

EVANGELICALS, REDACTION CRITICISM, AND THE CURRENT INERRANCY CRISIS

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Evangelicals in America are currently engaged in discussions about the viability of redaction criticism as an exegetical method for those committed to biblical inerrancy. Robert H. Gundry's Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art has been a catalyst in the present debate. This study surveys the background and the current situation by summarizing and evaluating the works of three men: Ned B. Stonehouse, Grant R. Osborne, and Robert H. Gundry. Also, the contemporary problems of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) are outlined. It is recommended that the ETS adopt the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" as a proper clarification of its own historic position.

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INTRODUCTION

WITHOUT a doubt, a crisis exists today in the evangelical world in the area of biblical inerrancy. One factor which has been a catalyst in the present controversy is the rise of redaction criticism. Evangelicals who hold to inerrancy are currently attempting to articulate an approach to the synoptic gospels which honors them as inspired documents which record historical events from unique theological perspectives. This dual nature of the gospels—history and theological purpose—is universally acknowledged. However, severe difficulties arise when men attempt to work out the specific implications of these factors. It is not an overstatement to say that the traditional orthodox approach to inerrancy is hanging in the balance, since some evangelicals today are beginning to view purportedly historical events recorded in the gospels as unhistorical theological tales.

Redaction criticism (RC) has been defined as

a method of Biblical criticism which seeks to lay bare the theological perspectives of a Biblical writer by analyzing the editorial (redactional)

and compositional techniques and interpretations employed by him in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand.¹

RC has come into prominence in the 20th century largely through the works of Willi Marxsen,² Günther Bornkamm,³ and Hans Conzelmann⁴ on the synoptic gospels. As practiced in most circles today it is based upon two other critical approaches to the NT—source criticism and form criticism. The prevailing theory of source criticism is the “two document theory”: Matthew used Mark and another source, Q, in composing his gospel. Form criticism attempts to get behind the written sources to the preliterate stage of oral traditions.⁵

Both source criticism and form criticism tended to fragment and atomize the gospels. RC arose as a more holistic approach dedicated to viewing the gospels as they stand as individual entities.⁶ It originated to correct the on-sidedness of the other two approaches, so that the “forest” would not be missed due to microscopic examination of the “trees.”⁷ It should not be supposed, however, that RC denies the insights of the other two approaches. On the contrary, RC presupposes the validity of both source and form criticism.⁸ The insights of these two disciplines regarding individual pericopes are the basis for RC’s study of “the ‘seams’ by which the sources are joined together, the summaries, modification, insertions, and omissions made, and in general the selection and arrangement of material.”⁹ As RC is done, the unique theological emphasis of each evangelist becomes more clear.

Evangelicals have attempted to utilize a more moderate form of RC. After all, the Lukan prologue (Luke 1:1–4) and John’s statement regarding his purpose (John 20:30–31) clearly allude to the use of previous traditions and to theological selectivity in recording only certain events from Christ’s earthly ministry. Ned B. Stonehouse is a

¹R. N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (2d ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 165.

²*Mark the Evangelist* (trans. J. Boyce et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).

³With G. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. P. Scott; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

⁴*The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. G. Buswell; New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

⁵For concise explanations of source criticism and form criticism see Soulen, *Handbook*, 71–74; 113–15.

⁶For detailed surveys of the origin and development of RC see N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), and J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists* (trans. D. Barton; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968).

⁷R. H. Stein, “What is Redaktionsgeschichte?” *JBL* 88 (1969) 45.

⁸It is not altogether true that “form criticism has outgrown its usefulness” and that it is “outdated and will have to go into retirement,” as S. J. Kistemaker states in *The Gospels in Current Study* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 50, 52.

⁹S. S. Smalley, “Redaction Criticism,” *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 184–85.

pioneer in this area, and his works are discussed below. Among other works which could be mentioned are William L. Lane's commentary on Mark,¹⁰ I. H. Marshall's two books on Luke,¹¹ and Ralph Martin's study of Mark.¹² Robert Gundry's commentary on Matthew is probably the most controversial work in this field. Gundry's approach to Matthew also receives attention shortly.

Of vital concern to inerrantists is the historicity of the events portrayed in the gospels. Granted that the evangelists were theologians, the question is, can a theologian write history?¹³ A related question is, did the evangelists find it necessary to create theological tales about Jesus in order to be relevant to their church's needs, or were the historical facts which they knew about Jesus sufficient to meet the needs of not only their churches but also the needs of believers throughout all time? This study examines three evangelical approaches to RC which attempt to treat the gospels as simultaneously theological and historical.¹⁴ First, these three approaches are summarized. Then, each will be evaluated in turn. Finally, the current situation of the ETS as it pertains to this issue is discussed. It is concluded that the theologians who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the gospels did write history. "All the evangelists were men who saw events as vehicles of truth regarding Jesus Christ, but there is no reason to suppose that the events were created in a theological interest."¹⁵

SUMMARY OF THREE IMPORTANT APPROACHES

Ned B. Stonehouse

Ned Bernard Stonehouse (1902–1962) taught NT at Westminster Theological Seminary from its inception in 1929 until his death. His work is included here even though some of it predates the use of the term RC because Stonehouse was a pioneer. His works have recently

¹⁰*The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), esp. 3–7. Lane's commentary properly assumes the validity of a RC which presupposes historicity as the basis of theological meaning. See also his "Redaktionsgeschichte and the De-historicizing of the New Testament Gospel," *BETS* 11 (1968) 27–33.

¹¹*Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), esp. 17–52; also *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGNTC; ed. I. H. Marshall and W. W. Gasque; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), esp. 32–33.

¹²*Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972), esp. 46–50.

¹³D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1970) 219.

¹⁴The three approaches chosen for this study were selected from several others of merit due to their representative positions and the fact that the three men are American evangelicals who have been involved in the ETS.

¹⁵Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 219.

been reprinted¹⁶ and his contributions have been noted both by M. Silva¹⁷ and by R. H. Gundry.¹⁸ W. L. Lane explains:

In his method of approaching the first two gospels, Stonehouse broke new ground. At that time most synoptic studies concerned themselves with the recovery of the traditions behind the finished gospels. In contrast, Stonehouse determined to focus his attention on the total witness of an evangelist to Christ with the conviction that an evangelist's distinctive interests and theological convictions are reflected in the composition of his work as a whole. The validity of this approach has been acknowledged by virtually all biblical scholars today, but at the time when Stonehouse published his volume it marked a bold departure from both radical and conservative approaches to the gospels.¹⁹

In *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, Stonehouse devotes four chapters to each gospel. He points out the astonishing meagerness of Mark's preface concerning Christ's early life.²⁰ Emphasis falls upon Mark's frequent omission of historical information,²¹ chronological factors,²² and incidental details.²³ The striking abruptness of the beginning of this gospel is relevant to the textual question at the end of the gospel. Thus RC informs textual criticism and the abrupt short ending (16:8) is defended as original.²⁴ Stonehouse underlines the fact that Mark does not write with the attention to detail one would expect of a biographer. Nevertheless, he repeatedly emphasizes the historicity of the events Mark records.²⁵ More than once the history versus theology dilemma is viewed not as an "either . . . or" but as a "both . . . and" situation.²⁶ "The proclamation of the meaning

¹⁶*The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) combines *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (originally published in 1944) and *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (originally published in 1951). His other book *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) was originally published in 1963, just after Stonehouse died.

¹⁷Silva's two-part study, "Ned. B. Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism" appeared in *WTJ* 40 (1977-78) 77-88; 281-303.

¹⁸Gundry claims that his approach to Matthew was to some extent anticipated by Stonehouse. See Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 623.

¹⁹W. L. Lane, "Foreword," *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ*, vii. Cf. Stonehouse's "Preface" to the same volume.

²⁰Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, 6.

²¹*Ibid.*, 24.

²²*Ibid.*, 27, 30.

²³*Ibid.*, 34, 116-17.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 99, 116-17.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 30-31, 33, 49, 51-52, 54, 77, 83.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 36-37, 49, 52, 83.

of that divine action in history is necessarily doctrinal without ceasing to be historical."²⁷

Matthew is viewed as similar to Mark in that it differs from secular biographies in its lack of chronology and historical details.²⁸ The presence of the infancy narratives in Matthew shows that Matthew's purpose greatly differed from Mark's.²⁹ Though the infancy narratives lack many historical and chronological details, their historicity is not thereby undermined.³⁰ Though Matthew's references to time and place are not often precise enough to fit into a detailed itinerary, it does not follow that they "are simply the creation of the evangelist in the interest of adding to the vividness of the narrative."³¹ Matthew's "great commission" passage (28:18–20), including the trinitarian formula, is viewed as a reported discourse of Jesus, not as an editorial composition.³² On the subject of Matthew's creating or reshaping accounts to meet the needs of his church, Stonehouse affirms that Matthew indeed followed the aim of meeting the needs of the church. However, he hastily adds that Matthew "had not lost the ability to distinguish between the history of Christ and the history of the church."³³ He wrote what he held to be true. Thus, reading the church's theology back into Matthew "undermines the very foundation of the Christian faith and makes the evangelist a herald of falsehood."³⁴

In *The Witness of Luke to Christ*, Stonehouse begins with a stimulating treatment of Luke's prologue (1:1–4). He concludes that the use of the adverb *καθεξῆς* in 1:3 does not necessitate viewing Luke as strictly chronological in order. Instead he proposes that Luke has in mind an orderly, connected, comprehensive account.³⁵ Luke's emphasis upon Christ's infancy and inclusion of its historical details is also noted.³⁶ On the other hand, Luke's compressed treatment of the death and resurrection of Christ, involving lack of explanation of duration and progress of events, is also highlighted.³⁷ Luke's method of writing results in his accounts frequently being more concise than

²⁷Ibid., 52.

²⁸Ibid., 124–25, 127, 132, 136, 139, 147–48, 162, 169, 178–79, 186–87.

²⁹Ibid., 124–27.

³⁰Ibid., 221.

³¹Ibid., 149–50, 132.

³²Ibid., 211–12.

³³Ibid., 257.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ*, 40–41. Significantly, BAGD, 338, define *καθεξῆς* as "in order, one after the other, of sequence in time, space, or logic." Thus, chronology may not be the point.

³⁶Ibid., 46–47.

³⁷Ibid., 128–29.

Mark's and less attentive to geography and chronology than Mark's.³⁸ Though he recognizes all these things, Stonehouse still makes it quite clear that Luke is historical. Luke is not a theological creation of the Christian community.³⁹ For Luke, "Christianity stood or fell with the objective reality of certain happenings."⁴⁰ Overall,

one may freely acknowledge . . . that his interest is theological and christological . . . but it is crucial to a proper estimate of the Lucan philosophy of history not to regard the christological and the historical as mutually exclusive. Though he does not write as a secular historian, Luke gives evidence at every point of being concerned with historical fact and takes great pains to assure his readers that he is qualified to provide them with reliable information concerning what had taken place.⁴¹

Stonehouse's last work, posthumously published, was *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*. In it he opted, with some reservations, for the priority of Mark and for the use of Mark by Matthew.⁴² At the conclusion of a chapter on the story of the rich young ruler appear some noteworthy general observations. Stonehouse asserts that the evangelists were not always concerned with Jesus' *ipsissima verba*; they exercised a certain amount of literary freedom.⁴³ This assertion leads him to comment that though a simplistic harmonizing approach to synoptic difficulties may be helpful at times, there is a sounder approach. This involves (1) "the exercise of greater care in determining what the Gospels as a whole and in detail actually say," (2) "greater restraint in arriving at conclusions where the available evidence does not justify ready answers," and (3) not maintaining "that the trustworthiness of the gospels allows the evangelists no liberty of composition whatsoever."⁴⁴ Notarial exactitude and pedantic precision do not characterize the gospels in Stonehouse's view, and he alludes to similar statements in John Calvin, John Murray, B. B. Warfield, H. Bavinck, L. Berkhof, and A. Kuyper.⁴⁵ A crucial point that must not be missed, however, is the fact that Matthew's liberty of composition does not justify the conclusions of some "that a doctrinal modification has taken place."⁴⁶ Later in the book the historicity of

³⁸Ibid., 103.

³⁹Ibid., 29.

⁴⁰Ibid., 44-45.

⁴¹Ibid., 67, cf. 33-34, 53-54, 59.

⁴²Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 76, 92, 111.

⁴³Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴Ibid., 109.

⁴⁵Ibid., n. 17.

⁴⁶Ibid., 110.

the gospel accounts and their total continuity with the Jesus of history is unqualifiedly asserted.⁴⁷ The conclusion of it all is that

Once it is acknowledged that the divine Messiah alone can explain the origin of that [gospel] tradition will one be in a position to discern how, as a part of a single historical movement, the Gospels not only as matchless historical documents but as integral parts of Holy Scripture came into being.⁴⁸

Grant R. Osborne

Grant Osborne teaches NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He has written four articles on NT criticism⁴⁹ and recently read a paper on genre criticism at the Chicago Meeting of the International Congress on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI).⁵⁰

Osborne's first article, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," focused on Matt 28:16–20 with the purpose of illumining a biblical understanding of inerrancy. The crucial point of this article was that Matthew's triadic baptismal formula (28:19) "expanded an original monadic formula."⁵¹ This was not free composition by Matthew but was a correct interpretation (*ipsisissima vox*) of Jesus' *ipsisissima verba*. Later in the article Osborne addresses the issue of biblical inerrancy, contending that synoptic differences are "the logical testing ground for the doctrine of inerrancy." These differences "show that the evangelists did not attempt to give us the *ipsisissima verba* but to interpret Jesus' words for their audiences . . . to makes Jesus' teachings meaningful to their own *Sitz im Leben*."⁵² The article concludes with the plea that history and theology are complementary and that the "domino theory" of deteriorating biblical authority need not be correct.

In the second article, "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," Osborne seeks to evaluate the method's use by non-evangelicals and to set it upon evangelical presuppositions. This method "seeks to determine the growth of a particular concept of tradition within the

⁴⁷Ibid., 148, 175, 190–92.

⁴⁸Ibid., 192.

⁴⁹These are "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *JETS* 19 (1976) 73–85; "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," *JETS* 21 (1978) 117–30; "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology," *JETS* 22 (1979) 305–22; and "Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narratives," *EvQ* 51 (1979) 80–96.

⁵⁰"Genre Criticism—Sensus Literalis," *Summit II: Hermeneutics Papers* (Oakland: ICBI, 1982) 3-1-54. These papers are to be published by Zondervan.

⁵¹"Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," 80, cf., 83.

⁵²Ibid., 84, cf., 85: "Matthew has faithfully reproduced the intent and meaning of what Jesus said."

history of the early church."⁵³ The critique of the erroneous practice of the method by non-evangelicals is lucid and insightful. Next a positive approach is set forth. In the process of the tradition's growth the selection and shaping process "did not involve creating or changing the historical data."⁵⁴ Inerrancy "covers both fact (the original event) and interpretation (the explanation of the ramifications of the event for the readers). There is no dichotomy between the two."⁵⁵ It is concluded that when it is properly defined and practiced, *Traditionsgeschichte* is a positive, helpful tool.

Osborne's approach in the earlier two articles did not go unnoticed by negative critics.⁵⁶ In a third article, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," he responded with a defense and clarification of his position. After surveying evangelical dialogue on biblical criticism, he sought to appraise RC accurately. In a crucial paragraph he clarified his view of the triadic formula of Matt 28:19:

I did not mean that Matthew had freely composed the triadic formula and read it back onto the lips of Jesus. Rather, Jesus had certainly (as in virtually every speech in the NT) spoken for a much longer time and had given a great deal more teaching than reported in the short statement of Matt 28:18–20. In it I believe he probably elucidated the trinitarian background behind the whole speech. This was compressed by Matthew in the form recorded.⁵⁷

Thus, Osborne attempted to handle properly both the differences and the veracity of the synoptic accounts. Next a discussion of proper redactional methodology is pursued, with several helpful insights. At the end Osborne appeals to skeptical evangelicals to consider the synoptic differences; in his view these demand a redactional treatment of a sort like his study of Matt 28:18–20.

The evidence points to the presence of selection and coloring but not to the creation of sayings or even of details. The evangelists themselves throughout show nothing but the highest regard for Jesus' actual meaning. They applied and highlighted but never twisted or created new meaning.⁵⁸

⁵³"The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," 117.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 127–28.

⁵⁶E.g., J. W. Montgomery, "The Fuzzification of Biblical Inerrancy," *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978) 220–21, and "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?" *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. K. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 57–65.

⁵⁷"The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 311.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 322.

In another study, "Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narratives," Osborne employs once again the methodology proposed, defended, and clarified in the other three articles. He believes that the passion tradition in the synoptics is a developing tradition:

It is obvious, on the basis of the numerous additions by Matthew and Luke to Mark, that the passion story was not static but dynamic, and the early evangelists added or subtracted episodes as the theological situation dictated. This does not mean that the pericopes themselves were necessarily non-historical, only that the story itself was fluid and subject to development.⁵⁹

The bulk of the article seeks to isolate the specific theological emphases of all four gospels' passion narratives. The conclusion maintains simultaneously (1) the continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, and (2) the creative interpretive genius of the evangelists in "selecting and colouring episodes."⁶⁰

Osborne's ICBI paper on genre criticism deserves brief notice. It is a broad survey of the history of literary genre from Plato and Aristotle to modern times. There is a direct connection, Osborne concludes, between genre and the literal sense of Scripture. Understanding genre "is an epistemological tool for unlocking meaning in individual texts and an indispensable aid to the interpretive task."⁶¹ Genre is also relevant for the formulation of a biblical doctrine of inerrancy, which must be based upon the internal evidence of Scripture. More specifically, knowledge of genre will "keep one from seeing 'surface' discrepancies in the text." It will "provide the strongest possible apology for the doctrine of inerrancy by resolving many so-called 'contradictions' or 'errors' in Scripture."⁶²

Robert H. Gundry

Robert Gundry is professor of religious studies at Westmont College. His approach to RC has been shown in detail in his recent commentary on Matthew.⁶³ Earlier he had published a scholarly monograph on Matthew's use of the OT.⁶⁴ It is safe to say that Gundry's treatment of Matthew's "literary and theological art" is the most thorough and controversial evangelical study to date. The book has

⁵⁹"Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narratives," 81.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 96.

⁶¹"Genre Criticism—Sensus Literalis," 3–40.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 3–41.

⁶³*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

⁶⁴*The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

been reviewed by both conservatives⁶⁵ and liberals.⁶⁶ The stir created by its publication has even been noticed by the secular press.⁶⁷

Gundry's commentary presupposes that Matthew uses Mark and a broadened Q which includes the traditions later found in Luke's infancy narratives.⁶⁸ It is not a heavily documented work including interaction with other views, but a work in which Gundry fully develops his own line of interpretation.⁶⁹ The introduction reveals that "Matthew's choice of words . . . betrays his editorial hand."⁷⁰ Thus statistical analysis of Matthew's favorite diction yields results for redaction critical theory. Matthew's theology shows concern for the problem of a large mixed church. Jewish Christianity is "breaking out into the wide world of the Gentiles."⁷¹ "Matthew writes his gospel to keep persecution from stymieing evangelism."⁷²

In the commentary proper, the reader is immediately struck by Gundry's insistence upon theological emphasis in the genealogy of Jesus.⁷³ The "fluidity" of this genealogy transforms it into a christological statement which prepares the reader for a "similar change of a historical report . . . into a theological tale. . . . Matthew turns the annunciation to Mary before her conceiving Jesus into an annunciation to Joseph after her conceiving Jesus."⁷⁴ This method of understanding Matt 1:18-25 is also employed in treating 2:1-12. "Matthew now turns the visit of the local Jewish shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) into the adoration by Gentile magi from foreign parts."⁷⁵ Later the praiseful return of the shepherds is transformed by Matthew into the magi's

⁶⁵From a conservative perspective, see D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," *TrinJ* 3 (1982) 71-91; R. T. France, *Themelios* 8 (1983) 31-32; R. P. Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 245-51; M. M. Hanna, "Biblical Inerrancy Versus Midrashic Redactionism" (unpublished paper read at the ETS Regional Meeting at Arrowhead Springs, CA, March 21, 1980); P. B. Payne, "The Question of Midrash and History in the Gospels: A Critique of R. H. Gundry's *Matthew*," *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 3 (Sheffield: JSOT, forthcoming); and D. P. Scaer, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (1982) 247-48.

⁶⁶From a more liberal viewpoint, see L. Cope, *ATR* 65 (1983) 218-20; and M. T. Norwood, Jr., *Christian Century* 99 (Sept 1-8, 1982) 903-4.

⁶⁷J. Dart, "Controversial Study of Matthew's Gospel Challenges Conservative Views," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 11, 1982), Part 1-A, 10-11. Unfortunately, this article paints Gundry as a man who is willing to face the facts being attacked by ultra-conservatives who will not face the facts. See also another article by Dart, "Society Clears New Testament Professor," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 25, 1982), Part 1, 36-37.

⁶⁸Gundry, *Matthew*, xi.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 2.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 9.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*, 13f.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 26, cf., 28, 29, 31.

flight from persecution.⁷⁶ Still another incident, the flight to Egypt (2:13–15), is a Matthean creation, changed from the holy family's trip to Jerusalem (Luke 2:22).⁷⁷ Finally, a fourth incident, the slaughter of Bethlehem's babies (Matt 2:16–18) is the result of a change from the sacrificial slaying of two turtledoves in the temple (Luke 2:29). "Herod's massive crimes made it easy for Matthew to manipulate the dominical tradition in this way."⁷⁸ Problems of harmonizing Matthew and Luke support this type of treatment. Gundry's preliminary justification for his method is as follows:

It may be asked how Matthew can put forward his embellishments of tradition as fulfillments of the OT. But this phenomenon should surprise us no more than his transforming historical statements in the OT—those concerning the Exodus and the Babylonian Exile—into Messianic prophecies. We will have to broaden our understanding of "happened" as well as "fulfilled" when reading that such-and-such happened in order that so-and-so's prophecy might be fulfilled. Two features of Matthew's practice save him from fantasy: (1) his embellishments rest on historical data, which he hardly means to deny by embellishing them; (2) the embellishments foreshadow genuinely historical events such as vindications of Jesus as God's Son in the resurrection. . . .⁷⁹

Later in the commentary Gundry asserts that Matthew assimilated Luke's woes into beatitudes (5:4ff.). Four of the eight beatitudes are constructed (or created) by Matthew himself.⁸⁰ Among other passages which Gundry views as Matthew's compositions rather than Christ's words or deeds are 10:5–8; 11:28–30; 13:24–30, 36–43; 14:28–31; 16:17–19; portions of 18; 23:3, 17–22; 27:19, 51b–53; and 28:19–20.⁸¹

A "Theological Postscript"⁸² provides the full justification for Gundry's treatment. He is aware that his approach raises grave questions regarding biblical authority. The first paragraph of the postscript is repeated here due to its cruciality:

Clearly, Matthew treats us to history mixed with elements that cannot be called historical in a modern sense. All history writing entails more or less editing of materials. But Matthew's editing often goes beyond the bounds we nowadays want a historian to respect. It does not stop at selecting certain data and dressing them up with considerable

⁷⁶Ibid., 32.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 35. Cf. his understanding of 21:16 (414, 604).

⁷⁹Ibid., 37.

⁸⁰Ibid., 69.

⁸¹Ibid., 184, 218, 261, 300, 330–31, 358, 454, 462, 562, 575, 595–96.

⁸²Ibid., 623–40.

interpretation. . . . Matthew's subtractions, additions, and revision of order and phraseology often show changes of substance; i.e., they represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events.⁸³

This approach is necessary since traditional conservative Protestant responses will not work. These invalid approaches include (1) side-stepping the details of the text, (2) pleading for suspension of judgment until solutions are found, and (3) bending over backwards for harmonizations.⁸⁴ Rhetorically, Gundry asks whether

embroidering history with unhistorical elements a la midrash and haggadah would be inappropriate to God's Word, though proverbs and parables, apocalyptic and erotic poetry are not? Who are we to make such a judgment? And what reason would we have for it? Would it be anything more than lack of appreciation for a literary genre that we think strangely ancient or personally unappealing?⁸⁵

The mention of literary genre signals the basis for Gundry's whole approach. The input of midrash-haggadah genre for Matthew means that Matthew's narrative style does not necessarily imply the writing of unmixed history. As this genre of Jewish literature embroidered the OT, so Matthew embroiders his sources, Mark and Q. "He treated these sources, which, like the OT, were written and venerated, in much the same way the OT was treated by those who produced midrash and haggadah."⁸⁶

None of this should occasion alarm. Elsewhere in Scripture and in other literature we live comfortably with differences of intent. . . . If, then, Matthew writes that Jesus said or did something that Jesus did not say or do in the way described—this supported by adequate exegetical and comparative data—we have to say that Matthew did not write entirely reportorial history. Comparison with midrashic and haggadic literature of his era suggests he did not intend to do so.⁸⁷

Those who are not disposed to agree with Gundry are cautioned against making invalid demands on Scripture and against literary insensitivity. After all, modern biographical novels contain a mixture of history and fiction which is recognized by writer and reader alike. Modern preachers and writers likewise embellish biblical accounts in order to make them culturally relevant and doctrinally appropriate.

⁸³Ibid., 623.

⁸⁴Ibid., 625–26.

⁸⁵Ibid., 626.

⁸⁶Ibid., 628.

⁸⁷Ibid., 629.

Biblical clarity does not demand that Matthew identify the unhistorical elements in his gospel. Matthew's original audience understood his intent because they were not preoccupied with 20th-century historical-critical demands.⁸⁸ It may be granted that this approach "narrows the historical basis of Christian faith but not nearly so much that the Christian faith is threatened with collapse."⁸⁹

In conclusion, Gundry asserts that the Spirit guided Matthew in this whole process so that both the historical and non-historical portions of Matthew constitute God's Word. There is no alternative:

If we do not enlarge the room given to differences of literary genre and, consequently, of intended meaning, scriptural inspiration, authority, infallibility, or inerrancy—call it what we will—cannot survive the "close reading" of the biblical text now going on. The old method of harmonizing what we can and holding the rest in suspension has seen its day, like worn-out scientific theories that no longer explain newly discovered phenomena well enough.⁹⁰

EVALUATION OF THE APPROACHES

Ned B. Stonehouse

Silva's excellent study of Stonehouse correctly depicts his work as that of a pioneer. Though RC was to become a tool largely destructive of the historicity of the NT, Stonehouse used the method "to strengthen confidence in the historical reliability of the gospels."⁹¹ Evangelicals who were contemporary with Stonehouse heard this apologetic note for historicity but did not perceive Stonehouse's point concerning the theological character and concern of the evangelists.⁹² It is clear that Stonehouse, as a Reformed thinker in the tradition of Warfield, championed the doctrine of inerrancy. He saw no contradiction between this theological stance and the recognition of the unique phenomena of the synoptics. There was an absolute continuity between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the gospels. Probably the most detailed statement of his position occurred in his last book after his study of the rich young ruler pericope. As previously summarized, Stonehouse will have none of the doctrinal modification views of Streeter and Taylor.⁹³ This approach is quite attractive.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 629–35.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 637.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 639.

⁹¹"Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: I," 78.

⁹²"Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: II," 282.

⁹³*Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 110.

Near the end of Silva's study he points out that Stonehouse's work may point to a further step in synoptic studies—genre criticism.⁹⁴ The hypothetical situation of an unhistorical literary form is proposed for evaluation. This could be accepted in principle, for Jesus' parables are not all strictly historical. Thus Matthew could theoretically have composed an account of Jesus' life and ministry containing some non-historical material.⁹⁵ Silva seems to think that though Stonehouse would not have endorsed this theory, he nevertheless left it open as a possibility.⁹⁶ This line of reasoning is summarized as follows:

*A semi-historical interpretation of Matthew's Gospel does not in principle appear to be incompatible with verbal inspiration, nor would the presence of some unhistorical material in one gospel by itself cast doubts on the historicity of Jesus' life and work. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that we need not interpret the gospel material in a substantially freer manner than Stonehouse did.*⁹⁷

I do not agree that Stonehouse's works leave open this possibility. Nevertheless, that does not prove what Stonehouse would have thought. Additionally, the problem with this approach is that to all intents and purposes, Matthew clearly purports to be historical. Where does the text indicate where the history stops and the midrash begins?

Though Silva would not interpret the gospel material in a substantially freer manner than Stonehouse, Silva's colleague at that time, Robert Gundry, would appear to do so. Nevertheless, Gundry claims that Stonehouse "found it necessary to admit as much."⁹⁸ That is, Gundry asserts that Stonehouse would reluctantly agree that Matthew's subtractions, additions, and revisions result in different meanings and departures from actual events. Once again I must disagree. It would appear from Stonehouse's general statements and from the one place where he speaks to this specific issue⁹⁹ that he would not accept doctrinal modification. D. A. Carson's searching critique of Gundry comes to the same conclusion: "Gundry should let his theories stand on their own feet, rather than to associate them with someone whose writings repudiate them."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴"Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: I," 293.

⁹⁵Ibid., 293–96.

⁹⁶Ibid., 296–98, citing Stonehouse in *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, 152 and *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 110 n. 17.

⁹⁷"Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: I," 298.

⁹⁸*Matthew*, 623. In personal correspondence (Nov 1, 1982) Gundry indicated to me that "I still claim that *at one point* Stonehouse opened the door to what I'm doing, indeed, *did* what I'm doing, not that he would endorse my commentary as a whole."

⁹⁹*Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 110.

¹⁰⁰"Gundry on Matthew," 78.

Grant C. Osborne

Osborne's articles on RC are characterized by careful exegesis, an awareness of contemporary scholarship, and a desire to use RC as a tool to understand and proclaim the synoptics as the Word of God.¹⁰¹ John Warwick Montgomery, for one, is convinced that Osborne's desire will not come to fruition. Apparently Montgomery believes that Osborne's position concerning "verbal inexactitude"¹⁰² contradicts the doctrinal statement of the ETS. Despite Montgomery's journalistic flare and commendable zeal for biblical authority, he appears to be wrong at this point, as Silva points out.¹⁰³ It is true, however, that Osborne's position in this article was ambiguous. In his third article Osborne articulated and clarified his position in a way which appears to be compatible with inerrancy and with the position of Stonehouse.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Osborne appeared to assert in his earlier article that Matthew *expanded* Jesus' words, he has since explained that it is his position that Matthew *compressed* Jesus' words. Thus the trinitarian formula of Matt 28:19 is viewed by Osborne not as a Matthean creation but as a Matthean summary of Jesus' words.

The debated issue here is the controversy over *ipsissima verba* or *ipsissima vox* in the *logia Jesu*. Stonehouse¹⁰⁵ and Osborne¹⁰⁶ realize that *ipsissima vox* is sufficient, but Montgomery appears to demand *ipsissima verba*. There is no doubt that Montgomery has gone beyond classical inerrantist statements on this matter.¹⁰⁷ Paul Feinberg's essay, "The Meaning of Inerrancy,"¹⁰⁸ agrees in principle with Osborne but disagrees with the way Osborne applies the principle in Matt 28:18. Two factors should be kept in mind in this debate. First, one should not assume that Jesus always spoke Aramaic, thus automatically denying *ipsissima verba* for Greek gospels.¹⁰⁹ Gundry himself has demonstrated the threefold language milieu of 1st-century Palestine.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹On this last point see "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 322.

¹⁰²Montgomery, "Fuzzification," 221, referring to Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," 84.

¹⁰³"Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: I," 291 n. 14.

¹⁰⁴"Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 311, 321.

¹⁰⁵*Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 108.

¹⁰⁶"Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," 84.

¹⁰⁷See, e.g., the sources listed by Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, 110 n. 17.

¹⁰⁸In *Inerrancy* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 301, 472 n. 98.

¹⁰⁹Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," 84.

¹¹⁰"The Language Milieu of First Century Palestine: Its Bearing on the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition," *JBL* 83 (1964) 404ff. Evidence in favor of *ipsissima verba* is also found in *The Use of the Old Testament in Matthew*, 181-83. Here Gundry argues that Matthew took careful notes on Jesus' discourses.

Second, Matthew's wording in 28:18 ostensibly introduces a direct quotation: καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων . . . The redundant or pleonastic participle λέγων, evidently analogous to the Hebrew וַיֹּאמֶר, appears to be a way of introducing a direct quotation.¹¹¹ Thus, one should not summarily dismiss the idea of *ipsissima verba* in Matt 28:18–20.

One wishes that Osborne had been more clear in his "Redactional Trajectories" article concerning the "dynamic, fluid" character of the passion story.¹¹² It is granted that episodes may be added or subtracted so long as they are historical. "This does not mean that the pericopes themselves were necessarily non-historical," Osborne cautions. Perhaps this is pedantic, but one wonders why the qualifying adverb "necessarily" was added.¹¹³ Does the dynamic character of the tradition involve non-historical pericopes or not?¹¹⁴

Finally, Osborne's ICBI paper on genre will be noted. It must be admitted that the paper does a masterful job of synthesizing an enormous amount of literary and historical data. Reading the paper should be an eye-opening experience for biblical scholars. Only one reservation is worth mentioning: Osborne may be too optimistic. It is debatable whether a proper understanding of genre will "provide the strongest possible apology for the doctrine of inerrancy."¹¹⁵ R. B. Allen, one of the respondents to Osborne's paper, expressed his own reservations concerning Osborne's genre-related solution to the problems of the empty tomb narratives.¹¹⁶ Allen's conclusion exhibits commendable caution. "In any event, I am confident that the study of genre will serve the evangelical scholar in being at least a part of the solution to these and other difficulties in the Bible."¹¹⁷ The importance of genre in the current inerrancy debate should not be underestimated, as anyone familiar with Articles XIII and XIV of the ICBI "Affirmations and Denials" can testify. The debate over genre and inerrancy

¹¹¹BDF, §420; N. Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* by J. H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 155; M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (trans. J. Smith; Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963) §368.

¹¹²"Redactional Trajectories," 81.

¹¹³Cf. the qualifying adverb "probably elucidated the trinitarian background" to Matt 28:18–20 ("Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 311). If Jesus did not do this, Osborne's position is to be distanced from Stonehouse's and becomes unacceptable.

¹¹⁴After this study was written, personal conversation with Osborne has indicated that he does not doubt the historical character of the pericopes in the passion story. However, due to the vagueness of his published words, this possible difficulty has not been deleted.

¹¹⁵"Genre Criticism," 3–41.

¹¹⁶"A Response to Genre Criticism—Sensus Literalis," *Summit II: Hermeneutics Papers*, A3–10.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, A3–11.

comes to a head in Gundry's Matthew commentary, to which the evaluation now turns.

Robert H. Gundry

It is instructive to compare Gundry's views in both his works on Matthew. In his earlier work, Gundry included a powerful chapter critiquing radical form criticism and defending Matthew's historicity.¹¹⁸ *Gemeindetheologie* is decried; the church is the guardian, not the inventor, of the tradition.¹¹⁹ Gundry discusses the effect of the fulfillment motif on the tradition and concludes that "the bulk of the gospel tradition cannot be traced to a reading of prophecy into the life of Jesus." "The direction is from tradition to prophecy, not vice versa."¹²⁰ This is specifically maintained for the infancy narratives of Matthew 1–2. Gundry denies that OT prophecy was the source of these narratives. Citing Stonehouse, he states that the nativity tradition created the need to see fulfilled prophecy. "The unbridged interval between Jesus' birth and his baptism certainly favors the historicity of Mt 1 and 2," since apocryphal childhood legends would have circulated by this time. "The apologetic, not the apocryphal, dominates Mt 1 and 2."¹²¹ "Something always prevents our seeing evolvment of the gospel tradition from prophecy."¹²²

In another chapter Gundry considers the legitimacy of Matthew's hermeneutic and Messianic hope. It is concluded that Matthew's OT exegesis is not atomistic.¹²³ Rather, typology is a key theme in such passages as the Hos 11:1 citation in Matt 2:15.¹²⁴ Such a typological method originated in the teaching of Jesus.¹²⁵ Such hermeneutical principles "demand the unique genius of the kind of man Jesus must have been—they cannot reasonably be set down to *Gemeindetheologie*."¹²⁶ The very last sentence of the book speaks of divine providence guiding OT history toward Jesus Christ, resulting in "remarkable correspondence between OT history and prophecy and the life and ministry of Jesus."¹²⁷

¹¹⁸ *Use of the Old Testament in Matthew*, 189–204.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191. Earlier Gundry had argued that Matthew took careful notes on Jesus' ministry which became the basis for the bulk of the gospel tradition (181–83).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 209–12.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 213–15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

What can be concluded from comparing these statements with the Matthew commentary? In all fairness, a man has a right to change his mind when he believes the evidence requires it, and this is apparently the case with Gundry. There is a more open approach to *Gemeindetheologie* in the commentary, which so heavily emphasizes the needs of Matthew's church.¹²⁸ The position on the historicity of the infancy narratives has changed.¹²⁹ One wonders why a note-taking eyewitness had to resort to such a heavy dependence upon Mark and Q and upon a non-historical genre.¹³⁰ It almost appears that the needs of the community now dictate a fast and loose approach to the OT, where before a unified typological approach originating with Jesus was advocated.¹³¹ These are definite shifts in position, but these do not prove that the new position is erroneous.

Some methodological criticisms can be made. On the whole, it appears that much more caution would have been in order. The source and form critical assumptions upon which Gundry builds his redactional approach are hardly an immovable foundation. Gundry's use of word frequency statistics is also debatable. Increasingly, more and more scholars are calling into question Markan priority and a documentary view of Q.¹³² Since these foundational matters are debatable, it is not wise to be so assured of one's hypothetical superstructure.¹³³ Also, Gundry's approach appears to be characterized at times by a speculative "over-exegesis" and "over-theologizing."¹³⁴ One wonders whether Matthew would have had *theological* motivation for every minor change he allegedly made in his sources. Granted, evangelicals must handle the gospels as theological documents, but must theology be the exclusive determinant of the phenomena?¹³⁵

On another front, it appears that Gundry has unconsciously diminished the value of knowing the Jesus of history and unintentionally implied the insufficiency of that Jesus. Gundry's approach

¹²⁸ *Matthew*, 5-10, 14-15, 20, 26, 28, 32, etc. Cf. Carson's section on Gundry's "anachronisms" in "Gundry on Matthew," 88-90, and his sentiments on the shift in Gundry's position, 91.

¹²⁹ *Matthew*, 20, 26, 28, 32, 34-37.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, xi, 2. This is defended later, 621-22, 628-29, 636.

¹³¹ Gundry now says historical statements were converted or transformed into prophecies. *Ibid.*, 37, 632-33.

¹³² W. Farmer is no longer nearly alone! See R. L. Thomas, "The Rich Young Man in Matthew," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 235-60, and esp. 246-51 for a survey of the current situation.

¹³³ D. J. Moo's paper, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert Gundry's Approach" presents a detailed critique of Gundry's source-critical and statistical assumptions and methods.

¹³⁴ Noted by Carson, "Gundry on Matthew," 81. For other examples cf. *Matthew*, 28, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 56, etc.

¹³⁵ Noted by Carson, "Gundry on Matthew," 72.

implies that Matthew's readers knew all they needed to know about the Jesus of history.¹³⁶ But how could that ever occur? Do believers ever get to know the Jesus of history well enough to need or to desire unhistorical fabrications, pious as these may be? Why does Matthew need to invent theological tales in order to be relevant in a practical way? The God who superintends history has certainly seen to it that Jesus' actual words and deeds have sufficient practical relevance for his people. But, in Gundry's view, Matthew evidently could not find sufficient significance in history, so he had to write fiction in order to meet his church's needs. Is there a subtle existential influence here? This line of reasoning seems to imply a different view of Jesus than that of the apostle John who wrote: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which should be written" (John 21:25 *NASB*). The implication of Gundry's approach seems to be that Jesus did many things which were not all that important. Matthew's readers already knew enough about the Jesus of history. What they needed most was akin to a historical novel about Jesus. This would be more relevant to their needs. Does Gundry's approach imply the insufficiency of the Jesus of history, or are some evangelicals guilty of insisting that Scripture conform only to those standards of writing with which they are comfortable?¹³⁷

It appears, however, that the above objections pale in comparison with the issue of genre and inerrancy. Gundry repeatedly asserts that non-historical genre is compatible with inerrancy.¹³⁸ Few will hesitate to agree with this in principle. However, it would appear that there should be an objective criterion which appears in the text for this to be granted in practice. Jesus' parables have the stamp of real life even though they may not point to any one specific historical incident. To say that "a certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . ." (Luke 10:30 *NASB*) is to refer to a type of incident which would historically recur many times. Parabolic genre is easily recognizable. However, by contrast Matthew 1-2 purports to be historical. Any approach which denies the historicity of this portion of Scripture must be based on stronger, more objective, more biblically demonstrable grounds than Gundry has supplied.¹³⁹ Today's "scholarly consensus" on the source criticism of the synoptics is in flux. Without a

¹³⁶Gundry, *Matthew*, 629. Note how Silva hypothetically states an agenda similar to that implied by Gundry, "Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism: II," 295.

¹³⁷This is Gundry's legitimate question to those whom he styles as "conservative historical positivists" (*Matthew*, 629).

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 37, 626-27, 629, 631-32, 637, 639.

¹³⁹Granted, Gundry admits that his view needs to be "supported by adequate exegetical and comparative data" (*ibid.*, 629). His current support is not at all adequate, however.

rather novel adaptation of a theory which may be dying (the two document hypothesis), Gundry's approach will not stand. It is doubtful that we will ever know enough about the synoptic problem and midrash genre to make statements which deny the historicity of a purportedly historical narrative.

Gundry believes that Matthew and his readers were both accustomed to such a genre as he proposes and would not be misled by it.¹⁴⁰ It may be doubtful whether this genre will ever be known sufficiently to support adequately his position. Carson, for one, doubts that Gundry's analysis of midrash genre is sufficient.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, there is a tension between Gundry's position and two of the denial sections from the 1982 Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics:

XIII: WE AFFIRM that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study.

WE DENY that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.

XIV: WE AFFIRM that the biblical record of events, discourses, and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, corresponds to historical fact.

WE DENY that any event, discourse, or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.

There is no doubt that Gundry's position imposes generic categories which negate historicity upon the narrative of Matthew which presents itself as historical. Gundry believes that many events, sayings, and discourses in Matthew were invented by him.

One must admire Gundry's scholarship and frankness. His approach to Matthew attempts to handle both the phenomena of the text and the doctrine of inerrancy. He has not jettisoned the doctrine of biblical authority, or even inerrancy as he defines it.¹⁴² However, his approach is misguided in assumptions, method, and conclusions. His attempt to defend the authority of the Bible may in the long run

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 632, 634-35.

¹⁴¹"Gundry on Matthew," 81-85. Moo's "Matthew and Midrash" also points up some weaknesses in Gundry's approach to genre.

¹⁴²His critique of radical form criticism in *The Use of the OT in Matthew* is supplemented by his expose of the "nakedness of the liberal protestant Bible" in *Matthew*, 623-24. Similarly, his critique of the "hardline antisupernaturalism" in F. W. Beare's recent commentary on Matthew demonstrates his commitment to biblical authority. See *TSF Bulletin* 6 (1982) 19-20.

defeat the authority of the Bible. If we grant *in principle* that purportedly historical biblical events did not actually happen, where are we to draw the line *in practice*? Where is the objective control which prevents us from regarding even the central redemptive facts of the gospels as non-historical?

CURRENT SITUATION OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The 34th annual meeting of the ETS was held on December 16–18, 1982 at Northeastern Bible College, Essex Fells, NJ. The first major plenary session was a critique of Robert Gundry's *Matthew* by Douglas Moo of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.¹⁴³ Moo stated that Gundry's position was suspect due to his (1) assumption of precise knowledge of Matthew's sources; (2) categorizing too many words as distinctly Matthean; (3) exaggeration of Matthew's editorial work and its theological motivation; (4) classification of Matthew as midrashic in genre. Gundry's lengthy response¹⁴⁴ defended his assumptions as working hypotheses and answered other critics' problems with his midrashic approach. More significantly, Gundry appealed to the OT as containing material similar to Matthew in its embellishment of the facts. Thus both Chronicles and Joshua contain data more theological than historical.¹⁴⁵ This broadening of the non-historical category of material in Scripture is bound to compound the difficulty that many inerrantists already have with Gundry.

At this meeting the issues raised by Gundry's position were also critiqued in various ways in papers by Royce G. Gruenler, Robert L. Thomas, Norman Geisler, and myself. At the last business meeting the ETS leadership presented to the society their decision to sustain Gundry's membership in the ETS. Their reasoning was that since (1) the society's doctrinal statement¹⁴⁶ speaks only to inerrancy not methodology, and (2) Gundry continues to affirm inerrancy, then (3) his membership in the society could not be questioned. Many members who were present applauded this decision, but evidently others were not pleased. The new president of ETS, Louis Goldberg, has encouraged the regional meetings to discuss what, if anything, needs to be done. He has also appointed an *ad hoc* committee to think through the issues and present a recommendation to the next national conference in Dallas, scheduled for December, 1983.

¹⁴³"Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert Gundry's Approach."

¹⁴⁴"A Response to Some Criticisms of *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art.*"

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 24–26.

¹⁴⁶The statement simply reads "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

Since the 1982 meeting, petitions have been circulated in various schools calling for repudiation of the decision by the ETS leadership to sustain Gundry's membership. There has even been talk of forming a new organization if the ETS fails to act on this issue. Norman Geisler has revised his 1982 paper.¹⁴⁷ His main contention is that orthodoxy is not limited to doctrinal matters but also includes methodological concerns. "*Sincerity* [in assenting to a doctrinal statement] is an insufficient test for orthodoxy. In addition there must also be *conformity* to some objective standard or norm for orthodoxy."¹⁴⁸ Geisler believes that Gundry's method is unorthodox because even though he confesses inerrancy, he denies that events reported by Matthew are literally and historically true. "To deny that what the Bible reports in these passages actually occurred is to deny in effect that the Bible is *wholly* true."¹⁴⁹ Geisler has suggested the following criterion to determine methodological unorthodoxy:

Any hermeneutical or theological method, the logically necessary consequences of which are contrary to or undermine confidence in the complete truthfulness of all of Scripture, is unorthodox.¹⁵⁰

Geisler's zeal for inerrancy and his opinion that Gundry's approach is not compatible with traditional orthodoxy is appreciated. However, at least two major concerns surface in the paper. First, Geisler does not appear to have caught the subtlety of Gundry's argument. Gundry does not deny what, in his view, the Bible affirms since he does not believe Matthew intended for certain parts of his gospel to be taken as historically true. Gundry affirms the truth of all that Matthew reports, but he does not believe that all of Matthew is reported history. Thus Geisler overlooks what must be considered by all to be the genius of Gundry's argument: authorial intent. Second, it also appears that Geisler's criterion for methodological unorthodoxy is unworkable. Evangelicals who staunchly hold to inerrancy have disagreed for years over which portions of Scripture to interpret "literally" or "figuratively." For example, many members of ETS, and perhaps Geisler himself, would deny that the events of the creation week and the flood of Noah are to be taken as literally and historically true. However, advocates of the "day-age" theory of creation and the "local flood theory" tend to undermine *my* confidence in the *complete* truthfulness of *all* of Scripture. I am arguing in this manner simply to

¹⁴⁷The title is now "Methodological Unorthodoxy." The paper compares the approaches of P. Jewett, J. Rogers, and R. Gundry.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 14.

show that evangelicals who hold to inerrancy will never be able to agree on how to enforce such a methodological criterion. The answer to the problems of the ETS appears to be in another direction: it must define more clearly what it means by inerrancy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Evangelicals are currently involved in a dispute which may be likened to the proverbial saying about "throwing out the baby with the bathwater."¹⁵¹ Some evangelists believe there is no baby in the bathwater (RC is unusable). Others believe the bathwater is very dirty, but there is a baby in there somewhere (cautious use of RC). Still others are persuaded that the water itself is rather clean (thoroughgoing RC). The value of RC as a tool for the study of Scripture should not be overestimated or underestimated. The relative infancy of the discipline as well as the lack of certainty (or even probability) of some of its necessary assumptions should cause it to be implemented carefully. These weaknesses and uncertainties render untenable any attempt to deny the historicity of purportedly historical material in the gospels. The warning of William Barclay, certainly no friend of inerrancy, should not go unnoticed: "I need not deny that the gospels are theology, but I abandon their history only at my peril."¹⁵²

It appears certain that Robert Gundry's approach to RC is seriously flawed. However, this does not mean that the discipline itself is unorthodox. Who will doubt that the evangelists had specific purposes as they wrote? Though there will always be difficulties regarding hypothetical *external* sources, there is no doubt that the principle of authorial intent *within* each gospel must be given attention. Robert H. Stein said it well:

Luke in his prologue tells us that he had a specific purpose for writing his Gospel. An evangelical hermeneutic must keep foremost in mind therefore the purpose of the divinely inspired author. This indicates that redaction criticism, and here I mean primarily the aims and goals of the discipline not the various presuppositions that various scholars bring with them to it, is not merely an option but a divine mandate for evangelical scholarship.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹See the fine essay by D. A. Carson, "Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool," *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). The whole article (pp. 119-42; 376-81) exhibits much wisdom in advocating a cautious use of RC. The discussion about the baby and the bathwater occurs on p. 376 n. 3.

¹⁵²*Introduction to the First Three Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 249.

¹⁵³"Luke 1:1-4 and *Traditionsgeschichte*" (unpublished paper presented to the ETS, Dec 1982) 14.

Granted, then, that there is a baby in the bathwater, what can be done to save the baby while disposing of the bathwater? More pointedly, what courses of action are open to the ETS? If nothing is done, there will certainly be a schism in the organization. Also, there is the constant need to clarify doctrinal positions as formerly clear, univocal terms become equivocal and potential "weasel words." This is not the first time the ETS has been exercised concerning inerrancy and biblical criticism. A perusal of the back numbers of the society's *Bulletin* and *Journal* reveals over twenty articles dealing with these issues and at least three numbers which are given over completely to them.¹⁵⁴ It is interesting that whenever an article has been printed which did not seem to be in agreement with the society's position, ample space was given for response.¹⁵⁵ The *Journal* also printed the ICBI's "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy."¹⁵⁶ All this leads one to believe that the current difficulties are not new but are a recurrence of symptoms which have troubled the ETS all along. It would appear that any group of Christians which maintains high doctrinal standards will have pressure to lower them. Such difficulties have caused members to drop out of the ETS before¹⁵⁷ and undoubtedly will do so again. Nevertheless, the ETS must perpetuate its historic and biblical position.

It has been argued above that Norman Geisler's methodological criterion is unworkable. It appears that instead of debating methods of exegesis, the ETS should strengthen its confessional base. I see no good reason why the ICBI's 1978 "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" should not be adopted by the ETS as a clarification of its understanding of the term 'inerrancy.' However, if this course of action is not wise, the ETS should draw up its own strengthened statement. Another issue concerns the ICBI's more recent (1982) "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics." As shown previously, Articles XIII and XIV contradict Robert Gundry's approach to Matthew. It would appear that this contradiction should be resolved in some fashion. At issue is the historicity of the gospels. Liberal scholars have been denying the historicity of certain events in the gospels for years. Gundry's *conclusions* are similar, though his *method* differs in its view of an *inspired* authorial intent to embellish history. It is doubtful whether

¹⁵⁴See *BETS* 3:4; 6:1; 9:1.

¹⁵⁵*BETS* 11 (1968) 139-46; *JETS* 12 (1969) 67-72; 18 (1975) 37-40, 93-103; 20 (1977) 289-305.

¹⁵⁶*JETS* 21 (1978) 289-96.

¹⁵⁷See Gordon H. Clark's 1965 presidential address, "The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow," *BETS* 9 (1966) 3-11. Clark's conclusion regarding the doctrinal integrity of the society is in the form of a parody on a familiar hymn: "Let goods and kindred go, some membership also" (p. 11).

Gundry's approach can be reconciled with the historic protestant understanding of biblical inerrancy.¹⁵⁸ And that position is precisely what the ETS claims to uphold. Changing views of the specific biblical phenomena should not be construed to contradict the Bible's general assertions about itself.¹⁵⁹

ADDENDUM: THE CASE OF J. RAMSEY MICHAELS

As this study goes to press, Dr. J. Ramsey Michaels has recently resigned from his NT professorship at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.¹⁶⁰ His book *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel*,¹⁶¹ was judged by the faculty senate to be in violation of the school's statement of faith on biblical inerrancy and the person of Christ. The book's admitted emphasis is on the humanity of Christ, but Gordon officials concluded that Michaels went too far in his critical methodology and in his one-sided approach to Christ's person. Earlier Michaels had written a perceptive essay, "Inerrancy or Verbal Inspiration? An Evangelical Dilemma."¹⁶²

The controversy here appears to be similar to that engendered by Robert Gundry's commentary on Matthew. Michaels's use of critical methodology resulted in his questioning the historical setting or details given to certain events in certain gospel accounts. Among these are John's testimony of seeing the dove-like Spirit descending on Jesus (John 1:32-34) and the location and nature of Jesus' temptation (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).¹⁶³ His book contains many statements as to the historical "probability" of events actually happening in the manner the gospels assert they happened. Nevertheless, Michaels continues to profess his assent to inerrancy. It

¹⁵⁸It is interesting to note that the evangelical R. N. Longenecker, at the 1982 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, characterized Gundry's position as "more conservative than the evangelicals on Mark and Q and more liberal than the liberals on Matthew." See G. R. Osborne, "Studies in Matthew: Professional Societies Evaluate New Evangelical Directions," *TSF Bulletin* 6 (1983) 15. From a more liberal view, L. Cope agrees with Gundry against the traditional historicist inerrancy position, but disagrees with Gundry's inspired midrashic approach. According to Cope, Gundry's "solution is worse than the problem." See *ATR* 65 (1983) 219.

¹⁵⁹See J. W. Montgomery, "The Approach of New Shape Roman Catholicism to Scriptural Inerrancy: A Case Study for Evangelicals," *BETS* 10 (1967) 209-25. See esp. 221-25, which are relevant to the current debate.

¹⁶⁰See "Publish and Perish: Two Seminaries Face Doctrinal Conflicts," *Eternity* (July-August, 1982) 9, 46; and "The Issue of Biblical Authority Brings a Scholar's Resignation," *Christianity Today* (July 15, 1983) 35-36, 38.

¹⁶¹Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.

¹⁶²*Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. R. R. Nicole and J. R. Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 49-70.

¹⁶³*Servant and Son*, 34-36, 54-65.

is his belief that the issue is hermeneutics, and that inerrantists have assumed certain unnecessary and narrow restrictions.

This episode underscores all the more the current crisis summarized and evaluated in this study. It appears that the issue is not hermeneutics in general but historicity in particular. Evangelicals are beginning to assert in essence that what the Bible says actually happened, but it need not have happened at the time or in the place or in the manner the Bible says it happened. It is doubtful whether such a de-historicizing approach is compatible with the doctrine of inerrancy. Yet those who disdain current de-historicizing approaches should not go to the opposite extremes of ignoring historical difficulties or eliminating them by outlandish harmonizations.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴For a survey of the difficulty, see R. T. France, "Evangelical Disagreements about the Bible," *Churchman* 96 (1982) 226-40.