

Matthew and Christian Theology

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Full title: The contribution made by Matthew's gospel to the development of Christian theology

SYNOPSIS:

1. Introduction

2. Characteristics of the Matthaean Material

Editorial additions and formulae; special narratives; *testimonia*; teaching.

3. Christology

Humanity; Son of Man; Son of David; King; Son of God – God as his Father.

4. The Kingdom of Heaven

Israel and the Kingdom; early proclamation; the Beatitudes; the parables of the Kingdom; the Kingdom and the Church.

5. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Matthew is a book of Christ and a book which proclaims a Kingdom – “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” (2.2); “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4.17); “This is the King of the Jews” (27.38); “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” (28.18). In this Gospel these two facts are taken and fused together.

There are other important contributions to Christian theology in this Gospel – the relation to the Old Testament; the significance of the Cross and Resurrection; the law of the Kingdom; the nature and mission of the Church. Partial consideration of some of these has been given along the way, but, since compression has already been necessary in the case of the other two in order to give at least some detail, it has been thought best to limit the scope of what could only be treated adequately in something nearer in size to a book.

In the approach to this essay, Matthew has been treated as the author of the book for convenience of writing, although it is well understood that controversy exists concerning its authorship. Further, for an essay of this nature, all passages have been taken at face value without enquiring into the authenticity of sayings or the historical accuracy of recorded events. Care was taken with some commentators who allowed their unfavourable judgment of these matters to distort their interpretation of the content of this Gospel.

2. Characteristics of the Matthaean Material

The scope of this essay hardly permits a detailed discussion of linguistic divergences between the Synoptic gospels. There is, however, a great deal of material found in Matthew alone, and it is important to assess the character of this material before considering in broader sweep the contribution of Matthew's gospel.

The special Matthaean material has been variously grouped by different scholars.¹ T.W. Manson's grouping is the simplest: (i) editorial additions and formulae; (ii) narratives; (iii) testimonia; (iv) teaching. Other classifications fall within these divisions. The material that is described as editorial is made to include a wide variety of fragments, some of which are better considered with the other Matthaean material. It must be noted here that the classification of passages as editorial additions should not imply that they are free compositions and not based on tradition, as W.C. Allen seems to imply.² Further, they would seem to have greatest significance now in terms of Marcan material, since it is difficult to determine precisely how the supposed Q source has been edited, even if it was a manuscript source. How much more nebulous when Allen attempts to establish editorial additions in the special Matthaean material itself!

A few significant examples of this group are worth noting. 3.14-15 are found in neither Mark nor Luke. They emphasise the superiority of Christ over John the Baptist and suggest that he was not baptised on account of sins committed. It may therefore be that they were included for apologetic reasons³ and were thus suited to the need of the Church. 5.13a,14 are an example of sayings which have been amplified. Since in this case the saying about salt has a different emphasis altogether (// Mk 9.49,50; Lk. 14.34-35), it may not be a different treatment of the same saying at all. The distinctive feature of the Matthaean sayings, however, is their concise statement of the relation of the disciple to the world, a statement which was certainly relevant to the missionary situation of the later Church. 11.14 (cf. Lk. 7.24-35) and 17.13 (// Mk 9.9-13) put the interpretation of the Baptist in terms of Elijah more strongly than any other of the gospels, though note needs also to be taken of Lk. 1.17 where he is set out as going before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah." The references of Matthew may be seen in terms of the more specific O.T. background of his gospel. The addition to the story of the Syro-phoenician woman of 15.23-25 (cf. // Mk 7.24-30) forms part of the Jewish emphasis of the gospel, especially when v. 31b is considered also, together with the longer section of material of 10.5ff.

With the special narratives, there are certain characteristics to be noted. The Matthaean nativity stories of 1.18-25, ch. 2, appear to be included for didactic and apologetic reasons - this is related to the situation of the early church. In considering the other narratives, it must be noted that a number of them are Petrine stories. Thus, 14.28-31 recounts an incident not included in Mark's account of Christ walking on the water (Mk 6.45-52). 16.17-19 are of both Petrine and ecclesiological significance (cf. //s Mk. 8.27-33; Lk-9.18-22). This is related to 18.15-22, though there the Petrine aspect is lost. There are also a number of Passion and Resurrection stories. These serve to emphasise the innocence of Jesus (27.24,25), the precautions taken against the stealing of his body and subsequent claims of resurrection (vv. 62-66), the stories which were invented to disprove the resurrection (28.11-15), and the commission to his disciples (vv.16-20). This latter certainly has ecclesiological implications, and the others have strong apologetic value. Broadly, the selected narratives reviewed here seem related to didactic, apologetic and ecclesiological considerations - and the first two of these categories are related to the third.

The O.T. quotations described by Manson as "testimonia" seem to presuppose a background of Judaism, and are at once didactic, apologetic and christological. Whatever is thought of Matthew's exegesis, his striking introductory formulae indicate a very deep reverence for the Scriptures and a strong sense of fulfilment in the understanding of Christ (the verb, πληρώω, is used except in 2.6). Important christological aspects stemming from some of these quotations include the virgin birth (1.23), the identification of Christ with Israel (2.15 - it is to be noted that "there was a general doctrine, widely accepted in rabbinical circles, that the events of the beginning of Israel's history would be duplicated in the end"⁴) and the identification of the Christ with the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42 (12.17-21) and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (8.17).

¹ See, e.g., T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (SCM, London, reissue 1949), p. 21ff; W.C. Allen, *St. Matthew - ICC* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 3rd 1912) p. liii and ff; G.D. Kirkpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (OUP, Oxford, 1950), p. 37ff.

² *op. cit.*, p. liii.

³ F.V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (A & C Black, London, 1960), p. 68

⁴ F.W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1961), p. 32.

A characteristic of the teaching of this gospel is that it is grouped in several large discourses. There are certain features to be noted with the distinct Matthaean material. A great deal of the material is in parabolic form. Except for 25.11-30 (where the introduction may imply it), the subject is ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (13.24-30, 36-43, 44, 45-46, 47-50; 18.23-25; 20.1-16; 22.1-14; 25.1-13). This is a characteristic Matthaean phrase, the other gospels regularly having ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Matthew only has this latter phrase at 12.28, 19.24 and 21.31,43. This may suggest a Jewish background with the tendency to avoid the direct use of the name of God. The use of so many Kingdom-parables points to the situation of the early church.

This is also true of what may be described as the anti-Pharisaic sections. The righteousness of his followers must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5.20). Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are to be done in secret, and not “as the hypocrites” (6.1-8, 16-18) – an evident reference to the Pharisees. Our Lord’s words to the Pharisees in 9.13a emphasise this – “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’” and it is of note that he later uses the same quotation in an anti-Pharisaic context (12.5-7). 12.11-12a also occur in an anti-Pharisaic context. The Pharisees are described as blind guides (15.12-14 – 14b has // Lk. 6.39). The parable of the wicked husbandmen (21.33-46; //s Mk 12.1-12; Lk. 20.9-19) is recognised by all accounts as directed against some groups of official Jewry taken up more specifically in Matthew against the “chief priests and Pharisees” (v. 45). Matthew has recorded a saying which gives the parable its most direct point (v. 43). Further, the whole intent of the sayings of ch. 23 is anti-Pharisaical.

The Jewish-Christian background of certain passages has already been noted. Many of the sayings from 5.17ff emphasise that the Mosaic law is to be “fulfilled”, not destroyed. The emphasis on the law and the prophets is continued in 7.12b. The requirements of the law seem to be reaffirmed in 5.32, 18.16, 19.9 and 24.20. A number of scholars regard 5.32 and 19.9 as embodying the adjustments of Christ’s sayings to later church practice. However, such a judgment on authenticity is beyond the scope of this essay. The life of the Kingdom in 7.22, 10.41 and 13.52 is described in terms which reflect a Jewish background. Several phrases characterise the Matthaean teaching: ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (noted already); πᾶτηρ ὁ ἐν (τοῖς) οὐρανοῖς and πᾶτηρ ὁ οὐράνιος; and πᾶτηρ ἡμῶν, ὑμῶν, σου, αὐτῶν. The essence of the first of these phrases is by no means chiefly the possession of Matthew. However, it is significant that Matthew uses the term πατήρ with reference to God in more than twice the number of instances in which Luke uses it – however, Matthew himself contains considerably less than half the number of instances found in John!

3. Christology

Care must be taken to note that in considering the christological indications of Matthew we are dealing with indications rather than formulations. Further, a mistake is sometimes made in attempting to define rigidly the various terms used in reference to Jesus Christ. Frequently these terms have a composite background and overlap in their N.T. use.

The humanity of Christ clearly portrayed, though the presentation appears to be less vivid than that of Mark. Thus, the omission of Mk 3.5 from the account of the healing of the man with the withered hand (Mt. 12.9-14) seems a hesitation to attribute human passions of anger and grief to our Lord. However, it is to be noted that Luke does the same in this place (see Lk. 6.10), and it is important to remember that Matthew and Luke may not have been using a Marcan source which would correspond exactly to our present gospel. Further, we tend to see this kind of development on the presupposition that a high christology must represent a later development. Such presuppositions often have little to do with the exegesis of the passages concerned. None of the synoptists set out a formulated christology, and it may equally be questioned whether, as Allen suggests, Matthew's changes are due to an increasing feeling of reverence for the person of Christ".⁵ The inference is that Mark shows less reverence by attributing human emotion to Jesus. However, it can be argued that precisely in preserving these emotions Mark is showing his reverence for the person of Christ – this demanding no alteration of the facts but rather their careful recording. It is highly significant that in each of the cases cited by Allen the omission is also made by Luke (as in the example noted above), that is, where the narrative has a parallel in the latter. This reinforces the caution above concerning the nature of the Marcan source. However, taking the evidence as it stands, Matthew may have made the alterations for other than theological reasons. The expression or non-expression of emotions in a narrative can become very much a matter of style, these being quite subjective and therefore to some extent difficult to describe. The fact that Matthew does not exclude emotion from his understanding of our Lord (even if he minimises it) is seen from 26.37 where Matthew has the less strong word *λυπέσθαι* instead of Mark's *ἐκθαμβείσθαι* (Mk 14.33).

Allen further lists clauses in Mark omitted by Matthew as ascribing inability or unfulfilled desire to Christ. Thus, 13.58 has "And he did not do many mighty works there..." in place of "He could do no mighty work there..." (Mk 6.5). In 14.25, the account of the walking on the water, the words "he meant to pass by them" (Mk 6.48) are omitted. In the trial scene, 26.61 has the accusation, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy this temple...'" for Mark's account, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple...'" (Mk 14.58). Here again, care needs to be taken in interpreting these passages, since on the one hand Matthew's changes may not indicate the conclusion reached and on the other Mark may not intend that meaning which it is claimed Matthew has hesitated in applying. This is true of the Nazareth incident cited above. If faith was a necessary precondition of healing, then it follows that, because it was lacking, he **could not** and **did not** perform many such acts of mercy there. The second instance depends very much on the interpretation of *ἤθελεν*. It may signify a deliberate intention or be used less strongly as an auxiliary – "he was going to pass by them". Vincent Taylor has noted that in the latter case there are two explanations – "either (a) Jesus intended to overtake the disciples on foot and surprise them on the other side, or (b) he purposed to test their faith or their knowledge of his power. These inferences, however, are speculative, and necessarily so, since only what the disciples saw is described."⁶ The example taken from the trial is inconclusive, since in both accounts the words are reported by false witnesses. The evidence, then, must be read very carefully, and while some changes seem to indicate greater reverence for Christ's person, it is still true that Matthew presents our Lord as truly human and that Mark also presents him as one more than human (e.g., Mk 4.41). In Matthew, the humanity of Christ is developed in terms of temptation (4.1-11; 16.23), prayer (26.39), lack of knowledge on certain subjects (24.36), his feeling of dereliction on the cross (27.46). Of these the temptation examples are non-Markan, and no significant modification is made in the others, except that in 24.36 (// Mk 13.32) Matthew adds a strengthening *μόνος*. The impression that he was more than man is built up through the account of his supernatural birth (1.18-25), his mighty works (as in the other gospels), his superior teaching (5.17,21ff; 7.28,29), the events at his death (as 27.51b-53) and of his resurrection (as 27.62-66; 28.2-4; 11-15), the promise of his continued presence (28.20).

Of considerable importance in assessing Matthew's approach to the person of Christ are the various titles applied to him. The term "Son of Man", as found in the Synoptic gospels, is always used by Jesus Himself. It appears to have

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

⁶ *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Macmillan, London, 1952, p. 329).

had a composite meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the incarnate Christ (8.20. 9.6; 11.19; 12.8,32;13.37; 16.13), especially in reference to his suffering and death (12.40; 17.9,12,22; 20.18,28; 26.2,24,45). This seems related to the theme of the *עֶבֶד ה' הַנִּיבֵן* as developed in the book of Isaiah. However, Matthew, somewhat more than the other Synoptists, develops the concept of the apocalyptic Son of man who will come at the end time in glory and judgment (10.23; 13.41; 16.27,28; 19.28; 24.27,30,37,39,44; 25.31; 26.64). This seems to derive from the book of Daniel, especially Dan. 7.13ff – “behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man...” It has often been remarked that Jesus combined these two notions in his use of the Son of man. The one therefore interacts with the other. Thus, Cullmann has written, “We see how the New Testament deepens the concept of the Son of Man as Judge. Jesus is both the incarnate man who is the representative Suffering Servant of God, and the future ‘Man’ who is the Judge.”⁷ The wording of this needs to be noted carefully – “**Jesus** is both...” The point of contact is not in a synthesis of the two ideas – it is seen above that the meaning tends to remain distinct in different passages – but in the person of Christ himself, and especially in regard to the Kingdom. The title is not characteristic of this gospel, but it has here more distinctly this complex significance.

Another term used more frequently in Matthew than in the other Synoptists is “Son of David.” It occurs on only two occasions in Mark and Luke. The first, the healing of a blind man at Jericho (Mk 10.46-52 = Lk. 18.35-42; cf Mt. 20.29-34), and the second, the discussion on the current Messianic understanding of the term (Mt. 22.41-46 = Mk 12.35-37a = Lk. 20.41-44), give possible indication that the popular understanding of Jesus as Christ was in terms of this phrase (note further Mt. 12.23 – “Can this be the Son of David?”). The use of this phrase is extended and made more specific in Matthew. In Matthew’s further two uses of the phrase in a plea for healing (9.27; 10.22), the notion behind the application of the title to him may be questioned. Thus, McNeile notes on the former passage, “Here, as in xx.30, it might possibly be only a form of polite address, though the idea that Jesus was the Messiah may have been already in the air, as it had recently been with regard to John the Baptist.”⁸ F.V. Filson regards these words as definitely Messianic in intent, though Matthew may tend to antedate the advance in popular thought about Jesus.⁹ The designation is more specific, however, in 1.1; 12.23 and 21.4,15. 1.1 sees *χριστός* in terms of God’s covenant promises to Israel. The Messiah is not only “son of Abraham”, a member of the chosen race, but “son of David”, of royal lineage. This is more than a setting of the story in historical perspective – it is related to the Kingship of Christ as this is to appear later in the gospel.

All three Synoptists highlight the term “King of the Jews” and the popular idea of Jesus as King in the account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (Mt. 27.11,29,37,42; Mk 15.2,9,12,18,26,32; Lk. 23.2,3,37,38). It is to be noted that Luke in a verse without parallel (23.2) seems to indicate the existence of some idea of the Messiah as King, even though this is inserted only to give the charge before Pilate some reasonable basis.

The theme of Kingship runs throughout Matthew. Its first occurrence is in 2.2 where the magi are shown seeking for one born “King of the Jews”. The indications this may give of widespread “Messianic” expectations throughout the civilised world,¹⁰ important in their place, do not give help here. More important is the indication that the Jews thought of the Messiah as ruler and as son of David – this is more relevant than the textual relation of v. 6 to Mic. 5.2. There seems no doubt that the passage was regarded as Messianic. McNeile refers to the Targum on the passage, “Out of thee shall come forth before me the Messiah.”¹¹ McNeile further notes, “The passage was understood to mean that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem; but the prophet probably meant that wherever he might be born, he would ‘come out of Bethlehem’, i.e. out of the stock of David, since David was born there.”¹² However, whether or not it was taken that Bethlehem was to be the place of his birth, the understanding that he was to be a descendant of David is plain.

The King theme reappears in the quotation of 21.5 in the scene of the entry into Jerusalem. Although this quotation is not made by the other Synoptists (but see Jn 12.15), the presentation nevertheless implies an incident “deliberately staged by Jesus as an object-lesson in his conception of himself as the lowly Messiah pictured by Zechariah.”¹³ All three express the same expectation of the Messianic kingdom and of the coming king in the words of acclamation which Jesus received on this occasion (Mt. 21.9,15; Mk 11.9-10; Lk. 19.38). The common designation – “he who comes in the name of the Lord” – is derived from Ps. 118.26. However, in view of the present state of studies

⁷ *The Christology of the New Testament* (SCM, London, 1959), pp. 158-159.

⁸ *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Macmillan, London, 1915), p. 127.

⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁰ McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³ F.W. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

of the Psalms, it is difficult to state definitively its significance in context. It is of interest that those who stress the cultic setting of the Psalms would see reference here to the supposed yearly ceremony of the reenthronement of the king. However, since such connections with Babylonian festivals are rather dubious, it is foolish to try to draw conclusions about the public view of Jesus. Luke, however, explicitly refers to him as the King. Mark, in referring to the coming kingdom, calls it “the kingdom of our father David”, designating Christ as King only by inference. Matthew makes specific reference to him as “the Son of David”, thus joining clearly the themes of the King, and the Son of David – this clears away any doubt which may exist about the implications of either this verse or the earlier quotation when taken in isolation.

The other occurrence of the idea of King in Matthew is at 25.31ff, where the striking feature is the relation between “Son of Man” and “the King” (vv. 34,40). Allen regards the change as “very abrupt and unexpected” and is devoid of further suggestions.¹⁴ T.W. Manson sees two possibilities: “Either the Son of Man is the same as the King, in which case ‘Son of Man’ has the meaning commonly assigned to it in *Enoch*; or ‘Son of Man’ stands for the body comprising the King and his brethren, In which case ‘Son of Man’ approximates in meaning to ‘Son of Man’ in Dan.7.13...” He himself settles for the latter interpretation.¹⁵ However, it is too convenient a trap to treat Old Testament exegesis as fixed when one has difficulty in determining exegesis in the New! But even more, while this passage may show the corporateness of believers with their Lord, there seems little indication here that the terms are to be reversed so that they are included in his speech about himself – what, then, is the significance of τούτων (vv. 40,45)? The term “Son of God” seems also to be echoed here in the reference to “my Father” (v. 34). Thus the prophetic vision represents a considerable complex of ideas. There seems no doubt that the King is thought to be Jesus himself.¹⁶ On the change noted above, Beare has the useful note that it “is a reflection of the dual function of Jesus as Judge of all the world and as ruler over the kingdom of God; and his reference to God as ‘my Father’ (v. 34) reflects the doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God: the Son of Man, the Judge and Deliverer of apocalyptic expectation, is not elsewhere designated as God’s Son.”¹⁷ This focussing of different ideas in the person of Christ is important in the overall christological presentation of Matthew. Thus, the depth of Christ’s self-understanding surpasses the Jewish nationalistic expectations, even in this gospel which has a Jewish-Christian background – and, although Jesus is called “Son of David”, he nowhere applies the term to himself, except, perhaps, indirectly in 22.41-46. The theme of Kingship, however, bears relation to the message of “the Kingdom of heaven”.

F.V. Filson has noted, “The Messiah was usually conceived by Israel as a human leader of unique goodness and power.”¹⁸ However, as he himself goes on to show, Matthew means more than this by the term, as is seen by his application of the term “Son of God” to Jesus. Care needs to be taken in seeking to appreciate Matthew’s use of this term. Although the term occurs more frequently in Matthew than in the other Synoptists, it is by no means clear that his use is more distinctive than theirs. The designation of Christ as “Son of God” in Mk 1.1 presents an interesting textual problem. With Taylor it may be agreed that there are strong reasons for accepting the phrase as original.¹⁹ It is of interest to note that Nestle and Huck omit the phrase while the RSV and NEB include it. The point of contrast with Matthew is that his opening designation makes reference to Jesus Christ as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1.1). The cries of the demon-possessed are taken as sure signs of Christ’s person (8.29, cf. Mk 5.7; Lk.8.28) – Mark records one further such testimony (3.11; cf. Lk. 4.41, where the title has a definite Messianic sense).

In Luke, the “Son of God” theme is woven into the Birth narrative, being related to his conception by the Holy Spirit (1.32-35). This connection is not made by Matthew, though he equally presents the Virgin Birth. However, “Emmanuel” (1.23; Is.7.14) is taken to signify, if not his divinity, at least that God was present and active in him. By a further quotation, in which the people of Israel are referred to collectively as God’s son, he implies the special sonship of Christ (2.15; Hos.11.1).

A further striking example of the term in Luke is in the trial narrative. It is used in mockery in Matthew (27.40,43), and also as a further designation of the Christ (26.63; cf. Mk 14.61). In Luke’s account the two terms are made into separate charges, the claim to be “Son of God” being the more serious (22.67,70).

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 265.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 249; Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 218; McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 152.

The divine testimony at the Baptism (3.17, //s Mk 1.11; Lk. 3.22) and at the Transfiguration (17.5; //s Mk 9.7; Lk. 9.35) is basically the same in all three Synoptists.²⁰ The only variant significant here is ἐκλελεγμένος at Lk. 9.35 instead of ἀγαπητός. Though the latter generally means in Greek “beloved”, it is to be noted that in the LXX it is a frequent translation for 𐤇𐤓𐤁, “the only one” (Gn. 22.2,12,16; Am. 8.10; Zech. 12.10; Jer. 6.26). The story of Abraham and Isaac in particular features the unique relationship implied in the word. Apart from ἀγαπώμενος at Prov. 4.3, the word is elsewhere chiefly rendered by μονογενής (Ps. 22.20; 25.16; 35.17; Jg. 11.34 in B). Of the Synoptists, this word is only used by Luke in reference to only children on whom miracles were performed (7.12; 8.42; 9.38). The rendering of 𐤇𐤓𐤁 by ἀγαπητός is probably due in part to the sense of the term in reference to persons and in part to its similarity of form to 𐤇𐤓𐤁, “beloved, lovely”, regularly rendered by ἀγαπητός (Ps. 60. 5; 84.1; 108.6; 127.2) or by the verbal form (Dt. 33.12; Is. 5.1; Jer. 11.15). The variant in Lk. 9.35 may be by analogy with the ἐκλεκτός (LXX = 𐤇𐤓𐤁𐤃 of Is. 42.1, cited Mt.12.18 (using ἀγαπητός and a free form which emphasises the present parallel) and bearing some resemblance to the testimony at Baptism and to Mt. 17.5. In any case, the evidence seems to point to the word indicating the uniqueness of the filial relationship of Jesus with God, and that the Old Testament allusion refers to Israel strengthens this force of the word.²¹

The account of the Temptation is basically the same in Matthew and Luke (Mt 4.1-11; Lk. 4.1-13). There are two questions which are difficult to determine: what is the nature of Sonship in this passage? and is Christ tempted to doubt his person or his mission? For the second question, it is to be noted that both person and mission are involved since not only the Father’s protection but also his own authority and power are called into question. For the first question, it can only be said at this point that the term seems to be used as a Messianic title (note that if the King as representative of the people of Israel could be called “son of God” how much more the Messianic king) in special relation to his mission. This is natural at this point in his life and work. However, the possibility of reference to his unique person may not be excluded.

In Matthew’s account of Christ walking on the water (14.22-23 = Mk 6.45-52) the disciples specifically declare, “Truly you are the Son of God” (v. 33). Here is an anarthrous predicate. This may merely be following the normal rule for classical Greek though frequently in the NT “the article is inserted if the predicate noun is presented as something well known or as that which alone merits the designation (the only thing to be considered).” But according to Colwell, definite predicate nouns **preceding** the verb are anarthrous.²² It is difficult to determine what degree of understanding of our Lord this confession is intended to imply, especially as far as uniqueness of title goes. The power of Jesus is plainly seen to point to his being more than man – note the force of ποταπός in 8.27. Filson notes, “They were groping for a title and understanding adequate to express the unique authority and power which they saw active in Jesus.”²³

Yet in Peter’s confession of 16.16, while the title is made more explicit, the emphasis is on the recognition of him as the Christ (cf. v. 20) as in the parallel passages (Mk 8.29; Lk. 9.20).²⁴ This again seems to relate the title to his mission, though the recognition of him as the Christ has been in large measure due to the awareness of his person. It is noteworthy that in this gospel the disciples ascribe the title of “Son of God” to Jesus before that of “Christ”.

The amount of understanding implied by the centurion and those with him in 27.54 (= Mk 15.39) is difficult to determine. The phrase may mean little more than “righteous man” as Lk. 23.47. Yet the emphatic arrangement of the words in Matthew seems to indicate that they are regarded as a testimony (though not understood by the centurion as such) to the divinity of Christ.

The uniqueness of Christ’s Sonship is further emphasised in the Gospel in Jesus’ references to God as his Father. Space does not allow the consideration of this theme in full here, but some mention must be made of it since Jesus himself nowhere expressly calls himself “Son of God”. In teaching of God as Father he at no time identifies himself in his relation to God with his hearers. Thus, he speaks of “your Father” and of “my Father” but not of “our Father”

²⁰ Some MSS read Ps. 2.1 (LXX) at Lk. 3.22. For a discussion of the evidence weighing against this reading see W.F. Arndt, *St. Luke* (Concordia, Saint Louis, 1956), pp. 121-122.

²¹ It is noteworthy that in the 5th edition of Bauer’s *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Töpelmann, Berlin, 1958) the first meaning of ἀγαπητός is given simply as *einziggeliebt* “only-beloved” (cf. Arndt and Gingrich from 4th edn).

²² Blass-Debrunner (tr. R.W. Funk), *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (CUP, Cambridge, 1961), p. 143.

²³ *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²⁴ The phrase, ὁ χριστὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, also used by Luke at 23.35 (there in conjunction with ὁ ἐκλεκτός) where Mt. makes reference to “the Son of God” (26.42,43), may represent a genitive of relationship (cf Lk. 3.23ff, where, however, υἱός in v. 23 puts the matter beyond doubt) – though one feels W.F. Arndt has more reason, “τοῦ θεοῦ is the subj. gen. = the one whom God has anointed” (*op. cit.*, p. 258).

except in that prayer which is to be a model for his followers (6.9). The characteristic phrase is ὁ πάτερ μου ὁ ἐν οὐρανοῖς (also ὁ οὐρανοῖς, 15.13; ὁ ἐπουράνιος, 18.35). It is noted that in several instances of this characteristic phrase there is no parallel in the other Synoptists (15.13; 16.17; 18.10,19,35). In a number of instances where there is a parallel, significant differences are to be noted; for ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρός μου τ. ἐν τ. οὐρ. in 10.32-33, Lk. 12.8,9 has ἐμπ. (ἐνώπιον) τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ (cf. Mt.18.14 and Lk. 15.10); for τοῦ πατρός μου κ.τ.λ. in 12.50, both Mk 3.35 and Lk. 8.21 have τοῦ θεοῦ; for τοῦ πατρός μου (simple form) in 26.29, Mk 14.25 has τοῦ θεοῦ. The characteristic form noted may be related to the eschatological thread which runs through Matthew, that is to the themes of the Kingdom and the Son of Man. The Sonship of Christ is seen to be beyond the temporal order of things, though it is difficult to say to what extent he is portrayed as of the essence of Godhood.

4. The Kingdom of Heaven

Reference has already been made to the characteristic Matthaean phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, especially in relation to the parables of the Kingdom. It is noteworthy that we return to this phrase after considering Matthew's phrase for God. As noted it may be related to the Jewish background and also to Matthew's greater eschatological emphasis. This characteristic phrase must not be separated from the other uses of "Kingdom" in this Gospel and the present and futurist aspects are not to be rigidly distinguished. This tension has led scholars like Albert Schweitzer to regard the Kingdom in Christ's teaching as completely future, and others like C.H. Dodd to emphasise the Kingdom as already present.

The attitude to the Old Testament in Matthew has already been briefly noted in reference to the *testimonia*. This could be extended to the teaching of Christ more generally. His work and teaching was not in opposition to the law and the prophets, and indeed the latter had abiding significance (5.17-20). He was, however, opposed to the rigid legalism which characterised so much of the current interpretation of the law and emptied it of its real significance (15.3ff). Space does not permit a full examination of this which certainly represents another of the contributions of Matthew's gospel to Christian theology. However, this brief mention serves to set the parallel which exists between the attitude to the law and the prophets and the concept of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is something new in the sense of fulfilment, yet the rule of God existed in Old Testament times also. Nevertheless, just as the law of God had been deprived of its true significance by an emphasis on outwardness, so the Kingdom had become the prized possession of the Jewish people, an outward security of a narrow nationalism. Thus, although our Lord is not recorded as having directly applied the term "Son of David" to himself – there was possibly no Messianic title which would have been more likely to arouse the wrong concept of his work – the element of continuity in the "Kingdom" must be borne in mind. Under the Old Testament the reign of God had already begun in the community of people who constituted his Kingdom and received his gifts and his laws. The continuity with the Kingdom Christ was proclaiming receives its most conspicuous expression in the conclusion recorded by Matthew to the parable of the wicked husbandmen (21.43) – "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it." Some scholars think the use of the phrase "of God" instead of "of heaven" indicates a different meaning.²⁵ It is true that a different aspect of the Kingdom is described here, but since the distinction in forms does not exist in the other instances of this phrase it seems rather hazardous to assert it here. The significant point seems to be that the Kingdom which was present under the old dispensation was about to enter a new phase.

There may also be reference to this element of continuity in the account of the healing of the centurion's servant (8.5-13; cf. Lk. 7.1-10). The words of vv. 11,12 are significant (cf. another Lucan passage, 13.28-30): "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." Here, the folly of attempting to distinguish between the Kingdom of heaven and "the Kingdom" is quite plain. As in the previous passage, the Kingdom is the kingdom of the consummation, seen in continuity with God's reign over his chosen people – "the sons of the Kingdom" – though many of the latter would be excluded and others not of the Kingdom would be brought in. The condition of entry into the Kingdom is evidently faith (v. 10), whereas the Jewish people tended to presume on God's promises, describing Israelites as "sons of the world to come", having a sure expectation of participation in the future world.²⁶ However, important as this is in establishing the perspective of the teaching about the Kingdom, the great weight is directed to its present and future aspects.

Even though the Israelites were God's chosen people, because of their rebellion and sin God's effective reign had not yet been established. The earliest proclamations of the Kingdom by Christ and his forerunner involved not only the nearness of the Kingdom but the call to repent (3.2; 4.17; cf. Mk 1.15). It is taken here that the verb ἐγγίζω basically signifies "to approach". C.H. Dodd, by reference to the use of this word "sometimes" in LXX to translate the Hebrew verb בָּרַךְ and the Aramaic verb כָּבַד, both of which are taken to mean "to reach, arrive", considers we should translate, "the Kingdom has come".²⁷ However, the meaning in any of these O.T. cases is not appreciably affected if ἐγγίζω is

²⁵ e.g. McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 312; Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxvii, 232.

²⁶ N.B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Tyndale, London, 2ed 1958), p. 232.

²⁷ *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Religious Book Club, London, 1935), p. 44.

rendered by its usual sense “to approach”, except in the case of Jon. 3.6. In this respect, Pss. 88.3 and 107.18 should be noted. But even more, note should be taken of its more regular rendering of $\Psi\eta\eta$ and בָּרַךְ , both “draw near, approach.” The only other count on which this interpretation of $\epsilon\gamma\gamma\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ might be made here is a consideration of whether it is intended in a spatial or temporal sense. “To be near”, it may be urged, could refer to its presence in the person of Christ (cf. Lk. 17.21, if $\epsilon\nu\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ is taken to mean “in the midst of”). However, this arises partly on account of our difficulty in rendering the Greek perfect. Bauer gives the meaning as *sich nähern, nahe herankommen*,²⁸ both indicating not simply a state of nearness, but the nearness of approach. Yet even as this is insisted from a linguistic investigation of these passages, it must equally be insisted that the alternative is not an interpretation of the Kingdom in terms of “the end of the world”. Thus, Stonehouse has noted, “Of all the instances where Matthew refers to the kingdom, only a few demand an exclusive reference to the coming of the kingdom at the consummation of the age.”²⁹

This is important in understanding the Beatitudes. In Luke’s account of these sayings, the use of the second person seems to indicate that essentially the same group (*viz.*, the disciples) is referred to under different terms (Lk. 6.20-22). In Matthew, however, the third person is used and the spiritual intent directly asserted (5.3-10). It is to be questioned whether, in this case also, the different terms are not intended to describe the one group of people – *viz.*, those who gain entry to the Kingdom. This seems at least possible when it is seen that the first and last of these sayings (vv. 11,12 are taken as a second-person extension and application of v. 10) state, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3,10), while the intervening beatitudes are expressed in future tense. The future may well indicate the **certainty** of the blessings,³⁰ rather than “that the kingdom is regarded as a condition of things still in the future.”³¹ The group of sayings as a whole cannot be so catalogued. In the fulfilment of the blessings some may have to wait till the end-time consummation, though this interpretation is not certain in any single case. Is the Kingdom, we may well ask, “a condition of things still in the future”? Then at least it is a present possession, even though it awaits final manifestation. The cumulative effect of the Beatitudes seems to be grace rather than law, and it is in this light that the sayings of 5.20 and 7.21 need to be considered. The Beatitudes are not setting out prerequisites of entry into the Kingdom, but characteristics of its blessed ones (cf. 18.1-4; 19.14).

The parables of chap. 13 exhibit the same complex time characteristics. Thus the parable of the sower relates the word of the kingdom (v. 19) to the earthly ministry of Christ (vv. 16,17). The parable of the tares relates the present state of the Kingdom to its future consummation (vv. 24-30, 36-43). Of key significance in the Kingdom in both present and future is the “Son of man” (vv. 37,41). The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven relate to the growth of the Kingdom (vv. 51-53), and those of the treasure and the pearl to the great worth of the Kingdom (vv. 44-46). The parable of the dragnet (vv. 47-50), however, is almost entirely futuristic (note v. 49). This is also true of other Kingdom parables in this Gospel – the labourers in the vineyard (20.1-16), the marriage feast (22.1-14) and the ten virgins (25.1-23). In each case, a present principle of life is set out, but in relation to the future consummation of the Kingdom. The parable of the unforgiving servant emphasises the principle of forgiveness in relation to the present life, though it is future in the sense that it points to the future reckoning.

The parables of the Kingdom, as set out in Matthew, present quite a varied picture of the nature of the Kingdom, especially with regard to the time element. However, although many aspects of the present life of the Kingdom are portrayed, in the overall view the Kingdom seems to await for its consummation in the future. Thus, Tasker sums up well, “If we are to give to the parables of the kingdom their *prima facie* meaning, we must suppose that, while Jesus regarded the kingdom or kingship of God as present indeed in his own words and actions, he also anticipated a period, the length of which he did not know (Mk xiii.32), during which that kingship would be a reality within the society of his followers who would constitute his worldwide Church, and predicted that the kingdom would not come in its fulness till he himself returned in glory.”³² This latter fact is certainly in mind in the request of 20.20-28, though our Lord’s reply indicates the relevance of the present life as far as the Kingdom is concerned (v. 27), as also in the case of the rich young ruler (19.16ff) or by contrast in the proselytising activities of the Pharisees (23.13-15).

Since the theme of the Church has been introduced here by Tasker, it is convenient to give it consideration at this point. Of the four Gospels, Matthew is the only one which uses the word $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (16.18; 18.17) used in the LXX as a translation for the Hebrew קָהָל *qahal* “assembly, convocation of the people”, also rendered by $\sigma\upsilon\nu\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\acute{\eta}$. It frequently

²⁸ *op. cit.*, pp. 422-433.

²⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 233.

³⁰ R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Tyndale, London, 1961), p. 61.

³¹ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³² art. "Parable" in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *The New Bible Dictionary* (IVF, London, 1962), p. 934.

refers to the “congregation of Israel”. In the light of this background, it has been thought that in 18.17 the reference is to the local Jewish synagogue or to a local group of Christ’s followers. In 16.17ff this concept is definitely related to the Kingdom of heaven, i.e. to the reign of God in its more comprehensive aspect. Whether the “rock” is taken to be the confession of Jesus as Christ or the person who has made this confession, Christ’s ἐκκλησία will stand against the gates of Hades because it is his, and not because of the supposed primacy of some individual within it. This latter seems excluded by the parallelism offered in vv. 22,23 – “**Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona**” is opposed by “**Get thee behind me, Satan**”. “**Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven**” becomes by contrast “**thou savourest (RV ‘mindest’) not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**” “**Upon this rock I will build my church**” is now “**thou art an offence**, i.e. ‘a rock of offence’, **unto me.**”³³ This characteristic of Matthew’s account is further emphasised when it is realised that the parallel Marcan passage (Mk 9.32,33) does not contain the words σκάδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ. The “keys of the kingdom” (v.19) may be seen to point more to responsibility than to privilege, and the reference to binding and loosing does not point to an infallible person and community but to the dependence of that person and community on God. Perhaps this helps in understanding the curious construction ἔσται δεδεμένον and ἔσται λελυμένον. C.F.D. Moule considers that little trace of the perfect sense still adheres, the participle being virtually an adjective, though he admits that it might be stretched to mean “shall be found to be bound”³⁴ (cf. the also curious use of the perfect in Jn 20.23). It is to be noted that this passage referring to the church gives what seems to be a principle of discipline within the Kingdom community – whatever and whoever it may precisely involve. This is also true in 18.15-20 – with the addition of the principle of fellowship within the Kingdom. In 28.18-20 a similar thought is brought out – Christ is presented as the one with all authority commissioning his disciples to go out and themselves make disciples in the knowledge that he is always with them. This is again the Kingdom in its nucleus form, the church, as is seen by the phases of its activity – discipling, baptising, teaching. The church, then, is related to the Kingdom, though not synonymous with it. Filson expresses the distinction thus: “(1) The Church is temporary, and will give way to the perfect and full rule of God in his eternal Kingdom. (2) The Church is thought of in terms of its mission. It must evangelise and teach in order to bring men to faith and train them in obedience to God’s will.”³⁵ The concern of Matthew with this latter need has already been noted in several instances in considering the characteristics of his special material.

³³ R. V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, p.161; cf. B.C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew* (C.U.P., Cambridge, 1951), pp. 131-133.

³⁴ *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (C.U.P., Cambridge, 2ed 1959), p. 18.

³⁵ *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, pp. 17,18.

5. Conclusion

Since the scope of this essay has been restricted and the material considerably compressed, in accordance with its size, it would be impossible to sum up in this brief section the contribution made by Matthew's Gospel to the development of Christian theology. However, there are some concluding observations which relate to the themes considered.

While there has been no consideration of the historicity or authenticity of different passages under consideration, Matthew's presentation of the words and deeds of Jesus evidences a clear interest in his person and mission. These are seen in the light of the Old Testament and in special relation to the Kingdom of heaven, both in its present and future aspects.

Space has not permitted here a detailed consideration of the relation of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus to this whole process, especially since much of this theme which is so important to him is in common with the other Synoptists. However, the evangelist gives clear signs that his record has a practical purpose – to say this does not imply that he used his material in a cavalier fashion, but simply that in many cases the utterances and incidents seem to have been placed on record with particular needs of the later Church in mind. Tasker expresses this well: "It became known as the 'ecclesiastical' Gospel, because it provided the Church with an indispensable tool in its threefold task of defending its beliefs against attacks from Jewish opponents, of instructing converts from paganism in the ethical implications of their newly accepted religion, and of helping its own members to live a disciplined life of fellowship based on the record of the deeds and words of their Lord and Master, which they heard week by week in the orderly and systematic form provided by this evangelist. In short, the Gospel of Matthew served as an apology, a handbook of instruction, and a lectionary for use in Christian worship."³⁶ Thus Matthew's Gospel is not a systematic theology, but his presentation of the raw materials of theology are so significant as to be placed by the early Church at the head of the New Testament Canon.

³⁶ *ibid.*

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