

'KING-CHRISTOLOGY':

The result of a critical study of Matt 28:16-20 as an example of contextual exegesis in Africa

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1. Introduction

Matt 28:16-20 is a narrative epilogue¹, and indeed, one which lets us in on one of the most hidden expressions of Christology. The African rituals of royal kingship can help us come to a better understanding of its implications for reflecting on the Lordship of Jesus in our own context. However, the structure, literary form and content of the pericope has, over the years, intrigued exegetes, commentators and interpreters alike². Its universalistic importance cannot be underestimated as scholars agree that the text preserves, in spite of some insignificant textual variants, Matthew's understanding of the status of the exalted and enthroned Christ who sends his disciples to evangelize the world, the *oikoumene*³. The importance of the pericope as a *Schlußabschnitt* in the Gospel of Matthew is predicated on its *Sitz im Leben* in the Matthean Hellenist Jewish Christian community, who saw it her responsibility to execute the Lord's commission⁴. From a contextual exegete's point of view I am being challenged to offer a perspectival reading of the text in order to negotiate the meaning of Jesus' injunction in the context of the emerging Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the period of the New Era of Evangelization in modern Africa. Such a reading becomes necessary in view of the urgent need for the African Churches to evolve an adequate image of Jesus, quite suitable for their task of evangelization in the year 2000.

The task of the paper will be as follows: just after this introductory paragraph, the Matthean epilogue will be critically examined *via* a brief but concise discussion of

1. Davidson, G W *et al* (eds), 1989. *Camber's Concise Dictionary*, 323. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2. See *infra*, 2-4.

3. See Stecker, G 1962. *Die Weg der Gerechtigkeit. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Matthäus*, 209. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

4. Johnson, S 1952. Matthew, Exegesis, in G S Buttrick (ed), *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 7, 620. New York.

the form-critical studies done on the pericope by some authors (II). In the third section, the installation and enthronement rites and statuses of kings-elect in precolonial African societies will be sketched (III). In the fourth section, I will present an exegesis of the pericope through a rapid analysis of the Matthean redaction of the Markan text (Mk 16:14-18) (IV); and from the standpoint of a contextual exegete, I will re-evaluate the pericope's central message in order to lend it fresh orientation for the African readership and churches. Finally, the concluding section will highlight the Christology of this much beloved passage for African Christianity.

2. Review of some previous studies

In the sixties; when it was considered fashionable among German scholars to probe the Form-History of the Gospels, Martin Dibelius, in his work, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*,⁵ detected a 'mythical attitude' in the text of Matthew's commissioning. Studied in the context of Hellenistic religiosity, Dibelius noted some features typical of the divine herald of a revelation⁶. For him, the words of commission (vv 18b-20) reflect this Greek background and possess no historical authenticity as obvious exegetical questions (such as: how does Jesus appear and disappear? how are the doubters treated? which mountain is meant?) raisable on the text find no historicity nor corroboration in the actual situation. For Dibelius, this absence of historical basis for the commissioning lends credence to the mythical character of the passage⁷. Matthew, in his opinion, has provided us with a word of revelation from the perspective of a Hellenistic divine figure cast in a mythological framework and narrative.

The injunction to baptize implicated in the words of the commission warrant Rudolf Bultmann to consider the pericope 'a sort of cult legend'⁸. For Bultmann as for Dibelius, the passage is unhistorical in character but only religious and edifying⁹. In the light of comparisons he made on the passage with those of Mk 14:22-23 (the Last Supper), and Mk 1:9-11 (Jesus' baptism), Bultmann concluded that such texts reached their form in a cultic *Sitz im Leben* of the early Church during which period a missionary charge has become interwoven into the tradition. It is worthy to note that Bultmann draws our attention to the interplay of both form and redaction in the passage.

Georg Stecher's work, *Die Weg der Gerechtigkeit*,¹⁰ represents, to my own way of thinking, a fusion of the two previous authors with a much better emphasis on the

5. Dibelius, M 1961⁴. *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. Tübingen: Mohr.

6. *Ibid*, 282.

7. *Ibid*, 285.

8. Bultmann, R 1963. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 286. Oxford: Blackwell.

9. *Ibid*, 244.

10. Stecker, *Die Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 210.

redactional role of the evangelist, Matthew. He sees Matt 28:16-20 as a combination of a pre-Matthean revelatory word with a Matthean expansion aimed at harmonizing this community's theological viewpoint. Strecker carefully analyses the so-called 'word of revelation' and isolates a tripartite form¹¹. For him, vv 18a and 20a reflect proper Matthean language. He sees in v 19a the universal missionary command and judges it a typical redactional feature, which is so outstanding in Matthew's entire Gospel. Like Bultmann before him, Strecker locates the *Sitz im Leben* of the pre-Matthean word of revelation in the cultic/liturgical assembly of the Matthean church. The theme of baptism remains for Strecker an external tradition received by Matthew. This, he argues, is proven by the fact that the language is quite un-Matthean, a fact which supposes that here, the redactor introduced into a virile community such as that of Matthew, a practice he had no words of his own to describe ...¹².

In 1950 an article by Otto Michel appeared, in which he suggested that Matt 28:16-20 is an enthronement hymn¹³ composed on the pattern of the Son of Man enthronement scene in Dan 7:14-14; a prophecy regarded by Matthew and his community as fulfilled in the Easter events of Jesus¹⁴. For Michel, the passage reflects in both language and form a reworking of the Danielite text in the light of his christology. There are corresponding themes such as authority that is given from above; all nations of the earth, glory and service; everlasting *exousia* and the indestructibility of his kingdom contained in the LXX text of Daniel. In form and structure, Michel asserts, Dan 7:13-14, Matt 28:16-20 and Phil 2:9-11 represent coronation texts. Each pericope, he argues, shows an underlying unity buttressed by three motifs: authority of Christ, his Lordship and the eventual recognition by all people of the earth of Christ's possession of these charismas¹⁵.

Some eight years later, Joachim Jeremias further advanced our knowledge on the action coronation motif in his work, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*¹⁶. Jeremias adds two more NT passages; namely 1 Tim 3:16 and Heb 1:5-14 which, for him, conform to the form of Matt 28:18-20. From the History of Religions approach, he arrives at the conclusion that ancient Egyptian coronation rituals which comprised such features as (a) elevation, (b) presentation and (c) enthronement of the king-elect must have influenced the composition of these NT pericopes and their christology¹⁷.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 209, and *idem*, The Concept of History in Matthew. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 35 (1967) 219-230, 229.

13. Michel, O 1950/51. Der Abschluss des Matthäusevangeliums. *Ev Th 10* (1950/51) 16-26, 22-23.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 22.

16. Jeremias, J 1958. *Jesus' promise to the Nations*. Naperville, Ill.

17. *Ibid.*, 22.

Hahn in his own work, *Mission in the New Testament*,¹⁸ offers a modified view of the enthronement idea. He notes correctly that Matt 28:18b which states the grant of full authority to Jesus in connection with his 'lordship over heaven and earth' rather indicates Jesus' exaltation¹⁹. For Hahn, the words about authority in v 18b do not refer to the enthronement act, but point to the revelation of the exaltation as an accomplished reality. V 20b, he insists, expresses the motif of the exercise of sovereignty by the exalted Lord. Hahn holds Ps 109:1 of the LXX as a reference text in the Bible. According to him, Ps 109:5-6 and even in the entire Psalm, the enthronement motif pervades all through and as such indicates the divine promise of the final lordship of the Messiah over the powers of this world²⁰. In conclusion, Hahn is of the opinion that Matt 28:16-20 represents Hellenist Jewish Christianity's replacement of the Hebrew Bible motif of the submission of the nations (Ps 109:6) by that of the evangelization of the Gentiles in the last days. In such a situation, the command to subject the people to baptism alludes to the plan of the exalted One who offers salvation to those of the *ethné* who receive the gospel.

Can Matt 28:16-20 belong to the genre of farewell addresses? Johannes Munck was one of the scholars who had attempted to demonstrate that Matt 28:16-20 belongs to such a group²¹. Through a form-critical study he made on the OT passages, Gen 47:29-50:14 (Jacob's speech to his sons) and Tob 14:3-11 (Tobit's blessings to his sons and grandsons) and the NT well-known passage, Acts 20:17-38 (Paul's address to the Ephesian Church elders). Munck applies his findings on the pattern to some of the NT post-resurrection pericopes in which Jesus addresses his disciples, for example Lk 24:36-53²². Applying the same to Matthew 28:16-20, Munck could not find accurately the common pattern he set out to seek. Among other elements lacking in Matt 28:16-20, Jesus does not announce his departure nor does he actually depart. He does not foretell future persecutions nor give final blessing to the disciples. He only gives them a commission - make disciples and teach them, I am always with you. The pericope, thus, does not fit the pattern of a farewell address as Munck would have us believe.

In an article which appeared in the *NTS* in 1970, Bruce Malina, the doyen of research on the influence of eastern Mediterranean culture on the New Testament²³, compares Matt 28:16-20 with 2 Chron 36:23 where, according to his findings, there is an 'official decree of the biblical type at the close of 2 Chron'²⁴. Malina traces the parallels in the literary forms of the two passages and just as Matt 28:26-

18. Hahn, F 1965. *Mission in the New Testament*. Naperville.

19. *Ibid*, 66.

20. *Ibid*, 66-67.

21. Munck, J 1950. in *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne, Melanges M Goguel*, 155-170. Paris: Delachaux et Nestlé.

22. *Ibid*, 165.

23. Malina, B 1970. The literary Structure and Form of Mt 28:16-20. *NTS* 17 (1970) 87-103.

24. *Ibid*, 96.

20 closes the Gospel, so does 2 Chron 36:23 close the Jewish Scriptures²⁵. After a brilliant and a close-knit analysis of the two passages which yielded into the exposition of the outline of their common parts, Malina can be said to have successfully brought to our knowledge a pericope from the Hebrew biblical tradition, which *Gattung* seemed to have influenced the compositional history of the Matthean commissioning in 28:16-20²⁶.

And now to summarize. The positions maintained in contemporary studies help us form a picture of the shape of the major interpretations given by scholars on Matt 28:16-20 since the sixties and which have, since then, continued to influence authors in the eighties; and will perhaps, in this decade too²⁷. As an African exegete, writing for an African audience (for PACE Conference), three of the studies passed in review are of particular importance to me as they tend to influence my own interpretation. These are the works of Otto Michel (1950) who uncovers an enthronement Christology arising from Matthew's redaction of Dan 7:13-14; Jeremias (1958) who, with the History of Religions approach, discovers the tradition of African (Egyptian) coronation rituals as possible influence on the Matthean composition of the pericope; Hahn (1965) whose study points to the category of exaltation of the risen Christ. These authors through form and redaction-critical methods point to a hidden Christology of the pericope which I consider quite at home with African religiosity. However, the job remains to be carried to its logical conclusion in order to profit our own audience. King-Christology is the picture which emerges from the commissioner's words of command and re-assurance. Such a model of Jesus who commissions his disciples, finds ready analogy in the enthroned statuses of many an African king during the pre-contact period.

II

3. The installation rites of kings-elect in Africa: an insight

In virtually all ancient African kingdoms, the kings-elect are submitted to lengthy and elaborate rituals of installation and coronation. The election, investiture, installation and coronation of African kings constitute and reflect the perpetuation of ancient societal value systems. From the north to the south, east to the west, similarities abound. Let me illustrate with four cases²⁸. Among the Shilluk of

25. *Ibid.*

26. In support of this, Stendahl's partial view on the possibility of the awareness of the Hebrew Bible in the Matthean community and its school may be at the back of Malina's mind. Cf Stendahl, K 1954. *The School of St. Matthew*, 205. Uppsala; McKenzie, J. 'The Gospel According to Matthew', in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol II, 64.

27. Cf Perkins, P 1989. 'Christology and Mission: Matthew 28:16-20'. *Listening* 24 (1989) 302-309.

28. Much of what is discussed here is culled from my Research Project: *Christ the African King. New Testament Christology from the African Context*, currently being undertaken as an AvH Fellow at the Phil.-Theol. Hochschule, Sankt Georgen, Frankfurt/Main, Germany. 1990/91.

Southern Sudan, the *reth*-elect is made to sit on the stool from which the effigy of Nyikang, the hero and demi-god of Shillukland is removed in order to create a place for him in the ancestral kingship. This procedure is immediately followed by an ox-spearling ritual to mark the incarnation of the soul of Nyikang, the progenitor and the Shilluk patriarch and primary representative of *Juok*, God in the being of the king-elect²⁹. Nyikang's possession of the *reth*-elect grants him the authority to reign in Shillukland as a sacred king, a godman, one with a special charisma conferred by both his office and his god-given prerogatives. He rules his land and people as the legitimate incarnation of Nyikang. He is the enthroned Lord of Shillukland.

In Southern Africa, the Zulu *Nkosi*, 'as the representative in the direct line of the tribal ancestors ...'³⁰, was ceremonially installed and confirmed into office by the rite of the *ukuMisa*. The enthronement of the *Nkosi* is marked by the kindling of a new fire with the tribal fire-sticks, the *uZwati lomuzi*. This rite heralds the inauguration of a new reign. Then, follows the anointing of the *Nkosi* - the *ukuOunga* - with ash as a sign of his divinization; and his drinking of a special cup of herbal concoction guarantees his imposingness and exaltation³¹. Finally, the *Nkosi* mounts the national temple where he communes with the ancestral spirits, the *amaKosi*. In the Royal kraal, the king-elect stands on the national sacred coil - the *inkata ye Zwe* holding the *isiJula*, the Royal Spear; he is proclaimed king by the Prime Minister³². As Bryant states, the *Nkosi*'s installation ceremony confirms 'the awful sacredness of the royal person'³³. After his installation, he became regarded as the clan's 'high priest'; the 'tribal king' and a 'prospective god'³⁴. He ruled his people as father and king of the land. According to Gluckman, 'he was generous to his subjects ... he gave them justice; he protected their interests'³⁵.

In Eastern Africa, the enstoolment of the Baganda king-elect, the *Kabaka* is outstandingly representative of the regal traditions of the Lakeside states settled on the mouth of the Kagera river up to the exit of the Nile. The *Kabaka*, a divine emperor who traces his pedigree to Kintu, the first *Kabaka* and Buganda nation-builder was chosen from among the princes in the line of succession and enthroned

29. Cf Riad, M 1959. The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk and its Origin. *Archiv für Volkerkunde* 14 (1959) 141-284; Arens, W 1979. The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk: A Contemporary Re-evaluation. *Ethnos* 3 (1979) 167-181; Schnepel, B 1988. Shilluk Royal Ceremonies of Death and Installation. *Anthropos* 83 (1988) 433-452.

30. See Krige, E J 1936. *The Social System of the Zulu*, 233. Pietermaritzburg: Longmans.

31. *Ibid.*, 241-242.

32. *Ibid.*, 243-244.

33. Bryant, A T 1929. *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, 471. London: Longmans.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Gluckmann, M 1970. The Kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa, in Fortes, M & Evans Pritchard, E E (eds), *African Political Systems*, 34. Oxford University Press.

at the Buddo Hill, a sacred spot of the land³⁶. The ritual is performed by the temple priest, Semanoba, in the presence of the *Katkiro*, the Prime Minister. In a quasi-battle, Semanoba and his acolytes engage the king-elect and his entourage at which the priest and the forces they represent are defeated by the king's men. In the Buddo shrine, the *Kabaka*-elect is handed both the jawbone and the umbilical cord, the twin royal insignia of his predecessor with the words: 'You are the King', pronounced by the priest. In turn, the king repeats this affirmation twice in its variant forms. In a final stage, the priest hands over to him the *kanuna*, the royal spear which is a symbol of his victory over his enemies. After a series of prayers uttered by Semanoba, the king is brought to the Sumba Hill where the priest, Mainja, takes over the rest of the ceremonies with its completion culminating in the rite of 'eating Buganda'. At this point in the ceremony, the *Kabaka* is installed as the 'legally appointed sovereign' of the Baganda³⁷. That the *Kabaka's* enthronement happens in the presence of state authorities, on sacred and national sanctuaries³⁸ and under the pontification of the representatives of the national deity confirms the sacred dimension of the *Kabaka*-ship, one of Africa's most powerful kingships.

In West Africa, the Yoruba *Oba* chosen by a committee of king-makers, the *Oyo Mesi*, in the case of the Old Oyo Empire, was installed and confirmed in office at the approval of *Ifa*, the Orishas and Oduduwa the immortal patriarch of Yoruba mythology, by a Queen Mother³⁹. The enthronement begins with the narration of the historical and legendary circumstances that gave birth to the kingdom. The genesis of the race's migration is traced. The king-elect descends to the *Bara*, the royal mausoleum to commune and to do obeisance to the principal ancestral spirits. Later, he submits to the rite of 'eating the king', a euphemism which implies that he partakes of a dish prepared from the heart of the immediate predecessor⁴⁰. This rite makes it possible to enter into direct contact with the predecessor and to be himself consumed by the kingship. For the Yoruba, in the real sense of it, to become a king means *je oba*, 'to eat a king'. According to Lloyd, through this eating, 'all the sacred powers of preceding Obas and ultimately those of Oduduwa' are transferred to him⁴¹. After these rituals, the king-elect is crowned with the beaded crown; he is donned in royal robes with a chain of beads round his neck, a staff of office and the

36. See Ray, B 1972. Royal Shrines and Ceremonies of Buganda. *Uganda Journal* 36 (1972) 35-38, 36.

37. Roscoe, J 1911. *The Baganda. An Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs*, 195-196. London: Macmillan.

38. Ray, B 1977. Sacred Space and Royal Shrines in Buganda. *History of Religions* 16 (1977) 363-373.

39. Johnson, S 1921. *The History of the Yorubas*, 63ff;192;227. Lowe and Brydore.

40. Ojo, G J A 1966. *Yoruba Palaces: A Study of Afins of Yorubaland*, 77. London: University of London Press.

41. Lloyd, P C 1960. Sacred Kingship and Government among the Yoruba. *Africa* 30 (1960) 221-237; Adediran, B 1987. Kings, Traditions and Chronology in pre-colonial Africa; Conjectures on the Yoruba Kingdom of Ketu. *Afrika Samani* 18/19 (1987) 74-87, 76.

sword of Mercy in his hand ⁴². He is thus exalted above all in the kingdom. He becomes the *Aláse ekeji orisà* - the second in command to the divinity ⁴³. After some other labourious ritual ceremonies lasting for some ten days, the king mounts his stool in the *Afin*, the palace ⁴⁴, and is shown to his people and the public. Thereafter, the *Oba* settles in his palace where he has little contact with people except those chiefs accredited to enter the king's apartment.

In all these cases, it is clear that for Africans, the choice and installation of a king is a divinely ordained event and his enthronement is religiously executed. In all, the immortal heroes of the peoples' mythology join God to elect and to enthrone the king. The divine choice is believed to be known through the oracles. Exalted and ordained, the kings-elect experience the utterly transcendental 'Holy' mediated thought the immanent spirits of the protoking. Kingship is thus a sacred legacy of African states. No one ascends to it on his own volition. It is bestowed upon a worthy prince by responsible agents acting in lieu of the gods, ancestral spirits and the people. In sum, it has been observed that the essential tasks of African kingship is that the king had the duty to ensure the spiritual welfare of his people by the acts of piety he performed, to protect the true faith of his people, to defend his people against outside attacks; and at home, to preserve justice and peace in the kingdom ⁴⁵. Thus, it must be remarked that kings in traditional African societies assumed office and authority not for political grandeur and world conquest but for service to their communities and people.

Can this insight into the elevation and status of African kings help us understand the Matthean text before us? Is there any idea we can gain from the insight that supports the views expressed already by Michel, Jeremias and Hahn? Surely Matt 28:16-20 is not speaking of Christ's enthronement as would his baptism in the river Jordan, the transfiguration scene in Matthew 17:1-19 or the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Lk 19:28-40) but the rulership and the commission of the exalted and enthroned Christ to his followers. In this light, I agree with Jeremias that the pericope alludes to a post-Easter re-interpretation of the person of Christ in the perspectives of crowned and elevated status ⁴⁶; a phenomenon which the African pattern elucidates fairly well.

42. Parinder, E G 1956. Divine Kingship in West Africa. *Numen* 3 (1956) 111-121, 115-116.

43. Adelowo, E D 1990. Rituals, Symbolism and symbols in Yoruba Traditional Religious Thought. *Asia Journal of Theology* 4 (1990) 162-173.

44. Ojo. *Yoruba Palaces*, 67; 76-80.

45. Cf Davidson, B 1969. *The Africans: An Entry to Cultural History*, 190-192. London: Longmans.

46. Jeremias. *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 38.

III

4. Exegesis of the text

In the section of the paper, in order to expose the mind of Matthew, a verse-by-verse exegesis of the pericope will be given. Emphasis will be placed on the redactional activity of the evangelist and my interpretation will depend mainly on internal evidence; that is, what is likely to be authentically Matthean as far as preceding texts can clarify. The text before us is taken from Nestle-Alland *Greek-English New Testament*, 26th Revised Edition, 87.

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

16 Οἱ δὲ ἕνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 17 καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν. 18 καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. 19 πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, 20 διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

V 16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

The verse performs a twofold literary function. In the first instance, the evangelist wishes to stress before his community that in the post-Easter events, the number of the loyal disciples is eleven. Judas, the traitor, had gone astray; an event which Matthew does not strive to account for as does Luke, the author of the Acts in Ac 1:12-26. Secondly, the author offers a geographical scenario of this great event. It occurs in Galilee, Jesus' home region as well as most of the eleven and at an unnamed mountain, the one 'to which Jesus had directed them'. I however reject a mythologizing interpretation given to 'the unknown mountain' (Stendahl and McKenzie⁴⁷), but wish to state that for the Synoptics as elsewhere in Matthew (15:29). *To horos* refers to the Galilean hill which is associated with important theological events and 'usually stands to portray topical events during Jesus' ministry in North Palestine'⁴⁸. Here, I believe that Matthew had taken over the mountain idea from Luke-Acts 1:12 where Jesus is described as having made his farewell speech to the disciples at the Mount of Olives. For Matthew Jesus' *Abschlußrede*, given from a mountain-top, would be an ideal. Matthew's Jesus delivers important sermons and calls disciples on mountains. And in this final encounter Jesus commissions from a mountain. Messages given on mountaintops are for Matthew like clarion-calls broadcast from piercing trumpets and peeling clarions. Thus, the motif of the mountain-commission is purposefully employed to heighten the exaltation of the Commissioner and the content of his commission. This manner may suggest a method for contemporary evangelization and communication in Africa.

V 17: And when they saw him they worshipped him;

but some doubted.

The text draws our attention to a phenomenon typical of biblical imagery, namely of the OT, that is, an epiphany of God and in the NT post-resurrection theology, a Christophany. In the scene, there was Christ in full appearance. The next states ... 'they saw him'. Their sight of him is established by their worship.

How then does one understand the reported anticlimax: 'but some doubted'? Bornkamm⁴⁹ and Dibeluis⁵⁰ have both put much stress on the miraculous element as a character of an epiphany. For me, one can read the miraculous aspect in the appearance itself. Matt 28:17 briefly states the fact of the epiphany which was well known by Matthew's readership. What is narrated is nothing but the bare fact of the

47. Cf Stendahl, 1962. Matthew, in Black, M and Rowley, H H (eds), *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, 698. London; McKenzie, *art. cit.*, 113.

48. Manus, C U 1991. The story of Jn 6:1-15 and its synoptic parallels: an African approach towards the solution of a Johannine critical problem. Forthcoming in *Biblical Pastoral Bulletin 7*, (*pro manuscripto*).

49. Bornkamm, G 1964. Der Auferstandene und die Irdische, Mt 28:16-20, in *Zeit und Geschichte*, Dinkler, E (ed), Dankesgabe an R Bultmann zum 80 Geburtstag, 172-191; 172. Tübingen.

50. Dibeluis, *Formgeschichte*, 91.

Christophany in which context the missionary charge is appended. What matters to Matthew is that Christ has appeared in glory, exalted; and in this status he said as in Gen 17:1 'The Lord appeared to Abram and said ...' or as in Gen 26:2, 'and the Lord appeared to him (Isaac) and said ...' For Matthew, Jesus' appearance is carefully located at the end in order to structure his epiphanic commissioning; '... They worshipped him ...' is a well-known NT expression with reference to worship done to a divine. In Matt 28:11 Matthew uses *proskyneó* to describe the type of homage the Magi did to the infant king, Jesus. In about five instances of direct dependence on Mark (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20), Matthew has redacted the tradition in such a manner as to describe the action of those who encounter Jesus as *proskynesis*⁵¹. The gesture of the women at the tomb in 28:9 which is described as worshipping the risen Jesus is thus anticipated in 28:17b⁵². Thus, having performed the same act, both the women and the eleven have become disciples on equal footing. Like in 28:17, the act of worship is placed in the context of a commissioning narrative. In 28:9-10, the women are charged by the risen Lord to announce to the disciples a meeting with him in Galilee. Here in 28:19, the charge is: go and win disciples from all nations, a mandate which stresses the universalistic complexion of the pericope and its injunction on missionary outreach.

The so-called doubt expressed by the disciples has continued to evoke much controversy. McNeile and Allen, just to mention a few, argue that another group apart from the eleven are obliquely alluded to⁵³. Grundmann and Bonnard are of the view that all the eleven see Jesus, worship him and yet doubt⁵⁴. Bonnard even affirms that the disciples' worship was not without some hesitation and inner anguish. The third position that only some members of the eleven doubted, is represented in the work of some of the authors passed in review such a Stendahl⁵⁵, Malina⁵⁶, Neirynek⁵⁷ and Filson⁵⁸. In ordinary common sense attitude, apart from the grammatical subtleties of the text,⁵⁹ this view appears most likely to have happened. Doubters are not faithless. Doubt is an essential ingredient of the human predicament. To be human is, in fact, to live in a kind of dialectical tension between belief and doubt (Cartesianism). It is in this context that the verb *distadzó* may be

51. Cf Greeven, H 1959. *Proskyneó*. *TWNT* 6 (1959) 750-767.

52. Neirynek, F 1968/69. *Les Femmes au Tombeau*. *NTS* 15 (1968/69) 168-190, 178-179.

53. See Mckenzie, A H 1915. *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, 484. London; W C Allen, 1924. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew*, 305. New York.

54. Grundmann, W 1978. *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 8 Aufl. Berlin: Evgl. Verl. Anst. 1978, *ThHNT* 3, 576; Bonnard, P 1963. *L'Évangile selon St Matthieu*, 418. Paris.

55. Stendahl, Matthew, 798.

56. Malina, *art. cit.*, 98.

57. Neirynek, *art. cit.*, 180.

58. Filson, F 1960. *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, 305. New York.

59. See *BD*, paragraph 250.

understood. In its classical and Koine usages, it supposes a division in the conviction of a person to the extent that he cannot decide whether to believe or to disbelieve⁶⁰. Such categories of believers are quite plentiful in the churches in Africa today. They constitute a significant part of the 'disciples' to be made. In sum, it appears reading between the lines, that Matthew's reason for juxtapositioning the themes of the disciples' worship and doubt was to stress in his community the difficulty of faith in the event of Easter and yet the need for it⁶¹.

V 18a: And Jesus came and said to them,

The verse is composed in the form of a descriptive narrative typical of inaugural visions. Before he speaks, Jesus approaches, *proserchomai* as is used in Matthew's redaction of the Markan transfiguration story (Matt 17:6-7). For me, the transfiguration episode is one of Christ's installation scenes in the synoptic tradition. Its literary affinity to Matt 28:16-20 has much to commend both passages as portrayals of Christ's royal installation and enthronement understood in their best anthropological terms⁶². A comparative look at the two pericopes becomes necessary at this stage. My purpose is to isolate the parallel elements and the linguistic correspondences.

Matt 17:6-7

When the disciples
heard this, they fell
on their faces, and
were filled with awe.

But Jesus came - *kai*
prosélthon ho lésous
and touched them, say-
ing, 'Rise and have no
fear.'

Matt 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples
went ... And when they
saw him, they worship-
ped him, but some
doubted.

And Jesus came - *kai*
prosélthon ho lésous
and said to them,
'All authority in
heaven and on earth
has been given to me ...
lo, I am with you always ...'

60. Note well: Matthew uses *distadzó* a second time in 14:31 where he narrates the story of Jesus' walk on the sea during which time Peter doubted to follow. In both accounts, an epiphanic element is readable in the text and the verb, *distadzó* is connected with *proskyneó* to depict the human foible.

61. Cf Barth, G 1963. Matthew's Understanding of the Law, in Bornkamm, G *et al* (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 58-164; 133. Philadelphia.

62. See Fortes, M 1969. Of Installation Ceremonies. Presidential Address 1967, in *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute for 1969*, 5-20.

Looking at the table, one notices immediately such parallel items as 'they worshipped' and 'they fell on their faces' (lying prostrate). Since 'doubted' in 28:17 and 'feared greatly' in 17:6 are parallel ideas, one can see the further sense of the verb *distadzó*: as belief mixed with unbelief which underlies both texts. Summing up the *sensus plenior* of the texts, I dare say the exalted Lord possesses awe; he becomes a challenging object of homage and at the same time of doubt. But in a low profile manner, he approaches the disciples, states his charge and promises them security and well-being. As is discerned from the installed statuses of African kings, Jesus is king of the community, the divinely ordained king to whose office and authority all submission is due.

V 18b: All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me.

It is in the context of the discussion above that this verse can be interpreted. *Exousia*, authority is a Markan term for the quality of Jesus' teaching and miracles (Mk 2:10). How does Matthew utilize the term? In Matt 9:8, the report that '... they glorified God who gives such authority to men' is a Matthean employment of the Markan term to designate the *semeia kai terata* granted to Jesus by God and performed by him. The sum total of the work of Jesus and his Christship constitute his authority in heaven and on earth. Thus, for Matthew (see Matt 11:27a/Lk 10:22) and the Q-Community, Jesus is the recipient of divine prerogatives, charismas only bestowed at the occasion of enthronement and installation. For me, in Matt 28:18 the risen Jesus expresses that his installation to kingship is an accomplished reality. Therefore, his possession of universal authority empowers him to discharge his duty as Christ, the King, to the community. It is in this status that Jesus hands out authentic commission.

The expression 'heaven and earth' represents the first two parts of the Jewish tripartite dimension of the cosmos. As such both stand for the entire universe including the sphere of God and that of man - what is otherwise known in African cosmology as the Spirit world (*Ala mmuo*) and the human world (*Ala ndi mmadu*)⁶³. In Matt 11:25, God is described as 'Lord of heaven and earth'. In 28:20, Jesus is said to have been granted authority over both entities. He is thus the bearer of the universal authority of the Father.

V 19a: Go therefore and make disciples
of all nations,

Without doubt, here is the mission command; a command which makes no bones about revealing the evangelist's universalistic understanding of the Lordship of Christ. The order is '*poreuthentes*', *gó*; a participial verbal construction urging an action so imperatively stated in its active form: *Matheteusate* - make disciples. The participial structure of the verb, *poreuthentes* lends emphasis to the spirit of mission

63. Uzukwu, E E 1982. Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning. *URAM 5* (1982) 188-2-0, 195; also my The Concept of Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament and Igbo Traditional Religion: some reflections for Contemporary Missiology. *Mission Studies 2* (1986) 41-56, 46-48.

implied in the text⁶⁴. Malina, on the contrary, thinks that it is inappropriate to speak of a missionary command here⁶⁵. For me, the charge to the eleven to make disciples of all nations - Jews and gentiles alike - suggests an extensive mission project which requires 'sending' (going) throughout the whole world - *pasin tois ethesin* (24:12). This theme harks back to the notion of Jesus' 'all authority' by which he is able to commission the eleven disciples for their universal task of disciple-making.⁶⁶

The theme of the universal missionary project is a Matthean subject. Apart from his use of all nations, Matthew is known to use the term *kosmos* - world - in a universalistic manner. In the parable and interpretation of the Weeds (only found in Matthew) the Matthean Jesus explains that 'the field is the world' which is, to the best of my ken, a universalism extending as much to Jews as to gentiles. Another universalistic use of *kosmos* is that found in Matt 26:13 where Jesus announces that his anointment by the woman at Bethany will be remembered 'wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world'. In Matt 5:14, the disciples are designated the 'light of the world'. As I have elsewhere⁶⁷ tried to show, the disciples were given a mission to shine as light to the whole world through their example and Christ-like lifestyles. To sum up my reflections, I find in Matt 28:16-20 a recapitulation of Matthew's notion of the universalistic mission of the Christian religion.

V 19b: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Many commentators have questioned the authenticity of the triadic baptismal formula in this verse. There is a lack of serious manuscript evidence for a variant reading of the text in the gospel, but its history is complicated by Eusebius of Caesarea's citation of Matt 28:19 without the baptismal formula. Given the random nature of Eusebius' quotations of NT texts, I wish to maintain that the baptismal command as it is transmitted enjoys *ius canonis*. Attached to the injunction to go disciple-making is Jesus' command to baptize the neophytes into the threefold name and to teach them to observe all of his commandments⁶⁸. These injunctions which Trilling in his book⁶⁹, *Das Wahre Israel*, has typified as *Gemeindeordnung* - regulations of the community - indicate the level of interest Matthew had in his community's *modus vivendi* under the New Dispensation.

V 20a: teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;

64. On the Matthean use of the verb *poreuomai*, see Matt 10:7 - where Jesus commissions the Twelve.

65. Malina, *art. cit.*, 90.

66. And also, K Schmidt, 1935. *Ethnos. TWNT* 2 (1935) 369-370.

67. Manus, C U 1986. Matthew 5:12-16 - Jesus' Ethical Teaching to the First Disciples: an Exemplar for Nigerians in the present Decade, in Abogurin, S O (ed), *Religion and Ethics in Nigeria*, 139-157. Ibadan Religious Studies Series, vol 1. Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1986.

68. And so Barth, *Matthew's Understanding of the Law*, 135.

69. Trilling, W 1964. *Das Wahre Israel*, 40. Munich.

This is a community-oriented command in which the key concepts are teaching and the observance of all aspects of the law that Christ has given since his ministry⁷⁰, especially as preserved in Matt 5:13ff. V 20 obliquely alludes to the importance of a post-baptismal catechesis in which the first Christian communities actively engaged themselves⁷¹. In Matthew, Jesus himself amply teaches his followers. In 4:23 he is shown '... teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom'. In 11:1 there is a hint that after giving instruction to the twelve, Jesus goes on '... to teach and preach in their cities'. In the Sermon on the Mount (5:2), Matthew presents Jesus as one who '... opened his mouth and taught them ...' As to the commandments to be passed on to the new members and the manner to go about it, Matthew, in 5:19 drops this hint:

Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For Matthew, it is the content of the Sermon that constitutes Jesus' teaching and all that he had commanded them⁷² which must be passed on. Therefore Matthew's use of the verb *didaskó* connects the Sermon with what he writes in this part of the commissioning text. That Matthew borrows the idea of 'all that is commanded you' from the Hebrew Bible, indicates the value placed on the Scriptures in Matthew's church⁷³. For the evangelist, the command of Jesus does not imply the establishment of a new Law but a new way of life⁷⁴. Jesus is, thus, according to v 20a, the King who teaches his community by his precepts, indeed the Messianic teacher⁷⁵.

V 20b; And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

The introductory expression, *kai ídou egó* - 'And lo (behold), I ...' is quite Semitic in form. It appears quite frequently in commissioning pericopes in the OT⁷⁶. In the perspective of the OT tradition, the expression is usually one of re-assurance mediated through divine presence. Jesus, the Lord of the community is portrayed offering the disciples divine re-assurance through his abiding, active and dynamic presence. In other words, this endverser recapitulates the theme of *Immanuel*, God

70. See Shrenk, G 1935. Entellomai. *TWNT* 2 (1935) 541-553.

71. See here Dodd, C H 1968. The Primitive Catechism and the Sayings of Jesus, in *idem* (ed), *More New Testament Studies*, 11-29. Grand Rapids, Michigan.

72. Shrenk, *art. cit.*

73. See Ex 7:12; Josh 1:7; 1 Chron 22:13; Jer 1:7.

74. McKenzie, *art. cit.*, 114; Stendahl, *Matthew*, 798.

75. Cf Senior, D 1989. The Jesus of Matthew, Compassionate Teacher, Faithful Son. *Church* 5 (1989) 10-13.

76. See Jer 1:1-10; Ezek 1:1-3,15; Is 49:1-6; 1 Chron 22:1-17; 2 Chron 36:22f; Gen 17:4; 28:15; Cf Manus, C U 1985. Conversion Narratives in the Acts: a Study in Lukan Historiography. *Indian Theological Studies* 22 (1985) 21-42.

be with us of Matt 123 (see its variant in 18:20). As a redactional thread, Matthew uses it to stitch the good tidings of his gospel in 28:20b together. The remaining expression - 'always to the close of the age', though a biblical imagery - does not allude to any apocalyptic and end-time events, but rather it points to the Matthean community's sound faith in the continual presence of the risen and exalted Christ whose promise of re-assurance is experienced every day.

5. Summary of the exegetical findings

My analysis proves beyond doubt that Matt 28:16-20 is a narrative summary of the First Gospel whose central message has abiding value for the African Church and readership. Matthew tells us that the mountain is an important spot for divine revelation (v 16). In contemporary Africa, the reverence hitherto given to sacred spaces and natural spots has become a thing of the past as a result of secularization and modernity, indeed a rape of our ecological values and spiritual heritage. The African Indegenous Churches still remind us of the need to make pilgrimages to sacred places: hills, river banks, mountains and wilderness - all so associated with the abode of God in both the OT and NT times. We should not fail to heed the Lukan injunction:

The God who made the world and everything in it being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man ...(Acts 17:24//Acts 7:48)⁷⁷.

The Oke Maria (Mary Hill) pilgrimage centre in the Oyo State of Nigeria is one such African retreat and worshipping centre which draws pilgrims all over the nation in their tens of thousands annually. Such and others like the Catholic Prayer Ministry of Elele run by the Charismatic Holy Ghost Father, Emmanuel Ede in Port-Harcourt Diocese of Nigeria help strengthen Catholic piety and can become strong avenues of pastoral service to the faithful.

The text of Matthew reminds us that there is a need for faith education in our communities (v 17). The state of minds of many African Christians is not so unperturbed. In the wake of the socio-cultural revivals and the politico-economic transformations sweeping through various parts of Africa since independence, those who have faith in the Christian gospel are indeed thinning out. Because of the upsurge of many fundamentalist sects, scientific socialism and atheism at African universities the faith of our educated elites and ultimately those of the simple church-goers are constantly being imperilled. Matthew behests us to tackle the issue of adult education and re-conversion more urgently, especially in the years ahead. Africa must be totally won to Christ. We must devise new ways and means and initiate bold strategies.

The authority of Jesus (v 18) remains a prominent theme in the First Gospel. Jesus teaches with this authority. He received it from the Father. He calls disciples and sends them with the same authority. His authority is ever immanent in the Church.

77. Here see my *The Areopagus Speech (Acts 17:16-34): A study of Luke's Approach to Evangelism and its Significance in the African Context*. *Rev Afr de Theol* 13 (1989) 155-170, 164-165.

The leadership and the worshipping community share, each in his or her own capacity, this same authority. It is this authority which energizes and activates the various charismas our community members put at our disposal. Exercise of the authority Jesus gives ought not be aristocratic. It is meant for the rebuilding of the Church of Christ and for the giving of strength to weaker members.

The need for disciple-winning remains a timeless command (v 19a). Matthew, like the other Synoptics, attach great importance to discipleship. The eleven are called disciples. The seventy of Lk 10:1-12, a Q-designation, is in Matthew merely disciples (Matt 9:42-50) on a larger scale. All who believed in Jesus during the New Testament Church period were disciples. In our times, the term is in poor neglect probably because of our gross preoccupations in denominational issues. A disciple is a follower, and in the Christian context, he or she is a follower of Jesus. African Christianity must recapture the sense of the ideal discipleship, for unless our Christians know what it takes to be a follower of Christ; not a 'born again', we may make no headway in the task of disciple-making.

The universalistic orientation and sense of the pericope (c 19a), while a Matthean predilection, offers hope to the African Church. Everywhere and everytime, the mission of the Church has been to go into the world and to teach all nations. It is through obedience to this divine order that Africa had received the gospel. As an African proverb goes:

What a father transmits to his offspring, so hands he on to his children.

Thus, the African Church is duty bound to carry on Christ's command to win the world for him. The African world is indeed a vast *kanón* (2 Cor 10:13-18). Many interlopers are already within the field. Catholicism must review her strategies of evangelization in Africa. In this case, all Africans must offer the Church their rich cultural experiences to advance her task of evangelization and inculturation. Some efforts have been begun in some regions, yet much more is expected⁷⁸.

The pericope attests that baptism and teaching (vv 19a-20a), one a sacramental rite, the other a method of confirming the former, remain important 'levellers' in the Matthean community. Through baptism each and everyone of us became admitted to the Christian community and later on is taught her doctrines and traditions. Our common baptism in the triadic formula admits us to the Church's common priesthood. Thus, the Christian community is truly a holy People, a priestly People and royal community⁷⁹.

Jesus commands in the Christian community. He is the risen and the exalted Lord (v 20a). As the King of the community, he rules his followers and commands them to observe all that he has commanded. His authority to command subsists in his royalty. In Africa, the reality of kingship provides us with the experience of the

78. Cf Mary Angela Uwalake, 1990. Biblical Apostolate in African Universities. *Biblical Pastoral Bulletin* 10 (1990) 44-51, as reported in *Theology in Context* 8 (1991) 145-6.

79. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-12 in *Doctrines of Vatican II*, 359-363.

sacred nature and the elevation of the divine king: a model through which we can perceive the glory commanded by Jesus in our Christian communities.

Finally, Jesus' enduring presense (v 20b) is a comfort to the Christian community. Aware of his presence in the Church, members fearlessly carry out his command to make disciples and to teach. The Church is destined, in the light of Christ's abiding presence, to support teaching programmes, aimed at the realization of justice and peace in the African nation.

Conclusion

Matthew's Christology, especially that read from this pericope, is post-Easter. The Jesus whom the eleven disciples saw and worshipped is the glorified and exalted Lord, the King of the Matthean community. The first three verses (vv 16,17,18) have no other literary purpose than to demonstrate that this Jesus who directs, commissions and is worshipped, is the enthroned and the exalted Lord⁸⁰, who has been justified by the Father and granted authority to reign in his stead in the community. Much as we agree that in Matthew not all pericopes place Jesus far removed from his humanity⁸¹, it must be stressed that in this commissioning pericope, Matthew 'divinizes' the person of Jesus. Thus, I dare say that his Christology can best be understood in the light of the theology of 'divine kingship', which classical anthropologists (Frazer (1980), Seligmann (1913), Evan Pritchard (1949), Lloyd (1960), Eva Meyerowitz (1960) and Young (1965) had employed to describe the phenomenon of African sacred kingships. As an evangelizer himself, Christ first of all proclaimed a kingdom, the kingdom of God. Seen therefore in the perspective of Matthew, the scenario and the encounter of the eleven with Jesus reveal Jesus as a divine King, the extension of whose kingdom must be achieved through the mission and mandate he has given to his disciples. Given our socio-political background and community life experience, especially before the arrival of the colonists to African shores, the lordship and reign of benevolent kings of various African tribes offer us an analogy on the regal and active functional role of Christ in Christian communities.

What emerges from the text is the face of a believing Small Christian Community; namely the Matthean Christian Community. Though, in its roots, a Hellenist Jewish Christian Community, its *Gemeindeordnung* offer us theological paradigms I consider quite *ad rem* towards a relevant NT theology of the Small Christian Community in our own context. The Small Christian Community must be recognized as a pastoral priority and strategy for evangelization in the year 2000 in Africa.

80. Cf Lambrecht, J 1975. The Oldest Christology: Resurrection or Exaltation? *Bijdragen* 36 (1975) 145-164.

81. See Lentzen-Deis, F (ed), 1988. *Images of Jesus. Contributions to Biblical Method*, 116. Bombay: Paul.