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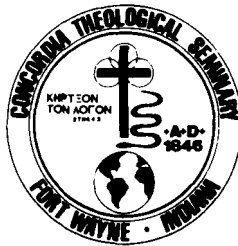
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The Relation of Matthew 28:16-20 to the Rest of the Gospel

David P. Scaer

The importance of Matthew 28:16-20 in the life of the church is demonstrated by its frequent use. It is the pericope used more than any other to show the necessity of baptism, and it is used in the liturgy for baptism. Infant baptism is supported by this pericope also. The same pericope is used in the liturgy for ordination to show that God has established the office of the ministry. This pericope is also used to demonstrate that God is tri-personal. Accordingly, the traditional service of the church begins with its words, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," and, according to the Small Catechism, morning and evening devotions and those offered at meals should begin the same way. Its words have been incorporated into the Gloria Patri, and thus it is spoken or sung with the Psalms of Matins and Vespers and the Introit of the main service of the church. In more recent times it has become the rallying point of the Church Growth Movement, which takes one of its characteristic words, "discipling," from this pericope. Matthew 28:16-20 comes as close to being the universal proof text as any other.¹

I. Initial Considerations

A. *The Authenticity of Matthew 28*

The confessional Lutheran scholar Edmund Schlinck adopted the then popular opinion that this pericope was so theologically advanced, with its Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula, that it could hardly have been spoken by Jesus.² He held that its trinitarian theology was so advanced that it was read back into the mouth of Jesus by the early church. Others have held that this passage, as well as the chapter in general, was not even part of the earliest forms of Matthew's Gospel. Some years later erstwhile LCMS New Testament scholar Jack Kingsbury undermined that theory by showing that Matthew 28:16-20 did not contain anything which could not be linguistically integrated with the rest of the gospel.³ Kingsbury showed that the evangelist was capable of a trinitarian theology in other parts of his gospel. In 11:27, for example, the Father and the Son each has exclusive knowledge of the other. The language of 11:27 is so advanced in its theology that to many

scholars it seemed strangely out of place in Matthew--something which would have been more comfortable in John. Kingsbury's study was sufficiently exhaustive to demonstrate that Matthew 28:16-20 was so similar to the rest of the gospel that one author was responsible for the entire gospel.

Not only is Matthew 28:16-20 an integral part of the entire gospel, but indeed the evangelist intended it as a summary and an endorsement of the gospel. No other book in the entire Scripture comes to such a satisfactory conclusion as does Matthew with Jesus' command to preserve His words and make disciples through baptism and His promise to be with the church until the current epoch has ended. The evangelist never informs his readers whether the apostles actually followed the command to make disciples of the Gentiles. Perhaps Luke-Acts was written to tell the reader that the church did follow this command, but that idea is a matter for discussion at another time. If there were Gentiles in Matthew's first audience, they would have been living evidence that the command had been fulfilled at least in some way.

B. The Organization of Matthew 28

Matthew's final chapter consists of three recognizably separate sections or pericopes: (1.) the events concerning the discovery of the empty tomb with the appearances of the angel and Jesus to the women (vv. 1-10); (2.) the Jewish allegation that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus (vv. 11-15); and (3.) the commissioning of the disciples (vv. 16-20). Compare Matthew's final chapter with Luke's. In Luke, as in Matthew, the women discover the empty tomb (24:1-7), but the narratives of the Emmaus Road (24:13-32) and Jerusalem (24:36-53) with Jesus as the center of each are uniquely Lucan, with no parallels in Matthew. Mark has only the discovery of the empty tomb with the angel's annunciation to the women (16:1-8). John is not unlike Luke in giving us narratives in which Jesus appears and speaks to His followers, namely, the Magdalene (20:11-18), the disciples (20:19-23) and Thomas (20:26-29), and the disciples and Peter (21:1-22). In comparison with the conversing Jesus of Luke and John, Matthew's resurrection narrative is more formal. In Luke and John Jesus engages in extensive

conversations with His followers. He converses for what must have been several hours with the Emmaus disciples and then later with the Jerusalem disciples (according to Luke). There is a dialogue or conversation with the Magdalene and Peter (according to John). Nothing in Matthew parallels this type of conversation between the resurrected Lord and His followers. Jesus speaks. Those who hear His words do not respond. The absence in Matthew's resurrection narratives of any conversation with Peter (as in John 21:9-22) or even mention of Peter (as in Mark 16:7 and Luke 24:34) is all the more surprising, since that disciple plays a prominent role for Matthew before the crucifixion (16:16-18; 17:1, 4; 18:21; 26:33-35, 69-75). Those who argue for Petrine supremacy, as the Church of Rome does and must do, on the basis of 16:17-19, must answer the question of why Peter is singled out for no special role in the final commissioning of the apostles.⁴

In Matthew 28 the events accompanying the resurrection are reported, namely, the earthquake (v. 2), the coming and appearance of the angel (v. 3), the trembling of the guards (v. 4), and the annunciation to the women that the Crucified One is risen and that they are to report this back to His disciples (vv. 5-7), though the reader is never informed when and how this resurrection was accomplished (v. 8). Jesus then appears, is worshipped (v. 9), and repeats the angelic command that the women are to inform His disciples to go to Galilee, where He will be seen (v. 10). Unlike Luke and John, Matthew has no record of what the women said either to the angel or to Jesus. What is central is that the tomb is empty, that Jesus has appeared to the women, and that the disciples are to see Him in Galilee, a message which is repeated twice (vv. 7, 10). Matthew makes no mention of how the disciples responded to the women. They do, as Jesus told the women, see Him in Galilee.

The record of the Jewish allegation of the disciples stealing the body of Jesus (vv. 11-15) is remarkable, since it is without parallel any place in the rest of the New Testament. The words of the Jewish officials to the soldiers are preserved, but not in the sense of a dialogue. Matthew's inclusion of the allegation of body-stealing has implications for dogmatical theology and hence for the church's mission. The resurrection may be more than merely a historical

event (as the resurrected body is a *soma pneumatikon*, a body which by the Holy Spirit has been brought into the realm of God [I Cor. 15:44]), but not in the sense that its reality is beyond ordinary historical investigation. After all, the women are invited to examine the empty tomb (v. 6), and the guards, who are not believers, are in fact the first *historical* reporters of the resurrection (v. 11). In the scheme of his gospel Matthew seems to have included this pericope to show that the proclamation of the gospel could not continue among those who denounced as untenable the resurrection, a characteristic feature of the Christian proclamation. Those who were creating and spreading lies, saying that the resurrection of Jesus was a fiction created by the disciples, could not expect their allegations to remain unanswered. The church would have no hesitancy in engaging them in debate. (Christian apologetics was born, so to speak, here in Matthew.)

We note again that, unlike Luke and John, who devoted considerable space to the appearances of the resurrected Jesus, Matthew has only two brief appearances of Jesus. Besides his recording of the commissioning of the disciples, Matthew preserves only these words: "Hail"; "Do not be afraid; go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there *they* will see Me." Mark, of course, has no appearance or word of Jesus.

Matthew connects verse 10, the declaration to the women that His disciples, who are now called His brothers, are to see Him in Galilee, with verses 16-17, where they do in fact see Him. The disciples have obeyed the command of Jesus delivered by the women to go to Galilee (v. 16), although, as mentioned, we are not told under what circumstances the command was relayed.⁵

Upon seeing Jesus in Galilee, the disciples worship Him, that is, recognize Him as God (v. 20).⁶ The reference to doubting (v. 18 RSV) should be not understood as meaning that the disciples had questions about the nature or actuality of His resurrection. Rather this doubting of theirs involved confusion in the sense of not fully understanding the significance of the resurrection for them and the reason why Jesus had commanded them to come to Galilee.⁷ The command which follows to make disciples of the Gentiles is intended to answer such questions.⁸ Although Matthew 28 opens in

Jerusalem, the evangelist thrusts the center of attention away from there to Galilee with the two nearly identical commands, one by the angel (v. 7) and the other by Jesus (v. 10), that His disciples will see Him there to receive a significant message.

C. The Audience

Matthew is very careful in identifying the commission's original hearers as the "eleven disciples" (v. 16), a noteworthy distinction, since the original disciples even after the death of Judas were called "the twelve" (I Cor. 15:5), a designation which the evangelist himself knew (10:1-2). Matthew knew his options but chose the restrictive "eleven disciples." Any idea that Jesus was speaking to a huge crowd, such as confronted Him in the giving of the Sermon on the Mount or in the feeding of the four or the five thousand, is simply without support. Matthew deliberately intends the limited audience of the eleven as the recipients of the command to make disciples of the Gentiles. Luke speaks of a larger group of disciples present for the ascension, but Matthew 28:16-20, which is situated in Galilee, dare not be confused with an event which took place on the outskirts of Jerusalem in Bethany (Luke 24:50) at the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).

The eleven disciples (28:16), known to Matthew's readers as apostles (10:2), may have stood in the place of the church in hearing the command, but there is no suggestion that the church, as it was constituted at that time (the other followers or the wider community) were present.⁹ If others were present, Matthew does not mention it. Matthew has already informed his readers in 10:2-4 of the identity of the eleven and has prepared them for the reduction of twelve (10:2) to eleven (28:16) by saying that Judas would betray Jesus (10:4). Thus, the reader already has the answer to the question of why there were eleven and not twelve present. Chapter 10 names the twelve and refers to their first status as "disciples" when Jesus enlisted them and their current status in the church as "apostles" (vv. 1-2). Matthew 10:2, while referring to Jesus' selection of the twelve, clearly presupposes the events of 28:16-20 by which the disciples were authorized as apostles. To put it in other words, already in chapter 10 the evangelist knew the outcome of his story.

The gospel was not composed as the events were taking place, but after and in the light of the resurrection. The eleven are already named in 10:1-2 and the evangelist expects that his readers already know the names.

In chapter 10 the disciples are also given their mission. Thus, chapter 10 is the presupposition for 28:16-20. Jesus first regarded the twelve (10:1-2; eleven, 28:16) as His disciples, but the church is to understand them as His apostles, men authorized by Christ to represent Him. From these pericopes, 10 and 28:16-20, the church could rightfully understand itself as Christian--that is, consisting in followers of Christ--but also as apostolic--that is, taught by the apostles.

Jesus' designation of His disciples as "My brothers" (v. 10) is not without significance. Those who have been His students have been raised to a status almost equal with Him as teachers of His message to the church because they accomplish the will of the Father of Jesus (12:50), which is the proclamation of His death and resurrection. The apostles are not the originators of the church's teachings, but they stand in His place as *the* teachers of the church. The "Apostolic Mandate" (a term used by the Reverend Charles J. Evanson) may have been intended at first for the ears of the apostles only, but the gospel in which Matthew recorded them was intended for the ears of the entire church. This intention hardly means that all those who were baptized could consider themselves as apostles, but they were aware of the special role that the apostles had in regard to the church and the church had in regard to the apostles. The apostles stood in Christ's place (10:40), and the church was obligated to support the apostolic mission with material means (10:11).

D. Galilee as the Place of Matthew 28:16-20

Compare Matthew's concentration on seeing Jesus in Galilee with Luke's resurrection appearances and ascension of Jesus in and around Jerusalem. Galilee is mentioned three times in Matthew 28 (vv. 7, 10, 16), with the one significant resurrection appearance taking place there. This concentration on Galilee belongs to Matthew's purpose of having the gospel preached among the Gentiles, a purpose which he states just prior (4:15) to the introduc-

tion of Jesus' ministry (4:17).¹⁰ Isaiah 9:1-2, cited by Matthew (4:15), speaks about the lands of Zebulon and Naphtali as "Galilee of the Gentiles." Here the Revised Standard Version and perhaps other translations are less than satisfactory in conveying the evangelist's intentions when the command is understood as making disciples of nations and not Gentiles--the preferred and, yes, correct translation. The word commonly rendered "Gentiles" in 4:15, *ethnē*, is the same as the one which most translations render "nations" (28:19). The evangelist is referring to the same group of people in both pericopes (4:15 and 28:19), and he intends that the reader make the connection. To be as faithful as possible to the evangelist's intention, the English translations should consistently use the word "Gentiles" and not "nations" for *ethnē*.¹¹ Northern Palestine is "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15) and not "Galilee of the nations."¹² What is important and, yes, even shocking for Matthew's Jewish audience is that the new followers of Jesus are to come from the Gentiles and that they, the descendants of the patriarchs, have lost their special status (8:11-12). Jesus had given command to His disciples to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to avoid the Gentiles (10:5-6). In sharp distinction to this prohibition is Matthew 28:19, where the Jews as a distinct people are not even mentioned. Disciples are to be made of the Gentiles.¹³ No longer is the mission only to the Jews or first to the Jews and then to the Greeks (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:28) but simply to the Gentiles. It is noteworthy that *ethnē* is a neuter plural, and *auta* would thus be expected as the proper form in apposition to it. Matthew uses *autous* so as to specify that the reference is to people and not groups.

The early church squabbled about whether Gentiles had to become Jews first before becoming Christians (Acts 15:5). They were debating about the place in the church of non-Jews and not nations! The evangelist's use of Isaiah's "Galilee of the Gentiles" indicates its status as a border province from the time of the captivity of the northern kingdom. Gentiles were mixing with Jews, and this integration had given Galileans inferior status. Jesus, whose commission from His Father, limited Him to the Jews (15:24), not only had come into casual contact with the Gentiles, but His message had met with unintended success among them (8:10; 15:28),

even those who had only heard reports of His preaching (4:24). The command given to the eleven to make disciples of the Gentiles was reinforced by His giving it in Galilee, the land where Jew and Gentile were already mixing.¹⁴ The Galilean ministry of Jesus is the prototype and prologue for the Gentile mission of the apostles.¹⁵

II. Central Considerations

A. *Jesus as the Revealer and Revelation of God*

The Galilean mountain scene culminates for Matthew a number of previous episodes in which Jesus is designated as the revealer and revelation of God. It is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 34. The first discourse of Jesus is given from the mount to which Jesus ascends (5:1) and from which He descends (8:1) in the fashion of Moses.¹⁶ God declares Him to be His Son on a very high mountain in the presence of Moses (17:1-2). Matthew 28:16-20 is the last in a series of scenes which the evangelist sees as significant in understanding who Jesus is.¹⁷ Unlike the scenes of the Sermon on the Mount and the transfiguration, no mention of Moses is made. Jesus has totally replaced him as God's oracle (cf. Heb. 1:1-2 and John 1:17). With almost unnecessary precision Matthew informs his readers that, not only did the disciples follow the command, given first by the angel and then by Jesus Himself (by way of the women visiting the tomb), that they should go to Galilee, but they indeed went "to the *mountain* where Jesus had directed them" (28:16). As Moses, in Deuteronomy 34, transfers his authority from God to Joshua, Jesus puts the disciples in His place. Moses who was refused admittance by God into the land of the Jews had to end his ministry on the border of the promised land, without entering it. In reverse fashion Jesus, whose ministry is limited by divine command to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, can similarly look into the Gentile country from the Galilean mountain, without entering it. As Joshua went in the place of Moses, so the disciples go in the place of Jesus. Whereas the Israelites to experience success must adhere to the written Mosaic revelation, the disciples are promised the presence of Jesus Himself: "And behold I am with you all the days until this age comes to an end [to the close of the age]" (28:20). The difference here is startling. Moses goes with Joshua and the tribes

only in the sense that the Pentateuch serves them as commissioning orders. Jesus actually goes personally with the eleven to the Gentiles! Unlike Moses His body does not lie buried (Deut. 34:6) or taken by assumption into heaven (Jude 9). Jesus may ascend into heaven (Acts 1:9), but He is not assumed. The difference between ascension and assumption is crucial.¹⁸ The Jesus who promises to return to His church (Matt. 25:31-46) actually never forsakes her (28:20).

Not only does Matthew arrange his gospel to point to Jesus as the final, ultimate, and complete revelation of God, but this arrangement is then punctuated by Jesus' own words: "All authority is given to Me in heaven and earth." This passage can with good reason refer to Jesus in almost Pauline terms as the one in whom heaven and earth have their completion, the new Adam in which God establishes His new creation (Col. 1:15-16). God establishes Christ as the new Adam, the man from heaven (I Cor. 15:45), in whom His new humanity is joined together, not by blood, but by the proclamation of the gospel, baptism, and faith. The church has become God's new creation and hence cosmology has been replaced by ecclesiology. God's real world has become those who follow Christ, that is, the church. Matthew's thrust in this chapter is to move rapidly from the resurrection, as the first event, to the transfer of His *teaching* authority to the apostles. Luke and John, by interspersing other historical narratives, are less hurried in accomplishing this transfer of authority to the apostles. In Matthew's commission of the disciples Jesus maintains the full possession of this authority. There is no real transfer in the sense of relinquishing it; the apostles exercise it in His place. The apostolic authority is no different than Christ's. Matthew 28:16-20 serves as an ecclesiological pericope which defines God's people no longer exclusively as Israel but inclusively by bringing in the Gentiles.¹⁹

B. Making Disciples of the Gentiles

In the English language the word "disciple" is listed as a noun. More recently it has been used as a verb, and people speak of "discipling." At least since Shakespeare using nouns as verbs has been common, and thus the English language is innately more

capable of expanding its vocabulary than are other modern languages such as German and French. Rendering *mathēteusate* "teach" (KJV) would be permissible in Matthew 28 if verse 19 were the end of the pericope. However, the ordinary translation of *didaskontes* in verse 20 is similarly "teaching" (v. 20), and the English reader is thus given the false impression that the same Greek word occurs in both instances: "teach the Gentiles" (v. 19) and "teaching them" (v. 20). To "make disciples" (v. 19) refers to the entire Christian life of faith, life, and faithful adherence to the apostolic teachings, not merely to conversion and instruction, although obviously they are embraced as primary in point of time.

During His ministry Jesus had gathered followers around Himself who regarded Him as the Christ. Now the responsibility for accomplishing this end is transferred to the apostles. In brief, to be a follower of Jesus means to take Jesus at His word and to make that word normative for one's entire life. To make disciples is the very purpose for which Matthew wrote the gospel. What is involved in making Gentiles into disciples is described by "baptizing them" and "teaching them." In hearing this gospel read, the baptized follower of Jesus is in that act continuing to fulfill this command.

The argument has been offered that baptizing and teaching (vv. 19, 20) are complementary so that it matters little which activity precedes the other. Some Lutherans, especially those associated with the nineteenth-century Erlangen school, have found support for infant baptism in the position of baptism preceding teaching in Matthew 28 (vv. 19-20). On the other hand, they have felt free to reverse the order in regard to adults with the preaching of the gospel preceding the application of the water.²⁰ As theologically convenient as the argument may be, the question is whether the pericope is properly used in this way.

The command of Jesus to baptize did not come upon deaf or unprepared ears (28:19). The ministries of John and Jesus were characterized by baptizing, so much so in the case of John that he was called "the Baptist" (3:1). Though others had engaged in this practice,²¹ he more than anyone else was associated with this ritual. The disciples had been baptized, probably all of them by John (John 1:38), and they themselves had acted as surrogates of Jesus (John

4:2) in baptizing the wider group of His followers, which had grown to such large proportions that, in the eyes of the religious authorities, His death was required. Neither the original eleven nor the first readers of the gospel had to be informed about what Jesus meant by commanding baptism. "Baptize" was not an alien word from a strange language, but had been part of their experience. They did not understand baptism as an isolated sacrament, but as a proclamation in water and word calling for faith and creating it. Baptism had meant for them that the kingdom of the heavens was coming in Jesus (3:1; 4:17). In Jesus' death and resurrection that kingdom had come. Baptism itself (the application of the water and word) gave the baptized what was promised in the *kerygma* (the preaching), namely, the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). The command of the disciples to baptize had to mean that what John, Jesus, and their disciples had done before the crucifixion was now going to continue basically in the same way. The real and only difference--and it was a significant difference--was that baptism, practiced before by John, Jesus, and their disciples, was transformed by the one who had been both crucified and resurrected. The command to baptize had to mean to the disciples that they were to preach about the one who had been promised as coming with the kingdom of heaven and had, indeed, now come and manifested that kingdom in His death and resurrection. John's and Jesus' baptisms before His death involved the baptized in the promised and coming work of salvation. The post-resurrection baptism of Matthew 28:19 involved the baptized in the accomplished work. He who was both king and kingdom was now drawing the Gentiles into that kingship and kingdom through the preaching about Him and the application of the water which worked contrition for sins and faith in the one who gave the command. Yes, it was the same, but not the identical baptism. The empty tomb had raised it to a higher dimension (cf. Rom. 6:3-4).

Baptism worked through (*not* because of) the intellect in the sense that the law and the gospel--that is, the preaching of repentance--are addressed to moral and hence in some sense rational human beings in the proclamation accompanying and involved in baptism. By this proclamation in the water Jesus incorporates believers into Himself and makes them disciples. Baptism is *the* proclamation (gospel) in its pure form.²² Without baptism there are no disciples! What then

is the role of teaching (*didaskontes*, v. 20)?

The "teaching" of verse 20 refers to the communication of the total revelation which God has given in Jesus and not only the call to faith. The call to repentance (i.e., contrition and faith) is the call to be baptized. The teaching (*didaskontes*) goes beyond that call. The twelve (now eleven) disciples had been placed in a relationship to Jesus in which other believers had not been placed. Just as baptism does not make pastors, so it does not make apostles. They are singled out as those who have received from Jesus His revelation (13:16-17). Regardless of the quality of their faith and their ability or inability to apply His revelation to themselves (as noted above in regard to "doubting"), they are entrusted with mysteries which they intellectually understand (13:11, 51). This teaching does not refer to that necessary preaching which must precede baptism and in a sense is comprehended by baptism, but rather to the continued exposition of the gospel in the church among those who have become disciples through baptism. Those who are made disciples remain disciples by listening to the *apostolic* teaching, which is nothing else than preaching the complete counsel of God.²³

The content of the teaching is "all things whatsoever" Jesus has "commanded." Matthew is not making reference here to the Old Testament, as from the beginning he assumes that it is the divine word, an assumption shared by the Jews who may have happened upon his gospel. Neither is he speaking of a completed New Testament canon, although his gospel may very well have followed other apostolic writings. Unlike Luke (1:1-4) or John (21:25), Matthew does not acknowledge any other prior writings about Jesus. Matthew is clearly referring to what he has just set down in his gospel and nothing else. His written gospel is the "all things whatsoever" which Jesus taught. The reader is invited, not to go on to any other writings, but to return in a circular fashion to reread what he has just finished reading. "Scripture interprets Scripture," but here Matthew's gospel, in the mind of the evangelist, is a satisfactorily complete document in itself. Here in his gospel are collected the sayings of Jesus, the institutions of the sacraments, and the record of the Lord's life, death, and resurrection. When Matthew reports Jesus as saying that the Gentiles are "to observe all

things whatsoever" He has "commanded," he is not speaking about the law as an negative condemnation in the sense of Paul and Luther. The terminology of commanding is here applied to the words of Jesus as divine words. What is spoken by God is by its very nature imperative. With God the indicative is the imperative. Matthew's words are as much God's word as those spoken and preserved by Moses.²⁴ These words, the ones which Jesus spoke, are the authoritative word of God recorded by Matthew, which gives his gospel its authority in the church. Only in so far as these words are spoken and believed does the promise of Jesus come true that He will be with His church to the close of the age. Jesus' promise to be present is made specifically to the apostles. Although the doctrine of the omnipresence of the human nature of Jesus may properly be deduced from these words, the promise is addressed to the apostolic community.

III. Additional Considerations

A. *A Word about the Evangelist*

Unlike Luke (1:1-4), there is no hint that Matthew sees himself as a third-generation Christian. No sources are acknowledged outside of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the first gospel there is no one who resembles the nearly ubiquitous beloved disciple of the Fourth Gospel, who has been favored with a special and close relationship with Jesus. Although the authors of Matthew and Mark resemble each other in remaining in the background of their accounts, the attitudes of these two evangelists are noticeably different. While Mark enters the story of the life of Jesus midstream at His baptism, he also leaves the story with an apparently unsatisfactory conclusion, with no resurrection appearances. His abbreviated life of Jesus is matched by the lack of any claim to comprehensiveness. We may compare this approach to Matthew's almost all-embracing approach, which begins the story of the life of Jesus with Abraham (Genesis 11:27) and ends with the promise that Jesus will remain until the end of time (28:20). The history of salvation is magnificently embraced. To be sure, Matthew does not provide the details of Jesus' working with the church in the time between His promise and His visible return, as Luke does in Acts. The time between the commissioning

of the apostles and the close of the age is still part of the story of Jesus. Luke, in writing Acts, has filled in a small portion of the lacuna between these points. The story is still being told in the life of the Christian Church wherever it is found!

Matthew's commissioning of the apostles involves more than an isolated oral command; it involves the gospel which he has written. The disciples are to teach the Gentiles "all things whatsoever" Jesus has taught them. The first evangelist has written his gospel precisely for the purpose of preserving all the teachings of Jesus. In fact, this is his own self-conscious claim to fame. Matthew is not simply dashing off a long document with disconnected words and events from the Lord's life among which was His command to the apostles to teach the Gentiles all that He Himself had taught. Rather the first evangelist sees himself as one who has been given the task of doing so.

Determining the circumstances of time, place, and events which moved Matthew to write the gospel is another matter, but he was self-conscious of exactly what he was doing and what the importance of his manuscript in the church would be. No one would suggest that he knew that he was writing the book which would later be placed first in the New Testament canon, but he was aware of this book's relationship to the Old Testament. He was thinking and writing "canonically." The claims of his document are too great for it to be otherwise.

The easiest conclusion to reach is that the writer is among those eleven who heard the command to teach and preserve all things. So that the names of these eleven did not remain a mysterious unknown to the listeners, Matthew, as mentioned, has named them in 10:2-3 as "disciples" and "apostles." If he was not one of these twelve, then he had to be someone else who had been authorized to act in behalf of one of them or all of them. Of course, it is most natural to conclude that it was one of the eleven who was acting not as an independent author, but on behalf of the others, even those who had been martyred by this time (e.g., James, the son of Zebedee) and for that matter Judas, whose treacherous act did not destroy the validity of his apostleship (10:4). The apostleship is like baptism in that its validity does not rest upon the faith of him who receives it.

The personality of one single author is as evident in the Gospel of Matthew as in Luke and John, but in Matthew there is more suggestion of multiple authority. The closing scene authorizes the eleven and does not single out anyone, Peter, for special attention, even though the author has not been hesitant in other sections of his gospel to elevate Peter to a position of prominence, as mentioned above. Before we put a name on the author of the gospel, it is important to recognize first that he belongs to the twelve and that he understands himself as possessing the authority which belongs to all the apostles collectively. He speaks as much for the others as he speaks for himself. His writing shares in the same authority inherent in his preached word. The written gospel is only an extension and not a discontinuance of the preached gospel. The evangelist also understands that his gospel possesses unique authority in the church because it consists in the words of Jesus entrusted to all the apostles. He would agree with the second verse of Hebrews: "Now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son."

B. A Word about the Inspiration of the Gospel

Matthew is so complete that he also sets forth a doctrine of inspiration which is rarely approached in fullness by other books of the New Testament. The apostles are, for Matthew, not merely led (2 Peter 1:21) or taught (Luke 12:12; John 14:26) by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit actually speaks through them in such a way that their words are no longer theirs but the Spirit's. "For you are not the ones who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you" (10:32). It is scarcely necessary to choose between describing the apostolic message as given the apostles by Jesus and describing it as spoken through them by the Spirit. Apart from any other considerations, the Spirit possesses all that He has from the Son and thus cannot operate independently from the Son. The Spirit does not work independently of Christ. His words are Christ's. The Holy Spirit is sent into the world by Him who lived, died, and arose again, and He continually ponders and delivers to the church the profound mysteries of incarnation and atonement. The Spirit is christocentric even to the point of being christomonistic in His purposes. Even Paul could say, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ and Him crucified." What is not about and from Christ is not

from the Spirit! Forcing a choice between describing the words of Matthew as those of Jesus and describing them as those of the Spirit reveals a deficient theology of the Trinity. With this dogmatic excursus behind us, it is best to follow the evangelist's own thinking.

The apostles have been selected by Jesus (10:2-3), to speak the words of the Spirit of their Father (10:20), and have been entrusted with the authority to preserve and teach Jesus' words within the trinitarian context of baptism (28:19-20). Jesus refers to the Spirit as "the Spirit of your Father" (10:20) and not "My Father" to show that the apostles are not lifeless instruments, but those led by the Father to confess who Jesus really is (10:32; 16:17). The apostolic message does not proceed with sovereign fury and irresistible majesty from heaven. Rather it proceeds from the one who from the humility of His heart invites the heavy laden to find rest in Him and learn from Him. Only He knows the Father and is authorized to give a revelation of Him (11:25-30). He humbled Himself through crucifixion for our sakes and expects a similar humility in His followers who speak His word (20:26-28). The apostolic speaking of the Spirit's words does not stand outside of the theology of the cross but is included in it. In the hour of their affliction and suffering for confessing the name of Jesus (10:16-20; cf. 32), the apostles speak the words of Jesus given by the Spirit. In their suffering they are most like Christ. The Spirit who enabled Christ to offer Himself as a sacrifice speaks now through them as living sacrifices. The Gospel of Matthew is written about the one who was put to death and martyred for all and is written by those who in confessing faith in Him were martyred for Him. The same can be said of the other gospels also. Any message or writing which is not written by martyrs for martyrs about the Martyred One is neither a saving nor an authorized gospel. The Spirit who speaks through martyred apostles proceeds from the mystery of the atonement which is hidden away in the event of the cross. For this reason the Gnostic gospels were rejected as fraudulent, and the message of many modern preachers, regardless of how much glory they give to Christ, falls under the same condemnation.

C. A Word about the Person of Jesus

In Matthew 28 no title is either appended to the name of Jesus or addressed to Him. He is referred to simply as "Jesus" (vv. 9, 18) or "Jesus the one who was crucified" (v. 5). From the other parts of the gospel it is clear that He is the Son in whose name baptism is administered and who is equal with the Father (11:27). The promise to be with the disciples is reminiscent of His being called Emmanuel, "the God who is with us." Thus, the argument is certainly valid that the resurrection shows that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, God Himself; but the evangelist expects the reader to make these conclusions by himself. Matthew used the divine titles of Jesus during His suffering and crucifixion. Faith recognizes the transcendental deity of Jesus in the moment of the cross and not in the glories of the miracles. True faith accepts Jesus' invitation, spoken in His humility, to come to Him: "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (11:29). The Son of Man in His humility, not the Resurrected Lord in His glory, is the example given to Christians. Matthew's careful avoidance of divine titles in recording the resurrection of Jesus and his reference to Him who was crucified (28:5) must at least have the purpose of identifying the Resurrected One with the Crucified One. The crucifixion is a past event, but He remains known to His followers as "Jesus the Crucified One."

Conclusion

Matthew 28:16-20 is as noteworthy a passage as any in the New Testament. Nothing is found here which cannot be found in or deduced from the previous twenty-seven chapters. No new revelation is made by the resurrected Jesus; He only hands over to the church through the apostles the message which He preached and they heard before His crucifixion. No other New Testament writing offers such a satisfactory conclusion as Matthew in summarizing and requiring faith in what was set down in the document itself and giving the church a mandate. This mandate does not say that, as the church preaches the gospel, the church is relieved of the obligation of preserving the words of Jesus. Quite to the contrary, the command of Jesus requires careful and continued attention to His words. It also means that the church in reaching out does not give

the world a little of this and a little of that; the church preaches the entire message of Jesus and it does so without embarrassment, without excuse, and without subtraction or addition.

We can only regard ourselves as the *apostolic* church when we are committed to preserving the words of Jesus and reaching out with those words to the unbelieving world for which the Son of Man gave His life as a ransom (20:20). Matthew 28:16-20 requires that the church, to be apostolic, must have an apostolic ministry in regard to office and function. The office of the ministry must be preserved and the qualifications for this office must be carefully maintained. The seminaries of the church must remain true to the apostolic mission, since they are under obligation to preserve the word of Jesus by preparing the next generations of pastors to keep that word as the apostles kept it and by that word to bring to a rightful and dreadful conclusion the kingdom of Satan.²⁵ By this word the gates of hell are torn down and its prisoners released.²⁶

ENDNOTES

1. This article was first presented as an essay to the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in September of 1987. Since then *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* by David R. Bauer (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988) has appeared in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* (31). From the preface it seems as if this work evolved out of a dissertation written for Jack Dean Kingsbury of Union Theological Seminary (Virginia). Although my essay was presented without the benefit of endnotes, references to Bauer's work have been added. Many of the lines of argument and conclusions are strikingly similar, although I did not have the advantage of his work at the time of writing.
2. *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 28. "Most probably baptism was originally performed upon (in) the name of Christ and this was later expanded, as in the expansion of the christological confession into the tripartite creeds. In that case the baptismal command in its Matt. 28:19 form cannot be the

historical origin of Christian baptism. At the very least it must be assumed that the text has been transmitted in a form expanded by the church."

3. "The Composition and Christology of Matt. 28:16-20," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 93 (1974), pp. 573-584.
4. See Joseph A. Burgess, *A History of the Exegesis of Matthew 16:17-19 from 1781 to 1965* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1976).
5. A comparison with Luke 24:36-43, where Jesus meets His disciples in Jerusalem on the evening following the resurrection, does not answer the question of when the women delivered the command to the disciples. John 21:1-23 records a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to five of the disciples in Galilee which may have taken place in connection with the appearance to the eleven disciples mentioned in Matthew 28:16. Consider that Matthew does not report the disciples going to the empty tomb or receiving any specific word from an angel or Jesus. Luke and John, both of whom have appearances to the disciples in Jerusalem on that first day of the week, leave no clue as to whether Jesus Himself confirmed His command directly to His disciples that they were to go to Galilee.
6. Bauer (p. 117) rightly says, "The term 'worship' designates the recognition of divine authority." He connects the worship of the disciples with that of the wise men (2:11).
7. Bauer mentions the contradiction that some scholars have seen between the concepts of worshipping and doubting. Along with most recent scholars he rejects the idea that it was not the disciples who doubted, but those who were with them. All worshipped, but either some or all doubted. Their doubting is to be understood in the light of 14:31-33, where they are identified as those of "little faith." It is difficult to disagree with Bauer's assessment: "This doubt expresses a wavering, which hinders disciples from appropriating the full possibilities of endurance, power, and mission which are offered through Christ." *Op. cit.*, p. 110.
8. Bauer must be saluted for this suggestion: "The problem of doubt is answered by the declarations of Jesus in vv. 18b-20, and especially by His promise to be with them always (v. 20b)."

9. While Luke makes no mention of Jesus meeting the disciples in Galilee and Mark only anticipates it, John does parallel Matthew in this point. Although John 21:1-22 takes place by the Sea of Tiberias (v. 1), it does happen in Galilee and there would be no problem in designating any number of mountains in that area which would fit Matthew 28:16. John does not refer to the "eleven," as does Matthew, but he does list Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, and the sons of Zebedee (James and John), for a total of five.
10. In commenting on 28:16-20, Bauer correctly uses this subtitle: "The Notion of Universalism Which Comes to Climax in 28.16-20" (op. cit., p. 121). By "universalism" he clearly means the universality of the gospel and not the notion that all men are eventually saved. He sees this universal theme beginning in the title of Jesus as "son of Abraham," since in Abraham all the nations or Gentiles will be blessed (pp. 76, 122).
11. Luther's *Heiden* ("heathen") probably comes closest of any German or English translation to the Greek *ethnē*; that is, they are the people without the saving knowledge of the true God. This view is supported by Louw and Nida, who says that, while *ta ethnē* "may be rendered as 'those who do not believe in God,' it is often more appropriate [to think] in terms of belief in other gods or in false gods." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:127.
12. The mention of Galilee in 4:15 as part of a quotation from Isaiah 8:23-9:1-2 is all the more striking since it appears right before what many commentators (e.g., Kingsbury) see as the beginning of the first major action of Matthew at 4:17. Bauer, pp. 41-45.
13. There is no support here for the mass baptizing of political entities called nations, for state-related churches, or for mass conversions of politically or ethnically united groups of people to form them into ethnically related or national churches. The command of Jesus focuses on individuals and not nations.
14. Again apropos is the excellent sub-chapter of Bauer noted above, "The Notion of Universalism Which Comes to Climax in 28.16-20," pp. 121-123.

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15. The similarity to Paul's "first to the Jew and then to the Greek" (e.g., Rom. 2:10), by which he means Gentiles (Rom. 2:14, 24), must be noted. It is not impossible that both Matthew and Paul were addressing the same problem from different perspectives.
 16. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 593-594.
 17. Bauer states: "In Matthew, the mountain is the place of revelation (cf. 5:1; 17:1-8)."
 18. The Reformed hold rather to an assumption of Jesus into heaven, not unlike the Roman Catholic doctrine of the assumption of Mary.
 19. Bauer states (p. 124): "Here universalism is made explicit and binding. Indeed, this universalism could come to full expression only in 28:16-20, since it is linked to the universal authority of the exalted Christ."
 20. See David P. Scaer, "The Doctrine of Infant Baptism in the German Protestant Theology of the Nineteenth Century" (Th.D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1963), pp. 53-156.
 21. James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 79. "For decades we have known that John the Baptist was only one well-known representative of baptizing groups who congregated especially along the Jordan."
 22. There is no support for the virtually dualist view of the nineteenth-century Erlangen theologians that baptism mystically addresses the body while the teaching addresses the mind. See note 20 above.
 23. The reference in Acts 2 to the early Christians remaining in the "teaching of the apostles" is such a haunting reminder of Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 that it is not impossible that Luke is making a clear allusion to Matthew's collection of the sayings of Jesus in his gospel.
 24. See Joshua 1 in the Septuagint, where the words of Moses are spoken of in a similar way.
 25. Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent 2*, trans. Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House,

1978). Throughout this volume Chemnitz placed Matthew 28:19-20 alongside other passages regularly used of the office of the pastor; e.g., 2, pp. 468, 680, 695.

26. So far as curricular matters are concerned, as the most comprehensive of the four canonical gospels, Matthew should be placed in the required column. The early church, by using it more than the other gospels, gave Matthew the place of highest honor in the New Testament canon.