

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AND JUDAISM<sup>1</sup>

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Matthew's vigorous anti-Jewish polemic is acutely embarrassing to most modern readers of this gospel. The fierce denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23 and the evangelist's apparent concern to stress God's rejection of Israel have been discussed in several recent German and American books and in collections of essays concerned with the general theme of Christian-Jewish relationships.<sup>2</sup> This important and sensitive issue has been discussed less frequently in this country, though an interesting set of letters, articles and editorials appeared in *The Times* in the Spring of 1983.

In this lecture I shall try to show that Matthew has strengthened still further the anti-Jewish polemic which is found in the sources at his disposal. I shall suggest that this Matthean emphasis is related to the greater prominence the evangelist gives to apocalyptic themes. By taking seriously these twin Matthean themes, which many modern readers of this gospel prefer to ignore because they find them either puzzling or unacceptable, some fresh light can be shed on the setting from which Matthew's gospel comes.

<sup>1</sup> The Manson Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Manchester on 3 November 1983.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, G. Baum, *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?* (Glen Rock, N.J., 1965); S. Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1979); J. Koenig, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue; New Testament Foundations* (Philadelphia, 1979); D. J. Harrington, *God's People in Christ: New Testament Perspectives on the Church and Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1980). The following important monographs originated as American Ph.D. theses: D. R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to St Matthew* (Cambridge, 1967); D. E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden, 1979). See also: W. P. Eckert, N. P. Levinson and M. Stöhr, eds. *Antijudäismus im Neuen Testament?* (Munich, 1967); F. Mussner, *Traktat über die Juden* (Munich, 1979); H. Conzelmann, *Heiden-Juden-Christen: Auseinandersetzungen in der Literatur der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit* (Tübingen, 1981). On Matthew, see especially W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel* (Leipzig, 2nd ed. 1961; Munich, 3rd ed., 1964); R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (Munich, 1st ed., 1963, 2nd ed., 1966).

Our conclusions will necessarily be somewhat tentative, for two reasons. Firstly, the evangelist is closely dependent on his sources. When we can trace with some confidence modifications he has made to his sources, we usually find that he is not an innovator but an *interpreter* of the traditions on which he has drawn.<sup>3</sup> This means that it is not always easy to isolate the distinctive contribution which the evangelist himself has made.

My second reason for hesitation is closely related. Over the last four decades redaction critical study has led to important advances in our understanding of Matthew.<sup>4</sup> At first sight this gospel seems well suited to the redaction critical approach. It seems to be possible to trace the evangelist's revision, re-arrangement and re-interpretation of Mark and of Q. But redaction criticism does not always live up to our expectations, for we soon discover that Matthew contains several divergent and even contradictory emphases. We frequently find that it is easy to account for part (or even most) of the evidence, but not all of it.

Theological or historical significance should not be attached to all the changes the evangelist has made to his traditions: sometimes they are purely stylistic. And it is important to note that the evangelist does not intend to tell us about his own community but to set out both his story of the origins, life and ultimate fate of Jesus of Nazareth and also his convictions about the significance of Jesus.

For these and other reasons which I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> I am convinced that the redaction critical method needs to be scrutinised carefully. This approach does not provide solutions for all the puzzling features of Matthew's gospel.

So how can we proceed? I shall try to complement use of the redaction critical method with an appeal to a range of roughly contemporary Jewish and Christian writings. Only by setting Matthew's gospel firmly in its first-century Jewish and Christian context can we hope to avoid the dangers which are inherent in a narrow and wooden use of redaction criticism.

<sup>3</sup> See G. N. Stanton, "Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus" in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. P. Stuhlmacher (Tübingen, 1983), pp. 273-287.

<sup>4</sup> See G. N. Stanton, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945-1980", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*, 25, 3, ed. H. Temporini und W. Haase (Berlin, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> G. N. Stanton, "Origin and Purpose", II, 1.

## I

In recent discussion Matthew's anti-Jewish polemic has been approached in several quite different ways. Some writers have insisted that the seeds of later Christian anti-Semitism can be seen in Matthew, especially in the cry of the people gathered before Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt. 27.25).<sup>6</sup> Lloyd Gaston claims that since Matthew taught the church to hate Israel, a distinction must be drawn between the acceptable attitude of Jesus towards Judaism on the one hand, and the unacceptable attitude of the evangelist which can no longer be part of the personal canon of many Christians. Gaston appeals, with W. G. Kümmel, to Luther's hermeneutical dictum, *urgemus Christum contra scripturam*.<sup>7</sup>

Some writers have claimed that Matthew's harsh polemic should be understood (and perhaps partly excused) in the light of the special circumstances in which the gospel was written. On this view, which, as we shall see, has a good deal to commend it, the evangelist wrote immediately after a period of intense hostility between Matthew's Christian community and the synagogue 'across the street'—hostility which had finally led to a parting of the ways.

Other writers have noted, quite correctly, that modern readers of the gospel often fail to notice that the evangelist is at least as fierce in his denunciations of unfaithful Christians as he is in his criticisms of the Jewish leaders. Some have insisted that

<sup>6</sup> On Mt. 27.25 see especially K. H. Rengstorf in *Kirche und Synagoge: Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden I* (Stuttgart, 1968) 33f. Rengstorf notes that the early church fathers did not refer to Mt. 27.25 when they referred to the guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus. Only after the fourth century did they begin to make use of this verse in order to defend Christian oppression of Jews; only at this later period did 'secular' hatred of Jews begin to win a place in the church. Rengstorf suggests that in its Matthean context 27.25 means that if Pilate can discover nothing which would allow Jesus to be executed, then the accusers of Jesus are ready to take on themselves the full responsibility for his death. On this verse see also J. A. Fitzmyer, "Anti-Semitism and Matthew 27.25", *Theological Studies*, xxvi (1965), 667-671, and H. Kosmala, "'His Blood on Us and Our Children (The Background of Matthew 27.24-25)", *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, vii (1970), 94-126.

<sup>7</sup> L. Gaston, "The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles", *Interpretation*, xxix (1975), 40.

the harsh words of Jesus recorded in Matthew should be seen as prophetic anguish rather than as anti-Jewish polemic.<sup>8</sup>

Before we consider further the reasons for the ferocity of Matthew's attack on Judaism, we must examine briefly a few important passages. I hope to show just how sustained the evangelist's polemic is and how frequently he strengthens considerably the polemic already found in the earlier traditions he has used.

(i) At the end of the Beatitudes Matthew includes two Q sayings which refer to persecution and rejection: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you ... for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you", (Mt. 5.11-12). Matthew's readers know full well that, according to a well-established interpretation of Israel's history, the prophets always stood with the faithful minority over against the majority, unfaithful and rebellious Israel.<sup>9</sup> Similarly in the evangelist's own day: God's favour (*makarioi este hotan* ... 5.11) rests on the faithful minority which is again under attack. In verses 11 and 12 the evangelist reproduces his Q tradition fairly closely, but in the preceding verse we read, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This verse is so Matthean in its phraseology and content that it almost certainly comes from the evangelist himself.<sup>10</sup> Matthew has extended a theme found in his source.

Just a few verses later he drops a broad hint as to the identity of the persecutors. In another redactional verse Matthew's readers are contrasted sharply with another group: "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5.20). So, already

<sup>8</sup> For Matthean polemic against Christians see, for example, 23.8ff.; 22.11-12; 13.36-43, 47-50. At 7.5 and 24.51 there are references to Christians as "hypocrites". See also S. Légasse, "L'antijudaïsme" dans l'Évangile selon Matthieu in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu: Rédaction et Théologie*, ed. M. Didier, (Gembloux, 1972), pp. 417-428.

<sup>9</sup> See the important study by O. H. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung des Deuteronomischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* (Neukirchen, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> This is generally accepted. See most recently B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 80-87, and R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: a Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas, 1982), pp. 155-161.

at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, we sense that the evangelist's community is under great pressure from scribes and Pharisees.

(ii) In chapter 6 we find the term "hypocrites" for the first time. In a passage which Matthew is generally considered to have taken directly from a source, the ways the hypocrites carry out their almsgiving, prayers and fasting are held up as examples to be avoided. In the original tradition the identity of the hypocrites is not disclosed: they are simply people who give alms, pray and fast. But from the context in which the evangelist sets this passage it is clear that *he* has in mind the scribes and Pharisees to whom he has drawn particular attention at the beginning of the preceding section at 5.20. So two verses added by the evangelist himself as part of his re-interpretation of his traditions (5.10 and 5.20), turn out to have far-reaching importance.

(iii) In the Q tradition which relates the healing of the Roman centurion's servant, his faith is said to surpass that found in Israel. Matthew underlines and extends this point by placing here sayings found elsewhere in Q: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt 8.11-12). The original setting of these sayings in Q was as part of a call to the half-hearted to repent.<sup>11</sup> Matthew has extended the rejection theme and made it refer to "the sons of the kingdom", i.e. faithless Israel in general.<sup>12</sup> By setting the sayings in a new context he contrasts the faith of the Gentile centurion with the complete rejection of Israel.

(iv) A similar point is made in 21.43, a verse which Matthew himself adds at the end of the parable of the wicked husbandmen which he takes over from Mark. "Therefore I tell you,

<sup>11</sup> See Luke 13.28-29. With many others I take the Lucan context to be more likely to represent the original Q version. T. W. Manson's crisp, clear discussion is, as always, worth consulting: *The Sayings of Jesus* (Cambridge, 1949), pp. 124-26. See also D. Lührmann, *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle* (Neukirchen, 1969), p. 57f. and, for a different view, E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (E.tr. London, 1976), p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> On "sons of the kingdom" see W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel*, p. 88f.: "Die Wendung geht wohl mit Sicherheit auf den Evangelisten zurück".

the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a nation producing the fruits of it". This verse is probably the clearest indication in the gospel that the Matthean community saw itself as a separate and quite distinct entity over against Judaism. The Marcan parable had already concluded with the words "he will give the vineyard to others" (Mark 12.9). In his additional words Matthew is elucidating his Marcan tradition, but the contrast between the rejection of Israel, the majority, and the acceptance of an *ethnos* which will reproduce the fruits of the kingdom is now drawn much more sharply.

At the end of the Marcan parable Jesus refers to Psalm 118.22-23: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner ..." In Mark this is almost certainly an allegorical reference to Jesus himself, but by his additional verse, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to an *ethnos* which will produce its fruits" (21.43), I believe that Matthew sees the new *ethnos* (his own community rather than Jesus) as the stone *rejected* at first by the Jewish leaders but accepted by God. In the narrative conclusion of verse 45 we read: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables they perceived that he was speaking *about them (peri autōn)*", not just *against* them (*pros autous*) as in Mark 12.12. The Pharisees are introduced here by Matthew himself: the parable is *about them* and the chief priests; they are rejected in favour of the *ethnos* whom they themselves have rejected.<sup>13</sup>

(v) The unusual exegesis of the Matthean version of the parable of the wicked husbandmen which has just been offered is supported by the passage which follows immediately in

<sup>13</sup> As far as I know, this exegesis of Mt. 21.41-45 has not been advanced before. Attention is often drawn to the importance of the Matthean addition at 21.43, but the implications of that addition for the interpretation of 21.42 seem to have been missed. Trilling, for example, discusses Matthew's interpretation of the parable at length (*Das wahre Israel*, pp. 55-65) and writes: "Die christologische Ausweitung bei Markus wird von einer 'ekklesiologischen' überdeckt. An die Stelle des Bekenntnisses zum erhöhten Christus tritt jenes zur Wirklichkeit des neuen Gottesvolkes" (p. 58). But he does not discuss 21.42. A. H. M'Neile's comment on 21.42, from a totally different perspective, is interesting: "If the quotation is by Jesus Himself, it is an explanation of v.41, and leads directly to v.43: the pious members of the Jewish race oppressed and misused by their religious leaders will be advanced to honour" (*The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London, 1915), p. 311).

chapter 22. The parable of the King's Marriage Feast is also addressed to the chief priests and the Pharisees. In its Matthean version it seems to have been influenced by the preceding parable: several similar phrases and motifs appear in both parables.<sup>14</sup>

In the similar parable recorded in Luke 14.16-24 a servant is sent to summon those who have been invited to the great banquet. In the Matthean version *two* sets of servants are sent to issue the summons. The original version of the parable has clearly been allegorised to a considerable extent. The first set of servants refers to the prophets sent to Israel. The second set of servants is the equivalent of "the stone rejected by the builders" of 21.42. They are servants in the new era: Christian prophets and messengers who are seized, treated shamefully, and killed (22.6). Matthew the evangelist makes the same point at 23.34, where the rejection of Christian prophets, wise men and scribes sent to Israel leads to her rejection. In the parable the rejection of the second set of (Christian) servants results immediately in judgement: "the king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (22.7). Finally, the Gentiles are summoned to the Marriage Feast.

In these five passages the evangelist re-interprets his sources considerably and sharpens the anti-Jewish polemic. In three cases (5.10-12; 21.41 ff.; 22.6f.) the polemic is linked to the persecution and rejection of followers of Jesus by opponents. In chapters 5 and 6 the scribes and Pharisees *seem* to be identified as the opponents; as I argued earlier, this is implied by the important Matthean addition, 5.20. At the conclusion of the parable of the wicked husbandmen the chief priests and the Pharisees are identified explicitly by the evangelist as the opponents (21.45). And at the end of the parable of the King's Marriage Feast which follows at the beginning of chapter 22, the Pharisees in particular are singled out by the evangelist (22.15). The opponents come into sharper focus as the gospel unfolds.

(vi) It is, of course, the next chapter, 23, with its seven woes addressed to the scribes and Pharisees which contains the evangelist's most sustained anti-Jewish polemic. It is this chapter

<sup>14</sup> For the details see J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (E.tr. rev. ed., London, 1963), p. 69, n. 77.

more than any other part of the gospel which so acutely embarrasses Christians today. As in the passages we have just considered briefly, the evangelist conflates his sources and sharpens and extends considerably their polemic.

The last of the seven woes is the most significant part of the chapter for my present purposes. Here Matthew claims much more explicitly than in the underlying Q tradition that the scribes and Pharisees are the sons of those who murdered the prophets: they, too, are murderers (23.31). The scribes and Pharisees are then addressed as "You serpents, you brood of vipers"—the very phrase John the Baptist addresses to the crowds at Luke 3.7 but to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3.7. Then follows the reference to the "Christian" prophets, wise men and scribes whom Jesus is sending to them, the verse (23.34) which I have just linked closely with Matthew's allegorisation at 22.6. Some of these 'new' messengers will be killed and *crucified* just like Jesus himself. Some will be scourged in the synagogues of the Pharisees and scribes and persecuted from town to town. As a result, God's judgement will come upon those who have persecuted and murdered the followers of Jesus (23.34f.). Harsh words indeed. Here the polemic found in a Q tradition has been intensified by Matthew himself.<sup>15</sup> Here themes prominent earlier in the gospel are summarized and sharpened still further in the evangelist's final collection of the sayings of Jesus.

## II

Why is this anti-Jewish polemic so prominent in Matthew? What is the evangelist's intention? Although his polemic is frequently directed against the scribes and Pharisees, he is not merely concerned with the Jewish leaders. The final verses of chapter 23 make it quite clear that Judaism as a whole is rejected: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you ... Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (23.37f.). The same point is made in two verses to which we have already referred, 21.43 and 27.25.<sup>16</sup> So what is the function of this anti-Jewish polemic?

<sup>15</sup> So also D. R. A. Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> See. P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 188-94.



Several answers have been given to this question. Some writers have refined the traditional view—which goes back to the early church—that Matthew is writing *to* the Jews. R. Hummel, for example, sees the polemic as part of a very real dispute between Matthew's Christian community and contemporary Pharisaic Judaism. On Hummel's view, which G. Bornkamm also accepted in his earlier writings, the debate is *intra muros*, for Matthew's community has still not parted company with a very diverse Judaism immediately after A.D. 70.<sup>17</sup>

Other writers have claimed that Matthew's intention is evangelistic and should be likened to the denunciations which were poured out by the Old Testament prophets and which were intended to lead to repentance. Gregory Baum has commented: "However grave the transgressions of the people and however terrible the punishment in store for them, the message was delivered for the sake of the people's conversion to a God who was always willing to forgive them".<sup>18</sup> Is Matthew intending to *provoke* the Jewish leaders of his day to accept Christian claims about Jesus? That would seem to be an odd evangelistic strategy, would it not? The Old Testament parallels cited by Baum are significant, but explanations along these general lines tend to overlook the fact that in chapter 23 it is the crowds and disciples who are being addressed and *not* the scribes and Pharisees at all.

A much more plausible, but not completely convincing, explanation has been offered in two recent monographs. Sjef van Tilborg suggests that the leaders of the Jewish people are in the eyes of Matthew, the *antithesis* of the disciples of Jesus. The anti-Pharisaism of Matthew is "at the service of his own ethics".<sup>19</sup> In his detailed study of chapter 23 David Garland argues that the woes against the scribes and Pharisees have

<sup>17</sup> R. Hummel, *Auseinandersetzung*, pp. 82-89. G. Bornkamm, "End Expectation and Church in Matthew", in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H.J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (E.tr. London, 2nd ed., 1982), p. 19f. and p. 39. This essay was originally published in 1956. By 1970 Bornkamm had modified his view; see "The Authority to 'Bind' and 'Loose' in the Church in Matthew's Gospel", now reprinted in G.N. Stanton, ed., *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London, 1983), p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> G. Baum, *Is the NT Anti-Semitic?*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> S. van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 26 and 98.

“a pedagogical function” for Christian scribes. The reproach “hypocrites” has “as much significance for Matthew as a negative warning for Christians as it has a deprecatory characterization of the Jewish leaders”.<sup>20</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by Donald Senior in his monograph on Matthew’s Passion narrative: “... in many cases the interest of Matthew is not directed toward the Jewish leaders’ hostility for its own sake. It serves rather as an effective foil to the majesty and dignity of Jesus ... Matthew’s stress on Jewish responsibility, while an evident characteristic of presentation, is ultimately subordinate to a more fundamental fascination with the majesty of Jesus”.<sup>21</sup>

These views can all be supported by some passages. At 23.8,10 the evangelist is clearly contrasting Jesus, the one teacher and the one master, with the scribes and Pharisees who let themselves be called rabbi and master. Garland is right to draw attention to the importance of the audience to whom the woes of chapter 23 are addressed: it is not the scribes and Pharisees themselves, but the crowds and disciples—in other words, the evangelist’s own community rather than the synagogue across the street. In some passages in Matthew, and perhaps most notably in 6.1-18, the scribes and Pharisees are held up as a negative warning to Christians. But the woes in chapter 23 do not seem to have this function. In the first twelve verses of the chapter the crowds are told not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees, but once the seven-fold woes start at 23.13, this point is not made again in the chapter.

I want to suggest that an alternative explanation of Matthew’s intensified anti-Jewish polemic is more plausible. Matthew’s community has recently parted company with Judaism after a period of prolonged hostility. Opposition, rejection and persecution from some Jewish quarters is not just a matter of past experience: for the evangelist and his community the threat is still felt strongly and keenly. Matthew is puzzled—indeed pained—by Israel’s continued rejection of Jesus and of Christian messengers who have proclaimed Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel’s hopes. The polemic is *real* and not simply used in the service of the evangelist’s Christology or of his ethics, as recent

<sup>20</sup> D. E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, pp. 118ff.

<sup>21</sup> D. P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew* (Leuven, 1975), p. 338.

writers have maintained. The evangelist is, as it were, coming to terms with the trauma of separation from Judaism and with the continuing threat of hostility and persecution. Matthew's anti-Jewish polemic should be seen as part of the self-definition of the Christian minority which is acutely aware of the rejection and hostility of its 'mother', Judaism. Kinniburgh has suggested that for Matthew's church "... faced with the problem of the failure of the Jewish mission and the ruin of the Jewish nation, the attribution of such a message of condemnation to Jesus was a source of comfort, even if it were to prove an embarrassment to later generations".<sup>22</sup>

This is precisely the point I wish to establish. The harsh words directed against the scribes and Pharisees are not to be explained as a setting up of straw men as an example of the reverse of Christian discipleship. The evangelist is not addressing scribes and Pharisees in direct confrontation or debate, but his denunciations are nonetheless polemical. They represent in part anger and frustration at the continuing rejection of Christian claims and at the continued hostility of Jews towards the new community. In part they also represent the Matthean community's self-justification for its position as a somewhat beleaguered minority 'sect' cut off from its roots.

I have now declared my hand. I now wish to give four reasons why this is a plausible explanation of the anti-Jewish polemic in Matthew and of the circumstances from which and for which it was written.

### III

The first pillar which supports my suggestions about the setting of this gospel is my insistence that Matthew's community still felt seriously threatened by Jewish opposition at the time the evangelist wrote. This has been denied by several scholars on both theological and historical grounds. Some have claimed that in Matthew's view Israel is utterly and finally rejected: the evangelist and his community are no longer concerned in any way with a mission to Israel. Even though the evangelist stresses that the mission of Jesus was confined to Israel, that era is over. The Matthean community is engaged solely with a mission to

<sup>22</sup> E. Kinniburgh, "Hard Sayings - III", *Theology*, lxvi (1963), 416. I owe this reference to D. E. Garland, *Intention*, p. 89.

Gentiles.<sup>23</sup> Israel and her hostility are both a matter of *past* history.

I am convinced, however, that this view is ruled out by the cumulative force of several considerations. When Matthew refers to Christian disciples in his own day who are sent out to *panta ta ethnē* (28.19), he means *all nations*, including individuals within Israel.<sup>24</sup> The key passage is 24.9, "You will be hated by all nations (*panta ta ethnē*) for my name's sake". In this verse "by all nations" has been added to the Marcan logion by the evangelist himself, but it cannot refer to non-Jewish nations, the Gentiles, and exclude hatred by Jews. At 10.17f. Matthew has redacted his Marcan traditions to make it quite clear that disciples of Jesus sent out as missionaries are to expect hatred and mistreatment by both Jews and Gentiles.

In Matthew 10 the evangelist sets out his account of the sending out of the disciples by the historical Jesus, but it is clear that at the same time he is portraying Christian disciples in his own day who have been sent out "to make disciples of all nations" (28.19). The evangelist has a 'dual perspective'. It is significant that no attempt is made to hide the fact that the first mission was to Israel.

In Matthew's allegorical expansion of the parable of the King's Marriage Feast (22.4f.), to which we have already referred, the second set of (Christian) servants is sent to the same invited guests (i.e. Israel) as the first set of servants (the Old Testament prophets). The Matthean version of this parable clearly implies a Christian mission to Israel even though its complete failure (which leads to judgement) is underlined.

At 23.36 God's judgement is announced on those who "kill and crucify ... scourge ... and persecute" Christian prophets, wise men and scribes. Here the evangelist surely has in mind present (or future) judgement on Israel: it is not a matter which is over and done with. At 23.39 that judgement is referred to again: "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'". Although the inter-

<sup>23</sup> See especially R. Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium* (Göttingen, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> See also J.P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28.19?", *CBQ*, xxxix (1977), 94-102. For a different view, see D. R. A. Hare and D. J. Harrington, "'Make Disciples of all the Gentiles' (Mt. 28.19)", *CBQ*, xxxvii (1975), 359-69.

pretation of this verse is much disputed, I take it (and the immediate context) to imply that there is hope that Israel may possibly yet be saved, even if this seems unlikely.<sup>25</sup>

In Matthew's view, then, the rejection by Israel of its Messiah means God's judgement, but this does not exclude a mission by the Church to Israel; the failure of that mission underlines Israel's guilt.<sup>26</sup>

It is also possible, I think, to refute the claim that Jewish persecution of Christians is past history by the time the evangelist writes. This view has been set out by D. R. A. Hare in his fascinating monograph, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Matthew* (Cambridge, 1967). He believes that Jewish persecution of Christian missionaries belongs essentially to the past. He builds his case primarily on the lack of evidence for such a persecution in the period between 70 A.D. and the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 132-135.

But Hare fails to do justice to John 16.2: "They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think that he makes an act of worship equivalent to the offering of a sacrifice".<sup>27</sup> While it is true that this threat of lynching may never have been carried out, at about the same time as Matthew's gospel was written the Johannine community was still keenly aware of the very real threat of violent persecution.

Hare rejects too hastily the evidence of I Clement. In a number of passages Clement refers to *zēlos*, envy. At times he has in mind factious people within the church, but, as Geoffrey Lampe has argued, in some passages it refers to the attitude of Jewish opponents of Christianity; this *zēlos* leads literally to death.<sup>28</sup> While Lampe has probably exaggerated his claim that in the

<sup>25</sup> So also D. Allison, "Matt. 23.39 = Luke 13.35b as a Conditional Prophecy", *JSNT*, xviii (1983), 75-84.

<sup>26</sup> See also U. Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel according to Matthew", E.tr. in G. N. Stanton, ed., *Interpretation of Matthew*, p. 101, and see especially his note 25.

<sup>27</sup> Here I quote the exegesis of B. Lindars, "The Persecution of Christians in John 15.18-16.4a", *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil (Cambridge, 1981), p. 65f.

<sup>28</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "'Grievous Wolves' (Acts 20.29)", *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 253-68 and pp. 263ff.

late first and early second century the church was faced with a powerful counter-attack from the side of Judaism, some of his evidence from later New Testament writings and from I Clement and Justin Martyr confirms that Jewish hostility could well have posed a very real threat to Matthew's community. More than that we cannot say. But there is little doubt that Matthew *perceived* that his community was living in the shadow of Jewish opposition and rejection.

The second pillar which supports my suggestion that Matthew's community was a rather beleaguered 'sect' is that there is evidence within the gospel which suggests that the evangelist and his readers were very much at odds, not only with contemporary Judaism but also with the *Gentile* world.

In the Sermon on the Mount there are three derogatory references to the Gentiles, 5.47, 6.7 and 6.32. The second reference has probably been added by the evangelist himself; the other two have been taken over from Q. And, as we have seen, in the mission discourse in chapter 10 the disciples are told much more explicitly than in Mark 13 to expect hostility from Gentiles as well as Jews (10.18,22).

In Matthew's fourth discourse, the Marcan tradition which gives a warning not to cause one of the little ones to stumble is set in an eschatological context by an additional logion inserted by the evangelist: "Woe *to the world* for temptations to sin. For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes" (18.7). This apocalyptic saying has been taken from Q in order to introduce a woe on the entire world as a part of the prophecy of the eschatological terrors which are expected soon. Here Matthew has heightened an apocalyptic theme—as he does elsewhere—and indicates that his community is alienated from a threatening world. Later in the same discourse, at 18.17, there is a further derogatory reference to Gentiles; as at 5.46f. they are linked with tax collectors in a general reference to society outside the Matthean community, a society with which the community has little to do.

At 24.9 there is another reference to the hostility Matthew's community may expect from Gentiles at the end time; the specific reference to Gentiles has been added by the evangelist himself to the Marcan tradition. Finally, we may refer to two further sayings of a very different character which are relevant at this point. In words which have been carefully shaped by the

evangelist himself, Matthean followers of Jesus are called to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (5.13 and 14). These words suggest that the Matthean community is a minority group set over against the world at large, and yet it is certainly not cut off from society in general.

The evangelist's firm commitment to a mission to the Gentiles is well known. But there is a string of other references to Gentiles and to the world in general which is often overlooked. In many of them Matthew's own hand can be discerned. They suggest that the Matthean community, just like the Pauline and Johannine communities, had an ambivalent attitude to society at large: it was committed to the task of evangelism "to all nations", but it saw itself as a group quite distinct from the 'alien' world at large.

The third pillar in my reconstruction of the setting of the gospel is the increased use the evangelist makes of apocalyptic themes. In chapters 24 and 25 Matthew extends very considerably Mark's eschatological discourse in chapter 13. Some of the material is taken from Q, some is tradition to which Matthew alone had access, and some comes from his own hand. An example of the latter which is particularly important for our present purposes is 24.10-12: "You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And many will fall away and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold". There are a number of traces of Matthean vocabulary and themes in these verses; they are in part a pastiche of phrases used elsewhere in this chapter.<sup>29</sup> External oppression and internal dissension, themes which one would not normally expect to find linked together, are here set side by side in the context of calls for vigilance: the parousia is both 'unexpected' and 'near', and judgement is at hand. These themes are prominent throughout chapters 24 and 25.

Why is there increased prominence given to apocalyptic themes in this gospel? What is the *function* of these traditions? Several

<sup>29</sup> For details see J. Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in Mt. XXIV-XXV" in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux, 1972), p. 320f. See also E. Schweizer, "Matthew's Church", E.tr. in G. N. Stanton, ed., *The Interpretation of Matthew*, p. 146.

writers have recently stressed that historical and sociological factors are at work whenever apocalyptic language becomes prominent. In periods of historical crisis and trauma and in periods of a marked sense of alienation from the outside world Jewish and early Christian writers turned to apocalyptic. P. D. Hanson correctly notes that apocalyptic "generated a symbolic universe opposed to that of the dominant society".<sup>30</sup> Wayne Meeks has suggested that apocalyptic language is used to reinforce attitudes of group solidarity.<sup>31</sup>

These explanations of the function of apocalyptic are most illuminating. As far as I know, the apocalyptic traditions in Matthew's gospel have not yet been considered from this point of view. But it is not at all difficult to see that these perceptive observations on the social circumstances in which apocalyptic flourishes are readily applicable to Matthew. The thoroughly Matthean passage just cited, 24.10-12, gives clear evidence of the community's sense of alienation from the outside world and the evangelist's concern to reinforce group solidarity.

There is probably no better illustration of the evangelist's interest in apocalyptic than the apocalyptic vision in 25.31-46. This passage also confirms the importance of the explanation of the function of apocalyptic in Matthew which I have just sketched out. The final pericope of the lengthy eschatological discourse which Matthew has shaped so carefully is a vision of all the nations gathered for judgement by the Son of Man. The nations are separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; they are judged on the basis of what they have done for "one of the least of these my brethren". Although I cannot defend my interpretation of this passage now, I am convinced that as it stands in Matthew's gospel the phrase "the least of

<sup>30</sup> P. D. Hanson, art. "Apocalypticism", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume* (Nashville, 1976), pp. 30ff. See also G. W. Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism" in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen, 1983), p. 645.

<sup>31</sup> See W. Meeks, "'Since then you would need to go out of the World': Group Boundaries in Pauline Christianity" in *Critical History and Biblical Faith: New Testament Perspectives* (Villanova, Pa., 1979), pp. 4-29; also his "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity" in *Apocalypticism*, ed. D. Hellholm, pp. 687-705, and his *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven, 1983), pp. 171-80.



these my brethren" refers not to men in general, but to those sent out by Matthew's community as missionaries "to all nations".

The Matthean community is committed to evangelism among all nations, but rejection, opposition and persecution are being experienced. Quite naturally the Matthean Christians have asked, "Why does God allow his enemies to play havoc with the new people who do bear the proper fruit?" The answer is that at the end all men will certainly be judged, rewarded and punished on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of Christian missionaries. This apocalyptic passage functions in exactly the same way as many other Christian and Jewish apocalyptic writings. It is a final note of consolation and encouragement to a community acutely aware of the hostility of the Jewish and Gentile world at large.

This very theme is prominent in two Jewish apocalypses written at about the same time as Matthew's gospel, about A.D. 90. Following the triumph of the Romans in A.D. 70 there was bound to be bewilderment and confusion and this is reflected in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. Let me refer to just two passages. In 4 Ezra 7.37, in a final judgement scene we read as follows :

"Then the Most High will say to the excited nations :

Consider and know those whom you denied

Or those whom you have not served

Or whose faithfulness you have spurned.

Look on this side, then on that :

Here are rest and delight

There fire and torments".

Suddenly at the last judgement nations are confronted with God's people whom they have denied and failed to serve and they are judged on that basis.<sup>32</sup> The close parallel with the interpretation of Mt. 25.31-46 which I have just given is, I hope, obvious.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> I have quoted the translation by J. H. Myers in his commentary in the Anchor Bible, *I and II Esdras* (Garden City, N.Y., 1974). Myers translates the Syriac text, not the Latin text which lies behind the translations in the RSV and NEB Apocrypha.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed the Armenian version of 4 Ezra, which was transmitted and interpolated by Christians, shows that Christians in those circles saw this, for they introduced into their version of 5 Ezra phrases from Mt. 25.31 ff.! See *The Armenian version of IV Ezra*, edited and translated by M. E. Stone (Missoula, 1978).

In 2 Baruch 72 all the nations are summoned before the Messiah for judgement. Nations which have not opposed Israel will be spared, but those who have ruled over her will be given up to the sword. Here the nations are not automatically assigned to destruction, as in I Enoch 62 which is frequently cited as a parallel to Matthew 25; they are judged on the basis of their attitude to Israel.

The final discourse in chapters 24 and 25 may not be the most attractive part of Matthew's gospel for modern readers, but these chapters reflect, perhaps more clearly than any other part of the gospel, the setting from which it comes. The apocalyptic themes are the response to the trauma of the parting of the ways from Judaism, to the perceived hostility of both Jewish and Gentile society at large and to serious internal dissension within the community. I am suggesting that the heightened anti-Jewish polemic and the greater prominence given to apocalyptic are both related to the particular circumstances of Matthew's community. If this is so, then it is no coincidence that Matthew 23, with its bitter denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees in the seven-fold woes, is juxtaposed with the extended apocalyptic traditions in chapters 24 and 25.

In discussions of the structure of Matthew's gospel and the five discourses, scholars often do not quite know what to do with chapter 23, since it does not seem to fit naturally with chapters 24 and 25. If my suggestions are sound, then chapter 23 belongs with 24 and 25: polemic and apocalyptic are both the responses of a minority community very much at odds with the world at large.

The fourth pillar which supports my suggestions about the setting of Matthew is the simple observation that the themes in Matthew to which I am appealing are found in other early Christian writings. Elsewhere prominence is given to the persecution and hostility experienced by Christian communities from both the Jewish and Gentile world. Elsewhere apocalyptic seems to be the response to rejection, hostility and the consequent feeling of alienation. Elsewhere we can find some classic examples of communities which some anthropologists now call "millenarian sects".<sup>34</sup> In using that term they are not drawing attention to

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, B. R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: a Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (London, 1973), and K. Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: a Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford, 1971).

heretical or unorthodox views but rather to the ways in which minority religious groups which are deeply alienated from the macrosociety turn to eschatological and apocalyptic themes in order to reinforce attitudes of group solidarity.

Let me give four examples. In 1 Thessalonians, as in Matthew, we find a community which is acutely aware of the hostility of Jews. In both writings anti-Jewish polemic and apocalyptic themes are prominent. In *The First Urban Christians* Wayne Meeks has noted that in 1 Thessalonians the threat to the community is turned into a reinforcement of the believers' solidarity with one another. "Apocalyptic sets the context of the paraenesis i.e. the reminders and encouragement of the ways in which Christians are expected to behave".<sup>35</sup> In 1 Thessalonians, as in Matthew, there is a strong emphasis on internal discipline. I do not believe that Matthew and 1 Thessalonians are directly related. This makes the similarities (in spite of obvious chronological and geographical differences) all the more striking.

The Thessalonian and Matthean communities are both, as it were, beleaguered 'sects'. Yet both Paul and Matthew are supremely confident of their convictions. Both are concerned to proclaim the Christian message to society at large in spite of their alienation from the Jewish and Gentile world which surrounded them.

My second example is the Fourth Gospel. Although most apocalyptic themes are conspicuous by their virtual absence, anti-Jewish polemic is even more bitter than it is in Matthew. Most scholars now accept that the Fourth Gospel was written shortly after a most painful parting from Judaism. Like the Matthean community, Johannine Christians see themselves as alienated both from Judaism and from the world in general: they are under attack and are misunderstood, but they live confidently as "branches abiding in the vine" (John 15.4f.) Like the Matthean community, Johannine Christians are a 'sect' which has in large measure defined itself by the trauma of its recent rupture from Judaism.<sup>36</sup>

My third and fourth examples are from the Matthean corner of the map of early Christianity, the *Didache* and the two

<sup>35</sup> W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, pp. 174ff.

<sup>36</sup> See especially W. Meeks, "The Stranger from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", *JBL*, xci (1972), 44-72.

Christian chapters added to 4 Ezra which are usually known as 5 Ezra. The Didache seems to have been written a decade or so after Matthew, and 5 Ezra immediately after the disastrous Bar Kokhba revolt of 132-135 A.D. In both writings we find anti-Jewish polemic, perceived hostility and persecution from Jews, and also apocalyptic fervour.<sup>37</sup> These two communities are strongly Jewish yet acutely aware of alienation from Judaism. In both writings paraenesis is set in an apocalyptic framework. The Didache and 5 Ezra are almost certainly both dependent on Matthew's gospel, but the more significant links are at a deeper level.

Together with Matthew these early Christian writings all bear the marks either of a very strained relationship with Judaism (I Thessalonians) or of a painful parting from Judaism (the other four writings). They represent different strands of early Christianity, but all five reflect the experiences of minority Christian groups who felt threatened by and alienated from Jewish and Gentile society. It is against this setting that their anti-Jewish polemic is to be understood even if it cannot be condoned.

Before I close, let me try to meet two obvious objections to my explanation of the anti-Jewish polemic in Matthew and my suggestions about the setting of the gospel. First, how does this understanding of Matthew square with evidence set out in all the standard textbooks which shows that the evangelist was a learned teacher, perhaps even a converted scribe? I do not believe that my suggestions are incompatible with traditional explanations of the origin of the gospel. We need look no further than Qumran for a parallel: there we find a minority group which has cut itself off from mainstream religious life, a group which indulges in fierce polemics against unfaithful Israel and which lives on apocalyptic fervour, a group much concerned with internal discipline. Alongside these features of the Qumran community which are broadly similar to the features of Matthew's gospel to which I have tried to draw attention, there is also, as in Matthew, a keen interest in and 'scholarly' approach to the re-interpretation of Scripture for the new circumstances in which the community believed itself to be living.

<sup>37</sup> Didache 1.3 and 5 Ezra 2.47. On the Didache, see K.H. Rengstorf, *Kirche und Synagoge*. I, p. 56. On 5 Ezra, see G.N. Stanton, "5 Ezra and Matthean Christianity in the Second Century", *JTS*, xxviii (1977), 67-83.

If my suggestions are correct, a second objector might well ask, why did the evangelist not address the needs of his community directly in an epistle like I Thessalonians rather than in a gospel? Or, to put the same point in a different way, surely Matthew is primarily concerned to set out the story of Jesus? Is not Christology the single most important theological emphasis of his gospel? I accept the force of this objection. Indeed I believe that the traditions of Mark's gospel and of Q were an even greater influence on the evangelist than any of the circumstances to which I have drawn attention. What I have tried to do is to account for a few of the strands which make up the skein. I readily concede that the evangelist is primarily concerned with the story of Jesus and with his convictions about the significance of Jesus. And yet since he interprets that story in the light of the needs of his own community it is possible to try to understand the concerns and the fears of that community. Whether my suggestions are plausible or not is for others to judge.

There is an important corollary to the view I have set out. Matthew does far more than simply react polemically to the perceived hostility of the synagogue across the street. He sets out his account of Jesus partly in the light of specific Jewish accusations and criticisms and partly in the light of possible Jewish objections to Christian claims. In short, in Matthew's skein there are apologetic as well as polemical and apocalyptic strands. I cannot now discuss Matthew's apologetic, but I hope I have shown that for much of early Christianity, and for Matthew in particular, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was the central problem for Christian theology.