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# Studies in Matthew

## Professional Societies Evaluate New Evangelical Directions

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***Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art***  
by Robert H. Gundry (Eerdmans, 1982, 665 pp., \$24.95).

***The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding***  
by Robert A. Guelich (Word, 1982, 451 pp., \$18.95).

The Group on Evangelical Theology at the American Academy of Religion meetings this past December decided to focus a major seminar on "New Approaches in Evangelical Biblical Criticism. Focusing on Robert Gundry's *Matthew* and Robert Guelich's *Sermon on the Mount*." The reason for choosing these two works is that they have become landmark publications from an evangelical perspective, especially in terms of their open attitude toward and utilization of biblical criticism. Gundry's *Matthew* commentary was also discussed in a plenary session of the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting. A report of the discussion at these two meetings can provide substantial reviews of these important works.

Gundry's *Matthew* commentary has as its central focus his theory regarding Matthew's use of his sources. Gundry believes that Matthew was indeed the traditional Jewish Christian disciple of Jesus, who utilized that approach which was familiar to his readers. Thus, Gundry sees three basic sources behind Matthew's gospel: (1) Mark, which Gundry believes is basically historical; (2) an expanded Q, which included not only the material common to Matthew and Luke, but also Luke's infancy narratives; and (3) the material peculiar to Matthew, which Gundry takes to be "creative midrash." By creative midrash, Gundry means an approach which takes existing stories, such as the shepherd account in Luke, and reworks them into new stories which portray Matthew's particular interest, such as the magi story, which Gundry takes to be the shepherd story rewritten from a gentile perspective. As a result of such an approach, Gundry's work has caused constant discussion and critique in both evangelical and non-evangelical circles.

Guelich's *Sermon on the Mount* is clearly the most comprehensive commentary on Matthew 5-7 ever produced. It is written in a style reminiscent of Raymond E. Brown's *Birth of the Messiah*. Guelich proceeds section by section, beginning in each with an exegetical translation, followed by literary analysis, notes (which form a basic commentary on the text), and finally comments (excurses on particular issues which arise from the text). This work has produced widespread admiration in the academic community, and at the same time criticism from the evangelical community for its use of tradition-critical techniques.

The first plenary session at the ETS meeting included a critique of Gundry's commentary by Douglas Moo (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). Moo recognized that Gundry's classification of the sections peculiar to Matthew as midrash cannot be disallowed a priori, but he argued that Gundry has erred in his definition and use of midrash as well as in his approach to the synoptic problem. First, Moo questioned Gundry's radical and rigid dependence on Mark and an expanded Q. This does not take into account important recent scholarship regarding Markan priority (which Moo also accepts but

with critical clarifications) and Q. To take Matthew as being the major author altering sources is, according to Moo, untenable. We cannot so absolutely identify the sources behind Matthew. Second, Moo considered the use of word statistics to identify Matthean composition suspect, since no control is observed regarding the valid possibility that a word also appears in the tradition. Therefore, the extent of Matthean redaction is exaggerated in Gundry's commentary. Third, Moo challenged the assumption that any redaction is theologically motivated and therefore a Matthean creation. The interface between history and theology has been demonstrated too many times; thus Gundry's theory lacks support from the evidence. Fourth, Moo argued that Gundry's use of the genre "midrash" fails for two reasons: (1) the generic categories which could identify creative midrash are not readily identifiable in Matthew's narrative (the only one mentioned by Gundry is a mixture of history and non-history, and is itself circular); (2) his evidence comes from such a wide variety of sources that any definition becomes impossible. Matthew's genre is more similar to Mark or Luke than to Jubilees or the Genesis apocryphon. Therefore, Moo concluded, there is insufficient evidence to warrant the view that Matthew is creative midrash.

At the AAR, an even more intense discussion occurred. Four scholars interacted with the works by Gundry and Guelich. In the first half of the session, centering on methodology, John P. Meier (St. John's Seminary) critiqued Guelich, and Raymond Brown (Union Theological Seminary, New York) critiqued Gundry. In the second half, James A. Sanders (School of Theology at Claremont) and Richard N. Longenecker (Wycliffe College, Toronto) discussed theological implications of the works. Gundry and Guelich then responded and a spirited interaction ensued between panel members (including questions from the floor).

Brown asserted that Gundry's work has "enormous problems." While Gundry states that his study is not a full-scale commentary, Brown wondered why he would choose such a narrow approach (dealing rigidly with the redaction of Mark and Q by Matthew) since no full-scale commentary on Matthew exists in any language. The major problem, Brown stated, is Gundry's methodology, which reads the high theology of the Church back into Matthew. Brown does not believe that incarnational or divinity language occurs in Matthew. Further, Gundry never provides evidence that Matthew made the changes purported for the infancy narratives. The theory, for instance, that Matthew altered the shepherd story of Q into his own magi story is posited but never proven.

Guelich's historical-critical methodology in *The Sermon on the Mount* received praise from Meier, who stated that Guelich approaches as nearly as possible to a reasoned objectivity. Meier especially notes Guelich's respect for philological and historical data, his emphasis on the author (and avoidance of the historical Jesus issue) and his weighing of exegetical options. Meier's disagreements centered on three issues: (1) Guelich is not successful in his argument that the five-fold structure approach to Matthew's organizational plan does injustice to the infancy and passion narratives; (2) he strains too much to create a parenetic tone and so short-circuits the issue of morality; and (3) he reads Paul into Matthew.

In discussing theological implications, Sanders was pleased to find in both works a commonality between liberal and conservative. He commended the authors both for their willingness to grapple with the positions traditionally held by evangelical scholars and for the ecumenical pluralism evident in the books. As one of his major concerns, Sanders argued that Gundry had misused the category of midrash (which Sanders defined as the use of Scripture to throw light on the problems of that day). Even more, Sanders was concerned with the assumption that inspiration resides with the individual authors, emphasizing the difficulty of approaching the Bible from the Reformation perspective. Rather, according to Sanders, canon criticism has shown that inspiration resides in the believing communities. Therefore, the stages of tradition are equally valid, and we cannot return to previous modes of harmonizing or seeking a canon-within-a-canon.

Longenecker lauded Guelich for his attempt to trace the tradition through its various stages and to note the connections between the redaction and the tradition behind it. The major weaknesses he noted concerned details, for instance the mountain motif in Matthew. Longenecker saw Gundry's strength as lying in the massive evidence and word statistics compiled. He also saw several weaknesses: (1) Gundry's statement that Matthew was an eyewitness contradicts his view that only those sections drawn from Mark and Q are historical; (2) with his view that Mark and Q are historical but Matthew is "truthful fiction," Gundry is more conservative than the evangelicals on Mark and Q and more liberal than the liberals on Matthew; (3) Gun-

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***These two works have become landmark publications from an evangelical perspective.***

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dry constantly appeals to midrash but does not demonstrate any serious study of the problem within Judaism; (4) there is insufficient interaction with opposing views. To Longenecker, Gundry's work is more a polemic than a commentary.

Guelich responded primarily to Meier's critique. First, he agreed that the five-fold structure was viable but was not convinced that we can conceptualize an intentional structure. He also agreed that he had sidestepped the issue of morality, mainly because of his reaction to "rabbinic" approaches. Guelich believes that Matthew's christology is fulfillment-oriented rather than stressing Jesus as Teacher of Righteousness. At the same time, he agreed that Matthew has both christology and ethics as central foci. Regarding Matthew and Paul, Guelich stated that the many parallels show an analogous relationship, even a "unity" between the two.

Gundry responded to the critiques by arguing that his use of Mark and Q does fit the external and internal evidence. It does not obviate Matthew's eyewitness basis, for his high esteem for Mark and Q led him to embellish their accounts. Mark can be viewed as more historical on the basis of the Papias tradition; Q, while not necessarily a single document, still is a uniform tradition. In later correspondence, Gundry states that Luke is indeed redactional but is more conservative in dealing with Jesus' sayings. Therefore, he believes that his theory is more economical and just as adequate to explain the data. In his response, Gundry stated that Sander's appeal to canonical meaning does not obviate the "canonizer," especially when seen as the "inspired canonizer." While we recognize tradition-levels of meaning, authority still resides primarily in the intended meaning of the text. Finally, Gundry argued that he is not dichotomizing history from tradition, but rather is noting the differing genres inherent in the text.

The fact that sections in both the ETS and the AAR chose to interact with Gundry signifies the importance of his volume. Also, Guelich's commentary will no doubt be one of the most significant works on the Sermon on the Mount in this century. Both indicate the quality and excitement of work currently being done by evangelicals. May their number increase.

—Grant R. Osborne

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## Evangelical Theological Society: 1982 Annual Meeting

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The thirty-fourth annual meeting of the ETS was one of the most significant meetings in recent memory, the topic being "biblical criticism," and the repercussions continue. The opening plenary session, which set the agenda for the entire conference, contained a dialogue between Robert Gundry and Douglas Moo on Gundry's *Matthew* commentary (see the preceding article).

This was followed by the first series of sessions, one of which contained a paper by Norman Geisler, "Biblical Criticism: The New Methodological Heresy." With respect to Gundry's affirmation of inerrancy, Geisler said in the discussion that while he believes Gundry's methodology to be wrong, he does not think that it is an explicit denial of inerrancy, since Gundry does affirm the text as he understands it. Other papers included David Turner's "Redaction Criticism and the Evangelical: An Introductory Survey and Evaluation" and Robert Stein's "Luke 1:1-4 and Traditions-geschichte," among others. While Geisler was negative toward any type of historical-critical methodology, the others were quite moderate, recognizing the validity of a positive approach to critical tools. There were of course cautionary notes, as for example in Robert Thomas' "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Redaction Criticism," which argued that recent examples departed from the historical veracity of the text. On the whole, however, there was an openness demonstrated toward critical tools. Such papers included those on canon criticism (Paul Feinberg), composition criticism (Ronald Russell), text criticism (James Borland), genre criticism (G. Lloyd Carr), sociology (David O'Brien: Edwin Yamauchi), as well as several others on redaction criticism in general or with reference to specific texts. This trend culminated with the presidential address, "The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice?" by Alan Johnson (Wheaton), which argued strongly for the value of critical methods when utilized properly.

Of course, biblical criticism was not the only focus of the conference. Other plenary sessions, covering a wide range of topics, were also highlights. The second session featured four papers on "Jewish-Christian Relations after the Holocaust: Continuing Points of Tension between Evangelicals and Jews in the United States" (by J. Ramsey Michaels, Robert Ross, Belden Menkus and David Rausch). It was widely felt that this session provided a real step forward in the ongoing dialogue. The third session focused on Ronald Nash's recent book, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, with critiques from Clark Pinnock and Robert Johnston. This too provided stimulating interaction about biblical authority and its impact on the modern mind-set. The fourth plenary session may have been the single most appreciated event of the conference. The session, "The Question of Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," featured a dialogue between Krister Stendahl (Harvard) and J. I. Packer (Regent) on the former's paper, "Biblical Diversity: Asset or Liability?" The spirited interaction of these two giants in the field was valued by all. The final plenary session focused on the topic, "Where are We Today Concerning Biblical Criticism and the Evangelical?" The session featured papers on Old Testament (Walter Kaiser), New Testament (Harold Hoehner), Biblical Theology (Grant Osborne), Apologetics (Norman Geisler) and Philosophy of Religion (Win Corduan). Again the tone was positive toward a judicious use of the critical methodology.

One of the most significant aspects of the conference was the unanimous affirmation by the ETS executive committee of Robert Gundry's right to remain within the society. The committee reported that, while they disagreed with Gundry's conclusions, there was no basis in the by-laws for removing his name from the list, so long as he has affirmed the basic criterion for membership in the society, the doctrine of inerrancy. The debate concerning the implications of Gundry's case is continuing at the present time and will certainly be central at the next meeting of the society next December in Dallas.

—Grant R. Osborne