

Chapter 10

Summary

I summarize the results of my study by repeating the following remarks by Norman Petersen on a narrative point of view analysis:

The starting point of literary criticism...is 'to accept the form of the work'...(O)ur Gospels...have a narrative form...and an imaginative world into which one can enter. How? By participating in the form of the work...A literary reading of a narrative text...begins at the moment when we allow ourselves to be addressed by its textually immanent narrator. That is the first step. All others follow from it...the narrator lures the reader into...times and places by perspectively locating himself and the reader in the midst of the scenes and events he describes, enabling the reader to see, hear, and know things he would not have access to without the narrator's guiding voice. Through this device which literary critics call narrative point of view, the reader becomes a participant in the narrative form....

(Petersen 1980a:36-38)

This investigation should be seen against the background of its twofold objective. It is intended on the one hand as a *methodological*, and on the other as a *theological* experiment.

The term 'theology' has been used in the context of the study with a particular connotation, which is not usually associated with this term. I have proceeded from the assumption that Matthew (and probably his readers) consulted Mark's gospel about Jesus Christ. Matthew retold this Gospel to his readers in a creative way. In other words he told it again from a particular perspective. The purpose was probably to communicate this perspective to his readers. In this communication Matthew spoke about God's actions in the person and dealings of

Jesus Christ. And in this sense Matthew's communication is 'theology'. I have thus used the words 'theological perspective' to convey the *idea* that Matthew wanted to communicate to his readers regarding Jesus Christ. And when I use the expression 'the theological perspective', I consider that there is a fundamental (basic) nucleus upon which this idea is based.

At the beginning of my investigation I said that the dominant theological perspective of the Gospel of Matthew is the *God-with-us* theme. I did not mean that every speech and incident in the Gospel would directly and explicitly spell out or highlight this theme. My thesis is that the idea that Matthew wanted to communicate was based by him in the *God-with-us* theme.

How did I arrive at this thesis, since nowhere in his Gospel does Matthew say that the *God-with-us* theme is the dominant theme of his theology? This question is a methodological matter. From the many other interpretative models that have been applied in Matthean research in the past and present, I have selected a particular exegetical method. The literary critics call this method the *narrative point of view* analysis. The reasons for choosing this method are particularly determined by the narrative form of the Gospel of Matthew, and other epistemological and teleological dimensions. Has my methodological experiment been successful? The answer to this question is related to an assumption that in my view is of great importance in any literary study – as in literary studies of biblical texts designed to serve theology in general. This assumption is that it is essential for *genre identification* to be done at the outset.

A very important point of departure in my investigation has therefore been the conviction that the key to Matthew's theology is to be found in the nature of the genre 'gospel'. By the term 'genre' we broadly understand the 'poetics' of a text, that is the manner in which the text has been 'put together'.

The genre 'gospel' is *narrative*. The gospel form complies with the following accepted description of what 'narrative' is: 'somebody tells something to somebody about something which is worthwhile telling' (Polanyi, in Vorster 1982c:1). This implies that the Gospel of Matthew as narrative has its own closed narrated world. In a certain sense the 'narrated world' of a narrative text comprises the *message* that the *writer* as the sender communicates to a *reader* as the receiver, by means of a *narrator*.

The narrative communication, therefore, contains at least four basic perspectives: The *writer* who compiles the story, the *narrator* who narrates the story, the *reader* who receives the story, and the *characters* who take part in the story. The analytical process in the exegesis of a narrative discourse as a communication record should thus be directed toward the unraveling of the following interrelations:

- 1 narrative discourse ↔ real reader;
- 2 real reader ↔ implied writer;
- 3 implied writer ↔ implied reader/listener;
- 4 implied writer ↔ narrator;
- 5 narrator ↔ narratee;
- 6 narrator ↔ narrated characters;
- 7 narrated characters in reciprocal dealings who move within a specific structure of time and space.

Number 1 refers to the communication between the real writer and the intended real reader/listener. These are the people whose social context is imagined in the narrative discourse and which the exegete should be able to construe as far as possible to be able to interpret the text meaningfully as an act of communication. The exegete is of course also a real reader, but the nature of his/her concern with and influence on the reception of the narrative discourse is closely connected with his/her construction of the imagined social context of the real writer and the real reader/listener. This construction depends, among other things, on a knowledge of other texts, of social and cultural norms and of the socio-cultural context. The more the construction is done in terms of a designed social-scientific model, the better. Numbers 3-7 involve the intratextual narrative arrangement and strategy. This study has focussed on the narrative poetics and strategy of the Gospel of Matthew and not on its social context.

Access to Matthew's strategy of communication is bound up in the relation between narrator and reader. Both narrator and reader are literary devices. And if the narrator does not specifically indicate his reader, as in the case of the Gospel of Matthew, we speak of the 'implied reader' (cf Petersen 1980a:37f). Matthew, as the writer, is himself the (third-person) narrator of his Gospel. His 'implied reader' is what Via (1980:209f) calls the *disciple-reader*. The investigation into the manner in which the narrator presents himself and his narrated world to his reader (his narrative strategy) enables us to identify the idea (theology) that Matthew wanted to convey to his reader. It is only through intrinsic direction-indicators, which the writer-narrator of the Gospel of Matthew himself inserts, that we can recognize this 'idea'.

I have methodologically followed these indicators in the Gospel of Matthew by listening to the narrator as he speaks to his reader at different 'levels'. In studying these 'levels' that we have investigated, in the footsteps of Uspensky (1973) and Petersen (1978b), reference has been made to the *ideological*, the *phraseological*, *temporal* and *topographic* levels. These 'levels' have certainly, as Uspensky (1973:7)

says himself, been selected arbitrarily – indeed, there could be more or even other categories affording access to the narrator and his world of characters that he has allowed to move in time and space. The methodological usefulness of narrative point of view analysis has been considerably increased by its systematic and logical steps (level by level). Investigations into the various ‘levels’ in the text can also serve as reciprocal controls.

As far as this study is concerned, attention has been given to the *dramatis personae*. In the Gospel as a whole the following characters have contributed to the constitution of the plot: Jesus (the protagonist), John the Baptist (the ‘prototype’ of the protagonist), the Jewish leaders (the antagonists), the Jewish crowd and the Gentiles (to whom the mission is addressed) and the disciples (the protagonist’s assumed helpers). I have seen that the Gospel has the striking and unambiguous consistent characteristic that Jesus is the vehicle of the narrator’s *ideological* point of view. The manner in which the narrator names the characters, and the role fulfilled by an ‘omniscient’ and ‘omnipresent’ narrator and protagonist in the Gospel, enables us to identify the ‘theology’ of the Gospel of Matthew and its dominant point of view. A special contribution has been made by the investigation of the two correlating-analogical ‘narrative lines’ (sequences) within which the narrator lets his characters move in particular temporal and spatial frames.

With what result? The answer will also be the answer to the question of whether narrative point of view analysis, as a method of exegesis for the gospels, is successful or not.

The plot of the Gospel of Matthew is, as indicated, characterized by two ‘lines of actions’, or ‘narrative lines’: That of the pre-paschal Jesus-commission (the primary sequence) and that of the post-paschal disciple-commission (the secondary sequence). The dominant point of view in the theology of the Gospel of Matthew is that from which the narrator convincingly accomplishes the analogy and association between the events of these two ‘lines of action’. This is the *God-with-us* theme. The implied ‘disciple-reader’ is associated with the role of the disciples by means of the analogy created between the pre-paschal Jesus-commission and the post-paschal disciple-commission. At the same time the *God-with-us* theme functions as the basis on which the narrator addresses the reader with authority. As a result the ‘disciple-reader’ feels that s/he is being addressed with such authority that s/he can hardly do other than become involved in the narrative. This ‘communication event’ is called *Einverständniss* or *Eindringlichkeit* in the new hermeneutics (cf the parable research by Linnemann 1975:35).

The *God-with-us* theme, in other words, functions as a type of 'verbal authority'. It links the Great Commission to the will of the Father in heaven (the law and the prophets) (cf Boers 1980:224). In this theme, the 'angel' announces Jesus' mission with a 'prophetic word' (Mt 1:21-23). Jesus links the disciple-commission to this theme (Mt 28:16-20). The mutual relationship between the ἀδελφοί in the Matthean community is also linked to it (Mt 18:19-20). The *God-with-us* theme thus functions as the basis of the 'theology' of the Gospel of Matthew, because both 'lines of action' in the plot of the Gospel are linked to it.

In the events of both 'lines of action' the disciples have a mission that comprises an instruction to teach (Mt 10:6-8; 13:52; 16:19; 23:34; 28:19-20). The content of this commission is the 'law and the prophets' (the 'will of God'), as interpreted and embodied by Jesus (cf i a Mt 28:20a). In both 'lines of action' the disciples have an inclination to deny their commission. This can be seen in, among other things, the phenomenon that their 'helper' function on the pre-paschal level as well as the post-paschal level is cast in the imperative in terms of various expressions (cf especially the so-called 'indirect discourses'). This imperative is based on the indicative of the pre-paschal Jesus-commission as *God-with-us*. The presence of the risen Jesus as *God-with-us* is conditionally bound to the obedience of the disciples, in the execution of their teaching commission (Mt 28:20), in *doing the will of the Father* (Mt 18:20). The 'disciple-reader' is drawn into the 'narrated world' of the Gospel of Matthew by means of association. S/he is challenged to take the right decisions.

Certain facets from the narrated world can be briefly summarized as follows: *The God-with-us theme is linked to the theme of obedience.* As far as the mission of Jesus as the 'Son of God' is concerned, it is in the indicative. As far as the mission of the disciples as 'sons of God' is concerned, it is an imperative. The indicative of the Jesus-commission is that, in the execution of his mission, he interpreted the will of God absolutely obediently and did it. This obedience is set off against the background of the opposition of Satan and his puppets, the Jewish leaders who represent the opposite position. This opposition reaches a climax when Jesus is crucified; but obedience also reaches its climax at this point. Jesus' resurrection from the dead began a new mission – that of the disciples. The ongoing antithetic role of the Jewish leaders during and against the post-paschal disciple-commission (cf Mt 5:12; 10:17; 23:34-36) brings out what it involves to give execution to the imperative to be obedient to the will of God.

The nature of the Jesus-commission is mentioned by the announcement of its beginning (Mt 1:21-23), namely the *forgiveness of the sins* of the λαός. The λαός (the Jewish multitude) are clearly distinguished from the 'leaders of the nation' (cf Mt

21:23; 26:46). At the crucifixion Jesus' obedience to this mission is carried to a climax. Here we find that the λαός, together with their leaders (πᾶς ὁ λαός – Mt 27:25), reject Jesus. The suggestion is undeniably that Jesus executes his act of obedience in forgiving the sins of the λαός here as well (cf Mt 12:31-32 with 27:20, 39). Matthew 1:21-23 cannot be read separately from Matthew 27:20, 25 and 39. The nature of the Jesus-commission is conveyed by the narrator to the post-paschal disciple-commission. This is particularly clear when one notices that the forgiveness theme is repeatedly raised as something that the disciples must display (cf Mt 18:10-35).

The mission of Jesus to the λαός concretizes in various ways. This can be summarized in the expression 'help to the socio-religious ostracized'. The 'need' of the λαός does not superficially comprise 'sin' (ἁμαρτία) – that is, 'wrongdoing in general' (cf Louw 1976:30) in the sense of transgressing the obligations of the law and temple purity regulations, but basically also the physical needs of hunger, thirst and sickness, or the psychological needs of possession by the devil, lack of a shepherd, 'blindness' and the religious need of standing before a closed door to the kingdom of God (Mt 23:13). The fact that the narrator handles even the τελῶναι and the πόρνοι as part of the λαός (i a Mt 21:32), indicates that, to him, 'need' does not only imply material need. Without reducing his demand for them to give aid to the 'materially disadvantaged', it is noteworthy that the narrator often 'spiritualizes' concepts such as 'poverty' and 'hunger' (cf Mt 5:3, 6). Even the feeding of the five thousand (Mt 14:13-21) and the four thousand (Mt 15:32-39) are related by the narrator to obedience (or otherwise) to the 'law and the prophets' (see Mt 16:11). The theme of healing often consists of 'driving out devils' in which the influence of Satan and his henchmen, and Jesus' victory over them, are portrayed (cf Mt 12:22-30; cf also Mt 12:38-42 with 12:43-45). The concrete forms that 'help to the underprivileged' take in the Gospel of Matthew must therefore often be labelled as symbolic and of an allegorical nature. But this does not mean that the symbolical universe is not the product of a social universe. On the contrary, the so-called symbolical interactionism in Matthew's gospel is produced by realities in the social world which is depicted in the Matthean story. Simultaneously, Jesus' challenge to the particularism of his antagonists, and his instruction to his disciples to continue his work, have to be interpreted as a challenge to change the real social status of the destitute (cf especially the work of Van Tilborg 1986; Combrink 1988:180-198; Malina & Neyrey 1988; Van Aarde 1988:829-846; Horsley 1989; Overman 1990; Balch [ed] 1991; Stanton 1992; Duling 1992, 1993; Duling & Perrin 1994:333-339).

The 'help to the underprivileged' given by Jesus, as *God-with-us*, during the pre-paschal mission functions as a 'transparency' for the post-paschal disciples' *help to the underprivileged* (cf especially Mt 25:31-46). And the risen Jesus is therefore *God-with-us* until the parousia.

Part II

And other essays