

Chapter 6

The Jewish crowd and the Gentiles

Although the Jewish crowd (οἱ ὄχλοι/ὁ ὄχλος) and the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) do not apparently fulfill the same character roles in the Gospel of Matthew, both groups function together as the target of the mission of Jesus and that of the disciples in the post-paschal period, as the continuation of the risen Jesus' position as *God-with-us*.

The relationship between the functions of the Jewish crowd and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew is related to one of the most difficult exegetical questions to explain in the Gospel of Matthew. This is the problem of the relationship between the *Jewish-particularistic trend* (cf Mt 10:5-6) and the so-called *Gentile-universalistic trend* (cf Mt 28:19). Many Matthean scholars, such as Walker (1967:114f), Hare (1967:157; 1975:359-369), Trilling (1974:95-96), Green (1975:21-22), Clark (1980:1) and Luz (1982b:1-2) are of the opinion that there is a discontinuity between the Jewish crowd as the object of the Jesus-commission on the pre-paschal temporal level and the Gentiles as the object of the disciple-commission on the post-paschal level. According to this view the Gentiles replaced the Jewish crowd as the object of the mission when the latter, together with the Jewish leaders, rejected Jesus at the crucifixion. The above scholars are of the opinion that such a 'discontinuity' viewpoint offers the best explanation for the so-called change in trend from Jewish particularism to Gentile universalism.

According to Luz (1982b:2) two other exegetical problems are also solved with the aid of the 'discontinuity' viewpoint. It is this so-called eschatological viewpoint between the 'judgment discourse' (Mt 23:1-24:2) and the 'parousia discourse' (Mt 24:3-25:46), as well as the oppositional placing alongside each other of the pericope about the Jewish leaders' casting doubt on the resurrection (Mt 28:11-15) and the pericope about the mission to the Gentiles (Mt 28:16-20).

Although a scholar such as Luz (1982b:2) supports the 'discontinuity' viewpoint, and regards the Gentile mission as the 'central theme' in Matthew's theology, he points out that this viewpoint does not offer a satisfactory solution for

the problem of interpreting a key text such as Matthew 10:23 – ‘When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of man comes’. Luz acknowledges the possibility that the disciple-commission in Matthew 10 can function as a sort of *transparency* reflecting the post-paschal disciple-commission. This possibility is, I think, more acceptable than the view that the disciple-commission in chapter 10 is ‘historical’, in the sense of an account of the pre-paschal particularistic commission, as distinct from the post-paschal universalistic mission in Matthew 28:16-20. My viewpoint links up with what Beare and Weren respectively have said about Matthew 10 and Matthew 28:16-20: ‘...the charge as it lies before us, especially as it is found in Matthew, is...a construction...of the evangelist...it is the gospel writer who has arranged them as seemed good to him, fitting them into a pattern of his own designing...’ (Beare 1970:2). And, according to Weren (1979:106-107): ‘This commission forms the pendant of the mission of Jesus’ twelve disciples to the lost sheep of Israel in Matthew 10:6’ (my translation).

No convincing argument, whether semantic or contextual, can be advanced that the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matthew 28:19 had reference to Gentiles only. And this includes Hare & Harrington’s (1957:359-396) arguments. If it can be shown, and this is a real possibility (see i a Grundmann 1968:577-578; Schmid 1969:269-273; Schniewind 1968:250-254; Wilckens 1975:363-372, 382-383; Meier 1977:94-102; Weren 1979:106-112), that this expression intentionally applies to both non-Jew and Jew, the ‘discontinuity’ viewpoint collapses entirely. Even someone like Frankemölle (1974:109) – who considers that Matthew, despite his particularistic inclination, in comparison with the other Synoptic writers, placed the greatest stress on Jesus’ work among the Gentiles – has the following to say in relation to the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη: With this expression all are meant, not only the Gentiles, but a world wide mission. This meaning is in line with Matthew’s use of the terms γῆς and κόσμος (Mt 5:13 - the disciples as φῶς τοῦ κόσμου and ἄλας τῆς γῆς; cf also Mt 26:13 - the preaching of the gospel ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ...).

Weren (1979:106-112) rightly points out that Matthew 28:16-20 is colored by the final eschatological time barrier. The disciple-commission to the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη continues until the συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος. The theme of end-eschatology is also in the foreground in other contexts in the Gospel of Matthew where the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη occurs, for example in Matthew 24:9 (cf v 13 where the term τὸ τέλος is used) and Matthew 24:14. The large concentration of occurrences of the word πᾶς in Matthew 28:16-20 (vv 18, 19, 20) makes the presence of any connotation of ‘limitation’ in this commission pericope unlikely. Also Weren (1979:107) stresses this point when he says that, seen in this context, one can hardly

state that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is subject to limitations. In Matthew 24:14 we also find an universal orientation: The preaching of the kingdom should take shape ἐν ὅλη τῇ οἰκουμένῃ. It is obvious that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is in both cases an universalistic category. Matthew therefore presumes that, at the end of the world, all people would have been confronted with the preaching of the gospel. As such, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη has a specific content: It is an universal category that has bearing on the evangelized mankind.

A researcher such as Minear (1974a:39-40), in contrast with the 'discontinuity' viewpoint, considers that in the Gospel of Matthew there is no abortive ending or replacement of the Jewish crowd as the object of the mission. According to him there are two possibilities in this respect: The Jewish crowd generally includes the Gentiles as a group during the pre-paschal period, or the mission to the Jewish crowd is the anticipation of the mission to the Gentiles during the post-paschal period. In this respect one would not speak of 'discontinuity' but rather of 'continuity', since the nature and the problems of the mission to the Jewish crowd during the pre-paschal period are carried over to the Gentile mission in the post-paschal period. My own view agrees with that of Minear, that the construction of the report on the mission to the Jewish crowd on the pre-paschal level fulfills the function of a type of *transparency*, which relates to the disciple-commission during the post-paschal period. I however differ from him when he sees the Jewish crowd either as a group that includes the Gentiles or as a group that anticipates the Gentiles.

As far as the first alternative is concerned, a passage such as Matthew 15:21-28 is adequate indication that Matthew made a thorough distinction between the character roles of the Jewish crowd and the Gentiles. As far as the second alternative is concerned, there is no reason to accept, as such scholars as Schyler Brown (1980:213-216) have, that the Gentile mission could only have happened after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The Jesus-commission could have had relevance for individuals among the Gentiles, apart from the Jewish crowd. This does not of course mean that the mission to the Gentiles did not intensify after the resurrection. Quite the contrary!

My viewpoint is that the situation to which the Gospel of Matthew would have related – however difficult to construct, and however deficient the details – is determined by the premise that the split between the Jewish συναγωγή and the Christian ἐκκλησία has already become a threatening experience:

[T]he Gospel of Matthew, in particular, mirrors a situation where ἀποσυνάγωγος has not been accomplished yet. On the contrary, there are indications that the author of the Gospel of Matthew experienced the separation with disappointment. Judaism still wields authority over the Jewish Christians and Matthew would prefer to avoid the final rupture with Judaism.

(Van Aarde 1989:225)

In such a situation a question like the mission to the Gentiles was no longer a bone of contention (as Brown 1980:217-219, inter alia, claims), but commonplace and hypothetical. The problem in a situation such as this was the danger that the poor, destitute ostracized people, Jews and also non-Jews, would be neglected and ignored by the 'church leaders' – one sheep among the ninety-nine others (cf Mt 18:12-14). This state of affairs should largely be ascribed to the split between the Jewish synagogue and the Christian ἐκκλησία (cf also Van Aarde 1990). This schism apparently contributed to the unforgiving and loveless attitude prevailing in the community towards the Jewish crowd and their forefathers (cf Mt 27:25), who had blasphemously rejected Jesus. At the same time Matthew stresses the positive role of the Gentiles in his narrative (Mt 2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 27:1-19; 27:54), because through it he paints the background against which his narrative should be read: Just as Jesus, in his mission in *Galilee of the Gentiles* (cf Mt 4:15), cared for the Jewish crowd without excluding the Gentiles; in just the same way the disciples should not neglect the destitute Jewish crowd in the routine of their mission to the Gentiles.

In the Gospel of Matthew these 'destitute folk' are depicted by, among other things, names such as οἱ ἐλάχιστοι (i a Mt 25:40, 45) and οἱ μικροί (inter alia Mt 18:14), πρόβατον (inter alia Mt 18:12), τὰ παιδιά (inter alia Mt 18:3) and τὰ τέκνα (inter alia Mt 15:26; cf Wilckens 1975:379-380).

Matthew associates the group to which the above names refer with the Jewish crowd (cf e g Mt 10:36; 15:26). The relationship between the earthly Jesus (and his disciples) and the οἱ ὄχλοι/ὁ λαός thus serves Matthew as a sort of *transparency* for the relationship between the disciples and the post-paschal situation with the 'destitute church folk'. This transparency or analogy is based on Jesus' position as *God-with-us*. Matthey formulates it as follows:

'I am with you.' According to Matthew, if Jesus of Nazareth is still present in his time, then it is with his disciples, when they baptize people in the name of God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and when they teach the commandments as contained in the Old Testament and

in Matthew's Gospel...Only by keeping these texts (chapters 10, 18, 24-25, 28:16-20 – A G v A) together do we have the full Matthean view of mission.

(Matthey 1980:172f)

The idea of a *transparency* with which we portray Matthew's ideological/theological perspective – his transposing of the commission of the earthly Jesus as *God-with-us* to the disciple-commission during the post-paschal period – is supported when one takes note of the use of the term ὁ λαός in the Gospel of Matthew. The evangelist used the terms ὁ λαός and οἱ ὄχλοι as synonyms, while the term ὁ λαός relates to the object of the Jesus- and the disciple-commission during both the pre-paschal and post-paschal periods. Frankemölle (1974:193) - unlike Strathmann (1942:49-55), Hummel (1966:136) and Trilling (1964:61) - points out that the referential meaning of the term ὁ λαός, against the background of the fact that Matthew relates the gospel of the 'earthly' Jesus to his readers from the post-paschal situation, is not used by the evangelist in a one-dimensional manner: Here one should listen for refined nuances and shades of meaning brought about by redactional intervention in the text. This is also true in regard to the term λαός in Matthew, which is not so monolithically monotonous as it seems at first.

Without concurring with the details of Frankemölle's arguments, in principle I share his opinion that there is a 'transformation' (Frankemölle's terminology [1974:218]) in the use of the term ὁ λαός in the Gospel of Matthew. On the one hand, I feel that it indicates a socio-political grouping (with religious connotation), the Jewish יְהוּדִים אֶרֶץ (*am ha'arez* = 'the people of the land'), during the pre-paschal period and, on the other, it indicates a socio-religious grouping within the context of the Christian ἐκκλησία (Matthew's community) during the post-paschal period. The term οἱ ὄχλοι (the 'multitude') emphasizes the subordinate and dependent sociological position of the ὁ λαός compared with the position of the Jewish leaders on the pre-paschal level. The names τὰ τέκνα, τὰ παιδιά, οἱ μικροί and οἱ ἐλάχιστοι are conceptual words that metaphorically refer to the subordinate and dependent position of the ὁ λαός, on both the pre-paschal and post-paschal temporal levels. As far as the latter temporal 'level' is concerned, this concerns the position of the 'underprivileged' compared to that of the disciples ('church leaders?').

The correlation of the metaphor πρόβατον in Matthew 9:36 and 18:12 with the expressions τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ (= 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel') (Mt 10:6) and τὰ παιδιά (Mt 18:3-5) respectively, as well as with οἱ μικροί (Mt 18:6, 10, 14; cf Mt 10:42), supports the *transparency* idea. Where the perspective of the Jewish leaders with regard to the οἱ ὄχλοι on the pre-paschal

temporal level is expressed by such phrases as πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα (= 'sheep without a shepherd' – Mt 10:36), there are, by way of contrast, the terms ἀδελφοί (Mt 18:15, 21, 35) and συνδουλοί (Mt 18:28, 31, 33; cf also Mt 10:24-25), portraying the disciples' ('community leaders?') probable relationship with the τὰ τέκνα/τὰ παιδία/οἱ μικροί/οἱ ἐλάχιστοι on the post-paschal level.

The use of the names τὰ τέκνα, τὰ παιδία, οἱ μικροί, οἱ ἐλάχιστοι and τὰ πρόβατα depicts the care and love of Jesus, as *God-with-us*, for the 'underprivileged'. At the same time the Jewish leaders' neglect of the 'underprivileged' is expressed by these names. Minear (1974a:32) put it as follows: 'The basic conflict between Jesus and his adversaries [the Jewish leaders – A G v A] issued from this concern of God for...his flock'. Van Unnik (1959:284) has shown that, in the Old Testament, the concept of *God-with-us* already related to God's concern for the 'underprivileged'. Where the term οἱ ὄχλοι occurs in the Gospel of Matthew, the context is colored by Jesus' loving concern for them. Minear refers in this context to John the Baptist's question as to whether Jesus is the Christ (Mt 12:2-5):

When John asks the messianic question, Jesus' answer is to point to these very 'ochloi', composed of the blind, lame, leprous, deaf and poor (11:1f). The inclusion of the last adjective, 'the poor', indicates that 'ochloi' was not defined solely by medical terms. Jesus' mission, though inclusive of healing, was not limited to the care of physical disabilities. In Matthew...the healing ministry is closely linked to the feeding ministry, and in both cases the motivation is Jesus' concern for the 'ochloi'...Because of the strongly theological...cast of the language, the exegete must construe both the sicknesses and the hungers as inclusive of religious components...Every detail in these stories (Mt 14:14; 15:30) has symbolic overtones.

(Minear 1974a:31)

In the so-called 'judgment' and 'parousia' discourse in chapters 23-25 we find a clear indication that the announcements of judgment on the Jewish leaders (Mt 23:1-24:2) and the judgment of the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (the evangelized mankind, according to Weren 1979:107) at the parousia (Mt 24:3-25:46) are transposed to a situation that relates to the relationship of the disciples with the 'underprivileged'. According to Minear:

It is highly significant that even the woes against the scribes and the lament over Jerusalem are placed by Jesus in the context of teachings addressed simultaneously to the crowds and the disciples. By this device Matthew is surely warning the 'mathetai'...against multiple forms of hypocrisy...These who default...become hypocrites (an epithet linking them to the Pharisees; cf 24:51 and 23:1f)...(T)he fate of the 'mathetai' is determined by their treatment of the least of Jesus' brethren, the 'ochloi' (cf 25:31-46).

(Minear 1974a:36-37)

The proper relationship between Jesus and the 'underprivileged' is reflected in the names ἀδελφοί and συνδουλοί (cf i a Mt 12:46-50; 18:15-20, 21-35; 24:49; 25:40). When, with regard to the above-mentioned relationships, the disciples do not comply with expectations, they are depicted by a name such as δούλος πονήρος (i a Mt 18:32; 25:36).

In contrast with the perspective from which the Jewish leaders are depicted with regard to the 'underprivileged', namely that of loveless disregard, the disciples are called upon to 'continue' Jesus' *God-with-us* mission. Minear and Van Unnik, respectively, refer as follows to this 'continuing' mission:

[J]esus' instructions of the 'mathetai' in the field of healing and feeding are designed to qualify them to take over his own work vis-à-vis these 'ochloi' after his death...They are those chosen and trained as successors to Jesus in his role as exorcist, healer, prophet and teacher.

(Minear 1974a:31)

Jesus, the Messiah...is the IMMANUEL and does his work of salvation; His followers...stand in the line of prophets...of the old Israel, obedient to God's will...The promise to the disciples in Matt 28:20 gets its full force in this perspective: after having set that enormous task (v 19), Jesus who has now all authority comforts His weak followers...and assures them of His powerful assistance...That is the surprising declaration at the moment of departure. Matthew returns at the end to the beginning: Jesus was (1:23) and is 'Immanuel' (28:20)....

(Van Unnik 1959:293, 297)