

THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW

FOREWORD

This book is intended as the course-booklet for a course sponsored by the Union of Monastic Superiors. The participants gather for some initial lectures, and then depart with the books and study on their own. The questions at the end of each chapter are intended for essays to be sent in for comment; but they will still be useful as a focus for private study.

The book is obviously not intended as a continuous commentary on the text of the gospel. Rather it is a series of snapshots or of probes on particular topics. I hope these will give an orientation which will guide the reader into a deeper understanding of the evangelist's approach, giving an insight into the message, and so making it easier to read and appreciate the Good News of Jesus which the evangelist brings to us.

Some justification should be given for the topics chosen and the order in which they are presented. Before the gospel itself is approached, a preliminary chapter is necessary, discussing the context of the world in which the evangelist wrote.

Specifically on Matthew, a preliminary chapter investigates the methods and literary techniques which are characteristic of the evangelist and constitute, so to speak, his personal finger-print. Only after this is it appropriate to discuss the material on which Matthew was working, and whence he derived it, or in other words, the Synoptic Problem. One of the aspects of Matthew which has recently come to be appreciated more and more is the specifically Jewish character of his thought and writing (Chapter 3); in several ways this determines his presentation. So this is discussed first in general (Chapter 4) before its particular applications are approached, in Chapter 5 his picture of Christ, and in Chapter 6 his picture of the Church as the New Israel. Finally in Chapter 7 the Sermon on the Mount is discussed, and in Chapter 8 Matthew's expectations of the final rewards and punishments are examined.

I am grateful to Sister Zoe of Turvey Abbey for suggesting that I should undertake this work, and to the score or so of monastic participants on previous courses; their essays have been stimulating and often challenging. They show that prayer and critical study complement rather than undermine each other.

Henry Wansbrough

Feast of St Alban Roe, 1998

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IMPORTANT NOTE

Throughout this study it is essential to read the text whenever a reference is given, and to become as familiar as possible with the whole text of Mark and Luke.

It would be extremely useful, before beginning this study, to photocopy a version of Matthew and paste each page onto a blank A4 page. This will provide you with a working copy of the gospel with wide margins, so plenty of room for making notes.

BOOKS

It is essential to have something else to read, to fill out and clarify this book. I would suggest, in order of priority:

The New Jerusalem Bible - if possible use the study edition (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1994). The introductions and footnotes provide wide-ranging historical and theological help, though I would no longer agree with it all. For texts, when I have not translated directly from the Greek, this is the version I have used.

Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford University Press, 1989). This has a good, clear introduction to many gospel topics.

Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992) - a series of essays and articles on topics in Matthew.

Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) - based on the author's major commentary, nine simple chapters, working continuously through Matthew.

Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Michael Glazier, Collegeville, 1991) - a full continuous commentary in the excellent Sacra Pagina series.

R.T. France, *Matthew, Evangelist and Teacher* (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1989) - a warm, fairly conservative, presentation of Matthew's theology.

The Interpretation of Matthew, edited by Graham N. Stanton (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, new edition, 1995) - a collection of important essays by scholars, which have been important in the formation of modern views on Matthew. Quite serious reading.

John Riches, *Matthew* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) - quite stiff reading, but short. Perhaps best kept till the end of this course and used as critical revision.

Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London, S.P.C.K., 1974), includes a brilliant analysis of Matthew's style, imagery and poetry. Goulder's use of the word 'midrash' is very general and his lectionary-theory unlikely, but his literary analysis is invaluable.

Chapter One

Before the Gospels

1. THE JEWS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

A. An alien race in a unified world

From the time of the Babylonian Exile (587 BC) the Jews became scattered round the mediterranean world. They stood out from other people by their strange habits. As the mediterranean world became more homogeneous, first under one Empire, then under another, they stood out more and more.

First Alexander the Great (died 323 BC) created an unprecedentedly great empire which spread all over the eastern mediterranean from Greece round to Egypt and as far East as Afghanistan. All this area developed a single culture, known as 'hellenistic' from the Greek for 'Greek'. The same cults, theatres, temples, designs of cities are to be found everywhere. Everywhere a reasonably good standard of Greek was spoken, less sophisticated and delicate than the classical Greek of fifth century Athens, but still at its best a cultivated and distinguished literary language. Communication over the whole area would have been easy, for the same language and books would be familiar everywhere.

After Alexander's death, his empire was divided between three generals. It eventually became three empires, the Macedonian, the Syrian (or Seleucid, because these kings were descended from Seleucus) and the Egyptian (or Ptolemaic, because these kings were descended from Ptolemy). Palestine lay between these two latter empires and was dominated first by one, then by the other, depending on which was more powerful at the time.

In 167 BC the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes attempted to suppress the peculiarities of Judaism within his kingdom, and particularly in Palestine. He was called 'Epiphanes' because, like a number of eastern monarchs at this time, he claimed to be a god, or at least a manifestation of a god ('Epiphany' means 'Appearance', 'Manifestation'). He attempted to stop the Jews practising all their strange habits, to stop circumcising their male children, to start eating pork, to give up their strange, barbaric, mountain God, called Yahweh, who would accept no other God beside him, and embrace the many gods of the Greek world.

The Greek world had a god to preside over every activity, Artemis for hunting, Hephaistus for metal-working, Cybele for agriculture, Ares for war, and so on, while the Jews had only one God. In consequence the Jews were a nation apart, because all the public activities, such as plays in the magnificent open theatres (many of which still stand today) or Olympic and other Games, involved sacrificing to these gods, and so were closed to the Jews. In addition competitors in the Games were always naked, which the Jews thought shameful; and in fact their sexual morals and family life were a good deal more healthy than those of the hellenistic world. Then there was the curious Jewish custom of observing one day in seven (the week did not exist as a division of time in the hellenistic world) as sacred to their God, and refusing to work or engage in most activities. If the Jews were to be integrated into Antiochus' empire, it was essential that they should abandon this separatism.

Antiochus failed, largely due to the resistance spearheaded by a priestly family from Modein, on

the coastal plain, who later became known as the Maccabees (or 'Hammers'). They soon formed the first dynasty of Jewish rulers since the Exile, and achieved for Palestine a large measure of independence from Syria. They were followed by the Hasmonean Kings, who ruled the country until Pompey the Great overran it in 66 BC. By then they had enjoyed nearly a century of independent existence.

B. Palestine under Roman Rule

During Pompey's campaigns in the East he used the services of an Idumaeen (from the territory south of Judaea) called Antipater as purveyor of supplies to his armies. Antipater became rich and influential, and eventually became the native ruler under Rome. His son, Herod, was appointed king in 40 BC. He was a friend of the Emperor Augustus, and the Romans envisaged his task to be to introduce Roman civilisation into the backward territory of Judaea. To this there was fierce resistance, and Herod, despite his title of King Herod the Great, was intensely disliked by the Jewish religious authorities. For one thing, he was only half a Jew (on his mother's side); for another he was known to sit very loose to the Jewish Law, at any rate outside Judaea. From his immense wealth he made great donations to the cities with a large Jewish community - he paid for the streets of Ephesus to be paved with marble - and also built standard hellenistic public buildings in Jerusalem, such as a theatre and a race-course. He was also responsible for building the magnificent Tomb of the Patriarchs which still stands at Hebron, and above all the splendid Temple at Jerusalem. So grandiose was this Temple that the Roman writer Pliny the Elder says it made Jerusalem 'far the most distinguished city of the East'. He also built fortified palaces in his kingdom, including his winter palace at Massada and his summer palace at the Herodium near Bethlehem, whose ruins still show traces of their splendour and wealth. They were built in the Roman style, but the surviving frescoes show that he was careful to avoid offending Jewish religious susceptibilities: the paintings are 'aniconic', avoiding all representations of humans or animals (in accordance with the current interpretation of the prohibition in the Law of graven images), and employing only geometric and floral designs.

At his death in 4 BC his kingdom was divided between his four surviving sons, who were named 'tetrarchs' (rulers of a quarter). Judaea and its capital Jerusalem were allotted to Archelaus, but Archelaus proved himself such a disastrous ruler that after ten years he was deposed and replaced by a Roman Prefect. The high priest continued to exercise a great deal of administrative power, but always under the supervision of the Roman governor. Symbolically, the high priestly vestments were kept in the custody of the governor, and one after another of the high priests were deposed because they were unsatisfactory to the Romans. Their activity as local ruler was therefore strictly controlled. During the ministry of Jesus, however, the high priest was Caiaphas, whose term of office lasted nearly 20 years, the last decade of which was during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. There must have been a fair understanding between the two of them.

Of the Roman governors we know most about Pontius Pilate. The Jewish historian Josephus and the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria both characterise his rule as tyrannical and unjust. He was eventually deposed by the Roman governor of Syria (his local superior) in 36 AD for his ruthless over-reaction to a messianic revolt in Samaria. However, only limited credence can be placed in the accounts of Josephus and Philo; both had a vested interest in exaggerating the harshness of the Roman regime in Judaea, and so excusing the Jewish reaction to it.

There had been minor insurrections against Roman rule in Palestine before this, but from now

onwards resistance stiffened and became more and more violent. Armed resistance was led by the Zealots, and eventually a full-scale revolt broke out in 66 AD. Rome reacted strongly, bringing armies to besiege Jerusalem, and in 70 AD the city was captured and the magnificent Temple was sacked. Of the three important groupings of the Jews, Sadducees, Pharisees and Zealots, only the Pharisees survived as a party. They re-formed at the city of Jamnia on the coastal plain, under the leadership of a Galilean rabbi, Yohanan ben Zakkai, reasserting and codifying the traditions of the Law. It is from there that the tradition of Pharisaic Judaism, the ancestor of all modern Judaism, spread.

C. Jewish Communities of the Mediterranean World

In the other parts of the mediterranean world, the Jews did not suffer from the persecution of the Syrian king Antiochus, and continued to develop in peace. In many cities by the time of Jesus there were large and flourishing Jewish communities. In Egyptian Alexandria they obtained the right to function as a political entity within the state, a city within a city, with its own administration. Cyrene in North Africa was not unlike. In many cities of the mediterranean world inscriptions show that there were synagogues, and large cities like Corinth or Rome had many synagogues, so many different Jewish communities. Each of these communities was ruled by a council of elders (in Greek *presbyteroi*, whence our 'presbyters'), presided by an *archisynagogos* ('president of the synagogue'). This was a temporary and elective office, which could be held several times by the same man.

Most societies dislike strangers, especially if they are clannish and rich. The Jews were forced by their peculiarities and differences from others (and especially their idea of cultic purity) to keep themselves to themselves and clear of others. Others did not really understand them and their strange ways, and consequently were suspicious of them. They trusted each other; they could by Law charge no interest to each other on loans, and this helped them to become already a comparatively rich group, sprouting into an early form of international banking system. They also had a slightly special relationship to the Roman emperors: their unpopularity made them rely on the emperor for protection, and the emperor normally took advantage of this to use them as supporters in the various cities. This in turn made them more unpopular.

D. The Pax Romana

By the time of the New Testament, communication between these communities was frequent and easy. The whole mediterranean world was ruled by Rome. But Rome, once it had conquered the world, did little more than ensure that the peace was kept, that there was a fair amount of justice and that they made enough money out of the provincials not only to pay for the armies but also to ensure a lavish income for their officials who administered them. The Romans had a stranglehold over most financial transactions within the Empire. But the whole area was a network of independent city-states, each with its own constitution and system of government, often ruling only a few hundred square miles of territory. This system was practicable because Rome prevented armed squabbles between these little states, and would judge cases of dispute between them. The Romans realised that local rulers understand their own people best, and also spared themselves the trouble of administering these territories - apart from taxing them heavily and lending rulers money at exorbitant rates of interest, interest which these rulers of course recouped from their subjects. Taxation was doubtless heavy, but modern estimates vary about just how oppressive it was to the poorer people.

Communications were easy because of the Roman peace which prevailed everywhere from 31 BC for a couple of centuries. Roman rule ensured that there was no war and no piracy. The great Roman roads, like 12-foot-wide walls sunk into the ground, criss-crossed the Roman world. This made land traffic easier and more rapid than it would be for another 1800 years. In crisis the emperor Tiberius once rode 200 miles (with frequent change of horses) in 24 hours. A steady 10-15 miles a day was uncomfortable and tiring but possible for the ordinary traveller by road. By sea travel was far quicker, though kept to an essential minimum in the dangerous winter (losses at sea were regular; a high proportion of the legal cases which have come down to us concerns insurance-disputes). Rome to Alexandria was possible in five days by ship, and Scipio showed the Roman senate how dangerously close Africa was to Italy by showing them a fig picked in Carthage the previous day. Trade flourished, and one merchant in Asia Minor claims on his tombstone to have made over 70 journeys to Rome. It has been calculated that in his dozen years of journeying Paul covered over 10,000 miles - and he was stable in Corinth or Ephesus for several of those years.

In this unified world there were travelling preachers and teachers in large numbers. Students travelled to different universities from Rome, but especially to Athens. Philosophers of the school called 'Cynics' travelled in poverty to spread their brand of knowledge. In a world where scientific causes of illness and disaster were poorly understood religion - and still more, superstition - held an important place. Those with means and leisure travelled to the famous shrines and centres of healing, like the shrine of Aesculapius at Epidaurus in Greece, whence stem a number of tales of miraculous healing. There were special centres of the 'mystery religions', promising salvation to those who were initiated into their secret rites, whose secrets were so closely guarded that they were never written down, and have remained largely secret to this day. Among these hordes of religious travellers and pilgrims, someone like Paul and his companions, pedalling their own particular recipe for salvation, would have excited little comment. The scene in the Acts of the Apostles of Paul being invited to speak to a group of philosophers at Athens is true to life. It was this ease of travel which enabled Paul to make his missionary journeys, travelling between the Jewish communities in Asia Minor and Greece, and to send the letters which have come down to us. His letters also provide evidence of the frequency of travel and communication between other members of these communities. Especially the greetings at the end of the letter to the Romans show how many people in the Christian community at Rome Paul had met, and how many more he knew about, even without going to Rome.

2. THE TRADITION BEHIND THE GOSPELS

The literary character of the gospels as we have them leaves no doubt that the gospel material was handed down for some years by word of mouth. Education in the ancient world included a large measure of memorisation, since books were scarce and expensive. In the Jewish schools of the first century pupils learnt the Bible by heart, and then went on to learn by heart the sayings of the rabbis. With memories so trained, learning the tradition of the deeds and sayings of Jesus would pose no problem to the first Christians. Passages learnt by heart are preserved for us in the letters of Paul.

A. The Early *Kerygma*

Two passages in the First Letter to the Corinthians clearly formed part of the basic instruction in Christianity learnt by heart by the new converts.

Paul writes:

The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that **Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that on the third day he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and later to the Twelve, and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time.**

(1 Cor 15.3-5)

This statement was not coined by Paul himself. The words for 'handed on' and 'received' are the technical terms used in rabbinic literature for the passing on and learning by heart of the traditions of the elders. Various terms used in the statement itself are uncharacteristic of Paul. He always speaks of 'sin' in the singular, not the plural as here. He never uses the expression 'the Twelve', and so on. This passage therefore represents the basic statement of the resurrection, learnt by heart by new converts.

Similarly about the eucharist he writes:

For the tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you is that **on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' And in the same way, with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.'**

(1 Cor 11.23-25)

Again he introduces the statement by the same technical terms, and again there are expressions uncharacteristic of Paul. Elsewhere he uses 'body' only of the Christian community. Several uncharacteristic grammatical constructions are apparent in the Greek text, though not the English. This statement on the eucharist differs from the account in the gospels only in minute particulars. It is probably a different form of the same tradition, handed down to all new Christians and eventually incorporated into the gospel text.

B. Christian hymns

The first Christians were encouraged to bring their own hymns to the liturgical assembly. Paul writes, 'When you come together each of you brings a psalm or some instruction or a revelation' (1 Cor 14.26). From the letters of Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia half a century later, we know that the Christians came together, as he put it, 'to sing hymns to Christ as to a god' (Epistles, Book 10, letter 96). One such hymn may have been used by Paul in Philippians 2.6-11:

**Being in the form of God,
he did not count equality with God something to be grasped,
but he emptied himself,
taking the form of a Servant.**

**Becoming as human beings are,
and in every way like a human being,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.**

**And for this God raised him high,
and gave him the name which is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend**
in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
and every tongue acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

Paul's additions (according to one reconstruction - the details are disputed) are given in normal type. In this hymn there are at least four expressions never otherwise used by Paul, as well as other differences. For example, Paul himself applies the word and the theology of the Servant of the Lord to himself, not to Christ. The carefully balanced structure is also quite unlike Paul's nervous and staccato way of writing. This is probably, therefore, another piece of traditional material incorporated into the New Testament.

3. THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE GOSPELS

A. The Variety of the Tradition

The variety of forms in which a single saying on the same matter has come down to us shows that the sayings circulated in different forms. This is the natural result of circulation by word of mouth. It is true of stories handed down in any closed community.

1. Paul's version of Jesus' saying on divorce differs from those in the gospels, in a way which is compatible only with being handed down orally:

1 Cor 7.10-11 To the married I give this ruling, and this is not mine but the Lord's: a wife must not be separated from her husband - or, if she has already left him, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband - and a husband must not divorce his wife.

Mark 10.11-12 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.

Matthew 5.32 Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Each writer has adjusted the saying to the circumstances of his own audience. Mark, writing to a gentile audience, adjusts it to include the possibility of a woman initiating divorce, which was not possible within Judaism. Matthew includes an exception for marriages which were illicit (the Jewish prohibitions of marriage within certain degrees of blood relationship did not hold for gentiles, so gentiles converted to Christianity might find themselves in a marriage considered illicit within Judaism).

2. Similarly Paul's saying on the reward due to a missionary is probably based on the same saying as Mt 10.10 // Lk 10.7:

Mt 10.10 The labourer deserves his keep.

1 Cor 9.14 Those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel.

3. Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.8-9) quotes from Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis at the beginning of the second century, traditions of miracles not contained in the gospels or the Acts, one a tradition of raising of the dead, passed down by the daughters of Philip, and another that Justus Barsabas drank poison without being harmed. These may be only examples of stories circulating in the Christian community which were not finally included in the gospels. At some stage there must have been a selection process. Some scholars would hold that the so-called *Gospel of Thomas* contains many sayings which represent a different oral tradition of sayings contained in the canonical gospels.

4. The relationship between the three synoptic gospels must be considered later (Chapter 3), but it is clear that the same story or saying is often contained in the gospel of John in a different form from that given in the synoptics. The story of the Healing at Cana in John 4.46-53 is similar in

many but not all respects to that given in Mt 8.5-13 and Lk 7.1-10; the kind of similarity and difference can best be explained in terms of oral tradition. Similarly the Anointing at Bethany in Mk 14.3-9 and Mt 26.6-13 is probably an oral tradition of the same story as that given in Jn 12.1-8. A third example is the synoptic account of the Agony in the Garden and the Johannine sayings about the approaching passion in Jn 12.27: 'Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say, "Father, save me from this hour"? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour.'

A number of sayings in John could be from the same oral tradition as those in the synoptics:

Jn 1.27 I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.

Mt 3.11 I am not fit to carry his sandals.

Jn 12.25 Anyone who loses his life saves it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Mk 8.35 Anyone who loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.

Jn 20.23 If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you retain anyone's sine, they are retained.

Mt 18.18 Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Jn 13.20 Whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

Mt 10.40 Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

B. 'Pearls on a String'

In the years after the First World War three German scholars were responsible for the development of the method known as the History of Forms or Form Criticism (*Formgeschichte*). Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann established that the gospels were handed down orally not as one entity but as units, which were subsequently joined together 'like pearls on a string'. Single units, stories or sayings, were originally independent, and the framework is purely conventional. Typically in Mark these are such expressions as 'and immediately', 'again', 'and he said to them'. For the purpose of classification one list of these units it:

1. Sayings

1. Logia, such as

Wisdom-Sayings (The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath: Mk 2.27)

Eschatological Sayings (If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words, the son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels: Mk 8.48).

Disciplinary Sayings (The time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then, on that day they will fast: Mk 2.20)

I-Sayings (The son of man is master even of the Sabbath: Mk 2.28)

Parables (either stories such as The Sower: Mk 4.3-8, or simple images, such as new wine in new wineskins: Mk 2.22)

2. Apophthegms, or Pronouncement Stories (more recently called by the Greek word 'Chreiai'), stories centred upon a pronouncement of Jesus, classified into

- Controversies, e.g. the story of the forgiveness of sins in Mk 2.5-10.
- Instructional Stories, e.g. the story of the true kinsmen of Jesus in Mk 3.31-35.

2. *Stories*

1. Miracles Stories

- Healing stories, e.g. the cure of a leper, Mk 1.40-45
- Nature miracles, e.g. the calming of the storm, Mk 4.35-41

2. Historical stories and legends, e.g. the baptism, the temptations, the transfiguration. (The difference between historical stories and legends lies in their relationship to a historical content. According to Dibelius, legends 'have no special interest in history...in the modern sense they are not historical accounts at all'. All three original proponents of Form Criticism had minimal interest in the historicity of the gospels. Their Lutheran emphasis was on the encounter with Christ in the present, to which the historical Christ was almost an obstacle. For example, Dibelius held that history which can be identified by the historico-critical method is 'world'; consequently God is not to be found in it. Similarly Bultmann held that what is known cannot be the object of faith, so that if a story has historical content it is outside the realm of faith. It is, however, not by any means necessary to deny that the accounts of baptism, temptations and transfiguration have a basis in fact. Merely a different genre or type of writing is used (for example, plentiful scriptural allusion) to that used by modern historians. It is not unexpected that popular writers of twenty centuries ago used different conventions from those of the present day, see Chapter 7.)

The purpose of this classification was to compare and contrast the units of the gospel with similar stories in the folk-literature of the time. It also helps to isolate the most important elements in each unit and to understand better the formation and purpose of the stories. A subsequent important step was to deduce the circumstances in which a story might have been told. For example, the disciplinary saying about fasting (above) might well have been passed down in the context of discussions, either within the Christian community or with outsiders, about whether Christians should obey Pharisaic legislation about regular fasts.

4. TOWARDS A WRITTEN GOSPEL

Between the stage of these individual units of gospel tradition and the first written gospel there may have been an intermediate stage. This would have been represented by two factors:

A. The Outline of the Kerygma

C.H. Dodd pointed out in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (1963) that all the initial proclamations about Jesus made by Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles have the same basic pattern, best seen in Peter's speech to Cornelius (Acts 10.37-40):

You know what happened all over Judaea, how Jesus of Nazareth began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil. Now we are witnesses to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judaea and Jerusalem itself, and they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet on the third day God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen.

This contains in order the elements of all synoptic gospels:

Beginning in Galilee
 Preaching of the Baptist
 Baptism/anointing of Jesus
 doing good and curing
 apostolic witnesses
In Judaea and Jerusalem
 crucifixion
 resurrection.

The basic outline of the synoptic gospels accords, therefore, with the original preaching of the apostles.

B. Partial Collections

Before the actual collections of the gospels there may have existed smaller and partial collections of material, which pre-dated and were used by the evangelists. Larger units which have been suggested include

Mk 1.21-38 The Day at Capernaum, a series of four incidents which together make up a sample day of Jesus' activity in Capernaum, immediately after the call of the first disciples.

Mk 2.1-3.6 Early Controversies, a series of five controversies with the Pharisees, which climax in their plot to destroy Jesus.

Mk 6.30-8.21 The Bread-Section, a series of incidents, beginning with the first Multiplication of Loaves and ending with the second Multiplication of Loaves and the reflection on them. All the incidents have some connection with bread or eating. It is suggested further (less probably, I think) that this could originally have been a eucharistic instruction.

Mk 12.13-37 Four Controversies. In the first three Jesus is questioned by representatives of the major parties of the Jews; in the fourth he takes the initiative by questioning them himself.

Mk 14.1-16.8 The Narrative of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. This is often held to have been the first long continuous narrative, and to be extremely ancient.

In fact most modern authors (and certainly the present writer) think that Mark himself was responsible for the arrangement of his material. Receiving the small units of tradition in oral form, he expressed them in his own terms, with his own inimitable stylistic features and his own brilliant story-telling technique. He built these stories up in his own arrangement, showing the gradual revelation of the wonder of the personality of Jesus. But that is another story (see the present writer's *The Lion and the Bull*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996). Mark's arrangements of material were not necessarily preserved by the other evangelists, each of whom had his own plan, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3.

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E.P. Sanders & M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (S.C.M., 1989), part III.

4. For the pattern of the apostolic preaching:

C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (1963).

Personal Study

1. Find for yourself in Mark one of each of the ten types of literary units described on p. 13.
2. Read Paul's letter to Philemon and write Philemon's reply to Paul. Philemon would want to include many details of his life and circumstances as a hellenistic Christian surrounded by both hellenistic non-believers and Christians issued from Judaism.

Chapter Two

Matthew's Literary Skills

From the second century onwards Matthew has been the most popular, the most often quoted of all the gospels. This popularity is to some extent won by his imagery and teaching methods. Mark concentrates on the authority of Jesus in his teaching, without giving very much of that actual teaching. Again and again Mark tells us that Jesus 'began to teach them' (1.21; 2.13; 6.2, 6) or 'taught them many things in parables' (4.2), telling only of the impression he made, without telling us what he actually taught.

1. A Clear Outline

Matthew does give a record of Jesus' teaching, and that in blocks alternating with Jesus' actions all the way through his ministry, for another of the attractive and readable features of Matthew is the clear organisation of his gospel. Each of these blocks treats in a coherent and organised way one particular aspect of the gospel message.

The account in Matthew of the ministry of Jesus can be divided in this way:

1. Initial preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven (chapters 3 and 4)
 2. Sermon on the Mount, basic conditions of following Jesus (chapters 5-7)
3. Jesus' miracles, a block of nine (or ten) of them (chapters 8 and 9)
 4. Mission Discourse, the task and trials of missionaries (chapter 10)
5. Opposition to Jesus in Galilee (chapters 11 and 12)
 6. The Parable Discourse (chapter 13)
7. Final ministry of Jesus in Galilee (chapters 14-17)
 8. Discourse on the Community (chapter 18)
9. Ministry in Jerusalem (chapters 19-23)
 10. Eschatological Discourse (chapters 24-25).

2. Patterns and Formulae

Within these blocks of teaching, too, there are carefully organised units, such as the intricately-structured Beatitudes (5.3-10, see p. 00). Matthew likes to give a principle, followed by examples or applications. In rabbinic teaching this was called *ab wetoledoth*, or ‘father and descendants’. So at 5.20 he gives the principle, ‘For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven’, followed by six applications, six ways in which Jesus’ teaching surpasses that of traditional Judaism. Each is built round the formula, ‘You have heard... but I say to you’, and after the main teaching a series of casuistic applications is given, ‘if... if... if...’.

Immediately after these contrasts come a new principle, which Matthew applies to the three classic good works of Judaism, almsgiving, prayer and fasting. ‘Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven’ (6.1), followed by three applications. Again a formula is used: ‘when you..., do not...in public as hypocrites do to win human admiration, otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you... you must...in secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you’.

It is not only in the Sermon on the Mount that Matthew uses formulae to give structure to his message. The sevenfold indictment of the Jewish leaders in chapter 23 is structured round the lament, ‘Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites!’ (verses 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). Here also a particularly intricate structure is used (verses 16-21), a balancing and reversible structure, called ‘chiasmus’ after the Greek letter *chi*, X:

If anyone swears by the Temple it has no force,	a
but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound...	b
Which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple ?	ba
If anyone swears by the altar it has no force,	c
but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar is bound...	d
Which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar ?	dc
Therefore someone who swears by the altar ...	c
And someone who swears by the Temple ...	a

There is also a series of key scriptural quotations which Matthew introduces to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of scripture, indeed that he acts ‘in order to fulfil’ the scripture (see p. 34-35). Each of the twelve has the formula ‘This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet’, 1.23; 2.6, 15, 18, 23; 4.15-16; 8.17; 12.18-21; 13.35; 21.5; 26.56; 27.9-10. These formulae, and others, such as ‘where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth’ (8.12; 13.42, 50; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30), or ‘when Jesus had finished these words’ (which marks the end of each of the five discourses, 7.28; 10.23; 13.53; 19.1; 26.1), give an air of comforting familiarity which has gone far to increasing the popularity of this gospel.

3. Matthew's Pairs and Contrasts

1. Pairs of Images

This impression of the familiar is strengthened by Matthew's affection for pairs, the two elements either reinforcing or contrasting with each other. So, in the Sermon on the Mount, immediately after the opening Beatitudes, come the two complementary images of salt for the earth and light for the world.

When the two sets of formulae detailed above as *ab wetoledoth* (5.21-48; 6.1-18) have been completed, the remainder of the Sermon is full of pairs of images:

- treasure on earth - treasure in heaven
- moth and woodworm
- light and dark
- God and money
- Look at the birds in the sky - Think of the flowers growing in the fields
- judgement given and received
- standard offered and suffered
- splinter and log
- dogs and pigs
- a stone for bread and a snake for fish

Then the Sermon ends with a volley of contrasts:

- the narrow gate leading to life and the broad road leading to destruction,
- a sound tree producing good fruit, a rotten tree producing bad fruit,
- a sensible man building on rock, a stupid man building on sand

2. Pairs of Parables

Similarly, Matthew likes to give his parables in pairs. Thus in chapter 13 Matthew adds another seed-parable to Mark's Sower, namely the Darnel. To Mark's Mustard Seed he adds a second parable with a similar lesson, the Leaven. Then follows a pair of parables on the joy of the Kingdom, namely the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price. Finally the Drag-Net balances the Darnel, with the same lesson, that the Kingdom contains both good and bad fish/corn. Beyond the pairing, this also gives a clearly balancing pattern, for Matthew starts the parable chapter (chapter 13) with Mark's pattern and continues with his own:

Parable of the Sower

The secrecy of the Parables

Explanation of the Sower

Parable of the Darnel

Parable of the Mustard Seed

Parable of the Leaven

The secrecy of the parables - explanation of the Darnel

Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Parable of the Drag-Net

An alternative structure to the chapter may be seen (based on R.T. France),

Parable of the Sower

The secrecy of the parables - explanation of the Sower

Three Parables of growth (Darnel, Mustard Seed, Leaven)

The secrecy of the parables- explanation of the Darnel

Three Parables of Searching (Hidden Treasure, Pearl, Dragnet)

Understanding the parables

Parable of the Scribe

In a later group of parables, appended at the end of the Eschatological Discourse there is a similar pairing and patterning. Matthew takes four elements of the conclusion to Mark's Eschatological Discourse, enlarging each image with a parable. Thus he gives two pairs of parables before his own great concluding parable:

The Watchful Householder (corresponding to Mark's householder, 13.34)

The Conscientious Steward (corresponding to Mark's doorkeeper, 13.34)

The Ten Wedding Attendants (corresponding to Mark's midnight master, 13.35)

The Talents (corresponding to Mark's unexpected coming, 13.36)

The Sheep and the Goats.

3. Pairs of Contrasting Characters

A further quality which contributes to the simplicity and attractiveness of Matthew's message is that all his long story-parables are built upon a contrast of good and bad. There are none of Luke's mixed characters, rascals seeking forgiveness (Lk 15.11-32), a wicked steward who nevertheless wins grudging admiration (Lk 16.1-8), an unjust judge who does the right thing for the wrong reason (Lk 18.1-5). Matthew's characters are black-and-white. They are seldom qualified by any adjectives other than 'good', 'evil' (or perhaps 'devilish') and 'rotten' (the tree and its fruit in 7.17-18, 12.33, the fish in 13.48). Contrast the simplicity of Matthew's Parable of the Two Sons (21.28-32) with the subtlety and delicate characterisation of Luke's Prodigal Son, or the blank brutality of Matthew's Unmerciful Servant with the premeditated cunning of Luke's Crafty Steward (Lk 16.1-8).

Where such a strong contrast is not inherently present in the story, Matthew introduces it. Of the Two Builders (7.24-27), The Playing Children (11.16-19), The Darnel (13.24-30), The Dragnet (13.47-50), The Lost Sheep (18.10-14), The Unmerciful Servant (18.21-35), The Two Sons (21.28-32), The Ten Virgins (25.1-12), The Talents (25.14-29) and The Sheep and Goats (25.31-46) this is entirely obvious. Further, in his version of The Sower, Matthew makes a starker contrast than Mark between the two groups of good/bad, insiders/outsideers by his stress on the unique quality of understanding or not (verses 13, 14, 15, 19, 23, 51). The parable of The Labourers in the Vineyard (20.1-16) is inserted to make a similar simple contrast between the first and the last (the purpose of the addition is shown by the fact that it is 'bracketed' by this saying, 19.30 and 20.16), although the original point of the story may well have been quite different, namely, to show that there can be no counting of merit or deserts before God. The addition of the Guest Improperly Clad to The Great Feast (22.11-14) makes the same contrast between good and bad, and in so doing somewhat distracts from the warmth of the welcome unexpectedly extended by the great king to his outcast guests.

4. Matthean Poetry

Poetry is much easier to memorize than prose, and a lesson taught by means of imagery sticks far more easily than one merely laid out analytically. Each language and culture has, of course, its own peculiar mode for proverbs and sayings. ‘A stitch in time saves nine’ and ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’ have a certain balance and assonance which is typical of English proverbs (compare ‘as snug as a bug in a rug’). ‘The dog that is idle barks at his fleas, but he that is hunting feels them not’ has a quadruple balance and the animal imagery which is characteristic of proverbs in many languages. Hebrew proverbs and sayings make little use of assonance or alliteration, but rely a great deal on balance and rhythm. One of the attractions of the Matthean sayings is precisely that Matthew is just such an artist with words, favouring neat and balanced formulations.

Michael D. Goulder (*Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, London, SPCK, 1974, chapter 4) has analysed the rhythms of Matthean sayings. Among the most prominent patterns are:

1. *A four-point antithesis with a paradoxical element*, such as

The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few (9.37)

Be cunning as snakes and innocent as doves (10.16)

The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (26.41).

Such rhythms are comparatively rare in Mark; Goulder counts only four of them (3.4; 7.27; 8.36; 14.38), while Matthew has 44. Obviously, credit for all of them cannot be given to the author of the gospel. They occur in material drawn from Mark and in material shared with Luke, as well as in material unique to Matthew; one from each group has been given above. It is, however, clear that Matthew has a special talent for this, not only from the number of times this figure appears, but also from the improvements which Matthew makes to some Markan, imperfectly-rhythmical sayings. So Mark 4.22 has a four-point antithesis, but expressed without care to bring out the parallelism, and in a Greek which has several Aramaic features. Matthew improves both the parallelism between the two halves and the succinctness of the Markan saying, at the same time cutting out the traces of Aramaic.

Mark 4.22 For there is no thing hidden unless in order that it be revealed, nor was it hidden but in order that it come into the open.

Matthew 10.26 Nothing is now covered which will not be revealed, nor hidden which will not be made known.

2. Especially frequent in Matthew is a specialised form of this figure, in which *two of the four terms are the same*, e.g. ‘Leave the dead to bury their dead’ (8.22) or ‘You received without charge, give without charge’ (10.8). Here again Matthew can pare down and clean up a Markan saying:

Mark 8.38 For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Matthew 10.33 Whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven.

3. This last saying exemplifies another frequent Matthean feature, *the converse use of this figure, giving both positive and negative*. Mark has nothing corresponding to the positive part, giving only the negative. Matthew clarifies and builds up the Markan original by giving the converse. The Matthean figure can then be seen to be of a piece with his preference for giving parables in pairs, and especially for his contrasting stark black-and-white characters. In Matthew, then, the whole

composition corresponding to Mark 8.38 runs:

Matthew 10.32-33 So everyone who confesses me before men, I too will confess him before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven. (Further examples, 5.19; 12.33)

4. Only slightly less frequent is *'the offensive rhetorical question opening with an abusive vocative'*. An example is 3.7: 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming retribution?', also 12.34; 23.17, 19, 33.

5. Another thought-pattern is *'prohibitions, the point of which is to emphasize the command or assertion following'*. Thus 10.34: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth; it is not peace I have come to bring, but the sword', also 3.9; 5.17; 6.7, 13; 10.5, 28.

6. Besides these binary rhythms Matthew also has *ternary rhythms*, repeating the same-shaped saying with different objects: prophesy - demons - miracles in 'Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work miracles in your name?' (7.22). Similar series occur with

'angry - raqa - fool' (5.22)

'ask - seek - knock' (7.7-8)

'Go - come - do this' (8.9)

'father/mother - son/daughter - cross (10.37-38, cf. Mk 8.34)

'prophet - saint - little one' (10.41-42, cf. Mk 9.41)

'kingdom - house - Satan' (12.25-26)

'teacher - father - master' (23.8-10).

Such an analysis does not, of course, solve the question of the origin of the sayings. The repeated and varied stylization of the thought patterns occurs in material shared by Matthew with Mark, material shared with Luke and material unique to Matthew. On some occasions (e.g. 10.37-38, 41-42) a stylized pattern occurs of which only one element appears in Mark; here it would be reasonable to suppose that Matthew has built up the stylized saying from a Markan original. Similarly it is quite possible that Matthew received the raw material of his stylized sayings either from a written or from an oral source. Certainly Matthew improves and tidies Mark's rougher language (numbers 1 and 2 above). On one occasion it is possible to see this happening:

Mark 8.35 reads 'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it.' The parallel passage in Matthew 16.25 reads 'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.' Here Matthew has simply omitted 'and for the sake of the gospel' and has changed 'save' to 'find', achieving a neater balance 'lose/find'. Another version of the same saying, however, is altogether neater, 'One finding his life will lose it, and one losing his life for my sake will find it' (10.39)

5. Matthean Imagery

Imagery is also a most important element in teaching and remembering lessons. Particularly animal imagery is frequent, both in English ('A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush') and in biblical ('A dog will return to its vomit') sayings.

Just as Matthew pairs story-parables and likes to put a positive and a negative statement together (see above), so he pairs images. This is a standard and continuous feature of his thinking. It may be amply illustrated from a little stretch of three verses (5.17-19): Law and Prophets, not abolish but complete, heaven and earth, dot and little stroke, infringes and teaches, keeps and teaches. Similarly in 7.1-6: judge and be judged, judgements and standards, splinter and log, dogs and pigs, trample and tear. The same habit of mind is visible throughout the teaching sections of the gospel.

Look at the birds of the sky - learn from the flowers of the fields (6.26, 28)

Stone for bread - snake for fish (7.9-10)

Narrow gate - broad road (7.13)

Can people pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? (7.16)

Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests (8.20)

On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh/the Queen of the South will appear (12.41-42).

The fields of imagery used show an author's background and thought-world. So all Mark's story-parables fit into the world of the countryside, and he is richly supplied with farming imagery - especially trees, for vines and olives are perhaps the most important element in the agricultural economy of Palestine (absolution for maliciously cutting down someone else's fruit-tree is still reserved to the bishop). In this his stress is on growth and productivity (fruit, branch, tower, wine-vat, sow, germinate, seed, bear fruit, etc). Matthew adds richly to both these fields of imagery, but especially richly to images directed towards his special theological interest in the final rewards and punishments (axe, root, cutting down, winnowing-fan, threshing-floor, fire, chaff, barn, uprooting, harvesters). Similarly rich is Matthew's use of animal imagery: not only does he mention 22 different animals by contrast to Mark's four (camels, sheep, puppies, birds), but each stands for some memorable quality: the cunning snake, the innocent dove, the cheap sparrow, the motherly hen, the destructive moth.

The most notable of all Matthew's fields of imagery is religious. Goulder counts that Mark has 19 religious images in 57 occurrences; to these Matthew adds another 35 images (e.g. phylacteries, ashes, tithing, rabbis, proselytes) and 147 occurrences, so a total of 204. In estimating this and similar figures it must be remembered that the overall length of Matthew's gospel is about twice that of Mark; one would therefore expect at least double the number of images. But the significance of the figures for religious imagery is further reduced by the fact that the proportion of teaching-material (and naturally it is primarily religious teaching) is far greater in Matthew than in Mark. Mark has little corresponding to Matthew's five great discourses. Nevertheless, these data make clear that Matthew's thinking circles round such 'churchy' matters.

Perhaps more significant as an indication of Matthew's background and world is the number and nature of images drawn from towns and economics. Mark moves in the world of the village and its store. On buildings he has such images as market-place, building, headstone, roof, door, drain (11 images in 28 occurrences). Matthew has 17 more images in 91 occurrences, including such additions as town, gates, streets, lanes, village, store-house and highway-entrances. On economics Mark's imagery is primitive indeed (8 images in 9 occurrences), only sell, barter, work, pay, make

and lose money, measure, livelihood. Matthew adds another 21 images, totalling 82 occurrences and including debt, borrow, loan, hire, banker, interest, merchant, unemployed. On money Mark mentions only the denarius (twice) and the widow's two *lepta*, totalling a *kodrantēs*, a sum equivalent to one sixty-fourth of the salary paid for a casual day's labour (Mt 20.13). Matthew adds, among other coins, a shekel, a stater (each four denarii), gold and the astronomical sum of a talent (10,000 denarii). He has moved from Mark's village into the town and into a considerably more developed economic scene. It is not a capital city where the countryside is remote, nor is it as sophisticated as Luke's world, but trade and commerce are familiar realities. It has been suggested that Matthew would feel at home in the important commercial centre of Antioch in Syria, an important centre in the development of the early Church, where the disciples were first called - or nicknamed - 'Christians' (Acts 11.26).

6. A Christian Scribe?

At the end of the parable chapter Matthew proclaims, 'Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old' (13.52). It is an attractive idea that this is a self-portrait of the author of the gospel. The author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, Ben Sira, himself undoubtedly a scribe, gives a lyrical description of the scribe, not as a mere literary hack but almost in prophetic terms. 'He will be filled with the spirit of intelligence, he will shower forth words of wisdom,... he will display the instruction he has received,... his memory will not disappear' (Sira 39.1-11). Viewed in this way, the scribe can be seen to have the task not merely of copying out, but of presenting and working on the message he passes on. This would give the author ample justification for the brilliant artistic work which we have analysed.

In fact when Matthew mentions the scribes he is extremely careful to guard their reputation, perhaps as though they are his own people. On some occasions he omits them where they oppose Jesus in Mark, for instance at his equivalent of Mark 2.16 and 3.22 (since scribes are concerned with legal questions, and there is no legal matter here) and 9.14. Similarly, the scribes take no part in the plot to dispose of Jesus: in Mark 14.1 it is the 'chief priests and the scribes' who plot to do away with Jesus; in Matthew 26.3 it is 'the chief priests and the elders of the people'. When the scribes do appear in opposition to Jesus they never stand alone as such: either they are joined to another group, so that they are seen to be tainted by the company they keep, or it is only 'some of the scribes' or more commonly 'the Pharisaic scribes'.

To be a scribe was no lowly task, for Enoch, the beloved of God, is presented in contemporary apocalyptic literature as a scribe, and in the Qumran literature even the founder of the community, the Teacher of Righteousness, is so represented (see also David Orton, *The Understanding Scribe*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1989). If Matthew 13.52 is the author's signature, he is laying claim to an important prophetic role in the Church.

Bibliography

Michael D Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (S.P.C.K., 1974) - chapters 1-5 provide a brilliant finger-printing of the author of Matthew.

Personal Study

In your working copy of Matthew

1. Divide the sections (discourses, etc) and mark out the patterns of parables, etc
2. Highlight some of the formulae indicated above, contrasts, contrasting images.

Chapter Three

Matthew's Sources

1. THE PROBLEM

The material in Matthew divides into three types with regard to sources. A large amount of it is shared with Mark and Luke; this is called the triple tradition (e.g. the Feeding of the Five Thousand, 14.13-21). There is also material shared with Luke only, called the double tradition (e.g. the Beatitudes, 5.3-10). Thirdly, some of the material is proper to Matthew, both units as a whole (e.g. the Coin in the Fish's Mouth, 17.24-27) and insertions into existing units (e.g. information about Pilate and his wife inserted into the Trial Scene, 27.19, 24-25).

The sources for this third group of material are difficult to establish: how inventive is Matthew being? If he is the first to write down this material, is he using an oral source which came to him by tradition? Or does he elaborate without any detailed source, on the grounds that 'it must have happened like this'? Any attempt to answer questions about the origin of this third group of material would be too speculative to be useful, and it will not be attempted here. On the other hand, these passages can be taken as a benchmark for Matthew's style and theology, especially as he reveals in them a consistency of approach in both style (discussed largely in Chapter One) and theological interests. This uniformity of approach can be used to discern the extent to which Matthew has edited the material of the first two groups.

The material of the triple tradition and the double tradition must be discussed together. Before any question of the origin of this material in Matthew can be settled, the interrelationship of the gospels as a whole must be discussed. The question has been hotly debated for the last century and a half, and is called the Synoptic Problem. The first three gospels share so much material that there must be a literary relationship between them. The same pattern of events is visible in each of them (with some alterations); this is why they were given the name 'synoptic' gospels (= 'at one glance'; they can be set out in parallel columns in a Synopsis, to show the relationships). Only two incidents of Mark are wholly missing from Matthew and Luke. In some incidents their language is identical for long stretches. This cannot be coincidence. For the last two hundred years it has been hotly debated whether Mark or Matthew is the basis used by the others. Alternatively it has been suggested that both of them, and also Luke, depend on an earlier written version of the gospel, or even several slightly different versions.

It is important for several reasons to establish which of the gospels was written first. Firstly, historically, it is valuable to know the most primitive and original form of the tradition. Here we are closest to the original words of Jesus. Secondly, it is important theologically. The evangelists edit and adapt the material to express their own and their Church's view of Christ and the Church. As we shall see, by selection of material and by little touches and alterations here and there, Matthew stresses the dignity and majesty of Jesus more than Mark (chapter 4). He also pays closer attention to the Christian community and its problems and leadership (chapter 5). Both his purposes and the means he uses will be made clearer if it is possible to establish his sources. How much did he simply take over from other sources? How did he feel his sources needed supplementing in order to bring out his view of the message of Jesus? What in his sources could he not accept? As each of the evangelists has such different emphases and points of view, it is important to see the line of development. In this way it is easier to understand the exact emphases of the theology of the evangelists.

Views on the priority of a particular gospel and of the origin of the others are strongly held. It may not be possible to reach a firm and final conclusion. But in any consideration of the gospels it is important to have at least a working hypothesis on the matter as a basis of consideration.

2. THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The external evidence about the writing of the gospels stems from Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in the early second century. He is quoted by Eusebius, the Church historian, some 200 years later; but Eusebius, who knew considerably more of his writings than we do, did not value his evidence highly. The quotation runs:

And the Elder used to say this, 'Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded, but who did not make, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them....Matthew collected the sayings in the Hebrew dialect and each interpreted them as best he could.

On Mark Papias seems to be concerned chiefly to defend the order in which Mark tells the story, why it is not a historical order, chronologically correct. The statement on Matthew has been endlessly disputed, the following points being the most contentious:

1. What does *λόγια*/sayings really mean? It would normally be narrowly 'sayings'; it could perhaps be understood more widely, to include the actions as well, stories about Jesus.
2. *Διαλεκτῶ*/dialect could mean 'language', but in this case is it the Hebrew or the Aramaic language? In either case, our Matthew as it stands cannot have been translated out of either of these languages, since it uses quotations of the Old Testament which prove their point only in the Greek version. Perhaps it means 'idiom', and Matthew is indeed the most semitic of the gospels. But the semitic colouring of the gospel is so all-pervasive that it is difficult to conceive that Matthew collected sayings already in semitic form; the semitic colouring comes at least partly from the author of the gospel.
3. *Ερμήνευσεν* /ermeneusen should mean 'translated', especially after mention of *dialektos*. It could also mean 'explained', but then the pessimistic note of 'as best he could' would have little sense.

This evidence is therefore tricky to handle, and can be used only to confirm and fit in with a theory held on other grounds, rather than serving as prime grounds for any particular theory. The most striking point is that Papias clearly thinks that Mark and Matthew worked independently, Mark depending on Peter, and Matthew making his own collection of *logia*. This is clearly not the case: one of these may be correct, but not both. In view of these difficulties and unlikelihoods, it is perhaps best to dismiss Papias' evidence altogether.

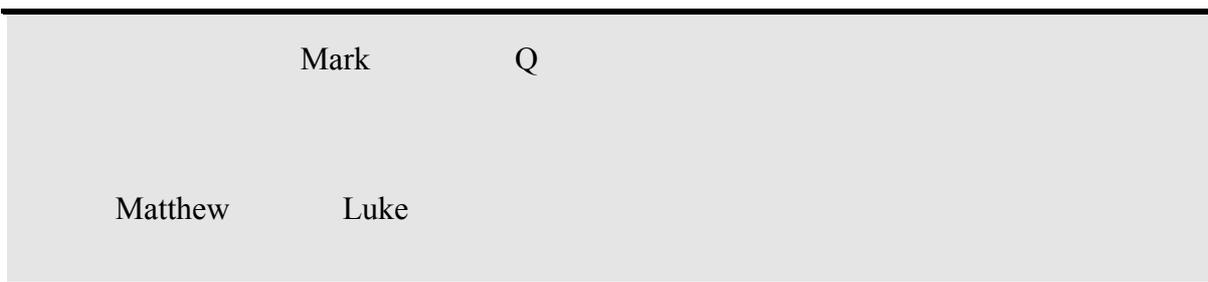
Eusebius himself does not quote Papias with much confidence. He called him a 'pin-head' (*σμικρὸς τὸν νοῦν*). Admittedly, Eusebius' opinion of him may be affected by the fact that he disagreed with him radically over some points of theology: Papias was a milleniarist, which Eusebius was not. In any case the meaning of almost every phrase of the quotation has been disputed. In practice scholars who use Papias do so very selectively, quoting simply those parts of his statement which agree with their already-formed theory, and rejecting the rest. We will therefore not consider the evidence of Papias, but will investigate the evidence of the gospels themselves.

3. THE TWO-DOCUMENT THEORY

The most widely-held theory is the two-document theory. During most of the present century this view has reigned supreme, and in most circles it is still simply taken for granted. For instance, in the authoritative *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), in the article on the Synoptic Problem (no. 40), Frans Neiryck, one of the most dedicated and dauntingly learned of its proponents, gives 14 columns to the exposition of this theory, and only two to 'alternative solutions'.

A. The Theory

Mark was the first of the three gospels to be written. If all three evangelists relate a saying or an incident, Mark is the source used by Matthew and Luke. If Mark has no account of a saying or incident, but Matthew and Luke have an account at least broadly similar to each other's, they both rely on a collection of Sayings of the Lord. This collection, which is called Q, no longer exists; it disappeared at an early date, and is merely deduced from the accounts. It can be seen to be a collection merely of Sayings, because such similarity between Matthew and Luke, unsupported by Mark, occurs only in passages which are sayings, not incidents.



B. Arguments in Favour

1. The argument from order. In the vast majority of instances the material which all three evangelists share occurs in Matthew and Luke in the same order of units as it does in Mark. Where the order does differ, the change can be explained in terms of theological interests or other editorial tendencies typical of the evangelist. For instance, Matthew is a careful teacher, and gathers sayings into great collections; he like to deal exhaustively with a topic on its first appearance. This leads him 13 times to give Markan material earlier in the sequence than does Mark himself. Thus for the first great collection of sayings, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew uses some teachings which occur only later in Mark (e.g. the prohibition of divorce). Similarly, for his great collection of miracles in chapters 8-9 he uses stories (e.g. the calming of the storm) which occur only later in Mark.

Lk is less uniform, but changes, for instance, 4.16-30 to provide the 'Nazareth manifesto', a programmatic speech of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, similar in function to the Sermon on the Mount. He changes 5.1-11 (the Call of the Apostles) to ensure that they have already seen and heard something of Jesus before they come to follow. He gathers 22.24-30, 22.21-23 to form his short discourse at the Last Supper, and adds 22.55-62, 22.63-68 to clarify his passion narrative.

2. The argument from detailed editing . Both language and theology of Matthew and Luke are more developed than those of Mark. Repeatedly Matthew and Luke iron out the roughnesses of

Mark's primitive Greek. They also, by little touches and omissions, present a more dignified picture of Jesus, expressing more clearly his majesty and glory. They show greater reverence for the disciples, omitting much of Jesus' criticism of their slowness to understand, which is a major feature in Mark.

It is possible that Mark could have deliberately roughened the more sophisticated Greek which he found in his sources, but it is not likely. It is also possible that he wished to present a less exalted picture of Jesus, making him more attractively human. It is possible that he personally inserted the criticisms of the disciples in order to show that Jesus' own followers were no less slow to believe than later followers. But none of these is likely.

C. Difficulties

1. *Mark-Q Overlap*

It is difficult to form a coherent picture of Q. Closer examination shows a number of passages given by all three evangelists where Matthew and Luke show such similarity to each other over against Mark that protagonists of this theory have to resort to the claim that the passage was present both in Mark and in Q; that is, there was a Mark-Q overlap.

All defenders of this solution accept that there are seven passages where Mark and Q overlap; most but not all of these passages where the sayings-material needs to be embedded in narrative,

Mt 3.11 The Baptist's Messianic Preaching

Mt 4.1-2 The Temptations

Mt 5.13 The saying on Salt

Mt 12.22-32 The Beelzebul Controversy (one of the clearest, where a mere glance shows that some bits are pure Mark-Matthew, some bits triple, some Matthew-Luke)

Mt 13.31-32 The parable of the Mustard-Seed

Mt 18.6-7 The saying on the Mill-Stone

Mt 22.34-40 The Great Commandment.

But in fact such instances have to go on being multiplied. If Mark did know Q, what would have been the principle of selection used by him, and the question becomes more insistent, why did he leave out so much good material? Q therefore grows beyond the limits of a Sayings-Source, used merely to supplement Mark. For some of these incidents (e.g. the Temptations) it can be argued that these are basically sayings-material with a minimal narrative framework. For others (e.g. the Healing of a Leper in Mk 1.40-45) this cannot be said. It therefore must be admitted that Q cannot have been simply a collection of sayings with occasional narrative framework.

2. *Minor Agreements*

There are at least 200 instances where Matthew and Luke agree against Mark. This occurs so frequently that it is difficult to attribute the agreements to chance or to independent editing. Even though Matthew and Luke each wanted to change Mark (e.g. by improvement of Mark's rough Gk, removal of historic present, popular diminutives (κλινίδιον), replacement of monotonous καὶ by δὲ), it becomes an overwhelming coincidence that they should independently have reached exactly the same conclusion again and again. Authors differ about how many and which of these minor agreements are significant, e.g. Sir John Hawkins has 21 of which P. Lagrange leaves 11 aside, though he adds 11 more. Perhaps the most difficult of them all is Mt 26.68, where both Matthew and Luke have 'Who is it who struck you?', an extraordinary coincidence of five consecutive Greek words. But the total number of these 'minor agreements' is also a major difficulty, especially cases where Matthew and Luke omit exactly the same passage of Mark.

Some avoid this difficulty by postulating an earlier or later form of Mark. For instance, neither Matthew nor Luke have anything corresponding to Mark 2.27, nor to Mark 4.39b; 11.13c. Perhaps these phrases were added to Mark after Matthew and Luke had made their copy of Mark. In this case it would be possible to argue that the most notorious of the minor agreements, Mt 26.68, stems from an earlier version of Mark, but was deleted after Matthew and Luke made their copies.

There are also a few passages where Matthew is closer to a real Jewish question than Mark. Is this because Matthew himself has deduced the situation which lies behind Mark (but is not expressed so clearly in his gospel) and re-Judaized the story, or because Matthew is dependent on an earlier version of Mark from which our present Mark has oversimplified and missed the point? Since the former alternative credits Matthew with extraordinary insight and detective powers, the latter alternative is attractive. Thus

1. In the story of Plucking Corn on the Sabbath (Mk 2.22-28; Mt 12.1-8) Mark presents the disciples as ‘making a path by plucking the ears of corn’, a vandalistic operation on any day. Matthew is far more aware of the legal niceties when he makes clear that ‘they were hungry and began to pluck the corn and eat them’. Both evangelists justify this with the defence that hunger justifies this breaking of the Sabbath regulation, but the question is much more clearly stated by Matthew (see further, p. 20).

2. In the question about divorce (Mk 10.2; Mt 19.3) Mark has the Pharisees ask a naively simple question, whether it is allowable for a man to divorce his wife. Any Jew would know the answer to this. Matthew gives them a more finely-tuned question, asking whether divorce is allowable *for any reason*. This was in a fact question debated by the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai, and they would be asking Jesus to take sides in the dispute. Has Matthew devined the finer question behind Mark’s narrative, or did he derive it from an earlier version of Mark, subsequently oversimplified into our present Mark?

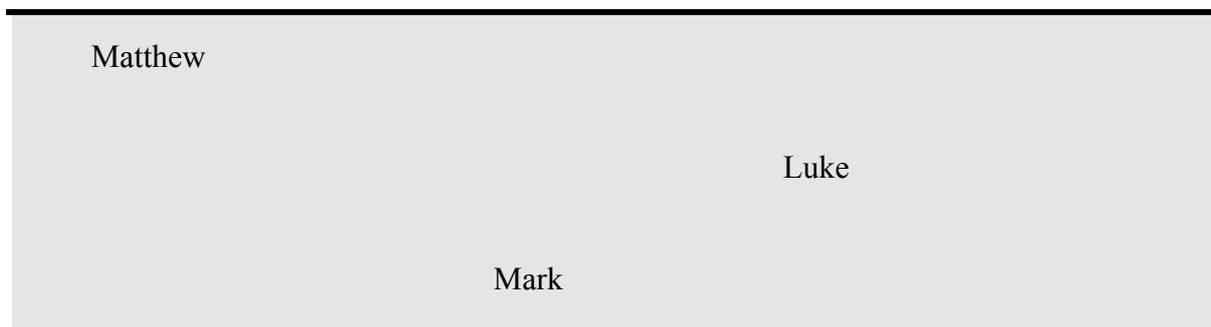
If Matthew knew Luke or Luke knew Matthew, there is no need to posit Q at all. Matthew could have used Luke directly, or vice versa. It is certainly hard to see that some Lukan passages could have developed without a knowledge of Matthew’s text, e.g. Lk 9.10-11; 10.25-28; 17.1-2.

4. THE TWO-GOSPEL HYPOTHESIS

This hypothesis was first put forward by J.J. Griesbach in 1789, and is often called 'the Griesbach hypothesis'. It has been revived in the last 20 years, and now enjoys a certain amount of support.

A. The Hypothesis

Matthew was the first gospel to be written, for Christians of Jewish origin. Luke was written next, sometime before 60 A.D., for Paul's gentile converts. The two were combined by Mark, who selects sometimes from Matthew, sometimes from Luke, zigzagging from one to the other between incidents, and sometimes within incidents.



B. Arguments in Favour

1. Frequently Mark has a double expression (1.32: 'when it was late and the sun was setting') of which one half occurs in Matthew (8.16: 'when it was late') and the other in Luke (4.40 'when the sun was setting'). This occurs, it is argued, too frequently for it to be explained by the coincidence that Matthew and Luke happened to choose different halves of the Markan expression; more economical is the solution that Mark chose both Matthew's and Luke's versions.
2. The order of material in Mark may be explained on the supposition that it was composed from Matthew and Luke. Mark zigzags from Matthew to Luke and back again, without ever turning back on their order. Sometimes his order is supported by both of them, but always by one or the other.
3. 'The priority of Matthew went unchallenged by orthodox or heretic for the best part of two thousand years'¹. This is perhaps an overstatement of the evidence, but from Irenaeus in the late second century onwards many Church fathers held that Matthew was the first gospel to be written. Irenaeus himself said that Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were still evangelising Rome, and Mark only 'after their death'.

C. Difficulties

1. It is difficult to see why Mark should have discarded so much of Matthew's and Luke's material,

¹Bernard Orchard, *Downside Review*, 106 (1988), 104.

the infancy stories, the great discourses of Matthew (at least partly echoed in Luke, including such key-passages as the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer), the appearances of the Risen Lord, and much else. Also why he should have composed an account both linguistically and theologically so much more primitive than those of his models. From another point of view, what would the point of Mark writing have been? He adds only vivid colour and a couple of not very important pericopae.

2. The argument from the 'zigzagging' order is valid only if Mark is first established on other grounds to be dependent on Matthew and Luke. It is also possible to make sense of the order of Matthew and Luke on the supposition that Mark is the first gospel. Indeed, protagonists of the Two-Source Theory give reasons, and good reasons, why Matthew and Luke depart from the order of Mark, whereas supporters of the Two-Gospel Hypothesis see Mark changing from one of his sources to the other more or less spontaneously, at random and without justification.

3. The patristic evidence is not so one-sided as it has been represented. Nor is it clear that Irenaeus, who stands at its head, really knew what he was talking about, a full century after the composition of the gospels. Some of his wording suggests that he was interpreting Papias, who states no such thing.

5. THE 'MULTIPLE ATTESTATION' THEORY

This theory, extremely detailed and complicated, is associated with the name of M.-E. Boismard and other distinguished scholars of the French Dominican *Ecole biblique* in Jerusalem. It has received little attention from the non-francophone scholarly community, perhaps partly because of its complications. Each incident and saying has to be taken for itself, and one of its most profound tenets is that any simplistic, overall solution fails to take account of all the evidence. The application of the theory is fully set out in *Synopse des Quatre Evangiles*, by P. Benoit and M-E. Boismard, tome II (Editions de Cerf, 1972).

A. The Theory

The gospel tradition stems basically from three documents: A (a Palestinian proto-gospel), B (a gentile-Christian revision of A) and C (a third document of varied character, which acts as a wild-card in the theory). Each of the gospels which we now have has passed through several stages of editing, with criss-crossing influences from other intermediate stages of other gospels. For instance, the final version of Mark has details which show that it was influenced by the final version of Luke. The narrative framework of Mark is at the base of all three gospels, and in its turn depends on a previous version, named by Boismard 'intermediate Mark'. The full history of the texts can be discovered only with the use of patristic quotations, which often show minute variations from the present gospel texts, reflecting earlier versions of the gospels.

A	B	C	Q
Mt-inter	Mk-inter	Proto-Lk	
Mt	Mk	Lk	

B. Arguments in favour

1. A coherent picture and a clear characterisation is presented of at least the two documents A and B which are taken to be at the base of the tradition.
2. The argumentation for the development of each passage is so detailed that it defies any attempt to summarise it or to generalise. The 'criss-crossing' is founded on the fact that expressions which seem characteristic of one gospel are found in another, and may be attributed to the influence of each gospel on each other at a late stage of the evolution of the tradition.
3. Even if the detailed conclusions of Boismard are not exactly accepted, the very fact of the continuance of the debate outlined above shows that there are phenomena which do not fit any of the simpler theories.

C. Difficulties

1. The process described may well apply to the development of the oral tradition before the gospel material came to be written down. Such criss-crossing and interaction would fit the more fluid consistency of a body of oral tradition, passing backwards and forwards between many witnesses, better than it fits more defined and fixed written sources.
2. The detective work involved in this theory presupposes that each of the characters involved in the plot behaved with inflexible predictability and consistency. The theory is too logical and too conjectural for a literary process.
3. The variations in the quotations in early Church Fathers may reflect their own faulty memories rather than differences in the original texts.

6. THE SINGLE-SOURCE THEORY

Recently an attractive theory has been gaining ground, promoted by M.D. Goulder, based on Markan priority without the Sayings-Source Q. This is a revival and extension of the position of the Oxford scholar, Austin Farrer, '*On Dispensing with Q*' (1955)².

A. The Theory

Matthew's only written source was Mark, which he edited and developed through his own resources. The material in Matthew which is not drawn from Mark, and the treatment of the Markan material, shows a consistency of method and approach which can only reflect the imprint of one mind. The elements said to be characteristic of Q are in fact characteristic of Matthew, since they appear also in the passages peculiar to Matthew and in his editing of Mark. Many of these elaborations are developed from reflection on the life and meaning of Jesus in the light of the scriptures, by methods reminiscent of contemporary Jewish exegesis, known as 'midrash'³. Similarly Luke results from a stylistically and theologically consistent editing of Matthew and Mark, without any need to postulate a further written source. There is therefore no need to postulate any written source for the synoptic gospels other than Mark.



B. Arguments in Favour

²in *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D.E. Nineham (Oxford)

³This term 'midrash' has generally been considered unfortunate. It relied on a very general definition of midrash current at the time, perhaps stemming from Rene Bloch's article in the supplement to the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*. For a tighter and more useful definition, see P. Alexander 'Interpretation, Jewish' in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (OUP, 1993).

1. The detailed arguments for the homogeneity of Matthean vocabulary, style and theological interests are presented with forceful detail in M. Goulder's *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (S.P.C.K., 1976). Without giving a detailed resume one can only say that they are careful and persuasive. The imagery and poetry of Matthew is, as has been seen above, consistent throughout Matthew. Goulder claims convincingly that these features occur in all parts of Matthew, both in his editing of Mark and in his own proper material. Since many of the same features occur also in material shared with Luke, Luke must derive this material from Matthew rather than from Q.

The claim about imagery and poetry is hard to refute and has not been refuted. Mark Goodacre, however, in *Goulder and the Gospels* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) has thrown a good deal of doubt on Goulder's claim that the vocabulary of the so-called Q material is in fact characteristically Matthean. Many of the expressions isolated by Goulder as Matthean are as characteristic of Luke as of Matthew. Similarly for Luke, Goulder has carefully shown in his *Luke - A New Paradigm* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) that there are features typical of Luke throughout his gospel, which would account for the gospel if it were derived from Mark and Matthew without any use of a further source, Q.

2. This theory accounts for the multiplicity of the so-called 'minor agreements' of Matthew with Luke, which despite attempted explanations, remains a problem for the Two-Source theory. If Luke knew Matthew, obviously Luke derived these elements from him.

C. Difficulties

1. Such an explanation of Luke must postulate that Luke worked with both Matthew and Mark spread out before him, carefully collating the two, and studiously moving from one to the other with detailed editing. Is this not more probable for a modern collator than for an ancient author? One of the greatest difficulties of the theory is the manner of doing this, pointed out long ago by B.H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London, Macmillan, 1924), p. 183: 'There is not a single case in which Matthew and Luke agree in inserting the same saying at the same point in the Markan outline'. So the theory presupposes that Luke 'must have proceeded with the utmost care to tear every little piece of non-Markan material he desired to use from the context of Mark in which it appeared in Matthew...in order to re-insert it into a different context'. There is in fact one exception to this: the parable of the Leaven follows the Markan parable of the Mustard-Seed in both Matthew and Luke, but one swallow does not make a summer. Both Matthew and Luke tend to pair parables.

2. Much of Matthew's great discourses (such as the Sermon on the Mount) appears in shorter passages in Luke; is it probable that Luke should so have broken up these carefully-crafted discourses? Goulder holds that Luke's motive was to break them into manageable units which could be more easily assimilated. He split the material of the discourses three ways: part he left where it was, part he re-assigned, part he omitted.

3. Is it really necessary to suppose that the evangelists themselves developed the gospel tradition so extensively without any historical basis, or at least without any further detailed historical data? Goulder's work certainly shows that they have worked over the material thoroughly and imposed their own patterns on it. However, recent studies on Mark (e.g. Keith Elliott, *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark*, 1993) have shown the same homogeneity of style in Mark: he too worked on his presumably oral sources so thoroughly that he imposed his own stylistic imprint on

them. Goulder's work on Matthew's poetry (see above, p.5-6) shows that Matthew improved the balance and rhythm of the sayings given by Mark. It is equally possible that, where no previous written material exists any longer, Matthew was also adopting and adapting into his own style a pre-existing underlay. Similarly in the case of Luke, the number of Lukan 'muddles' and instances of inconsistencies (nicknamed 'editorial fatigue') pointed out by Goulder and Goodacre positively suggest that Luke is using oral sources, incompletely or uncomfortably assimilated. The work on the homogeneity of the evangelists by no means proves, therefore, that they were working without oral or even written sources. It simply demonstrates that they assimilated and developed their sources to convey the message of Jesus in their own way and with their own particular emphases.

CONCLUSION

There is no easy and generally accepted solution to the Synoptic Problem. Each of the above positions is held by responsible scholars, arguing with fervour and conviction. None is without its difficulties. I am convinced of the priority of Mark, and incline towards the last solution outlined. It is, however, not without its difficulties, and there are also strong arguments in favour of the existence of Q. Nevertheless, it will be taken in this booklet as the dominant working hypothesis.

Bibliography

This chapter is an expanded version of an article which originally appeared in *Priests and People* 5 (1991), p. 265-9.

Apart from the works referred to above, a short discussion is given in most introductions to the New Testament or the gospels, e.g. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (O.U.P. 1989), p. 35-39.

A thorough and balanced discussion, with examples, may be found in E.P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (S.C.M. 1989), p. 51-119.

Personal Study

An exercise in comparing texts of the three synoptic accounts of the same incident, The Cleansing of the Leper. *For this you need three highlighters and a photocopy of the text; you'll make a mess the first time!* With Colour 1 mark all the words or parts of words common to Mark and Matthew. With Colour 2 mark all the words common to Mark and Luke. With Colour 3 mark all the words common to Matthew and Luke (some words, common to all three, will be double-marked). This shows you what is special to each - the unmarked words.

In Mark note:

1. Jesus' greater sympathy ('feeling sorry for him') - Matthew is more classic.
2. Mark says things twice (the repetition common in oral style), e.g. v.42, v.45 twice:
the skin disease left him = and he was cleansed
proclaiming = telling the story
could no longer go openly into any town = but stayed outside in desert places

In Matthew note:

1. Matthew's greater reverence: 'Lord'; 'bowed low' is a word used for reverence to God.
2. Matthew cuts short, to end on the fulfilment of the Law in action, after the Sermon on the

Mount, which represents the fulfilment of the Law in teaching.

In Luke note:

1. More sophisticated style, e.g. at the beginning.
2. The miraculous element is heightened: 'covered with skin-disease'.
3. The crowd-reaction is stressed (v. 15).
4. Jesus goes off to pray, as often in Luke.

Matthew and Luke have two positive minor agreements against Mark ('suddenly' and 'Lord') and two negative ones (shared gaps in the text, where they lack phrases of Mark). This is a difficulty for the Two-Source Theory.

Now try the same exercise on another, easier text, e.g. The Parable of the Mustard-Seed (Mt 13.31-32; Mk 4.30-32; Lk 13.18-19). Note down peculiarities of each evangelist, and agreements of Mt and Lk against Mk. There is so much agreement that some think this is a passage where Mt and Lk used both Mk and Q.

If you have time, write an essay: Which solution to the Synoptic Problem do you prefer and why?

Chapter Four Matthew the Jew

The paradox of Matthew's gospel is that on the one hand Matthew is the most Jewish of all the gospels, obviously formed in Judaism, thinking in Jewish categories, using Jewish methods of argument, but at the same time the most starkly hostile of the synoptic gospels to the Jews. This chapter is devoted to showing both these sides of the gospel, and then suggesting how this strange paradox may be resolved, or at least explained.

1. Matthew writes from within Judaism

The ways in which Matthew shows that Judaism colours all his thought are innumerable. His habits of thought are Jewish. So much is clear already from literary patterns.

1. The Sermon on the Mount may serve as an illustration. It begins with the Beatitudes. This is a very frequent literary figure within Judaism, occurring frequently in the Old Testament, particularly as an opening blessing or congratulation:

Blessed is anyone who has not sinned in speech...

Blessed is anyone whose conscience does not reproach him (Sir 14.1)

Blessed is anyone who rejects the advice of the wicked (Psalm 1.1, and frequently in the psalms: 32.1, 2; 41.1; 119.1, 2; 128.1).

The Matthean Beatitudes are bracketed, and so basically interpreted, by that very Jewish entity, the Kingdom of Heaven. By putting at beginning and end of the Beatitudes 'the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs' Matthew puts all the weight and importance of the moral life he is praising on the Kingship of God. Ever since the foundation of the monarchy by King David the Kingship of God has been a cornerstone of Jewish spirituality. In addition, Matthew adheres to the conventions of reverence, common in contemporary Judaism, of avoiding the use of the divine name, 'God', through the use of the circumlocution, 'Heaven'.

Next, the two first major sections of teaching are delivered in the shape of *ab wetoledoth*, much favoured by Jewish teachers (see above, p. 1-2). More fundamental in the same section is the fact that perfection is presented in terms of fulfilment of the Law, the goal of perfection of every Jew: Jesus has come to fulfil the Law, not to abolish it (5.17). The casuistry attached to several of the six corrections of the Law is also strongly reminiscent of Jewish legalistic attitudes to Law, 'If your right eye should be your downfall... if someone wishes to go to law with you... if you love those who love you...' (5.29, 40, 46).

2. The genuine fulfilment of the Law which was the centre of Jewish life remains a major preoccupation throughout the gospel. This had already been hinted by Mark's account, where legal controversies form an important element in Jesus' teaching in Galilee, and Jesus' freedom of interpretation of the Law leads to the earliest resolution to dispose of Jesus (Mk 3.6). In Matthew this is even more the case. Matthew strengthens and tightens attention to the Law.

Thus in the first of the cures after the teaching on fulfilment of the Law, the Healing of a Leper, Matthew cuts off the story before the end of Mark's account, in order to climax on Jesus' command to fulfil the prescriptions laid down in the Law, thereby throwing this particular element

into relief (Mt 8.4, compare Mk 1.44-45). Having shown Jesus fulfilling the Law in his teaching (chapters 5-7), Matthew immediately shows him fulfilling the Law in his actions. In the treatment of further legal controversies Matthew is concerned to reinforce the legal arguments for Jesus' actions.

The incident of Plucking Corn on the Sabbath is highly instructive in this respect. Several details in Matthew's treatment of the incident show superior knowledge of and regard for the Law. Matthew focusses the issues precisely on the points of legal observance:

1. In Mark 2.23-24 it looks as though the offence of the disciples consists in making a path through the cornfields (which, incidentally, they do by pulling out ears of corn), whereas in Matthew 12.1-2 it is clear that the purpose of plucking ears of corn is to allay their hunger, and the alleged offence is not vandalism but disregard for the Sabbath.
2. Matthew reinforces the legal argument itself. Mark was content to cite the precedent of David. Matthew follows this up with a closer example of an instance where the Law prescribes breaking of the Sabbath. This is knit into the story by a neat rabbinic-style argument *a minori ad maius*, of the type prominent in later rabbinic controversies, and already enshrined in Rabbi Hillel's seven principles of exegesis.
3. Mark concludes the incident with two general principles. Of these Matthew retains the second, Christological principle, 'The son of man is lord of the Sabbath' (Mk 2.28; Mt 12.8). On the other hand, the first general principle in Mark, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mk 2.27), is too sweeping a dismissal of the Law for Matthew, and he omits it.
4. Instead, Matthew inserts a vital principle of application of the Law which has been important ever since the earliest prophets, 'What I want is love not sacrifice' (Mt 12.7, quoting Hosea 6.6). This suggests the accusation, as in Hosea's time, that the strictly ceremonial procedures are being observed, but without any acceptance by God, since they are not genuine expressions of commitment and devotion. Matthew implies the same accusation against the official observance of the Law as did Hosea, at the same time showing what genuine observance should be. How important this principle of application of the Law is to Matthew can be shown by his use of this text of Hosea on two other occasions, 9.13 and 23.23 (and on its use in the Beatitudes, see p. 43).

In the immediately following incident of the Man with the Withered Hand the incident as related by Matthew is much more precisely focussed on the issue of Law than in Mark:

1. Instead of merely watching to see how he acts, the opponents of Jesus explicitly challenge him precisely about the legality of healing on the Sabbath (Mk 3.1 and Mt 12.9).
2. In Jesus' answer also the focus is on Law, rather than on the bad will of his opponents. It is notable that Matthew omits the rather unfocussed question in Mark, 'Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' (Mk 3.4). Jesus replies positively with another instance of a good rabbinic argument *a minori ad maius*: if it is permissible to pull a trapped sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, it is permissible to benefit a human being on the sabbath. (It has been alleged that Matthew does not in fact know the Law well, since later rabbinic practice permitted feeding of a sheep stuck in a pit on a Sabbath, but not extraction of the beast. There is no evidence that this ruling was in force in the first century).
3. Finally Mark has the Pharisees making a plot with the Herodians to do away with Jesus (Mk 3.6). Matthew sensitively omits mention of the Herodians. Such legal disputes would have concerned and upset Pharisees, whose whole way of life centered on obedience to,

and so interpretation of, the Law, but would have left unmoved the Herodians, whose interests were presumably political.

Whereas Mark is happy to interpret Jesus' teaching on clean and unclean food as abolishing the legal prescription against eating certain foods, 'thus he pronounced all foods clean' (Mk 7.19) Matthew, in his corresponding passage, neatly omits the phrase (Mt 15.17). This suggests that the attitude to the Law in Matthew's community was rather less liberal than that of Mark's community, and that they did not interpret Jesus' sayings as sweeping away that distinction between clean and unclean food. This would be of a piece with the little warning about the Final Coming of Christ, 'pray that you will not have to make your escape on a Sabbath' (Mt 24.20), which implies that the restrictions of journeying on the Sabbath still obtained in Matthew's community.

3. For Matthew the evidence of Scripture, at that time still the basic norm of Judaism (whereas now it could at least be claimed that the rabbinic writings have taken on more immediacy, just as for Christians the New Testament has so done), is central (see p. 34-35). Hence he seems to represent events as taking place simply in order to fulfil the scripture and for no other reason. 'All this happened in order that the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet should be fulfilled'

- 1.23, the reason for the naming of Jesus
- 2.15, the reason for remaining in Egypt
- 2. 23, the motive for removing to Nazareth
- 4.14, the motive for Jesus returning to Galilee
- 8.17, the purpose of Jesus' healing activity
- 12.17, the reason for Jesus' secrecy
- 13.35, the reason for Jesus' teaching in parables
- 21.5, the purpose of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey
- 26.58, the explanation of the condemnation of Jesus
- 27.9, the meaning of the death of Judas.

Similarly, when the messengers of John the Baptist come to Jesus, Jesus explains himself in terms of scripture. The message of Jesus was somewhat different from that of the Baptist. The Baptist preached fire and judgement, the axe put to the root of the rotten tree, the winnowing fan separating corn from chaff. Therefore from prison, hearing of Jesus' activity, John sends his messengers to ask whether Jesus really is the Messiah. To this, Jesus replies in terms drawn from Isaiah 35.5-6 or Isaiah 61.1 (as though to say, 'The proof that I am the Messiah is that my activity fulfils the scripture'), 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see, the blind see again and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the good news is proclaimed to the poor' (Mt 11.4-5).

4. As we shall shortly see (Chapter 4), Matthew's presentation of Jesus, his person, his work and his community, is largely in Jewish terms.

2. Matthew is critical of Judaism

However, at the same time, although the wellsprings of Matthew's thought are firmly anchored within Judaism, there is a strong undercurrent of discontent with current Judaism. The atmosphere

is suggestive of the struggle between Christians and Jews which took place towards the end of the first century, and eventually issued in Christian Jews separating from those who would not accept Christ. Some indications suggest that the split has already occurred, others that the followers of Christ who formed Matthew's community regarded themselves as accomplishing more successfully what the main body of Judaism, was claiming to do. It is difficult to discern whether any division had already taken place, or what this would have amounted to. But there is no doubt that Matthew is also strongly critical of Judaism.

Until recently this question was linked to two events which seemed to offer a possibility of dating precisely the split between Christian and non-Christian Jews, namely the Synod of Jamnia (=Yabneh) and the Birkat ha-Minim. Of the former it is now highly doubtful that it ever occurred as such. With regard to the latter, according to the Babylonian Talmud the twelfth 'Blessing', the 'blessing against the heretics' of the Jewish prayer *The Eighteen Blessings* was added at the instigation of Rabban Gamliel II at the end of the first century, presumably as part of the reconstruction of Judaism after the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. One form of this prayer/blessing/curse is directed against the *minim* and the *notsrim*. It used to be assumed that the *notsrim* were 'Nazarenes' or Christians, and the curse was brought into relation with a remark of Justin Martyr (*Dialogue*, 137.3) in the mid-second century that the Jews slander and make fun of Christ after their prayers. The evidence for the presence of the word *notsrim* (and for its exact meaning) is, however, extremely late, and against this interpretation must be placed the virulent efforts of John Chrysostom in 386/7 AD to keep Christians from attending synagogues. For this implies that some Christians still did attend synagogues, which in turn implies that no such curse on Christians was recited in the synagogues at that time. In any case, the interpretation of the evidence is so disputed that the Birkat ha-Minim provides an unsafe foundation on which to base any dating of Matthew. See Pieter van der Horst, 'The Birkat ha-Minim in Recent Research' in *Expository Times* 105 (1994), p. 363-8, also G.N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 142-5.

It is specifically against the Jewish leadership that Matthew inveighs. Right from the beginning King Herod, the Jewish leader of the time, violently opposes Jesus, by contrast to the wise men from the East, who reverence him. Here already the wise men represent the gentiles who will show themselves open to Jesus. Their homage to Jesus gains additional significance from the biblical allusion which it implies, for their homage echoes that which Isaiah prophesies will be paid by the nations to Jerusalem, the eschatological holy city:

The nations will come to your light
and kings to your dawning brightness...
Everyone in Saba will come
bringing gold and incense
and proclaiming Yahweh's praises (Is 60.3-6).

Just the same contrast is made in the story of the Centurion's Servant. There Jesus comments on the gentile Centurion's faith, 'In no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out' (8.10-12. If this passage is drawn from Q and the original version is given in Luke, this final sentence is meaningfully added by Matthew. Such a deliberate addition to an already existing story is

especially strong evidence of his view).

The chief brunt of the reproach falls on the scribes and Pharisees. They are the object of that favourite Matthean expression mentioned above (p. 5), the offensive rhetorical question opening with an abusive vocative. This already occurs in the message of John the Baptist, ‘Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming retribution?’, 3.7; similarly 12.34; but especially, and repeatedly, in the great tirade against them in 23.17, 19, 33. Matthew interrupts Mark’s discussion of clean and unclean foods to insert the bitterly pointed 15.13-14, ‘Any plant my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind, and if one blind person leads another, both will fall into a pit’.

But responsibility for rejecting Jesus cannot, in Matthew’s book, be confined to the leaders. Already during the Galilean ministry Jesus reproaches the whole ‘generation’ who refused to respond, whatever he did (11.16-19), and the lakeside towns, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, whose refusal to acknowledge his miracles brings them unfavourable comparison to Tyre, Sidon and Sodom (11.20-24). Similarly, in a closely following passage, the whole generation, ‘evil and unfaithful’ is contrasted with the men of Nineveh and with the Queen of the South, both of whom recognised God’s message; the attachment of this rebuke to the whole generation is reinforced by Matthew by his bracketing the passage at beginning and end with the expression ‘wicked generation’ (12.39, 45).

The same can be seen in the parables. The parable of the Wicked Vinedressers is spoken to the leaders, the chief priests and the Pharisees, but the resultant rejection applies to the nation as a whole, ‘I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a *nation* who will produce its fruit’ (21.43-45). Similarly in the parable of the Wedding Feast, if the allegory is taken seriously, no distinction is made between the leaders and the masses: ‘the king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town’ (22.7). Consequently it is not surprising that the sevenfold strictures on the scribes and Pharisees end with a lament over Jerusalem as such, not just the leaders themselves (23.37-39).

The final condemnation comes, of course, at the trial before Pilate. The chief priests and the elders did indeed whip up the crowds to ask for Barabbas, but finally the people, not just the leaders, take the responsibility on themselves, ‘And the people, everyone of them, shouted back, “Let his blood be on us and on our children”’ (27.25). Here Matthew deliberately (having earlier used *ὄχλος* for ‘crowds’) uses for ‘the people’ the expression *λαός*, which normally, and repeatedly in Matthew (1.21; 2.6; 4.16; 15.8), is a biblical expression standing for the sacred people of God, Israel as such. In the gospel of Luke there is a clear distinction between the leaders who are hostile to Jesus and the *λαός* who are responsive to him. Such a distinction cannot be said to obtain in Matthew.

There are, however, signs that Matthew’s strictures on the Jews and their leaders do not merely concern the past, the history of Jesus. They also have two contemporary dimensions for his own hearers. They are the result of contemporary controversy and also have the aim of warning Matthew’s own community. Matthew makes clear that his community stands well apart from the Jewish synagogues. He can observe without differentiation that the story of the theft of Jesus’ body from the tomb was current among ‘the Jews’ (28.15). To avoid any suggestion of good coming out of a synagogue Matthew goes to the lengths of changing *ἀρχισυναγωγός* into *ἀρχῶν* (‘synagogue-ruler’ into ‘a ruler’) in 9.18; there is thus no suggestion that Jairus, as he is

named by Mark 5.22, has any connection with the synagogue. On several occasions he carefully distinguishes 'their synagogues' from Christian assemblies (4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 23.34). The last two of these have a contemporary reference to persecution, which may be the source of Matthew's hostility, 'Be prepared for people to hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues'; 'I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some you will slaughter and crucify, some you will scourge in your synagogues and hunt from town to town'. How pressing a reality is persecution is shown by the addition of the final beatitude after the carefully-structured eight beatitudes, 'Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you', to emphasize the theme of persecution in the previous saying (5.10-12). This could be construed as putting the principal emphasis of the Beatitudes as being for Matthew on persecution. The persecution of Matthew's community cannot, of course, be taken as being exclusively from the Jewish side. Matthew also stresses that 'you will be hated by all nations for my sake' (24.10-12)

At the same time the polemic against the scribes and Pharisees, both in chapter 23 and in shorter mentions (5.20), also has the purpose of providing negative examples or 'negative stereotypes' (Ulrich Luz) for the Christian community, outlining behaviour which Christians are to avoid. Matthew's own community is firmly warned against hypocrisy in the teaching on good works (6.1-18), more vigorously, even with the appellation of 'hypocrite!' in 7.5, and finally with a warning that a Christian could receive 'the same fate as the hypocrites' in 24.51. The most obvious application of the warnings of coming judgement, and the threat of division between good and bad, in chapters 24-25 is to the Christian community. But G.N. Stanton points out (*A Gospel for a New People*, Edinburgh 1992, p. 165) that the juxtaposition of the polemic against Jewish leaders in chapter 23 may suggest that they too are to be similarly judged.

Stanton holds that Matthew's anti-Judaism represents 'anger and frustration at the continued rejection of Christian claims'. The anger and invective may be harsh by modern standards of courtesy and political correctness, and the use that has been made of Matthew's statements as a theological justification for anti-Semitism cannot but embarrass Christians today. But by the standards of contemporary invective Matthew's reproaches are mild. A useful comparison may be made with the sectaries of Qumran. It is perhaps helpful to consider Matthew's community as a similar sect within Judaism, similarly claiming to be the true representatives of the Covenant, accomplishing more fully what the parent body has failed to accomplish. The Damascus Document from Qumran speaks of 'the congregation of traitors who departed from the way...that he might call down on them the curses of his covenant and deliver them up to the avenging sword' (CD 1.14-16). There is the same sort of intolerance of the parent body as at Qumran ('blind men groping for the way', CD 1.11; 'all Israel had gone astray', CD 3.14), the same sort of invective against the parent body in normative Judaism, the same persecution from them ('they banded together against the life of the righteous, they pursued them with the sword', CD 1.21), the same judgement on unfaithful members of the community, the same mutual clan-support as at Qumran.

Personal Study Write an essay on one of the following two titles:

1. Is there sufficient evidence to lead us to suppose that Matthew was a Jew?
2. Did Matthew write from within Judaism or from outside it?

Chapter Four Christology

The dominant impression of the Jesus presented by Mark's gospel is one of awesome authority, but nevertheless a Jesus who is intensely human, who is jostled by the crowds, who sleeps in a boat, 'his head on the cushion' (Mk 4.38), who suffers the sarcasm of his uncomprehending disciples. His disciples call him 'Rabbi'. They may respond in reverent amazement, 'Who can this be?' (4.41), but there is no doubt that he is a man.

Matthew presents a still more awesome person. Jesus is already an exalted figure, who is lifted above and separated from the hurly-burly of daily life. When Jesus goes to heal Simon's mother-in-law, Mark shows him surrounded by the disciples; in Matthew the two protagonists confront each other in solitude, and the healed woman reverently serves not the whole party, but Jesus alone (Mt 8.14-15, contrast Mk 1.29-31). On a later occasion, the whole lively scene of the crowds jostling round Jesus, the woman with a haemorrhage pushing through the crowd, and the disciples answering him back, disappears, to give place to a solemn and seemingly solitary meeting between Jesus and the woman (Mt 9.21-22, contrast Mk 5.28-34). At the Calming of the Storm the sarcasm of the disciples has been cut out, whether to protect the disciples themselves or because it is unfitting that Jesus should be so addressed. Instead of protesting, 'Teacher, do you not care?' (Mk 4.38), the disciples cry out, 'Lord, save us!' (Mt 8.25). At the Feeding of the Five Thousand, instead of the disciples' sarcastic riposte, 'Are we supposed to go and buy 200 denarii-worth of bread?' (Mk 6.37), the disciples merely prepare for the wonder by pointing out, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish' (Mt 14.17); the rest can be left to Jesus.

1. From Rabbi to Lord

The form of address used to Jesus is also indicative. In Mark Jesus is addressed as 'Lord!' only by the Syro-Phoenician woman, a gentile (7.28). All others address him as 'Teacher!', either in Greek (10 times) or in Aramaic ('Rabbi', 4 times). In Matthew the only person to address Jesus as 'Rabbi' is Judas, when he is about to betray him (Mt 26.25, 49). Jesus is addressed as 'Teacher' by a scribe, by a would-be disciple (Mt 8.19), by the scribes and Pharisees demanding a sign (12.38), the rich young man who fails to follow Jesus (19.16), and by the three who finally try to trap Jesus with questions (22.16, 24, 36). For Matthew, then, it has a rather sarcastic air, used as it is only by those who fail to recognise him for what he is.

Those who do recognise Jesus call him by the much more reverential title 'Lord!' (8.2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9.28; 14.28, 30; 15.22, 25, 27; 16.22; 17.4, 15; 18.21; 20.30, 31, 33; 26.22). It would be an exaggeration to claim this as a divine title. Such, however, would be at least suggested if it were used with an article, 'the Lord', since this expression is frequently used of God. Such a usage appears in Matthew only at the empty tomb after the Resurrection, 'where they had laid the Lord' (28.6). But, though not in itself a divine title, the consistent use of this word by Matthew must have some significance. Mark uses it with the article in this way only once, and there it is full of mystery: when the disciples go to fetch Jesus' mount for the entry into Jerusalem they are instructed to say, 'The Lord needs it' (Mk 11.3). Who is this Lord/lord? Is it Jesus or the Lord God? Matthew follows this phrase (Mt 21.3). The most significant of all the scenes of Jesus in Matthew is the Last Judgement (Mt 25.31-46), where the Son of Man comes in *his* glory, escorted by all the angels, and takes his seat on *his* throne of glory, acting as King and judge, addressed as 'Lord!', in a way that could be applied in Judaism only to the Lord God himself, to whom belongs

all glory, whom the angels serve.

2. Jesus, Son of David

In accordance with Matthew's Jewish background, the true significance of Jesus is shown in more detail by his presentation as son of David and as a second Moses. It is notable that in Mark Jesus is hailed as 'son of David' only once, by Bartimaeus at Jericho (Mk 10.48). This is a messianic title and is used on a highly significant occasion, for a few verses later Jesus enters Jerusalem in messianic triumph while the crowds shout 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of David our father' (Mk 11.10). This is, however, consistent with the whole approach of the Markan gospel. There Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God, not himself. So on this occasion too it is the kingdom which takes centre stage, not the person of Jesus. Not so in Matthew, for there Jesus has moved to centre stage and the crowds hail him directly, 'Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord!' (Mt 21.9)

The whole tone of the gospel is of course set by the first two chapters, for there Matthew sets out to show that Jesus always was, from the first moment of his existence, what he afterwards came to be seen to be. The centre of the first chapter is Jesus' sonship of David. The hope of a future ruler who would be a son of David and so a favoured son of God had been strong in Israel since the promises made by Nathan to David in 2 Samuel 7. These promises had been the backbone of the dynasty of kings of Judah until the Babylonian exile, ensuring their stability - by contrast to the kaleidoscopic changes of dynasty in the northern kingdom of Israel. They are quoted or alluded to constantly in the Bible, e.g. 1 Kings 5.19; Psalm 89.29-37. Their importance in the first century is shown by their use in the literature of Qumran, 4Q174.8-12 (see G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Penguin 1995, p.353-4). Its important role in the earliest Christian theology is shown by the central proclamation given in Rm 1.3-4, 'the gospel concerning his son who, in terms of human nature was born a descendant of David'.

The puzzling feature of this chapter and its genealogy is that the genealogy ends not with Jesus but with Joseph, who was no blood relation of his. The purpose of the second half of the chapter, the story of Joseph and the angel, is, however, precisely to solve this problem. Joseph adopts Jesus into the House of David, and that not by his own will or decision, but only in obedience to the instructions of the divine messenger. Joseph himself was inclined to break off his relationship with Mary and her child when he heard about the pregnancy. The chapter therefore climaxes with the naming of Jesus by Joseph. This is the act of a father, implying that Joseph acknowledges Jesus as his son, thereby adopting the child into his own house, making him a son of David. (The Jews were less insistent on physical parenthood for fatherhood than seems necessary in modern eyes. The levirate law in Deut 25.5-6 is another means whereby a child is counted as the son of a man not physically his father).

Two explanations of Joseph's motivation vie for acceptance, suspicion and reverence.

1. Suspicion: Joseph did not know about Mary's pregnancy, and when he discovered he decided to divorce her on the grounds that she had committed adultery. But, being a kindly person, he decided to do it secretly and spare Mary the publicity. The angel, however, explained matters so that Joseph did not need to take this step.

There are two objections to this interpretation. The first, traditional, is that there would surely have been more trust and communication between Joseph and Mary; Mary would have kept Joseph informed at every stage. The force of this objection is doubtful, for a

remarkable feature of the Matthean Infancy Story is that no human being communicates with or speaks to another. Certainly Joseph never explains to Mary what he is doing when he takes her down to Egypt and back! A second objection is stronger: Joseph is said to be not kindly or tender-hearted but precisely δίκαιος, just or law-observant (1.19). It would be strange that he should be described in this way as a motive for evading the law that an adulteress should be stoned.

2. Reverence: realising that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, Joseph thought he had no part to play and should retire quietly from the scene, rather than act as a rival to the Spirit of God. The messenger of God, however, reassures him that he has a part to play, which only he can play, namely to adopt Jesus into the House of David. The difficulty about this interpretation is that is expressed only clumsily by the Greek.

The genealogy then functions as a sort of resume of the history of Israel to which Jesus is heir as son of David, rolling out the great names of Israel's past from Abraham onwards, concentrating especially on David himself, the only person who is given a title, 'the king'. For a Jew such as Matthew this would have been a proud recital, which gives background to the title of Jesus as son of David. Further reminder of the history of the Davidic dynasty is laid before the reader through the Emmanuel-quotation from Isaiah, for this was the promise of deliverance and salvation given by Isaiah to King Ahaz.

Matthew continues to give prominence to this title of Jesus as son of David, not only in Mark's double use by the blind at Jericho, 'Have pity on us, son of David!' (Mt 20.30, 31), but also to other blind men cured by Jesus (9.27), and even the Canaanite woman whose daughter Jesus heals (15.22). It reaches its climax at the messianic entry into Jerusalem, 'Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (21.9).

3. Jesus, the Second Moses

The promise of Moses in Dt 18.15 remained of crucial importance in Israel, 'Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet like me; you will listen to him'. Especially in the first century, when it was felt that there had long been no prophet in Israel (Lam 2.9; 1 Mc 4.46; 9.27), the yearning for a prophet like Moses was strong. A series of parallels with the story of Moses' infancy and early life shows that Matthew is deliberately telling the story of Jesus' infancy in such a way as to bring out the similarity between the two children: the events of Jesus' infancy show him to have been a second Moses. For this Matthew naturally uses not purely the biblical account but also the stories current at the time, amplifying the biblical account; one version of these can be conveniently found in the contemporary historian Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.9 (data from Josephus are given in italics in the ensuing table). Thus

The oppressed Hebrews sought freedom.
*A seer foretold the birth of a rival leader
 who would save his people.*
Pharaoh and Egyptians were alarmed.
 Pharaoh tried to kill the male Hebrew babies
 but his quarry escaped.

Oppressed Israel sought freedom.
*The magi warned Herod of the child's birth
 who would save his people.*
Herod and the whole city was alarmed.
 Herod killed all the male babies at Bethlehem
 but his quarry escaped.

Moses fled from his country.	Jesus and family fled from his country.
The Lord spoke to Moses in exile:	An angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in exile:
‘Return, for all those seeking your life are dead.’	‘Return, for those seeking the child’s life are dead.’
Moses took his wife and children back.	Joseph took his wife and child back.

Other accounts have other details of similarity, for instance the star: at the birth of Moses a great light like that of a star filled the house. But the appearance of a star to mark the birth of a great man is a standard feature of legends in the ancient world, reported at the birth of Alexander the Great, Mithridates, the Emperor Augustus and others (readily understood today through the use of the image ‘star’ of film or football: ‘suddenly the real star appeared from the dressing-room’).

The narration of the events of Jesus’ birth after the model of Moses implies almost nothing about the historicity of the details. On the one hand, a reading of Josephus’ account is instructive in showing the latitude which a strict historian of the period felt himself to have in embroidering a story. On the other hand, Herod made no bones about executing several sons, wives and other members of his family on suspicion of attempts to supplant him. He was so notorious for this that his friend the Emperor Augustus punned in Greek that he would rather be Herod’s υς than his υιος (his *hys* than his *hyios*, his pig than his son - Herod the Jew didn’t eat pork - got it?). To kill the few male babies of the little hill-village of Bethlehem would make no problem for him. This could, however, imply *either* that the story is true *or* that it is well tailored to Herod’s reputation.

The parallel between Jesus and Moses continues to be important throughout the gospel. It surfaces continually. In the story of the Testing of Jesus in the desert, the final temptation takes Jesus to a very high mountain from where he can see all the kingdoms of the world, which the tempter promises to give him (4.8). This is a satire, almost a parody, on Moses’ final ascent to Mount Nebo opposite Jericho (so in the same area), from where he sees the whole of Palestine, which God himself promises to give to his descendants (Dt 34.1-4). A further little touch in the same account showing that Matthew is thinking of Jesus in terms of Moses is the note that he fasted ‘for forty days (as in Mark’s account) *and forty nights*’ (as Moses’ stay on the mountain in Ex 24.18). Again, in his account of the Transfiguration Matthew makes slight adjustments to Mark’s account which show that he is representing Jesus as a second Moses: the radiance of Jesus’ face, white like the light (Mt 17.2) mirrors that of Moses at his descent from the mountain (Ex 34.29-35). Thus, for Matthew, Moses and Elijah accompany Jesus at the Transfiguration because these two conversed with God on the holy mountain.

The principal importance of this imagery of Jesus as the second Moses comes, however, to be seen in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus goes up the mountain to give the second Law (Mt 5.1), just as Moses had done. This Law is the basis of the new people of God, just as the Mosaic Law was the foundation of Israel as God’s people. By giving this Law on the mountain Jesus becomes the founder-figure of the Church just as Moses was the founder-figure of the people of Israel. It is as the second Moses that he has the right to correct and fulfil the Law in the six antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, and on the other occasions when he deals authoritatively with the Laws of Sabbath, purity of food, etc. This is part of the more general imagery of Jesus’ own ἐκκλησία as a mirror and fulfilment of the people of Israel (see below, p.35-36).

4. Son of God

1. The Title

Mark had already put considerable emphasis on Jesus' sonship of God by his use of the title at crucial points. Jesus is called 'Son of God' seldom but significantly. The title brackets the gospel. It occurs in the introduction, possibly in the title of the gospel itself, 'Beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, [son of God]', though the text is somewhat doubtful, present only in some manuscripts. At any rate it is confirmed by the divine Voice at the Baptism, 'You are my beloved son'. This introduction sets the scene of the gospel, explaining to the reader what is at issue. After the introduction, with Mark's carefully-wrought irony, the curtain comes down, and the reader watches the actors on stage discovering gradually who Jesus is. It is only at the crucifixion that the centurion recognises him explicitly, 'In truth this man was son of God' (Mk 15.39), the first human being to do so. At the same time the gospel could be considered as a journey of discovery also for the reader, a gradual revelation of what is meant by 'son of God' in the title and by the Voice at the Baptism. For the expression 'son of God' is used in the Bible of several different classes of beings; it certainly does yet not denote what later theology understands by the incarnate Son of God. Angels are called sons of God, Israel itself is called God's son, so are the judges and rulers of his people; latterly the Wisdom literature calls the just man God's son (see *New Jerusalem Bible*, note Mt 4.3d). So far its exact sense for the evangelist remains to be defined. It denotes that the son of God is God's special representative, specially close to God and specially endowed with his powers for a particular mission.

Matthew does not adhere closely to this gradual discovery unfolded by Mark. Already in the first chapter the mystery of Jesus is deepened by his conception through the Holy Spirit. In Old Testament terms the Holy Spirit is not neatly the Third Person of the Trinity, but the means by which God acts in the world, a dynamic force seizing on judges and prophets to enable them to act in extraordinary and powerful ways in the fulfilment of God's purposes. The spirit of God is the awesome power of God which led the people by the hand of Moses (Isaiah 63.11-14), the power which gives life to the whole people of Israel in the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek 37.1-14), which will be spread over the whole people at the last times (Joel 3). This is surely linked in Mt 1.23 to the mysterious name given to the child, 'Emmanuel, God with us' - perhaps a name of secret significance, since publicly he is to be called 'Jesus'. It would be absurdly anthropomorphic to imagine that, since Mary conceives through the Spirit of God, God is thereby shown to be the father of Jesus, as though God supplied the missing genes in a human way. But at the same time Jesus is somehow shown to be child of God. All this, at such an early stage of the gospel, still needs interpretation.

In the second chapter, where Jesus is presented as the Second Moses, a further reminder that he is God's son is given in the precise historical context by the quotation, 'I called my son out of Egypt' (2.15). Here Matthew plays on that wonderful passage of Hosea in which the prophet expresses God's undying paternal love for Israel. This quality of Jesus as God's son Israel returns in the story of the Testing in the Desert. It is precisely the testing of God's son, for forty days instead of forty years. The quasi-rabbinic text-swapping operation between Jesus and the devil relies on texts from Deuteronomy (Dt 8.3; 6.16; 6.13), the story of Israel's temptations in the desert. Jesus incorporates in himself the Israel of God, and we are being shown that, where God's son Israel succumbed, God's son Jesus overcomes the testing.

The awesome story of the gradual revelation of the mystery of Jesus' personality unfolds much as it does in the gospel of Mark. But it is a re-reading of the gospel of Mark, not unlike the re-

reading of the earlier prophetic books in the later books of the prophets, more explicit and fuller. Some features have already been mentioned, the solemn one-to-one confrontations with Simon's mother-in-law and the Woman with a Haemorrhage replacing the crowd scenes of Mark, the suggestive naming of Jesus as 'κύριε/lord' instead of 'teacher'. Where Mark simply shows Jesus 'proclaiming' over all Galilee and expelling demons (Mk 1.39), Matthew gives the content of Jesus' teaching, the new Law of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), followed by a recital of ten miracles (Mt 8-9). Whereas in Mark the disciples creep only slowly towards an understanding of who Jesus is, again and again Matthew downplays this slowness or shows them grasping the mystery (compare Mk 4.40-41 with Mt 8.27; Mk 6.37 with Mt 14.17; Mk 6.51-2 with Mt 14.33; Mk 8.17 with Mt 16.8-9; Mk 8.21 with Mt 16.12). One reason for this may well be that Mark has a special purpose in showing the slowness of the disciples, while Matthew wishes to spare the future leaders of the Church. A further reason, however, must be that the personality of Jesus is such that it cannot remain obscure and unrecognised.

The Christological climax of this re-reading is that Matthew deserts Mark's clear structure, which was moulded around Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. For Mark the earlier part of the gospel leads up (via the symbolic opening of the eyes of the blind man of Bethsaida in Mk 8.22-26) to the watershed of Peter's long-delayed recognition that Jesus is the Christ; then the later part consists in the painful process of learning that Jesus, precisely as Christ, must suffer and be rejected (and again the revelation comes, at the Passion and Resurrection, via the symbolic opening of the eyes of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho). Only at the Cross does any human being recognise Jesus as son of God. For Matthew the recognition comes earlier and is more penetrating. Twice Peter acknowledges Jesus not merely as the Christ but as son of God.

The daunting scene of Jesus Walking on the Water receives its sense from the Old Testament tradition that only God controls the seas - always a frightening element to the Hebrews, often represented as Rahab, the great monster of the deeps - in such passages as Ps 65.7; 89.9; or especially 107.23-30:

Voyagers on the sea in ships,
plying their trade on the great ocean,
have seen the works of Yahweh,
his wonders in the deep.

By his word he raised a storm-wind,
lashing up towering waves. ...

They cried to Yahweh in their distress,
he rescued them from their plight,
he reduced the sea to a calm
and all the waters subsided,
and he brought them, overjoyed at the stillness,
to the port where they were bound.

Similarly, only God can walk on the seas, so that Jesus' appearance walking on the sea is immediately seen as a divine apparition:

Your way led over the sea,

your path over the countless waters (Ps 77.19, cf. Job 9.8).

But whereas in Mark the appearance of Jesus leads only to confusion, fear and finally to staggered amazement and incomprehension (Mk 6.50-52), in Matthew Peter acknowledges Jesus as son of God (Mt 14.33) in terms similar to the declaration of the centurion at the foot of the Cross. The reaction of the disciples in the boat to the sight of Jesus is fear, the fear that is a standard biblical response to a divine apparition, to which Jesus replies - as is again standard with a divine apparition - 'Have courage, do not fear.' In Matthew the conventions of a divine apparition continue with Peter's brave sortie onto the water: he falls at Jesus' feet and Jesus raises him up (Ezek 1.28-2.2; Dn 10.9-11). It is striking also that the Greek word Jesus uses for Peter's 'hesitation' occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only of the hesitation of some disciples before the apparition of the Risen Lord in Mt 28.17.

On the second occasion, at Caesarea Philippi (see p. 41), Peter's confession of Jesus as 'the Christ' in Mark (8.29) has again be transformed into a fuller acknowledgement, 'You are the Christ, the son of the living God' (Mt 16.16). It is notable that this confession is fuller even than that of the Markan centurion on Calvary, for it includes the definite article. The centurion declared, 'In truth this man was son of God', neither '*a* son of God' (implying one of many) nor '*the* son of God' (implying uniqueness); the declaration touches only the quality and personality of Jesus, not his uniqueness. It is precisely this that Peter's confession in Matthew does declare: Jesus is *the* son of God.

2. *The Relationship*

The title 'son of God' is attributed to Jesus by other people. What it means for Jesus is shown by Matthew principally in two ways, the widespread use of the expression 'my Father' and two scenes of striking intimacy between Jesus and the Father.

In Mark Jesus calls God his Father only rarely (8.38; 13.32; 14.36). In Matthew he does so more than a score of times, giving body to the relationship between them by his reference to it, as though it is the background of his thought. It occurs mainly in two reciprocal contexts, the fulfilment of the Father's will and the Father accepting and confirming the son's decisions. Thus anyone who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven must not merely call out 'Lord, Lord!', but must do the will of 'my Father in heaven' (7.21), fulfilling the petition of the Lord's prayer (6.10). The full and exemplary dramatic accomplishment of this comes in the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, when he fully accepts the Father's will (26.39-53).

In reciprocation of this acceptance by Jesus of his Father's will comes the acceptance by the Father of Jesus' decisions. In the mission discourse the union of Father and son is suggested by Jesus acting as the Father's representative in acceptance or rejection: 'If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.' (10.32-33). The same comes to view in the scene of the last judgement, where Jesus exercises the power and majesty of judgement on the Father's behalf. Escorted by all the angels (and normally the angels are the courtiers of God), seated on his throne of glory (glory is a divine prerogative), he declares, 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed' (25.31-34). These passages therefore express a sharing and a union of activity and power between Father and son. We are already on the road towards the full Johannine expression of the same union, 'The Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgement to the Son, so that all may

honour the Son as they honour the Father. Whoever refuses honour to the Son refuses honour to the Father who sent him.' (Jn 5.22-23).

One scene of extraordinary intimacy between Jesus and the Father is given in Mt 11.26-27:

I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Even on a superficial level this language bespeaks intimacy between Father and son. This impression is deepened by the biblical background of the passage. It is, firstly, an intensely Jewish prayer, comparable to the prayer of Sirach 51.1 (starting, 'I shall give thanks to you, Lord and King, and praise you, God my Saviour'), and to many of the hymns of Qumran. There are immediate resonances with the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, where Wisdom represents the personification of God acting in the world. Several passages attempt to express the closeness of this relationship between Wisdom and God, searching for images to express separateness with union and dependence with independence, e.g. 'She is the reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God's active power, the image of his goodness' (Wis 7.26: a reflection of light is light, but not the original light. A mirror reproduces the form of the originator only while the originator is present. An image, picture or statue expresses the personality and power of the person imaged.) Furthermore, it is a commonplace of biblical literature that Wisdom reveals herself only to the simple, not to the proud and sophisticated, as Matthew's 'hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them to little children'. Jesus is, then, presented as the Wisdom of the Father, intimately related to him.

Other allusions to Jesus as Wisdom abound in the gospel. 'Wisdom is justified by her deeds' (11.19). His promised presence among his followers (18.20; 28.20) is very similar to that of Wisdom, 'delighting to be among men' (Wis 8.31). Significant also is his equation of himself with Torah (often spoken of identically with Wisdom) in claiming that his words will pass away (24.35) no more than those of the Law (5.18), and his teaching and correcting the Law with such magisterial authority in the Six Antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount.

In addition, the expression of the relationship of Jesus to the Father is strengthened by the phrase 'Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father' which suggests an allusion to the son of man in Daniel 7.14, who comes to the One of Great Age. 'On him was conferred rule, honour, kingship, and all peoples, nations and languages became his servants', indicating that the One of Great Age shares his power with this son of man. A further dimension of this allusion is that the Danielic son of man, coming after the beasts who represent various empires, represents God's people, 'the holy ones of the Most High' (Dn 7.22, 27). This chimes in with the presentation, already discussed (p. 28), of Jesus as Israel, God's son.

5. Conclusion and Climax

All of these themes come together with great richness in the great final scene of the gospel, Mt 28.16-20, in which the risen Jesus delivers his final commission to his disciples.

1. *Emmanuel*

The most obvious point is that the final statement, 'I am with you always, yes, to the end of time', arches over, back to the first scene of the gospel, to bracket the whole gospel by the presence of Jesus, Emmanuel. Just as Mark is bracketed by 'son of God' in the introduction and in the centurion's acknowledgement at the Cross, so Matthew is bracketed by Emmanuel, giving the whole sense of the book: it is that in Jesus God is present, not only during few years of his earthly life, but till the end of time. The gospel consists in showing what this presence meant and means.

2. *Authority*

Perhaps the most remarkable trait of the Matthean Jesus is his authority. Already in Mark people are amazed at his authority in teaching and healing. In Matthew's re-reading this is emphasized even more, by the sovereign dignity and command with which Jesus acts. In the final scene Matthew's model becomes clear. The reader has already been glimpsing the Risen Christ, invested with cosmic authority ('all authority in heaven and on earth'). Now the position in virtue of which he acted is finally made clear; it is about this supreme Christ that Matthew has been writing. It is in virtue of this authority that the son of man had exercised the judgment of God, escorted by his holy angels and on his throne of glory. Now the full meaning of the statement of 11.27 is made explicit, '*everything* is entrusted to me by my Father'. His authority is greater even than that of the Danielic son of man, for the Danielic son of man was granted only 'the splendours of all the kingdoms *under heaven*' (Dn 7.27), not 'all authority *in heaven* and on earth'.

3. *The Second Moses*

The risen Jesus is seated again on the mountain, as he had been as the Second Moses, when he gave the new Law of the Sermon on the Mount. It is in this capacity that he sends out his disciples to make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe everything he has commanded them.

Personal Study Write on of the two following essays:

1. What are the chief emphases of Matthew's presentation of Jesus?
2. Compare Matthew's presentation of Jesus with that of Mark.

Chapter Five

The New Israel

1. Fulfilment

The purpose of the constant succession of formula quotations which runs through Matthew's gospel (see p. 21) is not mere allusion. It is designed to show that the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel has arrived.

Matthew's way of quoting scripture is markedly similar to that employed by the sectaries of Qumran, who saw their community as the eschatological fulfilment of the hopes of Israel. There is a significant difference, however, in the mode of quoting. Matthew starts from the events of Jesus' life and applies the scripture to them in order to interpret these events. The scriptural commentaries at Qumran take their starting-point from the scriptural text and interpret these by applying them to events of current history. See G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Penguin, 1995), 4Q161-4, p.320-23; 4Q174, p.353-54.

Spread over the gospel, these quotations give a strong sense that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the hopes and history of the people of Israel, fulfilling one aspect after another by his being and his actions. To anyone familiar with and moved by the history of Israel they give a depth of view and a sense of completion of the long and varied pilgrimage of God's people, taking the reader back to different moments in that rich tradition. It functions as a sort of extension of the genealogy of Mt 1. Brought together as in the list below, they form a moving testimony, as one element after another in the history of Israel's hopes, fear, failures and developments is seen to 'home in' on Jesus.

1.23 'Behold, the virgin will conceive in her womb and will bear a son and they will call his name Emmanuel', the promise made by the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz at the time of the threat of destruction to Jerusalem, represents Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises of the continuance of the royal line, and its blossoming in a messianic figure.

2.15 'Out of Egypt I have called my son', drawn from the lovely poem of Hosea about God's parental love for Israel, encouraging Israel back to fidelity in the period of the early prophets, presents Jesus as that son, the fulfilment of Israel.

2. 23 'He will be called a Nazorene' is obscure. It has not been possible to locate what scripture Matthew is referring to. On one level the quotation merely explains why Jesus went to live in Nazareth (the fairly inaccurate punning is typical of Hebrew explanations of names). On another level it suggests that Jesus was a *nazir* or nazirite, living a dedicated life in the tradition of Samson (Jg 13.5; 16.17).

4.14 'Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphthali! Way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles! The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light.' The fulfilment of this quotation from Isaiah heralds the spread of the light of revelation beyond the traditional limits of Israel, an important part of the hope of Israel, amply attested by the post-exilic prophets.

8.17 'He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases', a reflection on Jesus' healing activities, is used by Matthew to designate Jesus as the Servant prophesied in the Book of Isaiah.

This figure of the Suffering Servant played an important part in Jesus' own understanding of himself. More important for our present purposes, it had been used since the Exile as an explanation of the sufferings and persecution of Israel. Jesus is therefore shown to be the complete expression of that figure.

12.17 'Look! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul delights; I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgement to the nations'. This reiterates the messages highlighted by the previous two quotations.

13.35 'Listen and listen but never understand, etc' This tragic quotation from Isaiah, much used in the early Church and quoted several times in the New Testament, shows that Israel's stubbornness and refusal to listen is in line with, and indeed is the culmination of, the stubbornness which in Isaiah's time was leading inexorably to the Babylonian Exile. Israel remains sadly true to itself.

21.5 'Look! Your king is approaching, humble and riding on a donkey' reflects the chastened mood of humility in Israel, all its pride punctured by the Exile, characteristic of the period of the Return and of Zechariah. Jesus is the fulfilment of that humility and reliance on God rather than on self.

27.9 'And they took the thirty silver pieces, the sum at which the precious One was priced, and they gave them for the potter's field'. It is hard to know quite how Matthew understood this quotation from Zechariah, wrongly attributed by him to Jeremiah because of the idea of the purchase of a field (Jer 32). If the emphasis is on the purchase, this may be because Jeremiah's purchase was a symbol of hope at the lowest point of Israel's history. It brings the impending Passion of Jesus into relation with the impending destruction of Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah.

These are the most emphatic of the uses of scripture made by Matthew, since they stress that Jesus (or others) were acting in order to fulfil the scriptures. In addition to these, Matthew is constantly referring to the scriptures to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the hopes of and promises to Israel. This occurs especially frequently in the Passion Narrative, where it was already frequent in Mark and is intensified by Matthew. There the purpose is to show that the shocking occurrence of the Messiah dying a shameful criminal's death is the fulfilment of God's will expressed in scripture.

2. The New Community

Matthew is the only evangelist to use the word ἐκκλησία/*ekklesia*, literally a gathering, called out to be together. The word is used liberally by Paul of the Christian communities scattered round the eastern mediterranean, and by Acts of the Christian communities at Jerusalem and elsewhere. It is also used some hundred times in the Greek Old Testament to denote the assembly of God, the gathering of the people of Israel, translating the Hebrew *qahal YHWH*.

It is in this sense that Matthew uses the expression. The first of two occasions is a Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus speaks of 'my *ekklesia*' (16.18). This seems to be in deliberate imitation and counterpoint of the Hebrew 'gathering of YHWH'. So Jesus' community replaces that of Yahweh. This is not only a Christological but also an ecclesiological statement, showing that for Matthew the community of Jesus' followers has replaced the people of Israel. This is the positive side of the negative which we have seen above, in Matthew's strong statements about the rejection of Israel (chapter 2, §2).

The heart of God's choice of Israel to be his own people was his presence among them, first in the desert in the Tent of Meeting (Ex 33.7-11), and eventually in the Temple. When the Temple was completed, the cloud symbolising Yahweh's presence filled the Temple (1 Kings 8.10-13, cf. Isaiah 6). The presage of the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem was the vision of the presence of Yahweh leaving the Temple (Ezek 8-11, especially 10.18-22; 11.22-25). Correspondingly, what constitutes Jesus' community is his presence among them. This is the theme-tune of the gospel, from the Emmanuel-prophecy (1.23) to Jesus' final promise of his presence for all time (28.20), which bracket the whole gospel. It is mediated also by a similar promise at the heart of the chapter on the community (18.19). This is also the implication of the statement that one greater than the Temple is here (12.6), with patent reference to Jesus himself and his authority. In so many passages Jesus himself replaces Israel (see above chapter 3 §2), and it is his presence at the heart of the community which constitutes the community as the new Israel.

A telling passage about the presence of Jesus in the Church is Matthew's story of the Calming of the Storm (8.23-27). Through small and subtle changes to Mark's version Matthew shows that he is picturing the boat as the ship of the Church, which is safe so long as it turns to the Jesus who is calmly present to help them. It is striking that the story begins 'his disciples followed him', just after Jesus has said to a disciple, 'Follow me' (8.22); they are doing just what disciples should do.

1. Instead of the sarcastic reproach of the disciples to Jesus which Mark gives. 'Teacher, don't you care that we are lost?' Matthew has the confident plea to Jesus, 'Lord, save us! We are lost.' They use, of course, the title κύριε, which, as we have seen, has divine implications. Furthermore, the word used by Matthew for 'storm' (changed from Mark's word) is also used in the Book of Jonah for the storm at sea, which immediately suggests that they are crying out to God as Jonah was renowned for doing in the desperate situation of the storm.

2. Further, in Mark Jesus reproaches their total lack of faith, even *after* he has calmed the storm, 'Have you *no* faith?' By contrast in Matthew Jesus reproaches their *little* faith, 'Men of little faith' and only *before* he acts.

3. Finally, after the miracle Mark relates the awestruck fear of the disciples, 'Who, then, is this?' In Matthew the disciples ask no further questions, for their faith has been confirmed. It is 'people' (presumably outsiders) who are amazed (not doubtful) and query 'What sort of person is this?'

Incidentally, this passage is constructed in the delicate literary pattern of a chiasmus, with equal and opposite members. This satisfyingly brings out the balance of the story.

1. The onlookers - 'the disciples'
2. A great storm
3. Danger
4. Jesus asleep
5. They speak to Jesus
- 5'. Jesus speaks to them
- 4'. Jesus rouses himself
- 3'. Danger removed
- 2'. A great calm
- 1'. The onlookers - 'people'.

3. A Structured Community

It would be a mistake to suggest that in Mark Jesus has no thought for the future of the community he founded. The outlook of Mk 13 is the future persecution of the community founded by Jesus. But there is next to nothing anywhere in Mark about structures of the community, whereas in Matthew there is a great deal. It would be wrong to concentrate too exclusively on this side of Matthew's message. There is also plenty about prophets, who are of their nature unstructured and unpredictable. Such prophets clearly played an important part in Matthew's community, as in other areas of the early Christian community, such as Antioch and Corinth (Acts 11.27; 13.1; 21.10; 1 Cor 12.28-29; 14.29, 32). 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward' (10.41), says Jesus in Matthew's missionary discourse. They will be the butt of persecution: 'I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes, some you will slaughter and crucify, some you will scourge and hunt from town to town' (23.34).

1. Inclusion and Exclusion

The first necessity for a structured organisation is arrangements for inclusion and exclusion. Just as the old Israel had these, in the form of circumcision and a plethora of regulations by which members were to be cut off for various offences, so does Matthew's new people of Israel. For Matthew's community the entry formula is given in the liturgical formula with which the gospel concludes, 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (28.19). There are also arrangements for exclusion. Some of these are eschatological, related to the final judgement. Those who merely cry 'Lord, Lord!' and fail to do the will of the Father will be told to their faces, 'I have never known you; away from me all evil doers!' (7.23, cf. 25.31-46). Matthew is quite clear that the Kingdom now contains good and bad fish, good and bad wheat, which will be separated at harvest time (13.38-43, 47-50).

But there are also regulations envisaging exclusion in the present time: if the offender refuses to listen eventually to the judgement of the community, 'treat him like a gentile or a tax-collector'. The strength of this verdict is reinforced by the immediately-following confirmation, 'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (18.17-18). That this is only a last resort is emphasized by the stress beforehand on the duty of the members of the community to seek out and tenderly bring back the lost sheep (18.12-13). The importance of forgiveness in the community is stressed by the sayings on forgiveness and by the concluding parable of the Unmerciful Servant (18.21-35), taking up nearly half the chapter on the community. Matthew is not naive enough to think that a community can long exist without offence. The same message of forgiveness and the authority of the community to forgive comes to light also in the conclusion of the story of the cure of the paralytic in Mt 9.1-8: while Mark's conclusion is 'They praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this"', Matthew's conclusion runs 'they praised God for having given such authority (to forgive) to human beings' (Mt 9.8) - the power is given not only to Jesus but to other human beings also. It is forgiveness, not sinlessness, which is demanded.

2. A Comparison to Qumran

In all these regulations there is a remarkable similarity to another contemporary Jewish sect, that of Qumran (see p. 34). Their Community Rule contains definite rules for entry (1QS 6.19-24, Vermes, p. 78) and for exclusion, either temporary or permanent (1QS 7.18-26, Vermes, p. 80).

Particularly similar are the rules for rebuking a member of the community:

They shall rebuke one another in truth, humility and charity. Let no man address his companion with anger, or ill-temper or obduracy or with envy... Let no man accuse his companion before the Congregation without having admonished him in the presence of witnesses (1QS 5.25-6.2, Vermes, p. 77).

This process prescribes exactly the same three steps as Matthew 18.15-17: private fraternal rebuke, admonishing before witnesses, accusation before the Congregation.

There is much the same view of what constitutes a *quorum*. Only Matthew's version has two vital differences: firstly, it is characteristically Christ-centred, for we have already seen that the heart of Matthew's community is the presence of Christ as God was present in Israel. Secondly, Matthew requires lower numbers, being more ready to find Christ always present to his people. With Mt 18.20, 'Where two or three meet in my name, there am I among them' compare 1QS 6.4-8 (Vermes, p. 77),

'Wherever there are ten men of the Council of the Community there shall not lack a priest among them... and where the ten are, there shall never lack a man among them who shall study the Law continually.'

If an overall comparison of the two communities may be permitted, it seems to me that Matthew's community is less rigid, exclusive and hostile to outsiders. True, there are in Matthew anathemas ('Anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea', 18.6; cf. 5.22), but more prominent are the rules leading to self-correction rather than correction of others ('If your hand or your foot should be your downfall, cut it off', 18.8; cf. 5.30). Most particularly, there is nothing in Matthew equivalent to the dire threats of the War Scroll, planning destruction after the model of the ancient biblical *herem*, or total destruction: 'all these shall pursue the enemy to destroy him in an everlasting destruction in the battle of God' (1QM 9.6, cf. 19.10). Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret these threats in the War Scroll as formal rather than realistic. They were surely never meant to be practical instructions, for they are clearly modelled on the ancient biblical ban, and prescribe a largely liturgical battle-formation, more reminiscent of Josue's attack on Jericho than of a tactical battle-plan.

3. *Opening to the Gentiles*

The most remarkable feature of Matthew's conception of the community is its openness to gentiles. This is particularly remarkable in view of two factors, the lack of any explicit concept of inclusion of gentiles in Mark, and Matthew's own fundamental Jewishness. The latter of these we have outlined at length (see chapter 3); it is exemplified, for instance, in his increased care over Mark for the practices of Judaism. A few words on the former of them may not be amiss.

In Mark's account of Jesus there are features which might be seen logically to lead to a gentile Church. In fact the frequent explanations in Mark of Jewish elements, customs and words, suggest that the gospel was written for a largely gentile audience. These are indications of the way things in fact turned out, rather than part of the gospel message itself. In Mark Jesus himself has little contact with gentiles. There are only two exceptions, the Gerasene demoniac and the Syro-Phoenician woman. The Gerasene demoniac may be presumed to be a gentile, since his homeland, the Decapolis, is largely gentile; but Jesus makes no comment on his gentility. To the Syro-Phoenician woman he is brusquely insulting, calling her frankly a 'dog', though his response to her combination of wit and faith may suggest that he does so tongue-in-cheek (Mk 7.27-28). An opening to the gentiles after Jesus' death is suggested by the recognition of Jesus by the centurion

at the Cross; his acknowledgement of Jesus as son of God, is surely significant as the first acknowledgement by any human being, and so the first of many.

In Matthew Jesus' actual contact with gentiles has not increased significantly. The centurion of Capernaum must be a gentile (Mt 8.5-13). But the gospel is punctuated by allusions to the response by gentiles and the replacement of Israel by gentiles. In chapter 2 the homage of the gentile magi contrasts favourably with Herod's bloodthirsty hostility (see p. 22). The centurion of Capernaum is made the paradigm of faith, contrasting with that of 'the children of the kingdom' (8.12). As so often, the language used by Matthew gains increased significance from its biblical allusion, for 'gathering from east and west' is often used in the Bible for the eschatological gathering of Israel, returning from exile (e.g. Isaiah 43.5; Ps 107.2), see p. 22-23. 'Many will come from east and west' implies, therefore, that the gentiles will take the place destined in the last times for Israel. Matthew adds to the parable of the Wicked Tenants not only allegorical features which stress the failure of Israel to respond either to the early prophets (Mt 21.35) or the later prophets (21.36), but also the threatening codicil, promising the kingdom to 'a people who will produce its fruit' (21.43). This is immediately followed up by the highly allegorical parable of the Great Wedding-Feast, in which the gentiles are symbolised by the guests pressganged to the feast after the refusal of those originally invited (22.5.10). Most of all, the conclusion of the gospel leaves no doubt that the message is addressed to 'all nations' (28.19).

It is only interesting to note that, despite this determination to include the gentiles in the mission of the Church, Matthew is not entirely consistent. He does occasionally slip back into Jewish xenophobia. It is hardly consistent with his own standards of political correctness to express failure to live up to Christian standards by 'Do not even the gentiles do as much?' (5.48) or to express the ultimate expulsion as 'treat him like a gentile or a tax collector' (18.17).

4. Order within the Community

A remarkable change in the attitude of the evangelist to the disciples has already (see p. 30) been noted. The reason for this may be Christological or ecclesiological. Either Matthew's view of Jesus is such that no one of good will can fail to appreciate his personality, or Matthew's estimation of the immediate disciples of Jesus is such that he cannot see them failing to appreciate Jesus' personality. So in Mark even the chosen disciples, the Twelve, are slow to believe, and are constantly being rebuked by Jesus for their hardness of heart, their *πῶρωσις/porosis*, a term used in Mk 3.5 of the Pharisees' hardness of heart, and in 6.52 and 8.17 of the disciples'. In Matthew these reproaches by Jesus disappear. Similarly in Mark, immediately after a solemn prophecy of Jesus' passion and suffering, the sons of Zebedee show the almost unbelievable insensitivity of asking Jesus for places at his right and left in his glory (Mk 10.37). Matthew protects the disciples by transferring this tactless ambition to their mother; it is she rather than her sons who makes the request (20.20).

On the positive side Matthew shows the importance of the Twelve by a whole series of touches. Eschatologically they will take the place in the new Israel of the twelve sons of Jacob, the theoretical founders of the tribes, in the old community, for they 'will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel' (Mt 19.28). So also they share in Jesus' power of forgiveness (Mt 9.8 - see above). They are given power to 'cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and drive out devils' (Mt 10.8). They take part with Jesus in the distribution of food at the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mt 14.19-21). While Matthew is professedly writing about the disciples of Jesus' time, he also has in mind their successors, the disciples of his own day.

This share in and prolongation of Jesus' service does not, of course, confer on disciples any dignity or right to give themselves airs; it is strictly a ministry of service, not of grandeur. So much is taught by Jesus' reaction to the request of the mother of Zebedee's sons, 'Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave' (Mt 20.26-27). For good measure this is repeated during the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, which, as we have seen, is not only concerned with the faults of the scribes and Pharisees, but is also heavy with prescriptions for members of Matthew's own community, 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant' (Mt 23.8-11).

5. Peter

It is obvious that Peter has a special place in Matthew. To begin with, he is often the spokesman of the disciples. In Mt 15.15 he asks the question which in Mk 7.17 is put by the disciples in general, though Jesus continues to give his reply to all, using the second person plural. At the Transfiguration Peter is the spokesman, and takes on himself the task of building the three lodgings, which in Mark they will all do (contrast Mt 17.4, 'Let me build...' with Mk 9.5, 'Let us build...'). Similarly in Mt 18.21 Peter puts the question about frequency of forgiveness, couched in typically Matthean language. Once more, in 19.27, Peter puts the question on behalf of the disciples, 'Look! We have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Then there are three passages unique to Matthew in which Peter plays the leading role, 14.28-31; 16.17-19; 17.24-27. Significantly, all of these occur in the section of the gospel which concentrates on the training and preparation of the disciples; again therefore, Peter is seen as the exemplar of the disciples.

The first major passage about Peter (14.28-31) occurs in the course of the story about Jesus walking on the water, which we have already considered (p. 30-31). As it stands, it is indubitably a Matthean composition; Goulder (p. 377-8) counts 17 words and phrases among the 66 Greek words in these four verses. The portrait of Peter given here both puts him forward as enthusiastic and well-intentioned and presents him perfectly as typical of the disciples. Like them in the other scene on the waters (8.26), he is *ὀλιγόπιστος*/man of little faith. Like some of the disciples after the resurrection (28.17 - the word is used only on these two occasions in the New Testament), he falters in his faith. Nevertheless, his own faltering brings the disciples to the fullest acknowledgement of Jesus' quality as son of God which has yet occurred, anticipating both Mark's carefully built median climax of the confession at Caesarea Philippi and his final climax of the centurion's confession at the foot of the Cross. The picture is surely one of reassurance to later disciples, enthusiastic to trust themselves to Jesus as son of God, but faltering.

Matthew's treatment of the Caesarea Philippi scene is of the utmost importance. Obviously, after the previous scene in which the disciples have already acknowledged Jesus as son of God, it has a quite different import from its function in Mark, where it is the watershed between the two halves of the gospel, the first of which shows the gradual revelation of Jesus' messiahship and the second the gradual revelation of his suffering role. For Matthew its importance lies more in Jesus' answer to Peter than in Peter's confession to Jesus.

Arlo J. Nau (*Peter in Matthew*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1992, p. 110) maintains that Matthew has recast the whole of 16.12-23 to make a single unit, designed to criticise Peter as well as to praise him ('encomiastic dispraise'). In this it would evince a similar pattern to the walking on the water, where Peter first does well and then fails. It is built on the four occurrences of 'you are' in verses 16, 17, 18, 23: thus

- 16 'you are the Christ'
- 17 'you are blessed, Simon Bar-Jona'
- 18 'you are Peter'
- 23 'you are an obstacle in my path'.

'A concerned first-century reader could hardly have missed the linkage or the irony' (p. 110). So Peter is first praised and then slammed down. However, if the fourth 'you are' is considered part of a separate unit (as it originally was in Mark), the Matthean insertion may be read in a simpler and more forceful balance⁴. To each part of Peter's confession Jesus responds with a promise, in reverse or chiasmatic order. So the giving of the name/title 'Peter' responds to the giving of the name/title 'Christ', just as the revelation by the Father responds to the giving of the designation 'son of God':

- 'You are the Christ' - 'You are Peter'
- 'the son of the living God' - 'my Father in heaven has revealed to you...'

The origin of these verses is of less interest than their use by Matthew. There are certain characteristics which are entirely typical of Matthew: the form of the macarism (Blessed are you, as 5.3-11; 11.6; 13.16), Father in heaven (5.16, 45; 6.1, 9; 7.21; 10.32, etc). The whole of verse 19b recurs in Mt 18.18. On the other hand the traces of an Aramaic origin are unmistakable: Bar-Jonah (*bar* is Aramaic for 'son of'), the nickname *Petros*, corresponding to Simon's Aramaic name or nickname 'Kepha'/'Rocky', the Aramaic expression 'flesh and blood'. It seems sure that Matthew is using Aramaic tradition in his own way, and to teach the lesson which he wishes to teach. There are three elements in Jesus' promise to Peter, of which I propose to start with the third.

3. 'Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven etc' The repetition of this promise to the community as a whole in Mt 18.18 means that Peter is here again a sort of ikon or exemplar of the disciple of Jesus, standing not separate from the other disciples but as their representative.

2. The promise 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' should be brought into relation not only with the promise to Shebna in Isaiah 22.22, giving to Shebna the power of administration in the palace, but also with Matthew's own 23.13, the reproach to the scribes and Pharisees that they 'shut up the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go in who want to'. This encapsulates the failure of the scribes and Pharisees as shepherds of the people; it is the opposite of the task of the disciples. So Peter is here entrusted with the task which is imposed on them all by their vocation and mission (e.g. Mt 28.19).

1. The play on the name 'Rock' (in modern lingo, 'Rocky') for the foundation-stone of Jesus' community immediately recalls Matthew's contrast, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, between the man who builds on rock and the man who builds on sand. Again the important element is the bonding between foundation and building; they are not separate but one. The 'gates of hell' will be unable to prevail not against the rock, but against the community which is built on it.

⁴For this interpretation I *think* I am indebted to a conversation with Bishop Christopher Butler in Rome during the Second Vatican Council.

In each of these instances, then, Peter receives the promise which is given to the community of the disciples as a whole. He does not stand separate from the others, but is their exemplar, just as he is when acting as spokesman and in the ultimate failure of his three denials (Mt 26.60-75), where he stands for them all in their failure.

The third major Matthean insert about Peter is on the Temple Tax (17.24-27). This includes the little story of the Coin in the Fish's Mouth, a surprising story for several reasons. Firstly, it is the only miracle in the entire Jesus tradition which Jesus works for his own advantage. Apart from this, all the miracles are a response when Jesus' heart goes out to those in some kind of need. Secondly, it bears all the marks of a folk-lore story. Stories of precious objects found in the mouth of a fish are numerous in ancient literature (the most famous being that of Polycrates' ring in Herodotus' *Histories*) and modern folklore (I was recently told a 'true' story which centred on the return of an engagement ring in a fish's mouth during the 1990s). In its present form and position there seem to be two main points to the story. The first is in fact a highly polemical point: Jesus claims that he and Peter are sons of the Kingdom in a way which the Jews, the normal contributors of the temple tax, are not. Jesus makes the paradoxical assertion that precisely by paying the tax they show themselves not to be sons of the Kingdom. He then uses the miracle to 'have his cake and eat it', avoiding the implication that Christians are trouble-makers or unco-operative. The part of Peter has its own point, to show in an unprecedented way the closeness of Peter to his Master in their sharing the same coin of tribute.

The positioning of this pericope just before the community discourse gives a further dimension to this last point. Before beginning the discourse about behaviour in the community and about Christ's presence in the community, Matthew needs to show the bond between the exemplar of the disciples and Jesus, and also that it is in virtue of that relationship that the disciples are members of God's kingdom.

In Matthew, then, Peter has a special part to play: he is the Rock on which Jesus' community is built. It is not that a distinction is made between the Rock foundation and the community. Rather, the Rock has all the qualities of the community, and is the perfect example of them, enthusiastic, well-intentioned, devoted to Jesus and weak, aware of the need to forgive and be forgiven.

Personal Study Write one of the following essays:

1. How does Matthew present the Kingdom as the New Israel?
2. 'Jesus preached the Kingdom and it was the Church that came' (Loisy). Did the rot set in with Matthew?

Chapter Seven The Sermon on the Mount

1. Structures

1. The form of the Sermon

Matthew's Jesus is the Messiah in word and deed. As we saw at the beginning, Matthew's gospel alternates between sections of action and sections of teaching. Good teacher that he is, patterns and balances are important to Matthew, and his five great discourses are themselves balanced, the first and last being considerably the longest.

- 5-7 Sermon on the Mount - entry into the Kingdom
- 10 Outgoing mission of the community
- 13 Parables of the Kingdom
- 18 Inner structure of the community
- 23-25 Rewards and Punishments - the completion of the Kingdom.

In the same way the Sermon on the Mount is itself also so structured, and in a way which importantly shows the heart of its message: it may be seen as built round the Father-Son relationship and obedience to the Father's will. This structure (put forward by U. Luz) is perhaps slightly too strict, but there is a certain balance. The Lord's Prayer interrupts the run of dispositions required for the three good works of Judaism, so carefully taught by Matthean formulae (see p. 2); as it is, these fall on either side of the Lord's Prayer. The sections 5.21-48 and 6.19-7.11 are exactly the same length and may be seen respectively as instructions for action and instructions on the spirit of trust which must lie behind such action. The neat little section on fulfilment of the Law (5.17-20) corresponds to the summary of the Law in the Golden Rule (7.12)⁵. The introduction and conclusion balance obviously. Thus the centre which gives sense to it all is the Lord's Prayer is prayer to the Father that his will may be accomplished in his children.

- 5.3-16 Introduction: the Beatitudes, Salt of the Earth, Light to the World
- 5.17-20 Fulfilment of the Law
- 5.21-48 Surpassing the Law - the six antitheses - actions
- 6.1-8 Almsgiving and Prayer - Interior dispositions
- 6.9-15 The Lord's Prayer
- 6.16-18 Fasting - Interior dispositions
- 6.19-7.11 Trust in the Father
- 7.12 The Golden Rule
- 7.13-27 Conclusion: contrasting parables.

2, The structure of the Beatitudes

⁵Compare the famous story about the rival schools of rabbinic interpretation of Shammai and Hillel: It happened that a certain gentile came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Shammai drove him out with a builder's rule which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, Hillel made him a proselyte. He said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah, The rest is commentary. Go and learn!' (Babli Shabbat 31a)

The composition of the beatitudes is itself a special work of art, a well-crafted gem to start the Sermon. They are carefully constructed in accordance with precedents in Jewish literature, the closest models being Sira 14.20-27 and the Qumran text 1 QH 6.13 (for a full treatment, see E. Puéch, '4Q525 et la péricope des Béatitudes en Ben Sira et Matthieu', *Revue biblique* 98 (1991), 80-106). The text should first be given, verses 4 and 5 being reversed as in some good early manuscripts:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
Blessed are those who mourn,
they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the gentle,
they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness,
they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful,
they shall have mercy shown them.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
they shall be recognised as children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness,
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

This form of repeated couplets is common in Jewish religious literature. The two lines of the couplet balance in various ways, sometimes positive and negative ([Blessed is the man who seeks wisdom] with a pure heart, and does not slander with his tongue, 4Q525, Vermes p. 286), or complementary in some way; in the case of Matthew the balance comes from each quality and the reward for it.

a. The ensemble of Matthew's Beatitudes is knit together by the line 'the kingdom of Heaven is theirs' at the beginning and end of the whole, which gives the sense of the whole composition. At the end of each quatrain comes the other keyword, δικαιοσύνη / 'uprightness' or 'justice', a concept which we shall see to be central to Matthew's ethical concerns.

b. The number of words in each couplet and each quatrain of the Greek is carefully and exactly balanced:

5+7	
3+5	20
3+3	36
7+3	16
3+3	16
5+5	36

3+5

20

5+7.

c. The tense and sometimes the sound of the verbs of reward also balances :

1 and 8 both 'for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven'

2 and 6 both ending with a future active verb with object

3 and 7 both ending with a future passive verb, ending κληθήσονται/klethesontai

4 and 5 both ending with a future passive verb, ending -θήσονται/thesontai.

d. There is also liberal assonance, e.g. in the first quatrain six of the key words begin with 'p':

ptochoi, pneumati, penthountes, paraklethesontai, praeis, peinontes

πτωχοί πνεύματι πειθοῦντες παρακληθήσονται πραεῖς πεινῶντες.

The penultimate line of each quatrain is built round two words beginning with 'd':

dipsontes, dikaiosunen, dediogmenoi, dikaiosunes

διψῶντες δικαιοσύνην δεδιωγμένοι δικαιοσύνης.

3. The Accent of the Beatitudes

Only the main lines of this carefully crafted composition can be currently considered. The first may be seen by contrast to Luke's four Beatitudes (which defenders of the Q-hypothesis maintain are the source of Matthew's). In Luke the accent is on poverty: the poor, the hungry now, those who weep now; this is further emphasised by Luke's corresponding 'woes' which follow, on the rich, on those who are filled now, on those who laugh now. By contrast in Matthew the accent is on spiritual qualities: the poor *in spirit*, those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*, the pure *in heart*. Whereas Luke is addressing the disadvantaged, and is teaching the reversal in the kingdom of values and situations, Matthew concentrates on the spiritual values required for the kingdom. This accent will be strong throughout the Sermon, which is not to say that Matthew is interested only in interior dispositions; the interior dispositions must be expressed in action. But here he includes also separate Beatitudes on the meek and the merciful and those who make peace (qualities to which we shall return). Later in the Sermon he stresses interior spiritual qualities in the six antitheses (see below), the attitude to good works (see below), and the disposition of trust in the heavenly Father (6.24-34; 7.7-11).

For Matthew the hunger and thirst of a follower of Christ must be for δικαιοσύνη/dikaiousune, lamely translated 'righteousness'. For Paul (especially in Romans and Galatians) this term designates primarily a quality in God, his 'saving justice' or fidelity to his own promises to show himself a loving Father. For Matthew it is quite different, and primarily a human quality of adherence to the Law. This is indicative of a radical difference in approach between the two Christian writers, so radical that one wonders what would have happened had they met. In his zeal to distance Christianity from all Jewish practices, Paul's emphasis is always on the undeserved and unearned favour of God by which we are saved (χάριτί εστε σεσωσμένοι, by grace/favour you have been saved, Eph 2.5), and thus on the fidelity of the God who saves. By contrast Matthew sees the essence of Christian behaviour to lie in a new way of observing the same Law.

Matthew uses the term δικαιοσύνη/dikaiousune 7 times (elsewhere in the gospels it is used only once, by Luke), and its opposite, lawlessness, four times (not otherwise used in the gospels). This raises the question of how Matthew understands this quality. His background is certainly Judaism and the importance of the Law of Moses. In the course of the Sermon we are constantly reminded

that the teaching of the Sermon is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets: ‘Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil’ (5.17). The six antitheses are prefaced by the heading, ‘Unless your δικαιοσύνη/righteousness (a legal term) abounds more than that of the scribes and Pharisees...’ (5.20). Similarly the Golden Rule, corresponding in the chiasmic pattern (above) to 5.17-20, is interpreted, ‘for this is the Law and the Prophets’ (7.12). Is Matthew, then, merely teaching the importance of adherence to the Law of Moses or a slightly adjusted Christian equivalent of it? After all, the presumably Christian unfaithful servant in the parable will be given his place with the hypocrites (24.51), that is, will share the lot of the unfaithful scribes and Pharisees. Is Matthew’s an ethic of works such as is condemned by Paul?

4. The Christocentric focus of the Sermon

While Matthew is teaching an ethic involving certain courses of action, he leaves no doubt that the rationale of his instruction is the following of Jesus. It is no chance that the immediate lead-in to the Sermon is the Call of the First Four Disciples to follow Jesus (4.18-22). The Beatitudes in fact continue to show that the Christian ethic is Christian discipleship, the imitation of Christ. Jesus is the one Teacher in the gospel, teaching with authority in the synagogue, and finally giving the great commission to teach and make disciples of all nations in his power (29.16-20). So, immediately after the Beatitudes, still as part of the introduction to the Sermon, the disciples are told they are light to the world (5.14-16), just as Jesus is the light which has appeared to the people sitting in darkness (4.16), and as he is so often shown to be by his acts of giving sight to the blind.

The third Beatitude is ‘Blessed are the gentle’, in which the same word is used as is used twice more in Matthew (but nowhere else in the gospel tradition), and then of Jesus. In an important passage already discussed (p. 32) Jesus makes an extraordinarily intimate statement of his relationship to his Father; immediately following this key passage of self-definition he exclaims (11.29), ‘Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart’. Such a disposition is also the keynote of his entry into Jerusalem as the messianic king in 21.5, ‘meek and riding on a donkey’ in fulfilment of Zechariah 9.9. This meekness is to be shared by his disciples. In a similar vein Matthew places great stress on the theology of Jesus as the Servant, which is the subject of two of his formula-quotations (8.17 and 12.17-21). In the latter passage Matthew shows his emphasis by using the unusual text (in v.19) ‘he will make no strife and will not cry out’. The former verb is justified neither by the Greek nor by the Hebrew of Isaiah 42 as we have it; Matthew must have preferred this unusual version because it suited his meaning better; lack of strife is another formulation of meekness.

The quality of the fifth Beatitude is ‘mercy’. This concept appears as a central one in Matthew’s thinking. It is the quality which the scribes and Pharisees lack in their observance of the Law, as Matthew shows by his quotation of Hosea 6.6, ‘What I want is mercy, not sacrifice’, on three occasions, when the Pharisees object to Jesus eating with tax-collectors (9.13), when they put the demands of the Sabbath Law above the needs of hunger (12.7), and in the final indictment of the scribes and Pharisees - all of these passages being distinctively Matthean.

5. The Six Antitheses

Six times in succession Matthew uses the formula ‘You have heard it said...but I say to you’ (5.21,27, 31, 33, 38, 43) and opposes Jesus’ interpretation of the Law to the interpretation currently proposed. The preface to this passage shows that these changes are examples of how ‘your δικαιοσύνη /righteousness’ must contrast with and supersede that of the scribes and

Pharisees. The formulaic succession would suggest that the form in which they are given comes from Matthew. The content of the antitheses, however, may well go back to Jesus. In one case (on divorce, 5.31-32) we can see that Matthew has culled the antithesis from the teaching of Jesus as it is given in an episode recounted by Mark (Mk 10.11-12// Mt 19.9); Matthew has excerpted this teaching and repeated it in his antitheses. The two keynotes of the Matthean series are love and interiorisation. This is Matthew's message also elsewhere in the gospel; he adds as a typically-phrased conclusion to the question about the great commandment of love, 'On these two commandments depends the whole of the Law and the prophets' (22.40). The circle is closed by Matthew's statement of the opposite: in the last times 'through the increase of lawlessness, love will be put to flight' (24.12).

The first and the last are always important in a series, and especially in Hebrew literature, where they are often used to form a bracket enclosing the whole and giving an interpretation to all the material within the bracket. Here the final bracket teaches limitless love for all people, with the daunting prescription attached that 'you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (5.48). This is only responding to the opening bracket, on killing and anger, the opposite of love.

It is not immediately easy to see whether there is a principle which binds all the six together. In a negative way it is removal of the limitation which allows that an external practice suffices. Thus:

1. 'You shall not kill'.

Abstinence from the action of killing does not suffice. Also unacceptable are the interior attitudes of anger and contempt.

2. 'You shall not commit adultery'.

Abstinence from the act of adultery does not suffice. Also unacceptable is the interior attitude which lies behind it.

3. 'You must give a writ if you divorce'.

The observance of a legalistic practice does not excuse. As can be seen from the fuller passage in 19.1-9, Jesus is here cancelling an easy let-out by which a husband could divorce his wife, provided that he gave her a writ which prevented him re-marrying her. In practice this meant only that the husband must think seriously before taking an irreversible step, still consulting only his own interests. Jesus' teaching is that the generosity of marital harmony intended by God must endure.

4. 'You must observe your oaths'.

This again is a purely legal prescription. Jesus' demand that a simple assertion, unsworn, should suffice presupposes a whole world of peace, generosity and trust, where oaths are unnecessary.

5. 'Retaliation must be limited to the amount of the original offence'.

Here the correction turns away altogether from the matter of retaliation to press forward to the positive side of generosity: when a service is demanded, twice the amount should be offered.

6. 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy'.

The limitation of love to those deserve it or will reward it will not suffice. The necessary perfection of generosity is to extend love to all people.

In each case, therefore, the correction removes a limitation which allowed that the Law was fulfilled by a merely external act. In the Christocentric perspective of the whole Sermon it is important that the final antithesis leads back to the perfection of the Father, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (5.48). The Sermon can never be considered merely as a set of ethical

prescriptions; it is entirely focussed on Christ and his Father, entirely Christocentric and theocentric.

6. *The Lord's Prayer*

After the six antitheses follows another typically Matthean section, about the performance of the three classic good works of Judaism, almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Again Matthew teaches by means of an *ab wetoledoth* (see p. 1) and consistent use of formulaic language (see p. 2), teaching the message which is central to the Sermon. It is not external appearances which count but fulfilling the Father's will. After the second of the good works is inserted the Lord's Prayer. This may seem a slightly clumsy intrusion, but it is in fact in every sense the heart of the Sermon (see plan, p.43).

The Lord's Prayer in Matthew divides into two halves, the will of the Father and the submission of Christians to it. The expression 'Father in heaven' occurs in the Sermon alone 10 times, but in the whole of Mark only at 11.25-26; this is a strong indication of how central to the Sermon is the thought of the Father. The Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer (which defenders of Q consider to be Matthew's source) has simply 'Father' (Lk 11.2). Matthew's phrase, 'our Father in heaven' not only focusses the other mentions of the Father in heaven, but adds the community dimension of 'our', indicating the Father of the Christian community.

However, the most characteristic Matthean feature of the Lord's Prayer is the final petition of the first half, 'May your will be done as in heaven, so on earth'. The pair 'heaven and earth' occurs 16 times in Matthew, once in Mark and six times in Luke; this is, then, a clear Matthean formulation. Its importance to Matthew is emphasized still further by its use on the lips of Jesus in Gethsemane, 'May your will be done' (26.4). Jesus himself there uses the same words as his followers are here told to use; so at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount his followers are instructed to imitate Jesus in his acceptance of his Father's will. It is no surprise to find that the final conclusion of the Sermon begins (7.21) with a warning to those who cry, 'Lord! Lord' but do not 'do the will of my Father in heaven'. The whole Sermon, then, is a word-picture, a sort of map or landscape, of what it means to follow Jesus in doing the will of the Father.

7. *Jesus as Judge*

Jesus is not only the Teacher of the will of the Father, and the example of doing the will of the Father. He is also the judge. The conclusion of the Sermon (7.13-27) is largely a series of complementary images, the broad road and the narrow gate, the good fruit of the good tree and the rotten fruit of the bad tree, the house built on rock and the house built on sand. In the middle of all this, however, is the dreadful warning to those who do not do the will of the Father, but who work *αννομία*/*anomia*, lawlessness (an exclusively Matthean word in the gospels, the opposite of *δικαιοσύνη*/*dikaioσύνη*): 'then I shall declare to them, "I never knew you"; depart from me' (7.23).

From time to time we are reminded of this role of Jesus as judge of good deeds. 'The son of man is destined to come in the glory of his Father with his angels [whose angels? The Father's or the son's?], and then he will repay each person according to his deeds' (16.37 - the last phrase being added by Matthew to Mark's phrase). The scene is played out in full splendour in the dramatic division of the sheep and the goats (25.31-46).

Personal Study

Is there any teaching which could be called 'the essence of the Sermon on the Mount'?

Chapter Seven

Matthew and the End of the World

1. Jesus and the End

The eschatological accent of John the Baptist is one of the strongest aspects of his message. Not only does he present himself - by his clothing (Mt 3.4) - as the Elijah, the prophet who would herald the final coming of the Lord in the prophecy of Malachi, 'Look, I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great and awesome Day of the Lord' (Mal 3.23). His message itself is full of threat, 'Brood of vipers, who showed you to flee from the destined wrath? Bear fruit worthy of repentance... The axe is laid to the root of the trees. So every tree not producing good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire' (Mt 3.7, 10). Onto this stage steps Jesus, preaching the same message of repentance, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near' (Mt 4.17).

It is fascinating to speculate whether Jesus began his mission among the disciples of John. Was he among John's disciples until John recognised him, perhaps at the very moment of the Baptism, and pointed him out as the Lamb of God: 'Behind me comes one who has passed ahead of me... I did not know him myself' (Jn 1.30)? The rabbi walked ahead of his disciples, so this would signify that Jesus was first the rabbi and then became the disciple. 'He must grow greater, I must grow less' (Jn 3.30) could again be a play on the word 'rabbi', which means literally 'my greater one'. These are no more than hints which preclude any certainty. The tradition, seen for example in the little dialogue between John and Jesus before the Baptism (Mt 3.14-15), already shows embarrassment at Jesus, the superior, submitting himself for baptism to his inferior. In Matthew Jesus solves the problem by saying that they are *together* fulfilling all justice: it is not one submitting to the other, but is a joint action. Luke, for his part, neatly avoids the embarrassment by relating John's arrest before the Baptism, so that it is not clear who baptises Jesus (Lk 3.20-21).

The accent of Jesus' eschatological message is different from that of John. Both figures centre their teaching on the Kingdom of God (to avoid the impression that this kingdom is territorial, like the Kingdom of Lesotho, it is often preferable to translate it as 'kingship'; the basic stress is on the *fact* of God being king). The meaning of the Kingship of God can best be seen in the joyful songs of the Old Testament which celebrate it (e.g. Psalm 93, 96, 97, 99). When God rules, all is right with the world, and especially with his chosen people Israel.

All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh,
And your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingship
and tell of your might.
Your kingship is a kingship for ever,
your reign lasts from age to age (Ps 145.10-13).

The expression is often used as a shorthand for everything for which Israel longed, the restoration of all things:

God was putting them to the test
and has proved them worthy to be with him;
he has tested them like gold in a furnace.
At the time of their visitation they will shine out,

and the Lord will be their king for ever (Wisdom 3.5-8).

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger announcing peace,
who proclaims salvation and says to Zion,
'Your God is king' (Isaiah 52.7).

The Kingdom of God is, then, a symbol and a banner of hope. Conceptions of how this symbol is cashed may vary. John's concept does not seem far from that attested in some of the writings of Qumran, a forceful and bloody victory in which opposing powers are crushed:

The first division of foot-soldiers shall be armed with a spear and a shield, and the second with a shield and a sword, to bring down the slain by the judgement of God, and to bend the enemy formation by the power of God, to pay the reward of their wickedness to all the nations of vanity. And sovereignty shall be to the God of Israel (1QM 6.5-7, see Vermes, p. 131).

Put against this, the message of Jesus is puzzlingly different. His healing and forgiveness show that the mercy and love of God have reached their fulfilment. This puzzles John, so that he sends from prison (Mt 11.2-6) to ask whether Jesus is 'the one to come, or should we wait for another?' Jesus explains himself by sending back the message to say, in effect, that he is fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 35.5-6 and 61.1-2,

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
the ears of the deaf unsealed,
then the lame will leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.

He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted...
To proclaim a year of the Lord's favour.

But the same proclamation of the moment of retribution is still prominent. To the lakeside towns he declares, 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you' (Mt 11.21-22). Nor is Jerusalem spared. His last words of the Jerusalem ministry before he decisively leaves the Temple (Mt 24.1 - much more definitive than the corresponding passage in Mk 13.1) form the lament, which could well have been in the ancient rhythm of the biblical dirge:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets,
and stone those who are sent to you!
How often have I longed to gather your children together,
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, and you refused.
Look! Your house will be left desolate (Mt 23.37-38).

2. The Time of Fulfilment

When did Jesus himself expect this time to be fulfilled? He proclaims forcefully that the Kingdom of God has come near, and there is a note of unmistakable urgency in his tones. At the beginning

of this century the great exegete Albert Schweitzer thought that Jesus was a mistaken apocalyptic visionary, who expected the fulfilment of the Kingdom, in the sense of the end of the world, to come with his death. Some of the sayings of Jesus are certainly uncompromising about the nearness of the fulfilment: 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the son of man coming with his kingdom' (Mt 16.28). The position of this saying immediately before the triumphal scene of the Transfiguration must give grounds for questioning how the evangelists understood it. The Transfiguration is in some sense a manifestation of Jesus in divine glory; is this seen as the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy? Again, at the Last Supper, Jesus declares, 'From now on, I tell you, I shall never drink wine again until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father' (26.29). Further, at the scene before the Sanhedrin, Jesus warns them, 'From this time onwards you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven' (26.64). It certainly looks as though Jesus expected the Kingdom in some sense to be fulfilled at his death.

This is surely the implication also of the extraordinary scenes painted by Matthew at the death of Jesus (27.51-54). Not only is the veil of the Temple rent asunder - and this must be the sign of the end of Judaism as it was known - but also the dead rise again and go into the Holy City. Whether Matthew actually envisaged them going into the heavenly Jerusalem or wandering through the gates of the earthly Jerusalem is unclear, and indeed probably not a question one should ask. The meaning is that the time of fulfilment of the ages has arrived.

And yet the evangelists know perfectly well that the world continued. They even speak of another occasion in the future, when 'they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other' (Mt 24.30-31).

Such language had already been used in the early Church, and it is clear that this urgency was a strong accent in Paul's earliest preaching. In what is probably the earliest of all Christian writings, First Thessalonians, Paul writes, 'At the signal given by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord himself will come down from heaven' (1Thess 4.15). A few years later Paul expresses the climax of this triumph, 'After that will come the end, when he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished every principality, every ruling force and power' (1 Cor 15.24).

In order to understand what is the meaning of this language, we must undertake a step-by-step investigation, first of Jewish apocalyptic writing, next of Mark 13, and finally of Matthew's corresponding chapters, Mt 24-25.

3. Jewish Apocalyptic Writing

In the Jewish world around the time of Christ, both before and after it, a type of literature becomes popular which describes special revelations given to a privileged person, a seer, revealing the secrets of the future, normally in coded images. Often the seer finds the images unintelligible and begs for them to be explained to him, which is normally done by an angel (Ezekiel 1.28-2.1; 3.1-4; Daniel 7.15-16). At other times they remain in code and symbol. To those as well-versed in the Bible as its original recipients would have been these are less obscure, because they normally use imagery already familiar from the history of Israel and the prophetic books, symbols which have acquired a standard allusive value. The exultant images of Second Isaiah, a pathway for the Lord across the desert (Is 40.3), rivers on barren heights (Is 41.18), describe the return of the exiles from

Babylon in terms which would immediately recall the path across the desert of the exodus from Egypt and water provided from the rock during their journey. Frequent also, especially in the later prophets, is the cosmic imagery of earthquake, thunder and lightning, originating in the language used to convey the awesome encounter with God on Sinai in Exodus 19.16-18 (e.g. Joel 2.10; 4.15).

It is no coincidence that this type of writing becomes popular in times of persecution and hardship, for one of its purposes is to reassure those who are being persecuted that they are in God's hands, that despite appearances God is in control of history, and so in the end all will be well. Often history is described in barely veiled symbolism up to the time of writing (and the decoding lends assurance to the truth of the message as a whole), after which the future deliverance is painted in terms considerably more obscure and symbolic.

Two typical examples in the Bible of this type of writing, one in either Testament, occur in the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John. Daniel 7 describes the subjugation of Israel to various foreign empires, descended from Alexander the Great and his successors, represented by four great and terrifying beasts. Then the ultimate reversal, the triumph of Israel by God's will, is described in terms of 'one like a son of man' - a reasonable being by contrast to the bestial monsters - who receives all power from the One of Great Age. A similar coded vision is given at length in the final chapters of the original book of Daniel, Dn 10-12. The final book of the New Testament uses the same rich technique in its visions, such as the vision of the Woman (Rv 12), heavily dependent for its meaning on Daniel, or the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21-22), heavily dependent for its interpretation on Ezekiel 48.

The danger of misunderstanding becomes the greater when such allusive apocalyptic symbols occur in the course of a seemingly factual narrative. A telling example is the heavens opening at the Baptism of Jesus (Mt 3.16), an allusion to the heavens opening at the revelation to the prophet in Ezekiel 1.1, showing that this is a revelatory event, and thus preparing for the Voice from heaven. Another example is the darkness at the noon of the Crucifixion. This is not a factual report of a solar phenomenon, but an allusion to the description of the Day of the Lord in Amos 8.9:

On that Day - declares the Lord Yahweh -
I shall make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.

The verse in Amos, in its turn, is a reference to Exodus 10.22, 'there was thick darkness over all Egypt' (Mt 27.45 uses the same Greek words). The imagery of the exodus is used particularly frequently in the description of the liberation of the people of Israel. From this allusion alone it is possible to see that Matthew's 'darkness over all the land' is showing the event of the Crucifixion to be an echo and a fulfilment of the great liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt at the time of the exodus.

Discussion and illustration have here been confined to the biblical books, which are reasonably familiar and accessible. The literary type of apocalypse is, however, much wider than this. It can be seen particularly in the Books of Enoch, 2 Baruch and 4 Esdras. The same genre appears also at Qumran, e.g. the fragments entitled 'The New Jerusalem' (4Q554-5, 5Q15, Vermes, p. 324-6). All of these draw densely on the imagery of the prophets.

4. The Markan Apocalypse

Mark 13, placed immediately before the account of the Passion, is a prediction of the future of Jesus' community. Typically of an apocalypse, its message is that despite persecution, the disciples are safe and will be vindicated in the end. The dual accent is usefully noted by the count of verbal forms done by J. Dupont (*Les trois apocalypses synoptiques*, Le Cerf, 1985): there are in the passage 27 future tenses and 21 imperatives: the central concerns are prediction and warning. As so much of Mark, the structure is clearly patterned; it falls into three sections, treating first the persecutions, then the coming of the son of man, and finally the timing of this event. Each section is - in the allusive apocalyptic manner - ruled by a quotation from Daniel: Dn 9.27 in verse 14, Dn 7.13-14 in verse 26.

A. Persecution of the followers of Jesus

This itself is neatly patterned as a chiasmus, alternate sections being marked off by the imperative βλέπετε/blepete, 'take care' or 'watch out' in verses 5, 9, 23, and alternate sections by 'and when you...' in verses 7 and 14:

5: *Take care* - a warning of deceivers, false Messiahs

7: And when you hear of wars

9: *Take care* - a warning of persecution

14: And when you see the appalling desolation

21: *Take care* (the word βλέπετε is delayed till v. 23, as a concluding bracket) - a warning of deceivers, false Messiahs.

The chiasmus shows that the unit is complete in itself, and also stresses the centre of attention, namely the warning of persecution. The union between Christ and his followers is twice stressed, at both beginning and end; the persecution is 'for my sake' (v. 9) and 'on account of my name' (v.13). Already in Mark, then, perseverance under persecution with Christ lies at the heart of the design for the future of the Church.

On either side of the warning about persecution occurs a passage which provides the dating and the circumstances surrounding the persecution, 'when you hear of...', 'when you see...'. The false messianic claimants mentioned in the first and final sections feature also in the pages of Josephus. It was a feature of the revolt against the Romans, gradually simmering up to the boil in the fifties and sixties, that rebel leaders claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus' disciples are not to be diverted into false hopes by them. Of the other historical features surrounding the main teaching of vv. 9-13, the wars and rumours of wars have been interpreted as envisaging particular events, such as the Year of the Four Emperors in Rome (79 AD); but these years were a period of turbulence all over the Roman world, which makes a specific focus unnecessary.

The 'appalling desolation' is slightly more complicated. This idiosyncratic phrase in Daniel 9.27 describes the statue of himself which the Syrian King Antiochus IV set up in the Temple, thus desecrating it, in 168 BC. It has frequently been suggested that Mark is making a cryptic reference to an attempt by the Emperor Gaius to desecrate the Temple in 41 AD by setting up there an equestrian statue of himself, a project which sent shock-waves of horror through the Jewish communities. However, the plan was so delayed by protests that Gaius died before it could be carried out; therefore any reference to a statue 'standing where it should not be' would be inept, since it never did stand in the Temple. It would be wholly within the apocalyptic conventions that

the ‘appalling desolation’ should be a cypher for desecration of the Temple in any form, without the sights being trained on any specific event or object. The two passages should, then, indicate the period of unrest leading up to the Jewish War, culminating in the desecration of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, the climax of the horrors of the War.

B. The Coming of the Son of Man

All the way through the previous section on the eschatological horrors, ‘the elect’, the chosen ones, have been in view: the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect (v. 20); the elect will be barely saved from deception by the false Christs (v. 22). Now comes the climax in their vindication. The solemnity and import of the scene is conveyed by the heavily scriptural language, grouped round three focal points. First, the punishment of the wicked on the Day of the Lord is indicated, as in several biblical apocalyptic passages, but especially Isaiah 34.4:

For in the sky the stars and Orion
will shed their light no longer.
The sun will be dark when it rises,
and the moon will no longer give its light.
I am going to punish the world for its wickedness
and the wicked for their guilt.

Second, the coming of the son of man, as in Daniel 7.13-14. These verses should not be taken in isolation, but joined to the whole story preceding. There four beasts stand for the four empires opposed to God’s people, who are stripped of their power and subjugated to the son of man, who stands for the People of Israel. So here too the drama is being played out on the national level. This is reinforced by the third focal point, as he gathers the elect from the four winds, etc. The language here used is familiar from many passages about the re-establishment of national unity (Deut 30.3-4; Is 27.13; Jer 31.8; Ezek 11.17). The message is that, despite persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem and the horrors which attend it, the Lord is bearing his elect constantly in mind, and will re-establish them as the true Israel.

C. The Timing

When will this all happen? The discourse concludes with a little, neatly arranged chiasmus which in effect declares that the time cannot be known, but alert wakefulness must be the watchword of the Christian:

- a. The parable of the fig-tree - the signs are there (13.28-29)
 - b. The time is near; this generation will not pass away (13.30)
 - c. The event is certain (13.31)
 - b. The time is unknown, even to the son (13.32)
- a. The parable of the watchful householder - three commands to be watchful (13.33-36)

To give a clear time of occurrence is never within the conventions of the apocalyptic style of writing.

5. The Matthean Apocalypse

Matthew makes two important changes to the whole aspect of the Markan apocalypse. The first is that the mission to the gentiles is explicitly included in the scenario, and the second that the judgement at the coming of the son of man has become the climax.

Right from the initial question of the disciples the emphasis has changed. According to Matthew they ask no longer the general question of the disciples in Mark when ‘all this is to take place’ (Mk 13.4), but specifically ‘what sign there will be of your coming and of the end of the world’ (Mt 24.3). For Mark the disturbances leading up to the destruction of the Temple are the prelude to the re-establishment of the true Israel. The coding of these apocalyptic signs remains, of course, coded, but Mark’s end-point may be interpreted as the establishment of the community of Jesus’ disciples free from the trammels of the Temple and of Judaism. This was indeed a crucial moment in the development of the Christian movement. Matthew looks beyond that to the final judgement. So for Mark the coming of the son of man takes place ‘*in those days* after that tribulation’ (Mk 13.24), whereas for Matthew it is ‘*after* the tribulation of those days’ (Mt 24.29). They are separate moments, for the disciples initially pose two different questions, ‘Tell us [1] when this is going to happen, and [2] what sign will there be of your coming and the end of the world?’ (24.3).

This gives the opportunity to include strongly the mission to the gentiles, in accordance with the great final commission at the end of the gospel (28.16-20). So Matthew includes the emphatic ‘This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world as evidence to all the nations, and then will come the end’ (24.14), and among the final signs of the end Matthew adds (24.30) the repentance of ‘all the tribes of the earth’, as prophesied in Zechariah 12.11-14. The elect who will be gathered from the four winds for the final judgement will now include ‘all the nations’, as Matthew shows by his use of the same verb *σύναγω*/sunago in 24.31 and 25.33.

The greatest change in the Matthean presentation is, of course, that new scene represented by the final judgement and the *παρουσία*/parousia of the Son of man. The grandeur of the scene is immediately suggested by the adoption of this word from the imperial cult. It is used in the cult of the Roman Emperors for the coming or visitation of a Roman Emperor on an official visit, to be received with great pomp and ceremony. The Palestinian area of the Near East is still littered with magnificent triumphal arches built in preparation for the *παρουσία* of the Emperor Hadrian on a great imperial progress half a century later (e.g. at Jerash [the gospel city of Gerasa] and Palmyra). The same imagery is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2.19; 3.13; 4.15 and 5.23 as part of his evocation of the great triumphal procession at the Lord’s Coming, ‘at the signal given by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God’ (compare the angels and the trumpet-call in Mt 24.31), when ‘we who remain alive will be taken up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4.16-17)⁶.

The judgement will be the fulfilment of Matthew’s insistence in the earlier part of the gospel that the kingdom or the Church contains both good and bad, the good and bad wheat (13.36-43), the good and bad fish (13.47-50), who are to be sorted only at the end of time. The wedding-feast includes guests without the due wedding-garment of good works (22.11-14). So, as a preparation for the judgement, Matthew expands each element of Mark’s little finale (Mk 13.33-37) into one of his characteristic contrast-parables (see p. 4), each stressing the need for vigilance, and each promising and threatening.

- The moment of coming (Mk 13.33) is expanded into the Watchful Householder (Mt 24.42-44)

⁶The similarity of ideas between these two writings stretches further. The coming of the Lord will be like a thief in the night (Mt 24.43; 1 Thess 5.2-4), and no one will know when it is to occur (Mt 24.36; 1 Thess 5.1). There is, however, no need to posit literary dependence, for both authors could be drawing on common early Christian imagery.

- The steward given authority (Mk 13.34) into the Conscientious Steward (Mt 24.45-51)
- The midnight reappearance (Mk 13.35) into the Ten Wedding Attendants (Mt 25.1-13)
- The sudden return (Mk 13.36) into the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25.14-30).

After this stress on the need for good works, the reader is prepared for the final show-down in the scene of the Last Judgement. Of this scene there are two competing interpretations. The interpretation current in most popular Christian circles is that the judgement of 'all nations' is on the basis of their generosity and attention to those in need. This puts the matter on the level of the classic good works of Judaism. Such an interpretation is certainly possible, though it would be more typical of Luke's emphases than of Matthew's.

Another interpretation is perhaps more probable: those who are to be judged are the nations of the world, rather than the Christian community. They are to be judged not on the basis of their attentiveness to all those in need in general, but in particular on the basis of their reception of and actions towards the missionaries who are sent to them. The chief arguments for this interpretation are three:

- The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη /panta ta ethne, all the nations who are to be gathered together for the Judgement (Mt 25.32) elsewhere denotes not the members of the Christian community, but the nations to whom they are sent, from whom, indeed, they will receive opposition (24.9,13)
- οἱ ἀδελφοί μου οἱ ἐλάχιστοι, these least brothers of mine (Mt 25.40, 45), should indicate Christians, as elsewhere. Those who hear the word of God and keep it are 'my brothers' (12.49), and 'brothers' is frequently in Matthew (18 times) the term used to describe fellow-members of the Christian community. Especially close to these criteria for judgement is the saying in Mt 10.42, 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward'. This promise is made specifically with regard to Christian missionaries.
- An important argument is provided by the nature of the scene. Such scenes occur several times in contemporary apocalyptic writings. Particularly two scenes are close to Matthew's. The gathering of the nations together appears in 2 Baruch 72 (a scene clearly dependent on Joel 3.1-3):

After the signs have appeared which you were told about before, when the nations are in confusion and the time of my Messiah has come, he will call the nations together and some of them he will spare and some of them he will destroy... Every nation that has not exploited Israel and has not trampled the race of Jacob underfoot will be spared, but all those who have had dominion over you, or have exploited you, will be given over to the sword.

The Apocryphal Old Testament, ed.H.F.D. Sparks (Oxford, 1984), p.884

The same focus in such a scene as Matthew's on treatment of God's chosen ones as the criterion of punishment occurs in 1 Henoch 62:

The Lord of Spirits will then so press them that they will hasten to go out before him... And the angels of punishment will take them, that they may repay them for the wrong which they did to his children and his chosen ones. And they will

become a spectacle to the righteous and to his chosen ones.

Tr. M.A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Oxford, 1978)

It seems, then, despite Matthew's warnings to members of the community about the need for good works, that his final stress in his final discourse is not upon the judgement of the members of the community but upon all the nations whom they encounter their mission. The final centre of interest, then, is on the Christian mission to the world. Here again, then, Matthew has developed a saying of Jesus in the context of the mission of the Church of his own day.

Personal Study Write an essay on one of the following:

1. If you had only Mark and Matthew as guides, how would you counsel a Christian to look forward to the end?
2. Is Matthew a pessimist?