

**Warren Carter 1996 — Matthew: Storyteller — Interpreter — Evangelist**

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers. 322 pages. Price: Unknown

**Reviewer: Dr Johan Ras**

This welcome publication centers around audience-oriented criticism and has been written for lay people and for scholars (pp xii). Carter tries to retell the story of Matthew and to express what the author has said (p 1). In a scholarly, yet simple but convincing manner, special attention is paid to introductory issues which are connected to this approach — something that certainly is an eye opener. Carter also uses redaction criticism (pp 100-101). He believes that Matthew's gospel genre is not an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus, but an ancient biography/story which proclaims Jesus (p 49).

The following are some of his conclusions: The Matthean author was an educated Jewish Christian — somebody who was competent in Greek and probably also knew Aramaic and Hebrew. The gospel was written in Antioch (Syria), probably in the 80s or 90s (pp 24-26). Carter believes that an unknown pastoral theologian shaped the different traditions underlying his sources (Mark, Q & M), in order to address the particular circumstances of his community/communities. The first audience was a small minority community, transitional, and it had experienced separation from the synagogue because of a recent bitter dispute.

This debate includes issues like claims about Jesus' God-given role to forgive sins, his manifestation of God's presence, and the interpretation of God's will (pp 88, 114).

Carter's work pays special attention to the evaluative or ideological point of view. He believes that the author told the story from God's point of view (p 121). This view is that Jesus will manifest God's presence (p 125). Jesus teaches and enacts the divine will and the authorial audience identifies this perspective, agrees with it and has its identity and lifestyle shaped accordingly (pp 130-131). The Matthean plot and its affective impact on the audience (pp 172-173) are discussed in the light of six narrative blocks (pp 160-173).

Attention is also given to the geographical and temporal settings of Matthew, and the characters that are selectively discussed are Jesus (the Agent of God's saving presence), the religious leaders (who opposed God's will), and the disciples (prototypes of believers, pp 189-228, 229-241, 242-256).

Carter's work is a rich source of information that reflects the insights of *inter alia* Wolfgang Iser, Umberto Eco and Boris Uspensky (pp 106, 108, 120). His remark that the image of the eunuchs (Mt 19: 10-12) powerfully expresses marginal existence is new (p 98), as well as the archaeological remark that the Matthean community had at least 40 to 50 members or more (p 80, 89 & note 13). He makes good, but average linguistic remarks, pertaining to Hebrew and Greek (p 132 n 11 & p 207 n 9), and often refers to word statistics (p 157, n 19-20). The anthropological remark on 'liminal existence' is interesting and underlines the fact that he tries to use the insights of other disciplines (pp 254, 256, n 18).

This is probably the first, and definitely the most recent, audience-oriented reading of Matthew, and it reveals stimulating thoughts about our own readings in the light of contemporaneous societies, because it begins dialogues between the Matthean text and our different contemporary worlds.

The bibliography reflects 316 titles, all in English, except for nine German and one French publication. I was disappointed that Carter has not taken cognizance of Joachim Gnllka's two German volumes, and even Robert Gundry's (1994) latest updated commentary. Other commentaries which have

been ignored are *inter alia* those of D Bruner, D A Carson, F V Filson, R T France, W Hendriksen, L Morris, J T Nielsen and D Patte. I also cannot understand why the work of no South African scholar (except for a reference to Jannie Louw's semantic dictionary), especially the publications of A G van Aarde and H J B Combrink (available in English!), was not consulted.

Note 27, dealing with the temple tax (pp 221, 227), is put at the end of the wrong sentence, and I think that at least some of Andries van Aarde's thoughts could have clarified Carter's comment that Matthew 17:24-27 is a difficult text. Almost no attention is paid, in his discussion of the content of Matthew (pp 259-271), to the important eschatological remarks, especially in Matthew chapters 24-25 (p 252). Although stimulating comments are made in his 430 endnotes, no text critical remarks are made — an indication that scholars too easily just accept a specific text and/or translation as 'canonical'! Carter also does not mention whether he has used Nestle-Aland 26 (1979) or the 27th edition (1993/1994/1995).

Although I would strongly recommend this worthy contribution to Matthean scholarship, Carter made a blunt mistake by titling his book 'Matthew: Storyteller — Interpreter — Evangelist'. Nowhere in his book does he explain the subtitle — especially the term 'Evangelist'! Why 'Evangelist'? Linguistic and theological reasons for this choice are lacking. In fact, he contradicts himself when he says that he believes that the Matthean author was 'an unknown pastoral theologian' (p 41-42, 49): I would also change the order of the subtitle to 'Interpreter — Storyteller', leaving out the term 'Evangelist', and even include the term 'Pastoral theologian' as possible substitute. I don't think that you can tell a story if you have not beforehand interpreted what you have heard and experienced — thus, I opt for the title 'Matthew: Interpreter — Storyteller'!

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