

REVIEW ARTICLE

GUNDRY ON MATTHEW: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art, by Robert H. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981. 652 pp. Cloth, \$22.95.

The publication in English of any commentary on the Greek text of Matthew must be heralded as a major event, if only because no gospel has been so poorly served in recent times as this one. That such a commentary should come from a scholar who has devoted many of his energies to this first book of the New Testament (I am thinking in particular of his *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* [Leiden: Brill, 1967]) can only increase the reader's anticipation. It turns out to be no ordinary commentary; and if it is to be fairly evaluated, its unique features and emphases must first be fully appreciated.

All commentaries, Gundry tells us, "fall into two classes: (1) heavily documented commentaries that include a great deal of interplay with views expressed in other works of modern scholarship, and (2) commentaries in which the author fully develops his own line of interpretation" (p. 1). Gundry deliberately chooses the latter course. He begins with a brief introduction (pp. 1-11), given over to explaining the nature of his commentary, outlining some of the theology he discovers in Matthew, and defending the view that the structure of Matthew is sufficiently mixed, not to say amorphous, that very little can be built on it. Moreover, if Matthew follows Mark more closely in the last half of the Gospel than in the first half, it is because "editorial fatigue set in" (p. 10). The bulk of the book (pp. 13-597) is "The Commentary Proper," as Gundry calls it. This is followed by three important sections. The first outlines "Some Higher-Critical Conclusions" (pp. 599-622), touching on such matters as the date, authorship, provenance and literary form of the first gospel. This essay includes a competent discussion of the evidence of Papias. Gundry concludes that the gospel was written by the apostle Matthew, at a fairly early date—before about A.D. 63, since Gundry holds that Luke depends on Matthew, and that Luke-Acts was completed by that date. The next section is titled "A Theological Postscript" (pp. 623-640), and constitutes Gundry's defense of his understanding of Matthew's use of midrash as a literary genre, within the context of a high view of Scripture.

The last section (pp. 641ff.) comprises the indexes; but the first of these, the Greek index, has some features found in no other commentary. Each Greek

word listed is immediately followed by six digits: e.g. ἄγγελος 4,9,7 (20,6,5). The first figure represents the number of insertions of the Greek word by the evangelist into material paralleled elsewhere, the second the number of occurrences in passages peculiar to Matthew, and the third the number of occurrences shared with one or both of the other two synoptic gospels. The three figures in parentheses represent the total number of occurrences in Matthew, Mark and Luke respectively. This index also includes, in addition to the lexical forms, some special forms of interest to redaction critical analysis.

The commentary is an immensely detailed redaction critical study. It presupposes, and occasionally argues, that Matthew is literarily dependent on two sources, Mark and Q. Gundry includes in Q a fair bit of material beyond the 250 verses or so which most scholars designate as Q or Q-material. This additional material includes Luke's birth narrative. So-called "minor agreements" between Matthew and Luke are resolved by postulating that although Matthew used Q (very often judged by Gundry to be preserved very closely in Luke), Luke also used finished Matthew as an "overlay" in his final editing. The focus of the commentary is the explanation of every change Matthew has introduced, of every word or phrase he has retained, or every re-ordering of material, and so forth. It is by far the most rigorously redaction critical commentary on Matthew ever written in any language, and can be used with profit only in conjunction with a Greek synopsis of the Gospels. Gundry makes many decisions about what is redactional and what is traditional on the basis of his word statistics; and when he introduces such determinative words into the commentary proper, he regularly includes the first two of the six digits provided in the index—i.e. the number of insertions of that word by the evangelist into material paralleled elsewhere, and the number of occurrences of the word in passages peculiar to Matthew. These two figures, Gundry argues, are most critical in judging whether any particular word is traditional or redactional; and what is redactional has *theological* motivation behind it.

The essence of Gundry's rigor lies in his assumptions that Matthew did not use any source other than Mark and (enlarged) Q, and that virtually every change from these sources must be and can be explained on the basis of purely *theological* motivation on the part of the evangelist. Changes in wording, story line, speaker, and so forth, must all reflect *theological* predilections; and, in general, when Matthew *adds* material not found elsewhere (whether some detail in a narrative, or a saying, or an entire pericope), Gundry regularly views it as a Matthean *creation* designed to make *theological* points *without having historical referent*. The literary genre to which such creative writing and re-writing belongs, he asserts, is midrash or midrash haggadah.

Any page in the commentary shows how these things work out. We may consider, at random, a few examples of Gundry's treatment of Matt 15:21-28 (cf. Mark 7:24-30). Matthew "starts his version of Mark's story" (p. 309), Gundry says, "by replacing δέ with καί" (p. 310). This Gundry explains by elucidating a connection between this pericope and Matthew's peculiar handling of the *last* pericope (15:1-20). The reason "going out" replaces "getting up" and moves ahead of "from there" is to "accentuate Jesus' departure into a territory of Gentiles" (p. 310); and in any case ἐξελθῶν is a favorite of Matthew (the crucial index figures are 10,4). The insertion of "Jesus" is "typical (80,12)." Matthew replaces Mark's ἀπῆλθεν with ἀνεχώρησεν (4,5) because Matthew's preference "connotes withdrawal from danger" (a point

already treated by Gundry) "and enables him to portray Jesus as a model of fleeing persecution, so that evangelism takes place in the regions beyond." Matthew changes Mark's ambiguous εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύριου [*sic*] to εἰς τὰ μέρη Τύρου to make it clear Jesus actually *entered* Gentile territory. "The concern to make the story a dominical example of ministry to Gentiles also leads Matthew to add 'and Sidon' to 'Tyre.' The stereotyped pairing of the cities conforms to the language of the OT [which Gundry sees as a constant influence on Matthew] and makes them typical of the whole world of Gentiles. . . ." Mark goes on to say that Jesus entered a house and wanted no one to know of his presence, but could not successfully hide. "Matthew omits all this," writes Gundry, "for it implies a lack of purpose to minister to Gentiles. On the contrary, his Jesus ministers to them by intent (though exceptionally) and thus sets an example of evangelizing them" (p. 310). Gundry argues this is confirmed by a number of details—e.g. displacing Mark's εὐθύς by the Matthean idiom ἰδοῦ. And so forth: this is essentially the way Gundry moves through the entire text.

More interesting yet is Gundry's assessment of what Matthew is doing in those places where Matthew differs markedly from his putative sources. Matthew's genealogy is not to be taken as a physical genealogy but as a Christological statement (I shall say more on this in a moment); and this "massive transformation" (p. 20) of Luke's genealogy, Gundry argues, alerts the reader to Matthew's intention not to provide historical data but to make theological statements. Matt 1:18-25 is a fusion of the stories of the births of Jesus and of John the Baptist as reported by Luke. For a start, "Matthew turns the annunciation to Mary before her conceiving Jesus (Luke 1:26-38) into an annunciation to Joseph after her conceiving Jesus" (p. 20). Indeed, throughout Matthew's birth narratives, "We only have to suppose that Matthew had the traditions that later went into Luke 1-2 to see what happens under his artistry" (p. 20). Thus, Matthew "turns the visit of the local Jewish shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) into the adoration by Gentile magi from foreign parts" (p. 26) in order to develop his theme of Gentile mission; but the evangelist "selects" the magi (= astrologers) "as his substitutes for the shepherds" for another reason, viz. "to lead up to the star, which replaces the angel and heavenly host in the tradition" (p. 27). The fact that Matt 2:7f. consists "almost entirely of Mattheanisms" (p. 31) supports the contention that Matthew himself is forming (i.e. creating) the episode out of the shepherds' visit. Farther on, Matthew changes the going up to Jerusalem by the Holy Family (Luke 2:22) into the flight to Egypt (Matt 2:13-15) in order "to carry on the motif of flight from persecution" (p. 32). The sorrow of the mothers of Bethlehem "corresponds to the sword that was going to pierce the heart of Mary, according to Simeon's prediction at the presentation in the Temple (Luke 1:35; cf. Matt 2:18). Herod's massive crimes made it easy for Matthew to manipulate the dominical tradition in this way" (p. 35). In an important paragraph, Gundry writes:

It may be asked how Matthew can put forward his embellishments of tradition as fulfillments of the OT. But this phenomenon should surprise us no more than his transforming historical statements in the OT—those concerning the Exodus and the Babylonian Exile—into messianic prophecies. We will have to broaden our understanding of "happened" as well as of "fulfilled" when reading that such-and-such happened in order that so-and-so's prophecy might be fulfilled.

In short, despite its length and technical detail, this is not a broad commentary designed for readers with a comprehensive interest in understanding the Greek text. Gundry devotes very little space to discussion of views other than his own (disarmingly, he points this out himself), or to questions of geography, biblical theology, salvation history, difficult Greek syntax, or the life. All energy is expended in redaction critical explanations of Matthew, *of every word of Matthew*, on the basis of Gundry's modification of the two source hypothesis. The subtitle of Gundry's work is to be taken seriously. By the same token, his commentary is not the sort of work a busy pastor will reach for to help him prepare his next sermon. Rather, though the book is in the form of a commentary, it is in reality a sustained thesis about the gospel of Matthew and its relation to the other synoptics.

Within the limitations adopted by Gundry, the commentary is extremely detailed and rigorous. Despite the technicality of the work, Gundry's prose usually reads smoothly, and is occasionally witty. A choice passage finds Gundry introducing his discussion of the somewhat anomalous text in Matt 23:3 in these words: "Matthew was neither a dim-witted tailor who, contrary to Deut 22:11, sewed together a literary garment of wool and linen without knowing the difference between his materials, nor a modern churchman who saw contradictions in the traditions that came to him but deliberately included everything so that ecumenicity might swallow up theology, lumps and all" (pp. 454f.).

Gundry includes in his introduction a brief section on "The Theology of Matthew" (pp. 5-10). His approach, like that of most redaction critics, is to infer the situation in which the evangelist wrote from a careful study of his emphases; and the same analysis points to Matthew's distinctive theology. Matthew betrays "great concern over the problem of a mixed church" (p. 5), grown large through the influx of converts from all nations (28:18-20). Unfortunately their number includes both true disciples and false (13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 22:11-14; 25:1-13), a distinction which has come to light because of the persecution (5:10-12). Some true disciples have had to flee for their lives (10:23); the false disciples are making public disclaimers of Jesus to avoid persecution (10:32f.; 26:70). They are led by false prophets "who appear to be settled ecclesiastics, i.e. church officials whose easygoing attitudes and policies of accommodation have preserved them from the hardships of an itinerant ministry (7:21-23)" (p. 6), having entered the church "from the Pharisaical sect and the scribal occupation (23:1-36)" (p. 6). Indeed, they "boost their own authority by claiming to have met with Jesus at hideouts in the city and desert (24:23-28)" (p. 6). Matthew presents the need for a surpassing righteousness of these false leaders, rejects honorific titles (23:8-10), and walks in humility (18:4; 23:12). Jesus "legislates the law that his disciples are to obey" (5:21-48; 7:24-28; 28:20)" (p. 7), making him "look like a new legislator greater than Moses" (p. 7). The Matthean Jesus does not so much deny OT law, as perfect it, carrying out "the tendencies of the OT law to their radical ends" (p. 7). To stress this theme, Matthew makes discipleship a function of hearing and understanding Jesus' words (false disciples do not understand), and accentuates "Christ's law" by painting "an awe-inspiring portrait of Jesus" (p. 7)—one who is immediately worshipped, who is not only fully divine but instantly perceived by some to be such (even though historically the recognition could not have come so early). Gundry treats these and other themes,

and concludes: "In the first gospel, then, we have Jewish Christianity breaking out into the wide world of the Gentiles. Perhaps here lies the reason behind Matthew's interest in cities, the centers of population. . . . All in all, Matthew writes his gospel to keep persecution of the church from stymieing evangelism" (p. 9).

Readers of this *Journal* will be interested to know how Gundry relates his understanding of Matthew's "literary and theological art" to the traditional, evangelical stance which Gundry has held in the past and continues to defend. This question is treated in a lengthy "theological postscript" (pp. 623-640). Matthew's changes, Gundry argues, "represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events. Though reticent, no less a champion of the Bible than N. B. Stonehouse found it necessary to admit as much in the story of the rich young man" (Gundry refers to *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963] 108-112). The real problem, Gundry suggests, is that both the conservative wing of Protestantism and the liberal wing have distorted views of Scripture. The former rightly stresses Scripture's authority and infallibility (a point Gundry repeatedly makes), but handles the sacred text so woodenly, harmonistically and ahistorically that it overlooks development within the NT canon, interprets many passages in so forced a way that Scripture is greatly distorted, and minimizes "the human manner in which the biblical writers went about their work" (p. 623). By contrast, liberal Protestantism has rightly paid more attention to the historical setting of the Bible, the influences of the surrounding culture on the biblical writers, "and the literary conventions according to which the ancient authors wrote" (p. 623); but unfortunately the modern bias against supernaturalism results in the human characteristics of the Bible devouring its authority as God's Word, "and theology dances to the ever-shifting tunes piped by the panjandrum of worldly culture" (p. 623).

Gundry proposes to keep the best of both wings. He trenchantly rejects various attempts to circumvent the dilemma—e.g. redefinition of "infallibility," the biblical theology movement, appeal to the authority of church tradition; and in particular he rejects the attempt to handle discrepancies among the Gospels by appealing to the looseness of informal language. Gundry writes: "(For) this argument to work where it is most needed, biblical language would have to be so loose as to be—much to the dismay of those who take this out—indistinguishable from ancient Jewish midrash and haggadah in distance from historical actualities, in liberties taken with historical data" (p. 625). The example to which Gundry appeals is Mark 4:39f. = Matt 8:26: Mark says the disciples had no faith, Matthew that they had little faith. "There are, of course, obscurities in Scripture," concedes Gundry. "But the tendentious patterns in Matthew are not among them. Either we recognize them or we obfuscate the text arbitrarily—and by doing so betray our own tendentiousness and forfeit our right to rest Christian theology on the clear teaching of Scripture" (p. 626).

Gundry is far from saying that the various levels of tradition he detects behind the text are in any sense equivalent with Scripture as far as normative status is concerned. He insists, rightly, that the text of Scripture alone has binding, canonical authority. The essence of his proposal is that Matthew's demonstrable handling of historical data, as measured by the way he has handled his sources, is so loose that it must be classed, roughly, within the

literary genres of midrash and haggadah. Gundry acknowledges there are differences between Matthew and midrash/haggadah. "For one, those who produced midrash and haggadah were embroidering the OT. Matthew was not" (p. 628). Here, however, Gundry balks, and suggests that in one sense it could almost be said that Matthew embroiders the OT with the story of Jesus. But the real comparison he insists upon is this: Matthew treats his sources, Mark and (enlarged) Q, in the same sort of ways by which midrash and haggadah treat the OT. Gundry acknowledges that the exact definition of these Jewish terms is much disputed among the experts, but brushes such problems away. "Semantics aside, it is enough to note that the liberty Matthew takes with his sources is often comparable with the liberty taken with the OT in Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, 1 Enoch, the Targums, and the Midrashim and Haggadoth in rabbinic literature. In his *Antiquities* Josephus takes similar liberties, or includes materials in which they have been taken" (p. 628).

Gundry argues that in this respect Matthew is *qualitatively* different from Mark and Luke, who did not take so much liberty with historical data that their gospels fairly merit categories like "midrash" and "haggadah." This means, for instance, that Luke's account of Jesus' virginal conception and miraculous birth is historically reliable; Matthew's account neither is nor intends to be, but makes a purely theological statement.

"None of this," Gundry writes, "should occasion alarm" (p. 629). All interpreters of Scripture recognize that many different kinds of literature are used by the biblical writers: psalms, aphorisms, letters, poems of various sorts, acrostics, parables, and much more. Some use much more symbolism (e.g. apocalyptic) than others (e.g. Luke's historical narrative). Parables are often stories without historical referent. "If, then, Matthew writes that Jesus said or did something Jesus did not say or do in the way described—this supported by adequate exegetical and comparative data—we have to say that Matthew did not write entirely reportorial history" (p. 629). Jesus was so extraordinary he evoked not only historical narrative from those who described him, but also midrash. Moreover, if both of these genres "can convey truth separately, there is no presumptive reason to think they cannot convey truth together, provided their mixture was a recognized and accepted mode of communication. Ancient midrash and haggadah show that it was" (p. 630)—much like modern historical novels, or like some modern sermons in which preachers, to dramatize a biblical account, spice it up with imaginative dialogue and the like. Gundry cites an amusing instance from the messages of R. C. Sproul, who recreates the interchanges among Adam, Eve and God in the garden. "Sproul is certainly backdating the theology of the cross in a haggadic, midrashic fashion" (p. 631). It is not necessary to announce in advance what genre will be used (the parables, for instance, are not always so introduced), but only to use a form which is recognizable.

Gundry argues that Matthew uses the OT in such a way as to give his readers clues as to what he is doing with "history." He "converts historical statements about the Exodus and the Babylonian Exile into messianic prophecies (Hos 11:1; Jer 31:5; cf. Matt 2:15, 18) and negates what Micah affirmed about the smallness of Bethlehem (Mic 5:1; cf. Matt 2:16 . . .)" (pp. 633-4). Similarly, he disagrees with Mark as to the day on which the fig tree was seen to be withered (Mark 11:12-25; Matt 21:18-22). "In such places Matthew is not writing as a

historian; he is writing as a midrashist and haggadist who bends and shapes his materials to make certain points" (p. 633).

The reason neither the early church, nor the medieval church, nor the reformation church, nor, until fairly recently, the modern church, recognized Matthew's literary genre lies in their ignorance of midrash and haggadah. But the rising tide of historical-critical knowledge during the past two hundred years has gradually forced us to recognize these literary categories. But Matthew's first century *Jewish* readers would have understood what he was doing, and not been upset by Matthew's complex mixture of history interwoven with theological embroidery.

Far from seeing any difficulty in the notion of an apostolic author who wrote midrash, Gundry perceives a strength in the idea: viz. it refutes any suggestion that "midrashists" *thought* they were writing history. The apostle Matthew knew the historical facts first hand. His midrashic contributions, therefore, he could not have thought to be historical; and, similarly, he did not intend that they be read that way. By the same token, he "would no more have denied the historicity of the data behind his embellishments than Sproul would deny the historicity of the biblical stories he changes around for homiletical purposes" (p. 636).

As Gundry sees it, then, the crucial question is literary genre. He insists he is not appealing to midrash because of intractable problems in gospel harmonization, "but because free revisions and additions pervade the gospel and fall into tendentious patterns" (p. 637). "What the biblical authors intended to say should exercise a magisterial role over our interpretation of the Christian faith" (p. 638).

One can only admire Gundry's willingness to tackle difficult literary, theological and critical questions head on. Yet virtually none of the central theses of this book should, in my judgment, win the approval of scholarly consensus, evangelical or otherwise. Despite countless provocative suggestions which shed light on Matthew's gospel, Gundry's commentary must be treated with serious reserve. To do justice to this painfully negative contention would require a full length book; but the following ten points outline the kind of reservations I have in mind.

1. It must first of all be pointed out that evangelicals will entirely miss the mark if they simply cry "Inerrancy!" and accuse Gundry of abandoning the camp. One may reasonably argue that Gundry is cutting a new swath, or that traditional formulations of the doctrine of Scripture should now be tightened up; but as such formulations stand, Gundry in no way contravenes them. Intelligent response to Gundry will have to wrestle with questions of literary genre, source criticism, redaction criticism, the significance of word statistics and the like. The doctrine of Scripture is relevant only insofar as the perspicuity of Scripture is at stake; and here, it must be remembered, Gundry has attempted to forestall criticism by addressing that matter himself.

On the other hand, Gundry is sufficiently innovative that it is scarcely good form for him to appeal to Ned B. Stonehouse as one who admits that Matthew's changes "represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events." Gundry appeals, as we have seen, to pp. 108-112 of Stonehouse's *Origins*. But careful reading of those pages reveals how far apart Gundry and Stonehouse really are. Stonehouse, it is true, argues, rightly, that the gospel writers "are

not concerned, at least not at all times, to report the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus" (p. 108), and that harmonization, however "fundamentally unobjectionable in principle" (p. 109), should not be used to override the transparent liberty of composition which the evangelists demonstrate. They are not characterized by "notarial exactitude" (p. 109). But if Stonehouse invites us to "greater care in determining what the Gospels as a whole and in detail actually say," he also commends "greater restraint in arriving at conclusions where the available evidence does not justify ready answers" (p. 109)—a restraint somewhat lacking in Gundry's work. Meanwhile, Stonehouse insists that even if the evangelists do not always provide the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, yet they do "give an accurate and trustworthy impression of the Lord's teachings" (p. 110); and in studying the story of the rich young ruler, the "general thrust" of his essay is that the argument "that a doctrinal modification has taken place is not established" (p. 110). If Stonehouse wants to avoid thinking of the evangelists "as mere scissors and paste editors" (p. 111), he equally denies that they have "substantially and tendentiously rewritten their sources in the interest of producing Gospels articulating their own individual historical and theological points of view as they had developed in the course of time" or that they were merely "the persons who gave literary form to the contemporaneous witness of the communities" (pp. 111-12).

All of this is diametrically opposed to Gundry's "developments of the Christian tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events." Gundry should let his theories stand on their own feet, rather than to associate them with someone whose writings repudiate them.

2. Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, the cogency of Gundry's source theories (see point 3, below), his rigid classification of material into "traditional" and "redactional," the latter assumed to be without historical referent, is naive. The naiveté reveals itself on two levels. First, the word studies, with their ubiquitous statistics, are only sometimes as decisive as the figures suggest. Words which are "inserted" into, say, markan material, may be part of an entire verse or paragraph that is added. In that case it may reflect part of Matthew's larger vocabulary. Why should not Matthew have a larger vocabulary when his book is about 40% longer than Mark and includes much greater *diversity* of material? Second, and much more important, the very freedom which Gundry insists the gospel writers enjoy vitiates the distinction between tradition and redaction when it comes to assessing what is historical. In other words, an evangelist may choose to follow a known source (which of course does not mean the content is necessarily historical, though Gundry seems to assume it is on the grounds that Mark and enlarged Q treat their sources with greater historical sensitivity than does Matthew—though what hard evidence do we have for sources behind Mark and Q which Gundry could treat to his word counts?); but he may relate an event, address, or even a short saying in his own idiom *without necessarily being any looser to the historical situation than when he is using sources*. Even where a word or phrase is demonstrably redactional, it cannot prove much about underlying questions of historicity unless either (1) it brings the account into irretrievable conflict with some other document which also seems, on the face of it, to be historical, or (2) it is part of a genre of literature which is demonstrably unhistorical in its focus. *In neither case is it the traditional/redactional disjunction which is crucial*. In the latter, it is the literary genre; in the former, the discrepancy with another source.

On the problem of literary genre, I shall say more in a moment (point 4, below). The problem of discrepancies between, say, Mark and Matthew, may delay us a little longer. Detailed treatment would require a book, or a commentary of comparable length to Gundry's. Logically speaking, of course, a discrepancy *may* not be a sign of another genre of literature without historical referent, but of an actual error; but Gundry rules that out. Quite apart from his high doctrine of Scripture, however, he should not overlook this possibility so quickly; for if it is only in the *discrepancy* that we gain a clue to the presence of a genre of literature without historical referent, then that fact would be lost on the reader who does not busily compare Matthew with his putative sources and thereby discover the tell-tale discrepancies. And if the reader found a discrepancy by comparing, say, Mark and Matthew, would he not simply think he had found an error? Are we not driven again to the conclusion that something in the form or vocabulary or subject matter must reveal this alien genre? Thus, even the presence of a discrepancy is insufficient, *in itself*, to establish genre.

The discrepancies which Gundry stresses, both in his "commentary proper" and in his "theological postscript," are not very persuasive if they have to bear the weight of so substantial a theological reconstruction. Many of the points he raises I have discussed at length in my forthcoming commentary on this gospel, and will refrain from repeating them here. One or two examples must suffice.

Gundry points out that Matthew's account of the withered fig tree (21:17-22) apparently places the discovery of the effect of Jesus' curse on a different day than in Mark. This, Gundry says, is a contradiction, and constitutes a reason why we must doubt that Matthew *intends* to write history. It is true that Mark divides his account into two parts (Mark 11:12-14, 20-26), with the cleansing of the Temple in between: from a strictly chronological perspective, Mark preserves greater detail. But strictly speaking, Matthew does no more than follow his typical pattern: he adopts a topical grid. He gives the *impression* the discovery is the same day, but in fact he does not actually specify: he simply says, "When the disciples saw this. . . ." Compare Matthew's condensation of 9:18ff.

Gundry says that Matthew's other changes can all be explained by supposing that Matthew does *not intend* to convey the account accurately, but to use the episode to excoriate Israel. In particular, Matthew omits Mark's "because it was not the season for figs" to remove any excuse from Israel. But this ignores the Jewishness of Matthew's readers. They would understand that if this event was alleged to have taken place near Passover, then *of course* it was not the season for figs (prompting some scholars to suggest this pericope actually took place near Dedication when figs were abundant!). Fig leaves appear about the same time as the green fruit, which is edible though rather disagreeable. Early figs are not unknown on the southern slopes of Olivet. If all of the fig trees in the area were bearing, Jesus' cursing of the tree is much more difficult to understand: if he wanted fruit, he would only have needed to walk to the next tree. Thus, *both Mark and Matthew* assume it was not the full season for figs. The tree Jesus saw was one of the exceptional early starters. Jewish readers might well presuppose all this, and therefore Matthew could omit mentioning that "it was not the season for figs." Jesus' curse, *whether in Mark or Matthew*, is in any case not nearly as dependent on the season as Gundry suggests, *but on the appearance of leaves*. This fig tree stood out as one that was promising fruit; but in fact it was barren. At that point, Jesus, perceiving the possibility of a

telling object lesson, therefore cursed it—not for barrenness *per se*, in or out of season, but for promising fruit and providing none. How like Israel! How tightly is this theme related to the cleansing of the Temple *in both Mark and Matthew*! Moreover, Gundry’s treatment of other changes in this pericope fares no better.

We may take another example. Mark 4:40 reads, “Have you no faith?,” whereas the parallel in Matt 8:26 finds Jesus berating his disciples as “men of little faith.” This is a major change, Gundry alleges, brought about because Matthew cannot envisage discipleship apart from *some* faith. But again, several considerations prompt at least some pause. (1) We may be reading too much into Mark’s *question* if we interpret it as a bold *assertion* that the disciples had no faith. An exasperated preacher might well berate *those whom he regards as true believers* if he thinks their conduct beneath their protestations of faith. It must be noticed that Mark does *not* elsewhere *develop* the theme of “disciples” who have *no* faith; so one may legitimately wonder if that is exactly what he is doing here. What Jesus’ *exact* words were we cannot know; but the large change in meaning Gundry ascribes to Matthew may rest in the first instance on too mechanical an understanding of Mark. (2) *Both* Matthew (17:17) and Mark (9:19) preserve Jesus’ ascription *to his disciples* of the epithet “*unbelieving* and perverse generation.” (3) Gundry preemptorily dismisses any suggestion that *ὀλιγόπιστοι* could refer to a different *kind* of faith; but the dismissal is premature. Bonnard, for instance, makes a good case for the view the cognate noun *ὀλιγοπιστία* in 17:20 must in this context refer not to littleness or smallness of faith but to its essential poverty: *little* faith, as little as a tiny grain of mustard seed, is no hindrance, but *bankrupt* faith, or *poor* faith, like that exhibited by the disciples, is ineffectual. *If* the same is true in Matt 8:26, Matthew may be credited with a little more theological precision than Mark, but scarcely with a radically new meaning. (4) If Matthew were so eager to insist that *true* discipleship involves *some* faith, it is strange to find him *introducing* the difficulty in 17:20 (contrast Mark 9:29). It seems more likely that Matthew uses *ὀλιγόπιστοι* because it is part of his working vocabulary; but it is very doubtful if his overall presentation of the disciples, to readers who sat down and read through both gospels, would make the disciples out to be men of substantially more faith than in Mark. Indeed, his very *reiteration* of the *ὀλιγόπιστοι* (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:28) serves to highlight their shortcomings in this respect.

Of course, Gundry offers countless other “discrepancies,” but these are among those he most stresses (e.g. he brings them up again in his “theological postscript”). The changes of meaning Matthew has introduced turn out to be very small indeed—much too small to bear the weight of Gundry’s theses.

3. Gundry’s commentary presupposes, and occasionally argues, that Matthew’s *only* sources were Mark and an enlarged Q, the only other significant influence being the OT. The multiplicity of sources Luke knows (Luke 1:1-4) Matthew either does not know or chooses to ignore in favor of embroidering history. Gundry believes the evangelist was the apostle Matthew; *but not once does he ever consider that under this supposition Matthew’s own memory of the events might be a very influential source.* Nowhere does Gundry intimate by what *methodological* controls he decides that some particularly matthean addition is *not* the result of memory or some other source, but a creation spun out of the theological commitment. Even on his own view, that this gospel is a strange

mixture of history (from the two known, written sources) and midrash, it must surely be thought imperative to distinguish how much of the non-source material might be true to history. Is Matthew capable of writing history only when he is copying someone else? Could he write of events which he himself had witnessed *without* calling up his memories? In this sense is not Matthew’s account very different from the sermon of R. C. Sproul, who does not claim to have been party to Adam’s conversations?

The question of Matthew’s sources becomes urgent when Gundry argues that “we only have to suppose” that Matthew had the traditions behind Luke 1 and 2 to explain the narratives of Matt 1:18-2:23. It is well-nigh beyond belief—mine, at least—to be told that Matthew creates the visit of the magi out of the story of the shepherds, or that he changes the holy family’s trip to Jerusalem into the flight to Egypt. What *evidence* is there for this, beyond bald assertion? And how does such paltry evidence as exists—e.g. similarity in the theme of travel!—stand against *counter* evidence? One could wish Gundry had immersed himself in some such methodological study as David Fischer’s *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). When Gundry simply *assumes* that some parable in Luke’s central section with vague similarities to another in Matthew must represent the common Q source, one longs for the careful weighing of the literary evidence presented, for example, by C. Blomberg, in his forthcoming dissertation at Aberdeen (see my commentary on 19:1f.).

Because he lies on this Procrustean bed of two sources and no more—not even personal memory or other tradition—incredible judgments abound. At 4:25, for instance, we are told that Matthew “skips to Mark 3:7-8” in order to “gain geographical terms” (p. 64). In the part of Jesus’ genealogy recorded in 1:12-16, Matthew continues his practice of “substituting freely,” only now his “thoughts turn” to the *priestly* genealogy of 1 Chr 6:3ff. because, first, he has been drawing on 1 Chronicles all along for his genealogy, and second, mention of “Eliezer” in *Luke’s* genealogy has made him think of the well known high *priest* Eleazar. Of course, “Matthew has no interest in priestly Christology” (p. 17): it’s just that this list provides an interesting quarry. Through several tortured paragraphs, Gundry relates the names of Matt 1:12ff. to the priestly line, and explains large shifts by saying that Matthew has obscured his priestly source to protect Davidic Christology! Yet a great deal of evidence can be amassed to show that many genealogies were still kept up until the destruction of the second temple. Whatever difficulties are found in the genealogies, thoroughly plausible solutions have been offered for all of them. The magisterial study by R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), rather surprisingly, overlooks a rather elegant solution put forward by J. Gresham Machen fifty years ago. But such an alternative Gundry does not even pause to weigh.

4. The most crucial element in Gundry’s argument is his appeal to midrash or midrash haggadah. Of course, there is nothing wrong in suggesting that an evangelist adopts this or that literary genre; but such suggestions must be based on adequate comparative data, embracing questions both of form and of content. Surprisingly, Gundry never addresses such matters.

Far too little work has been done on just what “midrash” is for the bold theses of Gundry to be sustained. At the level of mere etymology, “midrash” is a transliteration of the participle of a Hebrew verb which may be rendered “to

interpret." By such lights a "midrash" is an "interpretation." In that sense, every comment on another text is a midrash—including Gundry's commentary on Matthew. But clearly, Gundry means something more specialized than that.

Definitions proposed by specialists in the field have not met with universal approval. J. D. M. Derrett (*Studies in the New Testament*, 2 vols. [Leiden: Brill, 1977, 1978]. 2.205ff.) defines midrashic method in terms of its allusiveness to many sources, not in terms of historicity; but in that case, the term is ill applied to the kind of writing Gundry thinks the first gospel is. Klyne R. Snodgrass ("Streams of tradition emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and their adaptation in the New Testament," *JSNT* 8 [1980] 40) defines midrash not in terms of literary *genre* but "as a *process* [emphasis mine] in which forms of tradition develop and enrich or intensify later adaptation of Old Testament texts." But this definition serves Gundry's purposes no better than the last, for it says nothing about questions of historicity or recognizable genre (which for Gundry are crucial), and everything about process (which for Gundry is at best peripheral and usually not adequately accessible to the modern researcher). Many more definitions have been advanced: I hope to classify them and assess their validity in a later publication.

But Gundry never directly addresses the question of definition. Indeed, as we have seen, he brushes the question aside with the following: "Semantics aside, it is enough to note that the liberty Matthew takes with his sources is often comparable with the liberty taken with the OT in Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, 1 Enoch, the Targums, and the Midrashim and Haggadoth in rabbinic literature. In his *Antiquities* Josephus takes similar liberties, or includes materials in which they have been taken" (p. 628). This list is astonishing. It spans about five centuries, and embraces widely different *genres*. The Targums, for instance, are rather loose, Aramaic paraphrases of the OT, paraphrases which take certain liberties with the OT text. But when synagogue worshippers heard them, they knew what they were and recognized the canonical status of the Hebrew OT. Did early Christians think of Matthew's gospel as a paraphrase of canonical Mark and canonical Q? There is no evidence whatever for such a view; and as soon as questions of literary dependence were commented upon, the supposition was that the dependence ran the other way: Mark borrowed from Matthew. Again, if we consider the Jewish midrashim, they are a form which crystallizes *as literature* in the fourth century. Such late midrashim work through consecutive passages of Scripture, making comments and telling illustrative stories which may have no historical referent. But the line of continuity is the OT text, to which are appended the comments and stories. By contrast, Matthew's birth narratives, for instance, as R. T. France has clearly shown (see esp. his "Herod and the Children of Bethlehem," *NovT* 21 [1979] 98-120) constitute the real continuity of Matthew 1-2, and the OT quotations are themselves appended. This can be shown by removing them: the story line is not in the least affected. This is precisely the opposite of fourth century midrashim. "Midrash" in this case may include created stories; but this usage is both late and, as far as story line is concerned, the inverse of Matthew. Moreover, as with Targums, the text on which comment is being made (*viz.* the OT) is recognized as such. Nothing similar applies to Matthew.

Yet again, if we consider the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, there is no doubt that a great deal is "added" to the OT stories about the patriarchs. In

small sections of the book, the author(s) follow, adapt or change the OT narrative; but most of the work is, as far as we know, free creation. Doubtless the reader will detect *theological* commitments in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs; *but it is not at all clear that we are not meant to believe the narratives are historical*. By contrast, in Gundry's judgment, whatever Matthew has creatively inserted into his literary sources is without historical referent, and is *not meant* to be interpreted as having such referent. But Gundry discusses none of these considerations.

In a wide-ranging chapter of his doctoral dissertation, Douglas J. Moo ("The Use of the Old Testament in the Passion Texts of the Gospels" [Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1979]) ably discusses the various ways in which literature that treats the OT text may be analyzed, and applies his findings to the problem of defining midrash. He distinguishes literary genre (which turns on form and general content), citation procedures (e.g. explicit quotation, allusion, conceptual influence and the like), appropriation technique (the ways by which the OT text is applied to the contemporary setting) and the hermeneutical axioms that are implicitly adopted by the interpreter (e.g. that the Scriptures must be treated allegorically, or that they can rightly be applied only by a special figure who adopts a revelatory stance, or that they constitute a closed system which has to be interpreted in fairly ingenious ways to elicit from them answers to questions about conduct not specifically treated in the text). Now Gundry nowhere clearly attempts to define "midrash" in terms of genre (though he uses the word "genre" now and then); but if he did, he would discover that in the first century the semantic range of the term "midrash" is too wide to bear some neatly defined meaning related to absence of interest in history. Attempts to define "midrash" in terms of appropriation technique have not proved successful, because none of the techniques is *restricted* to midrash. Moo tentatively suggests that "midrash" be characterized "in terms of the hermeneutical axioms which guide the approach" (p. 66). There is merit in this proposal; but the hermeneutical axioms which govern the authors of the documents Gundry lists are poles apart. Moo himself restricts "midrash" to rabbinic Judaism; and there the operative hermeneutical axioms include a non-eschatological perception of itself and a deep preoccupation with enunciating its identity and directing its conduct, corresponding roughly to the two forms haggadic midrash and halakic midrash (in addition to Moo, cf. Daniel Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine* [Missoula: SBL, 1975] 49ff.). By contrast, Matthew's gospel, not least chaps. 1-2, are fundamentally eschatological. The events described are said to *fulfill* Scripture, in the context, not of halakic rules of conduct, but of a teleological perspective and of the dawning of the messianic kingdom.

A great deal more could be said about these difficult questions; but I have briefly mentioned these few things to illustrate the kind of crucial matters which Gundry nowhere discusses, but which are foundational to his theses. He seems to think that the *essence* of midrash and haggadah lies in their ability to stand loose from history and/or the literary sources on which they rely. But how loose? How much is distortion, and how much creation *ex nihilo*? Under what conditions does each occur? In which of the documents he cites would readers *think* they are reading history? And would they think a particular haggadic story is fictional because of its *form* or because it is placed in a context *illustrating* some OT text? How do these considerations apply to Matthew?

The matter is more serious yet. If Gundry cannot demonstrate that the allegedly non-historical character of the redactional material in Matthew is recognizable by its *form*, a number of further questions spring to mind. Exactly *how* is this allegedly non-historical material recognized as such? Gundry's closest answer to this question seems to be that the departure from the known sources is so great that this is the only reasonable explanation. Yet even here, Gundry equivocates; for as we have seen, he also says that his understanding of the matthean material as non-historical must not be thought to depend in any crucial way on the apparent discrepancies between the first gospel and Mark or Q. Then on what? And if the discrepancies Gundry finds really *are* crucial for his argument (and despite his theological postscript, they *function* this way in "the commentary proper"), could Matthew's readers have detected anything non-historical unless they had studied Mark and Q as closely as Gundry? And if they could, *on what basis*? Moreover, how do Matthew's pericopes *formally* differ from Mark's? If they *don't*, why not say Mark's content is also non-historical, theological embroidery? It will not do to say that Mark does not treat his sources as loosely as Matthew, since, on Gundry's view, we do not possess Mark's sources. Appeal to the way each evangelist individually handles the OT is not (as we shall see) a valid argument; and in any case, such distinctions, to whatever extent they exist, cannot by themselves bear the weight of Gundry's theses. Such "discrepancies" as do exist cannot in any case, as we have seen, establish an entire genre; and most of them are fairly easily explained in terms of the relative freedom of reportage exhibited by all the evangelists, consistent with their joint commitment to adhere to the truth of that to which they bore witness and to their own historical and theological concerns.

Although Raymond E. Brown (*The Birth of the Messiah* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1977]) does not discuss these things fully, he exhibits enough sensitivity to the problems that he cheerfully acknowledges Matthew 1-2 cannot meaningfully be labelled "midrash." Even so, he thinks that the evangelist might well have used "midrashic techniques," and that an environment which could produce non-historical midrashim might well produce the narratives of Matthew 1-2 with, allegedly, few historical referents. I do not think this argument is very convincing: it masks the confusion in terminology by the additional confusion of analogy. But whatever the merits of the argument in Brown's book, *it will not work at all for Gundry*. For his theological synthesis to be convincing, he has to argue that the reason why everyone has misunderstood Matthew from earliest recorded church history down to the present day lies in the fact that *before* the first writing of such history, Gentile Christians took over the book and read it, wrongly, with unwitting biases in favor of the historicity of midrashic material—even though the earliest *Jewish* readers well understood the non-historical nature of the redactional material. For such a hypothesis to be convincing, however, one needs an unambiguous and readily recognizable *genre* (which we do not have), not analogically similar methods with no well defined, formal characteristics.

Gundry says that his appeal to genre must be "supported by adequate exegetical and comparative data" (p. 629); and I agree. But on hundreds of exegetical points I beg to differ with him; and as for comparative data, he offers none, except in one cursory list of highly disparate documents. Casual references to R. C. Sproul are hardly convincing parallels; for even there, an

intelligent audience understands what Sproul is doing (and may even criticize him for it!) precisely because he is working from a text which both he and his audience recognize as canonical. This fact, as we have seen, does not apply to Matthew; but if it did, then there would be no reason to hide the church's failure to recognize non-historical "midrash" in Matthew behind a putative change in readership from Jewish Christian to Gentile Christian.

The failure of Gundry's work in this area is so deep that I do not see how his central theses can possibly be salvaged.

5. Gundry's commitment to his extreme form of redaction criticism produces an inevitable result: his commentary has too much theology—or, better put, for every change or addition to Matthew's two sources, Gundry finds *theological motivation exclusively*. He rarely considers the possibility that a change or addition could be prompted by historical factors, geography, personal reminiscence, further sources. Of quite literally hundreds of possible examples, consider Gundry's opening comments on 2:11-12:

Again we meet a Mattheanism in ἐλθόντες (10, 10), which corresponds to Luke 2:15-16. In Matthew "the house" means Jesus' house. . . . Here it replaces the traditional manger, hardly a fit place for distinguished magi [who, it must be remembered, are a matthean creation] to offer expensive gifts to a king. The seeing of the child with Mary his mother reflects the tradition behind Luke 2:16-17. But Joseph has dropped out, the child has come forward in order of mention, and Mary has gained the designation "his mother," as in 1:18—all to emphasize Jesus' virgin birth and deity (p. 31).

Part of the problem is the assumption that Matthew here depends on Luke 2:15-17 and transforms that narrative into something quite different. It is not certain that "the house" means Jesus' house in Matthew, and 4:13 does not settle the question (contra Gundry on 9:10). In 13:1, 36, the reference *may* be to his own house, but the focus of attention is indoors (i.e. privately) versus outdoors (i.e. publicly). There seems no merit in making the house in Matt 9:10 belong to Jesus, when Luke says it didn't and when the flow of the narrative in Matthew easily supposes it belongs to the newly converted tax gatherer. As for the disappeared manger, Gundry *never so much as raises the possibility* that the reason it has been displaced by the house is that the arrival of the magi took place some time later—a point clearly hinted at by the two year limit which Herod imposed on the age of those he ordered massacred in Bethlehem, after carefully discovering "the exact time the star had appeared" (2:7). Would the holy family have continued to live in a stable, perhaps a year after Jesus' birth? But if these factors are potentially relevant, on what grounds can Gundry say that the house displaces the traditional manger because the latter is "hardly a fit place for distinguished magi"? In fact, if the story of the magi were indeed a fabrication, one could make a plausible case for the contrary view—viz. that Matthew's considerable stress on humility and self-abasement might lead us, a priori, to *expect* him to place the magi beside the manger. But my fundamental criticism is that historical factors are too often not even weighed. Redaction criticism runs amok when the theology—*Matthew's* theology—swallows up considerations of source, history, geography, timing, literary style and the like. Gundry's zeal along these lines becomes so warm that he slips in countless non sequiturs. How does failure to mention Joseph, the bringing forward of the child in the sentence (and even that sort of language *assumes* a

tradition like Luke is the source!), and the designation “his mother” applied to Mary, *in any way* “emphasize Jesus’ virgin birth and deity”? The description of Joseph’s involvement in Matthew 1 has already made it clear he is not Jesus’ physical father; so why should mention of him, or failure to mention him, either support or detract from Jesus’ virginal conception? Maybe the reason why only Mary is mentioned is because when the magi arrived, Joseph was at work! I’m not arguing it was so; but if the incident is *historical*, that is at least a plausible *historical* reason for the omission. Or it may be that Matthew for reasons quite unknown and incidental mentions only Mary—e.g. she was holding Jesus at the time. The text does not say, and we are only guessing; but Gundry’s guess has the disadvantage of being a non sequitur. By the same token, early mention of the child, and addition of the words “his mother,” do not in any sense “emphasize Jesus’ virgin birth and deity.” Gundry desires that it be so, in support of his contention that Matthew’s fictional account pictures the magi worshipping Jesus as God. But again we may seriously doubt that the text supports, anything like so mature an understanding among the magi at this stage in salvation history (cf. my article “Christological Ambiguities in Matthew’s Gospel” in the forthcoming Guthrie *Festschrift*).

This kind of over-theologizing extends all the way down to individual words. The Greek word for city is a matthean favorite: πόλις 18,3,6(27,8,39)—especially in redactional material. Gundry suggests that the “reason behind Matthew’s interest in cities, the centers of population” (p. 9) may lie in a certain theological perspective adopted by the evangelist, viz. that his *Sitz im Leben* is “Jewish Christianity breaking out into the wide world of the Gentiles” (p. 9). Quite apart from the correctness of this theological perspective, it is difficult to see why Matthew’s frequent use of πόλις offers any support for it. Did not Jews also live in cities, whether in Palestine or in the diaspora? Indeed, as far as we can tell, Jews in the diaspora were more likely to be found in cities than in the country. Perhaps Gundry has been misled by his own statistics. The first digit (see above) reveals that eighteen out of Matthew’s twenty-seven uses are *insertions* into material paralleled elsewhere; and Gundry thinks that kind of evidence is most significant. But what does it signify? The total frequency is even higher in Luke than in Matthew (thirty-nine versus twenty-seven); and in both Luke and Matthew, it may suggest pedantic concern for historical details. After all, it was Gundry who, in his earlier book (*The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Leiden: Brill, 1967]) pictured Matthew as a careful note taker. More important, one could plausibly surmise that if πόλις were a favorite matthean word for *any* reason, it would crop up most often in his re-working of Mark, who uses the word but little yet provides the narrative framework most suitable for using it. A great deal of Matthew’s “M” material is address, not narrative; and there πόλις does not always fit. That could easily account for the disproportionately high first figure.

Another pair of examples come from Matt 2:6. Gundry says that Matthew adds οὐδαμῶς, “by no means,” even though this brings his text into flat contradiction with Micah 5:2 (MT 5:1), because “(for) Matthew the birth of Jesus has transformed Bethlehem from the unimportant village it was at the time of Micah’s prediction into the supremely important birthplace of the messianic king from David’s line” (p. 29). Here, of course, Gundry is siding with a large number of other commentators. But the conclusion is premature. It derives from a narrow focus on the word οὐδαμῶς, at the expense of carefully listening

to what Micah 5:2 and Matt 2:6 are each saying *as a whole verse*. The MT of Micah, scarcely less than Matthew, emphasizes Bethlehem’s greatness: “though you are small among the clans [that is what “thousands” refers to: cf. Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 10:19; 23:23; Isa 60:22] of Judah” sets the stage for the greatness that follows—i.e. though small and insignificant, *yet* implicitly Bethlehem will become great by virtue of him who will be born there. Equally, Matthew’s formulation presupposes that *apart* from Messiah’s birth Bethlehem is indeed of little importance: the γάρ (“for”) in the third line can scarcely mean anything else. The point was well defended by E. Hengstenberg (*Christology of the Old Testament* [Florida: McDonald, repr. n.d.] .1.475-6)—a point appreciated by Gundry in his earlier book on Matthew (*Use*, pp. 91-2), but now apparently disavowed. To put the matter another way, Matthew’s use of οὐδαμῶς brings the second line of Matt 2:6 into *formal* contradiction with Micah 5:2; but a holistic comparison of the two verses demonstrates that the contradiction is not more than formal. The two verses entirely agree in content. The most that can be said about their differences at this point, so far as content is concerned, is that the matthean way of citing Micah lays slightly greater emphasis on the one factor which, both Matthew and Micah agree, makes Bethlehem great.

The second example from this verse is the use of “rulers” instead of “clans” or “thousands,” doubtless achieved by supplying slightly different vowels to the consonantal Hebrew text. Gundry comments: “Later, in his account of Jesus’ passion and resurrection, Matthew will interject the designation of Pilate as ἡγεμῶν eight times. By using the same word in his quotation of Mic 5:1, the evangelist makes Jesus Pilate’s superior, too, the true governor of Judah” (p. 29). This is just possible; but several cautions should be aired. Would any of Matthew’s first readers have detected so much significance in the use of ἡγεμῶν? Would they even remember, by the time they got to Matthew 27 and were reading about Pilate, that that was the word Matthew had used back in Matt 2:6? In this early context, is there not more of a contrast between *Herod* as king and *Jesus* as rightful ruler of Judah? Is it not significant that in his interrogation by Pilate, Jesus, according to Matthew, is not asked about being a ἡγεμῶν, but about being “king of the Jews”? Does this not suggest the evangelist is *not* concerned to present Jesus as the true ἡγεμῶν over against Pilate? After all, the use of “rulers” instead of “clans” *may* simply reflect Matthew’s reading of the unpointed Hebrew—a natural enough supposition since he uses his own word for “ruler,” ἡγεμῶν, in the next line, where the LXX prefers ἀρχων. In other words, even here is it not possible that Gundry is reading more theological significance into one word than the evangelist himself intends? In this case, it is hard to be sure; but again and again I came away from Gundry’s commentary with the uneasy feeling that Gundry is doing with individual words the kind of redaction critical equivalent of over-theologizing so painfully common in the early volumes of *TDNT*, and so rightly debunked by James Barr.

6. Because Gundry has chosen to avoid much interaction with scholarly work on Matthew, he has constantly adopted highly speculative (not to say uncontrolled) positions, and done so with astonishing overconfidence. Of course, he hopes to disarm this criticism by his opening gambit: he assures us his commentary does not belong with those which are heavily documented and achieve great interplay with other scholarly works, but with those in which the author fully develops his own line of interpretation. This can be a great blessing.

Heavily documented commentaries hold an important and honorable place, but they can be tedious and repetitive. Nevertheless, if a commentator chooses to follow the route of independent interpretation and minimal documentation, he must at least demonstrate that he is aware of counter positions and contrary evidence, and provide some hint as to how he would respond to such material. And this Gundry fails to do. One could amass quite a bit of impressive evidence in favor of, say, a flat earth, provided there was little consideration given to contrary evidence and even less attention paid to competing explanations of the phenomena. In such a case it would not necessarily be a virtue to argue that the presentation opted to develop its own line of interpretation with little documentation and even less interaction with other interpretations of the data.

Several score examples of this weakness could be listed; but I shall restrict myself to three, of various types. First, the central theses of the book badly need testing along this line. Gundry *assumes* that Matthew had only Mark and (enlarged) Q as literary sources, *assumes* that the evangelist never uses his own memory of the events, *assumes* that the “minor agreements” are best explained by his theory that Luke used the gospel of Matthew as an “overlay,” *assumes* that what is redactional in Matthew is non-historical. He *argues* that the genre of a great deal of such material is midrash or haggadah, without a trace of comparative study or any attempt to weigh counterproposals. Yet in each case, substantial evidence and/or very different interpretations of the data are widely known. What are the merits, for instance, of Gundry’s “overlay” theory over against competing explanations of the “minor agreements”? Should the “overlay” theory leave us wondering why Luke should have used the gospel of an apostle *so little*?

Second, not only at the level of the book’s central theses, but also in many individual judgments, Gundry’s joint speculation and overconfidence, his failure to interact, is very unsatisfying. For instance, in 16:16 he adopts the more or less common view that the longer form of the Petrine confession is a matthean creation. But he does not even discuss the kind of careful, balanced arguments advanced by Ben F. Meyer (*The Aims of Jesus* [London: SCM, 1979] 185-97). I am not saying that Gundry should have referred to Meyer; but at very least he should have shown that he had reflected on the kinds of arguments advanced by Meyer, and how and why his own position is superior.

Third, much of the church theology which Gundry discovers in this gospel needs fundamental reconsideration. Following Gerhard Barth, Gundry holds, as we have seen, that Matthew has so transformed Mark’s categories for discipleship that, unlike Mark, Matthew makes *understanding* the determinative feature. The wholesale adoption of Barth’s thesis is unjustified: see esp. Andrew H. Trotter, “Understanding and Stumbling: A Study of the Disciples’ Understanding of Jesus and His Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew” (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1982). But the chief point I am now making is that although the question of the disciples’ understanding comes up again and again, not once is the proffered line called in question or weighed against a competing interpretation.

7. A necessary concomitant of Gundry’s approach is his discovery of countless anachronisms (e.g. pp. 84, 289ff., 355, 375ff., 383, 399, 453ff., 552, 578, etc.). This is scarcely surprising if the church theology of A.D. 63 or so can easily be read off the surface of the text. Both in details and in broad themes, the propriety of doing so is unquestioned by Gundry. For instance, Matthew’s inser-

tion “and seeing the crowds” in 5:1 becomes evidence not for apostolic testimony to Jesus’ concern for the crowds (compare 9:35-38!) but an ahistorical comment inserted “to make Jesus’ teaching the law apply to the whole universal church” (p. 65). I have already provided a representative list of the verses to which Gundry appeals to establish what he called “the theology of Matthew” but what is in reality a description of Matthew’s *Sitz im Leben* as Gundry reconstructs it.

But burning questions stand behind this hunt for anachronisms. What should be made of the fact that Matthew chose to write a “gospel” about Jesus, not an epistle or an apocalypse? When Gundry appeals to 10:32-33; 26:70 to argue that Matthew’s church has endured a split by false disciples making public disclaimers of Jesus to avoid persecution, how would he distinguish, *methodologically*, this interpretation from one which holds that the historical Jesus taught this, standing in line with OT prophets but far outstripping them in his vision; or from yet another interpretation which suggests the historical Jesus taught this would happen, and because Matthew was watching the fulfillment of these predictions in his own church, he felt it wise to remind his readers of Jesus’ words? The problems involved in reconstructing Matthew’s *Sitz* can be seen even more clearly by using one of Gundry’s own illustrations. Sproul, Gundry points out, adds a lot of chatty dialogue to the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Would it be legitimate to deduce the situation in Sproul’s church from the additions of Sproul? It would, I suppose, be proper to adduce such additions as witness to Sproul’s personal beliefs about what Genesis 3 and related biblical theology really teaches about Adam and Eve, and their temptation and fall; but could one then leap to an analysis of Sproul’s church? Thus, *even if* Matthew has added a lot of content which is not historically grounded in the life and teaching of Jesus (a point I am conceding only for the sake of the argument), it would not necessarily follow that such additions could be responsibly read as unambiguous pointers to the situation in Matthew’s church. And if Jesus *did* teach and do substantially those things which Matthew says he taught and did, then we must ask if Matthew intends to preserve an accurate record of these things as he remembers and/or has researched them, or if he writes those things which are largely in line with his own interests, or if he preserves those elements which he feels are of most pressing significance to his church in his own day, or if there is some combination of all of these. We may inquire, further, whether Matthew, *if* his material is largely shaped by his concern for “his own church,” is in reality dealing with *one* local congregation or with a battery of them, each afflicted with different and sometimes competing or even contradictory theological ailments. How would this affect our reading of Matthew’s gospel? On what *methodological* principle does the consistent redaction critic adopt one route and not another?

The truth of the matter is that there is no way, with the limited information we have, to rule out any of these options with a decisive show of evidence. By the same token, the various theories are arbitrary and undisciplined. What we *do* have is a text in which the writer, to all appearances, seems to be telling us, in his own words or with the help of sources, what *Jesus* said and did. Only evidence of a kind equally unambiguous may be permitted to stand against this simple fact. To navigate this shoal, Gundry, like many (though not all) other redaction critics, appeals to literary genre, though very unconvincingly (as we have seen); or he appeals to contradictions between Matthew and his sources.

This last tack is no more convincing than the first; for, (1) at a practical level, the question of the clarity of Scripture is raised for Gundry (as it is not for redaction critics who do not espouse a high view of Scripture) unless there is reason to assume the first readers of Matthew diligently compared Matthew with Mark and Q, *and* enjoyed an unambiguous literary category to explain the discrepancies; and, (2) at a deeper level, it must be strongly insisted that most of the alleged contradictions are nothing of the sort, and the few really difficult problems are all patient of reasonable and plausible explanations.

In short, the putative anachronisms fall into one or more of three categories: (1) they are highly speculative—e.g. those which allegedly describe Matthew's church, even though the text locates the material during Jesus' ministry; or (2) they are based on fundamentally false exegesis—e.g. attempts to argue that Matthew's treatment of the Jewish leaders is demonstrably anachronistic (cf. my "The Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: A Reappraisal," *JETS* 25 [1982]); or (3) they belong to a small number of difficult passages where there are several *plausible* explanations, but insufficient evidence one way or the other to enable us to venture a firm, exegetical conclusion.

8. It is not quite fair to accuse the conservative wing of Protestantism with handling the text so woodenly and ahistorically that it overlooks development within the NT canon and interprets the Scriptures in such a way that their plain meaning is actually distorted. Of course, there are many within the conservative camp who have been guilty of these and many other exegetical crimes. It is an accepted dictum of polemics, however, that one should respond to the *strongest* proponents of an opposing view, not the weakest; for otherwise one may be wasting time and energy in the erection and demolition of straw men.

Well trained conservative scholars today try very hard not to read Matthew in the light of the completed canon or later Christian tradition, but to grapple with this book in the light of its place in salvation history. At a very simple level, it is clear that none of the disciples really grasp the significance of the passion predictions until after the events to which they pointed (and since not all of those predictions are exclusively matthean, Gundry, unlike many redaction critics, is not left the option of saying they are all *vaticinia ex eventu*). The stance, in other words, as far as the *disciples* are concerned, is quite different from, say, that of Paul in Rom 3:21-25 or 1 Cor 1:23. The Book of Acts records some of the crucial changes and wrestlings which take place as the fledgling church moves out from what was initially its exclusively Jewish environment. Conservatives recognize these and many other developments in the theology as salvation history advances.

The real sticking point that divides Gundry from other conservatives is *not* appreciation for historical development, or lack of such appreciation, but, as we have seen, the question of the historical period to which the sayings and events in the gospel of Matthew properly belong. The two issues are quite distinct; and it is an important error of category to confuse them.

9. At several points, Gundry argues that Matthew's use of the OT would alert his readers to the fact that he is *not* writing history. I agree that Matthew is not writing *only* history; but I doubt very much that what Matthew is writing is determined by his handling of OT texts. Gundry says that Matthew turns *history*, like the exodus and the exile, into *prophecy* that is allegedly "fulfilled" in some event which "happens" in Jesus' life; and therefore we need to expand our understanding not only of what "fulfill" means *but also of what*

"happens" means. As a point of logic, this does not necessarily follow: it *may* be sufficient to enlarge our understanding of what "fulfill" means *with the result that it is not necessary to expand the meaning of "happens."*

More importantly, I am fairly certain Gundry has substantially misunderstood what Matthew is doing in his OT fulfillment texts. Adequate exposition would take too much space; but the analogy of the Epistle to the Hebrews may be of some use. There, the writer detects in what we today label OT ceremonial law a foreshadowing of a more perfect sacrifice, a superior covenant, a better priesthood. Law, in other words, enjoyed a prophetic function, based not so much on simple, propositional prediction as on a complex intertwining of individual OT predictions and large scale typological anticipation. I believe this can be worked out in considerable detail in Matthew's gospel, *and that Gundry himself was close to the heart of the matter when he wrote his first book on Matthew*, the subtitle of which does not disappoint the book's readers: *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel, with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*. Gundry has very substantially modified his earlier understanding of this Gospel. I only wish he had offered more substantial reason for doing so.

10. I have derived no pleasure from writing this review; for I have benefited much from Gundry's scholarship in the past, and expect to do so again in the future. I am forced to ask myself how so mature and meticulous a scholar could have written a book with so many fundamental weaknesses. The best hypothesis I can suggest is that he fell in love with one or two literary tools, especially redaction criticism, and one particular solution to the synoptic problem, and then subordinated all other tools, all other considerations of history and method and theology, to these two or three dominating pole stars. Gundry brilliantly works out the implications of these methodological first steps; and, with his mental equipment, he does not find it difficult to forge a defense of his resultant interpretation of Matthew. The tragedy is that he never questions the methodological justifiability of elevating one tool to godlike status; nor does he ever calmly weigh his results against the coherence of competing proposals, nor check his more speculative turns against the sober limitations of the text. As a result, this commentary combines rigorous brilliance and indefensible methodology, startling insight and fatal flaw. The book is an eloquent testimony to the rigor of a front rank scholar whose vision has focused too narrowly, and whose resulting theses are disastrously ill-founded.