

Preface

This book is aimed at the specialist in Matthean studies. Throughout the book debate is conducted with scholars, even on aspects of the interpretation of material in the Gospel of Matthew. The book is, however, not intended merely to cross swords with colleagues. It has the express purpose of communicating a particular viewpoint, so that future research into the Gospel of Matthew will also take note of this viewpoint. This viewpoint is related to my conviction that the fundamental idea that Matthew is sharing with his readers is the message of *God with us* – in a limitless way. According to Matthew, God's unmediated presence among his people – especially those who, because of their 'imperfections' were considered 'impure' and thus outside the realm of the kingdom of heaven – was manifested in the presence of the *Son of God* (Jesus), who made God's will his own through his conduct and attitude. But that is not all. God's presence can also be seen in the conduct and attitude of the *sons of God* (the disciples) who, after the analogy of Jesus, are obedient to the will of God.

My research done on this topic was completed in 1982 and, according to the record, was the first full-length narrative analysis of an entire book of the Bible in South Africa or overseas. Jack Kingsbury's epoch-making work, *Matthew as story*, appeared in print only in 1986.

There is a compelling reason for my need to revise and publish this research from more than a decade ago. In the first place, my current research on Matthew has brought me to the point where I have begun to publish material about the *social context* within which Matthew's message was embedded. I maintain the conviction that the heart of this message can be described in terms of the two narrative lines that are analogically bound together in the plot of the Matthean gospel. Matthew may be presented as a story within a story: the story of the disciples after the analogy of the story of Jesus. At the same time we should consider that the intended readers of Matthew lived after A D 70 and that the social context of these readers was transparent in its depiction by the evangelist. This context was that of *formative*

Judaism, and tension between the synagogue and the church. One of my assumptions in this connection is that people in positions of leadership in the Matthean community, under pressure from the officials of the synagogue, conformed to Phari-saic ideology in behaviour and attitude. A deviation from the example of Jesus was the result. Jesus, in his interaction with others, moved among the marginalized in society and his message of *God with us* is related to the behaviour and attitude of the disciples towards these marginalized individuals. To give greater meaning to this social context it would be expedient to refer back to my former work in this connection. I therefore found it necessary to review my earlier research. There was, however, another reason, related to the claim that this work could make for recognition of its pioneering role in literary studies of the New Testament. But it could not play this role if it remained unpublished and therefore unknown.

The book consists of two parts. Part I deals with a review of the earlier research referred to above. Chapters of this section of the book have already been published as articles in professional journals. These articles have again been revised with a view to uniformity in this first part of the book. Influential recent articles by other scholars have been referred to here and there in this revision. The literary references nevertheless largely reflect works that appeared before the early eighties. The failure to acknowledge the insights of more scholars over the past decade does not, however, weaken the fundamental thesis of this work. The involvement of the following publications in reviewing and adapting previous contributions is acknowledged: *Scriptura* (Part I, Chapter 1), *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* (Part I, Chapters 3 and 9), and *Neotestamentica* (Part I, Chapter 7).

Part II of the book contains a collection of the essays I have written on the Gospel of Matthew since the seventies. This collection of essays is intended to make those of my studies on Matthew that had a particular impact on other scholars more accessible. In a sense they also reveal the progress of my own academic work in respect of gospel research. They cover a variety of themes and methodical approaches. They include semantic, form-critical, redaction-critical, narrative-critical and social-scientific studies. They deal with the Beatitudes, a story of a miracle, a parable, and the stories of the resurrection and the birth of Jesus. Chapter 1 includes certain previously unpublished aspects of my early research. The following journals in revising previous published contributions are acknowledged: *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* (Part II, Chapters 1 and 2 and the second part of Chapter 4), *Neotestamentica* (Part II, Chapter 3 and Chapter 5) and the *SBL Seminar 1992 Papers* (Part II, Chapter 6). The first part of Chapter 4 comes from the *Metzger-Festschrift* which was compiled by South African New Testament scholars, edited by

Kobus Petzer and Patrick Hartin, and published by Brill in Leiden (The Netherlands).

As already indicated, Part I is intended to identify and describe the dominant perspective of the 'theology' of the Gospel of Matthew. One of the generally accepted results of modern biblical scholarship is acknowledgement and appreciation of the biblical authors as 'theologians'; this certainly also applies to the writers of the synoptic gospels. Since the time of Rudolf Bultmann, matters have developed to such an extent that the synoptic gospels are no longer seen as simply the sources containing the so-called presuppositions of 'New Testament theology' – that is, the theology of the 'theologians' Paul and John. Matthew, like Mark and Luke, is now regarded as a 'theologian' in his own right, alongside Paul and John.

Matthew, however, is not a 'theologian' in the sense of presenting a systematic and reasoned 'theology'. Matthew is a theologian in the sense that he tells his readers something about God's dealings with Jesus Christ. The term *dominant perspective* in the subtitle of Part I of the book relates to the point of view from which the evangelist introduced his 'theology'. The fact that Matthew nowhere in his gospel explicitly formulated his purpose in writing (cf e g Lk 1:1-4 and Jn 20:30f) is a considerable obstacle in the search for the dominant perspective of the 'theology' of the Gospel of Matthew. The expositor of the Gospel of Matthew should therefore distinguish between Matthew's 'idea' and his 'technique'. This study attempts, in applying a particular exegetical method, to gain access to the 'technique' that the evangelist used to express his 'idea'.

This concern with the relationship between 'technique' and 'idea' is the old problem of the relationship between 'form' and 'content'. The scholars Hermann Gunkel (Old Testament) and Johann G Herder (New Testament), at the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, already considered insight into the relation of 'form' to 'content' a factor in the interpretation of texts. It was, however, only in using these insights from literary theory that the hermeneutical implications of the relationship were recognized and exploited in exegesis. A growing awareness that the intention of a text was more than mere 'form' or 'content' was discernible among scholars. This research was concerned with *genre identification*. In other words, the identification of literary genres was not just a question of classification and naming. The identification of the 'generic' literary convention to which a text was witness helped the reader to perceive the intention of the text and what he could expect.

⁹ The *genre concept* is a multifaceted question with a complex history in literary theory. Although genre is broadly a collective category of literary units that display common character traits in form and content, studies of it are widely divergent. They may be used as an instrument to analyse the devices or constructive principles that make a text into a work of art. Genre, then, in this sense briefly means the

poetics of a text. And the term 'poetics' concerns the theory of production; in other words, the making of the text.

An analysis of the *poetics* of the Gospel of Matthew is therefore considered important in the light of the purpose of this study. By analysing the way that Matthew put his gospel together, we explore his *technique*, and his *technique*, again, is the key to his *theology*. Against the background of the purpose of this study of identifying the dominant perspective in the Gospel of Matthew, and explaining it in terms of a specific literary model, one cannot avoid first giving a methodological account. To place the literary model that I will use in perspective, a short overview is required of the exegetical methods predominantly applied to gospel research (and the Gospel of Matthew in particular) until the mid-eighties, and the results of using these methods.

The conclusion from what I have said is evident. It is that the variety of insights into the theological content of aspects of Matthew's gospel are directly related to the employment of a particular exegetical method. To give the reader an idea of the methods already used in the history of Matthean research, and to indicate the status of exegetical methodology relating to analysis of the Gospel of Matthew up until the mid-eighties, in Chapter I of Part 1, I have outlined the history of Matthean research and new developments in this area. At times this overview is expanded upon with material from broader research into all four canonical gospels. An overview of research into Matthean studies that have appeared in South Africa over the past decade can be found in an article by Bernard Combrink, published in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 50/1 (1994). My own overview is not limited to those investigations that focus on the 'theology' or the central theme of the 'theology' in the Gospel of Matthew. The aim of this chapter is to gain an overview of the most important *methods* that have been used in the exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew, and the results obtained by such methods of investigation. The function of such an overview is, first, to give a critical evaluation of the possibilities and the shortcomings of certain methods against the background of this aim and, second, to give a critical account of why the study of the particular paradigm is cast as a product of the research debate of a decade ago. For this reason I consider it necessary to present, at the end of the overview, a methodological account of my own analysis of the *poetics* of the Gospel of Matthew.

The most important part of my investigation is, of course, the analysis of the *poetics* of the Gospel of Matthew. In the subsequent chapters I present the theory of my exegetical method, its application and result, in an integrated manner that is limited to certain aspects. I trust that the result arrived at will support my thesis regarding the dominant perspective in the Gospel of Matthew. I do not, however,

give a full exposition of the theory of the method I have used. Neither will I, on the basis of this method, introduce all aspects of Matthew's 'theology'.

Subsequently, before dealing with the history of Matthean research and its more recent developments in Chapter 1, I will briefly formulate my thesis regarding the dominant perspective in Matthew's message.

The thesis is that Matthew shaped his gospel about Jesus in the form of a story and that this *form* offers the key to his message and the dominant viewpoint in it. The spoken language has the inherent potential of being delivered in a pluriform and therefore polysemantic way. Written language, on the contrary, is presented in a unique literary context. If a writer wishes to express the message in a different way at another time, he or she can use the same material to write a different text. And this is exactly what Matthew did with the Markan gospel. By retelling the Gospel of Mark and, in the process, taking over, omitting, adapting or expanding the material, Matthew wrote his own 'theology'. In this way there arose a 'synoptic', a 'new' narration of the gospel of Jesus, the Son of David, the Son of God – that of the Gospel of Matthew. As I have already said, it is my intention to show that Matthew's 'theology' consisted of the creative production of an *analogy* between the Jesus events, from his birth to his resurrection (I refer to this as the pre-paschal period), and the church in the period between the resurrection and the second coming (the post-paschal period). I can make an unqualified reference to this *analogy* as the *association* that Matthew suggested between his readers and the characters and events in the narrative about Jesus. This *association* is intended to provide guidelines for a *proper relationship* between the 'leaders' and the suffering 'people' in the setting of the post-paschal Matthean community. I see this setting as the social context within which the narrative initially communicated. This social setting was that of *formative Judaism* in the period after A D 70. My current research deals with this context and as such is not reflected in this book, except in certain chapters in Part II. In Part I, I argue that Matthew's purpose with the above *association* is also that the *relationship* to which reference is made should be seen as the testimony of *love* being the fulfilment of the Torah (the will of God), and as the way of life within the sphere of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew grounds the *analogy* between the pre-paschal Jesus events and the post-paschal disciple events in Jesus – the Son of David, the Son of God – who is seen by Matthew as *God with us*, not only in the pre-paschal period, but also in the post-paschal period. The theme of *God with us* was therefore the *Leitmotif* according to which Matthew constituted the 'theology' in his gospel. In other words, *God with us* is the dominant perspective from which Matthew presented his ideas ('theology') by means of the 'story' genre.

To write a book such as this requires the help and support of friends and colleagues. In our society, available time is one of those commodities that may be labelled 'limited goods'. The fact that I was able to take my sabbatical leave in the United States during the 1992-1993 academic year gave me the opportunity to spend time on this project. My thanks go to Dr Patrick Henry, executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota, and that Institute's Board, who invited me as a Resident Scholar during that academic year. Patrick also made valuable suggestions regarding the content of the book. The patience of my wife, Grobbie, and my children, Gideon and Salomie, made it possible for me to spend the available time fruitfully. Willem Oliver and Ernest van Eck in particular gave incalculable support in preparing the book for the press. Ernest took charge of the technical aspects of the book, as well as the compilation of the indexes. I am deeply grateful to him. Beverley van Reenen and Sam Hirschorn helped with editing the English. Ronel van Niekerk translated the German references into English. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. At the very early stages of my research into the Gospel of Matthew, Gert Pelsler made valuable contributions. I learnt a great deal from him.

In conclusion: the book also serves as a remembrance of my good friend and mentor, the late Professor Willem Vorster, who in his time headed the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa. Willem was the person who introduced me to gospel research. Right up to his shocking and untimely death on 10 January 1993 – while my family and I were in Collegeville and I was working on the book during my sabbatical leave – Willem was my most important partner in discussing the understanding of the gospels. I pay tribute to Willem Vorster and dedicate this book to him, particularly because of his continual encouragement to complete the project as speedily as possible.

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