

THE JEWISH LEADERS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: A REAPPRAISAL

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In the debate of the last few decades over the precise *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew's gospel, a consensus has gradually grown on two points. First, a large majority of scholars hold that the gospel was written about A.D. 85, although there are several who argue for a much earlier date.¹ Second, most hold that Matthew's Church is in some kind of dramatic tension with Judaism and synagogue worship, even though the precise nature of that tension is hotly disputed. On the one hand, many scholars think the gospel of Matthew represents a kind of "Jewish Christian" congregation that still sees itself within the context of Judaism: The struggle is *intra muros*.² Yet those who hold this view cannot agree on whether the *Birkath ha-Minim* (under the assumption of its pivotal importance)³ has been established by the time Matthew writes: Some hold that the gospel must be placed just after its promulgation and that the Church is still reacting to it,⁴ while others argue that the gospel must be dated before the *Birkath ha-Minim*.⁵ On the other hand, another group of scholars judges that the gospel of Matthew represents a form of Jewish Christianity that has broken with Judaism but is still

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¹These include P. Gaechter, both in his commentary (*Das Matthäus-Evangelium* [Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1963]) and in his study of Matthew's literary skill (*Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium* [Stuttgart: KBW, 1965]); rather cautiously, D. Guthrie (*New Testament Introduction* [3d ed.; London: Tyndale, 1970] 45-46); J. A. T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* [London: SCM, 1976] 13-30, 86-117); W. Hendriksen (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973] 92-97); R. H. Gundry (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981] 599-609), who argues for a date not later than A.D. 63.

²As far as I know, the phrase was first put to this purpose by G. Bornkamm ("Enderwartung und Kirche im Matthäusevangelium," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* [ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge: University Press, 1956]; ET in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [London: SCM, 1963] 15-51 [hereafter *TIM*]).

³Recent skepticism on this point should not be entirely ignored: Cf. P. Schäfer, "Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne," *Judaica* 31 (1975) 54-64, 116-124; G. Stemberger, "Die sogenannte 'Synode von Jabne' und das frühe Christentum," *Kairos* 19 (1977) 14-21.

⁴So for instance G. D. Kilpatrick (*The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1946] esp. 101-123); early G. Bornkamm (*TIM* 15-51); W. D. Davies (*The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* [Cambridge: University Press, 1963] esp. 256-315).

⁵E.g. R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (München: Kaiser, 1966); M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974); S. Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," *NovT* 22 (1980) 193-221.

defining itself over against Judaism: The struggle is therefore *extra muros*.⁶ More recently a third group of scholars has followed the lead of Clark⁷ and Nepper-Christensen⁸ and argued that the first evangelist is not Jewish at all. The form of this position varies considerably, but one can argue that Matthew's anti-Judaism language is so extreme that Judaism could not possibly still be a competitor for him,⁹ or that the anti-Judaism language tells us little of Matthew's historical setting because it is essentially the result of a theological conviction that Israel had been displaced and succeeded by the Church,¹⁰ or, more subtly, that Matthew's gospel reflects such a blending of Jewish and Gentile Christianity that it is injudicious to explain the text in terms of merely Jewish-Christian/Judaism polemic.¹¹ An extreme form of this argument follows Hare and Harrington in arguing that the Church has so displaced Israel, and Israel has been so rejected by God, that Israel is not even included among the *panta ta ethnē* to whom the gospel is to be preached.¹² But this position has been soundly rebutted by Meier.¹³

Whatever the merits and demerits of these assorted positions, there is a widespread belief that Matthew's treatment of the Jewish leaders makes a large contribution to defending one or the other of these stances. At very least, it is argued, Matthew's handling of the Jewish leaders is so fundamentally anachronistic, especially in redactional passages, that the emerging picture cannot possibly be thought to reflect Jesus' time.¹⁴ Matthew's ignorance of historical realities sur-

⁶So, *inter alios*, the later G. Bornkamm ("The Authority to 'Bind' and 'Loose' in Matthew's Gospel," in *Jesus and Man's Hope I* [ed. D. G. Miller; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1970] 41); K. Stendahl (*The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* [2d ed.; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1968]); E. Schweizer (*Matthäus und seine Gemeinde* [Stuttgart: KBW, 1974] esp. 11-13, 36-37); W. G. Kümmel (*Introduction to the New Testament* [rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975] 105-120); G. N. Stanton ("The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982], 2. 25/2); Gundry (*Matthew*)—though, as I have already noted, he thinks the date is much earlier than do the others.

⁷K. W. Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," *JBL* 66 (1947) 165-172, recently reprinted as the lead essay in a collection of Clark's articles, *The Gentile Bias and Other Essays* (selected by John Lawrence Sharpe III; NovTSup 54; Leiden: Brill, 1980).

⁸P. Nepper-Christensen, *Das Matthäusevangelium: Ein judenchristliches Evangelium?* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1958).

⁹So S. van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

¹⁰So R. Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967).

¹¹So argue G. Strecker (*Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962]) and W. Trilling (*Das wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangelium* [München: Kösel-Verlag, 1964]).

¹²Cf. D. R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967); D. R. A. Hare and D. J. Harrington, "'Make Disciples of All the Gentiles' (Mt 28.19)," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 359-369. Similarly Walker, *Heilsgeschichte* 111-113.

¹³J. P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?," *CBQ* 39 (1977) 94-102; "Two Disputed Questions in Matt 28:16-20," *JBL* 96 (1977) 407-424.

¹⁴So, *inter alios*, Strecker (*Weg*), Walker (*Heilsgeschichte*), van Tilborg (*Jewish Leaders*), J. P. Meier (*Law and History in Matthew's Gospel* [Rome: BIP, 1976]), and many others.

rounding Jewish leaders in Jesus' day is nothing short of "astonishing."¹⁵

The evidence advanced to support this view varies from scholar to scholar, but the most important considerations include the following. At the top of the list is the remarkable linking of "Pharisees" and "Sadducees" under one article in a number of unlikely places (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11-12 [*bis*]). Especially significant is 16:12: *hē didachē tōn Pharisaiōn kai Saddoukaiōn* betrays (it is argued) incredible ignorance of the doctrinal differences that divided Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day. The phrase could only have been written after the Sadducees were no longer a vital force, their doctrinal distinctiveness nothing but a faded memory. Secondly, it is argued that a host of redactional changes reveal that for Matthew the chief opponents have become the "Pharisees," understood to be a cipher for the rabbis of Matthew's day, and that Matthew's changes, additions and deletions, when he mentions the Jewish leaders, betray a pattern that could only be authentic about A.D. 85. For instance, in 8:18-19 "scribes" cannot become disciples, and "the wise and learned" condemned in 11:26 refers exclusively to the Pharisees and scribes. Omission of the Herodians in 12:14 reflects a post-A.D. 70 situation, and the explicit addition of "Pharisees" in 22:15-16 reflects the prevailing anti-Pharisaic bias. Third, a number of Matthean themes is thought to reflect a rather nasty anti-Semitism that could not possibly belong to Jesus' day. The Romans are exonerated at Jesus' trial (see especially 27:24), the role of the Jewish leaders is magnified, and Jews are pictured as persecutors of the Church.

A very useful display of Matthew's references to the Jewish leaders, in comparison with the parallels in the other two synoptic gospels, is provided by Garland¹⁶ and need not be repeated here. Detailed treatment of all the passages would require a lengthy book. In what is left of this short essay I propose to outline some limitations to our knowledge that are sometimes overlooked, comment on a representative sample of Matthean passages (dealing with Jewish leaders) most commonly cited as evidence for anachronism, and briefly discuss one or two of the broader theological problems.

I. LIMITATIONS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE

In order to demonstrate that Matthew's portrait of the Jewish leaders is anachronistic, one must begin with relatively certain pictures of what Jewish leaders were actually like both when Matthew wrote and during the time of Jesus (the period Matthew purports to describe). These matters are much studied on their own rights, but the fruit of such investigation is weighed all too little by gospel critics. To argue that Matthew's chief opponents are not really the "Pharisees" of A.D. 30 but the rabbis of A.D. 85, for instance, presupposes a known and agreed set of disjunctions between the two. In reality there is an enormous amount of scholarly disagreement about who the Pharisees of Jesus' day were, the authority they enjoyed, the influence they wielded, their relationships with the Sadducees, and much more.

At the risk of considerable oversimplification, we may distinguish among the many viewpoints four contrasting interpretations, each ably represented by one

¹⁵L. Gaston, "The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles," *Int* 29 (1975) 34.

¹⁶D. E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (NovTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1979) 218-221.

or more Jewish scholars. (1) A more or less traditional approach is defended by Guttman,¹⁷ who believes that the Pharisees were pragmatic and therefore effective leaders, rather unlike the idealistic, impractical and unpopular OT prophets who were little appreciated in their own time. The Pharisees learned to become flexible and adaptable, adjusting the demands of Torah by finely developed exegetical procedures. The results were rules of conduct that took cognizance of new cultural and political realities, made life easier, and defined right and proper conduct more precisely. The Mishna was the natural effluent of this work, and the rabbis of post-A.D. 70 were the Pharisees' natural heirs. (2) By contrast, Neusner¹⁸ detects very little continuity between the rabbis of the mishnaic period and the pre-A.D. 70 Pharisees. The Pharisees helped to shape the life of the Judaism of their day by extending the purity rituals bound up with the temple to the daily experience of every Jew, but such a project and *Weltanschauung* could not survive the destruction of the temple. (3) Rivkin,¹⁹ radically departing from Neusner, denies that the Pharisees had separatistic or ritualistic tendencies. He argues that they were men of broad learning and wide influence and that they constituted a rather late (post-Maccabean) theological development that unwittingly departed rather drastically from OT roots. Their development of the oral law, Rivkin argues, is largely codified in the Mishna. (4) Radically independent is the judgment of Sigal,²⁰ who holds that there is a complete disjunction between the Pharisees of the NT, whom he identifies as the *perušim* ("separatists") of the day, and the rabbis behind the Mishna. In Jesus' day the "rabbis" were not an official class of ordained men: Ordination had not yet come into vogue. According to Sigal, that is why Jesus himself could be addressed as "Rabbi" in the gospels (e.g. Matt 26:49; Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; John 1:38, 47; 3:2). Therefore Jesus belonged to a class of "proto-rabbis," the forerunners of the ordained rabbis of the mishnaic period, and his opponents the Pharisees were extremists who were opposed by other "proto-rabbis" and who disappeared without a trace after A.D. 70. Thus not only is his reconstruction radically different from the other scholars just mentioned, but also his assessment of the authenticity of Matthew's picture of the Pharisees is rather out of line with most recent scholarship. Sigal thinks Matthew's description of the Pharisees is essentially accurate and without anachronism. It is only Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as Messiah that is fundamentally anachronistic, the result of an exuberant but mistaken Church that promoted a "proto-rabbi" beyond anything he would have claimed for himself.

¹⁷A. Guttman, *Rabbinic Judaism in the Making: A Chapter in the History of the Halakah from Ezra to Judah I* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1970).

¹⁸J. Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1971). For a simplified treatment cf. also his *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

¹⁹E. Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution: The Pharisees' Search for the Kingdom Within* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).

²⁰P. Sigal, "The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1979); *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism*, vols. I.1 and I.2 of *The Foundations of Judaism from Biblical Origins to the Sixth Century A.D.* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980). For a somewhat similar dichotomy between Pharisee and rabbi of the mishnaic period cf. J. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973).

Detailed consideration of these representative positions, and their potential bearing on contemporary discussions about the way Matthew treats Jewish leaders, would require several volumes and would in any case take us a long way from the focus of this paper. My point in listing them is simply to illustrate the range of disagreement regarding Pharisees of Jesus' day and the rabbis of the period after A.D. 70 in order to point out that the discovery of anachronism in Matthew's handling of the Jewish leaders necessarily rests on historical reconstructions that are not recognized by all scholars in the field.

For two reasons, however, I shall avoid adopting one of the more individualistic historical reconstructions and adhere to a more or less traditional understanding: (1) I do not want to be charged with making my task too easy—i.e., with rewriting history so as to avoid obvious anachronisms; and (2) the traditional view is in my judgment still the most defensible reconstruction of the relationships between the Pharisees and the post-A.D. 70 rabbis, provided certain caveats, elucidated below, are borne in mind.

A case could be made for the proposition that the four representative positions sketched in above are something like the "six blind men of Hindustan" who ventured to describe an elephant: largely right in what they affirm and largely wrong in what they deny. Sigal is almost certainly right to argue that formal ordination was unknown in Jesus' day²¹ (though informal procedures for recognizing a properly trained teacher of Torah may have existed), and he is doubtless right to insist that there can be no simple equation of Pharisee and mishnaic rabbi. But against Sigal it is unlikely that the Pharisees were so separatistic that they did not embrace most if not all "proto-rabbis." The gospels refer to a variety of religious groupings (Sadducees, priests, Levites, scribes, Pharisees, Herodians) and hint at others (ascetics), and they criticize all of them. It is almost inconceivable, within this framework, that the evangelists maintain substantial silence on the "proto-rabbis," the group that becomes dominant after A.D. 70 and that in Sigal's scheme is of fundamental importance even in Jesus' day, and yet vent so much criticism against a group that has little relative importance in A.D. 30 and none after A.D. 70. The fairly rapid disappearance of the Sadducees after A.D. 70 offers no real parallel, because much of their influence depended on the temple destroyed by the Romans and because the evangelists do preserve some description of their theological position. Jesus cannot be reduced to a "proto-rabbi," training his followers to repeat his legal decisions. Reports of his messianic claims cannot be dismissed as anachronistic as easily as Sigal thinks, and to onlookers he appeared not as a "proto-rabbi" but as a prophet (e.g. 21:11, 46).²²

Neusner is right to stress the Pharisees' concern for ceremonial purity, but his assessment of the Pharisees is doubtless too narrow and his approach to the sources too skeptical. The evidence from Josephus is more significant than he suggests, for even when allowance is made for Josephus' personal bias in favor of the Pharisees his evidence consistently demonstrates their wide influence in the nation, not to say their paramount centrality during the Jewish War. True, the

²¹Cf. also the excellent discussion by S. Westerholm (*Jesus and Scribal Authority* [Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978] 26-39).

²²Cf. B. Lindars, "Jesus and the Pharisees," *Donum Gentilicium* (ed. E. Bammel, C. K. Barrett, W. D. Davies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 51-63, esp. 62-63.

Mishna cannot legitimately be read back into A.D. 30 as if Judaism had not faced the growth of Christianity and the shattering destruction of capital and cultus. But it preserves more traditional material than is sometimes thought. I suspect, though it is exceedingly hard to prove, that the "Pharisees" of Jesus' day include many "proto-rabbis," ideological forbears of the Tannaim. On this view the Pharisees included men of eminence every bit as learned and creative as the second-century rabbis, but they also included many lesser men, morally and intellectually, who were largely purged by the twin effects of the destruction of A.D. 70 and the growth of Christianity. These events called forth a "counter-reformation," part of whose legacy is the Mishna.

Guttmann is surely right to say that the Pharisees adapted the laws to the times and were effective leaders. But the minute regulations that resulted from their mission made legal distinctions rather difficult for the masses and morality too easy: Torah and the radical holiness demanded by the OT prophets were in danger of becoming domesticated. Unwittingly, such a vision prepares the way for preaching like that of Jesus, who in Matthew's account demands a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees (5:20). Finally, Rivkin is doubtless right to see in the Pharisees learned scholars whose meticulous applications and legal developments massively influenced Judaism. But one wonders if his identification of Pharisees with scribes and his handling of the development of oral law are not a trifle simplistic.

None of this can be argued in detail here, but there is good reason for not jettisoning the more or less traditional view too quickly. The Pharisees are a group of uncertain origin, generally learned, committed to the oral law as well as to the written, almost never priests, and generally concerned to develop *halakah*. Most of the scribes were Pharisees. Two recent discussions²³ of the Sanhedrin summarize the evidence and conclude, rightly, that the Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees (most of whom were scribes), Sadducees (most of whom were priests) and elders. The "elders" were not distinguished so much by theological position as by social position: They were respected community leaders, "nobility," and normally neither priests nor scribes but "laymen" (though some priests may have used this designation as well). Probably the exact proportions varied from time to time. The best evidence, however, seems to indicate that the leadership of the Sanhedrin lay with the chief priests (and therefore with the Sadducees) but that within this context the Pharisees were very influential members.

Quite clearly, after A.D. 70 the dominant force in Judaism, the early Tannaim, left little place for the Sadducees. A few other distinctions will be mentioned below. But if the reconstruction of Jewish leadership in Jesus' day, as rather crudely sketched in above, is a fair representation of the historical evidence, then two things are clear. (1) Not every group mentioned in the NT is to be set disjunctively over against every other group. "Scribes and Pharisees" may be overlapping designations, for instance (compare Matt 23:27 with Luke 11:43-44; Matt 9:3 with Luke 5:21). This is not to say that synoptic parallels may not mention quite different groups, of course (e.g. compare Matt 12:14 with Mark 3:6),

²³Cf. Westerholm (*Jesus and Scribal Authority* 40-50), and especially E. Schürer (*The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* [revised and ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-], 2. 210-223). Cf. also J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969) 147-267, esp. 222-232.

but the overlap in such designations must not be summarily dismissed. (2) More important, to detect anachronism in Matthew's handling of the Jewish leaders it has become clear that one must determine the ways in which the evangelist has portrayed these leaders as people who do not fit reconstruction of the historical reality available from other sources, and such assessment must reckon with a minefield of complex historical judgments.

II. A SAMPLING OF MATTHEAN PASSAGES MOST COMMONLY CITED AS EVIDENCE FOR ANACHRONISM

1. *Matthew 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11-12*. In all five of these verses the Pharisees and Sadducees are joined under a single article (*hoi Pharisaioi kai Saddoukaioi* in 16:1, the corresponding genitive in the other four instances), and in each case it is judged historically improbable that anyone with a working knowledge of the theological differences that divided Pharisees from Sadducees in A.D. 30 could have so conjoined them. The improbability is acute in 3:7 and 16:1 because it is unlikely that Pharisees and Sadducees would join together in asking Jesus for a sign or in checking out the Baptist's credentials, and it is acute in 16:6, 11-12 because "the yeast (= teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees" seems to suggest, on first reading, that the evangelist is unaware of the deep doctrinal differences between the two groups. There is no similar linking of Pharisees and Sadducees in the other canonical gospels.

Although the case for anachronism at first seems strong, several observations entirely remove its force. First, Matthew mentions the Sadducees seven times (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 22:23, 24), against Mark's once (12:18) and Luke's once (20:27). Why does he bother to introduce a group about which he allegedly knows so little and which, in the modern reconstruction, is peripheral to his concerns?

Second, Matthew demonstrates that he is deeply aware of the doctrinal distinctiveness of the Sadducees (22:23). This should make us very cautious about concluding prematurely that the one governing article in 16:11-12 means the evangelist thought that the doctrinal commitments of the two groups were identical.

Third, appeal to the Granville Sharp rule is easily overdone. When two or more groups are governed by one article, the separate groups "are treated as one for the purpose in hand,"²⁴ not assumed to be identical in every respect. Hence such combinations as *tas philas kai geitonas* (Luke 15:19), *tas plateias kai rhy-mas* (Luke 14:21), *tōn Epikourion kai Stoikōn* (Acts 17:18), *tē apologia kai be-baiōsei tou euangeliou* (Phil 1:7), *to platos kai mēkos kai bathos kai hypsos* (Eph 3:18). Most stunning is *tōn Pharisaion kai Saddoukaion* in Acts 23:7, the only place where this combination is found outside Matthew. In this context, of course, the doctrinal disparity between the two groups is contextually presupposed. The reason for linking the two groups with one article is that "for the pur-

²⁴A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 787 (emphasis mine). In reality the grammatical issue is far more complex. Sharp himself, it must be remembered, did not claim that his rule applied to proper names or to the plural number. In an exhaustive catalogue of the use of the distributive article with nouns in the NT (made possible by GRAMCORD computer facilities) one of my students, Tom Sappington, has demonstrated the remarkable diversity of functions that the distributive article can have when it is governing plural nouns.

pose in hand" the two are linked by the *stasis* precipitated by Paul's divisive remark. Of course this does not prove that Matthew, in his turn, has not succumbed to anachronism—but it ought to encourage the exegete to make an attempt to estimate exactly what point of commonality between the two groups Matthew may have had in mind in each case.

Fourth, Matthew's ability to distinguish groups from one another is further attested by the change in his usage once Jesus and his disciples arrive in the Jerusalem area for the final scenes. The chief priests are mentioned in 2:4, in the environs of Jerusalem; in 16:21 and 20:28, in the context of Jesus' prediction regarding what will transpire within the environs of Jerusalem; and then frequently from 21:15 on, especially in chaps. 26-27, all of which takes place within the more immediate sway of the temple and its functionaries. The Pharisees were less influential, relatively speaking, in Jerusalem: There was more competition from other religious authorities. Remarkably, therefore, the frequency with which Pharisees are mentioned decreases relative to other groups once the setting is Jerusalem. Chapter 23 is an exception, doubtless owing to its polemical nature, but the point is not thereby weakened. Those who see under the "Pharisees" the sole target of Matthean ire in his own day must at least admit that Matthew does not for this reason overlook known historical realities and may even begin to question whether the prevailing identification of Matthew's opponents may not be simplistic.

Fifth, the linking of Pharisees and Sadducees under one article in 3:7 and 16:1 may not indicate their shared doctrinal commitment but betray their common commission. Just as the Sanhedrin raised questions about Jesus' authority, it is intrinsically likely that they sent representatives to sound out John the Baptist. The Sanhedrin was the competent authority: It would have been remiss in its duty had it not done so. But because the Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees, it is likely that any important delegation would be made up of representatives from both parties, precisely because little love was lost between the two groups. Interestingly, the fourth gospel may lend support to this suggestion. The "Jews of Jerusalem" (who else but the Sanhedrin?) send "priests and Levites" (John 1:19)—certainly Sadducees—to ask John who he is; but Pharisees are also sent (1:24).²⁵ Doubtless the Pharisees and Sadducees could fiercely oppose each other when certain issues were raised, but this does not mean they could not work together with reasonable harmony when their circumstances required it. Something of the same approach could easily be applied to Matt 16:1.

Sixth, although superficial reading might prompt a casual reader to think that the remaining references (Matt 16:6, 11, 12) presuppose that the Pharisees and the Sadducees enjoyed common teaching, once again restraint is necessary. After all, in 16:1-12 Jesus cannot be denouncing everything that the "Pharisees and Sadducees" teach, for some of what they teach he holds in common with them. The particular point of teaching with which the context is concerned is their attitude to Jesus, and in particular the domestication of revelation that wants to control it, tame it, authenticate it, but that is so blind that true revela-

²⁵I have not here raised the relation between Matthew's mention of Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7) and the Lukan parallel (Luke 3:7-9), which refers instead to the "crowds," because that relation is not strictly relevant to the narrower question of anachronisms in Matthew. I am also supposing that *epi to baptisma* (3:7) refers to the place where John was baptizing.

tion cannot be discerned even when it appears. In Jesus' view, according to Matthew, Pharisees and Sadducees alike were guilty of this breach, and therefore Jesus warned against the "yeast (teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees." One could imagine a modern Baptist warning his congregation against "the teaching of the Presbyterians and Episcopalians," not because he is unaware of fundamental differences that might divide the latter two groups on, say, church government, but because he is treating paedobaptism and wishes to set paedobaptism, however defended, over against his own views. Something similar has gone on in Matthew 16.

2. *Matthew 2:4*. Desiring to find out where the promised king was to be born, Herod gathers *pantas tous hierois kai grammateis tou laou*—and again there is one governing article. Because the priests were Sadducees and the scribes predominantly Pharisees, Schweizer, for instance, judges this verse "historically almost inconceivable."²⁶ But Matthew does not say the two groups came at the same time—and even if they did, they may well have come as representatives of the Sanhedrin. Herod, knowing well that neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees loved him, may well have asked both groups in order to reduce the chance of trickery. The least that must be said is that Schweizer's conclusion is premature.

3. *Matthew 8:18-19*. It is sometimes argued²⁷ that Matthew's opponents, in his own day, are so consistently the "scribes" and "Pharisees" that we must conclude that the scribe in this verse, unlike the man in vv 21-22, cannot be a disciple. But *heteros de ton matheton [autou]* (v 21) more naturally reads "another of his disciples" than "another man, one of his disciples" (*NIV*) and therefore implies that the scribe of vv 18-20 is also a disciple. Moreover, although *heteros* can on occasion be distinguished from *allos* (e.g., Gal 1:8-9), this is not regularly so, and it is certainly not the case in Matthew.²⁸ Indeed, as judged by their respective approaches to Jesus, if anything the scribe is more promising than the "other disciple," pledging himself immediately to follow Jesus anywhere. In this light, Jesus' "Follow me," spoken to the second man, does not mark him out as preferred but is necessary precisely because this second inquirer is not at this time planning to follow Jesus. Moreover, contrary opinion notwithstanding, "disciple" is not used by Matthew to refer exclusively to committed believers. In context the word cannot have that meaning in 8:21 (a point Albright and Mann find so difficult to accept that they resort to textual emendation).²⁹ "Disciple" here and elsewhere in Matthew arguably refers to one who is following Jesus in a loose or casual way without any entailment as to whether he or she will press on in "discipleship" (so, for instance, 5:1-2—though more detailed substantiation would be desirable).

²⁶E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 39.

²⁷Walker, *Heilsgeschichte* 26-27.

²⁸BAGD 315.

²⁹W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 95-96.

4. *Matthew 11:26*. In a similar vein, some argue that when Matthew records Jesus' prayer to the effect that God revealed "these things" to babes and hid them from "the wise and learned," under the second rubric he is thinking primarily of scribes and Pharisees of A.D. 80. But again contextual factors suggest a broader reference. Jesus has just finished pronouncing woes on "this generation," not just its leadership (11:16); he has been denouncing entire cities (11:20-24). The "wise and learned" must include them. The point of interest is not the level of their education, any more than the point of interest in the "little children" is their age or size. The contrast is between those who are self-sufficient, who deem themselves wise, and those who are dependent and love to be taught.

5. *Matthew 12:14*. Unlike Mark 3:6, Matthew refers only to Pharisees and omits mention of the Herodians, and therefore many conclude that the omission springs from the evangelist's post-A.D. 70 perspective when the Herodians were no longer a potent force.³⁰ Doubtless that is possible. Yet caution must be urged, because (1) Matthew retains reference to the Herodians at the one other place the term occurs in Mark (Mark 12:13/Matt 22:16); (2) Matthew refers to the Sadducees more than any other evangelist—and presumably they too, like the Herodians, were unimportant after A.D. 70; and (3) Matthew so commonly abbreviates Mark when he follows him, especially in narrative material whose content is not words of Jesus, that theological and historical explanations of each omission are particularly lacking in methodological control.

6. *Matthew 13:52*. Interpretations of this difficult verse are legion. It has been variously argued that the saying refers to scribes who become disciples of the kingdom;³¹ that Matthew here refers to the way he himself functions within the community;³² that the verse demonstrates the existence of Christian "scribes" in Matthew's post-A.D. 70 community who are the Christian counterparts of the scribes in Judaism,³³ or even that the Christian scribes are more important than their Jewish counterparts;³⁴ that each disciple who is able to qualify may present himself as a scribe, a teacher of the law;³⁵ that any scribe who understands what has been taught about the kingdom is like the lord of a house "who handles everything in a carefree manner, who does not save anything and even uses what is old."³⁶

³⁰E. g. Hummel, *Auseinandersetzung* 12; D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: MMS, 1972) 213.

³¹Hummel, *Auseinandersetzung* 17-20.

³²C. F. D. Moule, "St. Matthew's Gospel: Some Neglected Features," SE II (=TU 87 [1964]) 98-99.

³³Strecker, *Weg* 37-38; G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) 111; and similarly the commentary by W. Grundmann (*Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [4th ed.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1975]).

³⁴T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1949) 198-199.

³⁵So, for instance, the commentary by M.-J. Lagrange (*Evangile selon Saint Matthieu* [Paris: Lecoffre, 1948]).

³⁶Van Tilborg, *Jewish Leaders*, 132; Walker, *Heilsgeschichte* 27-29.

The "is like" formula reveals this verse to be a parable: "It is as with a scribe who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven as with the owner of a house who, etc."³⁷ But what is the point of the comparison? The *oikodespotēs* brings new things and old things out of his storeroom. Presumably this is not to ogle them, but for a useful purpose. But the point is that his treasure includes both new things and old things, and so he can make use of both. The comparison becomes clearer when we remember that a *grammateus* was not simply a theological interpreter of Torah capable of rendering halakhic decisions, but a teacher. From his capacity as a teacher he derived much of his prestige and influence.³⁸ Indeed, he was perceived to possess even esoteric knowledge that could only be passed on to committed initiates.³⁹ Jesus, however, is interested in the scribe who *mathēteutheis tē basileiā tou ouranōn*. Whether the verbal form is strictly passive ("has been made a disciple") or deponent ("has become a disciple"), it is doubtful that *tē basileiā* means "about the kingdom." In the one passage with a very similar construction (27:57) the corresponding dative expression makes Joseph of Arimathea a disciple *tō Iēsou*—clearly "of" Jesus, not "about" Jesus. By analogy, the scribes with whom Jesus is concerned in 13:52 have become disciples "of" the kingdom of heaven. The point is not that this scribe has been instructed about the kingdom (and therefore understands), but that he has become a disciple of the kingdom (and therefore his allegiance has been transferred). The *thēsauros* regularly stands for a man's "heart." The discipled scribe therefore brings from his heart—his understanding, personality, being—*kaina kai palaia*, a subtle, unexpected order that reminds the alert reader that the gospel of the kingdom, though new, takes precedence over the old revelation and is its fulfillment. The new is not added to the old; the old revelation has as its central focus the new, which has now fulfilled and renewed the old, which has thereby become new.⁴⁰ The order is crucial: A discipled scribe is the one with this new and old understanding. The understanding does not generate the discipleship. This is in conformity with the flow of the chapter (though out of step with some modern research):⁴¹ The disciples in Matthew 13 are not defined as those with understanding but have to be given revelation and understanding (13:11-12). When they ask for an explanation, they are given it (13:36-43) and as a result claim some measure of understanding. Therefore (*dia touto*, 13:52) a discipled scribe is like, etc.:

³⁷J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (3d ed.; London: SCM, 1972) 100-103; and for Matthew's distinctive usage cf. D. A. Carson, "The *homoios* Word-Group as Introduction to Matthew's Parables," *NTS* (forthcoming).

³⁸Schürer, *History*, 2. 332-334.

³⁹Cf. discussion in Jeremias, *Jerusalem* 237-240.

⁴⁰Cf. the repeated treatment of this theme in the commentary by P. Bonnard (*L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* [2d ed.; Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1970]).

⁴¹Owing primarily to the influence of G. Barth (see esp. *TIM* 105-112), it is commonly believed that Matthew, unlike Mark, makes understanding the distinctive characteristic of disciples in his gospel. This analysis will not withstand close scrutiny; see especially A. 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).

Discipleship to Jesus, recognition of the revelation he is and brings, submission to the reign he inaugurates and promises—these are the necessary prerequisites to understanding and therefore also to bringing out from one's personality and life the rich treasures of the kingdom. Moreover, like the *oikodespotēs* who brings forth his treasure, presumably for some good purpose, Jesus' disciples bring forth *kaina kai palaia* in their capacity as *grammateis*—as teachers of the law. Jesus' disciples have just claimed they understand. "Therefore," he responds, if they have understood they must bring forth these treasures from their storehouse in such a way as to teach others. This of course is a major Matthean theme (esp. Matthew 10; 28:18-20). If this interpretation of 13:52 is correct, then although the disciples in Matthew 13 most probably refer to the twelve they epitomize the entire messianic community that would follow, not a specialized group of "teachers of the law," Christian or otherwise. Just as Jesus has already aligned his followers with prophets and righteous men from past ages (5:11-12; 10:41), so here they are aligned with the scribes.

7. *Matthew 21:33-46*. Of the many remaining passages that could be profitably examined, this must be one of the last two, chosen because of its peculiar problems of source and genre. This pericope is a source-critical battleground of extraordinary complexity. Perhaps it is marginally easier to account for the synoptic differences by postulating both a Markan and a Q recension, but this is far from certain.⁴² For our present purposes it is enough to note that on the face of it the parable continues the theme of the context and makes a statement against the Jewish religious authorities in Jesus' day. The metaphorical equivalences are obvious: The landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are the leaders of the nation, the servants are the prophets, and the son is Jesus Messiah. This seems so potentially allegorical to some that these elements, it is thought, could not have belonged to the original but only to the Church's interpretation of that original. Of course this necessarily affects one's assessment of what is being predicated of the Jewish leaders. Unfortunately, however, the reconstructed parable is so far removed from the texts as we have them⁴³ that several scholars have despaired of reconstructing the original.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, certain observations point in another direction. First, it has long been noted that rigid distinctions between "parable" and "allegory" lack sound methodological control.⁴⁵ Second, recent studies on the parables have allowed for considerable detail in narrative, provided all such details belong intrinsically to the narrative at hand and do not depend for

⁴²Cf. extensive discussion in my commentary on Matthew (in press, forthcoming 1983).

⁴³Cf. Jeremias, *Parables* 76; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936) 124-132.

⁴⁴E.g. W. G. Kümmel ("Das Gleichnis von den bösen Weingärtnern [Mark 12.1-9]," *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne* [ed. O. Cullmann, P. Menoud; Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950] 120-138), who also argues that the creative milieu from which this parable springs is not Galilee nor the ministry of Jesus but the first-century Church influenced by its own interpretation of Isaiah 5.

⁴⁵E.g. see M. Black, "The Parables as Allegory," *BJRL* 42 (1959-60) 273-287; R. E. Brown, "Parable and Allegory Reconsidered," *NovT* 5 (1962) 36-45; and esp. P. B. Payne, "Metaphor as a Model for Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus with Special Reference to the Parable of the Sower" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1975).

their relevance on the importation of some alien interpretive grid. Third, Jesus certainly faced some opposition from the religious authorities of his day, and there is no historical reason to think he could not himself have referred to Isaiah 5 in this connection. Indeed, there is substantial, formal literary reason to think that the parable, as the synoptics preserve it for us, fits in with some of Jesus' established patterns of teaching.⁴⁶ Fourth, recognizing these points, some have argued that the "son" motif in the parable itself depends on the logic of the story and therefore must not be judged inauthentic.⁴⁷ This argument is surely sound. But then to go on and assign the identification of this "son" exclusively to the Church seems a rather artificial expedient. Even the most skeptical approach to the gospels acknowledges that Jesus enjoyed a special sense of sonship to the Father. It is therefore almost inconceivable that Jesus could have used this "son" language in the context of defending his mission and not be thinking of himself. But if these arguments are essentially sound, then again there is little reason to think that references to the Jewish leaders in this pericope are irretrievably anachronistic.

8. *Matthew 27:24*. It is common to interpret this verse as a Matthean creation depicting a positive response to the advice of Pilate's wife (v 19), with a corresponding projection of guilt onto the Jews and their leaders (v 25)—and this is a reflection of Matthew's *Sitz*. But this is not the most natural interpretation, for the following reasons: (1) To the best of our knowledge, such hand-washing was not a Roman custom. As Matthew presents it, therefore, Pilate, after living several years among the Jews he detested, picks up one of their own customs (Deut 21:6; cf. Ps 26:6) and contemptuously uses it against them. (2) There is little reason to think this action out of step with the proceedings because, for whatever complex motives, Pilate repeatedly tried to get Jesus off. He sent Jesus to Herod (Luke), suggested the paschal amnesty be applied to Jesus (all four gospels), proposed to compromise with a scourging (Luke), proposed to turn the case back to Jewish authorities (John), remonstrated before pronouncing sentence (John), and here washes his hands. Only two of these are recorded by Matthew. It is therefore difficult to see why Matthew should be charged with exculpating the Romans simply because he includes one step not mentioned by the other evangelists. (3) If Matthew were really interested in exculpating the Romans at the expense of the Jews, why would he include the account of the savage mockery by the governor's soldiers (27:27-31)? (4) Pilate's claim to be "innocent of this man's blood" is no stronger than Luke 23:14. Why then should this verse in Matthew be thought to lend the first gospel's passion narrative so definite a hue? (5) Did Pilate really think his hand-washing excused him, or was this blistering contempt and calculated taunt? More important, what did *Matthew* think of it? 27:2, 4, 5 suggests he is aware that all connected with Jesus' death are guilty: Pilate's "It is your responsibility" is too reminiscent of 27:4 to be accidental. Matthew probably therefore understands the hand-washing to be an act of moral cowardice, not

⁴⁶Cf. E. E. Ellis, "New Directions in Form Criticism," in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (ed. G. Strecker; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1975) 299-315, esp. 312-314.

⁴⁷Hill, *Matthew* 299; cf. J. Blank, "Die Sendung des Sohnes," in *Neues Testament und Kirche* (ed. J. Gnlika; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 11-41.

a genuine shift of responsibility: It was common knowledge then (and is now) that the Romans desired peace and taxes, so that threat of uproar or report of insubordination would be enough to threaten a wicked man (as John makes clear). Even v 25 does not overturn this approach. The words "all the people" mean "not only the leaders but all the people" and doubtless point to the catastrophe of A.D. 70 (cf. also 23:37-39; 24:14-21). But Matthew understands that all the first Christians were Jews. Within that framework his remarks are no sharper than those offered by the Jew Jeremiah, who distinguished a remnant from the people at large. In any case, why should v 25 be thought to reflect animus against Jewish leaders of A.D. 80 in some anachronistic way? If that were Matthew's intent, why mention "all the people"?

III. BROADER THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Quite clearly this paper could be expanded into a book, not only to allow for detailed treatment of more passages but also because its theme is necessarily connected with the many intricate analyses of Matthew's situation that have been based on close redaction-critical study of this gospel. Quite untouched, for example, is the significance of the pronoun "their" in expressions like "their synagogue"; what if anything is revealed by the theme of persecution; how much of Matthew's *Sitz* can be deduced from his handling of the law; and so forth. But in one sense enough has been said. It is not our purpose to challenge detailed theories regarding Matthew's *Sitz* but to urge a much humbler warning: It is precisely when we are building our most comprehensive theories that we are most in danger of adducing exegetical evidence that more sober judgment must think of little use to the large reconstruction. In this case, regardless of the date and provenance of Matthew's gospel, I see little hard evidence for unambiguous anachronisms in his treatment of the Jewish leaders—anachronisms that, if they existed, might support some broader theory.

Nor is this paper meant to say that Matthew's treatment of the Jewish leaders must tell us nothing at all about his *Sitz* unless it is patently anachronistic. So drastic a conclusion is naive. By his patterns of inclusions, omissions, dominant interests and the like, doubtless Matthew betrays something of the concerns that dominated his thinking when he wrote, and thereby we may be helped to probe his thought more accurately. But even here the unknowns are considerable, and it may be the mark of careful scholarship to admit our ignorance more often and to be more hesitant about drawing detailed characterizations of Matthew's community from exegetical evidence at best marginally suited to the task. The "astonishing" ignorance may be our own.