Matthew 1–2 is little concerned with rules of conduct or the identity of the people of God. It bursts with christological concern and a teleological perspective.

When distinctions like these are borne in mind, the modern category “Midrash-Pesher,” which some wish to apply to Matthew’s treatment of the OT (cf. Moo “Use of OT,” p. 174), is seen as an inadequate label for the Qumran commentaries. Midrash and Pesher are alike in many of their techniques, but the hermeneutical axioms are profoundly different. But if the makeshift Midrash-Pesher is inappropriate for the commentaries of Qumran, it is usually inappropriate for Matthew. And in any case it is definitely not a genre recognized by Jewish readers of the first century.

These conclusions are inevitable:

1. Gundry cannot legitimately appeal to “midrash” as a well-defined and recognized genre of literature in the first century.
2. In particular, if “midrash” reflects genre, as opposed to hermeneutical axioms irrelevant to Matthew, it is being given a sense more or less well-defined only from the fourth century on. This raises the question of what we could expect Matthew’s readers to have thought. Gundry argues that the reason the church has failed to recognize the “midrashic” (and therefore nonhistorical) nature of Matthew 1–2 is that this Gospel was quickly taken over by the Gentiles who had little appreciation for Jewish literary genres. This plausible argument is weakened by strong evidence that midrash in any specialized sense relevant to Gundry’s thesis is too late in Jewish circles to be useful.
3. Even if we adopt this late narrowing of the term “midrash,” it is still inappropriate as a description of Matthew’s “M” material. Although the Jewish Midrashim are often only loosely connected with the texts they “expound,” yet a line of continuity runs through those OT texts. By contrast Matthew’s continuity in chapters 1–2, for instance, is established by the story line, not the OT texts, all of which could be removed without affecting the passage’s cohesion.
4. Much of the force of Gundry’s argument depends on his assessment of the tendencies in Matthew’s editing of sources. Gundry feels that demonstrable tendencies in Matthew require appeal to midrashic technique as the only adequate explanation of material that diverges so radically from the sources. But another assessment of the same evidence is often possible. Few

will be convinced by his postulation of a common source behind Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. Moreover some of the “tendencies” he detects in Matthew—e.g., he follows the now popular line on the disciples’ understanding (see section 11. i)—are better interpreted in other ways. These points depend on details of exegesis and emerge in this commentary. (See also the review of Gundry in Carson, “Gundry on Matthew.”)

An important element in Gundry’s argument is that the stories cannot be taken as history because, read that way, they include some demonstrable errors. For some of these matters, see the commentary in loc. Here it is sufficient to say that whoever uses “midrash” of any part of Matthew’s Gospel should tell his readers precisely what the term means.

c. *Miscellaneous*

Several other important forms of literature make up the constituent parts of our canonical Gospels: wisdom sayings, genealogies, discourses, parables, and so forth. The most important receive brief treatment in the commentary the most extensive note being devoted to parables (see at 13:3).¹

¹ D. A. Carson, “[Matthew](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 1–41.