

Chapter 2

The ideological/theological perspective in Matthew's story

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this chapter is that Matthew retold the Gospel of Mark to his readers for a particular purpose and from a particular narrative point of view. To convey this perspective to his readers, Matthew associated them with the Twelve Disciples and created a correlative analogy between the post-paschal disciple-commission and the pre-paschal Jesus-commission. He employed these two 'commissions' as two 'narrative lines' in the plot of the Gospel: The disciple-commission as an imperative, based upon the Jesus-commission as the indicative. The Jesus-commission is the embodiment and concretization of the concept *God-with-us*. The disciples' obedience to the will of God (the 'law and the prophets') during the execution of their universal commission, continues these Jesus-events. Thus the risen Jesus, as *God-with-us* is present with the church until the parousia.

The disciples' commission, similar to that of Jesus, ought to concretize in conveying compassion to those in distress. However, like the Jewish leaders, the disciples are inclined to disobedience. The premise of this study is that access to the dominant perspective in Matthew's story may be gained through the way in which the evangelist as narrator constituted his text.

2.2 THE NARRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL

The 'ideological perspective' in the Gospel of Matthew is, generally speaking, the 'theological' perspective of the redactor-narrator, from which he observes, evaluates and presents the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ideological level in a narrative is basic to the other levels. The Russian Formalist, Boris Uspensky, explains this relation of the *ideological* level to the other levels in a narrative in terms of the concepts of 'surface structure' and 'depth structure', which play an important part in Structuralism. In Structuralism a distinction is made between the level of observation (the surface structure) and the level of fundamental intentions (the depth structure). When we speak of the system of ideas that shape the work, we are speaking about the deep compositional structure, as opposed to the surface compositional structure which may be traced on the psychological, spatio-temporal, or phraseological levels (cf Uspensky 1973:8). In the light of this we can label the narrator's perspective on the ideological level as the 'idea' forming the fundamental principle according to which the narrative and its narrative elements are constituted. It is these 'elements' to which reference is made by the expressions *psychology, phraseology, time* and *space*. In other words, what it amounts to is that, as already mentioned, the narrator's ideological perspective is manifested on the *phraseological, psychological, temporal* and *topographic* levels – the eventual manifestations of the narrative and its narrative elements.

The most important matter to be resolved on the *ideological* level, in our study of the narrator's perspective, is the question of whose perspective the narrator absorbs in his *ideological* evaluation and observation of the narrated world. Does the writer allow the narrator to adopt a perspective that agrees with his own, or one that agrees with the normative system of the 'narrated world', as distinct from the norms of the writer (and which are perhaps in conflict with them)? Or does the narrator take the perspective of one (or more) of the narrated characters? In the Gospel of Matthew the narrator's *ideological* perspective coincides with that of the writer, and with the perspective of the protagonist. This phenomenon in the Gospel consists in all events, characters, and the like being presented from one consistent perspective, that is from that of one character, Jesus. A character such as this in a story is sometimes called the 'viewpoint character'. The *ideological perspective* of the narrator is manifested in that which the 'viewpoint character' does, says, thinks, and so on, and in the way he acts and speaks. The *ideological perspective* of the 'viewpoint character' thus forms the dominant perspective in the story. This single dominant perspective resounds through every episode in the story, because the

perspectives from which the other characters are narrated, as well as other *phraseological, psychological, temporal* and *topographic* givens, are subordinate to it as structurally integrated elements, synthesize with it and serve as its foundation. Uspensky (1973:9) looks on this phenomenon as follows:

[I]f some other points of view should emerge, non-concurrent with the dominant one (if, for example, some facts should be judged from the point of view of one of the characters), this judgment will in turn be re-evaluated from the more dominant position, and the evaluating 'subject' (the character), together with his system of ideas, will become the 'object', evaluated from the more general viewpoint.

(Uspensky 1973:9)

As far as the Gospel of Matthew is concerned, what this amounts to is that the sometimes divergent perspectives of the characters (the Jewish leaders, the Jewish multitude and the Gentiles, John the Baptist and the disciples), should be evaluated in terms of the perspective from which the protagonist, Jesus, is narrated. This dominant perspective revolves around the concept *Emmanuel*, which occurs at the beginning (Mt 1:23), the middle (Mt 18:20) and the end (Mt 28:20).

Next we shall give an explanation of the most important features of the perspectives from which the narrator presents the *dramatis personae*. (Uspensky 1973:9)

Using the Jesus-name of *Emmanuel*, the narrator proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand – that it is temporally and spatially within the reach of man. The proclamation of God's kingdom occurs in the Gospel of Matthew primarily through the actions of Jesus and secondarily through those of the disciples, in that they are called Jesus' 'helpers'. In other words, Jesus leads the way for his disciples by the proclamation. The Jewish leaders oppose it. The proclamation concretizes in a twofold but inseparable way: On the one hand by actions (κηρύσσω, διδάσκω, θεραπεύω) and on the other by 'attitude' (τὸ πλάγχθουν, ἡ ἀγάπη). The *actions* derive a convincing soteriological power from the Son's *attitude* of radical obedience to his Father, which reaches a climax in his passion and resurrection from the dead. The 'concrete' proclamation has the purpose of announcing to all (in particular the Jewish multitude, but also the Gentiles) forgiveness from sin. And it is intended to release them from the influence of the διδασχὴ of the Jewish leaders and therefore from the temptation of Satan. In other words, the narrator's perspective is expressed by the theme of *obedience to the divine will*. This theme is embodied in the perspective from which Jesus is presented as *God-with-us*.

The perspective of *Jesus* is in contrast with that from which the *Jewish leaders* are narrated. The *disciples* function as Jesus' assumed help. The role of the *Jewish multitude* is that of the object (addressee) of the commissions of Jesus and the disciples. The crowds (all the so-called socio-religious 'outcasts' mentioned in the Gospel are hereby included) are presented from the perspective of potentially having a following. The perspective from which Jesus is narrated with regard to the *Gentiles* is parallel with that of the Jewish multitude. The role of *John the Baptist* is that of a parallel proclaimer of God's kingdom and the figure of suffering. He serves as a 'prototype' for the role of Jesus. The opposition between Jesus and the Jewish leaders is the 'physical' representation of the 'metaphysical' opposition between *God* and *Satan*.

2.3 THE NARRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE PHRASEOLOGICAL LEVEL OF THE TEXT

The investigation into the narrator's perspective on the phraseological level is concerned with the different ways that a narrative can be and is indeed presented. It is therefore the study of the perspective that the narrator expresses by means of 'diction'. Diction is the writer's exercising of choices with regard to certain modes of expression in which 'ideas' can be expressed.

2.3.1 Introduction

The study of the narrative perspective on the *phraseological* level is concerned with what Uspensky (1973:19) calls the intention of *speech characteristics*. This investigation can demonstrate different facets. There are three important matters for the purpose of our study: The distinction between a *third-person narrative* and a *first-person narrative*, *character delineation* and *redactional narrative technique*.

2.3.2 The Gospel of Matthew is a third-person narrative

We have already pointed out that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew is simultaneously the narrator of the Gospel. The phenomenon of the roles of the writer and the narrator being the same attests to the evangelist's electing to present his story from a third-person narrative angle, and not from that of a first person. The distinction between these two possibilities (first-person or third-person

narration) represents a relatively simple classification of 'phraseological' possibilities. This is widely accepted by literary theorists as a serviceable frame of reference (Abrams 1971:134).

In a first-person narrative the narrator is himself one of the characters and he speaks of himself using the personal pronoun 'I'. In a third-person narrative the narrator is someone outside the text and he refers to his characters by means of various 'names'.

In the Gospel of Matthew the third-person narrator refers to his characters by 'proper names', such as Σίμων, 'group names' (which have the same function as 'proper names') such as οἱ μαθηταί, ὁ λαός, οἱ ὄχλοι, τὰ ἔθνη, οἱ φαρισαῖοι and a large number of names and 'combinations' of names which refer to the Jewish leaders as a single 'character' with a specific role in the story, for example οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ φαρισαῖοι, οἱ φαρισαῖοι καὶ σαδδουκαῖοι, οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι. There are also names that are used as 'titles' and which serve as a powerful literary medium for character-sketching, such as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, προφήτης, ὑποκριταί, οἱ ἐλάχιστοι and οἱ ὀλιγόπιστοι.

A third-person narrator can also, using other narrative techniques, present his story in a particular way, such as from the so-called *omniscient point of view* or the *limited point of view* (cf i a Kenney 1966:49-50; Abrams 1971:134-136; Uspensky 1973:83).

The third-person narrator that adopts an 'omniscient point of view', such as the narrator of the Gospel of Matthew, freely discusses the actions and attitudes of the 'he'/'she'/'they' characters without himself or any witnesses having been present at the narrated events; he describes the characters' emotions; he knows certain things about the narrated characters that they do not know themselves; he manipulates character and mood activities (cf Deist & Burden 1980:26-27) at will; he lets the characters move through time and space according to his *ideological* perspective. When a third -person narrator adopts a 'limited point of view', he limits the 'omniscience' and 'omnipresence' with regard to what is experienced, thought or felt, to a single character or at most a small group of characters in the narrative (cf Abrams 1971:135).

Both narrative perspectives, namely the 'omniscient point of view' and the 'limited point of view', can be used in a narrative. Kenney (1956:54) refers to this phenomenon as follows:

In fact, a work of fiction that is as a whole an example of omniscient narration will usually include all or most of the other points of view as well. That is, at some point in his narrative, the omniscient narrator will simply describe externals...At another moment, the narrator will present a scene to us from the point of view of one of the characters and will therefore employ third-person limited narration.

(Kenney 1956:54)

This is indeed the case in the Gospel of Matthew. Seen in its totality, the Gospel is a third-person 'omniscient' narrative. None the less, the narrator's perspective agrees with that from which Jesus is presented. On the one hand he allows his characters to act as he wishes them to act, but at the same time he describes and evaluates their behavior from the perspective from which he presents Jesus. The remark by Petersen (1978a:109) regarding Mark's gospel in this connection is therefore also relevant for Matthew's gospel:

Jesus' voice provides an evaluative context for understanding the speech of demons...the speech and actions of the crowds...the speech and actions of the disciples...the words and deeds of the authorities...[T]he speech of all the characters, including Jesus,...is an expression of his [the narrator's] own ideological standpoint.'

(Petersen 1978a:109)

The 'all-seeing' and 'all-knowing' narrator of the Matthean gospel knows his characters; he knows about their attitudes. The narrator knows, for example, about Jesus' love and loyalty; the Jewish multitude's don't-know-what-to-think attitude; the disciples' tendency to behave as they ought not to behave; the Jewish leaders' occupation with hatching a conspiracy against Jesus. The narrator knows what his characters see and hear and say to each other. For example, he is aware that the Jewish leaders gossip among themselves and ironically accuse Jesus of 'blasphemy' (Mt 9:3) and, also ironically, in their minds find in him a *σκάνδαλον* (Mt 15:12).

Uspensky (1973:97-98) points out that a particular character, as a 'carrier', can act from the narrator's omniscient perspective, as he can from the narrator's ideological perspective. In the Gospel of Matthew the protagonist, Jesus, is a character that has an omniscient perspective, as the narrator has. Sometimes Jesus is described 'externally' from the omniscient perspective of the narrator (cf i a Mt 9:36). At other times the narrator identifies himself to such an extent with the omniscient perspective of Jesus that it is impossible to distinguish between his own perspective and that of Jesus. While the narrator, for example, describes Satan's

temptation of Jesus (Mt 4:1-11), when there were no witnesses present other than Jesus himself, he lets Jesus act from a conscious position of power, being *God-with-us*. Satan's temptation should thus be seen as *ironic*: Later Jesus is going to make *bread* in a miraculous way in obedience to the will of the Father (cf Mt 4:3-4 with Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39); he will be successfully confronting the *temple*, because he 'is more than the temple' (cf Mt 4:5-7 with Mt 12:6; 21:12; 24:2; 27:51); he will repeatedly declare his authority from a *mountain* (cf Mt 4:8-10 with Mt 5:1; 17:1; 24:3) until, eventually, on a *mountain* in Galilee, he will announce that 'all power in heaven and earth' belongs to him (Mt 28:16-18). In the one other episode where Jesus and the narrator alone are present, namely the prayer at Gethsemane (Mt 26:39-46), one also encounters the omniscient point of view of the narrator combined with that of Jesus. The narrator has access to the privacy of Jesus' prayer, a prayer that particularly strongly stresses the full pre-knowledge with which Jesus accepts the cross as the will of the Father. He therefore knows the contents of the 'cup' that he must drink (Mt 27:39; cf Mt 20:22; 26:27). Jesus' omniscient perspective in the Passion narrative functions particularly to contrast his total obedience (the basic point of the *Emmanuel* concept) effectively with the Jewish leaders' plot against him and the disciples' inclination to opposition. This 'opposition' has already been mentioned in the first sixteen verses of the Passion narrative (Mt 26:1-28:20 – cf Senior 1972:355-356), the disciples' protest at Jesus' anointment by the woman in Bethany, foreshadowing his burial (Mt 26:8), and the dealings of Judas, one of the Twelve, with the Jewish leaders regarding payment for the betrayal (Mt 26:14-16). Jesus has prior knowledge of his burial (Mt 26:12) and of Judas' betrayal (Mt 26:21), just as he anticipates the negative behavior of the disciples in general (cf Mt 26:31 with 26:56) and Peter in particular (cf Mt 26:34 with 26:69-75) at the trial and crucifixion. Judas, for example, looks for the εὐκαιρία to betray Jesus (Mt 26:16); in reality it is Jesus who is deliberately seeking the 'perfect opportunity'. In Matthew 26:18 he tells Jerusalem, through his disciples: ὁ καιρὸς μου ἔγγυς ἐστίν; in Matthew 26:45-46 he tells the sleeping disciples: ἰδοὺ ἤγγικεν ἡ ὥρα...ἰδοὺ ἤγγικεν ὁ παραδιδούς με.

In the Gospel of Matthew the phenomenon that the third-person narrator's omniscient perspective often coincides with that of Jesus contributes to the structural and inherent unity of the plot of the Gospel. Thus there are many correlating thematic cross-references, previews and flashbacks (cf D L Barr 1976:354-355). Since Jesus knows ahead what awaits him in Jerusalem, the different announcements of the coming Passion link the episodes together, and this promotes the critical development and unity of the plot, creating tense expectation. The following correlating themes and key expressions link, for example, the first micro

narrative (Mt 1:1-4:22) in the Gospel of Matthew with the last (Mt 26:1-28:20): The 'forgiveness of sins' (Mt 1:21; 26:28; cf also Mt 9:6), the 'making disciples of men' (Mt 4:8-9; 28:19), the 'return to Galilee' (Mt 4:12, 15; 28:10, 16), the 'Son of God' title (Mt 1:23; 3:17; 27:54), the 'obedience' motif (Mt 3:15; 4:1-11; 26:39; cf also Mt 4:20; 28:10, 16-17) and the *God-with-us* motif (Mt 1:23; 28:20; cf Mt 18:20). In the course of the study we shall show that the analogy created by the narrator between the pre-paschal Jesus-commission and the post-paschal disciple-commission, based on the *God-with-us* theme, is effectively supported by correlating thematics such as the above.

The narrator's omniscient perspective and that of Jesus thus cover more than the mere 'earthly' period from birth to ascension. The only aspect of which the narrator and his characters – including Jesus – have no knowledge is the time of the parousia (Mt 24:36). This limitation in the perspective of the narrator and that from which the characters are narrated, functions effectively to continue the line of tension in the plot of Matthew until the dénouement is reached at the *συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος* (Mt 28:20).

2.3.3 Character delineation in the Gospel of Matthew

The objective of character development in narrative material is aimed at the role that the writer/narrator allows a certain character in the plot of the narrative to play. In other words, the study is concerned with the *motivation* behind the actions (what s/he says and does) and the attitude of the character (cf Abrams 1971:21). 'Any discussion of character in fiction, then, must attend to the relationship between character and the other elements of the story, and between character and the story as a whole. That is, character must be considered as part of the story's internal structure...' (Kenney 1966:26).

The narrator's ideological perspective manifests itself mainly against the background of the perspectives that the characters represent through dialogue, monologue, behavior and attitude. In other words, the exegete observes the perspective of the narrator, mainly by analyzing the different perspectives from which the respective characters are narrated. The perspective of the narrator is thus put into focus by the way in which the perspectives of the different characters function in relation to one another.

The functional role of a character in a narrative, therefore, is determined by the reciprocal relationship (one character determines the functional role of another) in which a particular character stands towards the others in a story. The following reciprocal relationships between the main characters occur in the Gospel of

Matthew: Jesus ↔ Jewish multitude and Gentiles, Jesus ↔ disciples, Jesus ↔ John the Baptist, Jesus ↔ Jewish leaders, Jewish leaders ↔ Jewish multitude and Gentiles, Jewish leaders ↔ John the Baptist, Jewish leaders ↔ disciples, disciples ↔ Jewish multitude and Gentiles, God the Father ↔ Satan, God the Father ↔ Son of God (Jesus), Satan ↔ Jewish leaders, Jesus ↔ Satan.

In a narrative there are only two basic types of character, namely a 'simple' character and a 'complex' character. Through the entire narrative the former embodies an unambiguous perspective and the latter not. 'If the mark of the simple character is that he can be summed up adequately in a formula, the mark of the complex character is that he is capable of surprising us...he is capable at least of some hesitation, self-doubt, internal division, and therefore tends towards complexity' (Kenney 1966:29-30). In the Gospel of Matthew the protagonist and the antagonist are 'simple' characters, while the disciples, the Jewish multitude and the Gentiles are 'complex'.

Jesus is the embodiment of the behavior and attitude that is characterized by absolute obedience to the will of the Father in heaven. And, since the 'fulfillment' of the will of the Father (= the 'law and the prophets') is compassion, Jesus' δικαιοσύνη is manifested, inter alia, in his didactic approach to (e.g. Mt 5-7) and healing activities among (e.g. Mt 8-9) the Jewish multitude in particular, as well as the Gentiles, driven by the motivation of love. This same δικαιοσύνη is expected of the disciples. And it is a δικαιοσύνη that testifies to something 'more' than the δικαιοσύνη of the Jewish leaders (cf Mt 5:20). The Jewish leaders' δικαιοσύνη is of a formalistic nature and lacks the deep-seated attitude of love towards the multitude and the Gentiles. The Jewish leaders are 'two-faced' (ὑποκριταί) 'murderers' (φονεῖς) of the prophets', 'Satan's henchmen' (πονηροί). The perspective from which the Jewish leaders are narrated thus stands, from the beginning, in constant and unambiguous contrast with that from which Jesus is presented. Both the disciples and the Jewish multitude (inter alia Mt 15:10) are warned against the influence of the Jewish leaders. Nevertheless, Jesus referred to the disciples using the names that he called the Jewish leaders, for example ὑποκριταί (cf i.a. Mt 23:13, 15, 23 with 7:5). This expresses the 'complexity' of the image of the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew. The Jewish multitude is, like the disciples, a 'complex' character, since its response with regard to the love of Jesus (the act of forgiveness of sin – cf Mt 1:21) is not predictably unambiguous. More often they (the multitude) act as 'potential followers' of Jesus (inter alia Mt 13:13). At times their decision is 'positive' (inter alia Mt 15:31; 21:9), but at others 'negative' (inter alia Mt 13:33-38). Eventually they cry: 'Crucify him!...Let his blood be on us and on our

children!' (Mt 27:23, 25). The role of the *Gentiles* is less complex. Their approach with regard to Jesus is positively unambiguous: At the beginning of the Gospel they are present in the persons of the μάγοι to pay homage to the 'King of the Jews' (Mt 2:1-12); at the end of the Gospel the Gentile officer and the soldiers called Jesus by the title given him from heaven (Mt 3:17; 17:5), and which was used otherwise only by the disciples (Mt 14:33; 16:16) and (blasphemously) by Satan (Mt 4:1-11), the Jewish leaders (Mt 27:43) and the Jewish multitude (Mt 27:39) saying 'This man was truly the Son of God' (Mt 27:54). On the other hand, the commission of Jesus and the disciples with regard to the Gentiles is of such a nature that considerable stress is placed on the fact that the commission to the Gentiles does not exclude the Jewish multitude. On the contrary!

One of the striking features of the Gospel of Matthew is that the Jewish leaders and other opponents of Jesus never refer to him by the title of Κύριος, as the disciples do. The opponents address Jesus as Διδάσκαλε (inter alia Mt 19:16) or 'Ραββί (inter alia Mt 26:49). This gives rise to the question of the functionality of the christological names that are used in the Gospel of Matthew as 'titles', such as 'Son of David', 'Son of God', 'Son of man', 'King of the Jews', and 'Kurios'/'Lord'. This character delineation by *name* is so important to the purpose of our study that we shall now discuss some of the names.