

***THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW IN CURRENT STUDY:
STUDIES IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM G. THOMPSON***

by DE Aune, (ed)

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This volume contains the proceedings of a colloquium attended by eighty participants and held at the Lake Shore Campus of Loyola University on June 12-14, 1998 in memory of the late Bill Thompson. He died rather prematurely in September 1996. This important publication on Matthew is edited by David Aune of the University of Notre Dame, and contains contributions by ten well-known Matthean scholars.

Taking his point of departure the retrospect on Matthean research given by Davies and Allison in their ICC commentary, Donald Senior discusses in an introductory essay the recent trends in Matthean scholarship while acknowledging a certain renaissance in the current research. He observes that in the debate concerning the Jewish setting of Matthew, the level of discussion has greatly matured with converging similarities on some disputed points. Definite gains have also been booked by literary and narratological approaches, but Senior feels that more bridges should be built between these approaches and classical approaches represented by Davies and Allison. It is now also acknowledged that Christology cannot be constructed on the basis of titles alone, but that the narrative as a whole and its impact on the reader has to be taken into account. With a view to Matthew's place in early Christianity, Senior highlights an important conclusion which amounts to what can be called almost a near reversal of many interpretations of Matthew – that Matthew's struggle should not be seen to be with Pauline Christianity, but with people in danger of losing all contact with their Jewish origins and leading to Christian communities becoming either all Jewish or all Gentile instead of being a community Both Jew and Gentile could flourish together.

Besides this survey, the volume contains a wide variety of interesting essays dealing with some fascinating aspects of methodology and Matthean research. Amy-Jill Levine, for example, attempts to contribute to a civil, yet honest conversation between the brother of historical critical and social scientific approaches and the sister of feminist interpretation and postcolonial analysis of Matthew. While the brother often accuses the sister of starting from inappropriate questions and serving ideology, the sister in turn responds that the brother ignores certain issues and that even his so called objective interpretation is often serving some ideology. She proposes to be a third voice getting the two in dialogue, joining the dialogue with her experience as historian (credibility with the brother) as well as feminist and engaged interpreter (sharing the concerns of the sister), and as a Jew being an outsider to the family. This is then done with reference to Mt 15:21-28. In a very stimulating contribution she is critical of positions taken by both sides, and also underlines that for the politics of reading (often overlooked) the real power in the story world is the Church, while for the historical setting the real power is Rome. She then shows how Matthew's account of this pericope resists the typical anti-Jewish reading of the Church, as

well as a reading that dismisses the non-Jewish population of the land. In a contribution by Harrington dealing with the pastoral significance of the interpretation of Matthew, he also highlights the danger of this Gospel becoming an anti-Jewish book in the environment of a primarily Gentile readership. He also warns against the danger of preachers promoting anti-Judaism or negative stereotypes of Jews, while also suggesting that Matthew should be studied in mixed groups of Jews and Christians.

In discussing the early reception of Matthew's Gospel in the light of recently published papyri fragments, Graham Stanton concludes that it seems that in the early reception of Matthew as if use was made of papyrus or parchment notebooks with Jesus traditions, alongside copies of Gospels and oral traditions. He also concludes that Christian communities were evidently in much closer touch with one another than we have usually supposed. This has relevance in the light of the issues raised in the symposium edited by Richard Bauckham¹ on rethinking the Gospel audiences.

Elaine Wainwright discusses the healing miracles in Mt 8-9 from a fresh perspective. She proposes to deal with these narratives in the light of contemporary literary and rhetorical methodologies combined with a socio-cultural perspective incorporating insights of medical anthropology. In this manner these healing narratives are seen in the context of the broader health care system. In the healing narratives of Mt 8-9, women's bodies become the site of transformative powers associated with Jesus: that of service, saving, and of being raised to new life. In this manner these narratives are read symbolically and rhetorically with reference to our own situation.

Another illuminating contribution is by Wendy Cotter dealing with the resurrection appearances in Matthew in light of the Greco-Roman apotheosis traditions. While most interpreters of Mt 28:16-20 see in this pericope a prophetic commissioning, with midrash on Dn 7:13-14 (LXX), it is not clear how the Old Testament allusions are meant to function in a story of a hero returning from the dead. There is evidence that the Greco-Roman concepts of *apotheosis* were well known – even in Judaism – in the Mediterranean world in the 1st century AD as the expression of the status of a hero before God and the world. Cotter poses that a Greco-Roman audience, Jew or Gentile, would have understood Mt 28:16-20 as an *apotheosis* of Jesus. Yet Matthew sets Jesus above and apart all other *apotheosized* heroes/gods. While the authority of Augustus was confined to the earth and to his mortal life, it would pass on with his death to his successor. But the authority of Jesus over heaven and earth begins with his *apotheosis*, and stretches over heaven *and* earth. The Son of Man background of Dn 7 remains important as it points to the Old Testament God as the One who authorizes Jesus, and who also authorizes the community. The Lord Jesus of the Resurrection narrative also surpasses all the Jewish heroes, even Moses. When Jesus is seen in same context as worldwide emperors and rulers, it becomes easy to see how the listeners could understand the worldwide and eternal significance of the kind of power that Jesus holds.

This volume really provides stimulating and enriching reading. This provides not only a very interesting survey of state of the art Matthean research, but will also stimulate further research along these and related lines. It is warmly recommended to a wide audience as it covers such an interesting range of well written contributions.

1. Bauckham, R (ed.) 1998. *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel audiences*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.