



1-1-1961

The Early Church Reflected in the Gospel According to Matthew

Jack L. Barnes

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THE EARLY CHURCH REFLECTED IN

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

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Date May 10, 1961

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THE EARLY CHURCH REFLECTED IN
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

BY

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Jack L. Barnes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
1961

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Gospels in our New Testament is, in each case, to present a picture of the significance of Jesus Christ. We have four different Gospels and as a result we have four somewhat different pictures. There are also similarities between them. The first three Gospels have been considered to be so similar that they are called the Synoptic Gospels. Both the differences and the similarities blend to make the Gospel record as a whole one which is wholesome, inspirational, and informative.

The reason there are differences between the Gospels may lie in part in the fact that each author had a different environment in which he wrote. It is practically impossible ever to be completely objective when one is writing with reference to the past. The interpretation and coloring by the author will almost always be certain to influence the finished product. Therefore, even though there is much similarity and duplication of material in our four Gospels, each has a different approach to the ministry of Jesus.

Many implications can be seen in these individual approaches. The challenge of this thought is what has brought me to explore the subject of this thesis. There seems to be, among other things, a vivid reflection of church life in the

Gospel According to Matthew. It is my purpose to point out the outstanding characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew and in so doing present what appears to me to be a definite portrait of an early church. As the environment seems to become clear in what we read, the church takes form and we can see many interesting aspects of it. Sherman Johnson has appraised Matthew in a similar way by saying of the author: "No matter how honest he was, no matter how good his sources--and he was an honest man who had some good sources--he was an evangelist, not a historian, and he was influenced by his theology and the needs of his church."¹

My procedure in seeking early church reflections will be first to take a broad look at the Gospel of Matthew from an historical point of view. With this background the two conflicting elements of particular and universal tendencies in the Gospel will be explored. All this will become the background out of which a picture of an early church will be pointed out.

The term "Matthew" often will be used interchangeably in reference to the author of the Gospel According to Matthew and to the actual document itself. The context in each case will show to which the term is referring. The word "Gospel" alone will always represent the document known as the Gospel According to Matthew. The word "gospel" will have reference to the message of Jesus.

¹Sherman E. Johnson, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII (New York--Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951).

CHAPTER I

AN HISTORICAL LOOK AT MATTHEW

The four accounts in our New Testament which contain a portion of the life and teaching of Jesus are to be ranked in a class of the most outstanding literature of the early Christian tradition. We have in these accounts information and impressions which have molded Christian thought. Each Gospel has its own individual importance as well as its own characteristics which make it valuable in its own right.

As early as 160-170 A.D. Tatian produced a work entitled the "Diatessaron" which was a mosaic of the four canonical Gospels ingeniously dovetailed together. However, there is evidence that this was not the first attempt to do such a thing.¹ But this did not seem to be satisfactory in the total light of Christian literature. Throughout Christian history there have been various voices proclaiming the importance of the individual Gospels.

¹NOTE: Certain secondary products of the oriental method of book-making by amalgamation had preceeded this. These composites blended together two or more of our Synoptic Gospels in various heretical interests. See Benjamin W. Bacon, Studies In Matthew (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), p. 43.

The Gospel of Matthew is certainly not the least of these four important documents. Matthew has been placed first in order of the four Gospels by the tradition of the church throughout the years. While there has been some variation in the order of the Gospels at some points in history, it has been the predominant case in fact that the vast majority shows the Gospel of Matthew in the first position of the four.

The Gospel of Matthew has a great deal to offer the student who will engage in its study. For in it we find not only an account of the sayings and activities of Jesus, but we also find some very important clues into the nature of the early church and early Christian thinking within the church.

AUTHORSHIP

Let us first consider the author himself. There has been and probably always shall be speculation as to who the author of the Gospel According to Matthew really is. May it first be affirmed that the title "According to Matthew" is not a part of the original document itself. This was a title given to the Gospel in its early history in order to designate it along-side the other Gospels in circulation. However, there surely was some kind of reasoning for giving that name to this particular Gospel.

The traditional view is that the Gospel is of apostolic authorship. This is to say that the Gospel According to Matthew was written by the Apostle Matthew who

was within the intimate circle which surrounded Jesus during his ministry. This would give authorship credit to the disciple sometimes called Levi. He was originally a tax collector, according to tradition, who gave up his occupation at the summoning of Jesus to follow him. The disciple Matthew seems to be a most unlikely possibility as a Gospel writer in some respects. He was originally from a tribe which was identified with formal Judaism and he was engaged in a profession which was hated by everyone. If the apostle Matthew did not actually write the Gospel, it seems that he might be the last person to give credit for it.

Much of the evidence for apostolic authorship rests on a statement made by Papias, a resident of Hierapolis in Phrygia, who made it his business to interview anyone who passed that way from Palestine and inquire of them for any memories of sayings of Jesus they might have heard back in Syria. He recorded these about the year 140 A.D. He has also recorded a statement about the apostle Matthew which says: "Matthew composed the Sayings (Logia) in the Aramaic (Literally, Hebrew) language, and each one translated them as he was able."² Scholars have never known of such a work by the apostle Matthew specifically called: "The Sayings." Therefore, traditional conclusions rest on the affirmation that Matthew the apostle took down Jesus' utterances at the

²Floyd V. Filson, Origins Of The Gospels (New York-Cincinnati-Chicago: The Abingdon Press, 1938), p. 58.

time they occurred. This, the conclusions continue, becomes the meat of a Gospel later written by the same disciple.

One of the most prominent advocates of apostolic authorship in our contemporary circle of scholars is Goodspeed. He has taken this position in recent years.³

First consider the genealogy. In the three fourteens of the genealogy of the Gospel, it is the man of figures--the tax collector!--who speaks. It seems that the important fact in the genealogy was not so much the identities of Jesus' ancestors as was the fact that the line, exalted as it was, reached its climax in him, as the one who began the seventh seven. This is hardly less than the sign manual of the tax-collector apostle.⁴

There is also another factor to be considered. It seems improbable to some that the Gospel of Matthew could come out of the Greek world of books and writers of its time with the actual authorship having been forgotten. The Greeks exalted authorship; they almost worshiped it. They were averse to anonymity. One poem could embalm the name and memory of an author. If he wrote Greek, and wrote well, it was enough.⁵ It does seem strange that such people could be so neglectful of the author of a book like the Gospel of Matthew.

³Attention must be called to the fact that Goodspeed opposed apostolic authorship in his earlier years. Such opposition can be noted in his work on Introduction.

⁴Edgar J. Goodspeed, Matthew Apostle And Evangelist (Philadelphia--Toronto: The John C. Winston Company, 1959), p. 14.

⁵Ibid., p. 38.

Goodspeed projects that Matthew was called by Jesus for the express purpose of being a recorder. Matthew was called as soon as hostility began to show itself. Isaiah's disciples had recorded at a time such as that also. Let us remember the emphasis the Gospel of Matthew places on Isaiah. There was also quite a Jewish habit of not taking notes (for fear of seeming to rival "Scripture").⁶ The tax collector, the inveterate note-taker of Jesus' world, might well have been called for this purpose. Thus, Papias wrote that Matthew "took down" Jesus' sayings. This may tell us why Matthew was so silent throughout the Gospel narratives. His purpose was to record.⁷

Others have favored the view which says the apostle possibly wrote that to which Papias had reference. Bacon points out, "All scholars now admit the impossibility of Papias' having reference to, or direct knowledge of, any other Matthew than our own."⁸ But this would not necessarily mean that our present Matthew is the result of that same author. This is the point where many scholars turn to find other authorship. But Goodspeed persists in his thesis:

That Matthew's name, as we are asked to believe, was given this Gospel because he wrote, not it, but a supposed Aramaic source of it, I find doubly improbable, for the Greeks, as we have seen, while they did call books by the names of men who wrote them in Greek, did not name them after the writers of their barbarian sources, as the Greeks considered them.⁹

⁶Ibid., p. 43. ⁷Ibid.

⁸Bacon, op. cit., p. xii.

⁹Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 88.

But there is, on the other hand, much which has been written emphasizing the fact that there is not an apostolic authorship connected with the Gospel. The front of this attack is to be seen by an attitude which does not keep Papias in such high regard as an authority. If Papias was referring to our first Gospel (and there is some speculation on this), it has been advocated that he was guilty of two major errors: (1) that Matthew wrote the Gospel to which his name is now attached, (2) that it was originally written in Aramaic.¹⁰ Papias, if we take him to be referring to our Gospel as we now have it, is saying that the first Gospel was written in Hebrew by the disciple tax collector. Thus the Greek Gospel which has come down to us must be a translation from a "Hebrew original." C. C. Torrey has made an extensive study of the four Gospels and is convinced that they were originally written in Aramaic. Commenting on the Gospel of Matthew he says: "It must have been a particularly fine specimen of literary Aramaic."¹¹ Yet the problem in this theory is that the first Gospel is not a translation, according to scholarly examination. Whoever wrote the Gospel used the second Gospel, Mark, it seems, and took the Greek phraseology of it. If the author had translated the Greek of Mark into Hebrew, and then someone translated Matthew's Hebrew back into Greek, the re-translation would have resulted in very different Greek than

¹⁰B. P. W. Stather Hunt, Primitive Gospel Sources (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 191.

¹¹Charles Cutler Torrey, The Four Gospels (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1933), p. 262.

we now have.¹² The writer does seem to have been a Jew. This seems evident by much of the content.¹³

If the apostle Matthew were to write a Gospel it would seem that he would have plenty of personal resource material. One who could write with the authority of an eyewitness would not have been content to base his work on that of a secondary authority (Mark). The Gospel of Matthew clearly exhibits reflexion, not recollection; it is a portrait of a Person rather than a chronicle of events.¹⁴

The summation of the large group of scholars today will say that the first Gospel as it stands does not come directly from the hand of Matthew. There is, however, some thinking which will give the apostle Matthew some credit for some of the material found in our present Gospel. Many will say if there is any truth at all in the tradition of Matthew's authorship, it must be simply that the disciple had drawn up some brief document which served as a nucleus of the later work. It has often been suggested that the Q document, or the earliest Aramaic nucleus of it, was the work of the apostle Matthew.¹⁵

¹²Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary On The Gospel According To St. Matthew (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. viii.

¹³This will be considered more fully in the following chapter.

¹⁴Alan Hugh McNeile, The Gospel According To St. Matthew (London: Macmillan and Co., 1915), P. xxvii.

¹⁵Sherman E. Johnson, "The Gospel According To St. Matthew--Exegesis" The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII (New York+Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), p. 242.

From the beginning of the second century the Jewish Christian Nazarenes had a Gospel which they ascribed to the disciple Matthew, and which was written in the Aramaic language. This, too, may have come from source material which was the work of an apostolic collection.

So may we conclude that there may have been some good reason which related the apostle Matthew to the Gospel which now bears his name. If there was not a source written by the apostle then the vast majority of scholars agree that there is a great difficulty in the name "Gospel According to Matthew." Some have conjectured that those who distributed this Gospel must have been ignorant of the book's true authorship.¹⁶ The name Matthew therefore being selected only because Matthew's call was recorded in the work. If, however, the Gospel incorporated a document which was popularly ascribed to the disciple Matthew, the book as a whole could have soon come to be regarded as his in the church for which it was first written.

We can say with certainty that whoever did write this Gospel must have been a very orderly sort of person--just like a good keeper of accounts who has everything well organized and grouped together.¹⁷ We can only be sure that

¹⁶J. Spencer Kennard, Jr., "The Place of Origin of Matthew's Gospel," Anglican Theological Review, XXI (October, 1949),

¹⁷Dean G. McKee, "The Gospel According to Matthew," Interpretation, III, 2 (April, 1949), p. 195.

he was a Christian of insight and devotion, who preferred to remain unknown, and cared only to exalt the figure of Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God.

DATE

The date the Gospel of Matthew was originally written is another part of the historical perspective. There are many speculations concerning the exact date. However, it is interesting to note the date which seems consistent with most of the facts. This gives us insight concerning both authorship and environment. Some attempt to place Matthew in an early period which would reflect a very young church. It is interesting that the Gospel seems to have no consciousness of the special problems and needs of the Gentile mission. It is true that the author is aware that the Christian message, rejected by the Jews, is to be carried to "all nations."¹⁸ Yet there are not many indications of the situation which developed when the Gentile mission first began. One might even receive the impression that the controversy between Gentile and Jew had not yet broken out in the Church when this Gospel was composed. It has been speculated that the Jewish-Palestinian coloring found in the Gospel of Matthew may be a sign of early date.¹⁹ This is not a popular view but it is worth momentary consideration.

¹⁸Matt. 28:19

¹⁹B. C. Butler, The Originality of St. Matthew (Cambridge: The University Press, 1951), p. 165.

Allen feels that it does not seem possible to suppose that a Gospel in which Christ's sayings are so arranged as to give a definite impression that He had foretold His coming as Son of Man, and the near end of the age, in close connection with the events of the year 70 A.D., could have been written more than a very few years after that date.²⁰

However, most scholars will be prone to give a somewhat later date to this Gospel. It has been illustrated by some that an addition to the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son²¹ is an indication that it was written after 70 A.D. There is nothing at all about either the persecution of the messengers, or the King's vengeance in the parallel parable in Luke. The words, "Their city," do not seem to fit into the rest of the story as the invited guests would either be citizens of one or more of the King's own cities or at least inhabit more than one city.²² The destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. seems to be clearly alluded to. Many scholars think that the references to the Gospel by later writers and the probable use by the Gospel of John

²⁰Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Gospel According to St. Matthew (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. LXXXV.

²¹"And the rest laid hold on his servants, and entreated them shamefully, and killed them. But the King was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." Mt. 22:6-7

²²Burnett Hillman Streeter, The Four Gospels (London: Macmillan and Company, 1951), p. 516.

make a date not later than 100 A.D. necessary. The author was able to look forward to a period during which the evangelization of "all nations" would be carried on. Keeping in line with much of the thinking of that trend, C. H. Dodd has given 75 and 95 A.D. as the limits for the dating of the Gospel of Matthew.²³

Let us consider the picture of the church which is reflected in the Gospel and observe what stage this might reflect. On two occasions the author refers to something which has continued "unto this day,"²⁴ which would seem to indicate a considerable time has elapsed since the event he is describing actually took place. There seems to be an echo of disappointment at the long delay of the promised return of Christ.²⁵ The church began to feel this way toward the end of the first century. There also seems to be some reference to persecutions suffered for the name of Christ.²⁶ Persecution was not a serious problem in the life of the church until near the end of the first century. There also seems to be a development of heresy, dissension, theology, and organization within the church reflected in the Gospel. The question is, could all this develop in just 30 or 40 years following the crucifixion? The church of the next two generations seems to have developed much less than the

²³C.H. Dodd, About The Gospels (Cambridge: The University Press, 1950), P. 26.

²⁴Matt. 27:8. ²⁵Matt. 24:48; 25:5.

²⁶Matt. 5:11; 10:18; 25:36,39.

church reflected in the Gospel of Matthew. Even the church of Ignatius' time exhibits very little development beyond what we see reflected in the Gospel of Matthew.²⁷ It seems evident that we see the early church at the turn of the century reflected in this Gospel.

WHERE WRITTEN?

There were probably several different churches in different locations by the turn of the century. The question here is, just what early church do we see reflected in this Gospel? Or, where was the Gospel According to Matthew written? To begin with, let it be affirmed that there is no way of knowing for certain just exactly where the document was written. Some of the passages in Matthew do have a strong Jewish character and therefore it has often been assigned to Palestine. But the author works with sources, and the Jewish coloring seems to belong to the sources rather than to the original part of the work itself.²⁸ There is also much in it that suggests the atmosphere of a Gentile church. A meeting ground of both Jewish and Gentile influences in the early church was the church at Antioch. This particular church was also one of the earliest and greatest churches. Because of this, many have traditionally placed

²⁷Johnson, Interpreter's Bible, op. cit., p. 241.

²⁸Ernest Findlay Scott, The Literature of The New Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 67.

the origin of Matthew at Antioch. Goodspeed emphasizes this view as he points out:

And it was at Antioch that the Gospel of Matthew was written--in this center of the Jewish controversy, which was also the source of the Greek mission; in Harnack's phrase, the first fulcrum of the Christian movement. Antioch was its stage; and it was here²⁹ that the Gospel of Matthew made its appearance.

But we can run into difficulties when attempting to precisely place the Gospel's origin in Antioch. For one thing there is the difficulty that Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, while he seems to know the Gospel, has a very different theological outlook.³⁰ More than this is the fact that according to other early church records, Paul was the angel of the church of Antioch. Matthew, on the other hand, is completely Petrine. The Gospel attacks some doctrines which Paul had defended and makes Peter the scribe of the new dispensation. There seems to be a different approach all together from that of Paul in Matt. 5:17-20, where the model Christian is one whose righteousness according to the Law exceeds that of the Scribes.³¹ Matthew just doesn't easily fit into our traditional picture of the life and thought of the Antioch church.

A great deal can be said for the possibility of this Gospel coming from somewhere in Syria. There is a certain apocalyptic expectation in Matthew similar to that which

²⁹Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 122.

³⁰Johnson, op. cit., p. 241.

³¹Kennard, op. cit., p. 244

was found in northern Paelstine. Syria is near enough to Palestine that Jews and Christians could be in daily contact. In many places throughout Syria the stater equalled two didrachmas which is consistent with the reference to the temple tax in Matt. 17:24-27.³² In such a city as Apamea, or Edessa, star-worship was the principal heathen cult.³³ A strong Jewish population lived throughout this region. These factors could have produced an environment which would account for some peculiarities of the Gospel of Matthew. It might therefore be a valid conclusion to speculate that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in what Kennard calls the North Syrian hinterland.³⁴

This conclusion would not completely take Antioch out of the total picture. It could well be that the Antioch church was later responsible for the distribution of the Gospel. It would require a strong church to provide wide distribution and Antioch might be a logical conclusion.

SOURCES

There have been throughout the history of Christian literature some few who hold the view of the complete independence of each writer. This view would hold that the apostle Matthew wrote Matthew, John the son of Zebedee wrote John, Mark remembered Peter's preaching and embodied it in

³²Johnson, op. cit., p. 241

³³Bacon, op. cit., p. 36

³⁴Kennard, op. cit., p. 245

Mark, Luke knew Paul's preaching and also made personal inquiry while in Palestine and was thus able to write Luke. But, on the other hand, as far back as the time of Augustine it was seen that the characteristics of the Synoptic Gospels demand some theory of interdependence. They have too much material in common, and there is too much agreement in wording and word order in the Greek to permit any view that at least the first three Gospels were written independently.³⁵

What were the sources used in the writing of Matthew? For most scholars it is a common assumption that the first and earliest Gospel which we now have is Mark. These same scholars are also convinced that Matthew uses Mark in the writing of his Gospel. B. C. Butler, however, does take issue with this by advocating the early thought of Augustine. He is convinced that Mark is secondary. While Matthew "shows no sign of having edited a source such as Mark, Mark on the other hand is dependent on a source or sources indistinguishable from Matthew."³⁶ Butler presents evidence suggesting that Matthew has, in the passages which are found also in Mark, Aramaisms not taken over from Mark. The number and quality of these Aramaisms, he claims, make it difficult to suppose that the author was a writer of Greek composing a Gospel by combining the Greek Mark with other sources and materials.³⁷

³⁵Filson, op. cit., p. 118.

³⁶Butler, op. cit., p. 85.

³⁷Ibid., p. 155.

The very fact that there is some disagreement about which was dependent on which is a good indication of a very important point. That point is that some Gospel writers did use sources outside their own private storehouse of information. So far as the question about the dependence of Matthew on Mark or visa-versa, let us consider some conflating. The Gospel of Matthew appears to omit three miracles recorded by the Gospel of Mark; but if we examine Matthew carefully, we will find that the details from the omitted sections appear elsewhere in the Gospel as modifications of similar stories taken from Mark.³⁸ Matthew was not omitting but rather conflating and therefore depending on Mark. Matthew has apparently taken Mark and used it as the base for a more complete account. If one will take a close look at the two Gospels he will notice that hardly a single incident recorded in Mark fails to reappear in Matthew. Even though Matthew is some forty per cent longer than Mark, it is conservative to say that fifteen-sixteenths of what Mark contains is to be found in Matthew.³⁹

It is a safe conclusion to assert that the author of our Gospel used Mark. When we compare the two texts it is even possible to learn what method was followed in incorporating sources into the Gospel. As we make such textual comparisons, it is apparent that not only Mark but a variety

³⁸Streeter, op. cit., p. 152.

³⁹Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 40.

of materials were before the author as he wrote. He also seems to have had a collection of Jesus' sayings which Mark did not have or did not see fit to use. We will recall that earlier a reference of Papias was mentioned. This was in regard to a statement he wrote verifying that there was a group of the sayings of Jesus written by the apostle Matthew. It could be that this group (or Logia) should not be interpreted as meaning the whole of the first Gospel, but only one of its elements. The expression, τὰ λόγια, could describe a document largely made up of discourses and parables. This is a part of what Matthew's Gospel contains making it unique from Mark. It may be regarded as certain that such a document is one main element in Matthew and it may have been written originally in Hebrew by the apostle Matthew.⁴⁰ Ropes says that the early church had two basic documents. They were Mark and the Sayings.⁴¹ These Sayings have come to be referred to as the Document Q. We do not have this document in any form today except through the evidence in passages of Matthew and Luke which seem to reflect a common source apart from Mark. Apparently this collection of Sayings was originally written in Aramaic. They are adapted to the needs of the early Palestinian Church. It has been calculated that Q was written before,

⁴⁰Plummer, op. cit., p. viii.

⁴¹James Hardy Ropes, The Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 227.

but probably not long before, Mark.⁴² It seems most likely that the Logia, mentioned by Papias, as well as the Sayings and Q were one and the same. We cannot know for certain who was the author of this document. However, since it seems improbable that the apostle Matthew wrote our present Gospel, and since the tradition of Papias mentions the apostle being responsible for some document, there is a strong balance of probability that Q is a work of the apostle Matthew.⁴³ This would also give some clue as to why the Gospel carries the name it now possesses: it is strongly inclusive of the Q document. This Gospel might have been based primarily on the writings and influence of the apostle Matthew.

Yet there is much material in Matthew which is to be found neither in Mark nor Luke. Scholars have affirmed that Luke was also dependent on the source Q. We might possibly assume that Matthew retains a number of Q sayings which Luke omits or that Matthew's copy of Q may have been more extensive than Luke's. Matthew seems to breathe, when considered as a whole, a Palestinian atmosphere, and the traditions to be found in it, apart from both Mark and Q, seem to be Palestinian.⁴⁴ Yet there is no independent

⁴²George Dewitt Castor, Matthew's Sayings of Jesus (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), p. 208.

⁴³Adolf Harnack, The Sayings of Jesus (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), p. 249.

⁴⁴McNeile, op. cit., p. xxvii.

use of the Hebrew Old Testament. Rather than just conclude that our author wrote as a good Christian Jew, we might consider that he had another source before him. Kilpatrick is definite in his opinion on this subject. He claims that the author used three and only three written sources. They were Mark, Q, and M.⁴⁵ This latter source is some of the material which is characteristic to Matthew only. M seems to have been a rudimentary document, more primitive in type if not in date than Mark or even Q.⁴⁶ It is quite difficult to tell just what the character of the M source was as there are no certain means of distinguishing in detail between the remains of M and the handiwork of the editor. The material which is peculiar to Matthew seems to be characterised by a very obvious Jewish atmosphere. This is where Matthew and Luke differ so greatly. Matthew's material, even though it is rich in anti-Pharisaic polemic, asserts the obligation of obeying not only the Law but also the tradition of the scribes. This seems to reflect the spirit represented in the early church by James. The source M might well be connected with Jerusalem, the headquarters of the James Party.⁴⁷ The Jewish character of the Gospel might possibly just be a part of the several sources the author was anxious to incorporate. There also has been

⁴⁵G. D. Kilpatrick, The Origins of The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 57.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁷Streeter, op. cit., p. 232.

the speculation that Matthew's Gospel represents a combination of the primitive "Gospels" of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome.⁴⁸ If this is so, we can get a picture of the total emphasis of the early church more completely than we could if everything came from one source or even from one geographic location. The author might have been attempting to bring a unity into the Christian Church of his day as he wrote this Gospel and included several emphases.

The possibility of some influence upon the writer which was beyond any written sources also bears mentioning. It is commonly accepted that for several years in the earliest part of Church history the oral tradition substituted for any written literature. It is likely that Matthew was indebted to no written source for some of the material used. In the first place let us consider the author intelligent and enthused enough about his subject that he included some of his own interpretation in what he was writing. Secondly, there surely was still an oral tradition rich in content which he included. The Gospel of Matthew seems to be the product of an author who shows more fondness than any other New Testament writer for stories of a legendary character, which had apparently come to him from floating tradition. Some examples one might cite in this respect are the dream of Pilate's wife,⁴⁹ Pilate's washing of his hands,⁵⁰ and the

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 234.

⁴⁹Matt. 27:19

⁵⁰Matt. 27:24-25

earthquake and ghostly apparitions at the death of Jesus.⁵¹ One might also place in this category the opening chapters concerning the birth at Bethlehem.⁵² Matthew and Luke are at variance in this part of their writing. If either of the accounts can be based on a historical document, it can hardly be that of Matthew as it is much the more fanciful and improbable.⁵³

If we then conclude that Matthew was dependent on at least three written sources plus oral tradition as well as his own editing, we begin to grasp the rich resource we have in this Gospel. The sources themselves are a challenge to the student interested in early church background.

PURPOSE OF MATTHEW

Our observations concerning the sources of Matthew's Gospel may well lead us to a consideration of purpose. Our author seems to have aimed at massing and coordinating his material. The miracles of Jesus are brought together in two chapters (8, 9). There is a coordination in his teaching accounts. The new righteousness is set forth in the Sermon on the Mount (5--7); duties of Christian missionaries are laid down in chapter 10. These are examples of the concern for literary unity which the Gospel of Matthew shows.

⁵¹Matt. 27:51-53

⁵²Matt. 2

⁵³Scott, op. cit., p. 68.

All these discourses can be shown to be amalgamations of a large number of separate sayings, ingeniously fitted into each other so as to form a sequence.⁵⁴ This seems to indicate a dominant purpose in the Gospel writer's mind was to unify all this which was being transmitted so freely and in such a disorganized manner. Even though he works with material which has come to him from different sources and with different influences, he seems to make use of it all impartially. Surely his object is to do justice to different tendencies which had hitherto been in conflict. The narratives of Mark and the traditions of Jesus' sayings seem to have a natural need to be combined. It is probably because they were separate, as well as other documents being separate still from them, that dissention arose concerning Jesus' teaching and emphases in the early church. Matthew could be called a force of unity in terms of literary style as well as in doctrine.

There are other emphases also. We cannot help but see our author as one concerned with teaching. Christianity seems to be conceived of as the New Law which has replaced the Old and it is given in a teachable way just as the Old Law was. By the time this Gospel was written the Church was becoming a numerous body in which there were growing numbers of converts to be instructed and a larger number of teachers to be recruited. A kind of text-book or work of reference

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 69.

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for teachers and pupils was needed. Such a work would have to give special attention to the sayings, or teachings, of Jesus since this was the basis on which all Christian instruction ultimately rested. The Gospel According to Matthew was designed to supply this need.⁵⁵ Our author conceives of it as the chief duty of the twelve to be "scribes made disciples to the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁶ It is their function, in the words of Jesus, to evangelize the world by "teaching all men everywhere to obey all things whatsoever I have commanded you."⁵⁷

The method used in the Gospel to achieve the above purposes becomes a purpose in itself. All through the book there is a constant demonstration that Jesus was the true Messiah. In order to create a proper unity and to develop a teaching and evangelizing manual, a life of Jesus Christ showing his Messiahship becomes the chief characteristic. The author wished to meet the need for an account of the life and teaching of Jesus, based on the living tradition, both spoken and written. In doing this we see Jesus Christ presented as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies for a Messiah to come. Right at the beginning the genealogy attempts to prove that Jesus is the Son of David. The title, Son of David, is used more often in Matthew than

⁵⁵Dodd, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵⁶Matt. 11:52

⁵⁷Matt. 28:19f

in any other Gospel.⁵⁸ The Gospel aims to prove that Jesus fulfilled in the details of his career the prophecies of the Old Testament, and therefore is the Messiah. No Gospel gives so large a place to formal quotations of prophecy. A special impression which the Gospel embodies is that of royalty. It is the evangelist's aim to show from the life of Jesus that the Church was not a heretical sect who misread the scriptures in the light of their presumptuousness, but the realization of a divine purpose and the verification of divine prophecies in the sphere of history.⁵⁹ This was written to be a life of the Messiah, which should articulate the Gospel with the Jewish scriptures and legitimize the Christian movement.

STATUS OF MATTHEW

Our look at the Gospel of Matthew from a historical perspective has given us several insights which are important in understanding and fully appreciating this particular Gospel. The environment surrounding the writing and the preservation of the Gospel give interesting insight to the position which it holds today.

It is significant that even though Mark has traditionally been accepted as the oldest, Luke has been held in historical glory, and John has been highly regarded as important

⁵⁸William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. xxvi.

⁵⁹McNeile, op. cit., p. xviii.

theologically, still Matthew remains first in the arrangement of the New Testament books. This cannot be disregarded.

The Gospel of Matthew was a pioneer in the field of Christian literature. Some have even regarded it as a pioneer to the extent of being the basic primary source for Luke's Gospel. M. S. Enslin denies that Q existed and suggests instead that Luke's author used Matthew.⁶⁰ This hypothesis falls short of certainty, but it is significant that Matthew is even considered for such a position. It truly shows the marks of a piece of literature worthy to be source material. It might even be called the first book of Christian literature; for Paul's writings, great as they are, are letters, not books, and Mark for all its value is hardly to be dignified as a book in the sense of a conscious literary creation as is the Gospel of Matthew.⁶¹ It has given us a unique account of the sayings of Jesus grouped with remarkable skill, so as to reinforce and illustrate one another. In fact the excellence of the work has caused some difficulty concerning its authorship. Many are driven by its very excellence to feel that it is too good for any one of the twelve Galilean disciples to have written.

Matthew may have been intended to supersede Mark. In the Church of its origin no doubt it did just this for a time. As soon as Matthew was published the title

⁶⁰Morton Scott Enslin, Christian Beginnings (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938)

⁶¹Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Story of The New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 57.

"the Gospel" was transferred to it from Mark.⁶² To illustrate the way in which Matthew seems intentionally to be not only including but also improving Mark, let us look at a comparison of a passage in Mark and the equivalent of it in Matthew.

Mark 1:34 "And he healed MANY that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out MANY devils."

Matt. 8:16 "And he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed ALL that were sick."

It appears that Matthew was attempting to make an improvement on the account already in existence which would magnify Jesus Christ more completely than the previous account had done. This Gospel, with its wealth of Jesus' teaching, attained such a high status in the church that it overshadowed Mark almost as soon as it appeared. The collectors of the four Gospels, about 120 A.D., could find only an incomplete copy of Mark to publish in their first edition of the Fourfold Gospel.⁶³ It has fallen into the shadows in comparison to Matthew. The most ancient Greek New Testaments, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, show Mark breaking off abruptly with 16:8. A complete copy of Mark was not to be found. Yet Matthew was intact, complete and well known.

The Gospel of Matthew also has a unique and respected status because it is the most inclusive Gospel of any that we have. Both the Jewish and Gentile Christians

⁶²Streeter, op. cit., p. 507.

⁶³Goodspeed, Matthew Apostle and Evangelist op. cit., p. 127.

of the early church could find a common spirit in Matthew. The author is not partisan on one side or another within the church, and makes no attempt to keep anything back or to smooth away the contradictions. This spirit has made Matthew the "representative Gospel," which is our best guarantee that it has preserved the facts with fidelity.⁶⁴ It is easy to see why the church so readily accepted Matthew and was so anxious to keep it in a position of leadership among the other Gospels. Matthew truly has a high status within the Church as well as within Christian scholarship. This status makes it important for us to consider when attempting to observe the Gospel Message in relationship to the early church. The Gospel of Matthew gives us an interesting picture as we study the influence the church had on the production of the Gospels and at the same time the influence the Gospels had on the Church.

⁶⁴Scott, op. cit., p. 75.

CHAPTER II

JEWISH ELEMENTS IN MATTHEW

The Gospel of Matthew has many characteristics which speak with a Jewish flavor. Some have pointed to influences throughout the Gospel which they feel outweigh or make insignificant the Jewish influence. But often these so-called "influences" are nothing more than Jewish tendencies in themselves. For example, the word "know" in 11:27 has often been discussed. Some have argued that this is a Gnostic influence. However the notion of "knowing the Father (God)" need not reflect Gnostic influence. It is probably Jewish, and can be traced back to the earliest prophets of the Old Testament. The Jewish thought "knowing God" does not imply an act of intellectual discernment, but a "mutual personal relationship, a state of being in communion with God."¹ In this same verse there is reference to the Father knowing the Son which points to a mutual relationship which is harmonious with Jewish thought. This verse is a good example of what is to be found throughout the Gospel.

¹Paul Winter, "Matthew XI 27 and Luke X 22 From The First To The Fifth Century," Novum Testamentum, I (April, 1956), 148.

It is nearly impossible for an author to write with absolute objectivity even when he attempts to do so. Regardless of his intentions it appears evident that the author wrote from a Jewish viewpoint. The Tübingen School went to an extreme in this thought of Jewish influence. This School treated Matthew in independent fashion and concluded that it was written to express and vindicate the point of view of a Judaizing party within the early church. This approach is now regarded as outmoded and most scholars work with the Marcan Hypothesis and study Matthew by way of a comparison with Mark. But the chief questions of interpretation have centered about the extent and character of the divergences of Matthew from Mark. It is in these areas we find the Jewish viewpoint expounded so strongly. Let us notice some outstanding examples of this Jewish viewpoint. The Gospel of Matthew seems to present Jesus as one who was very Jewish expressing a Jewish ministry. A striking instruction is given by Jesus to his disciples as they make preparation to go out preaching. Jesus says, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles."² Jesus himself hesitated to heal the Canaanite woman's daughter³ and is quoted as saying, "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."⁴ At another point he is presented as a Jew with no use for Gentiles as he says, "Let him be to you as a Gentile or tax collector."⁵ Many question some of the

²Matt. 10:5

³Matt. 15:21 ff

⁴Matt. 5:18

⁵Matt. 18:17

above evidence by asking if Jesus really said this or if Matthew was the one who was responsible for such anti-Gentile expression. Regardless of the answer, it is significant that the Gospel of Matthew is the main reflection of such an element. If Jesus actually said these things in just such a way, it is significant that Matthew was the one who saw fit to be certain they were recorded for all to know and understand. If these expressions are the work of Matthew's editorship, it is significant that he has such a strong Jewish viewpoint.

Matthew also has a peculiar pattern of writing. Many commentators agree that Matthew has arranged his material intentionally in five parts. Each part consists of a narrative taken from Mark and a discourse taken for the most part from the source Q. The author also has added an introduction and climax which is unique with him. In Jewish literature, we find a striking preference for arrangements of three, five, or seven sections. These patterns force the reader, especially when he reads the same text repeatedly, to focus his attention on the center which carries the strongest accent.⁶ This Jewish characteristic in construction is expertly followed by our Gospel writer.

The characteristics of a Jewish nature in Matthew may give us a picture of what Judaism was like at the time when the Gospel of Matthew was written. Even though we can

⁶Fritz Kunkel, Creation Continues (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 9.

never understand the Judaism of the first century without study of the Talmud and especially of its core, the Mishnah, we cannot in fairness say there is no description at all of Judaism in the Gospels. And among the Gospels we may learn most, as Moore says, from Matthew.⁷

Matthew is a New Testament book which is unique. Such patterns and forms found therein are quite valuable as a help in memorization. We may possibly consider them to have originated in oral form or as memorized from an earlier document than our present Matthew. But it does suggest that they came from the tradition of the Jewish-Christian wing of early Christianity.⁸

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

One of the first strictly Jewish elements which strikes the reader as he examines Matthew is the element of prophecy. Our author records that Jesus Christ was prophesied first by the Jewish prophets of old and the prophecy which has given hope to Israel is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Writing in this way would have certainly been an effective way to influence Jewish readers. Barclay carries this thought to quite an extreme pointing to the Gospel of Matthew as a Gospel concerned for Jews only.

⁷George Foot Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 186.

⁸Floyd V. Filson, "Broken Patterns In The Gospel of Matthew," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXV (1956) 231.

Matthew is the Gospel which was written for the Jews. It was written by a Jew in order to convince Jews. One of the great objects of Matthew is to demonstrate that all the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, and that, therefore, He must be the Messiah. It has one phrase which runs through it like an ever-recurring theme--"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying..." That phrase occurs in the Gospel as often as 16 times...It is Matthew's primary and deliberate purpose to show how the Old Testament prophecies received their fulfilment in Jesus; how every detail of Jesus' life was foreshadowed in the prophets; and thus to compel the Jews to admit that Jesus was the Messiah.⁹

The birth at Bethlehem and the journey to Egypt are apparently emphasized in order to point to fulfilled prophecies. This would be important primarily to the Jews. Some have pointed out, however, that these accounts were only invented to make unreal fulfilments of misconceived prophetic passages. Even the dwelling place in Nazareth is made the fulfilment of prophecy. What it fulfills seems very obscure. There is no passage in the prophets which says that the Messiah shall be called a "Nazarene."¹⁰ This would lead us to tone down Barclay's statement a bit. While it is true that the author was very much concerned about pointing to fulfilled prophecy, it doesn't seem probable that either the author or the people who read the Gospel accepted the Gospel were the best informed Jews of the world. More than likely the author had as one of his goals an attempt to influence

⁹Barclay, op. cit., p. xxii.

¹⁰C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, Vol. II (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1927), p. 11

Jews whom he felt would read his account. But to call it a Gospel written expressly or only for Jews seems a little unlikely in view of the above facts. Yet the loyalty to prophecy in the Gospel certainly does emphasize a Jewish element of some extent.

This Gospel stresses Jesus' Jewish Messiahship more than any other. The public ministry of Jesus is unique in Matthew in the fact that there are several indications that the ministry of Jesus had followed a divine plan which had been intimated to the prophets long beforehand. The name "Son of David" is a messianic title. It is used in Matthew to express his royal prerogatives and mission rather than merely to point to the fact of his physical descent from David. The opening sections of Matthew stress the conviction that Davidic descent was an indispensable qualification of the messianic king.¹¹ Jesus as the Jewish Messiah was the central thought of the author throughout his work. He never hesitates to preserve the values of the past in Judaism. Abraham and David carried "the blessing of the Lord," the promise of a Messiah. It is interesting that Matthew calls Jesus the Christ instead of the Messiah. The two words have the same meaning, "the anointed one," but their historical implications are quite different.¹² Thus, we see an all-out effort by our author to proclaim Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and yet we see a historical

¹¹Ned Bernard Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944), p. 224.

¹²Kunkel, op. cit., p. 22.

perspective creeping in with the term Christ emphasizing a scope with a Jewish viewpoint but a much broader boundary than just Judaism.

This might possibly leave us in a bit of a dilemma between the emphatic Jewish element and the wider interpretation. The reason we have the Gospel presented in such a way may be due to the fact that the author wanted to communicate with the world--Jews and Gentiles--that Jesus was the Anointed One from God for all mankind. To do this it was necessary to begin with a Jewish element. No Gospel gives so large a place to formal quotations of prophecy. It aims to show--and this aim seems never lost from view--that the Messiah's salvation was FIRST offered to the Jews and was by them deliberately and finally rejected.¹³ The true revelation of God was first known through the Jews. Therefore the Son of this true God was one which came to the people of God. This Jewish element in Matthew actually makes the total scope of Jesus' mission to the world more understandable. This was the way to link the new covenant with the old more closely. "Salvation is of the Jews," it had been frequently proclaimed. The Christ of God, though the Savior of the world, had been in a very special sense "the Hope of Israel," and therefore it is appropriate that He should be represented first from the standpoint of that nation. The Gospel writer saw the Gospel story as necessarily

¹³Ropes, op. cit., p. 233.

intimately related to prophecy. But he saw more than the fulfillment, in the sense of completion of the message and revelation of the Old Testament, is found in Christianity, even while the Old Testament remains Scripture in the full sense to the Gospel writer.¹⁴ Matthew is consistent with a constant interest in the ancestral faith not just of a certain people, but of the tradition of the one true God.

THE MOSAIC LAW

The Gospel of Matthew also contains a great deal of material which draws attention to the Jewish Law. This goes beyond the fulfillment of prophecy to the relationship of the Christian to the Jewish religion. There is a most impressive list of references in this Gospel which draws attention to the importance and validity of the Law. Let us at this point note some of the passages in reference:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them."¹⁵
"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."¹⁶ "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you."¹⁷
"For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is

¹⁴Filson, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁵Matt. 5:17

¹⁶Matt. 5:19

¹⁷Matt. 23:2

accomplished."¹⁸ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."¹⁹

The Gospel of Matthew seems to be affirming that Jesus had no intention of annulling the Mosaic Law and it declares the Law to be binding in all of its particulars. Jesus is presented as one who approved the sacrificial system.²⁰ The performance of this was dependent upon the provisions of the oral Law.²¹ Matthew also tells of Jesus setting his disciples the example of paying the half-shekel tax for the support of the Temple.²² This annual tax was a requirement of the oral Law--a Pharisaic regulation.

The Sermon on the Mount shows a great kinship to the Law. At this point Christianity almost becomes a transfigured Judaism. It is "the Law and the prophets" in their essential content and fulfillment.²³ When the passage 5:17-20 is examined, it seems that the attitude towards the Law is one of unqualified acceptance and

¹⁸Matt. 5:18

¹⁹Matt. 23:23

²⁰Matt. 5:24

²¹Moore, op. cit., p. 251.

²²Matt. 17:24-25

²³Benjamin W. Bacon, The Sermon On The Mount (London: The Macmillan Company, 1902), p. 15.

approval. The Law is to be observed in every detail and there is no suggestion that there is any limit in time to its observance. The Law is eternal.²⁴

But let us be willing to look at the other side of the picture. There are also points in the Gospel when only parts of the Law become important. It would be helpful here to mention some of the basic features of the Law. The Torah (The Teaching) was the important record of the Law for the Jews. The Pharisees continuously studied the Torah in an effort to make every little letter and inference applicable to man's everyday life. They were convinced that the Law demanded the kind of obedience the average Jew did not give it. Actually the Law was not a burden unless everyone took the Pharisaic rules seriously. These rules were based on the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law. Most people did not take the Pharisees seriously. Two types of oral tradition had grown around the Law. One was called the Halakah, the other the Haggadah. The Halakah was the tradition of the Elders. These were the precepts which came from the leading rabbis. This is where the Pharisees held an important role. The other oral tradition was the Haggadah which was the non-legal material. This was not Law. It was legend and folklore. Yet both Halakah and Haggadah were oral traditions

²⁴A. M. Honeyman, "Matthew V.18 And The Validity of The Law," New Testament Studies, I (1954-55) 141.

which had grown around the Torah. Actually it seems that Jesus paid very little attention to either of these. But the Pharisees were very concerned about the Halakah. When Jesus referred to the Law which he came to fulfill²⁵ he was making reference to the written Law.²⁶ Matthew presents Jesus with a willingness to accept the written Law without hesitation as long as it was consistent with itself and with the general good of mankind. This resulted in setting scripture against scripture. This is what not only put the work of the Pharisees in a bad light at times, but also enraged them because he seemed to be one who felt he had more authority than they. It is commonly said on the Jewish side that the Christian tradition found in Matthew is an exaggeration of the primitive Gospel tradition found in Mark, who in his turn ignored the good side of the Pharisees and exaggerated their bad side.²⁷ In his conflict with the Pharisees, Jesus turned to the scriptures for support and defense in a number of instances. When criticized for permitting his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, he cites as precedent the story of David and the showbread. When in indignation he drives those trading in sacred money and sacrificial beasts out of the temple, he quotes Isaiah

²⁵Matt. 5:18

²⁶Johnson, op. cit., p. 292.

²⁷W. K. Lowther Clarke, New Testament Problems (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 54.

and Jeremiah as revealing the true purpose of the Temple. The Gospel of Matthew has Jesus rejecting only a portion of the Law by appealing to another portion. This was where difficulty was encountered. In doing such a thing as this, Jesus could not avoid giving offense to the scribes and Pharisees. To them the Torah was a unit, the several parts of which were "throughout consentaneous, homogenous. There were not only no contradictions, but no real differences."²⁸ Jesus ignored this doctrine of scribal learning. But even with this evidence of Jesus' ideas of the Law, one cannot overlook how Palestinian the Gospel of Matthew is in the over-all presentation of the Law. If Christ had attacked the Pharisaic traditions, he had at the same time stood upon the permanent sanctity of the Scriptures. The letter of the Old Testament was still binding upon Christian men. Members of the new movement--the Christian Society--were still to obey its precepts.²⁹ This is Jesus' tone when he declares: "Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."³⁰

There is a real concern in this Gospel for the spirit behind the Law. Matthew goes out of the way to point out that there is no real conflict between Judaism

²⁸Moore, op. cit., p. 239.

²⁹Allen, op. cit., p. 311.

³⁰Matt. 5:19

and Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus is pictured as willing to stand in opposition to Judaism or anything else which violates a certain spirit. This certain spirit is to be found right within the Torah itself. The Pharisees seemed to be the symbol of the Law. But Jesus was pointing to the spirit to be found within the Law which the Pharisees had completely missed. They were not the symbol of the real Law. Jesus told those who followed him or listened to him to "practice and observe" whatever the scribes and Pharisees bade, as though with the major intent and meaning of their teaching he could make shift to get along.³¹ There is a genuine effort on the part of our Gospel writer to emphasize the fact that Jesus saw no wrong in the spirit of the Jewish Law. Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' question about the chief commandment is unique in Matthew. This narrative appears in both Mark and Q material. But in the Matthean version we have an additional statement by Jesus: "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."³² This addition appears in no other account of this incident. The same type phrase is found with reference to the "Golden Rule."³³ A comparison with the Q form in Luke again shows that this formula apparently did not appear in the source. This must have been an addition by the author of the Gospel

³¹Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Man From Nazareth (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 58.

³²Matt. 22:40

³³Matt. 7:12

of Matthew. Our writer saw in the supreme commands of love and unselfish service the essence of what the Law commanded.³⁴ The spirit of the Law was in harmony with the ministry of Jesus according to Matthew.

This spirit of the Law climbed much higher than the Pharisees had permitted the Law to go. When the rich young ruler questioned Jesus he was first reminded to keep the Law. The questioner pressed Jesus further: "What do I still lack?" Then Jesus tells him, "Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."³⁵ At first glance this seems to be little more than the Pharisaic method of doing certain things and eventually one will gain the long coveted reward. But in reality we can note that the new requirement is so exorbitant that all mere mercenary righteousness collapses before it. The questioner went away sorrowful. This is the point! The Law was good in its spirit. But many were following it, due to the emphasis of the Pharisees, in order to gain mercenary rewards either here or hereafter. Mere hope of heavenly recompenses cannot face such requirements as forbid not only the act of hate or lust, but the slightest unkind word or impure thought.³⁶ The command to turn the other cheek is a higher righteousness which is based on motive. This does not destroy the Law but fulfills it!

³⁴Bennett Harvie Branscomb, Jesus And The Law of Moses (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 95.

³⁵Matt. 19:21

³⁶Bacon, Sermon..., op. cit., p. 108.

JESUS AND THE GENTILES

In chapter 15 of the Gospel According to Matthew a Canaaites woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus' first reply to her was, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." When she persisted he spoke again, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Mark has a modified version of this reply in having Jesus to say, "Let the children FIRST be fed."³⁷ Some have felt that in this reply Matthew may have reproduced the source more accurately than Mark since Jesus was not really consumed with looking into the future.³⁸ In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says unconditionally that his help is for the Jews only.

Even though Matthew pictures Jesus healing some Gentiles and showing some love and concern for them, the Gospel seems to make it clear that this is not the true purpose of Jesus' ministry. Some have felt that this Gospel is a Jewish Gospel written for a Jewish church. At one point Jesus is reported as saying, "...if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."³⁹ One must remember that the Gentiles were the outcasts to the Jewish people. If a Jew became a Christian the obvious outcast would be those outside the church. The term Gentile may well be a carry-over

³⁷Mark 7:27

³⁸Montefiore, op. cit., p. 228.

³⁹Matt. 18:17

to indicate those who are outside the select group. The Jerusalem Church was the natural headquarters and shepherd of the church at the very beginning which would tend to elevate not only Jewish Christians, but also Jewish terminology. But this does not necessarily mean that Gentile Christians were not accepted by the church from which this Gospel came.

The great struggle within the thinking of Jewish Christians may have been taking place. This was not a struggle concerning whether or not Gentiles could become Christians, but a struggle concerning the relationship of Judaism to Christianity. Matthew is dealing with this problem from the point of view of the traditional Jewish thought. Allen has described Matthew's position like this:

The standpoint adopted was somewhat similar to that of the canonical prophets, who advocated the view that the Jewish religion was destined to attract to itself all nations, but who never seem to have doubted that the result would be the submission of the Gentiles to the privileges of Judaism rather than the complete supersession of Judaism by a new religion. In the same way there is nothing in the first Gospel which is not consistent with a conception of Christianity as a purified Judaism which was destined to absorb within itself disciples (Proselytes) from all nations.⁴⁰

The attitude toward the Gentiles may be an effort to elevate the Jewish importance of the church rather than an effort to suppress the Gentiles and keep them out of the church.

⁴⁰Allen, op. cit., p. lxxvii.

To be sure, Jesus is pictured as being critical of the Gentile way of life in the Gospel of Matthew. ("In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do."⁴¹ "And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"⁴² "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...It shall not be so among you."⁴³) We find no record of hesitancy to attack any way of life or thinking which was contrary to the best in God's sight. But Jesus is much more critical of the Gentile way of life than he is of the Gentiles themselves. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus' thought about the Gentiles was not so much a prejudice against them as an awareness of them, an interest in them, and a concern for them. The ways of the Gentiles are pointed out in contrast to the "superior" ways of the Jews. This is probably a reflection of the sources used. The Gospel of Mark is almost contemptuously anti-Jewish. Our author may be emphasizing the lowliness of Gentile ways in order to neutralize Mark's radicalism so far as the essentials of Mosaism are concerned.⁴⁴

A real problem existed in relationship to the Gentiles who desired to become Christian. The Jews had a basic faith in the One true God already established. To consider Jesus Christ as the Son of God was to have a faith

⁴¹Matt. 6:7

⁴²Matt. 5:47

⁴³Matt. 20:25

⁴⁴Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 220.

with a complete background. Most Gentiles knew nothing of the God of Jesus Christ and they knew nothing of the way of life which one pursued in service to that God. Matthew's Gospel is very Palestinian in its description of the Christian Church and in its relation to Gentiles.⁴⁵ The Christian community still retains the Jewish nomenclature. Its officials are described as "prophets," and "wise men," and "scribes." The relation of Gentiles to God's mercy remained the same. Under the old system they might join themselves to Israel as Proselytes. In this way they begin living in the "better" pattern of life under God. Under the new system they might attach themselves to the Jewish-Christian Society.⁴⁶ When we consider the pagan practices of many of the Gentiles and the superior society the Jews knew under the Law, we can see why our Gospel had a reflection against Gentile ways in it. Kilpatrick is convinced this is a well justified position.

The Gospel allows a place to both the law and to the oral tradition, whose main difference from that given in Judaism lay in the subordination of the law to Jesus. In contrast to the implications of the Pauline teaching, this position justified itself in so far as the early Church had to teach and observe an oral tradition or law of some sort, if it was to maintain any moral discipline among its members, especially among its Gentile converts.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Allen, op. cit., p. 310.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 117.

This contrast of faith and life between Jews and Gentiles was the source of a great deal of prejudice. Matthew infers that Jesus was convinced that his mission was something which rose above such prejudice--and yet this prejudice still had to be considered as a part of the thinking of the people. By confining his labors and those of the Twelve to the Jews primarily, he avoided exciting their prejudices, and thus deprived them of even the poor excuse for rejecting him which they would have found in his preaching freely among the Gentiles and Samaritans.⁴⁸ By presenting this in such a way, our author may have been speaking to a serious problem right within his own church.

There is a probability that these sayings which emphasize the Jewish element were collected and preserved by the early Church in Palestine.⁴⁹ This also reflects a group of Christians who thought the time was very short before the end of our present world would occur. Jesus charged his disciples: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."⁵⁰ There seems to be a close connection of thought between this opening and the words which conclude the first half of the discourse, "You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel

⁴⁸John A. Broadus, Commentary On The Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), p. 219.

⁴⁹Allen, op. cit., p. lxxvi

⁵⁰Matt. 10:5-6

before the Son of man comes."⁵¹ This verse gives a reason for the previous prohibition to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans. The inference is not that the Gentiles cannot or ought not be saved, but the time will not be long enough to preach to all, and Israel had been chosen of God throughout the centuries and had the right to hear the message first.⁵²

We read that the Christian community in Jerusalem, warned of the imminent destruction of the city, escaped to Pella in Transjordan.⁵³ This community was cut off from the main stream of Christian life when this happened. It went its own way soon to be forgotten by Gentile Christianity. This community became strongly opposed to the teaching of Paul; they had peculiar methods of interpreting Scripture, and had a Gospel of their own which had some connection with that of Matthew.⁵⁴ This might give us an explanation for the distinct and unique Jewish elements which are present in Matthew and not in other Gospels. One of Matthew's sources may reflect this early Christian community.

⁵¹Matt. 10:23

⁵²Streeter, op. cit., p. 255.

⁵³Arthur Jeffery, "Professor Schoeps On Judaeo-Christianity," Anglican Theological Review, XXXIII (1951) p. 170.

⁵⁴Ibid.

ACTS AND GALATIANS

In The Acts of the Apostles Peter declared the following about Gentiles to whom he was preaching: "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"⁵⁵ The account continues, "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."⁵⁶ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul declares: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love."⁵⁷ Acts and Galatians in relation to the Gospel of Matthew pictures a very strained situation in the early church.

A familiar theory is that the author of Matthew was the champion of Jewish Christianity, as against the more liberal teaching of Paul. The Gospel of Matthew records these words of Jesus: "Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁸ Some have felt that this is a direct reference to Paul.⁵⁹ Paul seems to be at the opposite pole from the Gospel of Matthew when at one point the model Christian is one whose righteousness according to the Law exceeds that of the Scribes.⁶⁰

⁵⁵Acts 10:47

⁵⁶Acts 10:48

⁵⁷Gal. 5:6

⁵⁸Matt. 5:19

⁵⁹Scott, op. cit., p. 72.

⁶⁰Matt. 5:17-20

However, our author may be concerned with the Law in some areas because he is convinced that there is a need so far as his readers are concerned. Perhaps it is not necessarily Paul and his teachings which our author is concerned about conquering as it is the wrong impression which they might have left with some Gentile pagans. The Christian community for which Matthew is framed is preponderantly Jewish in derivation. The rebukes of Paul had occurred due to the "scandal" of "lawlessness" in many Gentile Christian churches. Many had abused the Pauline principle "all things are lawful."⁶¹ This may have perplexed many of the Jewish Christians who were content with living within the Law as well as under Christ as Lord. The Gospel of Matthew is framed with these conditions in view. There is a definite value in the Law so far as our author is concerned. This value is not necessarily in excluding Gentiles, but rather for including the basic faith which the people of the author's church were so much a part and which was not in conflict with the basic premise of the Christian faith. There was a value in the Law. The sacred Torah was esteemed by Israel as the will and character of God. In it was the choicest product of the human thought of indefinite past centuries.

⁶¹Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 339.

Jesus and his followers were interpreters and reformers.⁶² Therefore Matthew has no anti-legalism as in Paul. But the victory of faith over works is just as emphatic. The Pharisee is left as completely as the publican at the mercy of God. The Law is not ultimate but it has basic value according to our Gospel author. This is a basic difference from the results of some of the teachings of Paul. But the common relationship between the two is the importance of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

The Pauline emphasis was that the Law had been completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ and therefore there was no need to consider the Law in any way as long as one had faith in Christ. Paul says in Galatians:

Why then the law? It was added because of transgression, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made...The law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.⁶³

Fulfillment of the Law finds a kindred attitude in the Gospel of Matthew. Here Jesus is presented as saying, "I have come not to abolish (the Law and the prophets) but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."⁶⁴ This statement makes it clear that whatever passes away

⁶²Bacon, The Sermon On The Mount, op. cit., p. 5.

⁶³Gal. 3:19; 23-24

⁶⁴Matt. 5:17-18

from the Law does not pass by the destruction of the Law. Rather it passes away by fulfillment--as the bud passes into the rose.⁶⁵ Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, points also to the fulfillment of the Law--not its destruction. "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"⁶⁶ This love does not proceed from the Law but from the Cross. When actions toward God and others are motivated by the love found in Christ we are fulfilling all that the Mosaic Law could require of us.⁶⁷

In the Pauline emphasis there seems to be more of an awareness of the impact of Calvary. Matthew presents Christ as constituting a new authority alongside that of the Old Testament. In this presentation there is the affirmation of the revelation of the Law and prophets, and there is even indication of subservience to it. Yet, on the other hand, Jesus' own authority is not derived from the revelation that had gone before. Rather his authority completes that which had gone before and even transcends it.⁶⁸ Many of those from whom Matthew received a source for his writing--and probably who would read his

⁶⁵John Monro Gibson, "The Gospel of St. Matthew," The Expositor's Bible (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900), p. 72.

⁶⁶Gal. 5:14

⁶⁷Lehman Strauss, Galatians And Ephesians (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957), p. 81.

⁶⁸Stonehouse, op. cit., p. 210.

finished product right away--wished to perpetuate within the church the national distinctions that marked Judaism. The logic of facts soon gave the cosmopolitan tendency of Paul the weight. The letter to the Galatians is the "polemical manifesto." In this there is the claim that the acts of divine Providence in the history of the ancient people had brought forth a new and emancipated "Israel of God" in which there is neither Jew nor Greek.⁶⁹ The impact of Calvary is the thrust of this thinking--not the destruction of the Law.

Actually the basic difference in the relationship between Matthew and what we read of Paul in Acts and Galatians occurs in the purpose of the writings. Our Gospel was written to give a picture of Christ and his teaching. Paul wrote and taught in terms of the development of a theology based on the event of Jesus Christ. In the 10th chapter of Acts Peter concluded that the Gospel was for the Gentiles. This seems rather strange. Peter had been with Jesus as one of the most important of the Twelve. Yet he had to learn that the Gospel was for Gentiles by a revelation after the crucifixion and ascension of Jesus. Would this suggest that Matthew is correct in saying that Jesus was primarily interested in the Jews and in those who were under the Law?

⁶⁹C. H. Dodd, The Authority of The Bible (London: Nisbet and Company, 1928), p. 208.

As the Jews welcomed the Gentiles as "God-fearers," an outer ring of adherents who kept the moral law, and in various ways respected the prejudices of the Jews proper, developed in the church. These Jewish Christians raised no objection to the baptism of Gentiles, but held that circumcision was "the entrance to a higher stage."⁷⁰ Paul began to discover that history was not the best basis for a higher order within the faith. Thus, in deeper thought and a developing theology, history was abandoned in preference to a faith which ultimately had to fulfill the Law. There is a true and harmonious relationship between Matthew and Paul. The harmony is in the fact that the fulfillment of the Law is the important fact in the event of Jesus Christ. Those gathered around Matthew felt that the Law was valuable but Christ was more valuable. Those around Paul felt the Law was completely in the shadows and here the variance occurred.

The Jewish elements in Matthew definitely show us a picture of the early church at a time of strength as well as a time of conflict. The Gospel of Matthew has been influenced by one who would not tolerate the perversion of the Christian message into a Jewish sect. This gives it a definite Jewish flavor. This has given it strength and undoubtedly gave the early church of its day added strength.

⁷⁰Clarke, op. cit., p. 153.

CHAPTER III

UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS IN MATTHEW

Several elements point to a definite Jewish flavor in the Gospel According to Matthew. However, it would be unfair to stop at that point. Indeed some have said that while there is a definite tone of Jewishness about the work, it also stands out as one of the most universal documents of the early church literature. To stay at either extreme would limit one's understanding as well as the Gospel's true quality. But it is certainly worth every effort to observe the universal elements contained in the Gospel. They certainly are there and they have a great influence on both the presentation of Jesus Christ and the reflection of the early church situation.

CONCERN FOR GENTILES

There appears to be an underlying concern for Gentiles throughout the Gospel. Even though there is reference to obedience of the Law and the concentration of Jesus' ministry on the Jewish people, there is at the same time a reluctance to completely reject the Gentiles. At points this reluctance becomes a genuine concern for those outside Israel.

Matthew presents Jesus as one who brought a "higher righteousness" to those who believed in his Heavenly Father. The very nature of this "higher ethic" must include all men if they will respond to it. It cannot be exclusive. Jesus was a loyal Jew who could even picture his twelve disciples, in the day of his coming glory, sitting "on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."¹ Yet this same Jesus seemed to interpret Judaism in such a human way that it became universally applicable to all mankind. He cared for and helped persons regardless of racial, religious, economic or national lines. "Whoever" seemed to be one of his favorite expressions.² Even in this Gospel where the Jewish element seems to be so strong, we are given a report of the teaching of Jesus "which at once lifts religion into the sphere of the universally human."³

The Gentile mission as such certainly is not specifically laid down in precise terms. But there is reference to such a mission. Jesus is presented as confiding with his disciples, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations."⁴ When the disciples criticized a woman for pouring expensive ointment on the head of Jesus,

¹Matt. 19:28

²Matt. 10:32; 10:42; 12:50; 16:25; 18:4; 20:26

³Dodd, The Authority of The Bible, op. cit., p. 209.

⁴Matt. 24:14

his reply was, "Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."⁵ Here the Gentile mission seems to be taken for granted. There is also the Great Commission in 28:19 which must be considered in connection with the Gentile mission. The interesting point is that there seems to be very little direct mention of the Gentile mission; yet the very fact that we find any references at all in such a Jewish Gospel is something worth consideration.

If Jesus' preaching and teaching had been along the lines of strict Judaism only, it is doubtful that the Gentiles would have been attracted to him. Yet on several occasions Gentiles were with him at the time he was teaching and they shared in his ministry. This is reflected in the Gospel of Matthew. When chapter 4 of that Gospel is considered in direct relationship to the first verse in chapter 5, it seems that those who heard the Sermon on the Mount were not exclusively Jews but came from Galilee of the Gentiles and Decapolis and from beyond Jordan.⁶ Considered in this context, the Beatitudes seem to be universal in their outlook. The disciples are "the light of the WORLD." Matthew does not record this as the "light of Jewry." The righteousness of the new

⁵Matt. 26:13

⁶Samuel M. Zwemer, Into All The World (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1943), p. 45.

kingdom exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. In teaching the Lord's Prayer we do not see Jesus limiting prayer to class or creed or place.

Considering the universal element of Jesus' teaching in our Gospel narrative, the Pauline argument emphasizing the Gentiles' direct relationship to God may have been a natural development. This is the reason Jesus experienced difficulty with the leaders of Judaism. C. H. Dodd has pointed out:

It was because Jesus employed with the utmost spontaneity and consistency the divine method of unqualified and gracious beneficence even towards the least worthy, while calling upon men for a righteousness exceeding that of scribes and Pharisees, that His ministry became a revolt against the national religion of the Law, and ended in His death.⁷

The author of Matthew's Gospel presents the importance and significance of the Law but at the same time presents the unqualified "higher ethic" of the teachings of Jesus. This is what forms the beginning of a small but significant universal element for the entire Gospel.

However, it would be incorrect to say that the Jews had no concern whatsoever for the Gentiles. If Matthew had presented Jesus as one who had nothing but contempt for the Gentiles and had no concern whatsoever for anyone outside Judaism, it would not have fit the pattern of the day in any way. The Jews were concerned about the

⁷Dodd, The Authority of The Bible, op. cit., 214.

Gentiles. They did regard the pagan ways and gods of the Gentiles with great contempt. But the people themselves were important to the Jews for they were concerned that eventually others would come to know the God of Israel. The Judaism of Jesus' day was itself strongly missionary.⁸ Josephus, The Book of Acts, and the classical writers along with all the extant literature of that period show how successful and intense was the endeavor of the Jews to win Gentiles to membership in the synagogue. Matthew's Gospel itself points this out in the words of Jesus: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte."⁹ There really was no issue in Jesus' day about what should be done with the Gentiles--they should be converted. The real issue was to what sort of religion the Gentiles should be converted.¹⁰ The Jews were convinced that Judaism was the one true religion. They were obsessed with the conviction that it was destined to become the universal religion of the world.¹¹ No other religion in their world and time made any such pretensions or cherished such aspirations.

⁸Harvie Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus (New York-Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1931), p. 330.

⁹Matt. 23:15

¹⁰Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus, op. cit., p. 330.

¹¹Moore, op. cit., p. 333.

There seems to be a definite pattern in Matthew which moves from the Jew to the Gentile. This is not to say that Matthew ever completely abandons the Jewish thought and way of presenting the gospel. But there is a pattern which creates the universal strain not to be noted in some other writings. During Jesus' earthly ministry nearly every emphasis was placed on dealing with the Jews only. But there are some indications of a hint toward Gentiles' inclusion in the future. Matthew's story of the Passion and Resurrection traces the whole body of gospel tradition to a mission of the Twelve from Galilee without any mention of Jerusalem except as the city which crucified Jesus and drove out his apostles.¹² It seems somewhat strange that such a "Jewish Gospel" does not even infer that James and the mother and brothers of Jesus ever changed their original attitude of unbelief and opposition to him. We do not even find any indication of a Jerusalem church. Jesus' encounters with Gentiles during his early ministry all seem to be in a pattern of going from Jew to Gentile. Praising a Roman centurion (generally felt to be a Gentile), Jesus says, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."¹³ Condemning the Jews as faithless, Jesus

¹²Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 256.

¹³Matt. 8:11

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represents God as saying to them, "I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."¹⁴ The inference here is that the Jews were the first to possess the Kingdom but it shall pass from Jew to Gentile. The parable of the wicked husbandmen¹⁵ has been observed as a clear prediction of the Gentile Church which will take the place of rejected Israel.¹⁶ Clark feels there is a definite difference here from the earlier message of Paul that Gentiles also may be saved by inclusion in the new Israel. The message here is that Christianity, now predominantly Gentile, has displaced Judaism as the true Israel.¹⁷ Fierce woes are expressed against the Pharisee, the official representatives of Judaism, yet one of the warmest eulogies is bestowed on a Gentile centurion. The Jews had missed their opportunity and thereby the Gentiles become the hope of the gospel. The Gentiles are now to be evangelized, and Israel will be saved along with them if any are to be saved.¹⁸ "The assurance that the Gentiles have displaced the Jews is the basic message and the Gentile bias of Matthew."¹⁹

¹⁴Matt. 21:43

¹⁵Matt. 21:33-43

¹⁶Scott, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁷Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile Bias In Matthew," Journal Of Biblical Literature, LXVI (1947) 166.

¹⁸Frederick C. Grant, The Gospels: Their Origin And Their Growth (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), p. 141.

¹⁹Clark, op. cit., p. 172.

It appears that Matthew presents the Law and a Christian relationship to it in such a light that the Gentiles suddenly receive a different perspective. One of the chief difficulties we see Jesus having with the Pharisees was his neglect to observe some of the laws. Jesus mingled freely with the "people of the land." He violated the food laws. He did not require his disciples to practice the custom of ceremonial hand-washing. The interesting fact is that Matthew does not present Jesus as being critical of these laws as such, neither is he presented as attempting to destroy them. Jesus was constantly attempting to get at the motive in the actions of man rather than strict obedience of the Law. But we do not see Matthew attempting to use the teachings of Jesus to do away with the Law.

Matthew has been called the "first historic apology for universal Christianity."²⁰ It is called such because it presents Jesus, though legally descended from Abraham through the royal line of David, as really begotten of the Holy Spirit. Jesus demands of those who would enter the new Kingdom a righteousness higher than that based by the Pharisees upon the Law. He follows this with a series of prophetic and messianic acts which show his right to make such a demand.²¹ There is a kind of goodness emphasized

²⁰Goodspeed, The Story of The New Testament,
op. cit., p. 57.

²¹Ibid., p. 58.

to which racial and national distinctions were irrelevant. The stricter Pharisees opposed this for it threatened them with the universalization of their ethics. Such a message could not be so well presented if the Gospel had no Jewish flavor. Because of this new relationship to the Law, Gentiles are more prone to become a part of the mission of the gospel. The narratives of the healing of the Jewish leper, who is told to observe the Law, and of the centurion's servant, who is shown by Jesus' words to be worthy of the Kingdom, are interestingly placed in Matthew. They come immediately after the sermon in which Christ sets forth the Christian's relationship to the Jewish Law.²² Surely there is a message here which points to the universal element being a necessity in the gospel which was presented first to the Jews.

If such a universal emphasis was in the thinking of the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, this may be the reason for the use of several sources. It was necessary to put sources with a Jewish influence side-by-side with Gentile influenced sources in order to fully grasp the total significance of Jesus' message to the world. It has been pointed out that the feeding of the four thousand²³ is probably intended as a miracle done among the Gentiles to parallel the feeding of the five thousand,²⁴ which was

²²Plummer, op. cit., p. 127.

²³Matt. 15:32-39

²⁴Matt. 14:13-21

for the Jews.²⁵ Originally these were probably separate traditions of the same event. We are sure that Matthew used the Q source heavily. The Gentiles were certainly recognized in Q. That document was very universalistic in outlook. It declared that many would come from all directions and lie down in the Kingdom of God.²⁶ The sources are surely handpicked in order to compare the universal with the Jewish.

THE HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE

The concern for Gentiles in Matthew comes largely from an influence which penetrated both Judaism and the early church. This influence was the Hellenistic force which seemed to be so prevalent at that particular time. The Greeks had entered into a great deal of the life and thought of the early church time. This contributed a Hellenizing influence even to the writing of a Gospel. Some of the scriptural quotations in Matthew suggest knowledge of Hebrew. Yet the ability to handle Greek rather well and to use the Greek version of the Old Testament gives the impression that the writer was more than just an old-line Jew. It is true he could well have been a Jew, but he was probably a Hellenistic Jew.²⁷ We regard Stephen as the first outspoken Hellenistic Christian of which we have

²⁵Johnson, op. cit., p. 444.

²⁶Branscomb, Jesus And The Law, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁷Filson, op. cit., p. 165.

a record. It has been suggested that a type of thought which comes close to the theology of the Gospel of Matthew is to be found in the address of Stephen before his martyrdom.²⁸ There is much evidence which would suggest that the Gospel of Matthew came from a Christian group which belonged to the Hellenistic rather than to the strictly Jewish wing of the early church.²⁹ The Gentile mission and the rapid spread of the faith is taken for granted. Jerusalem always represented the Jewish Church in all its love for the Law. We read in Paul's letters of the church gathered around James in Jerusalem being very zealous for the Law. Surely a community such as this would not have produced the Gospel of Matthew. This Gospel seems to reflect a struggle against the older orthodoxy. There are definite compromises reflected in this Gospel which are Hellenistic in character and quite out of accord with the Jacobean teaching which one would find in the Jerusalem church or a church as strictly Jewish as it was.³⁰ Consider the story concerning payment of the temple tax. It is the sort of story that the Hellenists might have created or at least cherished. It flatly denies the claim of the temple on Christians on principle, but permits Christians to support it as a matter of

²⁸Edward P. Blair, Jesus In The Gospel of Matthew (New York--Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 142.

²⁹Branscomb, Jesus And The Law, op. cit., ch. vi.

³⁰Kennard, op. cit., p. 243.

concession.³¹ There is an influence in Matthew to degrade the kosher food laws which had become a key issue between the Jacobians and other communities. Likewise Matthew's onslaughts against the Pharisees were not at all what could be expected from Jewish environment unless there was a definite Hellenistic influence.

There also is the point of ethical emphasis to be considered. In chapter 25 Jesus points to ethical tests as requirements for heaven. Montefiore points out that the Synagogue became more purely ethical in its tests for all men sooner than the Church.³² Hellenistic Jewish Christians could have been responsible for the ethical emphasis in the Gospel of Matthew. This would account for the strong universal element.

The Hellenistic influence found in Matthew appears to have taken the former Jewish teachings in some instances, and carried them to another sphere of life and thought which is more universal. The rise of the Gentile church and the Hellenistic Synagogue were phenomena which produced a need to either do away with the former way of life or carry it further into a more universal realm. The church which surrounded the writing of Matthew may have had many backgrounds represented. These backgrounds may have harmonized

³¹Blair, op. cit., p. 149.

³²Montefiore, op. cit., p. 338.

in the Hellenization which could have taken place. When Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., the Jews, many of them, were scattered in all directions. Many of them lost their nationality and probably became merged with the Gentiles. It stands to reason that many may have become Christians. For instance, it is difficult to explain some features in the rise of Christianity in Edessa--unless one might suppose that the congregation at first was made up largely of converted Jews.³³ These Jews would have been subject to much Hellenization by their environment. Rather than completely forget their former Jewish thinking about the importance of the Law, it would seem much more natural to permit a rethinking to take place. This could have resulted in events and teachings which were familiar either being extended from strict Jewish interpretation to Gentile inclusion or reinterpretation in a Hellenistic light. Matthew records Jesus' words about divorce.³⁴ In this record an exception is made which is not to be found in the parallel passage of Mark. One exception is allowed to the universal rule: when a man divorces his wife on the grounds of unchastity, and marries another, the word adultery is out of place. The former marriage is null. Matthew shows this as words from Jesus himself. When Jesus first spoke these words (which are probably more correctly quoted in Mark) he was

³³F. Crawford Burkitt, The Gospel History And Its Transmission (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1906), p. 172.

³⁴Matt. 5:32; 19:9

dealing with Jewish conditions. When Matthew was written, there was a new influence and a new development of the problem. The development of Jesus' teaching to fit Gentile problems might be thought of as a legitimate extension of the original teaching.³⁵

It also has been suggested that the story of the feeding of the four thousand might be considered the Hellenized version of the story of the feeding of the five thousand, in which the miracle has already been recognized as a type of the eucharist.³⁶ Thus the Hellenistic Church comes to consider the life and teachings of Jesus in light of what has developed at the time the Gospel was written. Matthew could possibly have been a sort of revision (or addition) to the Gospel of Mark made by a Hellenist. This is Blair's position as he claims this would account for the Jewish outlook of the Gospel. The author may have been a member of sectarian Judaism as represented by the Hellenists.³⁷ Likewise the universalistic note in Matthew is accounted for if we consider the author to be a Hellenist. This is supported by the fact that it was the Hellenists in Acts 11:19-20 who "spoke to the Greeks also." The way official Judaism is

³⁵Clarke, op. cit., p. 60.

³⁶Wilfred L. Knox, Some Hellenistic Elements In Primitive Christianity (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 5.

³⁷Blair, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

degraded, the love of true Judaism and the universalism in Matthew may become understandable when we consider the author a member of the Hellenists.³⁸

Another view is that Hellenization could have influenced the total Gospel through the various sources used. One source was probably in contrast to another in this regard. The author may have simply made use of sources which had come to him from various quarters, some from those who opposed the Gentile mission and others under the influence of Paul.³⁹ This would give us the impression that the author had no particular view of his own to expound in this area. This may be taking away some credit which is due the author. But there is an interesting possibility in such a view. If the author did use many sources he might have used ones with differing views in order to create a harmony. This may have been how Hellenization found its way into the Gospel. Knox assumes that the appearance of Jesus in the non-Markan tradition involves a "modification of Q (for which Jesus was not the Messiah) by a Jewish wing of the Hellenistic community."⁴⁰ The use of several sources could have created a Hellenistic influence.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Scott, op. cit., p. 73-74.

⁴⁰Wilfred L. Knox, The Sources Of The Synoptic Gospels, (Cambridge:University Press, 1957), p. 145.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

One of the most universal affirmations found anywhere in the New Testament comes at the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew. This has commonly been referred to throughout the Christian era as the Great Commission. There is no hesitation or uncertainty about the account as it is recorded:

And Jesus came and said to them, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, ⁴¹I am with you always, to the close of the age."

This is recorded as having been spoken by Jesus after his resurrection and immediately preceding his ascension into heaven. Matthew leaves no doubt that the final instruction left by Jesus contains a universal emphasis. This universal element seems to be placed in the Gospel as a grand climax for all that has been told before. Mark, as we have it now, breaks off at 16:8 with the women fleeing frightened from the tomb and telling nobody because they were afraid. There is, therefore, no Great Commission. Matthew at this point goes steadily on with the appearance of Jesus, the return of the disciples to Galilee, and the Great Commission. In his latest study on Matthew, Goodspeed is convinced that Matthew gives us the original conclusion to Mark.

⁴¹Matt. 28:18-20

It is very clear that this was the conclusion of Mark, which Matthew has faithfully taken over, as his previous use of 14:28 and 16:7 clearly requires, so that we can actually, with a fair degree of certainty, recover the closing twelve lines of Mark from Matthew's faithful use of them in 28:8, 9, 16-20, and thus in a very convincing way bring the earliest Gospel back to its first-century completeness.⁴²

Others have felt that these are not so much the words of Jesus which the Great Commission gives us as they are words of the author of the Gospel of Matthew. It is emphasized in the Gospel that Jesus confined his own work to the chosen people of Israel. Yet there is also evidence given throughout the narrative that the evangelization of the distant corners of the world was also a part of the gospel plan. Thus our author, or the disciples, meditating on Jesus' words and under the "influence of his spirit," were sure that the risen Christ had given them the command,⁴³ "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."⁴⁴ Yet when we take everything into consideration, the importance does not center so much on whether or not we have a true, word-for-word quotation from Jesus himself. The important fact is that our Gospel writer did insert the Great Commission. The universal element

⁴²Goodspeed, Matthew Apostle, op. cit., p. 128.

⁴³Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus, op. cit., p. 333.

⁴⁴Matt. 28:18-20

would be almost insignificant if it were not for this final insertion. But because this conclusion is in the Gospel, all other universal elements in the total work become more important and more significant than they otherwise would be.

The universalism which we find present in Matthew, especially in the Great Commission, appears to be a significant symbol of the necessary growth of the gospel. We have noted earlier in our study that often the emphasis goes from Jew to Gentile. This may be a worthy point to continue observing just now. Jesus did approach the Jews first with his gospel, but there is no indication that this was the absolute limitation. This appears to be simply a starting point or perhaps a foundation. He first must find followers; then Christian missionaries are to "make disciples of all nations." Jesus answer to the Canaanite woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"⁴⁵ may be more of an effort by our author to clarify what Jesus was doing than it was an effort to emphasize a gospel only for the Jews. The verse may have been a separate and independent saying, which Matthew has used for the purpose of emphasizing the total picture of Jesus' ministry to the world.⁴⁶ It leads us to understand that

⁴⁵Matt. 15:24

⁴⁶Montefiore, op. cit., p. 228

the ministry of Jesus was limited to Israel. This was also the limitation on the mission of the disciples before the resurrection. The purpose of this verse may be to explain the fact that Jesus, the universal Savior, did actually confine himself to the Jews.⁴⁷ This was the plan which God had ordained. Only after Jesus' resurrection would the disciples be sent into the entire world. Before his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appears in the Gospel to be busy laying the foundations for the new Kingdom. After the foundation is laid and the message of the gospel has been delivered to the people of Israel, then the heralds are sent forth. "All nations" then become the commission for the disciples. These are most extraordinary words spoken then and there to that little company.⁴⁸ The necessary growth which the gospel demands by its very nature now must take place and must include all men. The command by the risen Jesus made the Gentile mission imperative. The author clearly regards it as superseding the earlier policy of Jesus restricting activity to the Jews. Growth is now the important feature.

This was not a reversal of thought for Jesus or the disciples, it was the climax toward which the message of Jesus had always been directed. Pfleiderer says, "The mission of the Seventy was a symbolic anticipation of the

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Gibson, op. cit., p. 444.

Pauline gospel to all the nations."⁴⁹ The gospel message could not be completed until after the resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection were the apostolic message. Naturally this could not be preached universally until it all had been accomplished.⁵⁰ The Messiah came and lived for the Jews, he died and lives again for all mankind. This is the message that our author seems to be continually giving in the Gospel of Matthew.

C. H. Dodd, commenting on the Great Commission, calls it a "shattering commission," yet at the same time, "it is the logical conclusion of the whole Gospel according to Matthew."⁵¹ Goodspeed, in his attempt to establish the Great Commission as the lost ending for Mark, says that on the basis of what is forecast in Mark, "and what Matthew proceeds to narrate, it brings Mark's narrative to a vigorous and appropriate conclusion."⁵² Thus it seems that some scholars would emphasize that the Great Commission and the universal element to be found in Matthew are the logical conclusion to the whole message. Even though Jesus does not go directly to the Gentiles himself, when we read Jesus' words about eating with unwashed hands not defiling the man and the declaration that the Lord of the Vineyard will miserably destroy the unworthy tenants, there

⁴⁹Samuel M. Zwemer, Into All The World (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1943), p. 51

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Dodd, About The Gospels, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵²Goodspeed, Matthew Apostle, op. cit., p. 129.

seems a logical conclusion in the dawning which will bring the universal element into light. This is the need for the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel. Kilpatrick points out that the implication of 21:21-22:14 (all in parables) seems also to indicate a forecast of the conversion of the Gentiles. He also feels that 21:28-32, even though concerned with the publicans and harlots, considered in conjunction with the two following stories indicates a missionary sympathy. This appears also in the Matthean form of the Wedding Feast. The invitation has been refused by those first invited and others were brought in off the roads in their stead.⁵³

Even though the Gospel of Matthew contains a strong Jewish emphasis, when we consider the Gospel in its total context, we can see the universal elements coming forth in a way which leaves no doubt about who is included in the Christian message. The mission to the Jews was the first approach by Jesus. But the ultimate outcome must be observed by the total scope of Matthew's narrative--to take the gospel "into all the world."

⁵³Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 118.

CHAPTER IV

A PORTRAIT OF AN EARLY CHURCH

It seems to be reasonably certain that the Gospel According to Matthew is what would be called a "church book." Considering the date and sources which are reflected by the general character of the book, there is evidence that there is a church behind it. It seems to have grown in part out of the life of the early church and it certainly has elements in it which can minister to the needs of a church. Traditional materials have been used and definite interpretations have been applied to them which obviously reflect some community or group thought.

LIFE IN AN EARLY CHURCH

Differences in the way certain passages are expressed in Matthew from their counterparts in other Gospels have been examined. These variations may be reflecting the church in Matthew's day. Allen has pointed out that in Matthew paradox sometimes has been interpreted as literal truth and to some extent the sayings in process of transmission may very well have received accretions arising out of the necessities of a particular church life.¹ All of the observations which

¹Allen, op. cit., p. 320.

have been examined as well as many other features point to the possibility of a wealth of information being received about early church life in the reading of this outstanding Gospel. C. H. Dodd is convinced that the second century church looked back upon its own formative period, (which is the period which Matthew in part reflects) and made its canon of Scripture out of those writings which most directly represented the spiritual forces active in that period.²

It is my purpose at this point to make some suggestions as to just what may possibly be seen as characteristic of the early church in the Gospel of Matthew. There are some traits and items of interest which can be placed in a list of church characteristics.

Life in an early church seems to be clearly seen as the Gospel is examined carefully. A part of this life within the church is the organizational structure which may have possibly been represented in our author's church. Matthew is especially interested in the Church. The Gospel of Matthew is, in fact, the only one of the Synoptic Gospels which uses the word "Church" at all. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi is recorded in Mark and Luke. But only the account given in Matthew mentions the Church as Jesus' response to this confession. Likewise it is only in Matthew

²Dodd, The Authority Of The Bible, op. cit., p. 202.

that disputes are referred to the Church to be settled. Here is an indication that the church had developed a definite organizational life which could handle such situations. According to the way our author writes, the church had become not only a great organization and institution, but it had also become the dominant fact in the life of the Christian.³ The church had become something more than just the identification mark of a group of men and women who had possessed what they termed "the Holy Spirit." It had become organized to deal with the life situations of those within it. Bacon says that Matthew was written not only in the shadows of an organized church, but it was written in an effort to "perpetuate the scribal system in the Church by bestowing on Peter an office corresponding to the presidency of a college of scribes."⁴ Organization had certainly taken place before the writing. Reading the way different ideas are presented in Matthew we can sense an environment which requires some kind of church organization. Just how well organized the church behind Matthew was is difficult to tell. But it is very possible that Catholic Christianity could be in the dawning of the environment from which the author

³Barclay, op. cit., p. xxvi

⁴Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 131.

wrote.⁵ For this reason the Gospel of Matthew became the most influential of the three--it was the favorite of the Church.

It is certainly probable that the passages in Matthew which show such a marked interest in the organization of the church are the work of the author. But it does not follow necessarily that he composed them. More than likely they rest on church tradition or special sources which show the actual contemporary life of the church.⁶ Through an examination of the Gospel of Matthew we can get a clear glimpse of a church life which knew and depended upon organization.

An even more evident characteristic of the life of an early church which we can share in Matthew is that of worship. The church has always been an institution which gathered for worship. Worship is the central theme of the love of God which stimulates man to serve. Matthew gives evidence of a definite worship life in the early church. The arrangement of the book in itself gives evidence that it could have easily been used as a worship aid. In its arrangement the book can easily be separated into sections for reading in public worship.⁷ It was the practice of the earliest church to read in worship that which was common to their religious experience. It is Kilpatrick's opinion that the Gospel of

⁵Ropes, op. cit., p. 232.

⁶Castor, op. cit., p. 184

⁷Johnson, op. cit., p. 232

Mark and the sources Q and M were read repeatedly (over 20 years) in the church to which Matthew belonged.⁸ If this is so, the very fact that such passages are included in the Gospel tells of the need which it fulfilled in connection with public worship. It also tells us what kind of material was being used in public worship of the early church. In fact Kilpatrick is of the opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was written for the express purpose of supplying the early church with a definite liturgy for use in public worship. It is his contention that the very fact that the author of the Gospel retains so many characteristics of the sermon and the liturgy suggests that he was writing for this very purpose. He used some of the "treasure of the past" to supply material for the homiletic and liturgical use of the Gospel in the future.⁹ Whether or not the Gospel was written for the sole purpose of aiding worship in the early church is still open to opinion. But the fact that it is possible to even consider such a motive tells of the worship material which is included. This gives us a good picture of life in an early church. Bacon, in commenting on the account of the Eucharist at the final Passover in Jerusalem,¹⁰ is convinced that to the author of Matthew the group surely symbolized the

⁸Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 70.

⁹Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁰Matt. 26:20-26

formation of the primitive Brotherhood described in Acts 1-5.¹¹ This becomes a part of the worship liturgy. There is much more material commendable to liturgy and worship in Matthew than in the earlier Mark. The Gospel of Matthew may have been written in order to replace Mark--not to add to a collection of Gospels. There was a period when a single Gospel had the dominant liturgical position in the Church; the composing of the Diatessaron was a belated effort to save the one-Gospel system.¹²

We can even realize a change in the liturgy of the early church when we read Matthew in comparison with earlier Christian literature. There has been some speculation concerning the authenticity of the Great Commission at the conclusion of Matthew. But whether it is a part of the original or something added by the later church, there is still evidence of a change in thought and liturgy. Verse 19 presents Jesus saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The concept of the Trinity is here advanced in a liturgical fashion. This verse is evidence that the threefold name is coming to be used in baptism in place of the earlier formula which we read the church originally used at such a time.¹³ We

¹¹Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 222.

¹²Philip Carrington, The Primitive Christian Calendar (Cambridge: The University Press, 1952), p. 31.

¹³Johnson, op. cit.,

know the earliest church baptized, "In the name of the Lord Jesus."¹⁴ The author of the Gospel was either reflecting what had been done or was beginning to be done in the liturgy of the church of his day. The Gospel tradition was very highly treasured by the early church. Surely in their worship, their liturgy would include everything available which would emphasize this tradition. The Gospel of Matthew reflects the fact that more was desired in a definite form than what they already had. There is evidence that the church's use of the Gospel tradition in worship did affect the form in which this tradition appears in our Gospels today.¹⁵

We can also see the life of an early church reflected in the way evangelism is presented in the Gospel of Matthew. This Gospel gives, much more than Mark, the bulk of the teachings of Jesus himself. Our author is attempting to present Jesus in his effort to challenge the thoughts and ways of men rather than only a bare outline of the activities of his life. He is attempting to make Christ real in the church of his day. There are several important sayings in which Jesus seems to make definite reference to the conversion of the Gentiles. They are to share in the joys and privileges of the future kingdom. Some scholars have considered these in comparison

¹⁴Acts 2:38; 8:16

¹⁵Blair, op. cit., p. 39.

with other sayings which seem to have opposite emphases. These scholars have concluded that a number of these sayings concerning Gentile conversion are, in their present form, of doubtful authenticity. They reflect not so much the exact words of Jesus as they do the later experiences of the church.¹⁶ The church reflected in Matthew is a church which has accepted the Gentile mission. The conflict which we considered between the Jewish and universal passages may well reflect a history of an early church. It may be that some verses represent the unwillingness of the original Jewish church to embark on the mission to the Gentiles but later verses recall that the Gentiles overcame this reluctance. We may see reflected in Matthew a church which confined its earliest activity to the Jews; but it is quite clear that the evangelist intended the whole of the missionary charge to apply to the practice and experience of the Church. The condition of the church concerning evangelism which Matthew reflects is one which is attempting to win all men to faith in Jesus as God's way of salvation. We see this portrayed in ways that are understood by Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus is presented as the Son of God--a divine human being who had been born of a virgin--who had not only a supernatural origin but also miraculous powers. He was revealed to men by the Father so that they

¹⁶Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus, op. cit., p. 329.

might understand and be saved. Such a "Son of God" as a divine savior come to earth for the redemption of men was a common idea in the syncretistic religions of the period.¹⁷ Matthew presents Jesus with such concepts as would have been understood by Jews and Gentiles alike. The Gospel of Matthew reflects an evangelism for both Jews and Gentiles in the life of the church of its day.

Teaching methods in the early church are also reflected. Whatever else the Gospel may have been written to be, it was surely in some ways used as a tool for teaching in the early church. New Testament scholarship has emphasized the role played by the Christian community in the creation of all our Gospels. Since the Gospels tell us much about the church from which it came, as well as about Jesus, we can safely conclude that the church there reflected obviously used the teachings of Jesus in instructing converts concerning the meaning and implications of their new faith.¹⁸ The Gospel of Matthew is written in a very "teachable" way. Its division into five parts plus an introduction and a conclusion call to mind the method of teaching in the Rabbinical schools of the day of Jesus. Memorization was an intricate part of all education procedures and Matthew could well be used in such a way. In the church of Matthew's day

¹⁷Benjamin W. Bacon, The Gospel of The Hellenists (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933), p. 110.

¹⁸Blair, op. cit., p. 35.

the teachings of Jesus were apparently held in high regard and as essential for the convert to know. This is why Mark was not felt to be sufficient. The Gospel of Mark was good but not adequate in teaching material. Filson has written a paper concerning the broken patterns which are to be found in Matthew. In seeking an answer as to why they are present, he is convinced that a good possibility is that teachers of the early Jewish-Christian church were concerned for effective form in Jesus' saying, "and with an eye to their use in oral instruction, arranged the tradition in patterns which would aid both memory and clear understanding."¹⁹ This assumes that Jesus' teachings are arranged more for the teaching purpose and less for the chronological accuracy. This also assumes the importance of oral instruction and memorization in the teaching method of the early church from which Matthew came.

There are also traces of church discipline found in the Gospel of Matthew. It is this discipline character which gives Matthew much of its tone of authority. The Jews of that time were all convinced that the Old Testament Scriptures were divinely inspired and each author spoke with authority. C. C. Torrey is convinced that the writer of Matthew's Gospel had much more than mere teaching material in mind when he wrote. "Matthew writes as an Israelite

¹⁹Filson, "Broken Patterns In The Gospel of Matthew," op. cit., p. 231.

prophet, conscious of the same divine guidance which was granted to his predecessors."²⁰ If this is so, there must have been some obvious reasons related to authority back of such a document. The Gospel includes many directions for Christians of its day. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting, marriage and divorce, rules for conduct toward children and brethren, and injunctions to be faithful under persecution are all carefully included in Matthew. This Gospel reflects a church which has high standards and strict discipline over its members.²¹ The church had developed to the point where it was dealing with many problem areas of discipline. One example is in the situation of divorce. An exception was allowed in the otherwise absolute prohibition of divorce, The Gospel places the words in Jesus' mouth. However, in the earlier Marcan account there is no such exception spoken by Jesus. This seems to be a problem of church discipline with which Matthew is dealing. The problem of unfaithfulness had arisen in the church. Thus, discipline was not only projected by the church, it was probably also expected by the people of the church. The church is the congregation of the Messiah's chosen ones who are the "new Israel" within the larger body of the elect nation, though it is destined to include Gentiles also.²² This is the reason that

²⁰Charles Cutler Torrey, Documents of the Primitive Church, (New York and London:Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 43.

²¹Grant, op. cit., p. 142

²²Ibid.

Christianity is presented as the New Law. The Jewish people had always known a code which had led them in their daily conduct. A new law is presented as Jesus proclaims the traits of the people of the new order. On many points of daily life debatable questions of conduct would arise. Christians felt the need of rules which might give them a guide for their actions. In no book of our New Testament is the concept of a New Law for Christians so outstanding as in Matthew.²³ We can see the disciplined conduct of early church members more prominently in Matthew than any other Gospel. It must have been written in reflection of what the early church experienced.

THOUGHT IN AN EARLY CHURCH

We have affirmed the fact that it is probable that several sources were used in writing the Gospel of Matthew. We have also considered the fact that we do not know who the author of the Gospel was for certain as it is written anonymously. Streeter is convinced that in a work of this kind anonymity implies that it was originally compiled for the use of some particular church which accepted it at once as a reliable authority.²⁴ Both the authorship and sources of the Gospel apparently reflects something which the contemporary church had confidence in. It must have reflected

²³Burkitt, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁴Streeter, op. cit., p. 500.

the current thought of the surrounding early church. We may therefore observe not only church life in this Gospel, but perhaps we also can probe into the very thought of the early church.

It might well be that the thought of the early church was molded by the traditions which had surrounded the Christian message entirely. When our Gospels were written, it was probably necessary to make an adequate record of the Church's traditional knowledge of the life of Jesus by collecting and sifting the scattered fragments of the oral tradition.²⁵ One of the basic arguments against apostolic authorship of our Gospel is in the fact that there seems to be so much early church tradition reflected in the entire writing. When Matthew is compared with Mark it seems obvious that the former could not have been written by an eye-witness because it is such a compendium of church tradition.²⁶ This is the work of editorship, not the personal observations of a participant. The Gospel is filled with church tradition. In fact there is some opinion that the Gospel of Matthew is nothing more than a collection of various traditions, expertly edited. Knox is convinced that Matthew had before him a collection of "testimonia" and that he added to that from oral tradition.²⁷ Tradition which had grown up

²⁵Oscar Cullmann, The Early Church (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 43.

²⁶Johnson, op. cit., p. 242

²⁷Knox, The Sources, op. cit., p. 127

around the church in which the author was writing must have entered into the total picture. This may have been the oral tradition which scholars repeatedly mention.

One of the elements of tradition which we can see in Matthew is that bulk of teaching which contains the particularistic emphases of the Gospel. It is felt by some that this is an inheritance from primitive tradition, not necessarily reflecting the point of view of the readers.²⁸ The point of view of the readers might reflect the tradition which is in the opposite direction but just as evident in the Gospel of Matthew. We see several references of the universal element in Matthew and this is carried into a grand climax for the entire work. This tradition of the Great Commission and those passages in harmony with it might well be the tradition of the "home church."

We can see the teaching of the early church reflected in Matthew which goes beyond mere method. We can see a formation of theology and a depth into what was being taught in an early church. In this Gospel other material has been woven into Mark and Q which has a great insight into Christian teaching. Some of this material is haggadic, but some of it is plainly drawn from early Christian teaching and exegesis.²⁹ One of the most obvious trains of

²⁸Blair, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁹Grant, op. cit., p. 146.

thought in the teaching reflected in Matthew concerns the comparison of the teachings of Jesus and the Law of Moses. The Gospel regards the teaching of Jesus as the law which must henceforth be valid in the church, as the Law of Moses had been in Israel.³⁰ This reflects a people who were not only familiar with a way of life which the Law of Moses affected, but expected something to either take its place or make it continuously valid in the Christian era.

When we consider the teachings the Gospel reflects we can begin to speculate concerning the direction they were going in their formulative theology. We can compare what seems to be inconsistencies and begin to understand the growth that was taking place. Easton examines the passage concerning the scribes and Pharisees sitting on Moses' seat.³¹ He is convinced that this can be understood only as an expression of the later Palestinian church, "when a growing conservatism had made them 'all zealous for the law.'" ³² Easton is here saying that the thought of the church can be observed in this Gospel.

Another part of the theology of the early church reflected in Matthew has to do with the nature of Jesus' mission. Several sayings of Jesus begin with the words, "I am come."³³ Harnack and some other scholars are inclined

³⁰Scott, op. cit., p. 66.

³¹Matt. 23:2ff

³²Burton Scott Easton, The Gospel Before The Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 107.

³³Matt. 5:17; 10:35

to doubt the genuineness of these sayings because they deal with the specific nature of Jesus' mission. It is quite controversial whether or not Jesus would have made such statements. But the nature of Jesus' mission was of great interest to the early church.³⁴ It seems clear that early church thought was in the direction of Jesus' mission and its meaning.

There are two important considerations in the Gospel of Matthew. They are the Law and the church (or community). Grant feels that the author's theology is built on Jewish lines with its two foci being the Law and the Community.³⁵ This would say that the theology reflected in Matthew is more practical than speculative. He is concerned with the practical interests and empirical problems of the actual community where he is writing. Even the baptismal formula found in the Great Commission may sum up the experience of the converts and combine their inherited Jewish faith in God, their new faith in the Son, and their experience of the Holy Spirit which had been "given" them.³⁶

A basic thought which we see in an early church reflected by Matthew is the thought of an on-going church. The church has become all-important and the progress and

³⁴Johnson, op. cit., p. 291.

³⁵Grant, op. cit., p. 150.

³⁶Ibid.

future of that church is in the thought of those who now are a part of it. Even though there is abundant material which reflects early tradition and indeed the very words of Jesus himself many years before, there is a purpose which binds them all together which is far more than a recollection of that which has been in the past. The way the traditions and sayings have been inserted and edited by the author tells of the concern of an on-going church present in his mind. This Gospel is rather late compared to many other early Christian writings, but it holds a treasure which is unknown in any other writings. This treasure is told through the story of the age which produced it in final form. Matthew shows the adaptation of the everlasting gospel to the post-apostolic age and environment.³⁷ Mark's Gospel had to be revised for the on-going church and Matthew rose to do it. An example of this fact is in connection with the resurrection accounts. In Mark's Gospel no great emphasis is laid upon the resurrection or the empty tomb, except as forming the necessary transition to the final event in Galilee. Neither does Mark feel any real importance to a record of an appearance of the risen Christ. This is because everything leads up to the "parousia." Matthew is writing at a later date for a church which was needing something beyond that found in Mark. Therefore Matthew

³⁷Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 261.

views the whole matter of the resurrection differently.³⁸ We have in Matthew a portrait of Jesus which is so drawn as to challenge Christians to moral and spiritual growth in order to be prepared for the Kingdom of Heaven. A church in a later time needed this. Those in the church must possess the higher righteousness--be inwardly, not simply externally, good. Those who are like Jesus will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The on-going church must have those in it who are preparing to enter this Kingdom. The Kingdom seems almost to become identified with the church. There appears to be an age reflected when the church was becoming a power in the world, with a mighty future plainly before it, and the loyalty of many Christians had become evident in the community. But Scott speculates that this loyalty was to the community itself. They were proud to belong to the community and in their pride forgot what it really stood for. Our Gospel writer seems to be probing for more than devotion to the church for its own sake. He wants to make it clear what it means to be in the church, what it stands for and why its members must be faithful to it. So he identifies it with the Kingdom--representing the Kingdom of God on earth.³⁹ The great

³⁸Robert Henry Lightfoot, Locality And Doctrine In The Gospels (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938), p. 67.

³⁹Ernest Findlay Scott, The Purpose Of The Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 133.

purpose for which the church is to stand is to be the reason for any separate functions which are described in Matthew or anywhere else. Throughout the Gospel we see the continual emphasis on the inward motive being the primary reason for any external action. Jesus is quoted as telling the Jews, "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."⁴⁰ The nation is the Christian church, composed of both Gentiles and Jews.⁴¹ The church must therefore meet the responsibilities of bearing good fruit which comes from having a genuine motive and intent. This reflects a time when the truth on both sides of the Jewish-Gentile problem in the church could be fairly recognized. It reflects a concern for the on-going church to rise above all this. It stands, not for any partial interpretation of Christianity, but for one in which sincere dedication to the truth of the gospel message could find its place. This was the inward motive of love which would bear good fruit.

PROBLEMS OF AN EARLY CHURCH

One of the obvious motives behind the writing of the Gospel of Matthew was an effort to solve some of the problems which had arisen in the early church at the time the Gospel was written. It seems that some problems may have been raised by the several sources and background

⁴⁰Matt. 22:43

⁴¹Johnson, op. cit., p. 514.

materials which the early church had at its disposal. When we recall the differing sources which we assume to have been used in writing Matthew, we can easily understand why there might be problems develop when all these sources are compared side-by-side. The fact that the several sources did differ in many respects in their accounts (some differences of great importance) would illustrate why there would be difficulty for those who regarded them as important to the life of the church. The author of Matthew was writing for the church and used several sources of different points of view. This was probably an attempt to create a unity in viewpoint. The Gospel was written for the church with the needs of the church constantly in mind. Scott says this is true of all our Gospel writers.

They write for the church, and so describe the work of Jesus as to afford it practical guidance. Every earnest historian has something like this in view when he recounts the things that happened in a bygone time. But the idea that the church made the Gospels, in the sense that they project its present interests into a more or less fictitious account of Jesus, is a mere inversion of the truth. It was the Gospels which made the church. Their aim was to carry it back to what Jesus himself had taught, by word and act, so that it might be constituted on this model and no other.⁴²

In order to get back to the correct model it was important to write a Gospel which would eliminate the problems projected by the differing sources.

⁴²Scott, The Purpose of The Gospels, op. cit., p. 131.

The source which Matthew used almost in its entirety was Mark. While it was probably used primarily because it was so well accepted in the church yet considered incomplete, there may have also been a motive of attempting to clear up some problems which Mark created in the contemporary church of our author. One very notable problem which apparently was causing uncertainty was a plain rule in Mark which is given an exception in Matthew. This is in reference to the comment on divorce. It seems rather inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus that he would make the exception that he does in Matthew. However, the reference may well be to the local Syrian problem only.⁴³ It is quite evident that the Marcan form of the teaching is original and the tradition of Matthew has been assimilated. Matthew may have been attempting to overcome a problem which was created in the church due to the record found in Mark.

Several other problems are dealt with in Matthew which are problems due to their presentation in the earlier Mark. Sherman Johnson says of the Gospel:

Matthew quietly eliminated questions and doubts which Mark's Gospel had too easily raised in the reader's mind. Jesus' baptism could not be interpreted as a sign of personal repentance; Peter was praised for hailing the Master as Messiah; the miracles took place instantaneously; the body of Jesus was not stolen from the tomb, and such a story arose only because the guards had been bribed.⁴⁴

⁴³Clarke, op. cit., p. 60.

⁴⁴Johnson, op. cit., p. 232

By the time Matthew was written there had been opportunity for much study and speculation concerning the teachings and activities surrounding the Christian message and account. Mark's brief account had not dealt with these problems because the need did not appear at the time of its writing. The need has risen in the early church and Matthew wrote to overcome the problems created. The Gospel of Matthew solved, due to its "philosophy of Christian history," the most serious intellectual problems of the church in its day, and it harmonized and unified all the diverse materials which related to the life and teaching of Jesus. These things were accomplished with an "intuitive sense for religious values" which gives Matthew the outstanding and important position it occupies today.⁴⁵ As we examine this quality of Matthew we can at the same time see some interesting characteristics of an early church.

By realizing the problems with which Matthew is dealing there also appears evidence that there were some very great dangers to the church present at the time the Gospel was written. A bitter conflict appears between Jewish Christianity and those Jews who rejected the gospel. It is obvious that the church was locked in a bitter struggle with the synagogue. Judaism had set itself firmly against Christianity. Kilpatrick gives evidence of this

⁴⁵Goodspeed, The Story, op. cit., p. 60.

great struggle.⁴⁶ He quotes a benediction of Samuel the Small at Jamnia in the time of Gamaliel II (approximately 85 A.D.) which condemns the Christians so strongly that it is clear that attendance at the synagogue was no longer possible for them.

For the excommunicate let there be no hope and the arrogant government do thou swiftly uproot in our days; and may the Christians and the heretics suddenly be laid low and not be inscribed with the righteous.⁴⁷ Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.

This was obviously a great danger and threat to the early church. A writing was needed which would clearly define the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, offer a rationale for its existence, and provide a shield for the prevailing danger. Our author supplied this partly by appealing to Jesus himself, who had supplied in his own controversies with the Jews the needed answers to these problems. There were apparently slanders about Jesus current in Jewish circles which posed a threat to some of the basic beliefs concerning the Son of God. Matthew therefore has apologetic sections which indicate answers for the Jews. The genealogy and the nativity stories obviously are intended to counter the Jewish attack on Jesus' right to be regarded as the Messiah. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus really rose from the grave being victorious over death and his enemies. His disciples did

⁴⁶Kilpatrick, op. cit., Ch. VI.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 109.

not steal the body for the tomb was guarded, claims the Gospel. These and many other emphases are included in Matthew in order to over-ride the danger which the Jews were presenting to the church.

Another danger to the church which Matthew may have been attempting to eliminate was the movement loyal to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a figure of importance to the Christian community when each of the Gospels was written. At any rate each Gospel was careful to include an account which placed John secondary, or as a forerunner, to Christ. There is a most interesting addition in the Matthean account of Jesus' baptism by John which the earlier accounts do not record. Included is a peculiarly Matthean statement, "John would have prevented him..."⁴⁸ Here was Matthew's solution of a problem of the early church in explaining the baptism of Jesus by John. James Jones has written an article in which he feels that the church from which Matthew wrote was confronted with the problem of an active Johannine movement.⁴⁹ This movement may have been a real danger to the early church. "To those for whom the Gospel was written the claims made concerning John offered embarrassment and perhaps a threat."⁵⁰ In each

⁴⁸Matt. 3:14

⁴⁹James L. Jones, "References to John The Baptist In The Gospel According to St. Matthew," Anglican Theological Review XLI (1959) 301.

⁵⁰Ibid.

of the five major sections of Matthew there is an explanation of the relationship between Jesus and John. Surely there was a problem at this point which was a characteristic of the early church and which Matthew was attempting to overcome.

Other problems to which our eyes are drawn as we examine Matthew are those which were the result of conflict within the church itself. Wherever there are different people, there will be different points of view. The early church was not exempt from the problem of inner conflict. There were problems about the Christian community then just as there are today. Matthew gives us a glimpse of the problems of the church from which he wrote. Apparently one of the most urgent problems was that of the conduct of Jewish Christians. The story of the Coin in the Fish's Mouth⁵¹ seems to reflect the question of the payment of the Temple Tax by Jewish Christians who no longer felt themselves to be within the Jewish community. The question the disciples were asked concerning such payment is hardly likely to be important in the stage of church life represented by the early chapters of Acts. It is even less likely to occur during the lifetime of Jesus. The story is suspected of being a later addition for the benefit of solving a church problem.⁵² Two opposing points of view were apparently

⁵¹Matt. 17:24-27

⁵²C. H. Dodd, The Gospels As History: A Reconsideration (Manchester: The Manchester University Press, 1938), p. 17.

maintained within the church concerning obedience of the Mosaic Law. The Gospel uses the sayings of Jesus to present the view that the old Law had not been destroyed by Jesus but rather completed or carried to its fulfillment. In Jesus' teachings was to be found a new law. This new law was binding upon all Christians. This gradually became the view adopted by the Church as a whole, although Jesus never thought of his teachings as a new body of laws--taking the place of those of Moses.⁵³ The important fact is that the early church did think of Jesus' teachings in this way and in so doing solved the great inner conflict of the church. This was Matthew's purpose at this point. The real danger of the author's day was Pharisaic scribalism within the church, and to this he devoted the brunt of his attack.

Bacon feels that the long struggle against Gnostic heresy was beginning already.⁵⁴ This is the reason that the old Law is referred to and the Jewish element is so prevailing at points. There is a special development in Jesus' teaching by which Matthew is endeavoring to direct the church aright between the "Scylla of Pharisaism and the Charybdis of Hellenistic libertinism."⁵⁵ This gives a most adequate explanation for the differing points of view which we see represented in the Gospel. There are

⁵³Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus, op. cit., p. 64.

⁵⁴Bacon, Studies In Matthew, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 348.

conflicts within the church which can create characteristics far removed from the thrust of the Christian message.

Matthew is attempting to solve this coming menace and through his attempt, we can see the dilemma of that early church even today.

The problems of an early church which we feel are revealed in Matthew also reflect some basic needs which the early church must have had at the time the Gospel was written. Scott is convinced that each of the Gospels ~~were~~ written because of basic needs within the early church.

The Gospels were intended for the church, and whatever may have been their purpose it must have had some close relation to the needs of the Christian society in the later part of the first century.⁵⁶

Several verses reflect very emphatic words from Jesus which have a real tone of harshness. There must have been need in the early church for some genuine challenge concerning personal conduct. Montefiore, commenting on the phrase, "For many are called, but few are chosen,"⁵⁷ remarks, "How great must the corruption of the church have been in Matthew's eyes, how luxuriant the growth of the tares, if he ventured to assert that the just and the chosen should be so few."⁵⁸ There seems to have been a genuine need in the church for a spiritual awakening and realization of the demands of Jesus. This Gospel reflects a time of

⁵⁶Scott, The Purpose of The Gospels, op. cit., p. 121.

⁵⁷Matt. 22:14

⁵⁸Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, op. cit., p. 290.

lassitude and moral relaxation. The love of many has "grown cold." Matthew feels there is a lack of "good works" and he writes in an attempt to inspire the church to set an example for all the world.⁵⁹ We see the method of strict church discipline approved by this Gospel. There was apparently a real need for more genuinely Christian conduct on the part of individuals within the church.

There may also have been an external need which is reflected in the Gospel. Consider the fact that in Matthew many older materials have been altered. This may be an emphasis on the importance of reconciliation. Making friends with Roman officials may have become the condition of survival. There was a danger that both Christians and Jews would perish together. Matthew's zeal for reconciliation may be born of experience.⁶⁰ Terrible ordeals did become a part of the life of early Christians at various points. Matthew may be picturing a need for the early church to overcome such a problem by Christian love and reconciliation.

Among many scenes which the Gospel of Matthew pictures for us regarding the early church, we can see very clearly several problems which confronted the church out of which the Gospel came. As we realize the life, thought, and problems of the early church reflected in this Gospel,

⁵⁹Bacon, Studies in Matthew, op. cit., p. 75.

⁶⁰Kennard, op. cit., p. 246.

we can get a view of the way our fore-runners were able to maintain their survival. An examination of this Matthean picture might well give real insight for modern churchmanship.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Matthew has many areas worthy of intensified study within it. Many of these areas have been mentioned in this construction of an early church description. The possibilities for further study along this line are unlimited. However, the point of this thesis has now been reached. That point is that there is contained in the Gospel of Matthew a description of an early church which tells us something about just what the church was and what the point of view of the leaders within the church must have been in the day when the Gospel was written.

The over-all historical sketch has been given in order to give an adequate background for the individual characteristics which were later mentioned and/or developed. This background has placed the Gospel in focus as being written sometime near the turn of the first century with the bulk of evidence being opposed to apostolic authorship. It was our conclusion that the Gospel was probably written somewhere in Syria, though not necessarily in Antioch, for purposes which would strength the church.

Matthew has been often accused of being severely Jewish in outlook. This problem was examined and it has been clearly observed that Jewish elements are present.

But they seem to reflect an early church which could have had strong Jewish tendencies on the one hand yet on the other hand could not tolerate the perversion of the Christian message into a Jewish sect.

At the same time some have called Matthew a universal Gospel. There is a real concern for Gentiles found in it. There is a Hellenistic influence which deserves serious consideration in the study of Matthew. Contrasting this with the Jewishness of the Gospel, however, seems to indicate more of a record of ecclesiastical thinking than a deliberate attempt to support one side or another. The Gospel is written from sources and ideas which reflect both the past and the present in the church of its time. Therefore one would expect to find these two elements.

It has been my opinion that the Gospel of Matthew possibly gives a clear picture of the early church life of its own day. Organization, worship, discipline, and methods seem to be reflected in the writing. It is speculated that the current thought of early church leaders is to be detected in the writing. Problems with which the early church obviously had to deal have been mentioned. This justifies some of the accounts and particular points of view which Matthew uniquely presents.

It has not been my desire to cover up the overriding purpose of the Gospel to present Jesus Christ. If in any way this study has taken away from the importance of Jesus' ministry as presented in the Gospel, then much more has been lost than gained. But it is possible that Matthew's message may be better understood when it is considered in the context of the author's environment. Matthew is unique in many ways. If this unique element can be better understood, there is a good possibility that the ministry of Jesus which is presented can be better understood also.

The church was very much alive at the time Matthew was written. The over-all information we have concerning the church is very limited. Yet each time Matthew is encountered in serious study there might come from that encounter not only significant insights to Jesus' message but also important reflections of the early church.

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