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Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

The Book

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL AS A COHERENT BOOK

Today the Gospels are very seldom read in their entirety, from beginning to end. Laypeople prefer instead to choose isolated passages for their daily Bible readings, perhaps from a book of lections. Pastors do much the same: they need excerpts from the Gospels for their sermons or instruction. Theologians often use the Gospels (and other biblical texts) as a sort of quarry or 'documentation centre', employing passages from them to substantiate one or another theological verity. This state of affairs can even be felt in Gospel research: here and there the Gospels have been described as books of pericopes or lectionaries, that is, as collections of the traditions about Jesus.¹ Hardly anything could be more incorrect than this assumption.

There are several reasons why the Gospels are only rarely read from beginning to end. One very important reason is that we know them well – or think we do. Books we know well lack the element of excitement we feel, for example, when reading a novel or short story. Instead, one prefers to read isolated passages in order to refresh the memory. But this is to overlook one very important consideration: all the Gospels, though perhaps least of all Luke's, have an internal 'line of tension' extending from beginning to end. Each has an underlying conflict that arises in the course of the narrative, reaches a climax and arrives ultimately at a resolution. In the English-

¹ G. W. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 59–100, treats Matthew's Gospel as a lectionary with a catechetical slant.

speaking world this underlying conflict is called the ‘plot’ of a story, though perhaps ‘plan’ might be a better word. The field of research known as literary criticism² has taken up the Gospels as a whole and contributed much of importance to their understanding.³

The Gospel of Matthew invites reading from beginning to end. This is made apparent by many indications in the text itself. I will begin by mentioning the so-called *signals* that frequently occur, particularly in the Prologue. By these I mean passages that stand out in context because of a fuller significance that remains unclarified when that passage is read in isolation. Why, for example, does the genealogical section list precisely four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the ‘wife of Uriah’, or Bathsheba? Why, in Matthew 2:3, is not only King Herod but ‘the whole of Jerusalem’ distraught at the news of the birth of the Messiah? What is the meaning of the quotation ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’ (2:23), which not even Matthew was able to trace in his Bible?⁴ Why, in 3:15, does Jesus say in reference to the Baptist and himself that ‘we do well to fulfil all righteousness?’ Why is it so important in 4:15 that a fulfilment quotation be used to prove that Galilee is the land of the Gentiles? None of this is obvious to the reader when he or she reads the passage in question. Another passage of signal character is the section interpolated in the Parables Discourse (13:10–15), where the reader is puzzled to hear Jesus’ sharp words against ‘those others’, suspecting that he could mean Israel. This puzzlement arises from the fact that up to now the people of Israel have actually been quite friendly toward Jesus and have listened to him in great numbers (13:1–2). Similarly, Jesus’ abrupt withdrawal into the house, away from the crowd, in 13:36 comes as a surprise whose significance remains, for the moment, unclear.

² In the sense intended by the proponents of New Criticism, i.e. a close explication of the meaning of a text solely on the basis of its literary form and language.

³ See especially Kingsbury (cf. n. 1, Preface) and D. Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story: a Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, *JSN.T.S.*, 42 (Sheffield: ISOT Press, 1990).

⁴ See U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (Minneapolis and Edinburgh: Augsburg Fortress/T. & T. Clark, 1990), 132.

Related to these signals are the *prophecies* in which the Gospel abounds. One of the prophecies adopted by Matthew is the annunciation by John the Baptist of the coming of Jesus, who will ‘baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ and ‘winnow the threshing-floor with his shovel’ (3:11–12). Another prophecy, this time added by Matthew himself, refers to ‘those sons of the kingdom’, who will be driven out, while those who ‘come from the east and west’ will feast with the fathers of Israel (8:11–12). Equally prophetic, of course, are Jesus’ announcements of the passion, which were also known to Matthew (16:21; 17:12, 22–23; 20:18–19). Even parables may contain explicit or cryptic prophecies foreshadowing the end of the history of mankind’s salvation, as happens in 21:43.

Thirdly I should mention the technique, encountered frequently in Matthew, of *key words*. Unlike their role in oral literature, they do not function as *aides-mémoire*. In a written text such as Matthew’s they have a different function altogether. For example, the word ‘righteousness’ is highly significant in Matthew’s Gospel. Its every occurrence has been added by the evangelist. Five of the seven instances of this word in the Gospel are found in the Sermon on the Mount, where it constitutes the most important key word apart from ‘Father’ in reference to God (of forty-five instances, twelve are in Matthew 6!). Taken together, these two words indicate the subject-matter of the Sermon. Such key words do not, of course, stand out when the Gospel is read in isolated excerpts, though they will probably strike people who read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. Similar key words can be found in other sections. Of twenty-five occurrences of the word ‘follow’, nine are in chapters 8 and 9. There is an accumulation of the word *krisis* (‘judgement’) in chapter 12, where five of its twelve occurrences can be found. The phrase ‘Son of Man’ is strewn very unevenly throughout the Gospel: there are no instances of it in chapters 1 to 7, three in chapters 8 to 10, six in chapters 11 to 13, eight in chapters 16 to 20 and eleven in chapters 24 to 26. The frequency of its occurrence in certain chapters will only strike those readers who read the Gospel as a continuous narrative. In Matthew’s Gospel, key words have the same

highlighting function as does underscoring today, a practice unknown in Matthew's time.

Related to key words are other forms of *repetition*.⁵ Many of these were handed down to Matthew by tradition. Mark, too, in his section on the disciples (chapters 8 to 10), has three annunciations of the passion. Furthermore, many repetitions result from the fact that Matthew occasionally presents two variants of the same text, one from his Mark source and another from the 'second source' or 'sayings source' known as *Q* (from the German word *Quelle*, meaning 'source'). Examples of this can be found in 10:38–39 and 16:24–25, or in 12:38–40 and 16:1–4. However, since Matthew shows himself capable in many other passages of recognizing and unifying duplications it would be wrong to attribute such repetitions to literary ineptitude or mere deference to tradition. There are other repetitions for which the evangelist himself was responsible. The most famous of these is the formula 'wailing and grinding of teeth' which Matthew found in the Sayings Source (*Q* 13:28 = Matt. 8:12) and repeated no fewer than five times (13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).⁶ Other examples include the summary of Jesus' preaching and healing in 4:23 (repeated in 9:35) and his warning to the watchful disciples (24:42 and 25:13). Chapters 12 to 16 are distinguished by Jesus' various 'withdrawals' from the people. These are repeated again and again (12:15; 14:13; 15:21; 16:4), usually with the word *anachōreō*. The evangelist uses such repetitions to indicate what he finds important or to mark the divisions of a larger section. In short, his repetitions are deliberate, not proof of literary incompetence.

Similar to repetitions are *inclusions*, that is, sections bracketed at their beginning and end by a particular catchword or motif. The entire Gospel is bracketed by the fundamental Christological motif of 'God with us' (Immanuel) in 1:23 and 28:20. Inside this large-scale inclusion is another, the motif of obedience of the Son of God, which dominates both 3:13 to

⁵ See J. C. Anderson, *Over and over and over again: Studies in Matthean Repetition* (diss., Chicago, 1985).

⁶ Passages from the Sayings Source *Q* are indicated by references to the Gospel of Luke. Thus, *Q* 13:28 refers to the *Q* text on which Lk. 13:28 is based, whereas Lk. 13:28 refers to the Lucan text as we know it today.

4:11 and 27:38–54. One example of a shorter section ‘enclosed’ by identical catchwords is the central portion of the Sermon on the Mount, dealing with the fulfilment of ‘the law and the prophets’ (5:17; 7:12).

Of these techniques, the most difficult to recognize are the numerous *cross-references* and *flashbacks* in Matthew’s Gospel. These cannot be regarded as repetitions in the strict sense of the term. Let me give a few examples. Matthew 13:12 is found in that section where Jesus speaks, somewhat cryptically, of the incomprehension of ‘those others’: ‘For the man who has will be given more . . . and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has.’ The readers or listeners of his Gospel must have realized that Jesus was speaking of Israel. The verse is taken up again in 21:43 and explicated from a particular angle. There we read that ‘the kingdom of God will be taken away from you’. Another good example of a cross-reference is the episode of the gravewatchers and their bribery in 27:62–66 and 28:11–15. Here the high priests and the Pharisees know that ‘that impostor’ once claimed he would rise from the dead after three days. The reference can only be to the passage about the sign of the prophet Jonah (12:40), where the Pharisees were also present. In other words, the ‘sign’ given by Jesus to his adversaries is the resurrection. Finally, I would like to refer to the very last passage in the Gospel, the so-called ‘Great Commission’ (28:16–20). Again it alludes to a large and wide array of earlier texts: the Immanuel motif (1:23), the temptation of Jesus on the Mount (4:8–10), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus’ instruction to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:5–6), the revelation of the Father and the Son to the simple at heart (11:25–27) and Jesus’ announced intention to proceed to Galilee (26:32; 28:7). The final passage in the Gospel of Matthew is like a large terminal railway station in which many lines converge.

All of these literary techniques are only recognizable to readers who choose to read the Gospel as a continuous narrative rather than in excerpts and individual pericopes. Many are so difficult to recognize that they only become apparent after several readings. These are the sort of readers Matthew

must have hoped for, and they must have existed in his day. Yet this presupposes a high degree of literacy among at least some members of the Matthean community. Who were the readers Matthew had in mind for his book? Perhaps they were those Christian ‘sages’ and ‘scribes’ (see 23:34; 13:52) whose task consisted in conveying ‘old’ and ‘new’ to the community. By the former Matthew may have meant the Bible, by the latter such Christian texts as his own Gospel. Whatever the case, he could not have meant the entire community, for literacy was relatively rare in the ancient world.⁷ Most of the members of Matthew’s community would have become acquainted with his Gospel by having it read to them.⁸ Perhaps Matthew hoped for some form of public *lectio continua* for his book. Many of the literary techniques described above can also be recognized when the Gospel is read aloud from beginning to end, especially if we consider that memory in the ancient world was presumably better than it is today. Still, individual reading was preferable, as it provided an opportunity to turn back to earlier passages and thus to trace repetitions, inclusions and so forth. None the less, a lector of the Gospel could help his listeners get started by his accentuation and emphasis, and by offering an occasional explanation.⁹

MATTHEW’S PREDECESSORS

It is customarily assumed that Matthew took the Gospel of Mark as his source. He also made use of the Sayings Source or ‘logia document’ *Q*, a written-out but no longer extant collection of Jesus’ sayings (‘logia’) arranged in groups by topic together with a few stories. Although it has been questioned from various angles in recent years, I consider this assumption, known as the ‘two-source theory’, to be correct. Still, I would like to refine it in several respects:

⁷ W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 267, calculates a literacy rate of fifteen per cent for ancient Rome. The rate may have been higher among Jews, but even so one must consider that an ‘ability to read’ did not primarily apply to books so much as to invoices, letters and the like.

⁸ In antiquity as a whole, reading was generally performed aloud rather than silently.

⁹ See G. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 72–76.

(1) I posit the existence of various ‘recensions’ or critical revisions of *Q*. Unlike the Gospels, the Sayings Source was evidently not bound and codified but rather a loose-leaf collection of materials to which new leaves could be added.¹⁰ These additional materials included, for example, the Beatitudes of 5:5 and 5:7–9, the saying of 6:34, and perhaps such ‘logia’ as Matthew 5:19, 10:5–6 and 10:23. To my mind these are relatively few; the version of *Q* employed by Luke may well have had a larger number of such addenda.

(2) There is a very large number of ‘minor agreements’ between Matthew and Luke that cannot be entirely accounted for by the two-source theory. In my opinion one must choose between two possibilities. Either Luke and Matthew employed a slightly different, presumably somewhat later recension of Mark’s Gospel as we know it today (*Deuteromarkus*).¹¹ Or, alternatively, Luke was aware of Matthew’s Gospel among the many predecessors mentioned in his Prologue (Luke 1:1) but only turned to it occasionally to settle marginal issues (perhaps because he realized it was a relatively recent work).¹² The first assumption has the drawback that it must introduce an unknown variable and can therefore in most passages be neither proved nor disproved. The drawback of the second assumption is that it scarcely explains why Luke refrained from using Matthew’s Gospel in practically all truly important questions, such as that of its design, or why he excluded the Matthean special sayings. For these reasons I incline to posit the existence of a deutero-Markan recension which departed slightly from the canonical Gospel of Mark and was available to both Matthew and Luke.

(3) Besides Mark and the Sayings Source, I feel that there is only one instance where Matthew turned to a written source: the Sermon on the Mount. Here he probably worked material

¹⁰ See M. Sato, *Q und Prophetie*, *WUNT*, 11/29 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 62–68.

¹¹ See especially A. Ennulat, *Die Minor Agreements: ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur Erklärung einer offenen Frage des synoptischen Problems*, *WUNT*, 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994).

¹² See M. Goulder, *Luke: a New Paradigm*, *JSNT.S*, 20/1 (Sheffield: JSNT, 1989), 22–23. Admittedly Goulder assumes that Matthew was one of Luke’s principal sources.

from *Q* into a written source of the Antitheses (5:21–22, 27–28, 33–37).¹³ For most of the remaining Matthean special sayings I presume that Matthew was the first to put them down in writing from oral tradition.¹⁴

Matthew was indebted to these sources in many ways. Apart from a few texts such as Mark 1:23–27, 4:26–29 and 12:41–44, he did not omit a single passage from his Marcan source. Even in the case of *Q* there is, I feel, only one passage (*Q* 12:49f) for which it can be argued convincingly that Matthew disregarded a Jesus saying. But most of all he was indebted to them for their substance. In many different ways they, or rather their authors, were his theological mentors.

Matthew patterned the narrative outline of his Gospel essentially on Mark. Apart from a few interpolations and the discourses he follows Mark's narrative outline very closely from chapter 12. Even in chapters 3 to 4 and 8 to 10 the Gospel of Mark served as his basic outline. None the less, he made crucial changes in the opening section of his Gospel. He created a new introduction in the narratives of Jesus' infancy in chapters 1 and 2. He inserted the Sermon on the Mount somewhat as a substitute for Mark 1:23–27. And he substantially altered the Marcan sequence in chapters 8 and 9 and greatly expanded the Mission Discourse, as he did all the Marcan discourses. Thus, one might view Matthew's Gospel as a new edition of Mark with an extended new introduction and a totally revised internal structure. It is all the more important to bear this in mind as Matthew apparently had no literature to take as his formal guide or inspiration apart from Mark's Gospel, the Sayings Source, and the Greek Bible, the Septuagint. For this reason especially, it seems to me questionable to consign Matthew's Gospel to the genre of 'biography'.¹⁵ Matthew

¹³ A similar view is held by S. Brooks, 'Matthew's Community: the Evidence of his Special Sayings Material', *JSN.T.S.*, 16 (1987), 113, who however includes 5:19 among them. Even Matthew 6:2–6 and 16–18 may have been derived from such a source.

¹⁴ The number of redactional linguistic idiosyncracies is disproportionately large in passages such as 1:18 to 2:23, 18:23–35, 20:1–16 and 27:3–10.

¹⁵ P. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: the Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), thinks that Matthew wrote an 'encomium biography'.

himself probably had no notion of what a biography is. Despite certain points of similarity between his Gospel and Hellenistic or Roman biographies, we had best refer to Matthew for the moment as a 'new Gospel of Mark'. The later Church was therefore perfectly right to attach the generic label 'Gospel' to both books.

But it was not only Mark's external narrative outline that substantially guided Matthew. The two books also resemble each other in the way their narratives function. Both Mark's and Matthew's Gospels (and John's as well!) are 'inclusive stories'¹⁶ in that the experiences of contemporary readers are included in the narrated account of the historical Jesus. Both of these Jesus stories reveal an open-endedness toward the writer's present that one might characterize with the term 'transparence'. Put differently, in both stories Jesus and his disciples on the one hand, and the readers on the other, are to a certain extent 'contemporaries'. We shall have more to say about the meaning of this later.¹⁷

Furthermore, a large number of basic theological ideas of Matthew's Gospel derive from Mark. I need only mention the imitation of Jesus' path of suffering, the Church as an assembly of disciples, the 'Son of David' title for Jesus the healer, the 'Son of God' title as a central Christological concept, the passion of the Son of Man, the fulfilment of scripture, and above all the openness toward the Gentile mission. Many key theological terms of the first Gospel ultimately derive from Mark, among them *akoloutheō* ('to follow' or 'to imitate'), *euangelion* ('teachings') and *kēryssō* ('to preach'). Their theological meanings will not be taken up until later. What is important here is the realization that Matthew's theology did not fall out of the blue but was considerably beholden to the Gospel of Mark.

¹⁶ As far as I know, this expression comes from my article 'Geschichte/Geschichtsschreibung/Geschichtsphilosophie' in *TRE*, 12 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1984), 597–98, and was made into a book title by Howell in his *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (cf. n. 4). Applied to Matthew, the structure refers to what J. L. Martyn has called a 'two-level drama' in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968).

¹⁷ See pp. 62–66 below.

Matthew also owes several things to the Sayings Source. The idea of the coming judgement of the Son of Man is as central to Matthew as it was to the compilers of *Q*. Another important survival from the Sayings Source is Matthew's confrontation with 'this generation', meaning Israel, and with its leaders, the Pharisees and scribes. The Sayings Source also supplied Matthew with the important notion of 'little faith', which helps him to characterize the state of the disciples between faith and faint-heartedness. Above all, it seems to me that the sociological continuity between Matthew and the Sayings Source is relatively large. It is essentially distinguished by the preaching (in *Q* 10:2–16) of the wandering missionaries or 'early-Christian itinerant radicals', who also make an appearance in Matthew (see 10:40–42; 25:31–46). In both sources the key members of the community are prophets (*Q* 6:23; 11:49; Matt. 5:12; 10:41; 23:34) and teachers (*Q* 6:40; Matt. 13:52; 23:8, 34). The Jesus traditions in the Sayings Source, like many special traditions in Matthew's Gospel, point to a Jewish-Christian setting (see *Q* 16:17). As far as I can tell, the Sayings Source did not yet contain a reference to a Gentile mission.

Moreover, Matthew is rooted in the devotional observances of his community in many ways. Let me demonstrate this with one example, perhaps the clearest example of all: the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13). This centrepiece of the Sermon on the Mount contains several of the central theological concerns of Matthew's Gospel: God is the 'Father'; his 'Will' must be followed; he grants the forgiveness that human beings in turn grant each other (see 18:23–35). The Lord's Prayer, rather than being newly formulated by Matthew, was simply retold as recited in his community. What this means, however, is that several of Matthew's central theological insights are drawn from the main prayer of Jesus and the community – the Lord's Prayer.