Wim J.C. Weren, studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary design, intertextuality, and social setting

Author:
Dirk van der Merwe[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Correspondence to:
Dirk van der Merwe

Email:
vdmerdg@unisa.ac.za

Postal address:
189 Kotie Avenue, Murrayfield 0184, South Africa

This article summarises and comments on the book *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary design, intertextuality, and social setting*, by Wim Weren, published during 2014. The essence of this book is all about meaning: the meaning of a structure, texts, and consequently the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew. For Weren, 'Meaning is the result of the interplay between a textual unit and such other factors as language, literary context, and cultural setting'. This relates to the three parts of the content of this monograph. His approach in studying Matthew comes from three perspectives: firstly intratextuality, then intertextuality, and finally extratextuality. He has deliberately chosen this order of successive steps so that they complement each other.

Introduction

Wim Weren, professor emeritus of Biblical Studies at the University of Tilburg, is the author of *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary design, intertextuality, and social setting*, published during 2014. This is his most recent book in an impressive list of publications. His main interest lies in the:

> … exegesis of texts from the New Testament and to the dynamic framework of their relations with Old Testament texts and to the dynamic connection between textual units from Scripture and discussions in the oral Torah, which have been partly codified in early Jewish and rabbinic writings. (Weren 2014:vii)

Not to be bogged down in making subjective links, as he states it, his approach and modus operandi in this book is not to conduct any intertextual analysis until he has:

> … made an in-depth exploration, in the context of an intratextual analysis, in the patterns within each of the textual units that will play an important role in the subsequent comparison. This approach is reflected in the structure of this book. (p. viif)

In my review of this book I have focussed on three aspects: the approach of Weren in his investigation of the Gospel of Matthew, the analytical investigation of Matthew as he presents it in 15 chapters, and a dictum on the 'Final Observations' at the end of the book on linguistics.

Weren's approach in investigating the Gospel of Matthew

In his 'Introduction' Weren clearly and thoroughly orientates the reader about the content of the book and his intended modus operandi.[1] Weren has explicitly spelled out the hypothesis that directed his analysis of texts from Matthew as well as the presuppositions which formed his points of departure (Weren 2014:297). His approach in studying Matthew comes from three perspectives: firstly intratextuality, then intertextuality, and finally extratextuality. He has deliberately chosen this order of successive steps in order that they complement each other.

Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary design, intertextuality, and social setting is, according to my analytical and critical reading and judgement an excellent piece of scholarly work. I enjoyed reading this book, expecting every moment to notice something innovative. I discovered the academic maturity of a dedicated scholar. My verification for these statements is for the following reasons: sound exegesis occurs throughout the book; logical, analytical and critical reasoning paves new paths for new avenues; the discussions and reasoning are sound, which make for easy reading.

According to my judgment, the essence of the book is all about *meaning*; the meaning of texts, the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew. For Weren, 'Meaning is the result of the interplay between a textual unit and such other factors as language, literary context, and cultural setting.

1.Weren applied '… two synchronic and coherent methods that complement each other: structural analysis and text semantics' (p. 3). His new proposal for Matthew's macrostructure is the answer of the following two posed questions: '(a) what medium-sized textual units does this Gospel consist of, and (b) what are the relations between the book's composing parts and what is their place and function within the document as a whole? … Semantic analysis refers to a systematic study of the way in which meaning is expressed in a particular text and in a particular language' (p. 3).

Within this interplay, a text usually acquires a multi-layered meaning while the text is still a unit' (Weren 2014:4). This relates to the three parts of this monograph. Weren also states that his emphasis will be on semantics. All three of the questions he asks to address relate to meaning: 'What meaning or meanings do textual units … acquire …? What meaning do these textual units have …? What are the relationships between the meanings that textual units acquire …?' (p. 4). He states that the Matthean text has layered and multifaceted meanings that are closely interwoven and determined by the literary, intertextual, cultural, and historical context (pp. 4–5). He also asserts, 'I will focus on the level of semantics' (p. 126), 'What meaning do these quotations acquire …' (p. 126), '… how does the meaning of the words … relate to their meaning in their own literary setting?' (p. 131) and 'I will explore the meaning …' (p. 143). Hence, it is all about meaning!

Meaning then is, according to Weren, constituted by linguistics (structure, discourse analysis and intertextuality) and interpreted in its socio-cultural environment. He has done this in a superb way in demonstrating this technically and clinically, looking more holistically in his search for the meaning of the text.

I respect Weren's emphasis and focus on the literary, intertextual, cultural, and historical context in the process of finding meaning in the Matthean text. I would, nevertheless, like to refer to a component that complementarily contributes to the 'meaning' and consequently the 'understanding' of texts. At places throughout the book (except ch. 7, Christology; ch. 11, eschatology) Weren has added such a component implicitly, instead of paying explicit attention to it.[2] This component I would like to refer to as the 'theological component' within the spectrum of searching for meaning. Obviously Weren had a specific scope, paradigm, approach and methodology in mind and held firmly and successfully to it and executed it in an excellent way. Weren concentrated, especially in part 2, predominantly on various literary analyses by using the following phrases: text-semantic analysis (Weren 2014:42); literary analysis (p. 72); literary-historical analysis (p. 162); semantic analysis (p. 222); and intertextual analysis (many times).

In the most recent publications on hermeneutics, exponents such as Hays (2007), Virkler and Ayayo ([1981] 2007), Montague ([1991] 2007), Osborne (2008), Tate (2011), Köstenberger (2012) and Robbins (1996a, 1996b) moved away – as Weren did – from particular hermeneutics to a more comprehensive approach, including the following three components: historical, textual and theological. At a few places I have felt that Weren could have elaborated more on the theological aspects embedded in the text (e.g. meaning of

the kingdom of heaven [God] Weren 2014:61), eschatology, salvation, Son of man in Peter's confession or eschatological discussion of the end (pp. 62–63). Nothing is said about the theological content of Peter's confession (p. 67). Weren elaborated about Peter's role and position, his protesting and leadership (pp. 65–66) in the chapter of 'secret knowledge and divine revelation'. Only brief references about the secrets of the kingdom occur in the conclusion. I am convinced that explicit theological reflections in the literary and socio-cultural analysis of texts can verify his excellent literary discussions and findings.

The question is whether the construction of structure, semantic and literary analysis in texts is, in many cases, not the result of the theological themes and connections embedded in words, phrases, and texts? Structure analysis and semantic analysis are not always matters of pure linguistics or semantics. Biblical authors definitely had theological constructs/paradigms in mind when they were writing.

The analytical investigation as presented in the 15 chapters
Part 1: 'Intratextuality' (Literary design)

The heading of the first part, 'Literary design', is well chosen and a compound descriptive heading of what Weren describes in the four chapters of this section. He looks at the text from four different, although related and complemented perspectives, namely, macrostructure, text-semantics, the divine revelation of hidden knowledge and Matthew's own interpretation and understanding of life beyond death. All four chapters relate to 'meaning'.

In chapter one ('The macrostructure of Matthew's Gospel: A new proposal') Weren presents a new proposal regarding the macrostructure of the Gospel of Matthew and discusses the meanings of textual units on the basis of synchronic research. His point of departure is that Matthew is a narrative text, a *story* about Jesus. The narrator offers his main character ample opportunity to speak. He considers the different sections in Matthew as the character's text which is embedded in the text of the narrator. What is new about this hypothesis is that it provides a layered image of the structure of the Gospel of Matthew. Also new is the insight that five passages function as hinges (Mt 4:12–17; 11:2–30; 16:13–28; 21:1–17; 26:1–16). Such a hinge text is linked with both the sequence that precedes it and the one that follows. In chapter two ('Children in Matthew's Gospel: a text-semantic analysis') he applies text-semantics to the word group *child* (Greek lexemes: παιδίον, παῖς, τέκνον, νήπιος, and μικρός) in Matthew. He develops some of the texts about children in a text-semantic analysis (Weren 2014:43). This approach generates insight into various lines of meaning. Weren points out how this word group denotes real children who form a vulnerable group, refers to Jesus himself, is used in a figurative sense and is applied to (certain) followers of Jesus. For him '… it indicates that children occupy the lowest position in society and that

2. In chapter nine which concerns 'Jesus' entry into Jerusalem', which is loaded with theology, Weren states that, 'I will examine these citations by means of a literary-historical analysis which is to enable us to determine their textual form. Next, I will broaden my methodological perspective by linking up with the theory of intertextuality. In sections 3–6, the separate citations from Matt 21:1–17 will also be explored in the light of this theory. I will conclude this chapter with some reflections on the way in which the various citations are connected' (Weren 2014:162–185). See also Weren (p. 186) for a similar modus operandi of chapter 10 on the use of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the parable of the tenants.

it is evident that this position must also be characteristic of those who see the kingdom of heaven as their supreme goal' (p. 51).

In chapter three ('Secret knowledge and divine revelation in Matthew's Gospel') Weren points out how divine revelation of hidden or secret knowledge (secrets of the kingdom) has taken place through different bearers of divine revelation. Exponents in this regard are Jesus, his disciples – Peter as an example – and finally through the poor and homeless. For anyone to understand the secrets of the kingdom one has to conform to the solidarity with people in distress. Chapter four ('Human Body and Life beyond Death in Matthew's Gospel') emphasises Matthew's own interpretation and understanding of Jesus' resurrection. In the first section of this chapter Weren discusses the burial and resurrection of Jesus through a literary analysis of Matthew 27:55–28:20. In the second section of the chapter he broadens the perspective by discussing the resurrection of many saints after the death of Jesus and the eschatological fate of his followers. In both sections, Weren (2014) discusses whether the

> … resurrection is depicted as a reality in which also the human body is involved and, if it is, what Matthew means with corporeality and how we – in the light of present day assumptions – can interpret his statements about this subject. (p. 72)

Part 2: 'Intertextuality'

For Weren, 'This term refers to both the phenomenon that texts are fundamentally interwoven and to the academic research into this phenomenon' (p. 4). He states that intertextual analysis builds on the results of thorough structural analysis and text-semantic research of the constituting texts. This part starts with the description of intertextual theories. It also develops practical tools to identify various types of relations between texts from the Gospel and co-generic and co-thematic textual units from the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and early Jewish and Christian writings. In this part Weren discusses various forms of intertextuality and applies this approach to textual units from the Gospel of Matthew and '… the relations of these texts to the pre-texts from the Hebrew Bible and/or the LXX, and with early Jewish and early Christian texts' (p. 7). Firstly, he tries to integrate literary-synchronic methods into the intertextual study. Secondly, he tries

> … to narrow the gap between the world within and the world outside the text by not merely concentrating on relations between texts but also on the texts' correlations with their socio-cultural contexts. (p. 298)

In chapter five ('Intertextuality: Theories and practices') Weren begins with an introduction to intertextuality and a discussion of the best way to conduct an intertextual analysis of Bible texts. He describes his approach to intertextuality to which he refers to as '… the new concept of intertextuality'. For him intertextuality '… refers to the phenomenon of the fundamental interweaving of texts but can also be used as a designation of theories and practical tools by which this phenomenon can be studied in a systematic and innovative

way' (p. 94). Weren also discusses the importance of contexts and the nature of quotations in Matthew quoting from the Masoretic and Septuagint texts. Finally, he compares intertextuality with literary-historical methods and canonical exegesis. Chapter six ('The five women in Matthew's genealogy as paragons of virtue') discusses the question why Matthew included five women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary) in his genealogy in Matthew 1. In Weren's answer, different from previous explanations that focussed on the differences, he explores through five elements what the narratives about these women have in common with the description of Matthew about the role and position of Mary.

Chapter seven ('Two quotations from Isaiah and Matthew's Christology [Mt 1:23, 4:15–16]') explores two quotations from Isaiah (7:14, 8:23b–9:1) that frame the prologue of Matthew (1:23; 4:14–16). Herewith, Weren proves that in investigations on traces of the Old Testament (OT) in the New Testament (NT), both the Hebrew and the LXX texts deserve equal attention. He also proves that explicit quotations continue to refer to the textual units from which they originate, whilst simultaneously they are interwoven into new literary contexts. In chapter eight ('Marriage, adultery, and divorce: Interpretations of Old Testament texts in Matt 5:27–32 and 19:3–12') Weren points out that although the teachings of Jesus with regard to marriage, adultery and divorce (Mt 5:27–32; 19:3-12) seem to be radical, an intertextual analysis points out that the opinions of Jesus '… link up with layers of meaning in Old Testament texts (Gn 1:27, 2:27; Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17, 24:1–4)' as well as strict interpretations of contemporary Jews (Weren 2014:8). He ends this chapter with the statements that, 'The exception clause in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 shows that there is scope for new developments', and that the NT encourages the later disciples of Jesus '… to find suitable solutions to new situations' (p. 161).

In chapter nine ('Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: Matt 21:1–17 in the light of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint') Weren aims to test the hypothesis that the citations that occur in Matthew 21:1–17 must also be understood in the light of the texts from both the Hebrew and LXX texts (Weren 2014:162). He discusses the interaction between separate texts in order to point out how this interplay powerfully generates new meanings. He points out how the six explicit and combined quotations in the narrative about the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Mt 21:3–17) shed light on each other in their new literary setting. This provides a new perspective of Zion as the place where the people of God will have a new future (Weren 2014:8). In chapter 10 ('The use of Isa 5:1–7 in the parable of the tenants [Mark 12:1–12; Matt 21:33–46]') Weren discusses how Matthew made additional links to Isaiah 5:1–7 which he did not derive from Mark. For this purpose he uses the parable of the tenants which occurs in both Mark (12:3–12) and Matthew (21:33–46), which has been constructed by Mark on the basis of the vineyard song in Isaiah 5:1–7. According to him later exegesis of Isaiah 5:1–7,

as it occurs in the Targum and in 4Q500, has left some traces in the parable.

In chapter 11 ('Matthew's view of Jesus' resurrection: Transformations of a current eschatological scenario') Weren points out the parallels between Matthew and 4 Ezra (a Jewish apocalyptic book). According to him these two writings are variants of each other. Each document '… has its own elaboration of the idea that the eschatological resurrection is part of a broader eschatological scenario' (Weren 2014:8). In the first section of this chapter he shows that the resurrection imagery in both 4 Ezra and Matthew results from '… an interpretation developed within apocalyptic groups of biblical texts about life and death, and about blessing and curse' (p. 211). In the second section he presents the eschatological scenario of 4 Ezra. He argues that it was extensively accepted by the turn of the 1st century. In the last section he explores how Matthew adapted this scenario in the light of his view of the resurrection of Jesus (p. 211). Chapter 12 ('The ideal community according to Matthew, James, and the Didache') shows the close relation that exists between Matthew and two other early Christian documents, James and Didache. Weren argues that in the construction of ideals, which the early Christian community must meet, these three documents are related, although some differences between them also occur. He then discusses three themes that occur in all three these documents: the references to the community, the relationship of the community to God and Jesus, and the concept of perfection. In his semantic analysis of lexemes ἐκκλησία, θεός, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός and τέλειος that are central in the books of Matthew, James and Didache, he assumes that '… a text is not an isolated phenomenon, but functions in a communicative context and has a pragmatical function' (p. 222).

Part 3: 'Extratextuality' (history and social setting)

This part concerns the 'history and social setting' of the Matthean communities and explains to what extent the ways in which the disciples are portrayed in Matthew are related to real groups in the Matthean communities. Extratextuality focuses on actual objects, persons, places, processes, and events in the reality outside the text.

In chapter 13 ('The real community: The history and social setting of the Matthean communities') Weren (2014) discusses the topic or issue of

> … whether and to what extent the ways in which the religious communities are portrayed in Matthew's Gospel are related to 'real' persons and groups in different phases of their history. (p. 9)

In his discussion he distinguishes three phases in the history of the Matthean communities. In the first phase (prior to 70 CE) the Christian Jews regard themselves to be full members of the Jewish community. In the second phase (70–80 CE) they became a minority group within the Jewish community. This was as a result of their conflict with the Pharisees who tried to redefine Judaism. The last phase (80–90 CE) concerns the gradual detachment of the Christian Jews from the Jewish

community. This results in them coming '… into contact with a broad multi-cultural network of Christian communities' (p. 260), which consisted of Jewish and gentile Christians who stayed in upper Galilee/Southern Syria. In chapter 14 ('"His disciples stole him away" [Matt 28:13]: A rival interpretation of Jesus' resurrection') Weren shows how the same tradition has been elaborated into two different directions. This becomes evident in the literary-historical analysis of the expression of fear that the disciples of Jesus will come and steal his body from the tomb, as described in the canonical Gospel of Matthew and the non-canonical Gospel of Peter. Chapter 15 ('From Q to Matt 22:1–14: New light on the transmission and meaning of the parable of the guests') comprises a literary-historical analysis pointing at the reconstruction of the wording and meaning of Q used by Matthew in his composition of the parable of the guests in Matthew 22:3–14. In this chapter Weren reflects on the differences between literary-historical research (sources and redaction) and the intertextual approach which he develops in this monograph.

Conclusions

In part 1 Weren succeeded convincingly to point out that the Gospel of Matthew is a well-structured, coherent, substantive, dynamic and organic whole which is verified by the many references to previous and later parts of the text (Weren 2014:297). It is true that the literary structure refers to a well organised and planned written Gospel and the intertextual references and usages also complement the skilful writing of the Gospel and interpretation and understanding of the identity and ministry of Jesus.

In part 2 Weren proficiently applied literary theories on intertextuality to some selected texts from Matthew. He convinces that the OT quotations of Matthew generate interaction between the original text and the text into which it is incorporated. Also that the function and meaning of textual units are more understandable when these units are related to cothematic or cogeneric texts from the OT. He persuasively points out that the Gospel of Matthew contains traces of both the Hebrew Bible and the LXX (p. 297). In this research (chapters 6–12) on intertextuality Weren points out the following relations between texts: common elements in texts (ch. 6); adapted meanings (ch. 7); additional links (chs. 8, 10); new meanings (ch. 9); parallel meanings (ch. 11); and closely related meanings between texts (ch. 12).

In part 3 the reader gains insight regarding the history and social setting of the Matthean communities[3] and enters

3.This reviewer is of opinion that chapter 12 should have been part of part 3 (socio-cultural background) and chapter 15 should have been part of part 2 (intertextuality). Although chapter 12 relates to the intertextual discussions it explores what images of the ideal community are constructed in the Gospel of Matthew, the Letter of James, and the Didache, and presents the results of a semantic analysis of three topics: the way in which the community is referred to, the community's relationship to God and Jesus, and the concept of perfection. The following lexemes are central: ἐκκλησία, θεός, Ἰησοῦς, and τέλειος. It is shown that the three documents are closely related where the construction of ideals which the Christian community must meet is concerned, but the differences are likewise striking. Chapter 15 contains a literary-historical analysis, aimed at the reconstruction of the wording and meaning of the source text (Q) used by Matthew, in composing the parable of the guests in Matthew 22:1–14. This chapter, '… reflects the differences between the method of literary-historical research of sources and redaction, and the intertextual approach developed in Part 2' (Weren 2014:9).

the field of 'extratextuality'. Weren's understanding of the historical development of the Matthean community is interesting, but also challenging with regard to his understanding of the circumstances which he interprets as being projected in the text and that the author is addressing. Under this part the reviewer wants to address the following thought provoking aspect.

Multiple layers (*levels*) *of interpretation:* In chapter 13 Weren writes, 'Matthew's book belongs to a particular literary genre, which we usually refer to with the term "gospel" and which is modelled on ancient biography.[4] It is characteristic of a gospel that it offers a story of the life of Jesus *in illo tempore*, but such a text has been deeply influenced by the situation of the community within which it originated and for which it was originally meant' (Weren 2014:251).

In this quotation Weren makes two important statements. He refers to the genre of Matthew as a biography, '… which is modelled on ancient biography…', and that the '… text has been deeply influenced by the situation of the community'. According to Keener (2003:13), 'Biographies were essentially historical works'. Burridge (1992:63–67) is of the opinion that ancient biographers intended their writings to be more historical than novelistic. Fornara (1983:34–36, 116) points out that the historiography practiced during the 1st century frequently focussed on notable individuals. Eddy and Boyd write the following about the close connection between history and biography:

> However effective any historical or biographical author may have been in achieving it, it seems that authors in both genres were to a significant degree concerned to report the past as it actually took place. And it seems that their audience read these works with that expectation. (Eddy & Boyd 2007:325)

Aune (1988) writes:

> [W]hile biography tended to emphasize encomium, or the one-sided praise of the subject, it was still firmly rooted in historical fact rather than literary fiction. Thus while the Evangelists clearly had an important theological agenda, the very fact that they chose to adapt Greco-Roman biographical conventions to tell the story of Jesus indicates that they were centrally concerned to communicate what they thought really happened. (p. 125)

With regard to '… the situation of the community', in Weren's discussion of '… secret knowledge and divine revelation', he refers to Matthew 11:25–30 to '… be understood in the light of Matthew's polemic against the Pharisaic interpretation of the Torah. It is aimed at all those who prefer Jesus' interpretation of the Torah to the heavy burdens imposed upon them by the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mt 23:4)' (Weren 2014:56).

Thus, for Weren, Matthew is addressing certain problems in the society and community about which he is writing. A question that then arises is how do we merge a biography of Jesus with Matthew addressing certain problems in the society and community?

This then implies for the reviewer that the text of Matthew has a double layer[5] (level) of interpretation and that the author has *purposefully selected* specific, trustworthy, relevant and applicable material from the tradition to address these problems: Matthew is writing about the real historical situation of Jesus, which he obtained from reliable tradition; Matthew subjectively selected specific historical material and organised and structured it in such a way to address the circumstances of the readers.

If this is the case, then the approach of Matthew relates to what the better historians like Polibius (*The Histories* 8.8) felt, and that is to include in their work not only praise and blame for individuals, but that they should also pursue truth and fairness. For Polibius (3.4.1) the distribution between praise and blame should be true. In the work of Arrian (*Alex.* 4.7.4; 4.8.1f.)[6] and other biographies praise and blame were mixed. Although some teachers were regarded as extraordinary, (see Keener 2003:16) Xenophon's (1858) report about Socrates was only good (*Mem.* 4.8.11).[7] There was a variety of material (traditions) available from which they could have made selections.

How then should we understand the trustworthiness of the Gospels, in this case Matthew? According to Keener the Gospel writers attempt to be historical as well as theological. Thus, Matthew seems to be '… both historical and literary/theological' (Keener 2003:17).

In order to do justice to the understanding of both 'biography' and 'circumstances' I agree with Stendahl (1968) and Schille (1957–1958) that Matthew was initially written to be a document for catechism in the Matthean communities. This view does justice to the biographical status of a primitive Matthew text and fits well into the first stage of Weren. Later on (probably during Weren's second phase) with the availability and circulation of Mk and Q, more texts were added and the text of Matthew was adapted to address the situation in these communities, although the message about Jesus remained unchanged.

---

4. Weren refers to Matthew as part of the genre of a biography from the Greco-Roman world various times (pp. 228; 251; 256). Keener's (2003:15) understanding of biographies agrees on this point. According to him the canonical gospels reflect 'Greco-Roman rather than strictly Palestinian Jewish literary conventions'. Keener (1999:25), in his commentary on Matthew writes, 'Although the historical accuracy of biographers varied from one biographer to another, biographies were always primarily historical works. Historians wanted to make their accounts interesting and had specific emphasis in writing, but such practices do not keep one from writing good history'.

5. Weren uses the word 'layer' in a social context referring to the aristocracy of Jerusalem as the upper layer (Weren 2014:295). He also uses it in a semantic context referring to older and younger (pp. 9, 209, 253) meanings as well as multiple meanings (pp. 4, 5, 8). See also the work of Louis Martyn (1979) about the two level theory on the Gospel of John.

6. In his review of Bosworth, *A historical commentary on Arrian's history of Alexander*, Heckel (n.d.) pointed out how the biography of Alexander the Great was praised and blamed by Arrian in his biography on Alexander.

7. The word 'Mem' refers to the memories of Xenophon about Socrates. It stands for 'Memoralia', the title of this document. 'Of those who knew what sort of man Socrates was, such as lovers of virtue, continue to regret him above all other men, even to the present day, as having contributed in the highest degree to their advancement in goodness. T me, being such as I have described him, so pious that he did nothing without the sanction of the gods …' (*Mem* 4.8.11). Cf. Keener (2003:11–53) for a thorough discussion on ancient biographies.

All this seems to relate to Weren's three statements that:

- Old oral and written traditions have been incorporated into it, which the author or final redactor processed in his own way and incorporated into his writing (p. 2).
- Parts of that process go back to oral and written traditions and they have undoubtedly undergone redaction processing following, among other things, discussions with opponents from outside the communities and with dissidents within a community's own circle (p. 5).
- [T]he passage (Mt 10:13.16) has the form of a biographical apophthegm which has been formed by the community, perhaps on the basis of memories of a striking event from Jesus' life or on the basis of an authentic saying of Jesus about the special relationship between children and the kingdom of God. That the tradition preserved here is a *Gemeindebildung* is evident from the fact that participation in the kingdom of God is put in the perspective of entering into a relationship with Jesus, and this points to a Christology which presumably developed only within the community (p. 42).[8]

A dictum on the 'Final Observations'

Under his final observations Weren (2014) makes the following three vital statements:

- One innovative idea is that the reader or interpreter plays an active and creative role in the process of meaning making.
- Old Testament pretexts clearly reveal the richness of meaning that these texts from Matthew and their pretexts have: they contain different visions of the world.
- A Bible text is not a self-contained entity but a dynamic and open whole (p. 298).

These quotations relate closely to what Weren has stated in chapter eight (Marriage, Adultery and Divorce) that, 'Changes in society have an impact on the way marriage is perceived. We can see this in the Bible as well as in our own time. Therefore it is not very useful to consider one institutional form as an unchangeable norm for all eras' (Weren 2014:161). For him the exception clause in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 shows that there is scope for new developments. That is also important for the later disciples of Jesus. The NT encourages them to find suitable solutions to new situations (p. 161). The first quotation is a matter of semantics and the second a matter of conduct, changes in meanings and changes in conduct.

When I read these statements made by Weren I was thinking about the invaluable contributions of Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1973a, 1973b, 1976) and even Schneiders (1992, 2002, 2003) and Vanhoozer (1997) on the phenomenology of language. Unfortunately I missed these names in this book, especially in the discussions in part 2 concerning 'intertextuality'.

I would like to further validate what Weren has stated here by adding a few remarks on the idiosyncrasy of texts.[9]

A new reading: Biblical texts (in this case OT texts) need no longer be regarded exclusively about the world to which and in which they were written. Rather, the author of Matthew develops a world of Christian discipleship, into which the author invites his original 1st century (CE) readers and succeeding generations to enter. The contemporary Matthean meaning of OT texts used intertextually by Matthew is not something added on to a basic literal meaning of the OT text. It seems to be intrinsic to the meaning of the text.[10]

Dialectical illumination: Studying a text is not to dissect the text diachronically into its constituent elements to account for its origin or etymology, but to appropriate the meaning of the text. The objective of interpretation should be the dialectical illumination of the meaning of the text as well as 'the self-understanding of the reader' (Schneiders 2003:184). In this dialectic the interpreter moves, through finer mediations,[11] between the pole of explanation by means of intertextuality (in this case) and exegesis, and the pole of understanding by means of theological-spiritual sensitivity (cf. Schneiders 1982:68). Thus, a text mediates meaning that is not only embedded behind or in the text. In fact, also with the assistance of the reader, it mediates meaning that lies in front[12] of the text in the various possibilities of reality which it pictures for the reader (cf. Ricoeur 1976:87; Schneiders 2003:184; Smith 1971:131–140). In such a reading act, faith, culture and spirituality become hermeneutical tools in the meaning of texts.[13]

Meaning is more than what was originally intended: Schneiders (2003:185; also Ricoeur 1976:25–44, 29–30) points out that a text 'is semantically independent of its author'. The meaning of a text is not limited to the intention of the author.[14] Whether or not the author intended such a meaning, the meaning of a text was open, whatever it means *when validly interpreted; although, readers always also owe some debt to an author*. Ricoeur writes:

> We may have to repay a debt owing to the authors we read. So we cannot say whatever we like… Perhaps we could say that

---

8. See also Weren (2014:253) who states that the major part of material in the oldest layer consists of sayings by Jesus. The second layer shows a mixture of both tradition and redaction. Many textual elements are derived from Mark or Q, but at the same time Matthew felt free to adapt them to the situation of his community. In the last stage, Matthew adapted old traditions to the circumstances that had changed. He also added new textual elements and felt free to adapt them to the situation of his community (p. 253).

9. In my discussion on the idiosyncrasy of texts I rely on what I have already discussed in my article, 'Reading the Bible in the 21st century: Some hermeneutical principles', in *Verbum et Ecclesia*. I have used it here in an adapted form because of its relevancy for this article.

10. Cf. Vanhoozer (1997:197–452) concerning his discussion on the re-doing of interpretation in his book.

11. Cf. Maddix and Thompson (2012:85) and Howard (2012:56–77) on the *Lectio divina* of texts.

12. Meaning that is created by the reader.

13. Issler (2012:120) refers to two modes of reading scripture: the mode of 'exploring' and 'research' and the mode as 'listening' and 'hearing'.

14. See also Weren (2014:96) who quotes Paul Claes who describes reception-oriented intertextuality, in which the reader plays an active part, as '…the complex of relationships between texts to which a function can be assigned by a subject that recognizes them'. The response of Weren on this is that, 'An essential element of this definition is that there is a reader who perceives relations and gives them a meaning and a function. Reception-oriented intertextuality involves implicit and free connections made by the reader, who can create relations which the author was not aware of' (p. 96).

a text is a finite space of interpretations: there is not just one interpretation, but, on the other hand, there is not an infinite number of them. A text is a space of variations that has its own constraints; and in order to choose a different interpretation, we must always have better reasons. (Ricoeur, quoted by Vanhoozer 1997:436)

Total reader involvement. Bultmann (1984:145–153) argued that exegesis without presuppositions is not possible.[15] Thompson (2000:204) refers to Iser (1978:275) who states that meaning occurs not in the text itself, but in the convergence of the text and the reader.[16] It '…brings the literary work into existence' (Thompson 2000:204).

Texts are linguistically polysemous:[17] By virtue of its linguisticality a text is polysemous[18] (see Ricoeur 1973b: 97–111). The meaning of a text cannot be reduced to a single, univocal, literal sense.[19] The polyvalence of words and semantic richness of larger linguistic units generate various valid interpretations in different readers under diverse circumstances. Matthew, as a Jewish Christian interpreter of the OT text, has an advantage over the mainstream Jewish readers of the 1st century. The tradition operative in contemporary interpreters assists them to draw from the text richer meanings than were available to the original readers (see Gadamer 1975:300–307; Ricoeur 1976:43–44; Schneiders 2003:185).

A much wider horizon: The historical distance between the OT text and the Matthean reader needs not be an obstacle to understanding, but rather an advantage for understanding.[20] The Matthean readers interpret the text within a much wider horizon,[21] one that results from the fusion of the horizon of the OT text and that of the later Matthean interpreter. Those readers had the help of the Spirit-Paraclete which, according to Paul (1 Cor 2:14) and John (15:26; 16:13), makes scripture spiritually understandable to those believers (Schneiders 2003:185–86).

15. Cf. Thompson (2000:202) for his evaluation of the contribution of the reader in the interpretation process. Bear in mind Matthew's presuppositions concerning the situation in the communities.

16. Robbins (1996a:215) refers to the awareness created by postmodernism that a biblical text does not have one possible objective meaning. This perspective was flawed as the reader has shaped and contributed to every step of the pursuit. Thompson (2000:201–202) supports this point of view.

17. Weren refers to it as 'polyphonic' (Weren 2014:100).

18. See Wittig (1977:78–87) for the pluri-signification in the parables in his essay, *A theory of multiple meanings.*

19. Vanhoozer (1997:417–18) distinguishes four kinds of interpretive plurality: firstly, a plurality of authorial intentions occurs – an author might intend a number of interpretive possibilities in a particular text; secondly, there is a plurality of intra-textual relations and intertextual contexts; thirdly, a plurality of readers and the contexts of these readers may be discerned – multiculturalism influences biblical interpretation; 'In order to serve the various needs and desires of various readers, texts *ought* to have plural meaning'; fourthly, a plurality of reading methods occurs.

20. Cf. Ricoeur (1973a:129–141; 1976:43–44) for his discussion on 'productive distanciation'. Years later Gadamer (1975:300–307) deals with the same phenomenon in his explanation of the concept 'effective historical consciousness'.

21. Gadamer (1975:269–274) was the first person to refer to the 'fusion of horizons'. According to him it was not possible to fuse the historical horizons of Scripture with the historical horizons of contemporary readers. Five years later Thiselton (1980), in his first major publication on hermeneutics, discusses the possibility of the fusion of horizons.

Conclusions and recommendations

This monograph is the evidence and result of many years of hard work and thorough and critical research of a skilful scholar. The book is well written: the way Weren argues, his analytical and logical thinking and reasoning is exceptional. The writing style of the book also deserves a compliment for it adds to easy reading. I appreciated Weren's rhetoric and how he guides the reader in following his arguments.

I have experienced humbleness in Weren's presentation in phrases, and references throughout the document that he does not intend his understanding to be the only way of understanding and interpretation. I find in his work an open-mindedness for other interpretations. This is noticed in references like, ' … my observations are therefore open for supplementation and any corrections from different research perspectives' (Weren 2014:247), '… it will be obvious that my reconstruction is hypothetical in nature' (p. 252), 'probably' (p. 276), '… if this hypothesis can stand the test' (p. 293), and '… both propositions are highly hypothetical' (p. 296).

I endorse this book to be read by theologians, especially biblical scholars and to be prescribed in postgraduate programmes for students to become acquainted with how to work text-immanently: doing structure analysis, determining the rhetoric of the author, how to follow the argument of the author, how to manage intertextuality and also how an author uses semantic networks (intentionally or sometimes unintentionally) to communicate the *kerugma*.

For me the vantage point of this book is the manner how Weren works with texts. Whether I agree with him or not (and there are a few cases) is not the issue, but that he sincerely makes an invaluable academic contribution to the discipline of NT, and to be more specific, the Matthean field, is indeed true.

Acknowledgements
Competing interests

References

Aune, D.E., 1988, 'Greco-Roman biography', in D. Aune (ed.), *Greco-Roman literature and the New Testament: Selected forms and genre*, pp. 107–126, Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA.

Bultmann, R. 1984, 'Is exegesis without presuppositions possible?', in S.M. Ogden (ed.), *New Testament and mythology and other basic writings*, pp. 145–153, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Burridge, R.A., 1992, *What are the Gospels?: A comparison with Graeco-Roman biography*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Eddy, P.R. & Boyd, G.A., 2007, *The Jesus legend: A case for the historical reliability of the synoptic Jesus tradition,* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.

Fornara, C.W., 1983, *The nature of history in ancient Greece and Rome*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Gadamer, H.G., 1975, *Truth and method*, Sheed & Ward, London.

Hays, R.B., 2007, 'Reading the Bible with eyes of faith: The practice of theological exegesis', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1, 5–21.

Heckel, W. n.d., 'Bryn Mawr Classical Review 97.4.7 of Bosworth', 1995, A historical commentary on Arrian's history of Alexander, vol. II, Oxford University Press, Oxford, viewed 01 July 2015, from http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1997/97.04.07.html

Howard, E., 2012, 'Lectio divina in the evangelical tradition', Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care 5(1), 56–77.

Iser, W., 1978, The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Issler, K.D., 2012, 'Approaching formative scripture: Reading with both head and heart', Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care 5(1), 117–134.

Keener, C.S., 1999, A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Keener, C.S., 2003, The Gospel of John: A commentary, vol. I, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA.

Köstenberger, A.J., 2012, 'Invitation to biblical interpretation & the hermeneutical triad: New hermeneutical lenses for a new generation of bible interpreters', Criswell Theological Review 10(1), 3–12.

Maddix, M.A. & Thompson, R.P., 2012, 'Scripture as formation: The role of scripture in Christian formation', Christian Education Journal 3(9), 79–93.

Martyn, J.L., 1979, History and theology in the fourth Gospel, Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Montague, G.T., [1991] 2007, Understanding the Bible. A basic introduction to biblical interpretation, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ.

Osborne, G.R., 2008, The hermeneutical spiral. A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

Ricoeur, P., 1973a, Hermeneutik und strukturalismus: der konflikt der interpretationen 1, Kösel-Verlag, (S.I.).

Ricoeur, P., 1973b, 'Creativity in language: Word, polysemy, metaphor', Philosophy Today 17, 97–111.

Ricoeur, P., 1976, Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, TX.

Robbins, V.K., 1996a, The tapestry of early Christian discourse: Rhetoric, society and ideology, Routledge, London. http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203438121

Robbins, V.K., 1996b, Exploring the texture of texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, PA.

Schille, G., 1957–1958, 'Das Evangelium des Matthäus als Katechismus', New Testament Studies 4, 101–114. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500011462

Schneiders, S.M., 1982, 'The paschal imagination: Objectivity and subjectivity in New Testament interpretation', Theological Studies 43(1), 52–68. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004056398204300103

Schneiders, S.M., 2002, 'Biblical spirituality', Interpretation 56, 133–142. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002096430005600202

Schneiders, S.M., 2003, Written that you may believe. Encountering Jesus in the fourth Gospel, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY.

Smith, W.C., 1971. 'The study of religion and the study of the Bible'. Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39(2), 131–140. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XXXIX.2.131

Stendahl, K., 1968, The school of St Matthew and its use of the Old Testament, C. W. K. Gleerup, Lund.

Tate, W.R., 2011, Biblical interpretation: An integrated approach, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI.

Thiselton, A.C., 1980, The two horizons: New Testament hermeneutics and philosophical description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein, Paternoster Press, Carlisle, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Thompson, R.P., 2000, 'Community in conversation: Multiple readings of scripture and a Wesleyan understanding of the church', Wesleyan Theological Journal 35(1), 200–215.

Virkler, H.A. & Ayayo, K.G., [1981] 2007, Hermeneutics. Principles and processes of biblical interpretation, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

Vanhoozer, K.J., 1997, Is there meaning in this text?, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

Weren, W.J.C., 2014, Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary design, intertextuality, and social setting, Brill, Leiden.

Wittig, S., 1977, 'A theory of multiple meanings', Semeia 9, 75–103.

Xenophon, 1858, Memorabilia of Socrates, transl. J.S. Watson, Harper & Brothers, viewed 30 June 2015, from http://babel.hathitrust.%20org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015062083491;view=1up;seq=527