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## THE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FIGURE OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: SOME PRINCIPAL FEATURES IN MATTHEAN CHRISTOLOGY

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**THE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE  
FIGURE OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW:  
SOME PRINCIPAL FEATURES IN MATTHEAN  
CHRISTOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

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In the wake of redaction-criticism it has become customary to treat the evangelists as theologians. This study is an attempt to elucidate how the Gospel of Matthew defines the impact of Jesus on salvation in a reinterpretation of tradition. Following a new trend in christological studies, emphasis has been laid not so much on the different christological titles as on the way the Jesus story is told as articulating the writer's christology. A special trait in Matthew is its meekness Christology, and great importance is also given to Jesus as the Teacher *par excellence*. God being the real actor in the gospel story, the Christology of Matthew turns out to be theology in the sense of soteriology.

**1. THE EVANGELISTS AS THEOLOGIANS**

Today the Christology of each of the gospels is normally looked upon as expressing the individual interpretation of the figure of Jesus by the evangelist in question. But while much interest has been given to the special use of the different christological titles, little attention has been paid to the so-called indirect Christology, the constructing of the theological impact of Jesus in the way of telling his story. This story is, however, the most obvious place to find the special features of the different evangelists' christologies.

The earliest testimony we have to an interest in the distinctive character of each of the four gospels is the tendency criticism of the Tübingen School in the nineteenth century, trying to detect the

<sup>1</sup>Paper read to the seminar 'Inhalte und Probleme einer neutestamentlichen Theologie' at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the SNTS in Copenhagen. For the careful work with the translation I want to thank the secretary of our institute, Mrs Lise Lock, and for a critical reading of the translation Professor Michael Goulder, Birmingham.

different ‘parties’ behind the gospels. Here the interest focused not so much on the different casting of the figure of Jesus as on the ‘author’ behind the gospel. But it soon became overshadowed by the endeavours made by the ‘life-of-Jesus-research’ to reconstruct the historical Jesus as he really was. Here the individualities of the evangelists were – also for theological reasons – looked upon as of only minor interest, and this attitude was also, at least partly, typical of the form-critical approach at the beginning of this century. It was certainly important to be able to recognize each evangelist’s individual stamp on the traditions, but this was mainly to be able to eliminate it in the quest for earlier layers of the tradition, i.e. for the historical Jesus. But with the redaction-critical research which prevailed from about the middle of the 1950s the situation soon changed, and an independent and positive interest in the evangelists *as theologians* emerged.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that everything in their gospels should be accepted as being in accordance with their special theology. Just as Mark in his gospel takes over older material which has not been transformed into being completely Markan, so Matthew, in his rewritten edition of Mark, includes traditions representing older theological strata. Anyway, it seems possible to treat the evangelists as theologians constructing their stories in accordance with a more or less coherent theology.

This development in the interpretation of the gospels was closely associated with an increasing recognition that what faces us in the NT is theology, and it is impossible for us to revert to a, so to speak, non-theological stratum. An historically minded exegete cannot of course ignore the historical starting point, i.e. Jesus from Nazareth. But what is stated in the gospels as the significance of Jesus for salvation is anyway due to interpretation. And even though this interpretation in the gospels must be assumed somehow to originate in its object, it is undertaken by the evangelist as his way of constructing the theological impact of Jesus. This means that the unity inherent in the starting point necessarily becomes split up. Continuity and discontinuity therefore

<sup>2</sup>This interest is fundamental in the different surveys on the theology of Matthew that have been published in the last decade: R. T. France, *Matthew – Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter, 1989); Alexander Sand, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (EdF 275; Darmstadt, 1991); Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge, 1993); Donald Senior, *What are They Saying about Matthew?* (New York, rev. and expanded edn, 1996); and John Riches, *Matthew* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield, 1996). Cf. also Graham Stanton, ‘The Origin and Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel. Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980’, in *ANRW* 2.25.3 (Berlin, 1985) 1889–951.

clash in an unavoidable dialectic. In this connection it should be stressed that the 'earthly' Jesus described by the evangelists is pre-eminently a theological creation due to the need for a horizontally transmitted, authoritative teaching, not only just the simple continuation of an oral tradition. The circumstance that the existing traditions are being linked in a superior, theologically tinted course of events alters their character decisively.<sup>3</sup>

A 'biography' of that kind will have to be adapted to an external chronological sequence of events which refers these events to a past that can only be approached via tradition. Thus Georg Strecker speaks of Matthew's perception of Jesus' history as 'heilige Vergangenheit'.<sup>4</sup> But this tradition only exists due to a continuous reception, which is analogous to a creative interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Interpretation means – then as now – that tradition should in particular be related to the interpreter's own sense of reality and horizon of reading. In the case of Matthew this means primarily Judaism and its holy books. For this evangelist these constituted the screen through which Jesus' life and works were filtered. In other words: the significance of Jesus' life and works is thrown into relief by virtue of a particular interpretation of Judaism and its holy books. Earlier there was a tendency to see Jesus as the fulfilment of the expectations inherent in the holy books of Judaism, perhaps as they were understood at that time. In other words, Jesus should have stepped into a pre-fixed role. Today this understanding has in general been abandoned in favour of an appreciation of the reception of Jesus' life and works as re-interpretation, a transformation of the contents of the Messianic expectations. Continuity is somehow a postulate and explains why every interpretation should be valued on the basis of its own contents.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See for this e.g. Geert Hallböck, 'The Earthly Jesus. The Gospel Genre and Types of Authority', in *The New Testament in Its Hellenistic Context* (ed. Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, Einar Sigurbjörnsson and Pétur Pétursson; Proceedings of a Nordic Conference of New Testament Scholars, held in Skálholt; *ST* 10; Reykjavik, 1996), 135–45.

<sup>4</sup> See Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit. Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (FRLANT 82; 3rd edn, Göttingen, 1971) 122, where Strecker concludes: 'So erscheint das Leben Jesu als ein Zeitabschnitt, der zwar im Zeitablauf eine besondere Stellung einnimmt, aber ihm doch immanent ist, ihn nicht beendet, sondern von dem noch aufstehenden, Gericht und Heil bringende Ende der Geschichte deutlich abgehoben ist.'

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hans Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1995) 3.244. As the reason why there is no such thing as *Sacra Scriptura per se ipsam*, it is said here, 'Denn wo Geschichtlichkeit ist, da ist Rezeption. Rezeptionslosigkeit ist eine ontologische Unmöglichkeit. . . . *Es gibt nie Tradition an sich, es gibt nur interpretierte Tradition.*' The words are in Hübner not only italicized, but also in bold.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Luz, 'Fiktivität und Traditionstreue im Matthäusevangelium im Lichte griechischer Literatur', *ZNW* 84 (1993) 153–77, here 154, points to the remarkable fact that even though the evangelist must have known that he was creative in his transmission of the traditions, he insists

## 2. 'FORSCHUNGSGESCHICHTE'

An early analysis, 'Die Arbeit des ersten Evangelisten am Bilde Jesu', was undertaken by Walter Grundmann in 1940.<sup>7</sup> Grundmann shows how Moses is seen as a prototype for Jesus in Matthew: 'Wie der erste Erlöser die Thora gab, so gibt nun der zweite Erlöser seine Thora, die eine Auslegung und Erneuerung der alten darstellt' (p. 76). It is 'der durchgehende Versuch, Jesus als den Messias der Juden in die von ihm gesprengte Lebensverfassung des palästinischen Judentums wieder einzuordnen' (p. 87). Matthew's Christology is here made out of a combination of a Galilean Son of Man expectation and a Judean Messiah expectation, as is also the case in 4 Ezra (see p. 97). Grundmann concludes that the evangelist as a scribe 'von seinen Gedanken her das Bild Jesu gestaltet, fußend auf der heilsgeschichtlichen Überlieferung des Alten Testaments, ringend mit dem Problem der Stellung Israels zu Jesus von Nazareth, gestaltend aus dem Gemeindeglauben der judenchristlichen Gemeinden, offen für den Weg, den das Christentum in die hellenistische Welt gegangen ist' (p. 100).

Edward P. Blair, *Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Nashville, 1960) is the first comprehensive redaction-critical attempt to disclose the special character of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus. It is an advantage that Blair not only confines his question to the christological titles appearing in Matthew, but also concentrates his efforts on the contents of Jesus' works, i.e. on his significance for salvation. In his introduction Blair sums up his results in this way: 'Salvation, for him [Matthew] results from understanding the mysteries of God's redemptive purposes and activities as mediated through Jesus, the Son; from faith in and loyalty to Jesus as eschatological Deliverer; from inner righteousness and loving attitudes; from merciful deeds as an expression of a benevolent spirit. Matthew's thought on this subject thus revolves around four centers: understanding, believing, being and doing.' This induces Blair to turn to the origin of the Matthean Jesus' authority – "authority" as both inherent right and manifest capability is associated with particular identity: one has it because of what or who he is or what he is made to be by another. Such

all through his work on the 'Referenzialisierbarkeit' of his account: 'In keinem einzigen Fall deutet irgend ein Textmerkmal eines von Matthäus fingierten Textes an, daß diese oder jene Episode keine Referenz in der Geschichte Jesu haben will.'

<sup>7</sup>See Walter Grundmann, Hg., *Christentum und Judentum. Studien zur Erforschung ihres gegenseitigen Verhältnisses* (Leipzig, 1940) 55–77; repr. in and here quoted from Joachim Lange, Hg., *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (WdF 525; Darmstadt, 1980) 73–102.

authority is concomitant of status' (p. 47). This partition Blair now applies to the examination of three christological titles, namely Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man (see pp. 47–84). Of these three he considers the latter the most important (cf. also p. 140: 'Jesus is the kind of Messiah suggested (in part) by the term "Son of Man"') – which means that Blair reckons with the existence of a particular Son of Man expectation. In the following chapters he now treats Jesus' authority 'in the realm of knowledge' (pp. 85–109) and 'in the realm of conduct' (pp. 110–37). The final chapter (pp. 138–65) is dedicated to an attempt to place Matthew's Jesus in the Christianity of the first century. Blair introduces this chapter with a conclusive statement (p. 139):

Jesus is the divine-human, God-sent, eschatological Deliverer (the Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, suffering Servant, second Moses), by whose life, death and resurrection mankind is delivered from the bondage of sin. He is the giver of a new Torah (inherent in, explicative of, and the consummation of the old Torah) and the God-appointed inaugurator of the coming kingdom of heaven. Knowledge concerning him (who he is, what he has said and done, what he will do), faith in him, and loyalty to him (by radical obedience to his Torah and imitation of his acts of loving service) will result in admission by him to the heavenly kingdom soon to be established.

A softening of title Christology is found in Jack Dean Kingsbury, both in his redaction-critically orientated study *Matthew. Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia, 1975 = London, 1976; the book is mostly a reprint of earlier articles), and in the 'narrative' article 'The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Literary-Critical Probe' from 1984.<sup>8</sup> Even though in both approaches Kingsbury arrives at the result that the Son of God Christology is prevalent in Matthew, its content is primarily defined by means of this gospel's description of Jesus' works.<sup>9</sup>

From this period we have a number of redaction-critical studies of the various christological titles in Matthew. However, insofar as they are all attempts – in my opinion futile attempts – at proving that prevailing ideas have essentially influenced the theological interpretation of the Jesus figure in Matthew, I shall ignore them in this connection. Cf. Leander E. Keck's apt remark, that 'probably no other factor has contributed more to the current

<sup>8</sup> Printed in *JSNT* 21 (1984) 3–36; cf. also his *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> For a criticism of this concentration around the Son of God title, see David Hill, 'The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Response to Professor Kingsbury's Literary-Critical Probe', in *JSNT* 21 (1984) 37–52, where he says that it distracts attention from a number of allusions to the OT. Cf. also Kingsbury's 'The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: Rejoinder to David Hill', *JSNT* 25 (1985) 61–81.

aridity of the discipline than this fascination with the palaeontology of christological titles'.<sup>10</sup>

Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis/Edinburgh, 1993) is a step in another direction. To be sure, several people have emphasized the 'mosaic' features in Matthew's Jesus figure,<sup>11</sup> but Allison elaborates the theme by proving how widespread Moses typologies are in ancient Jewish literature, with which the author of Matthew was familiar. The Moses typology is most conspicuous in the story of Jesus' childhood, but – as Allison proves – it is found throughout the gospel. What is particularly inspiring in this attempt is that attention is concentrated on Jesus' works as a fulfilment of Moses' law-giving. Matthew 'composed a book in which Moses, while remaining normative, becomes a symbol of someone greater, a promise awaiting fulfilment, a book in which the exodus becomes history anticipating eschatology' (p. 273). Christology thus becomes part of the understanding of Jesus' impact on salvation. God's impact becomes essential. And the Law becomes the centre, as a Jewish law should. Jesus becomes the one who proclaims God's will with divine authority.

An earlier attempt to place the Law in the centre of Matthew's soteriology is Russell Pregeant, *Christology beyond Dogma. Matthew's Christ in Process Hermeneutic* (Semeia Supplements 7; Philadelphia/Missoula, 1978). Inspired by A. N. Whitehead's language philosophy, Pregeant thus produces the following two theses in 'Part III: The Components of Matthew's Christology: Torah, Salvation, Grace' (p. 61): '1) Matthew's soteriology is based on Torah; while it is Jesus who brings salvation, by interpreting the Law, it is finally the Law itself that is the efficient means of salvation, and not any kind of vicarious atonement; 2) salvation, nevertheless, is not "legalistic", but actually rests upon a functional equivalent of the Pauline "grace".'

This view had found a most lucid expression ten years earlier in J. M. Gibbs's essay 'The Son of God as the Torah Incarnate in Matthew' (printed in *SE 4 = TU 102* [Berlin, 1968] 38–46). Expounding the position that 'the Moses typology is there, but it is the disciples and not Jesus who are designated by it', the conclusion runs as follows:

<sup>10</sup> See his 'Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology', *NTS* 32 (1986) 362–77, here 368.

<sup>11</sup> See the review of predecessors in the appendices in *The New Moses*, 293–328.



Jesus, as the totally obedient Son of God, is the Now of God's righteousness (E.Diog.9.1f.). Thus there is no Torah *and* Gospel in Matthew, there is no New Law, there is no Torah plus New Law, but there is rather the Good News that in Jesus the Torah, the demand of God's righteousness is now totally and efficaciously present and that in him there is rest, for his yoke is easy and his burden light (11.30).

Cf. Eduard Schweizer's formulation in connection with 11.28–30: just as wisdom and law are paralleled in Sir 24.23 and Bar 4.1, 'so ist Jesus das fleischgewordene Gesetz. Das erklärt die positive Wertung des Gesetzes wie die unerhörte Freiheit ihm gegenüber.'<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Ulrich Luz has tried to transcend 'title Christology' in his essay 'Eine thetische Skizze der matthäischen Christologie' from 1991.<sup>13</sup> Luz maintains that in Matthew's Jesus story the story of the Matthean congregation is indirectly visible, viz. as the church which has its historical roots in the Palestinian Jesus movement, which failed in its mission towards Israel and – maybe during the Jewish war AD 66–70 – was driven out of Palestine to Syria, and which now finds its new, God-imposed task in the Gentile mission (see p. 222). To be able to understand the Immanuel formula is important: 'Die Immanuel-Formel zeigt die *Theo*-logie im Matthäusevangelium, bzw. umgekehrt die theologische Dimension matthäischer *Christ*-ologie. . . . Jesus ist im Matthäusevangelium die neue und definitive Gestalt von *Gottes* Gegenwart bei seinem Volk' (p. 223). According to Luz Matthean Christology has a narrative character; in cases where christological titles originally told us – predicatively – who Jesus was, it seems in Matthew to be the other way round: 'Die mt. Jesusgeschichte funktioniert als Prädikativ und bestimmt den Inhalt der traditionellen Hoheitstitel neu. Sie "verflüssigt" gleichsam die feststehende Bedeutung der traditionellen Hoheitstitel' (p. 223). Thus, according to Luz, Matthew characterizes Jesus' coming 'als Erfüllung und Transformation der messianischen Hoffnungen Israels' (p. 226). In the light of this perception Luz, after his examination of the titles 'Son of David', 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God', comes to the conclusion that the latter is the most fundamental because it includes both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions: still, it seems indefensible to denote one christological title

<sup>12</sup> See 'Nachtrag' to 'Gesetz und Enthusiasmus bei Matthäus' in his *Beiträge zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Zürich, 1970) 49–70, repr. in J. Lange, ed., *Das Matthäusevangelium* (WdF 525; Darmstadt, 1980) 350–76, 369.

<sup>13</sup> In Cilliers Breytenbach and Henning Paulsen, eds, *Anfänge der Christologie* (FS Ferdinand Hahn; Göttingen, 1991) 221–35.

‘als “hauptsächlichen” Titel’. It is better to say, ‘Christology is in the whole story’ (p. 235).<sup>14</sup>

The preliminary conclusion must be that what is said in the gospels about Jesus essentially gives meaning to the various christological titles. In a way they become subjected to Matthew’s interpretation of the soteriological impact of Jesus. To grasp this, it is necessary to map out the ‘indirect’ Christology expressed here, either on the level of theological reflection or in the story itself. The theological interpretation of Jesus found in Matthew thus expands into both a discursive and a narrative Christology.

Where mythical Christology is moving along vertical lines (see e.g. Phil 2.6–11; Col 1.15–20; 1 Tim 3.16), the horizontal presentation favours prophetic traits. So in the narrative sections Christology is couched in stories very much resembling what is told of Elijah and Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings. In Matthew Jesus is also once referred to as prophet (21.11; cf. 13.57). And the theme of revelation is expressed, not only in christological titles, but rather more in terms which betray the influence of wisdom speculations (see esp. 11.25–30).<sup>15</sup> This also corresponds to the focusing in Matthew on Jesus as the teacher, to such a degree that it has given rise to the expression ‘didactic Christology’.<sup>16</sup> For whereas titles belong to the context of confession, declaring a person to be for example Son of God (see 14.33; 16.17; 27.54), only the story is able to indicate the content; cf. also the indirect non-titular confessions in the many summaries of Jesus’ deeds (4.23, etc.) and the people’s giving praise to the God of Israel as response to Jesus’ healing activity (15.31; cf. 9.8, but also 5.16, where the disciples reflect the

<sup>14</sup>Luz here refers to Dale Allison, ‘“The Son of God” as Israel. A Note on Matthean Christology’, *IBS* 9 (1987) 74–81, here 75. Seen in relation to the above, the essay of Ingo Broer, ‘Versuch zur Christologie des ersten Evangeliums’, in *The Four Gospels* (FS Frans Neiryneck; ed. F. van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. van Belle and J. Verheyden; BETL 100; Leuven, 1992) 2.1251–82, marks a certain step backwards by again concentrating on the ‘Hoheitstitel’ and seeing a continuity between the existing understanding of the various titles in Judaism and their significance in Matthew. Rudolf Schnackenburg, on the other hand, gives in his *Die Person Jesu Christi im Spiegel der vier Evangelien* (HTKNT Supplementsband IV; Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1993), in the chapter about Matthew (pp. 91–151), a comprehensive account of the particular features in the Matthean picture of Jesus. So Schnackenburg expounds both this gospel’s especial way of (re)telling the story of Jesus and its mode of depicting his significance as Christ for salvation.

<sup>15</sup>See for example Celia Deutsch, ‘Wisdom in Matthew’, *NovT* 32 (1990) 13–47, esp. ‘Conclusions’ (46): ‘And so Matthew identifies Jesus with personified Wisdom.’

<sup>16</sup>See Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher. Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community* (CB.NT 24; Stockholm, 1994) 290–306, where it is said (290) that ‘the expression “didactic christology” denotes here the positive assessment of Jesus’ role and status in terms of existing Jewish categories for teachers and teaching’.

impact of Jesus). Also the more provocative parts of Jesus' activity belong to what Martin Karrer has phrased 'gelebte Christologie',<sup>17</sup> inasmuch as they characterize him as acting and preaching on behalf of God. The story is Christology!

### 3. THE MATTHEAN JESUS STORY

Right at the beginning the genealogical table in 1.1–17 signifies the integration of Christology in the story: as if it were part of a 'rewritten Bible' (cf. 1. Chron 1–9) it makes Jesus the consummation of the story that started with Abraham, and whose other climax was David. The part of the history of God's salvation of his people that was connected exclusively with Israel is thus brought to its culmination – as also its end.<sup>18</sup> Matthew expresses this partly by the remarkable Jesus saying about his being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (15.24; cf. 10.6), a saying which should not be understood as a particularistic relic, but rather as a reference to a universal mission following on the rejection by Israel. It is to be read in connection with the parables of the unfaithful vineyard labourers and the wedding of the king's son.<sup>19</sup> Thus the promise to Abraham is fulfilled: 'By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves' (Gen 12.3; cf. 18.18; 22.18). This perspective is also expressed in the transformation of the title 'Son of David' that takes place in Matthew, particularly in 22.41–5 where it is made secondary to the title 'Lord' (κύριος).<sup>20</sup>

The story of the virginal conception proclaims in this context that the birth of Jesus is an expression of God's final will to save sinners, as evident in the expounding of the name of Jesus in 1.21: 'For he will save his people from their sins'. As is made clear later, this is effected by his giving his life as a ransom for many (20.28). His blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς

<sup>17</sup> See Martin Karrer, *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament* (NTD Ergänzungsreihe 11; Göttingen, 1998) 278.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. for this also Mogens Müller, 'Salvation History in the Gospel of Matthew. An Example of Biblical Theology', in *New Directions in Biblical Theology* (ed. Sigfred Pedersen; NovTSup 76; Leiden, 1994) 58–76.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 116: 'Daß Israel den Vollender der Heilsgeschichte dem Tod überantwortet, bedeutet nicht nur Frevel gegen die Erwählung des Volkes, sondern schließt die Zurückweisung der heilsgeschichtlichen Prärogative in sich.'

<sup>20</sup> Cf. again *ibid.*, 120: 'Es kann sich also nur um ein gleichzeitiges Nebeneinander handeln: Jesus eignet an dem als Israel Gesandten die Davidsohn-Bezeichnung. Da seine Bedeutung jedoch nicht in die Geschichte Israels aufgehoben wird, also auch nicht durch die jüdische Zurückweisung seines Anspruches aufgehoben wird, vielmehr darüber hinausreicht, kann er zugleich "Davidsherr" genannt werden.'

ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, 26.28). As in the Hebrew *jeshua*, God is the proper subject in this act of salvation.<sup>21</sup> It is also apparent that this naming was interpreted as a fulfilment of the word in Isa 7.14 – already in this, the first of the so-called formula quotations, it is evident that it is not a question of a proof from Scripture, but of an event that expounds the deeper meaning of the word of the Scripture. In this connection the involvement of Isa 7.14b is significant: ‘and you shall call his name Immanu-’el, which is “God with us!”’ This saying should be looked upon as a confession of faith. It is a predominant feature in Matthew that Jesus is portrayed as the one in whom God is with his people.<sup>22</sup> As has often been emphasized, it runs like a red thread through the Matthean Christology from 1.23 via 18.20 on to 28.18–20, where the resurrected Jesus says: ‘And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’ What happens here is not that Jesus becomes transfigured from what he was in the gospel – the saying ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father’ in 11.27 is characteristically in the present tense, not the future; what is said is that he is with his people to the close of the age. Accordingly Matthew has no need of an ascension, which marks a separation, an absence. The part played by the Holy Spirit in Acts is here somehow taken by the Exalted One, who, on the one hand, is described as omnipresent in all he has commanded and in his little ones (see 10.40–2; 18.5; 25.40, 45), and, on the other, as the one who will come and call his church to account (see esp. 25.1–46).<sup>23</sup> Here we have Matthew’s own interpretation of faith in the resurrection.

It is also significant that the description of the baptism, during which Jesus receives the Spirit of God – apparently it is only now he becomes the Messiah, the Anointed<sup>24</sup> – and at which he is

<sup>21</sup>Karrer, *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament*, 45–55, shows how the NT is conscious of the etymological meaning of the name of Jesus, both in the use of the verbs σῶζω and ῥύσασθαι, and later on also in the title of ‘Saviour’: ‘Je steht Gott im Hintergrund des Handelns. Doch bindet sich das theophore Moment in der Person Jesu. *Jesus bringt und repräsentiert Gottes Retten personal*’ (p. 47; the author’s italics).

<sup>22</sup>This theme has its own monograph in David D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel. Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel* (SNTSMS 90; Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>23</sup>In *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium* (FRLANT 91; Göttingen, 1967) Rolf Walker has said: ‘Matthäus arbeitet seine “Apostelgeschichte” (mit der nachösterlichen Israel-Sendung der Boten und ihre Sendung zu den Heiden nach 70) so organisch in die von ihm vorgelegte vita Jesu ein, daß sein Evangelium keiner Ergänzung durch ein zweites Werk bedarf. Das Matthäus-Evangelium enthält die matthäischen vita Jesu und “Apostelgeschichte” in einer.’ Cf. p. 116: ‘Der nachösterliche redende “Geist” ist verdrängt durch das vorösterliche gesprochene Wort.’

<sup>24</sup>While the account in Mark 1.9–11 understands the story of Jesus’ baptism as a vocation account, the situation is more ambiguous in Matthew, where the conception by the Holy Spirit seems to forestall the descent of the Holy Spirit in the baptism; cf., however, also 1.16, where ‘Messiah’ is just a name for Jesus.

publicly proclaimed as the Son of God, is immediately followed by the story of the temptation, the intended purpose of which is to proclaim in what ways Jesus is not the Son of God. To be sure, powerlessness is here converted into a renunciation of omnipotence; compare also his words later, at his arrest, that he might well ask for more than twelve legions of angels (26.53). This is to ensure that God's unity is not interfered with. The story about Peter's attempt to dissuade Jesus from entering upon his way of suffering serves the same purpose. For this is also, for the reader, to forestall any attempt at a false understanding of the confession of Jesus as 'Christ, the Son of the living God', which is ascribed to a divine revelation to Peter. In Peter's attempt to ward off danger, the devil – it is said – is at work (cf. 16.23 to 4.10); this is interpreted as a human way of thinking, which is not what God wants. Jesus' works and his fate are what define the context of the confession 'Christ, the Son of the living God', not the other way round.

Jesus' reply to the disciples sent by the imprisoned John the Baptist to ask whether he is really the one who is to come, or whether they are to wait for another, is also meant as a corrective. For the 'headline' of this pericope is 'the works of Christ' (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ), which defines what John the Baptist has been told, and which inspires his question – a question which no doubt he asks also on behalf of later readers, who may be in need of the elucidation of Jesus' works from Scripture, which lies implicit in Jesus' reply. The reply is a mosaic of promises from the book of Isaiah which have been fulfilled in what takes place around Jesus. The time of salvation is in full swing. But as is said in the final blessing of those who take no offence at him, this is a matter of faith. In this connection it is worth noticing that the works of Christ incorporate the preaching of the gospel to the poor. Not only Jesus' healing activity, but also his preaching and teaching, i.e. 'the works of Christ', are a synthesis of both the Sermon on the Mount and the miracles of chapters 8–9.<sup>25</sup>

The corrective to a false Christology of glory is particularly conspicuous in what I would call the meekness Christology

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Birger Gerhardsson, *The Mighty Acts of Jesus According to Matthew* (Scripta Minora Regiae Societatis Humaniorum Litterarum Lundensis 1978–1979: 5; Lund, 1979), where he says that the many summaries of Jesus' works in Matthew are to counterbalance the picture of him as a prophetic preacher. Gerhardsson thus thinks (p. 23) 'that Matthew does not really make any clear distinction between Jesus' preaching/teaching and his therapeutic activity. They belong together. The Matthean Jesus teaches when healing and heals when teaching.'

peculiar to this evangelist.<sup>26</sup> Twice Matthew refers to Jesus as 'gentle' (πραῦς), an adjective that only appears once more in the NT namely in the third of Matthew's beatitudes (5.5). The first time is in the I-saying in 11.29 where, by way of an argument for being a disciple of Jesus, it is said: 'For I am gentle and lowly in heart'; the second is in the description of the king to the daughter of Zion in 21.5. Here Jesus is portrayed as one who does not crave power, a motif also present in his prayers in Gethsemane (26.39, 42) and in the mocking at the cross for not being able to save himself. His power is defined as the authority (ἐξουσία) which is only recognized by those who have ears to hear. This meekness Christology also finds expression in 12.18–21, where Isa 42.1–4, the first song about the Servant of the Lord, is applied to Jesus who does not wish his healing activity to be universally proclaimed – it is hardly accidental that this quotation is the longest Bible quotation in Matthew, nor can it be accidental that the evangelist rounds it off with the LXX version of v. 4b: 'And on his name the peoples shall hope' (καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἔσθνη ἐλπιοῦσιν).

The motif of powerlessness is held to be important, as will appear from the thought, strongly accentuated compared with Mark, that the fate of Jesus was the culmination of the persecution that befell God's earlier messengers, i.e. the prophets; this is evident in both gospels in the parable of the unfaithful labourers in the vineyard (Mark 12.1–12; Matt 21.33–45). The troubled relationship between Israel and its prophets is however most conspicuous towards the end of chapter 23 in the hard accusations against the Jewish leaders, but the motif is also found in the Jews' invoking Jesus' blood on themselves and on their children, which is reminiscent of Jer 26.11–19.<sup>27</sup> The redaction of the pericope on the death of John the Baptist suggests the same in as much as the account becomes primarily the story of a prophet's death (cf. Matt 14.3–12 with Mark 6.17–29). Unlike Mark, however, Matthew uses the motif to

<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.11.11(8), speaks of the gospel as given in four forms (τετράμορφον) and involves, in his determination of their individualities, the description of the four faces of each of the four creatures before God's throne in Ezek 1.10. In Rev 4.7 these become four different creatures, each of them, in Irenaeus's view, characteristic not of the individual evangelist, but of the way in which Jesus Christ is depicted in each of the gospels. The third creature, having a human face, thus describes Jesus' coming as a human being (τὴν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον αὐτοῦ παρουσίαν φανερώτατα). Matt 1.1 and 1.18 are quoted, and the gospel is described as the gospel with a human form (ἄνθρωπόμερφον οὖν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦτο). So through the whole of this gospel Jesus is characterized as a humble and meek man (*humiliter sentiens, et mitis homo*). The Greek and/or Latin text according to W. W. Harvey, *Sancti Irenæi Adversus haereses* (Cambridge, 1857) 2.46–8.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Karrer, *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament*, 99.

explain why the gospel, originally directed to the people of Israel only, was now preached to all peoples of the world.<sup>28</sup> The reference to the surrendering of the kingdom to a people that produces the fruits of it (21.43) is followed up by the parable of the wedding of the king's son (22.1–14) where the servants are sent for the third time to invite the people at the end of the thoroughfares. This was an anticipation of Jewish disciples being sent to the heathen world (28.18–20).

The picture of Jesus is also profiled in those passages that refer to Jesus as being 'greater than'. Thus it is said in Matthew that Jesus is 'greater than' the temple (12.6), Jonah (12.41), Solomon (12.42) and David (22.41–6); cf. also the reference to the Son of Man as the lord of the sabbath (12.8). René Kieffer places these words within the framework of a hierarchically structured world-view, and he sees their *Sitz im Leben* in the readings from the Scripture (OT) during service, when what was said about Jesus was thrown into relief.<sup>29</sup> The saying that Jesus is greater than the temple should be read in conjunction with the testimony of 26.61 (cf. 27.40), according to which Jesus said: I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. Although the meaning of this is obscure in Matthew, it seems to be a question of a spiritualization of the idea of a new and glorious temple, i.e. the congregation Jesus will inspire.

Last, but not least, Matthew expands on the interpretation of Jesus' death as the inauguration of a new covenant; this theme is also found in Mark. From the very beginning this idea seems to have been fundamental in the interpretation of Jesus' relation to salvation.<sup>30</sup> It is characterized as that new achievement in salvation history which had been prophesied in particular in Jer 31 and 32 and Ezek 11 and 36, though also elsewhere in the OT. Jesus' death becomes the historical basis for the talk of two covenants that makes possible the sending of the disciples to the Gentiles by creating new identification factors for God's people. In this connection it is especially interesting that the fulfilment of the Law is made a result of salvation. The Spirit that alone makes law

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 100: 'Israel erscheint nicht mehr als gesondertes Volk ("laos" o.ä), wenn Mt es nicht sogar aus dem Jüngerauftrag ausklammert und mit "ethne" 28,19 nur nichtjüdische Völker meint. Die Kritik an Israel nach dem Schema des Prophetenmords enthüllt ihr Ziel. Sie begründet den Weg der Christusbotschaft über Israel hinaus.'

<sup>29</sup> See René Kieffer, "Mer-än"-kristologin hos synoptikerna', *SEÅ* 44 (1979), 134–47.

<sup>30</sup> See for this Mogens Müller, 'The Hidden Context. Some Observations on the Concept of the New Covenant in the New Testament', in *Texts and Contexts* (FS Lars Hartman; ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo, 1995) 649–58.

obedience possible is given in baptism, and with it also the realization of such righteousness as conforms with God's will, and which comes from the heart (see esp. 18.35). Only in this context is it possible to understand the preaching of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew has it, for here Jesus' fulfilment of the Law and the prophets (see 5.17) is a manifestation of the Law's true significance.<sup>31</sup>

The result of this is, among other things, that in 20.28 Matthew can take over the saying from Mark 10.45 that the Son of Man 'has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' and, in the words at the institution of the Eucharist, accentuate this by saying that the blood of Jesus is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), those words which Mark, unlike Matthew, used in connection with the baptism by John the Baptist and therefore cannot repeat. In Matthew the ransom saying is associated with the motif of the new covenant, according to which the new obedience is made dependent on sin losing its power. It was part of the expectations of the new covenant that God would now eliminate all sin (see Jer 31.34; Ezek 11.18; 18.31; 36.25, but also Isa 59.20 and *Jub* 1.22).

#### 4. THE TEACHER AND HIS TEACHING

Following Mark, Matthew makes the concept of authority (ἐξουσία) the crux of the matter in the description of the relationship between Jesus and his hearers (see 7.29; 9.6, 8; and not least 28.18; cf. 10.1, where the authority is transferred to the disciples). It is thus the experience or non-experience of Jesus' authority that decides one's relationship to him. This is evident in the pericope 21.23–7. For even though this evangelist is the only one to make the resurrection a public event (28.11–15), this evokes callousness rather than faith in the Jewish and Roman authorities. There is, as pointed out by Birger Gerhardsson,<sup>32</sup> a close connection between

<sup>31</sup> See for this Mogens Müller, 'Loven og hjertet. Bjergprædikenen som pagtsteologi' in *Matteus och hans läsare – förr och nu* (FS Birger Gerhardsson; ed. Birger Olsson, Samuel Byrskog and Walter Übelacker; Religio 48; Lund, 1997) 41–54. Cf. also my 'The Gospel of St Matthew and the Mosaic Law – A Chapter of a Biblical Theology', *ST* 46 (1992) 109–20.

<sup>32</sup> See B. Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes. Messias, Agape und Herrschaft nach dem Matthäusevangelium', *ST* 27 (1973) 73–106; repr. in and quoted here from his *The Shema in the New Testament* (Lund, 1996) 139–72, here 150: 'Es erweckt den Eindruck, als ob Matthäus ein Gleichheitszeichen zwischen der Exousia Jesu, die er vom Himmel erhalten hat und Jesu Besitz des Heiligen Geistes setzt. Auf jeden Fall [sic!] gehören diese beiden Vorstellungen sehr eng zusammen.'



Jesus' authority and the Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον, θεοῦ, πατρός), which is conspicuous in vital passages, not least in the saying (12.31–2) on blaspheming the Spirit (ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία).

Matthew's strong emphasis on the teaching of Jesus should also be understood in this context. In Matthew Jesus appears as the teacher (ὁ διδάσκαλος) *par excellence*, not least because of his discourses.<sup>33</sup> Many other passages also emphasize this part of Jesus' Messianic ministry. Thus the result of it is described in 11.30 as the easy yoke and the light burden, and in 23.10 it is said that the reason why no disciple may be called teacher by anyone is that only one is their teacher, Christ – here the term 'Christ' is directly associated with Jesus' teaching. It is implicitly understood that this monopolization means that the disciples reduplicate Jesus himself in their teaching activity (see 10.40), which is therefore also identical with the power to forbid and to allow, the *potestas clavis* (cf. 16.19; 18.18).

Matthew's theological interpretation of the Jesus figure is also reflected in the way the gospel represents the disciples' role in the work of salvation.<sup>34</sup> This applies in particular to the sayings about the disciples as the salt of the earth and the light of the world in 5.13–16, the reference to the sons of the kingdom as the good seed in 13.38, and the sending of the disciples in 28.18–20. In these passages the role of being Christ's representatives is bestowed upon them. In 5.13–16 it is their light that is to shine before men with the result that when they see their good works they will give glory to their heavenly Father (cf. 4.16). According to the interpretation of the parable of the weeds in the wheat, the disciples are once more those who are to bear witness to the works of Jesus towards men. Here the good seed is paralleled to the sons of the kingdom, for the Son of Man who sows is not Jesus in his role as

<sup>33</sup> Cf. again Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, an impressive attempt to outline the christological implications in Matthew's picture of Jesus as teacher. His point of departure is the statement of Gerhard Kittel in *Die Probleme des palästinischen Spätjudentums und das Urchristentum* (BWANT 37; Stuttgart, 1926) 69 (quoted in Byrskog, 14–15): 'Was im Rabbinat völlig, auch in Ansätzen, fehlt, ist die bewusste Beschränkung des Traditionsstoffes auf eine Person, auf den einen Mann . . . Jeder, auch der grösste und verehrteste Schriftgelehrte, steht für seine Schüler in der Reihe, und seine Isolierung, seine Herausnahme aus der Traditionskette, ist völlig undenkbar. Für den Jesusjünger ist alle Lehre und Tradition aller anderen Autoritäten verschwunden. Die Reihe, die Traditionskette hat aufgehört zu existieren. Wert, tradiert zu werden, ist nur noch das Wort und die Geschichte des Einen.' The closest parallel is that of the Teacher of Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls: see Byrskog, 114–35, 148–55, 148–93.

<sup>34</sup> See for this Mogens Müller, 'Mattæusevangeliets messiasbillede. Et forsøg på at bestemme Mattæusevangeliets forståelse af Jesu messianitet', *SEÅ* 51–2 (1986–87; FS Birger Gerhardsson) 168–79, here 170–2.

preacher on this earth, but the Exalted One as we see him in 28.18–20.<sup>35</sup> In the latter passage the disciples are also the representatives of Christ. In reply to the question how the Exalted One will be with them to the close of the age, it is said that this is because they observe all that he has commanded, i.e. they live in obedience to his authority.

Birger Gerhardsson has underlined several times that the Christology of Matthew is of an ethical character, and he has spoken of this evangelist's interest in the ethical dimension in Jesus' secret.<sup>36</sup> In this connection Gerhardsson has actually coined the term 'Gerechtigkeitschristologie'.<sup>37</sup> The ethical aspect is, however, also present in the works of Jesus *pro nobis* in what might be termed the ethical effect of salvation, as expressed in e.g. the saying of 5.48: 'You must be perfect (τέλειοι) as your heavenly Father is perfect (τέλειος).'

##### 5. CHRISTOLOGY AS THEOLOGY

In its interpretation of the Jesus figure the Gospel of Matthew is a piece of genuine theology. For if 'theology' is defined as a clarification of what we mean when we speak of God, then Matthew is theology. What takes place in this gospel is that all that is said about Jesus is in fact said about God and his will to save sinners. In the portrayal of his life and fate and the reproduction of his preaching and his teaching it is, according to Matthew, God's will that is seen and heard. Jesus is, so to say, God's mercy in person (cf. the use of the verb σπλαγχνίζομαι in 9.36; 14.14; 15.32 and 20.34; see also 18.27). Accordingly, what God demands is mercy (see 9.13; 12.7, both places in a quotation of Hos 6.6, and the 'summary' in 23.23). But if mercy does not create mercy, it is not taken to heart and therefore to be withdrawn (see 18.23–35; cf. 6.14–15).

According to this Christology, theology becomes soteriology,

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mogens Müller, *Der Ausdruck "Menschensohn" in den Evangelien. Voraussetzungen und Bedeutung* (ATD 17; Leiden, 1984) 112–14.

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes', 140, and "An ihren Früchten sollt Ihr sie erkennen." Die Legitimitätsfrage in der matthäischen Christologie', *EvT* 42 (1982) 113–26, where Gerhardsson tries to establish that Jesus' life was in complete accordance with the Law, since every single commandment was interpreted in view of the commandment of love of one's neighbour. 'Ich möchte dies die ethische Dimension oder vielleicht besser die Gesetzesdimension der Christologie nennen, m.a.W. die Frage nach Jesu Gerechtigkeit, seiner eigenen Echtheit und Legitimität nach dem Gesetz' (p. 124).

<sup>37</sup> "An ihrer Früchte sollt Ihr sie erkennen", 125.

which may also explain the strong emphasis on the fact that throughout his life Jesus realizes the contents of the prophetic testimonies. It is God's will that is carried out in Jesus' life and deed. The so-called formula quotations' reference to fulfilment has nothing to do with the later apologetical proof from Scripture. What is relevant here is that Jesus' life exemplifies what is meant by the proper fulfilling of the prophetic words.<sup>38</sup> In this respect there are certain parallels to the Teacher of Righteousness of the Dead Sea Scrolls, who is also described as one to whom the secrets of the Scripture have been revealed, and whose congregation has been constituted due to his knowledge of these secrets and obedience to them (see esp. 1QpHab 7.1–8).<sup>39</sup> But even though Jesus appears as the one who preaches – and in his teaching reveals – the true meaning of Holy Writ, it is he himself who realizes this meaning in his works and fate. In works and destiny he becomes one with God's words and acts, indeed, he becomes God such as he is with his people all the days until the close of the age.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the still fundamental work by Henrik Ljungman, *Das Gesetz erfüllen. Matth. 5.17ff und 3.15 untersucht* (Lunds Universitets Årsskrift. N.F. Avd. 1 50/6; Lund, 1954).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 134–5: 'The Teacher was to the Qumranites much more than merely one teacher among many others. The validated status made the Teacher and his teaching inseparable. The Qumranites did not subordinate the Teacher to the teaching. All teaching was to come from him.'