

REDACTION CRITICISM AND THE EVANGELICAL: MATTHEW 10 A TEST CASE

Robert E. Morosco*

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This paper is not a history of redaction criticism, nor is it an analysis of any of the redactional studies that have played such a large role in recent Biblical interpretations. Rather, it is a humble attempt to explore and set down in basic terms what the writer sees as the possible or potential value of redaction criticism for evangelical interpretations of the Bible, especially the synoptic gospels.

As suggested by its title this work is an evaluation, from an evangelical perspective, of the higher critical methodology known as *Redaktionsgeschichte*—i. e., “the history of the editing of Biblical traditions” or more popularly “Redaction Criticism” (RC). Through redaction analysis the documents of the Bible are examined in order to determine the way in which the Biblical writers may have selected, arranged and shaped the traditions they incorporated in their works in order to communicate a message to their contemporary communities. The redaction critic seeks to gain a sensitivity to the writer-redactor’s own theology and *Sitz im Leben*, for it is held that his beliefs and church situation influenced the manner in which he edited his materials. The Biblical author is thought to have been interested in writing and recording traditions for a particular community of God’s people and is believed to have taken this opportunity to instruct his people concerning certain theological ideas as well as to encourage them by suggesting ways to deal with situations facing the community.

The question we need to deal with is this: Is RC a methodology that at best yields only unproven, speculative results about Biblical backgrounds and at worse can actually destroy religious faith? Or is RC a tool that can actually bring insight into the composition and meaning of Biblical texts and can ultimately uncover a practical significance for them in the Church?

With regard to the NT, RC has special relevance to the study of the synoptic gospels. Their advantage for redactional studies is obvious—that is, when the same tradition is found in more than one gospel, one may see how the material has been treated and used by two or even three different Biblical writers facing different situations. We will approach our query into RC using the Commissioning Story (CS) of Matthew 10 as a test case. By focusing on this one synoptic text we will be able to compare Matthew’s treatment of it with Mark’s and Luke’s and thereby make some conclusions about Matthew’s redactional *Tendenz*.¹

*Robert Morosco is associate professor of New Testament and chairperson of the department of Biblical studies at Biola College in La Mirada, California.

¹Though it is not without contemporary criticism, our analysis of Matthew is based on and also lends further support for the theory that the first evangelist used various sources in the composition of his gospel. It is believed that Matthew had at his disposal the gospel of Mark essentially as we have it today, some materials in common with Luke, and some unique traditions. Whether or not Matthew’s unique materials and those he shared with Luke were written, oral or a more complex mixture of both is not significant for this study.

II. STRUCTURING OF MATTHEW'S COMMISSIONING STORY

The CS of Matthew 10 begins at 9:35 and extends to 11:1, as most paragraphed versions of the NT indicate. This means that Matthew included a great deal more material in his version of the CS than either Mark or Luke, Matthew's version being nearly 100 lines of Greek text (as found in the *UBSGNT*) as compared with 13½ lines in Mark and 12 lines in Luke. It is believed that the exaggerated length of Matthew's version can be accounted for by his literary methodology.

The CS of Matthew breaks down into four blocks of material.² Matt 9:35-38 provides the story with an introduction and a *Sitz im Leben Jesu*. At this point in the gospel, Jesus is the only missionary of the kingdom. The need for the disciples to go out as missionaries to Israel is set forth in 9:37-38 with Jesus' metaphor of a lush harvest and few reapers. The rest of the discourse is presented as the solution to this missionary dilemma.

The second section of Matt 10:1-15 is a block of sayings-material that is arranged in a way that systematizes Jesus' instruction on details of the messianic mission. Verses 5-6 define narrowly the mission field of the disciples. Jesus orders his messengers to "go nowhere among the Gentiles." Instead they are to go singularly to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Even the Samaritans, who were regarded as only part Gentile, are to be excluded from the mission of the twelve. This kind of select mission for the disciples is not surprising, for Jesus himself followed the same principle according to Matt 15:24. The message that is to be delivered is specified in v 7. The twelve were to preach the same message as that of John and Jesus: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The messengers are to confirm this message by doing the miraculous works of the kingdom: healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers and exorcising demons (10:8a). These too were the works of Jesus (9:35). As in the case of Jesus, the disciples were to declare the kingdom in both word and deed. The sensitive issue of financial support and profit while on the mission is dealt with in vv 8b-10, while vv 11-15 go on to speak of the different kinds of audience response facing the missionaries. The messengers are told that their mission is on behalf of God, and rejection of it by their audience calls for the severest judgment by God.

The third major section, Matt 10:16-23, is a discourse on the distresses that await the mission. Listed as persecutions that Jesus' messengers will meet on their way are court actions, scourgings, family betrayals and even executions. The final verse of the section, v 23, promises relief for missionaries in flight.

The remainder of the CS (10:24-11:1) contains a host of different encouragements for those messengers who will suffer for Jesus. Jesus makes it clear that the reason his messengers will be persecuted is that he himself was also maltreated: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (10:25). Such encouragements were apparently thought necessary to keep the messengers from aborting their mission when trouble came. The missionaries were to follow Jesus' instructions and example in the face of distress.

²In a paper to be delivered at the Institute for Biblical Research in March, 1980, we will attempt to break down this CS from a literary perspective into the six or seven elements of the commissioning type-scene which is patterned after the commissioning of Moses in Exodus 3-4.

From even this very brief outline of the CS it is evident that though it is in form a discourse to the twelve by Jesus, more specifically it may be a carefully constructed *didache* on the topic of missions by the evangelist. The words seem to go beyond the mission of twelve men in Israel to the mission of the Church in the world. In order to confirm this idea, an examination of some of the details of content is in order.

III. CONTENT OF MATTHEW'S COMMISSIONING STORY

Across the various sections of Matthew's CS the interpreter is presented with a curious array of data—data that may be interpreted as putting the discourse in conflict with itself if the mission of the twelve is its sole focus. It is perhaps possible to suggest harmonizations for this material, but the number and kind of conflicts present and the fact that they are peculiar to the account of the first gospel encourages another kind of resolution, one that looks for the answer in the evangelist's literary intention. It is this kind of resolution that is sought for by the redaction critic.

One of the first difficulties that appears in the discourse involves Jesus' explicit command that the twelve go not to the Gentiles in their mission but only to the lost sheep of Israel (10:5-6). In view of this strict prohibition against bearing witness to the Gentiles, it is a bit odd that subsequently the messengers are told that they would indeed bear testimony to the Gentiles (10:18). Another point to note is the seeming contrast between the lush and ready harvest described in 9:37-38 and the stress on the terrible resistance to the mission in 10:16-22. There is also an unusual shift in the text in the use of the sheep simile. The disciples in 10:6 are sent to the lost sheep of Israel, while in 10:16 it is the disciples themselves who are the sheep and the audience is now represented as wolves.³ Strange also is the story's complete silence concerning the actual mission of the twelve to Israel. It is not even known from Matthew whether or not the mission was ever undertaken or what the results were if it was. Matthew was evidently less concerned with the frame-story of the mission of the twelve than he was with Jesus' teaching on missiology generally. This is in contrast with the other synoptic gospels (and Matthew's sources?), which do stick with the frame-story and therefore narrate something of the actual mission of the twelve along with its results (cf. Mark 6:13; Luke 9:6).

Interesting too are the specific kinds of troubles that are described as ahead for the messengers of Jesus. While the commissioning of the twelve concerned a local Palestinian mission that would probably last only a short time (perhaps only days), in 10:16-22 Jesus speaks about such very drastic consequences for his messengers as court trials, floggings and political actions before governors and Gentile kings. It is also said that the families of the missionaries would turn against them, betray them to hostile authorities and even have them executed. There is no record of any of these kinds of problems for the disciples before Jesus himself had experienced persecution and was executed. Even Jesus' comment that his messengers would be maligned because he himself was called Beelzebul

³Matthew even employs the same Greek word for "sheep" (*probata*) in both texts. Luke 10:3 uses "lambs" (*arnas*) for the latter saying in his gospel. Had Matthew done as Luke did, the shift would not be so obvious.

(10:25) seems somewhat out of place, since Jesus is not linked with Beelzebul in Matthew until two chapters later.⁴

A final point worth noting is the very troublesome saying at 10:23. Jesus here apparently promises the disciples that while they were still on their mission they would witness the eschatological coming of the Son of Man—i. e., the moment at the “end” (*telos*) when they would be “saved” (cf. 10:22). Albert Schweitzer believed that this was the first of several mistaken expectations that Jesus had with regard to the coming of the kingdom of God.⁵ The parousia did not occur during the time that the twelve were on their mission, nor was it evidently thought to have taken place by the time of the penning of the first gospel, since for Matthew the coming of the Son of Man remained a future event (24:1-25:46) that could not take place until the gospel had been preached not just in Israel but throughout the whole world (24:14). Why then does Matthew record a saying in the context of the mission of the twelve that promises the coming of the Son of Man? This issue may have a literary explanation that can be discovered through a redactional analysis of the text.

The content of this CS would seem to argue that the interpreter give to it a wider significance than just the story of the mission of the twelve. It may be that the evangelist used the mission of the twelve as a lens with which to focus on the mission of his contemporary community and the future Church. Due to Matthew's redactional work we may have a mixture of sayings in the CS, some belong to the commissioning of the twelve to go to Israel with others seemingly looking to the later mission in the world.

IV. ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW'S COMMISSIONING STORY

When conflicting sayings like those above are viewed in their context blocks within the discourse a certain pattern emerges. The first part of the CS (9:35-10:15) is arranged to fit the setting of the sending of the twelve with little difficulty to the interpreter.⁶ Likewise, the last part (10:24-11:1) produces no problems⁷ because it is composed of such general principles and encouragements that it could fit in nearly any context with no serious problems. The difficulties in Matthew's CS are most clearly obvious in 10:16-23, at least as this section is related to the initial story of 9:35-10:15. The sayings of the later section seem to speak not of the local mission of the twelve but of a universal mission of the Church. This is where the tension arises.

When one examines the parallels to the different sayings that are in Matthew's CS, there surfaces an explanation as to why there is a seeming tension between 10:16-23 and 9:35-10:15. It is Matthew's apparent redactional work that

⁴Matt 12:24 is the account where the Pharisees associate Jesus with Beelzebul. In Matt 9:34, however, the Pharisees link Jesus with “the prince of demons” but do not refer to Beelzebul.

⁵A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1961) 358-359.

⁶Though some of the sayings are a part of the original call of the twelve found in Mark 3 and Luke 6, as well as the commissioning of the seventy-two in Luke 10.

⁷This is not because it has the same setting in view, for the synoptic parallels use even this material in different contexts.

brings about the problem. The same material Matthew uses in 10:16-23 is used differently in Mark and Luke, and the sayings fit much more evenly in these parallel contexts. Matthew has evidently strung together into a single address materials that were originally associated with various other contexts. The following chart details the parallels that Matthew's CS shares with the other synoptic gospels.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Introduction (9:35-38)	9:35	6:6b (12)	8:1
	9:36	6:34 (12)	—
	9:37a	—	—
	9:37b-38	—	10:2 (72)
Details (10:1-15)	10:1-4	3:13-19 (call)	6:13-16 (call)
	10:5a	6:7-8 (12)	9:1-2 (12)
	10:5b-6	—	—
	10:7-8	—	9:2 (12)
	10:9-10	6:8-9 (12)	9:3 (12); 10:7 (72)
	10:11a, b	—	—
	10:11c-14	6:10-12 (12)	9:4-5 (12)
10:15 (11:24)	—	10:12 (72)	
Distresses (10:16-23)	10:16	—	10:3 (72)
	10:17-20	13:9-11 (esch)	12:11-12 (inst)
	10:21-22	13:12-13 (esch)	—
	10:23	—	—
Encouragement (10:24-11:1)	10:24a	—	6:40a
	10:24b-26a	—	—
	10:26b-27	4:22	8:17; 12:2-4a (inst)
	10:28-33	—	12:4b-10 (inst)
	10:34-36	—	12:51-53
	10:37-38 (16:24)	—	—
	10:39-40 (16:25)	8:35; 9:37	9:24=17:33; 10:16; John 12:25; 13:20
	10:41	—	—
	10:42	9:41	—
11:1	—	—	

(12)=commissioning of the twelve

(72)=commissioning of the seventy-two

(call)=original call of the twelve

(inst)=general instructions given to the disciples

(esch)=Jesus' eschatological discourse

These parallels suggest that the first evangelist has reorganized *logia* into the CS with apparently little in the way of rewording for his application of them.

The reason that Matt 10:16-23 does not agree easily with the frame-story of the sending of the twelve is that it has apparently been edited in largely from a different context, namely that of Jesus' eschatological discourse in Mark 13. More particularly, Matt 10:17-22 agrees nearly word for word with Mark 13:9-13. Mark's context is also that of a commissioning text, but the focus is not on the

local Palestinian mission of the twelve but on the eschatological mission of the Church that was to terminate with the parousia. Matthew, it seems, has edited into the local Palestinian CS this missionary material that concerns the more universal mission. It is this and other evident redactions that give rise to many of the interpretive difficulties in Matthew's version of the CS. He has apparently enlarged the story by interfacing materials that look at different missions—the local and temporal mission of the twelve to Israel (and the seventy-two in Luke) and the universal mission to the world that Jesus said would suffer the same acts of contempt as Jesus himself and that would continue until he returned.

While the twelve were to go nowhere outside of Israel, the later mission will extend even to the world of the Gentiles. The later mission is not necessarily directed toward a lush and ready harvest either but will be opposed through court actions, floggings, betrayals and even executions of the missionaries. Thus instead of the later missionaries being depicted as going to lost sheep, they themselves are described as sheep before wolves that desire to devour them. And while the local mission would last only a short period, the universal mission will find its *telos* in the parousia of the Son of Man. This kind of material on the final mission fits nicely in the context of Mark's eschatological discourse (cf. also Luke 21:12-19) from which most of it seems to have been derived by Matthew.

Evidently Matthew felt the freedom to editorially construct a single continuous address by Jesus from dominical sayings that came out of different contexts in his sources. Matthew seems to have operated on the principle of a thematic arrangement of sayings materials. The unifying theme in this case is that of misology. For this evangelist there was but a single mission that began with Jesus (or even John) and extended through the twelve to his Church. The mission began in Israel but was extended in Jesus' final commission to "all nations" (28:19), where a new discipleship would carry on the mission. By this kind of redactional activity Matthew was able to make his statement on the unity of the messianic mission and also to speak to the mission of his own Church.

Matthew's redactions do not appear to have been meant to "fool" his readers into thinking that Jesus spoke all the material of 9:35-11:1 on a single occasion to the same audience and with the same mission in view. The readers could easily pick up on the difficulties that the evangelist left in the story and that the discerning reader today is aware of. Also, the first readers were probably already familiar with the sayings of this discourse as they were attached to different contexts, especially in the gospel of Mark. In addition to problems of content, Matthew left other signs that he had edited together materials drawn from different contexts. For example, in the introductory material of 9:35-38 Jesus is already with his disciples, while in 10:1 he calls them to himself as though they were not present. It appears that 10:1 came from a pericope independent of 9:35-38. The redundancy could be explained on the grounds that Matthew meant for his readers to divide their section and understand that two separate occasions were in view. But 9:38 is joined to 10:1 with a simple *kai* ("and"), which seems to mark them as unity in structure in the story, though the difficulty is left intact and so seems to signal an editorial seam.

Likewise, the conclusion to the CS is also believed to disclose a redactional touch. In 11:1 Jesus is said to have gone on after the discourse to "teach and preach in their cities." It appears that it is the Jews who are the intended antecede-

dent of the pronoun *autōn* ("their") (cf. 9:35), but the Jews are not mentioned in the surrounding context. This concluding verse would fit much better in another context (e. g., Matthew 9) but may have been edited into this context in order to provide closure for the entire mission narrative and discourse of 8:1-10:42. Matthew did not care to remove witnesses to the old contexts from which he drew the materials he joined together into the CS, for he was not intending to produce a smooth sermon for Jesus but a composite thesis on the theme of mission.⁸

Matthew organized his traditions generally around the traditional story of Jesus, as seen for instance in Mark. However, he seems to have made *theme* his primary focus for organizing Jesus' sayings. Therefore his CS scans somewhat inconsistently from the viewpoint of the mission of the twelve. But from the perspective of the evangelist's literary purposes, Matthew's CS fits in quite nicely with what may be discerned concerning the aim of the evangelist.

That Matthew's literary purposes included a kind of thematic structuring of Jesus' sayings may be confirmed in the other four sermons of Jesus in the gospel. The first address, the sermon on the mount (5:1-7:29), includes sayings that are used in various contexts in Mark and Luke. But they are pinned together by the first evangelist on the theme of ethics. Jesus' third sermon focuses on the theme of the kingdom (13:1-53). His fourth is on the Church (17:22-18:35). And his last is his eschatological discourse (23:1-25:6), which is unified on the subject of the parousia and its accompanying events. Matthew's gospel appears to be a creative and generally unique production that was designed with five systematically organized dominical treatises on themes important to the evangelist.

V. MATTHEW'S LITERARY AIMS

From a redactional approach, Matthew is seen as an ingenious writer who composed his gospel using both a traditional gospel narrative structure and also a thematic grouping of *logia*. The latter seems to be Matthew's own literary contribution, though the model for such an arrangement may well be seen in the Mishna itself, for the Mishna too sought to collect and preserve authoritative teaching (*halakah*) on a thematic basis.

Some time ago B. W. Bacon popularized the view that the first evangelist meant to write his work with the structure and content of a new Pentateuch.⁹ Bacon's pentateuchal structuring hypothesis has been accepted by other commentators, such as G. D. Kilpatrick,¹⁰ Krister Stendahl¹¹ and Howard Kee.¹²

⁸Tradition says that the apostle Matthew was a missionary to the Jews for whom he wrote his gospel but is later supposed to have gone to the Gentiles as a missionary (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.6). Such a Matthean situation, if accurate and if it actually depicts the anonymous author of the first gospel, fits well with the creation of a manual on missions as seen in Matthew 10.

⁹B. W. Bacon, "The Five Books of Matthew against the Jews," *Expositor* 15 (1918) 56-66; *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Holt, 1930) 47, 145-261.

¹⁰G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) 136.

¹¹K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

¹²H. Kee, *Jesus in History* (New York: Harcourt, 1970) 151-152.

While the viewpoint is not without some worthy opposition,¹³ it is still worth considering.

The evangelist may have meant to provide a plain verbal signal to his readers that he wanted them to see five major addresses in his book when he editorially marked the conclusion of each of the five discourse sections with the literary formula "and when Jesus finished ['these sayings']." This landmark is found nowhere in the gospel except at the five crucial breaking points (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It is also to be noted that in the opening title¹⁴ of the gospel the evangelist uses the word *genesis* (translated "genealogy" in the RSV), which also serves as the title of the first book of Moses (Genesis) and so opens the entire Pentateuch in the LXX.¹⁵ Did Matthew purposely employ *genesis* at the head of his gospel to suggest a connection between his gospel and the Pentateuch? He may have if he meant for his work to be seen in pentateuchal terms.

Supporting further the idea of Matthew's pentateuchal structure is the evangelist's use of the theological motif of Jesus as the new Moses who brings a new Torah.¹⁶ Like Moses in the Pentateuch, Jesus in Matthew is born in humble circumstances under a foreign tyrant who threatens his life by slaying Israel's male infants. Jesus too has an exodus from Egypt (where Matthew applies to the situation the text of Hos 11:1, which speaks of Israel's exodus; cf. Matt 2:15), and Jesus also, like Moses, enters the wilderness where he is tested for a period of time marked by the number forty. And like Moses, Jesus in Matthew climbs a mountain in order to provide God's will (the new Torah?) to God's people. The Moses-motif that resonates throughout the first gospel lends strong support to Bacon's hypothesis.¹⁷

Matthew's thematic organization through redaction would also serve to systematically organize important teaching for the Church. This arrangement would make an effective teaching manual in the Church. A "gospel-manual" would be a fine pedagogical device, whether the first gospel was designed as a catechetical document for new converts as Schille suggests,¹⁸ or a lectionary for the Church to read at regular seasons as Goulder indicates,¹⁹ or more probably as a Church manual designed for teachers and administrators in the Church as Stendahl

¹³E.g., see W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964) 14-25; J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 1-7.

¹⁴W. D. Davies takes "the origin [*genesis*] of Jesus Christ" (1:1) as Matthew's title for the whole first gospel (*Setting*, 67-72). But it is probably more accurate to limit it to the genealogy itself (A. H. M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* [London: Macmillan, 1957] 1) or better yet to the prologue of Matthew 1-2 (A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* [London: Elliot Stock, 1910] 1).

¹⁵The whole phrase of Matt 1:1, *biblos geneleos*, "the book of the generations," is found twice in the LXX of Genesis (at 2:4 and 5:1).

¹⁶See Davies, *Setting*, 14-93.

¹⁷Even the CS itself seems to have been composed with the CS of Moses (Exodus 3-4) as its model. This is the thesis of the above mentioned paper for IBR (see n. 2).

¹⁸B. G. Schille, "Bemerkungen zur Formgeschichte des Evangeliums. II. Das Evangelium des Mattäus als Katechismus," *NTS* 4 (October 1957) 101-114.

¹⁹M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974).

argues.²⁰ Through collecting, arranging and shaping traditional materials that the Church had already received as authoritative, Matthew gave birth to what could be construed as a new genre, a new format for the gospel that would serve his own theological and practical aims. Through his unique organization of sayings materials Matthew could lift his readers beyond the context of the days of Jesus, where he brought them with his narrative structure, and could place them forward by application into the contemporary situation of their Church. In this sense the gospel-manual would serve as a practical device for the Church.

VI. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The above is largely a redactional analysis of Matthew 10 and the first gospel generally. Does RC have any real value for the evangelical scholar? One thing is certain: Evangelicals will no more reach a unanimous agreement on this issue than they will on church polity, the mode of baptism or certain eschatological issues.

It is true that RC has in the past produced studies of questionable value, and this may well be the case in the future. But this in itself should not be the determining factor when one estimates its value as a discipline, any more than certain strange results from some theological studies should be the basis for evaluating that discipline. It would also be untrue to claim that without RC the NT cannot be properly understood. Nothing of the central message of the Bible is hidden to even the unskilled reader. Still, RC may provide the interpreter with added insights and understanding.

A major area of dispute in the use of RC is the degree to which Biblical writers actually shaped or altered their traditions. Undoubtedly they selected and arranged traditions according to their purposes, but the extent to which material was added or existing traditions were shaped or modified needs to be studied carefully. It is also true that determining sources and/or settings of the various Biblical traditions continues to challenge redaction analysis, but with continued work in this regard a more certain understanding may develop.

Again it is true that conclusions reached through a redactional approach are never "certain" or "proven." RC can only deal with various degrees of probability. This is because it is largely a historical discipline. RC is *Redaktionsgeschichte*; it deals with the history of the editing of Biblical traditions. The interpreter can demand no more of RC than he does of any historical discipline—that is, to provide possible or probable answers to questions regarding what has happened in the ancient past.

Our redactional analysis of Matthew 10 has provided possible resolutions of tensions and apparent contradictions within the CS that traditional harmonizations have long struggled over. And this has been achieved without sacrificing evangelical distinctives. While it is not without its dangers, ultimately RC appears to have the potential to bring about practical contributions for the contemporary Church. For if used responsibly, RC may aid in discerning the theological and practical needs that the writers of the literature of the Bible sought to meet. As applied to the synoptic gospels, RC reveals how the Church handled situations and attacked problems using the words of its Lord, and this is a lesson that could profit even the contemporary Church.

²⁰K. Stendahl, *School*, 35.